

SABETH BUCHMANN / THOMAS FEUERSTEIN
NARRATIVES OF ART¹

Sabeth Buchmann: The formal range of your work extends from aspects of comic-strip drawing across moments of expressiveness to poster design and science fiction. At the same time, there are references to the nineteenth century as well as to modernism, from Surrealism to Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. The question, then, is to which extent your work is apt to tease out, from the field that opens up between the antagonistic conceptions of visual art in high culture and popular culture, the variegated and often invisible ways in which art and science are interwoven? I am thinking, for example, of the sculpture *PLASMA*, whose appearance is loosely based on a molecular model.

Thomas Feuerstein: *PLASMA* started out with considerations about sculpture. I wanted to implement a conception of sculpture that builds on the phases of matter, which is to say, that ranges from solid across liquid to gaseous. So I see the form as temporalized insofar as the sculpture might dissolve at any moment and take a new shape in a different phase. It might trickle away or form a cloud beneath the ceiling. Cézanne and his idea of a pictorial condensation of the world into sphere, cone, and cylinder was an inspiration, as were Adolphe Quetelet's *Physique sociale* and Antonio Negri's *Multitude*. The sphere strikes me as being the most elemental three-dimensional body, and hence a basic module of sculpture. Atoms are usually visualized as spherical models, and so the association with a molecule comes naturally, but some beholders see a mutated blackberry, an alien-like parasite, or a coral. These associations help construct the work and are part of its aesthetic.

SB: Almost all of your works are accompanied by drawings, which often take up considerable room in your exhibitions. Does drawing serve your art as a connective medium of sorts, synthesizing the heterogeneous forms of representation and the wide spectrum of thematic fields from which your works draw on an overarching level? In other words, beyond its distinctive aesthetic qualities, does it function as a medium of commentary and explanation?

TF: I have drawn since I was a teenager, but in the 1990s I abhorred drawings because I thought they transmitted a bourgeois concept of art built on simple originality and virtuosity. I did not go back to drawing until the late 1990s, when I made graphic works in combination with texts. Since then, writing and drawing have constituted a unified whole for me that gives rise to a form of emblematics. Graphic works turn into paintings, especially when printed on large posters and shown in an exhibition, and their effect is one of atmosphere. I think that there is something timeless about them, since they recall medieval woodcuts as much as works of the nineteenth century or comic strips. This trans-historical aspect is important to me, since the graphic works are vehicles that travel between times and spaces, between past and future. They show that the exhibition is, to my mind, a medium or narrative of its own, one that tells stories via objects and pictures and has a completely different structure than theater or film. Materiality and tactility are important to me, whence also the affinity for molecular worlds, the significance of physical matter as such, and the associated processes of the animate world. Visual art is the only medium that can do that. And it is something that goes far beyond forms of presentation and representation.

SB: The approach you've just sketched aims at interrelations between art, the theory of science, philosophy, biology, economics, politics, etc., that always allow the beholder to read your aesthetic language as a conjunction of heterogeneous codes – codes that seem to both define and determine your mode of production. That brings a systemic conception of authorship into play that articulates itself as an "effect" of processes of appropriation and translation rather than as a "creative" principle. The motif of the hand strikes me as positively emblematic in this context. In the historical perspective, the hand and authorship are closely related – often as a token of sublime craftsmanship – and so I wonder whether and how this motif serves you as a way to give the beholder some indication of how you work and how you see yourself as an artist.

TF: It sometimes seems to me that I have little authority over my works. They lead lives of their own, following their own intrinsic logic. Nor do I, as the artist, want to be the dictator of my art, and so I see my works less as objects than as subjects. A work of art, I believe, is a sort of assembly or collective, as Bruno Latour has shown with regard to everyday artifacts, one in which different parameters come together to leave their material inscriptions. Generally speaking, these parameters may be drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from art history, philosophy, or the

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sciences, or they may be induced by the market, the gallery, the collector, curator, critic, and so on. I want to render these structures transparent and aesthetically productive. That doesn't mean that there's no room for emotions, but I distrust any kind of naïve expressivism and spontaneity, because they usually just repeat what already exists. If you define the author in exact fashion, he is easily transformed, in an algorithmic manner, into a program. In modernism, manifestos, in the sense of rules and recipes on how to generate art, were very popular, as is evident in the phenomenon of isms. In the early 1990s, I offered an ironic take on this in the form of various simple pieces of software that, despite their limitations, produce more pictures and sculptures than fit into the visible universe. Authorship, I think, is not so much an artistic category as rather a mechanism of economics and marketing. When an author creates a product and signs it, the work becomes a label and the artist, a brand. But who wants to be branded? The art market prefers labeling and redundancy because they entail the creation of an aura, which transforms the work into a tradable commodity like a Coca-Cola. That's also why people storm the Guggenheim's branch museums as though they were burger places. When I, as an artist, create a work, I want to transgress certain boundaries and make something appear that exceeds my previous imaginations. At that moment, ideas and experiments carry me off, suspending what is usually called the author. I am no longer master of my creation, and art takes on an aspect of the ecstatic in the Greek sense, as I am figuratively speaking beside myself. This form of ecstasy cares nothing for authorship and market mechanisms. It is only when the invoices for the materials come in and the works stand their ground in the art market that I become an author.

SB: The art historian Michael Fried sees the manifestation of the artist's hand in the picture as an instance of authorial (self-)absorption. As the art historian Svetlana Alpers has argued in her book on Rembrandt, it is, according to Aristotle, what distinguishes man as an intelligent being. That's why the motif of the hand also appears in the context of the so-called paragone, the rivalry among the arts, where it was often staged in a way that ennobled the artist, turning him into a thinker and inspired craftsman at once. In this connection, you refer to the Surrealist *écriture automatique* – a technique that both disempowers the artist's hand and reinterprets it as a medium (in the twofold sense of the word) with almost demoniacal abilities. Your references to the motif of the hand moreover blend different discourses from art history and mythology, from biology, information theory, and economics, such as Adam Smith's figure of the invisible hand. We might read this as a visual discourse about the cultural history of the hand; then again, we might also see a (self-)ironic take on concepts of artistic agency and creativity that are once again popular right now.

TF: The hand cannot be reduced to a single meaning. In keeping with the structure of conceptual narrative, it plays with different levels, and can be no more associated with Smith's invisible hand than with an *acheiropoieton* (an image not created by human hands). Yet it is patently a severed or amputated hand, which shows an ironic side. I am interested in thick descriptions in Clifford Geertz's sense of the term. That is to say, the hand operates in the work *MANIFESTO* as a narrative node that aggregates traditional meanings and connects them to the current market action, to the stock market, the insurance business, and capitalism. At first glance, the hand recalls a seemingly occult magician's legerdemain: an oversized wooden hand, moved as if by an invisible hand, draws an endless line. But the line has a "rational" origin: it records stock-market data supplied by insurers that trade at Lloyd's, in London. Lloyd's started out, in the late seventeenth century, as a coffee house where businessmen met to hedge against the risks of maritime trade. Seafaring beckoned with large profits, but the seas and tidewaters harbored great risks. The technical connection linking the hand to a computer server in the shape of a container ship also establishes symbolic relations between capitalism, globalization, the insurance industry, and meteorology. That's an assertion – but the economy defines the global climate and has become a meteorological category. Due to automated high-frequency trading, fluctuating capital flows are so complex and chaotic that financial streams behave like air flows and become unpredictable beyond the short term. When the chart lines accumulating behind the ship in gestural fashion darken into a black cloud, what I see is a seascape of capitalism.

SB: Is it an aim of your approach to interweave diachronic and synchronic topologies? I am referring to your graphic art and the way you present it, in the form of cloud-like layered poster walls. In this instance, authorship seems to stand in the tradition of semiological or else allegorical procedures that are characteristic of politicized forms of artistic practice, such as the deconstruction of the stereotypical idea of the white, Western, heterosexual artist. In your work, however, authorship always also appears as a genre tied to historical practices of representation that counter conventional myths of creation as well as the contemporary imperative of boundless productivity.

TF: My graphic works stand in the emblematic tradition. They are hybrids composed of text, imagery, historical references, and futuristic speculations or assertions that provoke semantic inter-connections, resulting in hypertext-like links between the works. They feed pumps of meaning that, depending on the beholder and his or her perception, bring different constellations and references to light. When, for example, the hand (Latin *manus*)

inscribes itself in the title of the installation *MANIFESTO*, it becomes the motif, in the graphic works, for a variety of interconnecting narratives. *MANIFESTO* was first shown in early 2009, and given the economic crisis at the time, the impression was that it was meant to be topical. But I am not interested in such topicality, in the sense of journalistic editorializing or illustration. I refuse to make any sort of occasional art. The reflections and preparations leading to works of this sort usually go back several years.

SB: In your work, this aspect is articulated by the emphasis on the historical and heteronomous, on collecting and combining things in forever new ways. I also recognize in your art a media-technological perspective on authorship that reminds me of the writings of Friedrich Kittler, Vilém Flusser, and others; their endeavor, which constructivism, Pop art, etc. anticipated, was to highlight the share the machine-like has in authorship, which is to say, to promote a 'post-human' model of aesthetic production. Do your works make explicit reference to this media discourse that was popular in the 1980s and 1990s, a strand that ran between poststructuralism and postmodernism?

TF: That's certainly the case with my computer and web art from the 1990s. To this day, I am interested in machines and computers, because they transform the consciousness and the lives of people. So it is not the machine that fascinates me, as a piece of technology, but its relationship with man. The networked computer as such is a structuralist system that implements on many levels what poststructuralism described in theory. The polemic over authorship has been supplanted, in the social perception, by the fight over copyrights, which perhaps goes to confirm my insinuation that the question of authorship is an economic rather than an artistic issue. In the early 1990s, I designed networked installations such as *Hausmusik* or *Proustmaschine* that transposed real-time stock market or news data into music and literature. When the upswings and downturns directly influence the musical notation, the question of authorship moves to the level of power and money: as an artist, I do not have the necessary capital to manipulate stock markets, and so I am also not the composer of the sounds. The authors are stockholders, speculators, corporations, and, in a wider sense, all consumers.

SB: So it's a discourse about systems rather than media?

TF: I am fascinated by the idea of making systems and things speak for themselves. As an artist, I operate first and foremost as an observer, devising arrangements and experiments that may be used to set artistic processes in motion. These may be information systems, but also materials, forms, social, semiotic, or aesthetic processes. Once a work of this sort is up and running, linkages and narrative nodes emerge that grow and come to life. It starts like in a Petri dish and spins threads that extend into reality. At that moment, I'm a structuralist who tends to relations, interconnections, and mechanisms, but I am also a gardener, a farmer, a cook, and a lab technician. The best works are those that come into being without authorship, that result from processes.

SB: There are several historical sources we may relate this to, not least importantly the role eco-logy played in the art of the 1960s and 1970s. I am thinking, for example, of Robert Smithson, a protagonist of land art whose influence is felt even today. His conception of entropy in connection with the era's great interest in cybernetics was, and still is, of particular interest: Smithson strikes me as significant for your work primarily because he was likewise interested in linking science to science fiction and popular narratives. My question, then, is whether and how your fairly rigorous systems of order integrate such approaches of entropy and cybernetics, which are by now historic.

TF: Entropy is a key term, and there is no necessity to see it as the opposite of order and information. In fact, entropy operates in the aesthetic as a complex antagonism. Smithson correctly recognized this and integrated processes into his work that generate a poetics of their own. Cultural history is usually told as the story of a struggle against entropy: humans create civilization by fighting the windmills of decay, disintegration, and oblivion. That's why there are libraries and museums, negentropic temples, that is to say, that protect knowledge and order, but also material artifacts, against decay. The concept of entropy in Smithson comes very close to what I am interested in, since it respects the intrinsic dynamism of materials and processes and frees them from the dictate of the artist's hand. Entropy must not be understood as the negation of nature, art, and ultimately, culture as a whole; it must be seen as their integral component.

SB: Can you give some examples of the form that the application and elaboration of such approaches takes in your work?

TF: I have worked with fungi for many years, which may be described as entropy accelerators, since they break down the large majority of all organic material. For the work *ONE AND NO CHAIR*, I used a "terrorist" fungus that goes by the wonderful name *Serpula lacrymans*, which may be translated as "crying creeper." I had a carpenter build a

chair according to his own ideas and infected the wood with the mycelium. After some five years in an incubator, the chair had lost all stability; the wood was as light as paper. What remained was its shape. The title *ONE AND NO CHAIR* is a paraphrase of Joseph Kosuth's work *One and Three Chairs*. Kosuth's piece, to my mind, illustrates a passage from Plato's *Republic*, examining the relations between language, image, and referent. But I was more interested in the aspect of entropy and the point at which a chair ceases to be a chair and becomes a transitional object on the way to nothingness. Ownership, identity, and ontology are biodegradable.

SB: Which is to say, your raw materials, like sugar, always also imply a critical perspective on capitalism? Is that what leads you to deliberately determine the framework within which your artistic practice operates? But doesn't that also imply a danger of totalization, in that you base your works on a code that is supposed to explain everything, including capitalism? Doesn't it jeopardize the dimension of arbitrariness and contingency you lay claim to?

TF: As an artist, I am always determined in my options: I speak in a limited set of letters and words, I paint with certain colors and materials. The history of art would be inconceivable without restrictions on, and the determination of, color, material, space, or light. But the deliberate and conceptual limitation of one's means is precisely what gives rise to surprising possibilities. So autonomy presupposes determination, and that's why I base works on a code, as you call it, from which processes, meanings, and narratives spring. But I do not see this code as totalitarian and dogmatic; to the contrary, since it is conceptually posited, I see it as discursive. What I feel is totalitarian is when art veils itself in an aura of the erratic and mystical and the artist operates in ways that look free, spontaneous, and emotional only on the surface.

To stick with the example of sugar, or more precisely glucose, it all comes down to a single small molecule. But this molecule contains the principle of life, since all metabolisms in biology, including man's, are based on glucose. The reduction sets a very narrow frame, but it at once also opens up a wide field that gestures beyond biochemistry. Sugar becomes a narrative node that involves colonialism and slavery as much as contemporary political and economic debates over resources and the speculative trade in them. The initial limitation to glucose shuts out many possibilities and means of expression, but it also sparks something new. Making experimental setups that function on a sugar basis run takes great effort; painting pictures with sugar tests the limits of technical control over materials; producing sculptures made of sugar is ultimately more complicated than casting them in bronze. But as a visual artist I am interested in the material, since materials are always also carriers of meaning. There is no arbitrariness of the sign when it comes to materials. People may criticize that as material fetishism, but I see it as a specific feature of visual art.

SB: My point is not to criticize that. To the contrary, the figures you design and posit become manifest as materials and as transformative media: that way, there is not only an interplay between material levels (which have to do with production and objects) and immaterial ones (which have to do with information and communication) – it also, I believe, opens up new perspectives of perception that intervene into contemporary models of the relationship between art and science. What I have more of a problem with is when analogies are drawn between science and art: one, because they run the risk of being read as mere illustrations, and two, because they evince a penchant for a universalism framed in biologicistic terms that is observable, for example, in today's debates over genetic engineering. That's what leads me to ask the simple question: how do you position your works vis-à-vis this problem, and why do they look the way they do?

TF: I share your discomfort, but that's exactly why I'm interested in it. Biology has mutated, since modernism, into a sort of ontology. It's just that, in contradistinction to philosophy, there seems to be nothing to negotiate. The dangerous part is that the dogma is shunted from ideology into the genes, naturalizing all social and economic concerns. But what is the gene? Any contemporary geneticist will know better than to give an exact definition, since the concept is in flux. The gene is a narrative node in stories of the sciences, and that in turn makes it interesting for art. The word "gene" as such is well chosen, since it is a fabulous, a mythical term, related on the level of etymology to the Roman *genii* and to the Greek demons on that of meaning. "Gene" is in fact an artistic concept, but today, it is at home in the laboratory and not the studio. To my mind, such narratives, which extend from antiquity across Frankenstein into the present and a not-too-distant future, are most fascinating, and they help me understand what it is I do as an artist. When I claim that the occidental tradition has seen the metaphysical forces emigrate into the engine, that it is no longer priests and artists who study demons and *genii* but, to use the Enlightenment term, engineers, that also has a great deal to do with a shift of meanings in art. Art, via aesthetics, can put these complex issues in a nutshell, and that's exactly where its contemporaneity lies.

SB: Can you explain that in more concrete terms in an example project?

TF: With the project *BIOPHILY*, for instance, my interest was in building a link between biology and the information

age. As part of it, I deposited my sperm in a sperm bank in Los Angeles in 1996, since that institution struck me as an adequate contemporary museum. It was an Internet project titled *EUGEN*, with a reference to Francis Galton and his eugenics, which initiated a tradition of particularly sinister biologicistic and biopolitical ideas. Charles Davenport based his argument on the improvement of man on Galton's work, championing, starting around 1910, the idea of public compulsory sterilization programs as well as the deportation of all American Blacks from the US. It was no more than a stone's throw from there to Hitler's speech about the "biological state."

So the reason I am interested in biology, among other fields, has to do with cultural narratives. My attempt to develop an artistic method with regard to these issues brought me to "conceptual narration." To my mind, there are both hard and soft stories in this context: hard ones are nonnegotiable; soft ones, by contrast, carry the readiness within themselves to be retold in a different way. Biologisms are hard stories, because they harness biology to certain purposes and propagate a reductionistic worldview. The more nonsensically and irrationally a story is spun, the more dogmatic its narrative registers. Art, I believe, does not tell hard stories; it is far removed from dogmatism of any sort and operates, at least as idealistically conceived, beyond power and territory. Art has a great deal to do with contingency research, in the sense of building an intuition for possibility, by breaking up and deconstructing ostensible inevitabilities within hard narratives. Most recently, hard stories have made a comeback in politics, economics, and religion, as systems are undergoing a structural transformation that dogmatic confabulations seek to compensate for. Once I recognize that there is no natural "gene" for the nation-state, for the elect, for "race," for capitalism, etc., I have to construct it by narrative means while also making the narrative a dogma or blind spot. These very blind spots, I think, are the neuralgic node for an artistic narration.

SB: When people raise the question of the social and political relevance of art today, the answer they receive often points to the way it positions itself within modern structures Michel Foucault described as complexes of power and knowledge – as though that sufficiently accounted for the relevance art lays claim to. On the other hand, we might counter the question with another question: whether and why art should submit to such an objectified criterion of relevance. Art, it appears, is supposed to be useful in some way. Conceptions of "artistic research," which invite misunderstandings and are often instrumentalistic, illustrate this. Such tendencies expectably trigger a reflexive backlash, fuelling an imperturbable re-romanticization of art. What's your view of such dynamisms and ambivalences, and how do you deal with them?

TF: The appearance that it has no function is art's most dangerous function, because then art serves the purposes of a hard story. It always caters to a narrative, which, whether we are aware of it or not, has its place in ensembles of functions or meanings. Any escape from such entanglements would not only be naïve, it also gives rise to harmless and boring works. But I have to agree with you, the so-called scientification of art leads to its bureaucratization. However well-intentioned "artistic research" and all funding programs may be, they hardly promote art. Conventions, a new academicism, and mediocrity are installed as standards of value. But engaging with the sciences does not, to my mind, automatically imply that methods of the sciences are adopted as methods of art. Art has its own methods, and if it were to copy scientific methods, it would be utterly uninteresting to the sciences. Art condenses materials from reality on an aesthetic level, and since the sciences are currently the leading constructors and producers of reality, an artistic interrogation of the social role the sciences play seems to me to be of obvious interest.

SB: But what is the true reality? In light of your artistic practice, I don't think that way of putting it can stand.

TF: As you know, reality is not the same as objective fact. Reality is negotiable and pluralistic, objective fact is absolute. One quality of art, to my mind, is that it can unfold its own reality. So engaging with art affords us the experience of seeing reality in a different way, in possibility.

SB: You're touching upon a fundamental issue that is of interest to psychoanalysis, which strikes me as important also because psychoanalysis, after a period of popularity – if you think of Kristeva and Lacan – has been marginalized in contemporary discourses about the sciences, like Latour's. To what extent do such antagonisms inform what you describe as narrative? What role do you believe they play in the context of today's network cultures, which, as we know, are defined by the pressure upon art to adapt to the evidently prevailing paradigm of digital forms of organization?

TF: Art, to me, is inconceivable without the interplay with social and psychological realities. To adopt a temporally detached, let alone a neutral or objective standpoint would be presumptuous. Latent processes – to use slightly lofty terms: the unconscious of the systems, what has been buried beneath them or is uncanny about them – have long been a motif of art. That's why I study demons and try to develop a new demonology. When we hear "demon," we

think of superstition, myth, exorcisms, or esoterica, but we get mail from them on a regular basis: when an email can't be delivered, for example, we hear from a mailer daemon. Ever since Maxwell's demon, if not earlier, these beings haunt our world as figures of thought or real processes; today, they have become synonymous with automated cybernetic systems. These pieces of software, which have been called daemon (Disk And Execution MONitor) since the 1960s, supervise information processes – but they also surveil us. In the Internet age, we live in the pandemonium of Google and Facebook. When I realize works with “demonic processes,” such as *DAIMON* or *BOTCAFÉ*, your objection that art is adapted to the prevailing systems is perfectly correct. I build works of art like traps in order to render these demons and the processes associated with them visible. If I, as an artist, refuse to get involved with these systems, I cannot draw the material from them.

SB: What is the import of the systemic for the question concerning the conditions of the possibility of the poetological?

TF: The systemic is a concept I avoid – I prefer to speak of narrative, as did Clifford Geertz, whose roots were in anthropology, or, most recently, Siegfried J. Schmidt, who's a constructivist. To engage with dominant stories – including those of art – means, to me, to tell a new story. There is no other way for me confront and question stories. That's where the interplay between fact and fiction unfolds, which is not the lonely métier of art but a general principle that may be found in all social discourses. Historically speaking, many narratives of art were closer to fact than to fiction, even though they are regarded as fantastical today. So the clean distinction between science = fact and art = fiction is unsustainable. As an artist, I am not only an observer, an epistemician, a phenomenologist, or a pragmatist, I am also free to assert something. In my visual language, assertions result from constellations among stories. This may on occasion lead to misunderstandings, but one should not censor a possible multiplicity of interpretations. On the contrary, such multiplicity charges art like a battery. That's the only way to explain how a Renaissance picture can still electrify us with its spark.

SB: If we think of the traditionally male line, from Dürer and Leonardo to Duchamp and Beuys, the synthesis between art and the sciences has always been fed by a social practice that went far beyond single agents, involving a great number of informal co-producers. Several studies have been written on this issue in recent years; scholars of art and culture are more and more open to network theories, though some of them take a distinctly uncritical view of them, too often overlooking the fact that such theories are apt to reduce the social to a functional conception of actions and narratives, which blinds us to social power relations and hierarchies.

TF: Visual art would be inconceivable without inscriptions of actions, codings, and ideas upon material objects. That's why, like many artists, I am interested in Latour and actor-network theory. For as long as ANT has existed, it has also been discussed in art theory, but artists have always unconsciously applied it in their practice. If I were to answer the question of why the works look the way they do with arguments from ANT, that would be easy, since any work is a collective of different conditions, interests, and influences: conceptual considerations are intermingled with banal aspects such as the price of certain materials or the capacity of one's storage space.

The de-dualization between matter and concept, between content and form comes naturally for work in the visual arts. That's why the question of form and aesthetics is inseparable from -issues of material, technology, socio-political context, narrative, etc. These interconnections are all over art history. On the other hand, it would strike me as too boring to associate a defined aesthetic with my entire oeuvre. Aesthetics would then lead to a totalization of the perspective and a conditioned form of seeing.

SB: Your work also combines this sort of suspended state between determinacy and autonomy with a turn to autarkic systems such as Henry Thoreau's. I think that's interesting in that they conceive autonomy not, as a predominant strain in European modernity does, as a universally valid formula, but as a situated model of autarkic forms of production. Given that your laboratory arrangements and process-based sculptures refer to this notion of autarky, I wanted to ask you about the role socio-political ethics plays as a guiding theme in your work.

TF: With the conceptual sculptures *MANNA-MACHINE*, the initial idea was that of a painting machine. I wanted to grow and harvest my painting materials and colors myself, like a farmer. I conducted various experiments with organisms in the studio; what fascinated me most was the monocellular green alga *Chlorella vulgaris*, which contains the largest concentration of chlorophyll, making it the perfect pigment base. Evolutionarily speaking, moreover, it is very old; its size is that of a red blood cell; and it is used in medicine for detoxification and in environmental engineering as a carbon dioxide binder. As a foodstuff, it is a very good source of protein. But most importantly, it is a model organism in science – it was used, for example, to analyze the process of photosynthesis. What I'm trying to say is that it all started with a question of visual production that became tied in, over the process

of implementation, with technological, scientific, ecological, etc., issues. In the end, what I had was a narrative node that intertwined threads from art with today's "great problems" – food, resources, climate.

The works *MANNA-MACHINE* are hybrids between sculpture, painting, and a bioreactor for the production of pigment. So the pictures painted with plankton are given the title HARVEST, and their number is constrained by the yield of a batch and the formats. New pictures grew up in the studio and in exhibitions that are sometimes widely different depending on the harvest and processing, though they are by and large monochromes. So the work flows from a discourse in painting, but I think that external content and references to reality do not derogate from it. With this project as with others, its evolution included the production of graphic works with reference, for example, to Thoreau or science fiction. The drawing is an ideal medium of reflection and confabulation, and so I like to post the graphic works as placards, like a wall newspaper. The drawings are pictorial texts, but less linear, logical, or causal in their organization than conventional texts.

SB: Your exhibitions often turn the process of manufacturing a material or the transformation of one material into another into the object of interest. You have described this as process-based sculpture. How would you classify your conception of sculpture in a historical perspective? Are you interested in inscribing yourself also in a specific history of sculpture or in a genealogy within modernism? Are Beuys, Haacke, Trockel, Höller, Rhoades, et al. possible sources of inspiration, or do you see greater affinities with strands such as the subsculpture tradition, with its preference for automata and organic-machine hybrids? To put it in the terms the curator and theorist Jack Burnham used: from Frankenstein to digital information systems? Smithson, for example, writes that the avant-garde of 1960s New York preferred the science fiction and Z movies that were shown in theaters on 42nd Street to art exhibitions. I see your work as operating on the interface between these two cultures, as it were, which interweave in the Fluxus movement, in environmental art, and in the context of what is called multimedia art.

TF: The sculptures contain ruptures as well as continuities. The boundary between sculpture and subsculpture gets blurry, but I see that in a historical perspective as well, since modernism would be unthinkable without the influences of the natural sciences, media technologies, or psycho-analysis. My concept of form, however, has little to do with a classical conception of sculpture. The material, with its molecular structures and the associated processes and transformations, plays a specific role. I do not see form as the opposite of matter, nor do I think it is immutable, as in Platonism; it is a structure that can take on different shapes and figurations.

With the condensation objects, for example, the humid air we exhale makes ice sculptures grow. The more people talk about art, the more water condenses and freezes on the objects. The ice sculptures, in other words, are speech sculptures, produced by something immaterial; speaking about art makes the art appear. Since conditions vary between rooms and exhibitions, the form is also a different one each time. In the ensemble of works *POEM*, the water condensing on the sculptures is fed into biochemical processes and transformed, under the conditions of a primeval atmosphere, into amino acids and ethanol. Speaking about art produces molecular sculptures that the visitors to the exhibition may in turn drink in the form of liquor. As everyone gets increasingly inebriated, the talk about art grows more and more excessive, generating more steam for the sculpture. That's partly ironic, to be sure, but it also has a conceptual side. There's an obvious historic reference to Pataphysics and its bachelor machines, but unlike there, the processes function not only on a symbolic level but also in reality, according to principles of natural science. Based on this logic, we should have stored our conversation not on a recording device but instead with the work *VERBALE*. Then we would now have a sculpture.