

Yves Netzhammer

Die Subjektivierung der Wiederholung, Projekt B (The Subjectification of the Repetition, Project B) (2007)

Installation with mirrored walls, installation enclosure consisting of floor relief, painted ceiling, 3 projections of animated videos, each 37:37 min., PAL/DVD; 12-channel soundtrack (soundtrack: Bernd Schurer)

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Exhibition: 2007 Karlskirche Kassel, documenta 12 accompanying programme



Yves Netzhammer's (born 1970 in Schaffhausen, Switzerland) space-filling installation was shown for the first time in the Karlskirche, a church in Kassel, as a part of documenta 12's official accompanying programme. It was the counterpart to *Die Subjektivierung der Wiederholung, Projekt A (The Subjectification of the Repetition, Project A)* which was being presented at the same time in the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, an equally monumental installation, in which a tilting plane led from the pavilion's façade inside. While the façade's facing showed drawings in a stencil technique, the traditional sculpture gallery of the pavilion housed a 42:24 min. video film. While *Project A* was mainly visible as an outward facing intervention, the intervention in *Project B* was located inside. The work withdraws to an inner space from where the surroundings via the reflection on the sidewalls virtually implode.

Project B consists of an acute-angled stage enclosure with reflective sidewalls and a painting on its ceiling. Within the structure a wooden silhouette of a tree is housed. Individual fallen leaves lay scattered across the floor. Let into the mirrored walls are three circular shaped video projections of digital animations each of approx. 35 min. duration as well as a complex soundtrack, created by the composer Bernd Schurer for a 12 channel installation, which has

been modified for the exhibition space in Kunstmuseum Bern and is played back over 6 channels. Via the mirrored sidewalls the film projections as well as the surroundings including the viewer are multiplied. The impression of a multi-dimensional universe is generated, in the centre of which stands a tree and in whose branches a planetary system of images orbits. The same motifs appear in all three films, and so it seems as if particular sequences wander from one circular projection to the next. The recurrent subjects within this planetary system are images of violence and images of the transformation of people, animals and plants: a cigarette is put out on a person's arm, a chameleon is cut up into pieces, an elephant lying on the floor and cut in two right through the middle, is bleeding to death, a person's tongue is pulled out by a wire clamp, a chameleon hovers in the air, a person is transformed into an elephant, leaves fall and collect on a magnificent garment and so on. Transformation is a recurring motif, whether it be the chameleon adapting to its surroundings or the transforming of one creature into another. The ability to transform can be understood on the one hand as the questioning of the concept of consistent identity or on the other as a reference to the fundamental similarity of all creatures, in that they all clearly carry the germ of others within them.

Netzhammer's films do not show complete stories, but rather short sequences in which something changes. The brief events appear like fleeting visions.ⁱ This cosmos of images is denoted by sterility and smoothness, instead of wrinkled skin, fur or craggy bark there are bare reflective surfaces and polished hardness.ⁱⁱ Only the occasional flow of blood is evidence that Netzhammer has created living entities and not bloodless chess figures to be moved about.ⁱⁱⁱ The occasional violence that befalls the genderless and faceless figures is cushioned by their laconically concise and emotionless depiction.^{iv} It is only the accompanying music that expresses something of the vehemence of the experiences depicted or merely implied by the video.

Appropriate to our contemporary loss of orientation Netzhammer appears to be playing with the idea of the "Tree of Knowledge" in whose branches human behaviour is reflected. However, the content and form of the installation were conceived for the Huguenot Karlskirche church in Kassel where, following strict observance of the Old Testament's ban on imagery, all decoration or imagery in the church's interior has been renounced. In these sober surroundings Netzhammer constructed his stage on which an alternative visual world was conceived and current dilemmas were visually addressed. The filmic probing of possibilities points to Netzhammer as a utopian in the tradition of Robert Musil in that his thinking leads to another form of "the understanding of reality".^v This links the artist to the monadology teachings of the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 -1716). Leibniz's monads are kinds of spiritual atoms, eternal, irreducible and unique but simultaneously mirror the universe, synchronised by "pre-established harmony".^{vi} Netzhammer's installation is based on the world as an alternative world as well as a reflection of the actual world. Thanks to the reflections on the sidewalls, the world of filmic images achieves a dialogue with the world of the viewer and is also simultaneously a model-like representation of the real world – or at least a fragment of it - addressing emotions and experiences belonging to general human experience and feeding off an image bank that is culturally specific. It also attempts however to invent new ways of visually representing old experiences and allow according to the associative potential of each viewer an individual interpretation and narrative. In this sense Netzhammer's installation is a narration and knowledge generator which bundles a wealth of human experience into archetypal scenes and via the visual-linguistic reinventions encourages new kinds of insights.

Through the mirroring of the surroundings the viewer becomes part of the work and thus inexorably linked to its "critique of civilisation".^{vii} Netzhammer's works, which used to be restricted to mainly visual and sound elements, are assigned a new physicality and sensibility in the installation, whilst simultaneously the former strict separation between the virtual and the real is temporarily abolished within an aesthetic experience.

Kathleen Bühler, Curator Contemporary Art Kunstmuseum Bern

ⁱ Yves Netzhammer. *Wenn man etwas gegen seine Eigenschaften benützt, muss man dafür einen anderen Namen finden*, Manor-Kunstpreis Schaffhausen 1998, exhib. cat. Museum zu Allerheiligen, Kunstverein Schaffhausen, Schaffhausen 1999, n. pag. (dust cover).

ⁱⁱ For Netzhammer's mutations in 3-D the same is true to some extent as for Aldo Walker's late drawings, for example his *Morphosyntaktisches Objekt (Morphosyntactic Object)* (1999, 6 parts, acrylic on wall, 300 x 208 cm). In the large-scale wall drawings of his former teacher questions of perceptual theory were dealt with, and in the outline drawings of mutant creatures the contemporary expressive capabilities of the line were examined. A major element for Walker as much as for Netzhammer is the transformation of the compositional structure, which in the latter becomes three-dimensional and is time-based. For the expressive capabilities of his pictures cf. also Sabine Maria Schmidt, "Die Formen zukünftiger Gefühle. Die Utopie der Möglichkeitswelt im Werk von Yves Netzhammer", in: *Yves Netzhammer. Das Gefühl präziser Haltlosigkeit beim Festhalten der Dinge*, exhib. cat. Krefelder Kunstmuseen / Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbrock Museum, Duisburg 2003, pp. 19–32, in particular pp. 21–24 as well as id., "Die Beredsamkeit der Bilder. Zu den Tieren in den Bildwelten Yves Netzhammers", in: *Yves Netzhammer*, Hatje Cantz: Ostfildern 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. (see note 1). The continually inflicted injuries address limits and boundaries as a recurring obsession. The repeatedly depicted nightmare of the permeability of bodily boundaries could also be read as a symbolic rendering of its invasion by biomedical sciences and neurotechnology.

^{iv} "The works unfold their presence mainly in imagery which may affect and unbalance our emotional state. Even though the protagonist appears unmoved by it all, we associate it, due to our visual and perceptual habits, to our individual life experiences, psychologically elementary phenomena such as love, feelings of security, loneliness, alienation, speechlessness, curiosity, illness or death." Cf. Beate Ermacora, "Schnittstellen", in: Duisburg 2003 (see note 2), p. 11.

^v Sabine Maria Schmidt, in: Duisburg 2003 (see note 2), p. 24.

^{vi} In accordance with Leibniz's concept of "pre-established harmony" everything occurs in all monads simultaneously, like two synchronised clocks which are however completely independent of each other. This is why the existing world is the best of all possibilities, because it possesses a maximum wealth of moments and the largest possible diversity. The frequently misunderstood concept of the "best of all possible worlds" does not want to put a spin on real and great misfortunes but refers to the world with all its potential, which in an ongoing process will continue to develop. Cf. also Anton Hügli, Poul Lübcke (ed.), *Philosophielexikon. Personen und Begriffe der abendländischen Philosophie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Rowohlt Verlag: Reinbek near Hamburg 1991, p. 344.

^{vii} Netzhammer's installation belongs to the tradition since the 1990s of committed installation art, not however in heavy-handed illustrations of political subject matters as in so called "illustrative art" (Julia Rebentisch), but in facilitating a particular aesthetic experience. These experiences cannot be separated from the content of the work, because: "Aesthetic experience only seems able to obtain a certain intensity and consequently also quality, when the contents which come into aesthetic play are of some importance to the recipient." Cf. Julia Rebentisch, *Ästhetik der Installation*, Edition Suhrkamp, Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 2003, p. 279.