

7. Epilogue

The Oeuvre as (Agential) Assemblage

The first epigraph to the prologue of this book was intended to establish a basic tenor for the study. In it Günther affirms that the “dichotomic distinctions of subject and object” and of other categories that have formed bivalent thinking are finally over.¹ As has been shown, for him many-valued logic first leads back to an additional perspective of reflection of another subject and then leads to an intensification of reflection within a subject. The rejection of “dichotomic distinctions” is for Günther still completely subject-centered; thus he does not challenge the principal distinction of subject and object as separated spheres. The crucial thing for him, rather, is a breaking up of a strict antithesis of identity and nonidentity that leads to logic-based extensions. From her specific appropriation of Günther’s theory, Bauermeister formed her own approach, which we have described as many-valued aesthetics: reciprocal networking is fundamental to it; moreover, there is an extension relative to the subject-object separation in which processes are shifted to the objects or in their merger—both aspects were discussed based on identity of reflection of the object and theories of the assemblage. Challenging distinctions such as “true” and “false” also opened up a space in between in which image-based statements adopt a mediating position.

The epilogue will now aim to synthesize all of the theoretical sections as well as their characteristics within the corresponding works of art into a comprehensive understanding; this will achieve the overcoming of dichotomies already addressed by Günther. In addition, the connection of the theoretical sections will be supplemented by a speculative extension that will make the artistic processes in Bauermeister’s creative work completely visible for the first time: the use of the philosophical concept of the assemblage was cited in various places in this study and these strands will be pulled together in what follows. The approaches of artistic research and of New Materialism are especially productive to that end, and within the latter the agential metaphysics of the philosopher Karen Barad is especially crucial.

¹ Gotthard Günther, *Idee und Grundriss einer nicht-Aristotelischen Logik: Die Idee und ihre philosophischen Voraussetzungen*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Fritz Meiner, 1991; orig. pub. 1959), 334.

In the effort to get as close as possible to Bauermeister's oeuvre from 1955 to 1975, the specifics of important groups of works were worked out in the chapters. Several works could be cited repeatedly as reference points for this study; the selection made could have been different, resulting from the different compositional, thematic, technical, and media elements that are continuously combined with one another—this is essential for the networking in her oeuvre. In the second epigraph of the prologue, Bergson explains how the partial already points to the “real whole,” since every aspect bears within it the potential of the whole.² Bauermeister's art consists of a web of elements that relate to one another, which is why it also seems legitimate to pick out individual elements in order to open up overarching insights. Based on the networks that exist between works and all the conditions that make them possible, the present study also adopts a network-like form: the simple addition of different elements within the works and the levels they produce have to be constantly reconnected to make it possible to understand the events.

The integration of the identity of reflection of the object has already shown that it was not enough to stick to Günther's notion of many-valuedness, since Bauermeister's artworks open up their own potentiality. Art cannot be roped in to illustrate theories and expand them by implementing them. Rather, the transformation of many-valued logic into many-valued aesthetics results a decided change in status: Bauermeister began in the early 1960s to integrate stimuli from many-valued logic into the composition of her artworks. This led to premises that she continued to bring along. The oeuvre that developed from this is, however, its own field and offers many more possibilities than Günther's written study. The many-valued aesthetic opens up a horizon that can only be partially described with words, since every artistic element integrated has the potential to condition an effect on another, and all of the resulting changes are equally important as the previous unchanged status and all of the contradictions. Based on the continual references between the elements employed as well as between entire works of the entire oeuvre, and based on the intricacy of the compositions, it is absolutely impossible to grasp all of the eventualities, especially since the choice of the viewers who observe given sections and corresponding have to be networked with one another possesses an unmanageably large number of potential variables. The works show without the (definitive) possibility of expressing in language a surplus of imaging that employs writing, drawing, scribbling, (artificial and natural) objects, photographic reproductions, and lenses.

By shifting reflection into the object, the works participate in an (epistemological) artistic research into the aesthetic: “Creative research deals in matter that signifies. It is a discourse of material signs [...]. Matter that signifies is matter capa-

2 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Holt, 1911; orig. pub. Paris, 1907), 36 (italics original).

ble of transforming itself.”³ Because material and materiality are integrated into the meaning-generation practices of showing, they also have the opportunity to change that was described above for the identity of reflection of the object. It is thinking in aesthetic dimensions that leads to a linking of epistemology and metaphysics. In this context, epistemology can be described as an effort “to reflect the perceivable through perception, and the experiential through experience” and is accordingly necessary for the autonomy of an approach to artistic research.⁴ The extension of strict dichotomies can also be derived from the understanding that comes from artistic research because it avoids strict separations of “subject and object, material and form, investigation and presentation, theory and practice.”⁵ The processes initiated within the works and their networks are a “constitution of forms of non-subjective reflexivity that operate exclusively in the realm of the senses.”⁶ They form an “interstice of knowledge” that can no longer be completely controlled by subjects and also not exhaustively described.⁷ The only possibility to gain insight is thus to understand the implications within the work in their own horizon of meaning, since in them and their combination an expressive power develops: “The sculptural work-world seems like an action by means of which one can speak effectively.”⁸ The simplest element of this action is the obvious contradiction of “yes, no, perhaps,” which results from all three words being equally apt. The metaphysical implications contained in this triad as a result of the many-valued aesthetic can also be supplemented by an epistemological level: in artistic research, the “as well as” and “also” dominate, so that antitheses do not become disjunctions but rather dominant conjunctions achieve in principle an equal “validity.”⁹

The ubiquitous interconnections in her oeuvre were made accessible by concepts of the assemblage because they cannot be understood without a theoretical framework. The assemblage goes beyond the metalevels and the metaimage, or they are parts of a more comprehensive interconnection that constitutes an assemblage. As already demonstrated, the assemblage is just as active in the smallest unit as in the

3 Paul Carter, *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (Melbourne 2004), 182.

4 Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics*, trans. Laura Radosh (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2015), 46.

5 Elke Bippus, “Einleitung,” in *Kunst des Forschens: Praxis eines ästhetischen Denkens*, ed. Elke Bippus, 2nd ed. (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2012), 7–23, esp. 16.

6 Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics* (see note 4), 169.

7 Kathrin Busch, “Wissenskünste: Künstlerische Forschung und Ästhetisches Denken,” in Bippus, *Kunst des Forschens* (see note 5), 142–158, esp. 158.

8 Anke Haarmann, *Artistic Research: Eine epistemologische Ästhetik* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 61.

9 Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics* (see note 4), 196–97.

largest possible one. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the multiplicity of an assemblage has to be actively produced, not by continuously adding new levels but the other way around: by freeing up and observing one level of all the available ones so that it always has multiplicity as origin, and every level analyzed in this way changes the totality again.¹⁰ For that reason as well, none of the examined levels can be placed in the absolute center; even dominant tendencies, such as the integration of one's own subject or the many-valued aesthetic, should not be named here. Rather, it is about connections that together form an "acentered multiplicity."¹¹ In this merge without a hierarchy and center something results that can be described with processes of "territoriality": Every assemblage is based first on a territorial effect, that is to say, it begins by drawing a boundary with the outside. This "territorialization," however, soon draws "lines of deterritorialization"; they "cut across" the assemblage and in the process establish transitions to other assemblages, so that the next step can also result in a "reterritorialization," that is, a return to the starting point.¹² An assemblage must therefore be described as a "concrete historical individual."¹³ DeLanda assumes that the individual aspects of an assemblage exist in the here and now, from which it follows, first, that in the next moment changes can occur and, second, it is possible that real components are assumed as given but have not yet been formed.

Understanding an artistic oeuvre as an assemblage focuses on the multiplicities of networking in its reception. It cannot be assumed, however, that these interconnections are grasped completely, since, on the one hand, a temporal or methodological restriction limits the totality of the assemblage; on the other hand, every assemblage has "dispositions, tendencies and capacities that are virtual," though most of the possible formations remain under the surface.¹⁴ For example, an interpretative approach that makes neither many-valued logic nor Bauermeister's specific appropriation of it as many-valued aesthetics one of its main strands would gain entirely different insights. Nevertheless, the networking in the oeuvre—the references ahead and back and the resulting development—remain the decisive trends in Bauermeister's works; the continual integration of the artistic elements described produces constant change without hierarchy; within it every circular structure and every "no" is equally important for the totality. In this context, repetitions merely reinforce the assemblage. A tendency to territorialization certainly exists in Bauermeister's work, in that demarcations from other art movements are created with

¹⁰ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 6–9.

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

¹² Ibid., 325 and 504.

¹³ Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 108.

¹⁴ Ibid., 108–10.

written comments references to other works within her own oeuvre. The territorialization as the starting point of any assemblage transitions in Bauermeister's case into the potentials of deterritorialization, since the numerous aspects that constitute her oeuvre cannot be exclusively interpreted for that: the integration of thematic fields as different as art criticism, sewing, tools, or natural materials—to name just a few—makes it possible to undertake a deterritorial expansion of the assemblage that would theoretically permit a transition to another one. Bauermeister reconnects this in a next comment back to her as an artist or to her work, a reterritorialization results that is just as decisive for the assemblage-like differentiation of an oeuvre. The works should always be thought of in this alternating movement.

After the forgoing discussions of the assemblage in relation to Bauermeister's oeuvre and the potentials of the identity of reflection of the object, it cannot be assumed that the assemblage has to be made active as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Jane Bennett offers an interpretation close to New Materialism when she writes: "In this assemblage, *objects* appeared as *things*, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the context in which (human) subjects set them."¹⁵ She is thus referring back to the ontological boundary between subject and object, since the later cannot be understood as a passive and clearly outlined category. Rather, Bennett assumes "humans" and "non-humans" that can gather in assemblages and tend to influence one another.¹⁶ In order to describe this "vibrant" quality of the material world she emphatically introduces individual elements of an anthropomorphism that is intended to challenge thinking in dichotomies, since the connections are meant to be understood as "resonances and resemblances."¹⁷ The result is an assemblage that can be understood as a temporary merger. It can be related to material and materiality since both are described by New Materialism as "an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable."¹⁸ In Günther's theory of polycontextuality, there are repeated suggestions

¹⁵ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 5. In this context Ian Buchanan criticizes Bennett for focusing exclusively on the substance of the assemblage and not considering the form and argues that it must always be ensured that both are taken into account; see Ian Buchanan, *Assemblage Theory and Method* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 114–15.

¹⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (see note 15), 115–16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁸ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–43, esp. 9. A similar argument is also made by Susanne Witzgall, for whom the material is nothing passive but rather "possesses intrinsic self-transformative potentials and is in constant metamorphosis and morphogenesis." Susanne Witzgall, "Macht des Materials/Politik der Materialität – eine Einführung," in *Macht des Materials/Politik der Materialität*, ed. Kerstin Stakemeier and Susanne Witzgall (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2014), 13–27, esp. 14.

that describe an extended agency; in his case it is the context that has an essential influence: "It is quite legitimate to say that something may be alive relative to one environment and dead relative to another."¹⁹ Nevertheless, he does not take the step of attributing a productive dimension to objects or matter.

Bauermeister's oeuvre is enriched with such processes; not only do the combination principle and the commentary system create a permanent development and retrospective connection, and sometimes even anticipations, but the intricacy also creates a continuity of altered references, since one element can occur again and again in a new grouping with others, so that a reciprocal influence inevitably occurs. Another intensification is the use of lenses, which make it possible to add another level of an actively influential material to the aforementioned aspects. Viewing Bauermeister's oeuvre as an assemblage is thus less about actively producing that assemblage by means of continual description but rather understanding the process of active production in order to gain insights.

In conclusion, Barad's "agential realism" will be used to describe how this special form of assemblage should be precisely categorized. She developed a posthumanist, performative approach in which matter possesses "agency"; the latter is "inexhaustible, exuberant, and prolific."²⁰ In addition to matter, she addresses discursive practices that limit statements and behavior patterns and become possible in the first place in that way. If both are taken together, what Barad calls "material-discursive phenomena," it results in the foundation to which every process and every entity can be traced back.²¹ This merger of matter and discourse occurs by means of "intra-activity"; it is a central concept in her thinking since only through it can phenomena form and achieve effectiveness: "Agency is doing/being in its intra-activity."²² In Barad's agential approach, continuous intra-actions are responsible for all causes and their effects. They are "nonarbitrary, nondeterministic causal enactments" whose fusion produces (material-discursive) phenomena and their qualities.²³ Neither exists before intra-action; the "universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming."²⁴

19 Gotthard Günther, "Life as Poly-Contexturality" (1973), in *Beiträge zur Grundlegung einer operationsfähigen Dialektik*, vol. 2 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1979), 283–306, esp. 305.

20 See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 132–85, esp. 170. The term "posthumanist" should be interpreted here as a critical question of subject-centered thinking that is intended to lead to its dissolution; Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 50–54.

21 Karen Barad, "Verschränkungen und Politik: Karen Barad im Gespräch mit Jennifer Sophia Theodor," in Barad, *Verschränkungen* (Berlin: Merve, 2015), 174–212, esp. 181.

22 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 20), 235.

23 Ibid., 179.

24 Ibid., 141.

For these interpretations, Barad has recourse to quantum physics, especially “quantum entanglement” and the writings of the German physicist Nils Bohr.²⁵ In her agential realism, she draws conclusions that go back to her work on theoretical physics; this leads to a new metaphysics. The crucial thing is that phenomena are no longer separable; their mutual entanglements are comprehensive and exist on “all length, time, and mass scales.”²⁶ Supposed constants such as space and time are not preexisting containers to which phenomena can relate and then differentiate; everything derives from entanglements: “Space, time, and matter are intra-actively produced in the ongoing differential articulation of the world.”²⁷ Accordingly, the extension of metaphysics includes a rejection of the separation of the reflecting person and the reflected object, which for Günther existed at every time. Barad calls this an “alternative meta/physics that entails a reworking of the notions of causality and agency.”²⁸ To achieve this “alternative meta/physics,” its understanding of apparatuses is just as crucial as that of material-discursive intra-activity. Apparatuses should not be understood as technical devices that watch over an experiment without participating. They are “boundary-drawing practices” that iteratively rework material-discursive phenomena intra-actively.²⁹ As the “*material conditions of possibility*” of the boundaries of phenomena, they cause “agential cuts,” with each cut being a temporary separation of an entangled material-discursive practice.³⁰ The apparatuses are themselves phenomena that can be constantly expanded without boundaries. A change to the apparatus would mean a new agential cut, changing in turn the phenomenon produced.

For Barad, the focus is not so much on the equal value of subject and object; rather, both terms belong generally to an (outdated) ontology that cannot be supported by agential realism. She repeatedly emphasizes that the material plays an active part in the overall assembly of meaning but primarily in order to affirm that point. Discursive practices and their possibility of prompting actions or behaviors are equally important. Both are constantly in an entangled intra-action of phenomena. The agential cuts of the apparatus now provide for a formulation of these phe-

25 Barad has a PhD in theoretical particle physics and is Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She describes quantum entanglement as an idea that exists since the mid-1930 but only recently became essential for quantum physics; see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 20), 386. Günther's brief reference to quantum physics is mentioned in section 2.2.

26 See Barad, “Verschränkungen und Politik” (see note 21), 189.

27 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 20), 234.

28 *Ibid.*, 393.

29 Barad, “Verschränkungen und Politik” (see note 21), 185.

30 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 20), 148 (italics original).

nomena, which is why Barad sometimes also calls them “diffractive apparatuses.”³¹ Human beings need not be involved in the “causal intra-actions”; the phenomena already have “primitive relations” through intra-activity; in addition, subjects are also formed materially-discursively.³² Because phenomena are constantly relating, any entity can get involved in potential (discursive-material) new formation that is produced by means of an apparatus. With every intra-action, the totality of manifold phenomena is reconfigured.³³ This now includes space and time as well, and Barad speaks of an “enfolding” in which the past, present, and future are no longer authorities of exclusion: “Neither the past nor the future is ever closed.”³⁴

Bauermeister’s oeuvre as a whole can be understood as this agential assemblage: The individual artistic elements seem to float freely between the works, revealing the connectedness, on the one hand, and causing constant change in the development, on the other. The impression that her oeuvre is unfinished comes from passages that formulate references forward and backward or where a space is left free for an inscription that will only come from one of the next works. As already demonstrated with the pencil motif, a retrospective reference can decidedly cause changes. The on-going connections within the artworks produce new meanings; they have a material level and a content level at the same time. As the study of materiality made clear, it is necessary to grant it a power of its own that causes it to generate meaning. The discursive aspects are just as critical, since every inserted element “constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.”³⁵ The oeuvre as agential assemblage contains elements that expand its meaning by occurring repeatedly within the works. Intra-activity is crucial to this, since the material-discursive phenomena only convey meaning fully within the merger: for example, when the straws are contextualized with honeycomb and their round forms recall the dissolving (drawn) circular structures; or when the Fibonacci sequence is written in a work while at the same a composition principle provides the basis for a Stone Picture; much the same is true of the picture-to-picture references, which are not produced solely by inserting photographic reproductions but are also reworked with materials that are also employed in the original work and ensure subsequent integration into the next context.

The viewers can in a limited sense be regarded as the ones who carry out the agential cut and thus achieve a temporary separation of several entities. In a limited sense because they are not in the privileged situation to carry out such a procedure;

31 Ibid., 384.

32 Ibid., 170 and 180.

33 Ibid., 393–94.

34 See *ibid.*, 383.

35 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 1–211, esp. 23.

that would confirm again the asymmetry between subject and object. The agential cut is instead carried out in equal measure by the viewers and by the processes within the works. The processes provoke a reciprocal influence of the anticipations and re-courses. For this entire process, Bennett's understanding of the assemblage must be cited, according to which an assemblage is produced by human and nonhuman connections that continuously affect one another reciprocally. When an aspect is singled out in a work of art by Bauermeister, for example, a seam integrated into a light sheet with needle and thread, and interpreted in the context of the work, then drawn seams, comments on the practice of sewing, and drawn needles or needles inserted as objects are soon also present as a result of agential networking. At the same time, the seam executed with a thread, the seam simulated by drawing, and the drawn line are also associated, so that their distortions, provoked by the many-valued aesthetic, become apparent.

Finally, it could be speculated that the complete agential cut is realized by a Lens Box. As an apparatus, it carries out an exclusion of several discursive-material phenomena, but it does so only for a limited time, since the next separation—in the form of a new work—changes the totality and consequentially also the individual parts. This is not by means saying that Bauermeister's oeuvre is a visualization of Barad's metaphysics; that would be as incorrect as the view that the works individually illustrate many-valued logic. It can be regarded as crucial that looking at her oeuvre as an assemblage already permits an extension of the many-valued aesthetic to higher-order interconnectedness and their processes that in the course of the study have repeatedly been identified as multiplicities. With the additional extension to an agential assemblage, these networks become discontinuous “manifolds of space-timematter relations.”³⁶ The identity of reflection of the object and the many-valued aesthetic, as well as the metareferential elements and the metaimage, thus appear to be only an intermediate step. The movements of reflection are contained in the entire oeuvre, on every level and through all entities. They share, however, a tiny, common nucleus in which everything else is already inherent: “yes, no, perhaps.”

36 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 20), 178.

