

Simone Schardt

Drawings

13.09. – 08.11.2008

Pointing Out Gestures of Pointing

When Louis Pasteur demonstrated his hypothesis of biogenesis in 1864, he changed mankind's view of nature: as from then, illnesses were no longer attributed to particularly favourable conditions for generation but to their transfer via micro-organisms.¹ Since, laboratories have been regarded as places where ultimate truths are investigated, truths that are directed towards the future, aiming to ensure that we enjoy the best possible life in it. But a rather longer, more testing look indicates that although such truths define the future, at the same time they exercise a powerful effect on our definition of the present and the past. Seen in this way, the laboratory contains no more than old apparatuses for experiments; experiments that have attained the status of fact providers even though their interpretation is already secure, since they uphold a model without which specific phenomena could not be explained. In this sense, laboratories are places equipped with instruments in which the future is developed accordingly, by continual reference back to the past. Now, the laboratory no longer appears as a store of insightful benefits, but is presented as a place in which people puzzle out artificial scenarios. Consequently, the answers that the laboratory provides are, first and foremost, answers to those questions that the same laboratory is capable of posing – and not answers to questions that humanity is still seeking.

The series of drawings on continuous paper is based on these existential conditions of scientific insight, which shatter the mythological construct of "objectivity". These protocols of experiments, whose curve progression and painstaking notation of basic conditions aim to provide information about the success or failure of an enzymatic reaction. In a second stage of work, a distancing-subjective commentary emerges on the sheet so immersed in objectivity; a commentary incorporating various interpretative intentions. Produced on a material that carries its narrative and significance with it, language and image interlock in an accumulation of scientific and cultural artefacts: here, protocols of experimental set-ups create a collage together with scientific demonstration material; natural understandings of the non-natural are interlaid with manifestations of indescribable tedium, and written characters amass into pictorial formations. In this way, the relation between the seeing and the seen is shown to be mutually defining. The investigating subject not only gazes through his instructive instruments – microscopes, monitors, test-tubes – at the object to be investigated; the object gazes back as well. The viewer not only sees an image; he or she is always

captured by the view inherent in the object as well. This double motion significantly disturbs the epistemological arrangement that is symbolised by the diagrammatic surface of the drawings. Overlapping “authentic” scientific material with the experimental course of subjective commentary highlights ambiguities that are inherent in the gesture of exposure, which points to things and says “Look at that!” and at the same time maintains - with the authority of those who know what they are talking about - “That is how it is.”² The same material, the primary function of which is to provide a foundation of proof and verification for previous scientific assumptions – produced from a scientific activity that follows the requirements of subjective design as a scientist – now reports on the constructed quality of those assumptions. The result appears to trigger the promise of “infinite subjectivity” (Alain Badiou). While Badiou formulates a full spectrum of “truth processes” and accredits art with an exceptional position within it, according to which, in art: “[...] the subject of truth is taken from the sensual, whereas by contrast, in science, the subject of truth is taken from the letter [...]”³, the continuous drawings indicate that such dichotomising is not so easy.

--

¹ A comprehensive description of the constructed quality and existential conditions of scientific insight can be found in: Isabelle Stengers, *Wem dient die Wissenschaft?*, Hamburg 1998

² Mieke Bal analyses these gestures of pointing as declaratory acts of speech in the museum context on the basis of the “American Museum of Natural History” and concludes that they can certainly be transferred to the field of natural science. On this, cf. Mieke Bal: *Kulturanalyse*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 72-116

³ Alain Badiou: *Dritter Entwurf eines Manifests für den Affirmationismus*, Berlin 2007, p. 26