4. Material and Materiality

Dimensions of Combination and Many-Valuedness in Bauermeister's Aesthetic of Materials

The materials employed by Bauermeister broadened considerably in her early work. She was constantly adding new components to her repertoire and would then begin to relate them to one another in her art. That development occurred in parallel with a refinement of the combination principle and at times fused with it. Bauermeister's process of producing new connections is already defined as central to her work in an essay from 1972: "The variability of the material points to the fact that the process of relating is central; anything may serve as a starting point."[1] In addition, however, the materials used have an autonomous dimension, since a semantics that is specific to each is inscribed in them by their making, their origin, or the place where they were found, the (original and varying) way of using them or the place they were traditionally employed, their appearance and haptics, and their contextualization with other materials. This has a continuing level that goes beyond combining in order to create ever-new works. Accordingly, an "approach that does justice" to the specific materials but also to their interaction with one another is crucial.[2]

1 Géza Perneczky, "It Is Perhaps Not Coincidental …," in *Mary Bauermeister*, exh. cat. (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1972), 2–14, esp. 10.

2 See Dietmar Rübel, "Abfall: Materialien einer Archäologie des Konsums; oder, Kunst vom Rest der Welt," *Material in Kunst und Alltag*, ed. Dietmar Rübel and Monika Wagner, Hamburger Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte 1 (Berlin: Akademie, 2002), 119–38, esp. 120. The German term used here, *materialgerecht*, "doing justice to the materials," is understood to mean that the materials of works of art receive attention and are not simply marginalized in an ancillary function relative to the form or idea. It should not be confused with the discourse on *Materialgerechtigkeit*, or "truth to materials," a theme of the late nineteenth century, whether materials should only be permitted to be employed according to their own inherent and specific properties; see Dietmar Rübel, Monika Wagner, and Vera Wolff, eds., *Materialästhetik: Quellentexte zu Kunst, Design und Architektur* (Berlin: Reimer, 2005), 95–96 and 143–44. Study of the horizon of meaning of materials in works of art began rather late in the discipline of art history. Günter Bandmann provided essential impetus for the German-speaking world with two essays: Günter Bandmann, "Bemerkungen zu einer Ikonologie des Materials," *Städel-Jahrbuch* 2 (1969): 5–100, and Bandmann, "Der Wandel der Materialbewertung

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In the early years of her oeuvre Bauermeister determinedly employed traditional artistic materials. Her early period is characterized above all by pastel on deckle-edge paper, occasionally interspersed with the aforementioned experiments with chemicals from processes for developing photographs or transparent films while studying in Saarbrücken. There is also a three-part work from this period in which nonrepresentational, expressive structures are applied in black poster paint to panes of glass; around 1956 or 1957 it is an unusual extension of the support in Bauermeister's oeuvre: from 1963 onward, glass then becomes an omnipresent material in the Lens Boxes. Pastel on deckle-edge paper is joined by casein tempera on canvas or wood in 1958. In this same period she added a craft material not intended for artistic use in the form of a modeling compound. This modeling compound was the first example of a material that Bauermeister employed for several years that is not one of the traditional materials for art, such as oil and tempera paints, wood, canvas, stone, and bronze.[3]

It will be followed by many other materials that are "foreign to art," such as plastic straws from 1960; found objects from 1961; flotsam and jetsam, sand, stones, beetles, honeycomb, and wasps' nests from 1962; found linen sheets, electric light sources, and tree trimmings from 1963; mushrooms, plant fibers, and seeds from 1964. In the years thereafter the majority of these materials will be used by Bauermeister again and again. New materials are added to her repertoire when they are necessary to realize a specific group of works—like (old) studio materials for the *Studio Fetish* series of 1967–71, for example—and then usually reappear in other works as well for a time. There are also materials that are found only in a single work; for example, the object *Memento Mori, Momento Mary* of 1969–71 has two human skulls and one an-

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in der Kunsttheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Beiträge zur Theorie der Künste im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Helmut Koopmann and Josef Adolf Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1971), 129–57. In 1975 Wolfgang Kemp was still speaking of the material as an "unsolved problem of art history"; Wolfgang Kemp, "Material in der bildenden Kunst: Zu einem ungelösten Problem der Kunstgeschichte," *Prisma: Zeitschrift der Gesamthochschule Kassel*, no. 9 (December 1975): 25–34. Beginning in the 1990s, there was systematic engagement with the semantic levels of materials in works of art; it was initiated by treatises by Thomas Raff and Monika Wagner; the latter also initiated the Archiv zur Erforschung der Materialikonographie (Archive on Material Iconography Research), from which emerged in turn referential texts on working with the material aspects of art. For a first attempt to examine the materials employed by Bauermeister, but without considering the level of many-valued aesthetics, see Hauke Ohls, "'Steine, Lumpen und Kamelköttel …': Zur Materialästhetik von Mary Bauermeister um 1960," in *Mary Bauermeister: Da Capo; Werke aus 60 Jahren*, exh. cat. (Koblenz: Mittelrhein-Museum, 2015), 27–39.

3 See Monika Wagner, *Das Material in der Kunst: Eine andere Geschichte der Moderne*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2013), 11 and 170–71.

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imal one.[4] The use of materials that originate outside of an artistic context clearly reached a temporary high point in the years from 1962 to 1964. In that period she created mainly works that employ the strategy of expanding the range of her materials and combining them. These materials continue to be found (occasionally) in in the years thereafter but they can no longer be assigned the status of the primary conveyors of meaning, since the introduction of writing and a metareferential approach become the focus. In her works of art from 1962 to 1964, many-valuedness repeatedly takes the form of materials being combined with one another. If the diversification of the materials she employed that occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s seems to have still been part of her effort to expand the combination principle, the subsequent reciprocal imitation of natural and artificial materials and the fusion into an overall ensemble is already one aspect of many-valued aesthetics.

Material and Materiality

The category of the material has a wide-ranging history similar to that of writings on logic. For Gotthard Günther, Western logic goes back to Aristotle and, at the time he was writing his books, he believed that that ancient legacy unconditionally determined our thinking. Günther's descriptions are too absolutely apodictic; he generalizes to support his argumentation. If, however, one follows the tendency to believe that ancient philosophers (still) have a substantial influence on the categories of our thinking, then the marginalization of materials is extraordinarily fraught with tradition. The stages of first degrading and then upgrading the material are crucial to Bauermeister's many-valued aesthetics, because they immediately clarify the area of tension as soon as the materials are given an autonomous level of meaning in the works of art.

There are numerous passages in Plato's writings that describe a dichotomy between material, thing, stuff, and body versus idea, form, spirit, and soul and observe a divide that favors the last four concepts. In the dialogue *Parmenides*, the young Socrates is challenged about the theory of ideas he is still developing: for an idea must exist for each thing, even for such "ridiculous" ones as "hair, mud, dirt."[5] After initial hesitation Socrates concludes that the ideas exist as "patterns" and that the "visible objects," that is all material objects that we can perceive, must participate in them, but no similarity between them can be assumed. The "like" would presume further ideas that refer to the things and the way that we perceive them in order to

4 The human skulls were from the collection of her father, Wolf Bauermeister, who was a professor of anthropology.

5 Plato. *Parmenides*, in Plato, *Cratylus*, *Parmenides*, *Greater Hippias*, *Lesser Hippias*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 193–331, esp. 211.

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create "concrete things."[6] It would require, for example, an idea of greatness that mediates between the idea of the thing, between the thing as we perceive it and the greatness of other things, so that the similarity to the original idea is produced—that would have to happen with all qualities, which inevitably leads to an infinite regress. The sphere of idea is strictly separated from "our world," the latter leads to only one relationship between them, and non of the ideas is recognized by us.[7] All objects and the material of which they consist never convey knowledge of the nature of the being of things; they are merely a dissimilar imitation of a pattern. This negation of our material surroundings that can be perceived by the senses goes so far in Plato that he has Socrates declare in another dialogue that philosophers free themselves of the body. (Corporeal) death liberates from the limitations that result from connection to the sensory environment.[8] The degrading of things and the materials of which they are composed is a leitmotif of cultural theory that recurs again and again in many facets. In his aesthetics Kant creates a hierarchy of the arts based on the material they employ and in distinction from form:

> "Yet in all beautiful art what is essential consists in the form, which is purposive for observation and judging […] not in the matter of the sensation (the charm or the emotion), where it is aimed merely at enjoyment, which leaves behind it nothing in the idea."[9]

For Kant, matter is tied to illusion, which we grasp subjectively, and therefore it has a certain arbitrariness relative to the idea. In contrast to the degrading of things and of material, attempts to rehabilitate them can look back on a less intense tradition. Two striking positions within it, Walter Benjamin and George Bataille, will be addressed in section 4.2 in connection with Bauermeister's art: in order to be able to identify the many-valued aesthetics even in works that do not have writing and accordingly do not reveal their contradictions at first glance, the autonomous dimension of the material is necessary.

Equivalent to the degrading of the material beneath the form or idea, a tendency to self-negation has been attributed to the traditional materials of art—for centuries, the focus was not on the paint or pigment and the canvas; rather, everything disappeared behind the motif depicted.[10] For a many-valued aesthetics that

6 See ibid., 219–23.

7 See ibid., 227.

8 See Plato, *Phaedo*, in Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 292–523, esp. 317–35.

9 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203.

10 See Wagner, *Das Material in der Kunst* (see note 3), 18–22.

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includes the material and materiality, the inherent potency of the material in question is emphasized first. This inherent potency is, however, not presented as an end in itself by including the production process—this only comes into focus with the Lens Boxes. Nor should the materials selected actively determine the form, that is, reversing the original relation, as Robert Morris, for example, called for.[11] An approach like that of Arte Povera, in which natural, poor, and quotidian materials are used in works of art in order to upvalue them or to reveal an intrinsic beauty applies in only a limited way and only to a few of Bauermeister's works.[12] In her work the material is admitted into a broad field of extra-artistic qualities as a result of its origin; in the next step it imitates other materials, which often do not conform to the artistic canon either, in order to create an overall compositional design together. Every single material has its own level of meaning, as does the combination of them that strives for a synthesis into a new ensemble. In Bauermeister's works, it is the area in between that alternates between absolute marginalization and absolute upvaluation of the material: material has its own levels, just as the form obtained from it does; both create a relationship of exchange, a united hybridization. This results in works in which the—everyday, found, artificial, natural, and traditionally artistic—material reveals a many-valuedness. It results, first, from the challenges to the viewers to identify amalgams and, second, from the imitative fusions with which Bauermeister composes or combines.

For that reason, in the interpretations of the works that follow, the term "material" is joined by the expression "materiality." Materiality is considered "*one* condition of making iconicity possible and effective."[13] In this view, the materials from which a work of art is made and their visual appearance—that is, the aspect that evokes the inevitable and also inseparable duplicity of the image—are irreducible joined to each other. Materiality should not, however, be understood as something "physical" but "rather something that first *happens* from there."[14] Materiality stands for a trace of the material that reaches over to the form of the visual but is neither the one nor the other. Rather, materiality appears as a transformation of the material that by pointing instigates meaning but cannot yet be a completed and interpretable form.[15]

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11 See Robert Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (1968): 33–35.

12 See Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, rev. ed. (London: Phaidon, 2014), 14–47. The beauty in "poor" materials can be read out of the fabric works based on objects found in Sicily; see section 4.2.

13 See Marcel Finke and Mark A. Halawa, "Materialität und Bildlichkeit: Einleitung," in *Materialität und Bildlichkeit: Visuelle Artefakte zwischen Aisthesis und Semiosis*, ed. Marcel Finke and Mark A. Halawa (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012), 9–18, esp. 16.

14 See Dieter Mersch, *Was sich zeigt: Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 134.

15 With reference to Adorno, Christoph Menke calls this "aesthetic hesitation": even though they are material identically, the signifier is already distinguished from the mere thing by

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This interstice in which materiality is found only makes the concept more difficult to grasp, so that it can be described in words only inadequately.[16] In addition, the concept of materiality has to get by without a (long) history of its definition, since the material and any inherent potency it has were long degraded; this has changed only in recent decades; there has even been take of a "material turn."[17]

Bauermeister herself did not use any concept of materiality in creating her works; she was primarily interested in employing different materials in combination. Since the beginning of her engagement with many-valued logic and the specific implementation of that theory in works of art, a change in her aesthetic can be observed. The works to be analyzed next represent this change, and their materiality functions as one possibility to make many-valuedness visible without using writing in the paintings.

4.1 A (Many-Valued) Intermateriality

The term "intermateriality" opens up a dimension that goes beyond an (active) appropriation of a (passive) material: it is the bringing together of two or more materials that in combination have an "excess contingency" that was not predictable.[18] The conception of materiality, which already has a productive level compared to a purely ancillary material, is expanded to include the observing of interaction. Every material stems from a changing and manifold resonance chamber; moreover, the interpretation changes according to the context into which it is brought, and the

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its semantic reference. This conflict occurs on the level of materiality; Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. Neil Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 33–70, esp. 36.

16 See Finke and Halawa, "Materialität und Bildlichkeit" (see note 13), 13–14.

17 See Thomas Strässle, "Pluralis materialitatis," in *Das Zusammenspiel der Materialien in den Künsten: Theorien—Praktiken—Perspektive*, ed. Thomas Strässle, Christoph Kleinschmidt, Johanne Mohs (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 7–23, esp. 7; Manfred K. H Eggert, and Stefanie Samida, "Menschen und Dinge: Anmerkungen zum Materialitätsdiskurs," in *Materialität: Herausforderungen für die Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed., Herbert Kalthoff, Torsten Cress, and Tobias Röhl (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016), 123–40, esp. 123. Dieter Mersch proposes as a figure of though for the concept of materiality a "strange dual relationship of a negativity that includes a positivity"; by means of the double negation something happens and on the pictorial surface that can be seen as its own phenomenon; Dieter Mersch, "Materialität und Formalität. Zur duplizitären Ordnung des Bildlichen," in Finke and Halawa, *Materialität und Bildlichkeit* (see note 13), 21–49, esp. 43.

18 See Christiane Schürkmann, "Eisen, Säure, Rost und Putz: Material in der bildenden Kunst," in Kalthoff, Cress, and Röhl, *Materialität* (see note 17), 359–75, esp. 369. On intermateriality, see also Anselm Stalder, "Unterwegs im Inter," in Strässle, Kleinschmidt, and Mohs, *Das Zusammenspiel der Materialien in den Künsten* (see note 17), 115–25.

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addition of another material multiples the interpretation again. For artists, too, it is an experimental process with an unpredictable outcome: "Artist and material work together in this way."[19]

Contemporaneous art critics repeatedly addressed Bauermeister's selection and use of materials as a special feature. Before the Lens Boxes dominated her oeuvre (especially as it was perceived by the public), she attracted attention in New York's art system of the early to mid-1960s for the materials she employed. Critics praised the use of "out-of-the-way materials," which she combines into works:[20] "She uses strange materials (pebbles, rocks, sand, charred tree trunks, weird sea organisms, soda straws and patched old bed lines, are only some of them) to fascinating abstractions."[21] Uncertainty was repeatedly expressed about the terms to characterize her works, because Bauermeister's art seems to lie between categories. Critics wrote of "paintings," "constructions," "objects," and "accumulations," only the term "sculptures" occurs rarely or was rejected as not seem appropriate.[22] Works such as *Sandhalme* (Sand Straws) of 1962 or *Howevercall* of 1964 are prototypical of an in-between and emphasize it especially by the materials they employ.

Sandhalme was produced in the second half of 1962, one of her first works in the United States (fig. 31). It measures 130 by 190 by 30 centimeters, and its title alludes to the intermateriality of two materials used: sand and plastic drinking straws. Additional materials are glue, parts of wasps' nests and honeycomb, a slice from a tree trunk, driftwood, and soot, since several places have been treated with fire. The central support is a rectangular, sanded plywood. Attached to its upper right is a rectangular piece of driftwood.

Bauermeister put several of the materials together a way that results in a fusion. The slice of tree trunk on the central support is largely covered with straws; they were cut at different lengths and then glued vertically side by side to create changing, almost organic-looking patterns. The straws have also been combined into small groups that automatically suggest a compound, as if the individual round elements were part of a larger amalgamation. Bauermeister has applied a honeycomb to the lower right edge of the slice of trunk; it is flanked by straws, several of which are even attached to its outside. The knowledge that two different materials are joined here is necessary not to assume just one in a superficial viewing, because the straws are only slightly smaller in circumference and are placed closely together, so they too take on a honeycomb-like form. It is just as difficult to decide whether additional honeycombs have been inserted into the field of straws on the left edge of the

19 Schürkmann, "Eisen, Säure, Rost und Putz" (see note 18), 366.

20 Stuart Preston, "Art: Conservative Realism Resurgent," *The New York Times* (March 21, 1964).

21 Emily Genauer, "57th Street & Environs," *New York Herald Tribune* (March 21, 1964).

22 See James R. Mellow, "'Art Can Go on Spawning New Art ad Infinitum,'" *New York Times* (April 26, 1970), 27.

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slice of trunk; both materials produce an approximation so that now one seems possible, now the other. Two lines of straws on the sanded board lead away from the slice of trunk. One line runs to the lower right edge and snakes about a little before meeting an oval form; the latter also consists of honeycomb and is bordered with straws. The second line leads to the top right, running under the driftwood board and then reappear in the center of a burned-out opening. One observes here the effect Bauermeister also evoked in the *Needless Needles* drawing, namely, that another level is lying under the support that is only exposed. The straws grow denser in the upper right corner of the driftwood, where they border parts of a wasps' nest and more honeycombs. The wasps' nests thus fit homogenously in the (slightly burned) underground but remain unequivocally identifiable. They are similar in color to the driftwood and are also partially sanded; their relief-like character and above all the furrows, holes, and patterns on their surfaces, however, cause the nests to stand out as an element of natural rather than artistic origin.

Fig. 31: Sandhalme, 1962, plastic straws, wasp nest, honeycomb, glue, carbon black, tree pit, drift wood on particle board coated with sand, 130 x 190 x 30 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

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Intermateriality

Thomas Strässle has described three models of intermateriality in which the materials employed affect one another but each in different ways; each is an "inter-model for the aesthetics of materials."[23] With an eye to the wasps' nest in *Sandhalme* or even the combinations in the *Sand Stein Kugel Gruppe*, one can speak of "material interaction": here there are perceptible material differences that continue to be identifiable; we are deliberately led to encounter them in the work.[24] The straws and honeycombs in *Sandhalme* contrast with that. Their joining can be located between "material transfer" and "material interference": in the former, the "phenomenality and/or functionality of another material is transferred," so that the "material identity" is called into question; in "material interference," an "immateriality" is produced in that both components are combined in a way that they negate each other.[25]

In the case of the honeycombs and straws, another aspect comes into it: neither does one observe just one material imitating the other nor does their combination result in a new material phenomenon. Rather, an interaction results to the extent that there is a not-only-but-also. Bauermeister brings both materials into an unresolvable hanging in the balance: two elements of completely different origin and emergence get closer to each other and thereby suggest a reciprocal resolution, which is, however, not ultimately completed. Identification is still possible on the level of materiality. Moreover, the materials not only happen to have a similar look but something is also being assembled that falls roughly under the dominant categories of natural and artificial.

In their haptics and coloration, which grew more intense over decades, the drinking straws look like paper but were in fact made of plastic. Of the very material that Roland Barthes described in his now iconic entry in *Mythologies* as an "alchemical substance" and prototypical of the postwar era.[26] Synthetically produced and infinitely transformable materials already led to controversies when rubber was introduced; the development of plastic in the early twentieth century then led to the "aesthetics of artificiality," which sought to distinguish itself emphatically form the language of natural forms.[27] The universal use of plastic for everyday consumer objects accompanied the economic miracles after World War II and led visual artists

23 Strässle, "Pluralis materialitatis" (see note 17), 11–12.

24 Ibid., 14–16.

25 Ibid.

26 See Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 93–95.

27 Carsten Rohde, "Plastic Fantastic: Stichwörter zur Ästhetik des Kunststoffs," in *Ästhetik der Materialität*, ed. Christiane Heibach and Carsten Rohde (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 123–43, esp. 129–31.

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to a "reevaluation of the materiality of art"; the "plasticity" of the synthetic material that possesses no (preexisting) form was appropriate for design from then on.[28]

Drinking straws are an artificially formed product of the commodities of a consumer culture and are intended to be used once and then thrown away. In the early 1960s, these and other industrial (mass) products seemed like a utopian promise of universal prosperity and progress, a break with the years of rebuilding after the war. In the twenty-first century, the view of such objects changed fundamentally, since they lead to the ecologically catastrophic formation of microplastics and drive the exploitation of raw materials—a clear example of how historical contexts and hence the assessment of materials change.[29] When Bauermeister began to use straws they were a material without a tradition in art and a consumer good that was available in almost infinite quantities. Their plasticity and artificially produced form are, however, employed to create a connection to or fusion with a natural artifact.

The honeycombs were collected by Bauermeister and integrated into the composition; even the transfer of physical set pieces from nature into the picture did not have a significant tradition and was initially a material foreign to art. Bauermeister's fascination with honeycomb form is already evident from the Honeycomb Pictures from 1957 onward; five years later she then integrated natural honeycombs rather than imitating them with artificial materials. Karl Marx uses the motifs of the bee and the human being to contrast the natural work instinct with human labor power: "a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells."[30] This assessment did not, however, lead Marx to value the achievements of bees more: "But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality."[31] Marx's analysis assumes that the animals act instinctively and need not come up with concepts or ideas beforehand. Whether this low esteem can still be justified given what scientists know today is less important than the consequences of it. First, it clearly shows that Marx was still committed to the dichotomy of idea and form versus object and material; second, it reflects the (modern) separation of nature and culture. According to Bruno Latour, at the beginning of the modern era the two concepts began to be regarded as antithetical, with nature associated with facts and science and culture with politics and morality.[32] This separation should never have happened,

28 Dietmar Rübel, *Plastizität: Eine Kunstgeschichte des Veränderlichen* (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2012), 306.

29 See Amanda Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2019).

30 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, *The Process of Capitalist Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 178.

31 Ibid.

32 See Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 99–102.

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in his view, because it is an artificial division that separates people from their environment and degrades everything found in it to passive objects without agency. This undermines our embedding in the network of nature that has existed since time immemorial.[33] In addition to Latour, there are a number of authors who consider separating the spheres of nature and culture to be constructed, even dangerous, because it marginalizes the effects of the human species on our planet.[34] Many no longer use the word "nature" for that reason, or only in the sense of the separation, and instead speak of ecology.[35]

In 1962 Bauermeister was not striving to make eco art or for a conscious approach to the categories of nature and culture; only in our present context these levels stand out in her works. She was always interested in forms and materials equally, as a result, however, bringing together honeycombs and drinking straws and combine them in an integrative way actively challenges the dichotomy of artificial and nature—this occurs by means of intermateriality.

The respective aesthetic of materials, which always (also) derives from its context, is determined by materiality—this eventful appearance on the surface of the picture. Synthetic materials such as plastic contain a many-valuedness in that they are artificially synthesized and formed but must have a natural origin, since the elements in their production can all be traced back to natural materials.[36] The very name "straw" points to a natural origin of the form. By means of (inter)materiality,

33 Latour's book title *We Have Never Been Modern* should really be "We should never have been modern," since he certainly assumes that human artificially separated nature and culture, which for him is the characteristic of modernity; see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). In recent years Latour has increasingly turned to how humans are embedded in the network of their surroundings in order to question the separation of human and nonhuman creatures; see Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

34 For that reason, Donna Haraway coined the expression "natureculture" and speaks in her latest publication of a Chthulucene that must be reached if humanity is to have a chance to survive; Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). For any rejection of the categories of nature and culture, or for the need of a new coexistence, the writings of Philippe Descola and Michel Serres are also essential; Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

35 See Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). In this text the term "nature" will only be used in the context of the origin of a material; that is, for everything that is no artificially synthesized. When the term is used, no separation into self-contained areas is implied.

36 See Rohde, "Plastic Fantastic" (see note 27), 126.

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a many-valuedness is achieved. Similarly to what was demonstrated for the *Needless Needles* group of works, simultaneities are already visualized in *Sandhalme* of the previous year that run counter to Aristotelian logic as described by Günther. Materiality reveals a many-valued aesthetic, since the elements employed—honeycomb and straws—become indistinguishable. Thanks to the special way they are brought together, each has the potential to be the other for viewers. Here again Bauermeister was not illustrating Günther's writings but drawing conclusions for the use of materials in a situation that must be regarded as fundamentally many-valued metaphysically.

Howevercall as an Intermaterial Assemblage

In the work *Howevercall*, which was created in 1964, two years after *Sandhalme*, the implementation of many-valued aesthetics seems less obvious at first than in the example of the honeycombs and straws, but it can be extracted (fig. 32). The very title of the work— *Howevercall*—illustrates the problems posed by trying to approach the work in a descriptive way: Bauermeister wanted to express "However called," in the sense of "However you want to call something like this."[37] The work was first shown in 1964 at the Galeria Bonino in New York in Bauermeister's first solo exhibition; the exhibition's title— *paintings and howevercalls*—was derived from the work. It was supposed to express the openness of the concept of art that Bauermeister applied in her early works with writing, fabric, and materials.

37 Her New York gallerist, Fernanda Bonino, asked Bauermeister how to categorize the work she had made. To her question: "How would you call it?" Bauermeister replied: "However you would call it," from which derived the work's title.

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Fig. 32: Howevercall, 1964, wood, sand, found driftwood, soot, plant fibers, thread, wool, modeling compound, casein tempera, ink, mushroom, carbon black, 350 x 120 x 120 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

Howevercall is a combination of several artificial and natural materials: on a plywood board measuring 120 by 120 centimeters, metal eyelets have been fastened in a grid arrangement, from several of them hang threads of wool or other yarn of different lengths. The threads on the edges of the board tend to be shorter and not placed as close together as in the middle, resulting in a suggestion of an inverted pyramid shape. Brownish spheres are attached to selected threads; they are made of plant fibers that have been compressed into round objects by the waves of the Mediterranean. Other organic objects found on the beach in Sicily are distributed on the floor of the exhibition at the base of the work. The height Bauermeister stipulated for the installation of the work is circa 350 centimeters, so that the lowest hanging

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plant fields just touch the wooden beam, which was also found flotsam. The latter is very burned on one side, resulting in a difficult pattern of its structure degenerated into coal. The wooden board on which the beam is standing also measures 120 by 120 centimeters and seems to float just above the floor, because it has small rollers attached to its back for transportation. The burned wooden beam is not placed in the middle of the board but has a decentral location that results in a subdividing of the plane. The lower board is divided diagonally into a dark section and a bright one, which does not run symmetrically from one corner to the other, since the bright side takes up more space. It consists mostly of a sanded surface as well as a second with a white ground on which delicate lines are drawn; they mirror the grain of the wooden beam like a cast shadow. The drawn patterns on the wooden are in turn found again on the beam, as if the white surface were a two-dimensional likeness of a three-dimensional object in a different medium.

This detail reveals one level of the many-valued aesthetic in *Howevercall*: In the spirit of many-valuedness, there is no longer a projection, as if the wooden beam were the "real" object and the drawn passage merely its imitation; rather, each of them as the same degree of reality and could also condition the other. Bauermeister's implementation now makes it clear that she placed the beam on the board in a certain way and then did the drawing on the white strip. What the many-valued aesthetic reveals is another level contained in the beam: It consists not (solely) of the phenomenally perceptible object; rather, its surface structure is an intricate pattern that simultaneously bears within it the potency of a drawing. The drawing is thus another perspective on the beam.

The other levels of many-valued aesthetics become recognizable only when looking at the black surface on the base plate. It is composed of relief-like, round shapes, which consist in turn of a mixture of casein tempera, modeling compound, soot, and mushrooms. This mixture of materials with artificial and natural components stands in for the work *Howevercall* as a whole, in which, much like with *Sandhalme*, both kinds are employed in order to make it more difficult to identify each. They are not only natural materials that are foreign to art from which the work is made and that determine its interpretation but also the immateriality, which brings everything into a holistic system. Very different materials are combined, but each has its own horizon of meaning, yet the combination can only be understood with the composition. This putting together creates in the first place the specifical materiality that has many-valued components in *Sandhalme* und *Howevercall*. By means of its title, materials, and design, the work *Howevercall* raises the question how to categorize it; the work alternates between painting, sculpture, and installation—on this level, too, one can speak of many-valuedness.

The system of (inter-)materiality and many-valuedness enters into the concept of the assemblage that this text is continually trying to refine for Bauermeister's artworks. In his research on the concept of the assemblage, Manuel DeLanda, follow-

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ing Deleuze and Guattari, described two main aspects that are fundamental to an assemblage: "Two aspects of the concept are emphasised: that the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them."[38]

In this view, every assemblage is initially a merger of components that according to our usual (quotidian) sense is not consistent or uniform. That merely means that the parts of which an assemblage is composed attract greater attention, particularly in their special amalgam. They break with experience and demand interpretation. When Bauermeister causes materials to fuse together in *Sandhalme* and *Howevercall*, it is first and foremost a metaphor for an assemblage. Those works should not be understood as an intentional bundle of objects that are (or can be) produced actively by subjects—rather, the concept of the assemblage should lead us out of the subject-object dichotomy. An assemblage as a work of art is therefore an artist's amalgam of materials and objects only on the first level; in the next step the specific combination has the intrinsic possibility of "active" producing relations between them.

By means of her selection of materials, their combination and fusing, and the theoretical background of many-valued logic, Bauermeister creates a situation in which the works of art contain a many-valued aesthetic. It is only at this point that the assemblage begins. Every assemblage has "extensive" and "intensive boundaries"; viewers can only perceive the "extensive" ones, but they are triggered by "invisible processes" that lead to the "intensive" ones.[39] The concept of materiality should be located in the space between "intensive" and "extensive"; there is a level that protrudes, but at the same time a more comprehensive stratum of events that occur independently. With reference to that DeLanda characterizes the assemblage as a "realist ontology": the concept itself should be seen as a production of the human spirit; the specific assemblages that evolved must, by contrast, be seen as completely independent.[40]

The situation is similar with Bauermeister's many-valued use of materials. While it follows the intention of first combining materials and then putting them in unified compositions that both challenge the (traditional) concepts of artworks and materials and create works that incorporate concepts from Günther's many-valued logic, the assemblage results in an extension of the situation. By way of describing the productivity of its own dynamic, it comes to form overarching connections, since it cannot be assumed that assemblages remain with the boundaries of objects with fixed contours, such as *Sandhalme* and *Howevercall*. Dichotomies such as artificial and natural or the various formations of many-valued aesthetics are integrated

38 Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 2.

39 See ibid., 110–11.

40 See ibid., 138.

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into the work of art by means of the assemblage, and reveal some of these qualities to the viewers.

4.2 The Poetics of the Found as Material I: Light Sheets and Textiles

The discovery of the patched bedsheets on Sicily led to a separate group of works: the light sheets. As discussed above, the patches had not originally been intended aesthetically but were supposed to make it possible to continue using the bedsheets. Bauermeister then made some changes in particular points: *ONNO (Light Sheet)* of 1963 consists of several bedsheets; they form the fabric ground of abstract patterns (fig. 33). In the next step she sewed bedsheets that had been patched more around them, so that the letters O and N could be added to the cloth ground, nearly filling the format. All of the fabric in this light sheet consists of patches that Bauermeister had not sewn herself; she appropriated the material and then composed it to achieve this look with the two large letters.

Fig. 33: ONNO (Light Sheet), 1963, found linen sheet, fluorescent tubes and painted wood construction, mirrors, 270.2 x 227.3 x 20 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

The work is usually exhibited in a hall of mirrors. Two mirrors with the same dimensions as the work are attached to the sides of the wooden box, one on each side, and extend into the space at a ninety-degree angle so that they stand precisely paral-

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lel to each other. This produces the effect that one side constantly mirrors the other, opening up a virtual receding space that shows the words "ON" and "NO" in alternation (fig. 34). This too should be understood as incorporating many-valued aesthetics: the arrangement of the two mirrors illustrates that an affirmative expression such as "ON" can always already contain a counterweight such as "NO." Each conditions the other infinitely often, so that no conclusive decision can be made.

The levels of many-valued aesthetics in the *Needless Needles* light sheet have already been mentioned, especially in connection with the other works of that group. A perspective that exposes strategies for content and concepts runs the risk of overlooking the aesthetics of the material. The light sheets bundle up all the levels of meaning of the material in the site and context where it was found: the Italian economic miracle of the postwar era, which began in full force in the late 1950s, had not yet reached rural Sicily by 1963.[41] The perspective of a culture of consumption brings out the abstract structures in the bedsheets, but they are completely irrelevant for their daily use and in the process of repairing; there the result alone is decisive, making further use possible.

Untitled (Light Sheet) of 1963 is at 370 by 370 by 20 centimeters one of the largest light sheets (fig. 35). Bauermeister's kept her reworking of this example to a minimum; words in the form of additional patches, as for *ONNO (Light Sheet)*; other fragments of fabric, canvas cutouts, drawings, and objects, as for *Needless Needles*, were not added. The artist merely sewed several bedsheets together and stretched them in a light box. The patches appear to consist of different layers; the more they are superimposed, the darker that spot becomes: "Surfaces appear to human perception wherever light does not pass through but is reflected and so a contour of a volume becomes visible."[42] Light thus needs matter that it encounters, that it reflects back, and that it only partially penetrates.

41 See Andrea Leonardi, "Das italienische ‚Wirtschaftswunder' 1950–1963," in *Annali dell' Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient*, nos. 36–37 (2010–11): 69–82, esp. 81.

42 Peter Sloterdijk, "Licht und Widerstand. Über Materie," in Heibach and Rohde, *Ästhetik der Materialität* (see note 27), 33–50, esp. 44.

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Fig. 34: ONNO (Light Sheet) (Detail), 1963, found linen sheet, fluorescent tubes and painted wood construction, mirrors, 270.2 x 227.3 x 20 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

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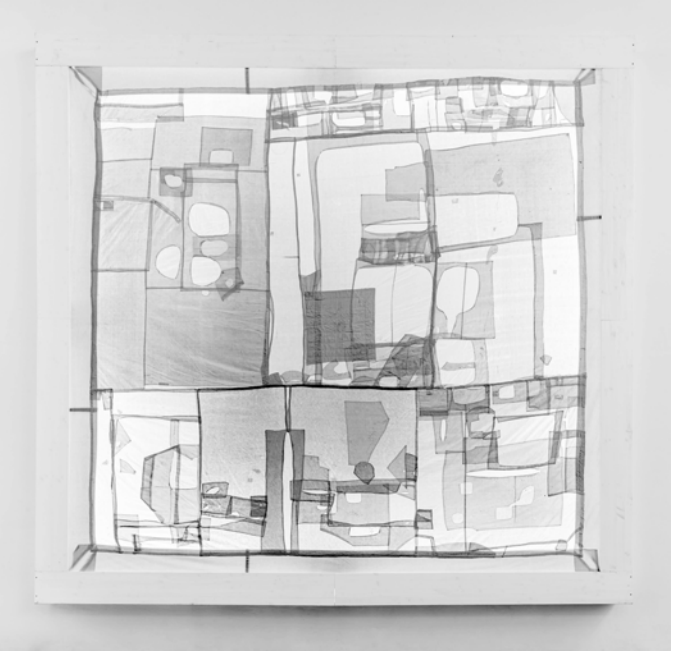
Fig. 35: Untitled (Light Sheet), 1963, found linen sheet, fluorescent tubes and painted wood construction, 370 x 370 x 20 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.



The use of fluorescent lights in the light sheets has an ancillary function; they are supposed to demonstrate chance and the inherent aesthetic that results from repairing the sheet. Bauermeister's use of light has less to do with the qualities that are traditionally attributed to it in the history of culture and art.[43] Bauermeister's view of light is clear from a handwritten note from the early 1960s titled "Licht" (Light):

43 In Plato's parable of the sun, light and the eye as the organ that receives it already have a knowledge-generating power and serve as a metaphor for insight in general; see Plato, *The Republic*, vol. 2 (Books 6–10), ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 81–97. In the neo-Platonic tradition after Plotin, and with the "metaphysics of light" in the Gothic era, light reveals spiritual qualities. The latter and the topos of insight remain in the background and can still be found, for example, in the work of Zero artist Otto Piene, who was a friend of Bauermeister's and employed in his text "Über die Reinheit des Lichts" (On the Purity of Light) a metaphysical vocabulary for light's qualities; see Otto Piene, "Über die Reinheit des Lichts," in *Zero* 1, no. 2 (1958): 24–27; translated as "On the Purity of Light," *Zero* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), 46–47. Artistic currents of the 1960 that used light as a material in their works, such as the Light and Space Movement, had a specific approach in which spaces were created by putting light in the foreground. Bauermeister merely commented ironically on this use

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> "Art was always equated with 'so-called divine' processes. That is solely on the inability thus far to trace the complexity, i.e., many-valuedness of painterly or—more broadly—artistic processes back to unambiguous initial values."[44]

For her, it was not the supposedly transcendental qualities of light that led to the incorporation of that material but rather the pragmatic decision to illustrate the poetics of the find—the sunlight penetrating the sheets on a clothesline. As the quotation shows, sacred explanations of artistic processes are not acceptable for Bauermeister; that would merely represent a simplification. It is revealing that she associates "complexity" with "many-valuedness," since that seems to be the ultimate effect of many-valued aesthetics: another level that is and was already contained in the works of art—it need only be named.

That history took place on the sheets themselves, since they were presumably in use across generations, is another aspect when textiles—especially with obvious traces of use—are integrated into a work of art: "To be human is to be involved with cloth."[45] At all stations in life, people are accompanied by textiles; individual and private tragedies as well as moments of happiness are inscribed in the bedsheets: every patch and every stain revealed by the neon light represents this. It is reminiscent of Benjamin's historical materialism: for him, "history" is not "homogeneous, empty time" put is always constructed by the relevant official authorities.[46] His materialist history writing employs rather a "constructive principle," in which an artifact itself is observed, and its categorization in a system of marginal objects can "blast out" the course of history.[47] This is made possible by the figure of the collector: the (found) object is separated from its function and transferred to a collection, where it can reveal its history and all the events that have sedimented in it: "for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects."[48] Because they are authentic

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of light in the form of her Lens Boxes; see the work *My Contribution to Light Art is Dead Serious Art*, discussed in section 6.3. On light's power to generate knowledge in relation to visual art, see Hartmut Böhme, "Das Licht als Medium der Kunst: Über Erfahrungsarmut und ästhetisches Gegenlicht in der technischen Zivilisation," inaugural lecture, November 2, 1994. https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/2191 (accessed July 14, 2020).

44 Mary Bauermeister, "199 Licht recto, verso," ca. 1961–62, unpublished source.

45 Beverly Gordon, "Cloth and Consciousness: Our Deep Connections; On the Social and Spiritual Significance of the Textile," in *Art & Textiles: Fabric as Material and Concept in Modern Art from Klimt to the Present*, ed. Markus Brüderlin, exh. cat. Wolfsburg, Kunstmuseum (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 60–67, esp. 60.

46 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940), trans. Harry Zohn, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 (1938–1940), ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 389–97, esp. 395.

47 See ibid., 396.

48 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 207.

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artifacts, the things can be used to reconstruct past events, and so the course of time is reveals. In his text Benjamin also refers to Plato's "archetypes of things," but the material can bring out an island of the "sea of fog" of the senses.[49]

In addition to the bedsheets, which would be disposable items in an industrial context, this function of an authentic souvenir also seems to apply to Bauermeister's *Flickenkleider* (Patched Clothes) of 1963 (fig. 36). The items of clothing are also from Sicily, and Bauermeister sewed canvas cutouts to some of them. A body lends individuality to an item of clothing; the textile takes on the person's outlines, without the person, the piece of fabric is usually just a placeholder in the absence and has the function of a memento.[50] Gunnar Schmidt speaks in this context of clothing's "textile-anthropological dimensions."[51]

If one overemphasizes the mnemonic function of a textile object, one can lose focus on its material and materiality—which is equivalent to Bataille's critique of (historical) materialism and hence of the position Benjamin represents. For Bataille, the objects merely enter into a relationship of exchange in lieu of ideas; it is, however, still an "idealistic" order, as he expresses it in an entry on materialism in the journal *Documents: Doctrines, Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie*, which has also come to be known as the *Critical Dictionary*: in his view, materialism valorizes a science of things, rather than trying to help the material or the material world itself out of its devalued status.[52] This "senile idealism" must be replaced by a "direct interpretation […] of raw phenomena."[53] In his highly regarded text "Informe" (Formless) he extends this interpretation to the dichotomy of form and material: philosophy has only one purpose, to compel a form; the assertion of the formless is necessarily perceived as "declassify[ing]."[54] Something formless has no rights of its own, and saying that the universe itself is formless would be to equate it with a "spider" or with "spittle."[55] With his polemic statements, Bataille is trying to put material on a par with the category of form; his provocation calls for rethinking the forming of hierarchies.

49 See ibid., 205.

50 See Cora von Pape, *Kunstkleider: Die Präsenz des Körpers in textilen Kunst-Objekten des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 32–57.

51 Gunnar Schmidt, "Textile Poetiken: Über Um-, Ein-, und Verkleidungen," in Heibach and Rohde, *Ästhetik der Materialität* (see note 27), 145–71, esp. 150.

52 Georges Bataille, "Materialism" (1929–30) in Bataille, *Encyclopædia Acephalica, Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*, ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg, trans. Iain White et al. (London: Atlas, 1995), 58.

53 Ibid.

54 Georges Bataille, "Formless" (1929–30), Bataille, *Encyclopædia Acephalica* (see note 52), 51–52.

55 See ibid., 52.

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Fig. 36: Flickenkleider, 1963, found linen sheet, fluorescent tubes, and patches of canvas, variable dimensions, Staatliches Museum Schwerin.

Bauermeister's oeuvre includes, in addition to the light sheets and the work *Flickenkleider*, other textile works that are also from Sicily: the works *Hommage à Rauschenberg* and *Untitled* were both found in 1963 and introduced to the sphere of art (figs. 37 and 38). The first-named work is a conglomerate of many scraps of fabric in different colors and sizes, sewed to a piece of red-and-white-striped fabric measuring 210 by 210 centimeters.[56] There is a distant similarity to works by Robert Rauschenberg, such as *Bed* of 1955. The situation of its origin is, however, reversed; whereas Rauschenberg appropriates both art and nonart objects in order to make a composition from them, thereby expanded the canon of materials, Bauermeister declares a completely unintentional patchwork intended only for use to be a work

56 Bauermeister has explained that this piece of fabric was being used to cover a chicken cage when she found it.

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of art and lines the work to her esteemed colleague with its title. She recognizes the formal similarity of the results of two completely different processes. A detail such as a pair of jeans visible in the top center of the work evokes in the viewers of moment of insight into these processes of chance. The second work, *Untitled*, is made in a similar way; here tattered clothes have been transferred to a dark blue textile ground. One can speak of a sublimation of a "poor" material in these two works; that is equally true of the light sheets, especially when the randomly patched patterns are also illuminated and look almost golden, though that is due to the color of the sheets. This special level admits of a certain closeness to the artists of Arte Povera; in addition, one recognizes the Nouveau Réalistes, who also integrated cast-off objects when they turned to material culture.[57]

Fig. 37: Hommage à Rauschenberg, 1963, found mended cloth, 210 x 200 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

57 See Jill Carrick, *Nouveau Réalisme, 1960s France, and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Topographies of Chance and Return* (London: Ashgate, 2010).

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Fig. 38: Untitled, 1963, found mended cloth, 210 x 200 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

In addition to Duchamp, Bauermeister has repeated referred to Kurt Schwitters as a point of reference, who enabled her to work out her own artistic approach. In his "Merz Art" Schwitters wanted to incorporate all materials visible "to the eye" and compose them, "supported by segmenting, folding, covering up, or overpainting."[58] He called for "essentially [...] equal evaluation [*Wertung*] of individual materials" for the artistic process.[59] These views can be found in Bauermeister's works, too; the

58 Kurt Schwitters, "Merz-Painting" (1919), in Schwitters, *Myself and My Aims: Writings on Art and Criticism*, ed. Megan R. Luke, trans. Timothy Grundy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 24.

59 Ibid.

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equal value of materials seems particularly apt. That we cannot stop at this point, however, already became clear in the previous chapters; both the combination principles and many-valuedness have a substructure that goes beyond equal value; it is just our starting point.

With regard to the found objects that Bauermeister integrates into her art, she has occasionally used the term "Ready Trouvé."[60] It is a combination of Duchamp's ready-made and the Surrealist *objet trouvé*. Decades after he made the first ready-mades, Duchamp offered a suggestion of a theory for them: In general, the idea was to take already produced ordinary objects from the world of commodities and transfer them to the sphere of art by means of "déclaration" and "exposition."[61] Combining his method with the *objet trouvé* seems like a contradiction. Whereas Duchamp's is said to be marked by "indifference" toward the object, André Breton, the impresario of Surrealists, described the *objets trouvés* luring one to the find with their "convulsive beauty."[62] The object thus plays the role of a dream; it is supposed to liberate from "paralyzing [...] scruples" and offers the opportunity to gain brief insights into the penetrability of the universe.[63] Bauermeister's understanding of a ready-trouvé should be understood less with reference to the two descriptions by Duchamp and Breton than as an example of the use of language in her oeuvre. The concept should be understood quite literally; it is simply something "found" as "ready" for use in a work of art—whether the bedsheets in the light sheets or the stones and the plant fibers in *Howevercall*. With reference to the line of tradition between Duchamp and Surrealism, in which Bauermeister places herself by using it, her use of the term is entirely inconsistent, because for her it includes both things found and not further processed and the reworked, assembled, and purchased. Moreover, a balanced and

60 Mary Bauermeister, *Ich hänge im Triolengitter: Mein Leben mit Karlheinz Stockhausen* (Munich: Bertelesmann, 2011), 131.

61 In the brief text "Apropos of 'Readymades'" Duchamp also distinguishes two different types, namely the "reciprocal readymade" and the "readymade aided"; Marcel Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 141–42, esp. 142. In an interview in 1961 Duchamp explains that he never succeeded in coming up with a satisfying definition of his ready-mades; Katherine Kuh, interview with Marcel Duchamp, in Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), 81–93, esp. 90. On the terms "déclaration" and "exposition" and the concept of the already "made" in Duchamp, see Sebastian Egenhofer, *Abstraktion—Kapitalismus—Subjektivität: Die Wahrheitsfunktion des Werks in der Moderne* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), 118–21, and Lars Blunck, *Duchamps Readymade* (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2017), 15–20 and 117–29.

62 André Breton, *Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 13. Duchamp emphasized in several interviews that indifference toward the object and blocking out personal taste at the crucial differences of the ready-made from the *objet trouvé*; see Duchamp, *Interviews und Statements* (see note 61), 216.

63 See Breton, *Mad Love* (see note 62), 32.

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mediating approach would be necessary for the combination of the two concepts to succeed at all. Bauermeister tries rather to contextualize the different levels of meaning by joining the two concepts. This does not result in any "substantial" concept but rather in a playful reference to the two earlier ones. It is a small linguistic trick that leads one to question whether the one concept should be adopted or the other—or both at once along with everything in between. In general, Bauermeister is trying to work again dogmatism here. Mixing English and French, as in Ready Trouvé, is found often in her work, as was shown already using the example of "St. Pierre" in the *Needless Needles Vol. 5* Lens Box.

One crucial aspect of the light sheets and fabric works concerns their material itself; it is not enough to consider its previous use and finding. The prominent use of textiles in an artistic work reveals properties of the material that have been attributed to it in the history of culture: "Textiles […], based on the modalities for producing them and their form, have always been considered an especially feminine material."[64] One point of departure for this line of interpretation can be seen in Aristotle. The ancient philosopher makes a distinction between form and matter that makes form the higher principle and that is connected with gender associations. For him, only one thing ever results from matter, whereas the form always produces several: "Such too is the relation of male to female: the female is impregnated in one coition, but one male can impregnate many females."[65] Even if such statements obviously seem completely inadequate and without substance today, their historical influence is important, because it is one example of many. Things were equated based on the assumption of an active, masculine formative and a passive, feminine mutable.[66] Not only the dichotomy of form and matter was subjected to this interpretation, but hierarchies were formed even within the material, in which "adaptability" and "mutability" were associated with the "feminine."[67] Working with textiles or "soft" materials in general took on subversive elements after World War II and especially in the 1960s: the materials that had previously been marginalized in the context of art were integrated and appreciated in order to subvert traditional stereo-

64 Pape, *Kunstkleider* (see note 50), 29. Hartmut Böhme makes similar observations; he not only shows that the textile art has been interpreted as feminine but also connects it with the Ovidian myth of Arachne; Hartmut Böhme, "Mythology and the Aesthetics of the Textile," trans. Michael Wolfson, in Brüderlin, *Art & Textiles* (see note 45), 46–59.

65 Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Books I–IX*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 47.

66 See Silke Wenk, "Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit," in *Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius and Silke Wenk (Marburg: Jonas, 1997), 12–29, esp. 17–24.

67 See Pape, *Kunstkleider* (see note 50), 28.

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types. The "inherent meaning" and "resistance" of the material against the form was emphasized, which also supposed to challenge traditional gender attributions.[68]

The light sheets incorporate these strategies in different ways. The largely unprocessed ones, such as *Untitled (Light Sheet)* of 1963, make the very textile material their theme; next to the abstract pattern of patches, it comes to the foreground: On the one hand, they too are textiles, and the repair succeeds because of the properties of that material. On the other hand, not only is an otherwise marginalized material that is interpreted as rags or trash transferred to the context of art but the inherent beauty of the repair work is also exhibited. In connection with the transfer of everyday materials or objects to the sphere of art, Boris Groys has described a process of exchange in which something is valorized and thereby accepted into the cultural archive, and a simultaneous devalorization occurs, and something else is removed from the archive.[69] Because Bauermeister manages to transform commodities into a work of art that is based on textiles, thereby introducing it to a broader context, she questions at the same time the hierarchies of materials and the prejudices of gender-specific interpretations. Something is transferred into the cultural archive that was already considered depleted by the industrial nations of that era and was associated with the "feminine" in the semantics of materials. Only when it is perceived as a work of art are the various levels of the materials emphasized.

The *Needless Needles* light sheet addresses the cultural categorizations of sewing and embroidering much more directly: In several places on the light sheet Bauermeister wrote sewing instructions or transformed proverbs of domestic manual labor. In the central collection of round canvas cutouts, which are half sewn on and half opened, we read, for example, "knots belong on the backside," followed by an affirmative "yes sir." This instruction to sew flawless was apparently given to Bauermeister by a male authority. She does not, however, apply that proposition but merely writes it, only half-visible, on the back of the sewn, circular canvas. Direct above it, sewn into the textile patch with needle and thread, so that the knot, which brings together several threads, is demonstratively placed on the front side.

A transformed proverb is found to the right of this detail: A round canvas cutout is sewn completely to the light sheet; a short sentence is written, also in a circle, in English and German: "lerne klagen ohne zu leiden," "learn to complain without really suffering." Bauermeister is alluding to a needlepoint embroidered with the Prussian virtue "lerne leiden ohne zu klagen" (learn to suffer without complaining) that she had, by her own account, seen once.[70] This is an allusion to the meditative aspects attributed to working with textiles and especially sewing and embroidering

68 See Rübel, *Plastizität* (see note 28), 178.

69 See Boris Groys, *On the New*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014).

70 Artist's personal remark to the author in Mary Bauermeister's studio, June 28, 2019.

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by hand.[71] Repetitive and accurate action can, so the embroidery claims, channel one's own suffering by working with fabric. Bauermeister's statement calls for inverting that, thereby ironically exaggerating gender roles: First, her art should not be analyzed as an expression of femininity, even if she works with and sews textiles.[72] Moreover, the change to the sentence calls for a "complaining" that is supposed to occur without any "suffering," which is Bauermeister's allusion to states of hysteria. In keeping with that, there are several seemingly uncontrolled stitches on the canvas cutout; at first they are still trying to frame it, but they evolve into a messy zigzag stitch as soon as they leave the canvas and enter the textile. Complaining without suffering could be a pathologizing of a human state that was accepted because of gender clichés.[73] Only rarely do Bauermeister's works contain obvious feminist statements, which are usually hidden in such details or occur a performative level, in that the artist creates works that reflect on art and insist on their place in the art world.[74]

When working with textiles as a material, the thread itself is significant. It can be seen as a "metaphor for the creative process" in general. As a "thing without qualities," freely reworking it makes it possible to create a new reality, which gives it something of the potential of the line.[75] Moreover, the thread is a "reality external to art," because it stands as a mediator between the creative process of working it and the anthropological dimensions of the textile.[76] The idealness of a drawn line, which as the basic element of drawing is part of the origin myth of fine art, was distilled from it only over the course of history. It is an artificial separate that associates the line with the conceptual and cognitive achievements and the thread with a craft process. The drawn line and the sewn thread, which is the basic material of all textile techniques, were originally of similar importance.[77]

In addition, the thread provides references to the metaphors of networking, a woven form of individual threads creates connections between different elements

71 See Gordon, "Cloth and Consciousness" (see note 45), 65.

72 See Deborah Cherry, "Autorschaft und Signatur: Feministische Leseweisen der Handschrift von Frauen," in Hoffmann-Curtius and Wenk, *Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit* (see note 66), 44–57, esp. 46.

73 See Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*, trans. Enrico Caouette et al. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 21–44.

74 See section 5.2.

75 See Gunnar Schmidt, *Ästhetik des Fadens: Zur Medialisierung eines Materials in der Avantgardekunst* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 13–17.

76 See ibid., 146.

77 See Böhme, "Mythology and the Aesthetics of the Textile" (see note 66), 52–53.

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so that everything can be linked to everything else by it.[78] Bauermeister illustrates these potentialities of the thread using the features in the *Needless Needles* light sheet but also in the other works from that group. Lines that simulate seams transition repeatedly into "real" seams made with a needle and thread. The frame of the eponymous Lens Box is strewn with drawn lines that are clearly identifiable as such and drawn seams that simulate sewing on a canvas that has been folded back. Bauermeister's works contain drawings that consist of lines but at the same time drawings sewn with threads as well as drawings of simulated (drawn) seams—it is a many-valuedness that unfolds between clearly definable forms of medialization.

4.3 The Poetics of the Found as Material II: Stones

Before examining more closely those areas of interpretation that are connected with Bauermeister's use of writing, drawing, scribbling and their iconicity, I conclude this chapter with another category of finding: Bauermeister collects stones that she then introduces into her works as a material. From an art historical perspective, the "stone" as an umbrella term is one of the most traditional materials for creating works of art. One constant in its meaning is the "solidity and imperishableness" of the material, so that stone was often employed as a "formula of dignity."[79] Moreover, stone is generally regarded as a mediating authority between the organic and inorganic, in that different temporal perspectives are scrutinized: "First, geological time puts human time into perspective and, second, the weathering of stones points to the instability of human reality."[80]

The stones in Bauermeister's oeuvre are the result of weathering. She employs stones found on the beach exclusively, so that do not represent massiveness and imperishableness. This kind of stones had no art historical tradition in the early 1960s, nor could they be associated with nascent Land Art, which employed strategies such as the decentralizing of artistic activity and its institutional reflection, new pictorial forms, and a question of human and natural scales.[81]

78 See Birgit Schneider, "Caught in the Tangle of the Net: On a History of the Network Metaphor," trans. Amy Klement, in Brüderlin, *Art & Textiles* (see note 45), 328–41, esp. 331.

79 See Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien: Anleitung zu einer Ikonologie der Werkstoffe* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1994), 37–38.

80 Benjamin Bühler and Stefan Rieger, *Bunte Steine: Ein Lapidarium des Wissens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014), 14.

81 See Jane McFadden, "Not Sculpture: Along the Way to Land Art," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, exh. cat. Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012; Munich, Haus der Kunst, 2012–13 (Munich: Prestel, 2012), 43–60; Philip Ursprung, *Grenzen der Kunst: Allan Kaprow und das Happening, Robert Smithson und die Land Art* (Munich: Sike Schreiber, 2003), 199–210.

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The material used by Bauermeister has a regularly oval, at times also round form. All of the stones used have a smooth surface, with no sharp edges or asymmetries. Bauermeister has not intervened in their form or texture; rather they were created over a course of time far beyond the human scale by the wave movements of the sea. Bauermeister uses the English word "pebbles" for the individual stones.[82] The artistic intervention with regard to stones is the activity of collection and repeated selection; stones are seen as a "nearly ubiquitously available natural material."[83] Certain colors are only found at specific beaches; there the stones are selected first for their regular form; in the studio they are sorted by size and the colors are distinguished again; the composition of the work represents the final selection. With a few exceptions, the wooden support was sanded by Bauermeister before she applied the stones. Sand is, like earth, a "medium of memory," natural processes have been deposited in it in order to reach a specific combination.[84] In contrast to stones, however, sand is not associated with individuality but seems to be a "collective."[85]

Like all of the other stone works, *Progressions* from 1963 resulted from this process (fig. 39). The work consists of four plywood boards, arranged in a spiral. The size of the four boards once again refers to the Fibonacci series, with the square open area whose edges are formed by all four parts of the picture is the starting point, that is, the "1." Adding the open area to itself results in the size of the smallest board; adding it to the open area results in the dimensions of the next larger one; a process that Bauermeister continued to the largest board—she thus takes up an aspect from her education that was incorporated into the combination principle. *Progressions* also has a Fibonacci series running in the opposite direction: every element of the painting has a square part into which no stones were inserted. The largest of them contains the smallest stoneless area, and the dimensions increase the smaller the Stone Pictures become. The endpoint here is the open area that is the starting point for the Fibonacci sequence, which was introduced to determine the size of the elements. The work measures 130.2 by 120.3 by 12.1 centimeters and parts of its composition result from a mathematical sequence associated with natural growth processes.

82 The more neutral umbrella term "stones" is used here.

83 See Monika Wagner, "Papier und Stein. Kommunikative Potenziale anachronistischer Trägermaterialien in der zeitgenössischen Kunst," in Strässle, Kleinschmidt, and Mohs, *Das Zusammenspiel der Materialien in den Künsten* (see note 17), 263–76, esp. 264.

84 See Christiane Heibach, "Erd-Verbindungen: Über Erde als 'ideelles' Material in der Kunst," in Heibach and Rohde, *Ästhetik der Materialität* (see note 27), 213–41, esp. 225.

85 See Bühler and Rieger, *Bunte Steine* (see note 80), 189.

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Fig. 39: Progressions, 1963, stones on particle board coated with sand, 130.2 x 120.3 x 12.1 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Matthew T. Mellon Foundation Fund, 1964, 254.1964.

When placing the stones Bauermeister had recourse to two principles that are determinant of her oeuvre: first, ordering in series; the stones were glued side by side according to their size, and smaller stones of suitable form were layered on that, resulting in stone towers that taper toward the top; second, the rather unstructured-looking arrangement in which diverse staggered stone towers are in turn linked by stones. Both seem contradictory at first, but each creates its own ordering of the material. Both the largest pictorial element and the one on the left feature ordering in series; in *Progressions* Bauermeister sought shifts within the rows. Because the darker stones on the right half of the largest wood panel are initially larger, and in

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the left, brighter half a rising relief results; stone, a robust material, thereby take on a dynamic. This dynamic must have determined the process of making the work, since the small stones were supposed to be removed from the larger context, like cobble.

In other stone works—*Vinavil* of 1964, for example—this movement of the "passive" material stone is depicted even more pointedly (fig. 40). There are also works constructed without these shifts in size within the rows of stone; in them the material seems to be ordered most consistently: *Verschwindender Horizont* (Disappearing Horizon) of 1966 consists of eight square Stone Pictures applied vertically one above the other on a wooden construction that looms out of the wall into the space, creating a sculptural work (fig. 41). The stone towers are accurately arranged, always from large to small, on top of and next to one another. The reduction of the size of the stones and the height of the stone towers is framed by another progression: the depth of the white wooden pedestal to which the Stone Pictures are attached decreases as it gets taller.

Fig. 40: Vinavil, 1964, stones, ink on particle board coated with sand, 121.5 x 121.5 x 29 cm, Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

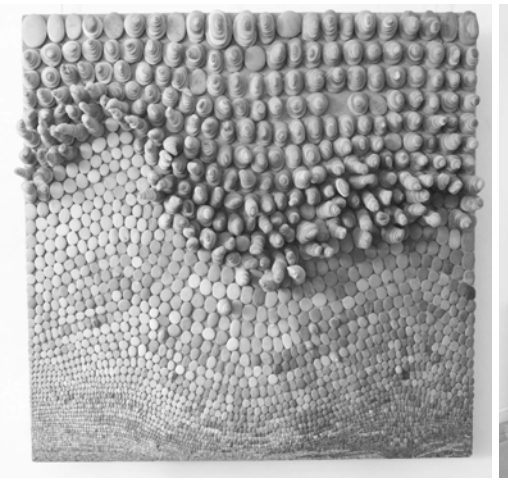

Fig. 41: Verschwindender Horizont, 1966, stones, sand on wood, 250 x 107.5 x 70 cm, Mary Bauermeister Art Estate.

Working with different progressions can be observed repeatedly in the Stone Pictures: each of the two pictorial elements in *Progressions*, which follow the ordered principle of stone composition, has a progression that runs counter to the other: whereas the one runs from large to small, the other is constructed from small to large. The sizes of the panels and the stoneless areas are likewise marked by con-

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trary progressions: that of the Fibonacci sequence. It is reasonable to assume that Bauermeister intended the arrangement of the stones in rows to allude to (natural-mathematical) principles of growth such as the Fibonacci sequence. The stone towers convey the impression that their individual components resulted from progressive formulas and accordingly grew naturally. Another possible interpretation is that Bauermeister was alluding to tradition of creating trail markers or asserting one's presence by stacking stones.[86] This would result in, as with the *Needless Needles* light sheet, a performative-feminist level, since with her shore finds the artist was appropriating an unusual material and layering countless towers of all sizes over the course of her oeuvre. Each individual tower could be interpreted as a self-assertion of her own path and an affirmation of her presence and hence as the repeated act of capturing for herself something already explored.[87]

On the smallest and the second-largest pictorial elements in *Progressions*, the stones are arranged in a way that appears unstructured at first. It is, however, another of the artist's principles for dealing with the raw material. On closer inspection, it becomes evident that Bauermeister applied diverse stone towers to the surface. There are connected to one another by more oval stones, to which further towers are glued. From a slight distance, they give the impression of disorder, as if the stones were simulating the situation of their finding. It is, however, instead a more subtle order that demands greater powers of abstraction from the viewers. One could cite here again Günther's polycontextuality, since for him reality and order are two equivalent concepts: "If something *is*, it must have order and if it *appears* as chaos it only means that we have not yet found the code which unravels the seeming chaos and shows us the hidden order in the imbroglio."[88]

This results in a situation similar to that of Bauermeister's point structures. The stone towers are equivalent to the points painted one above the other on the canvas in which a black point has a smaller white one and that in turn has an even smaller black one. With its unstructured arrangement of stones of towers nested into groups and with smaller towers added, it is like looking at *Konstruktiver Tachismus* from a slight distance: it conveys the impression of an expressive randomness. The ordered and planned structured is revealed only when one moves closer.

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86 See Kathrin Rottmann, "Technisch erhaben: Michael Heizers Steintransporte," in *Steine: Kulturelle Praktiken des Materialtransfers*, ed. Monika Wagner and Michael Friedrich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 99–114, esp. 108.

87 These tendencies in Bauermeister cannot be marginalized. The "documenting" of an artistic act is evident already with the patent application for the Magnet Pictures. The artist's self-assertion is also found in the light sheets, which commented on work with "feminine" connotations, namely, sewing.

88 Gotthard Günther, "Life as Poly-Contexturality" (1973), in *Wirklichkeit als Poly-Kontexturalität*, vol. 2 of *Beiträge zur Grundlegung einer operationsfähigen Dialektik*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1979), 283–306, esp. 290.

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The four parts of *Progressions* unite two different principles for composing with stones; accordingly, the combination principle is thus transformed with the stones in comparison to the technique of painting: from the point structure, which will be employed repeatedly as an element in the further course of Bauermeister's oeuvre, two principles of arranging the stones can be observed, which will also be observed repeatedly. That there is a correspondence between her painting and her composition with stones is made clear by Bauermeister in the work *Layers* of 1964 (fig. 42). That vertical-format work consists of stacked stones and outlines painted in casein tempera to simulate stones glued on top of one another. The upper third of the work has primarily painted forms and a total of five stone towers inserted; in the lower section there are clearly more towers, even though the painted structures continue to dominate; the part of the work created with stones no longer has painted surfaces, though the darker stones sometimes suggest this. Here Bauermeister has united the sorted and stacked stones into one work with drawn round and oval forms inside one another and thus made a direct connect. Because painting gets a counterweight with the stones, in *Layers* it is no longer necessary to decide which technique is imitation and which the model. With reference to the title, it is also possible to think of it as different "layers" of the same principle that merely reveal themselves in different ways: the structures designed with paint and those with stones should both be thought of as in one horizon. That would be another implementation of many-valued aesthetics; there should be no categorical different between the stones and the painted but rather equal value.

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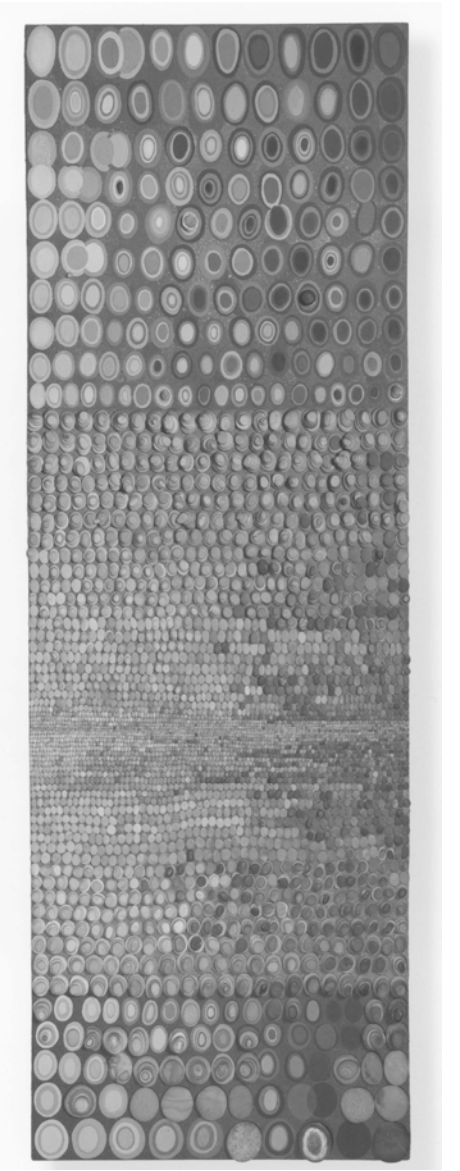
Fig. 42: Layers, 1964, casein tempera, ink, stones on particle board coated with sand, 149.9 x 50.8 x 11.4 cm, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jean-Pierre Radley, United States.



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The level of materiality that is contained in the stones and goes beyond material aspects produces a resistance when it comes to contextualizing with painted structures: the stones mediate between human and nonhuman scales of time.[89] They could be found by the artist, placed in a composition, and given strategies of many-valued aesthetics; nevertheless, the stones contain a remnant of natural processes that gives them their special look. Bauermeister does not just employ stones in the Stone Pictures, where they are the dominant material, but also in other groups of works, as one element among many: in the Lens Boxes, for example, where their integration is also reflected on in drawing and writing. The drawn and written are, however, also a material presence of their own, which also has an effect on the level of materiality.

89 As early as 1966 Roger Caillois was speaking of stones not only being older than life but also that they would still exist after it has disappeared: "They arose before mankind; and man, as he developed, did not mark them with his art or with his industry." Roger Caillois, *Stones & Other Texts*, trans. Valentine Umansky, *Flint Magazine* 1–2 (June 2018), https://sensatejournal.com/stones-other-texts/.

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