

YVES NETZHAMMER

THE FEELING OF PRECISE INSTABILITY WHEN HOLDING THINGS

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Mankind – man's body and psyche - represents the focal point of the mysterious, silent and disturbing pictorial cosmos which Yves Netzhammer invents in drawings and 3-D animation produced on the computer. While the commercial picture industry - with its cinematic special effects and computer games - is literally teeming with cyborgs, viruses and machine-people against whom heroes bravely struggle to defend humanity, in Netzhammer's world there is no apocalyptic, black and white vision of good and bad, right or wrong. Far more, he presents us with a scenario in which strange events and mutations repeatedly lead man into states of being that seem to trigger new activity and modes of behaviour quite automatically.

As an artist, Yves Netzhammer employs the technology of the new media, meaning that its conditions and use in society cannot be ignored when considering his works. Firstly, he utilises the possibilities of computer-based programmes for the development of his images; these are inevitably adjusted accordingly. Secondly, as a result of the medium, his works are also measured against the context of non-artistic digital picture production and pictorial ideas. Thirdly, and this is the truly decisive factor, he succeeds in linking questions originally bound up with new technological developments and insights to psychological and cultural historical content, thus creating a dense web. His picture designs exist in the field of tension between the real aims of science and the speculative, as a rule diametrically opposite visions of commerce and art.

The Prototype Human Being

Neither the graphic works nor the video films by Yves Netzhammer draw an image of man that can be associated with concepts such as individuality, the demonstration of feelings or a pursuit of personal aims. The protagonist of his animated sequences is a faceless and sexless jointed doll, whose body parts appear to have been fitted together and whose somnambulant movements are stereotyped. The pink colour¹ of its shining surface associates the figure with people of the western world and the corresponding cultural context. For this reason, despite their considerably disconcerting effect, the abstracted landscapes with trees and birds, the spaces in which the protagonist moves and those he forms, the animals, things, equipment and machines with which he is confronted, and the rituals he performs radiate familiarity and are thus able to adopt a kind of mirror function for us. The pictogram-like figure and its artificial life are located on a level between puppet show and science fiction, and this inevitably animates the viewer to participate in its life and sufferings. The works unfold their presence primarily in pictorial moments which touch our potential to feel and are capable of knocking this off balance. Although the protagonist appears to be completely untroubled by everything, the images trigger associations - as a result of our habits of seeing and perception - with psychic phenomena elementary to our own experiences of life; such as love, security, loneliness, alienation, speechlessness, curiosity, illness or death. Yves Netzhammer has a subtle understanding of how to assemble series of images with opposing messages and effect so that despite optical discontinuity, leaps, interlocking and branching out, one becomes aware of how terribly thin and permeable the boundaries are between an ideal world and catastrophe, between the intact and the injured. And even though Netzhammer employs the human body, so to speak, as a demonstration object creating identity, he is not merely concerned to argue on the basis of the body.

Far more - in highly expressive images that are oriented on the aesthetics of current computer

animation and employ his own language of images and signs – he investigates the conditions faced by the individual in the here and now. He circumscribes these with metaphors that may be equated with concepts such as autarchy, infection, assimilation or the cycle. In doing so, he makes use of an intellectual, artistic repertoire and vocabulary which is newly invented, yet fuelled by a range of sources.

The Strange

Hybrid, mixed beings can be found in the portrayals of all cultures throughout the centuries.² Fantasies which create a world beyond reality - i.e., which operate in an abstract, intellectual area beyond known pictorial notions - have always shaped our vision of the world beyond, of the inconceivable, but also of the monstrous and the abstruse, the dreamlike and the psychic. Bosch, Goya, Kubin, Magritte may be cited as artists who have pointed the way, setting their visions of human existence into images now engraved in our memories. Competing with these, there are film concepts that confront people with the unknown and the strange; equated by psychoanalysis³ with the dark, the isolated and the suppressed. While this definition of the strange is still very much part of films by Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick or Steven Spielberg, others refer primarily to visions of the future and horror scenarios which examine encounters with alien forms of life, viruses or bacteria - or which concern genetic technology.

Black birds and dark shadows, suddenly spurting blood, balls flying through the digital picture space and locking onto the protagonist's body, penetrating it, claustrophobic rooms with unstable walls – contrapuntally set against lyrical and idyllic moments – are only some of the numerous and constantly returning metaphors, resembling quotations, with which Yves Netzhammer writes his mental landscapes from scene to scene, causing the seemingly familiar tip over into unfamiliar, disturbing strangeness. In 1997, Yves Netzhammer published an artist's book entitled "Whatever can be told will be improved"⁴ that is exclusively devoted to his drawings. One shows a human face with eyes closed as if deep in meditation, its tongue hanging right out. Like veins, the interwoven tails of two mice wind around its outer skin, while the mice themselves nestle harmoniously in the top of the skull, which is hooded by a shallow dome. Antlers sprout above the eyebrows, although they might also be rampantly growing blood vessels. Inside the body, the neck finishes as an undefined sack with two adjacent ends. This picture is followed by an image in which a kneeling man shows the bone of his forearm to a dog whose thigh bone is visible, as if in an X-ray. And it continues with a creature lying on its back, holding on to another that appears to have grown into it. Then a hand combs through the fingers of another, or a drawing identified at first glance as a comic, smiling frog-face proves to be the reproduction of bulging thumbs grown into one. From page to page, we continue through visions in which the body is fragmented and mutated and body orifices – sexual organs, eyes, mouths, ears and pores, navel and nipples - are assigned an outstanding role as sluices and interfaces between inside and out. If one follows up the lines, it emerges that they occasionally alter their function. Instead of fixing body outlines, they suddenly lead into the inside or belong to two apparently separate figures simultaneously. Incorporation and reproduction, organic growth and uncontrollable rampancy appear to be mutually dependent in images recalling picture puzzles. The motifs of these drawings also appear once more in the video animations, as stills or processed variations.

Today the probable and the improbable, the natural and the artificial have moved so close together that the boundaries between fiction and reality are increasingly unclear. It is symptomatic of this that the natural sciences are making use of computer-aided pictorial models in order to envisage the invisible in simulations, and both developing and visualising these in an aesthetic way.⁵ For Yves Netzhammer, this field of picture production is also a frame of reference within which he works. His images not only possess a model-like character, resembling experimental set-ups⁶ into which he transfers abstracted depictions in the form of brightly-coloured balls, for example - he also smuggles his art into media that are alien to art. In 1999, for example, he presented pictorial contributions on the topic of "Infectious illnesses. Strategies in dealing with viruses" to the journal of the University of Zürich⁷, he illustrated a text entitled "be yourself" in an economics magazine⁸ focusing on "Growth", and he works regularly for the magazine "Das Magazin". A drawing appeared in the May 2003⁹ issue of this publication that shows a black bird holding on to the forearm bone of a hand filled with a dot raster that may be interpreted as a loudspeaker, into which the bird is calling. The same dot raster may also be seen on the bird's back. As in all his commercial commissions, which also included the poster design for the 2001 Frankfurt Book Fair¹⁰, here Netzhammer does not illustrate the article "Death is no longer appropriate to life", but reacts to themes which he explores, contemplates and reflects in an artistic way. In this way, he has an important instrument available with which to intervene into the everyday world and its everyday questions by using his art; he is able to trigger discussion among a wider audience and, above all, to turn his pictorial cosmos into common property, received as a matter of course.

The Border

Lack of place, time and standards in the media age are causing those stable borders (not only the political) that would serve orientation to swim increasingly and new, temporary ones to emerge. Yves Netzhammer begins his work at this point, where meaning shifts and disappears. In his images, the theme of borders and delimitation becomes a complex, symbolic event in which skin attains a central significance. The skin¹¹ is the largest sensory organ, and through it we feel desire, pain, cold and warmth. An exchange between the outside and the inside takes place via the skin, influencing our perception and the ways and means with which we discover the world. The earliest sense of the self and of identity is formed by experiences we enjoy through our skin. At the same time, the skin serves the body as protection and a covering.¹² In Yves Netzhammer's work, direct encounters and touch are the trigger for unexpected changes of form and colour, and these are capable of ramifying the narration into the infinite. While cultural historical touch-taboos reflect moral concepts, but also the drive for self-preservation - to protect the individual from alien attacks and aggression -, electronics, biomedicine and neuro-technology cross over these borders and destabilise our old notions of body and identity¹³. Yves Netzhammer makes old and new tactile references, and thus those pertaining to the perception of our surroundings, run seamlessly one into another. He visualises a range of views into the inside of the body, which is - like his drawings - emptied or possessed by alien creatures or occurrences that are suddenly continued under the earth by means of dramatic alterations in perspective. Micro and macro structures are drawn as equal worlds of experience, borders always have two sides.¹⁴

The theme of the border between the self and the other - with its philosophical and psychological connotations - and of that between inner and outer reality is transposed into images that recall Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but Netzhammer's work undermines the latter's assumption that although nature transforms everything, it remains essentially the same.

Touch

Any attempt to approach Netzhammer's world of images verbally means that technological and scientific concepts come forcibly to mind. He sets endless viral chain reactions into motion through his encounters between people, machines, trees, birds, spaces, balls or other elements, and these never find their way back to a starting point. Every touch brings with it deeply significant changes. As in interactive installations, impulses of movement trigger new images. The invention of the data suit, via whose sensors other people may be touched over a distance in order to trigger physical feelings, also appears to be a force behind things. Yves Netzhammer introduces us to the body as a central interface with storage functions, with channels for input and output - he depicts it as a sounding body that sends and receives. If one assumes that - as in the biblical allegory of *Doubting Thomas*¹⁵ - only actual touch rids us of doubt and (via the body) leads to insight, then one can understand why Netzhammer prefers to see hands and fingers at work, carrying out the gestures of pointing, forming and taking possession. The title of the exhibition "The feeling of precise instability when holding things" is accompanied by the expressive image of two hands whose fingers hold red wedges while simultaneously being split open by them. If hands in Netzhammer's videos touch something, whatever has been touched is transformed magically as if in an old fairy-story. However, since the substance of what is touched remains, the one touching is also subjected to a process of change.

In "The time until a form emerges added to the time until the form is destroyed"(2003), a finger gently strokes the annual rings of a tree trunk, whereby it receives a slight wound from a splinter. A falling drop of blood sinks into the green background, from which a tree sprouts. Its trunk turns colour from green to pink - the colour of man. The tree begins to bear red fruit, which fall to the ground as balls and roll away. In a following sequence, the red defines an abstract area of colour in order to float - as a ball - up from the interior of the tree trunk to the surface again, where - disguised as a tank - it defends its territory. A little later, tiny tanks occupy the perfect pink surface of a reclining figure, appearing like leprosy that has destroyed the skin from the inside. At the same time, the image triggers the association of an attack by insects, whose poisoned stings have caused man to fall. Far from any common, logical narrative structure, Netzhammer designs images which concern themselves with coming into being and fading. And at some point the protagonist clambers, curious and determined, onto the tree trunk in order to fall head first into its suddenly bubbling surface. He arrives in pleasant living rooms, whose patterning grain he himself then adopts.

In Netzhammer's model-like description of the world, one constantly drawn motif has a signal effect, becoming a true leitmotif. Since red is used, it stands out in the black and white surroundings. On the tips of fingers - significantly, this is usually that of the index finger - the only interior forms to be seen are red papillary lines. The spirals of these fingerprint patterns, evidence of man's uniqueness, leave marks on those places they have touched. In other images, whose effect

is highly unpleasant, they separate from the finger like tentacles. Like lasers, they can point precisely to other objects and penetrate their surfaces. Or they are pulled by flying dragons, boats and birds that soar away in different directions. In every case we are sure, if we continue the images in our minds, that the connecting fibres will give as a result of the strong pull, and that the person to whom the finger belongs will thus be robbed of his unique individuality and his capacity for making contact, becoming something else or a tabula rasa.

1. Yves Netzhammer always works with bold colour symbolism oriented on nature: pink stands for man, red for blood, green for fields, red-brown for trees and the interior of the earth, blue for sky, grey for non-living material. Parrots, as mediators between animals and beings capable of speech, are allocated several colours.
2. Compare Sven Drühl: Chimärenphylogese, in: Kunstforum International, Transgene Kunst und Mutanten, vol. 157, 2001, and Marcel Brion: Jenseits der Wirklichkeit. Phantastische Kunst, Vienna 1962.
3. Compare Sigmund Freud: Das Unheimliche (1919), eds. Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, James Strachey, vol. IV of the study edition, Frankfurt am Main 1989.
4. Yves Netzhammer: Was sich erzählen lässt wird verbessert werden, Zürich 1997.
5. Compare Gero von Randow: Unsichtbares sichtbar gemacht. Zu bildgebenden Verfahren in den Naturwissenschaften, in: cat. Hypermental. Wahnhafte Wirklichkeit 1950-2000 von Salvador Dali bis Jeff Koons, Kunsthaus Zürich, Hamburger Kunsthalle 2000, p. 43 - 45.
6. Netzhammer commented on this in the following way: "I consider the representational by using the abstract. This can lead to situations that point out features shared by abstraction and representation." Quoted acc. to Simon Maurer, Vorzüge gegenständlicher Modelle, in: unimagazin. Die Zeitschrift der Universität Zürich, 2/99, p. 4.
7. Ibid.
8. brand eins, Wirtschaftsmagazin, year 5, issue 03, April 2003.
9. Das Magazin (Tages Anzeiger, Zürich), no. 21, 2003.
10. In this poster design, Yves Netzhammer melted the book and the reader into one form as a pictorial idea symbolising the incorporation of reading. The direct realisation of linguistic images is a constantly repeated means of style in Netzhammer's work.
11. Compare Didier Anzieu: Das Haut-Ich, Frankfurt am Main 1991.
12. However, since the skin is vulnerable, Netzhammer repeatedly makes use of the image of tanks, which can offer man additional protection and keep attackers at bay. The video "Reversed Armament" (2003) also belongs directly in this context. Through the theme of skin and its protection, Netzhammer joins a current artistic discourse in which clothing, tattoos, masks and camouflage are employed as strategies offering the individual a new positioning within society.
13. As representative of the numerous exhibitions since the early 90s which have examined the theme of the body and identity from various perspectives, the following may be cited: Post Human, FAE Musée d'Art Contemporain, Pully/Lausanne; Castello die Rivoli, Turin; Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athen; Deichtorhallen Hamburg 1992/93. Doppelt Haut und Tattoo - Bilder die unter die Haut gehen, Kunsthalle zu Kiel 1996. Ich ist etwas Anderes. Kunst am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2000. Unter der Haut, Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbrock Museum, Duisburg 2001.
14. Compare Burghart Schmidt: In der Grenze, in: cat. Unsichere Grenzen, Kunsthalle zu Kiel 1999, p. 50-59.
15. "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing!" (John 20, 24-29).

INTERFACES

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THE FORMS OF FUTURE FEELINGS

THE UTOPIA OF A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES IN THE WORK OF YVES NETZHAMMER

Sabine Maria Schmidt

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“Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world, a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

There is no standstill in the “strange” pictorial worlds of Yves Netzhammer. His motifs and creations constantly metamorphose into ever new narrative fragments filled with poetry. They are “narratives” that revolve around the question of the nature of life, around becoming, changing and passing.

The artificiality of his flood of images touches us all the more in face of their stillness, their long, drawn-out or quietly abbreviated grasp of time, their tenderness. It is relevant to our most fundamental, sensitive questions about life: illness and love, physical decay, sexuality and death. A paradox arises – for virtual, artificial images make it possible to feel the emotions, involvements and conditions of human existence.

His images are generated exclusively by the computer and in their substance they exist in purely digital form. The possibilities for a transfer of these pictorial sources to various media and image carriers extend far beyond the classical work categories within art. They ignore the notions, common in the art world, of self-contained works or working processes, and also disregard any differentiation between applied, utility art and free artistic expression.

The technique of digitalisation has not only caused the apparently inexhaustible possibilities of picture manipulation to become omnipresent, but has also shaped new pictorial aesthetics. Although today’s viewer should surely have grown familiar with these aesthetics, Yves Netzhammer’s image worlds are astonishing, and on occasion they even leave us stunned. These are floods of images the like of which one has never seen before, even though a “subconscious” collective store of images is immanent in them.¹ It is not the fascination with the digital which makes these works so interesting, but the fact that they permanently open up new spheres of meaning, often difficult to decipher. In addition, his pictorial language is deeply rooted in classical drawing.

From the beginning, Netzhammer has proved – in the context of “media art” – to be an “inventor of images” in the classical sense. He rejects found-footage and model images which, as reproduction, orient themselves on perceptible “reality”. These are all “camera-less” images, although camera optics and perspectives remain immanent in them, insofar as these are a component of the programmes used, which – in turn – permit divergence and alterations.²

Like a draughtsman before an empty white page, Netzhammer begins in front of an empty computer screen. He is an author who – by means of his imaginative abilities – invents a world of his own from the store of conscious and subconscious images, a world that “reflects our entire present in a model-like way”.³

Yves Netzhammer comes from a family of engineers, and initially he completed training as a draughtsman in structural engineering. During his time at the Academy of Design in Zürich, he already worked as a graphic artist. Afterwards, among other things, he designed the postage stamp “Choco Suisse” (2001), which exuded the sweet aroma of chocolate when gently rubbed with a finger.⁴ As well as designs for exhibition projects, in 2001 he also produced the poster for the Frankfurt Book Fair. The focal points of his artistic work include collaboration on numerous

magazines and literary book publications. For more than three years, Netzhammer was one of the designers of the Zürich monthly magazine "Monatsmagazin für Neue Politik" (last issue in January 2001). He received a silver medallion from the ADC Germany for his collaboration on the first issue of "brand eins" (issue 01, Oct. 1999). Since then he has been involved in the design of more than 30 issues of this Hamburg economics magazine. His contributions to it should not be understood as illustrations. Far more, he places his drawings - exclusively digitally-generated - at the disposal of a text contribution, yet without rejecting their autonomy. They are more like pre-productions than reproductions, more like pre-emulations than mimesis, appealing to the viewer's associative ideas and presenting a complementary, visual representation of facts, references and ideas. Netzhammer has frequently been invited to contribute to the magazine supplement of the Tages-Anzeiger (Zürich), which has reserved a page for him each week since 2003. In this context, Netzhammer develops drawings to accompany texts by the Swiss philosopher Andreas Urs Sommer.

Armed with a solid knowledge of technical digital image production, Netzhammer soon began to investigate the possibilities of digital drawing, developing these drawings as "symbols" and examining them with respect to their semiotic and perceptive-processual potentials.⁵ Besides the "Panorama Picture" of 1994, a collage made up of 94 computer drawings, Netzhammer produced the two-part slide projection "When is my cat the opposite of me" in 1995, linking computer drawings together in an analogously animated and associative-narrative series. His work at the computer (Netzhammer uses CAD programmes) presupposes conditions specific to the programmes, but because of the way that Netzhammer employs these, comparisons can initially be made with traditional drawing processes. The digital image evolves from dots and lines located in a system of coordinates. Netzhammer frequently uses the outline drawing type, which could also be created in a manual form, while other drawings are filled with colours and patterns, a process that might be compared to painting. For Netzhammer, however, the artificial structure of his images is highly important, since it permits an alienation constituting meaning. The consciously chosen artificiality and reduction of media are what enables him to bring the abstracted essence of things onto a communicable level. By means of this "artificial" pictorial language, it is possible for the artist to create personal metaphors for a world that cannot be illustrated, although rejecting a personal signature, and at the same time to integrate this world into the context of current pictorial aesthetics from science and popular culture. The artist is not fundamentally interested in creating simulations that are as natural as possible by using digital images.

By contrast to photography or painting, every creative process using digital means is reversible at any time (if it has been stored in advance). Nevertheless, in Netzhammer's work, any digital image finding is always preceded by a precise pictorial idea and aesthetic construction, and the software is merely used as a tool of realisation. For example, many pictorial ideas are already pre-formed in the 80 small-format modelling clay figures of the work "Tools for machines that manufacture tools" (1996), and these are developed further using new, two-dimensional computer aesthetics in the later digital animations.

“‘Reality’ is one of those words that are meaningless without inverted commas.” (Vladimir Nabakov)

Between 1998 and 1999, Netzhammer made the film “If you use something in opposition to its character, you have to find another name for it”, which reveals itself - in retrospect - to be an inexhaustible reservoir of images in which the basic patterns of motifs and picture ideas of later works seem to have been preconceived. The entire work proves to be a great voyage of discovery concerning the question of how form attains meaning and how meaning may be given form. “I consider the representational by using the abstract”, as Netzhammer once put it. A cosmos of elementary forms, figures and primary schemata appears, as if the prefigured components and basic structures of a world were first established, only to become the starting point for a new “world construct” and endless metamorphoses. These experimental set-ups, animated to create small sequences of images, draw their vitality from the figurative and from the figures’ interplay with objects and spaces. Nothing in this world appears to be fixed, everything seems possible. Many of these sequences display the characteristics of scientific, schematic illustrations and experimental set-ups, but their meaningfulness rapidly proves questionable. Far more, they function as symbols of processes which can only be rendered and conveyed visually in science as well. Other images are constructed as experimental set-ups in which the experiment itself is left out. But the most insistent processes prove to be those which adopt utterly unpredictable courses, completely inverting any previous experience or knowledge.⁶

There is a text by the artist, dated 1997, which can be read as a grammar of this new, individual pictorial syntax or as the initial thesis for new experimental set-ups:

“: conversions: everything visible is similar: lies: the possibility of observing movements until a groove emerges: information: doors are used like windows, and the corners of the room need more space than the room itself: anatomy: the volume of water stored by camels that die of thirst: injury: if you use something in opposition to its character, you have to find another name for it: pre-emulation: the muscles are something that also alter their meaning when we don’t move: surroundings: meanings wear camouflage patterned with the images of our repetitions: development: combining the real with deceit until supposed opposites can no longer be differentiated: rules of the game: the number of objects to be confused must be smaller than the number of objects that can be differentiated:

: conversions: the opportunity to be as dissimilar to self as possible: lies: telling stories in which subjects and objects get mixed up, telling those whose stomach capacity is big enough to digest a different subject: information: choosing sentences whose content can be conveyed faster in other languages: anatomy: creating an object whose noise of production sounds like the cause of its destruction: injury: images whose reproduction is more beautiful than they are themselves: pre-emulation: all objects make the same movement, and only their wide variety of form and the conversions connected to that deceive us into seeing different movements: surroundings: the qualities of a place which only consists of what cannot be doubled: development: chance petrifications which have the form of future feelings: rules of the game: what can be told will be improved.”⁷

Robert Musil, one of Netzhammer's favourite authors, coined the phrase "sense of possibility" at the beginning of his novel fragment "The Man without Qualities": "But if there is a sense of reality, and nobody is going to doubt its right to exist, there must also be something that one can call a sense of possibility. Those who have it do not say, for example: this or that happened, will happen, must happen here: instead, they imagine: something could, should or ought to happen here; and if one explains to them that something is the way it is, they think: well probably, it could also be otherwise. Thus, the sense of possibility could be described as the ability to conceive of everything that might just as easily be, and not to attach more importance to what is than to what is not."⁸ In the best sense, Netzhammer is a utopian in the spirit of Musil, whose utopian thinking is defined as the intellectual testing of possibilities that extend far beyond reality, thereby leading to a different way of "understanding reality". As in the case of Musil's protagonist Ulrich, in the pictorial worlds of Yves Netzhammer we find both the experimental nature of the scientist and the constructive imagination of a logician and mathematician. "He compares the world to a laboratory, a huge sphere of experiment where it is possible to try out and discover the best ways of being human."⁹ And yet Netzhammer does not remain bound to inductive scientific methods - he also includes literary and artistic models that extend the relation between reality and possibility. In a similar way to Musil (W. Voßkamp), for Netzhammer there is no question of dividing the world into two; into scientific and artistic fields. Netzhammer employs film (as Musil did literature) as a communicative medium with which to experiment with utopian models.

"The transmigration of souls does not take place after, but during life." (Cees Nooteboom)

The film "Young branches imitate old antlers and old antlers imitate young branches" (1999) may be viewed as an exemplary illustration of such interlocking scientific and literary models. The first image of the film shows a tree trunk, and branches growing out of this transform into the skeleton of a deer. The construction continues to grow, becoming more fragile until it collapses. In a different scene, the deer eats from the leaves of the tree and thus incorporates its external and internal structure, adapting to fit this completely. The deer's antlers turn back into branches. The surfaces of the tree and the deer are transformed into one; we are reminded of Bernini's brilliant marble sculpture showing the dramatic heightening of an isolated moment in Ovid's story of Apollo and Daphne. Analogies of form are explored and taken ad absurdum ("Everything visible is similar"), micro and macro structures are linked, and above all, views into the inside of the body and its fundamental structures are pursued. The outside is turned inwards and vice versa. In this world, the body is no longer a fixed entity, as tongue-shaped forms slither over stair-like structures, body parts (like the fingers of a hand) are sawed apart and reassembled, reproducible on many levels, a deer's antlers become independent, new forms of movement (like a snail's creeping) are tried out, and individual limbs merge into new beings which awaken our primeval fears of predictable, failed genetic experiments. This is nature exaggerated, full of abundance and exuberance, attempting to overshoot itself. It is nature which knows adaptation and mimesis, but also pre-emulation. And it is a nature of autopoietic systems¹⁰ which uses all its components as elements of self-creation; a nature without purpose, with no duty to any external reference.

"I wanted to show that words often understand themselves better than those by whom they are used."
(Friedrich Schlegel)

In all his films, Netzhammer assembles individual sequences into associatively open and complexly combined series whose thematic contexts can be developed by the viewer. Sometimes sequences are repeated within the series so that rhythm ensues. In other cases, individual, static drawings are slotted in. Whilst some series may be interpreted as endless narrative loops, many "courses of development" and "alterations in state" terminate irreversibly. In the more recent films, the possibility of simultaneous and synchronous narrative structures is presented by means of an arrangement of several-part projections.

There is repeated emphasis on the ephemeral structure of reality, which is best expressed in animation.¹¹ Alterations are presented in real time or in a simulated speeding up of time that extends far beyond the suggestive power of static images. Here, the use of the computer has become a necessary precondition. Just as bodies and objects blend together in endless "changes of state" on the level of pictorial motifs, the visual sequences glide into one another like mixing fluids. All Netzhammer's films are also closely interwoven as a consequence of returning basic motifs, work titles and self-citation. In every film, Netzhammer tries out new narrative structures which do not only alter through the artistic sequences, but are also founded in the pictorial quality itself. Many of the invented images appear encoded, as linguistic images or picture puzzles to which textual, linguistic and numerical systems belong.

"The earth died screaming, while I lay dreaming." (Tom Waits)

In Netzhammer's work, the body is no longer a fixed quantity, but a field of research with no taboos, inviting endless experimental set-ups. Thereby, despite all its complexity, it is always simultaneously shown as an extremely fragile unit. It is perhaps true that all its metamorphoses are evidence of a desire to be able to zap between several worlds, to be able to move at any time to any place, and above all to be able to plunge into different bodies. At first glance, the transformations of his "representative figure" seem possible, since physical and personal identity appear to have been broken up, and the being which seems unaware of itself is able to leave the body that is frequently regarded as a prison. But these visions remain metaphorical. Yves Netzhammer is neither a follower of virtual reality nor a visionary of telematic systems.¹² Far more, he seeks to make the entire, also vulnerable state of the (human) body tangible and perceptible once again. In medicine, in genetic research, in media theoretical and practical discourses, and also in the socio-political debates of everyday culture (fitness cult, health, plastic surgery) the human body is being increasingly viewed as inadequate: for it wears out and becomes old. It offers too few input and output channels, and as an organic body, it is no longer compatible with the interfaces of globally networked telecommunications technologies.¹³ Media artists like Stelarc¹⁴ have attempted to synchronise the human body with machine rhythms and to open up ideas within which man may become a component of man-machine systems of growing complexity in the future; a vision that has been formulated in numerous literary and cinematic science fiction concepts for more than a hundred years.¹⁵

In Netzhammer's pictorial worlds there is an echo of those kind of images from nanotechnology, biogenetics, prostheses, chemical simulations, brainchips and the idea of artificial life. We are also made to recall those attempts to separate life forms from their biological anchorage. But no matter what possibilities arise, it remains the body onto which we project our self and in which we remain embodied. "We belong to our organs and so we can only plan our lives to some extent" is one of Netzhammer's recent works, and its title is a programmatic reaction to the philosophical and aesthetic challenge posed by new images of man, manifesting the determinedness of (ultimately finite) life on the indispensable body.

One of his most attractive and lucid films¹⁶, shown in a two-part synchronous projection, uses a fascinatingly simple artistic language to illustrate "how thought and perception of the world can be defined as a matter of the body".¹⁷ The faceless and sexless figure "reads its senses on the horizon", becoming aware of itself in interaction with sensory impressions and the experiences involved in these, while the body - in turn - is recharged through them. "(...) For even the most distant lines outline our life." (Netzhammer). Here the artist uses a synchronism of two perspectives. While the figure in one image bends down, in the other image we see the horizon wavering. The scenario is an exemplary space with a schematic primeval landscape (green = grass, blue = sky) in which the basic categories of physical orientation (top and bottom, earth and air/ gravity and levitation, day and night / brightness and darkness, silence and noise) are experienced by means of simple symbols. An approaching bird demonstrates the limitations of a physical state defined by gravity. The figure imitates the bird's motions of flight and tries out new possibilities of movement, also succeeding after having touched the other being to give rise to a relationship and assimilation. This protagonist resembles an "original human being" in a self-creating genesis where assimilation and fitting into the world take place through touch and the bestowing of names.

"When a dead man cries, it means that he is on the road to improvement", the raven solemnly announced. (Collodi: The Adventures of Pinocchio)

A finger pokes open its own wound, into which a mirror sinks, a tongue licks blood, viruses attack the skin, sebaceous glands swell to infected bladders, hands are cut up, feet turn into skeletons, bodies crushed, man - as in the final sequence of "Reversed Armament" (2002) - perishes in his own blood. Netzhammer's images cut to the quick. And while the familiar and omnipresent, spectacular images in the media often only trigger a brief few seconds of disturbance or fear, Netzhammer's work only produces this effect after a few seconds.

The express denial of any illusion prevents the artist from using the spectacular, and the consciously chosen coolness, the lack of textures and surface details in the dimensions of the computer drawing lead to a stylised alienation effect, making it possible for us to distance ourselves, yet capturing our attention all the more effectively.

Thus the omnipresent body fluids, for example, and the uncontrollable, vulnerable and often taboo flow of juices bound up with these are actually banished from the image, although constant references are made to them. Nonetheless, a sensitive corporeality is always present and

is reintroduced in an associative fashion. A paradox emerges: these virtual, artificial images trigger physical sensations when we view them.

How does the artist succeed in this? The use of numerous synaesthetic images is noticeable, some of which may be traced back to a tradition of portraying the senses in fine art. The scene with the "representative figure" that turns tenderly to the bird and touches it¹⁸ inevitably recalls scenes with falconers from the Middle Ages, and the depiction of the "senses" in the cycle of tapestries "The Lady with the Unicorn" to be seen in the Paris Musée de Cluny. The night-time reproduction of a paradisaal group of birds in a tree¹⁹, despite its computer aesthetics, reminds us of Indian miniatures and images of paradise dating from medieval times.

On the other hand, Netzhammer looks beyond existing stereotypes for possible new artistic and acoustic solutions expressing synaesthetic ideas. His "representative figure" must get by without sight, and it assimilates the world through feeling, touching and tapping. One example: parts of the body, such as the tongue or a snail's antenna, are not only presented as tasting and creating language, but as equally valuable organs of feeling. In Netzhammer's work, a human being is what he becomes through perception: a store of senses and a body of language, as one Zürich critic put it.²⁰ These are the experiences that "format" him. On occasion, they are ejected from the body again, or they form layers of sediment, petrify, sink into the earth, which becomes an archaeological site of human sensory experience in this way.

Sound - first used in the work "Old scars around fresh injuries" (2001) - is usually very carefully reduced and thereby employed as alienation. It is of considerable significance in the construction of synaesthetic effects. Similar to the reduced range of colours used (red = blood, green = earth etc.), the sound employed also introduces a categorisation (sound of wind = air, silence = earth or water). But attention! When a scene leads us to expect the sound of scratching, this is missing, while an accompanying scratching sound (like that of a finger running over a surface) elsewhere conveys the material idea of a smooth surface. In places, the employment of signal or bell-like tones repeatedly directs our attention from the smooth flow of images to a specific event, an acoustic marking - however, its meaningfulness is not necessarily congruent with the signal tone itself.²¹ In the work "The world is bigger in summer" (2003), Indian songs are included, appealing to the memory of an archaic awareness of man's integration into the cosmos and of metaphysical contexts. In the work "Reversed Armament", which was made in cooperation with the video artist Bjørn Melhus, Netzhammer adopts a new approach.²² The work revolves around the theme "blood", which the artist sees as a both physical and a psychic material. The highly suggestive images - concerned with touching and injuring of the body, attacks by bacteria and viruses on the human organism, a questioning of the mythical protection of the skin/armour, and exposure of the subject to microbiological processes - are accompanied by an autonomous sound track. This adds a further level of action to the images by means of computer-generated sounds and noises - sound material from old feature films (westerns and science fiction) with reference to the topics "Blood Brotherhood" and "The Invasion of the Body Snatchers".

In some of the more recent works, which the artist developed for his outstanding presentation in the Helmhaus, Zürich (2003), Netzhammer also employs the spoken word and epigrams transmitted by brightly-coloured parrots (here, too, the animal functions as a bearer of empathy).

“The cosmos scarce will compass Nature’s kind, but man’s creations need to be confined.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust II

Watching Netzhammer’s films, the viewer finds himself in a range of situations, as the artist generally develops specific spatial scenarios for his projections, and in this way the perspectives and sequences of narrative also continually change for the viewer. That may involve - as in the Helmhaus in Zürich - series of rooms (over two storeys), in which the viewer passes through different coloured spaces where bridges for viewing have been constructed and panoramic scenarios are opened up. Repeatedly, Netzhammer also plays with the possibility of diverting virtual spaces back into real space. In several cases, object installations are exhibited opposite his projections, thus converting the intermediate bodies and images into another material state of being. In these works in particular, Netzhammer proves that he is not only a draughtsman and painter, but also - and primarily - an architect and sculptor, who counters the virtual infinity of his constructions (which have no material, proportional and technical limitations) with real “fields of interference”. He envelops the viewer in not only virtual, but also real spaces, where the latter may find himself in states of immersion analogous to those of the “representative figure”. The delimitation can, of course, never be fully complete; there have to be entrances through which one’s body or parts of one’s body can enter into the situation. Such openings, on a sculptural and architectural level, take up cinematic motifs for the orifices of the body (like doors and windows).

It is not a purely aesthetic quality that causes these worlds of possibility to fail as a utopia in Netzhammer’s work. His virtual bodies always look upon the painful, finite, corporeal and needy body. A human being is not satisfied with seeing everything in the distance, but also longs to experience it physically himself. It is precisely the intimate physical experiences (like love, but also illness) - which are dependent on physical presence and proximity - that represent the greatest challenge.

Netzhammer takes up this challenge, not only by employing a fascinating new language - he also adopts a forceful position in the partly glorified, partly suppressed discussion of new body images.

1. For example, his hybrid pictorial language recalls the surrealist scenarios of Max Ernst or René Magritte, but also scientific model illustrations from old textbooks. In the same way, there are echoes of the world of comics, ancient mythology, Christian symbolism, tribal cults, film and trivial culture.
2. Compare the essay by Enno Kaufhold: *Kameralose Digitalbilder*, in: *cat.natürlich künstlich*, Kunsthalle Rostock etc., 2001, p. 6 - 26.
3. Simon Maurer: Press text for the exhibition at the Helmhaus Zürich 2003.
4. Indeed, the rubbing of surfaces with a finger is a frequently recurring image in Netzhammer’s films.

5. In his "Writings on Semiotic", Charles S. Peirce suggests the following definition of the sign: "A sign [...] is everything that represents something else, its object, for some form of intellect that can thus interpret it. To be more specific, a sign is something that appears in place of its object, which does not appear itself (at least not in the sense that the sign appears), so the sign is, to a certain extent, the species or phenomenon which literally or metaphorically emanates from the object and is capable of having an effect in an intelligent being - [...] who is known as the interpreter of the sign - an effect which is recognised in some sense other than as defined by the object." Cited from Charles S. Peirce: *Writings on Semiotic*, vol.3, eds. Pape and C. Kloesel, Frankfurt a. Main 1993, p. 381. For Pierce, "however, the definition of the sign is not a fixed state of aliquid pro aliquo, but a dynamic process, in which not only the sign and the interpreter, but above all the medium - as signal means - represents a decisive role for the perception of the object referred to. [...] A sign is not complete unless all three aspects - object, signal means and interpreter - refer to each other. The division of the sign triad into its individual relata is the result of an analysis, of an abstraction. [...] With reference to perception, perceptive judgement cannot refer directly to the object of perception, but solely to the object of perception as this stands in relation to the sign. Thus, the object of perception does not appear directly, but is conveyed through the sign in our perceptive judgement." Cited according to Alexander Roesler: *Jenseits des Bildschirms. Mediale Wahrnehmung und Wirklichkeit*, in: *Televisionen*, eds. Stefan Münker and Alexander Roesler, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 211-212.
6. See here: Oliver Kielmeyer: *Oberflächenspannung. Die computergenerierten Welten von Yves Netzhammer*, in: *Kunst-Bulletin*, 5/2000, p. 14 - 19, esp. p. 17.
7. First published in *cat. Gewebeprobe. Kunst aus Schaffhausen*, Schaffhausen, 1997, p. 18.
8. Robert Musil: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1978, p. 16.
9. See Wilhelm Voßkamp: *Möglichkeitssinn und Utopiemodelle*, in: *Gegenworte. Zeitschrift für den Disput über Wissen*, ed. by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 10th issue, autumn 2002, p. 60 - 63.
10. The term "Autopoiesis" was coined by the Chilean biologist and neurophysiologist Humberto R. Maturana together with his colleague F.J. Varela in the early 70s. "An autopoietic system, according to Maturana, is a production network of components which form the network by which they are themselves produced. Because the network also creates its own boundaries, it constitutes itself as a unit in a phenomenological space. Autopoietic systems are thus both self-creating and self-limiting." W. Krohn and G. Küppers (eds.): *Emergenz: Die Entstehung von Ordnung, Organisation und Bedeutung*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, p. 394.
11. See here: Oliver Kielmeyer: *Oberflächenspannung. Die computergenerierten Welten von Yves Netzhammer*, in: *Kunst-Bulletin*, 5/2000, p. 14 - 19, esp. p. 17.
12. On this term see the publication: *Telematik. NetzModerne Navigatoren*, ed. by Jeannot Simmen, Cologne 2002.
13. Compare Florian Rötzer: *Der virtuelle Körper*, in: *Perspektiven der Medienkunst*, ed. by ZKM, Heinrich Klotz, Karlsruhe 1996, p. 25 - 34, esp. p. 27f
14. Since 1994, Stelarc has been working on computer-driven muscle stimulators which are to enable a human being to be physically moved by a different intellect or by a computer.
15. Most recently in films like David Cronenberg's "Existenz" (1999), in which body orifices become interfaces for connecting the nervous system and game consoles, and amphibian organic units become game ports for a computer game used for a virtual journey into the realm of the psyche.
16. "Am Horizont können wir unsere Sinne ablesen/" (2003), engl.: "On the horizon we read our senses".
17. Gerhard Mack: *Bilder der Verunsicherung. Der Künstler Yves Netzhammer erfindet am Computer Geschichten, die von unseren Ängsten erzählen*, in: *NZZ am Sonntag*, 19th January 2003.
18. A scene from "Am Horizont können wir unsere Sinne ablesen".
19. A scene from "Die Möglichkeit nicht mehr haben, sich weniger ähnlich zu sein.", engl.: "The lose of opportunity to be as dissimilar to self as possible"
20. Peter P. Schneider: *Sprachbildspeicher*, in: *Züritipp, Tagesanzeiger*, 17th - 23rd January 2003, p. 62 - 63 (with a title page by Yves Netzhammer)
21. Practised users of PC or Apple will recognise one of these tones as the computer's error signal.
22. More detail on this work: Justus Jonas: *Die umgekehrte Rüstung*, in *cat.: Yves Netzhammer/Björn Melhus: Die umgekehrte Rüstung*, Kulturamt der Stadt Kaiserslautern, 2003, no pag.