

Sophie Schmidt

There is going to be a different time when the recombination of the human body will be complete and thereby, we humans will have reached new states of being – contrary to the primacy of the head. Then our bodies might be open, might be entangled in and with the world. Until we have reached this point, we need body aids – prostheses – to get entwined with the world and to overcome the separation of mind and body. Until then, we also need our own language, a new vocabulary to describe the immediacy of what we experience in the world.

Sophie Schmidt's works center on this different kind of being in the world: She ventures on an evolutionary advancement which will not only transform human anatomy, but also being human and our perspectives on the world. By means of drawings, pictures, texts, and performances – or to use a different categorization: through motion machines, prostheses, operating tables and drawings on chalkboards, she creates a system which allows and at the same time requires her and the observers to completely engage with this new “widening of being human”. This process is structured by a strict set of rules and builds upon precise animistic observations.

Schmidt's interest in nature, psychoanalysis, and philosophical – predominately phenomenological – approaches to the body pervades her art. Her way of widening human existence usually begins at the solar plexus and negotiates her immense theoretical knowledge of the human body, which is the basis for her works. Similar to the theories of the philosopher Vilém Flusser, the bodily posture here circumscribes an approach to the world. She wants to get away from a perspective which views nature from above in order to achieve a closer relationship with the world. Her works are extremely personal: Take for example her protective skins which are inspired by insect shells and which offer an aid to oppose vulnerability and pain. For every “shortcoming”, Schmidt develops a prosthesis and instructions. The prostheses help the recombination of the body and thereby they test the new state of being. Snails and insects are not only reoccurring motives, but friends whom Schmidt imitates – their antennae for instance allow a better connection to the world. She integrates the antennae in her works to enable an opening of the bodies. And she builds prostheses of the stomach for the “becoming of the stomach” or creates an aid for balancing in order not to walk vertically through the world anymore. The prostheses are re-appearing elements in her works, but they are also aids which enable the transformation of being in the world. The body doesn't end with the skin, but is opened, expanded, and freshly connected.

Schmidt employs and explains these filigree body aids or those massive motion machines whose instable make-ups slowly dissolve while being used. Additionally, she continually recombines them. The instable installations are in a constant state of balancing which doesn't survive their usage: Constructing, performative destruction, and re-construction form a cycle. The performances, i.e. the uses of the prostheses and the operation tables, dissolve boundaries or delineate metamorphoses, after which the boundaries of the world have to re-form for the artist – this process is comparable to the resettling of a hermit crab or the state of a freshly sloughed snake.

Text by Anja Lückenkemper, translated by Ulla Stackmann