

[*Worpswede Trilogy*] and the site-specific *Eine Beziehungsweise. Duett-Rufe der Kraniche* [A Relational Mode. Duet Calls of Cranes], though clearly discrete and distinct projects, are unflagging in their exploration of the relationship between seeing and knowing.

In addition to Ludmila Vachtová, another voice, with which the artist engaged in dialogue for many years, fell silent while work on this publication was in progress. The fundamental question of understanding our reality was as crucial to the writer Barbara Köhler as it is to the art presented here. Wolfensberger's dancing volumes take shape in response to our ›speechlessness‹, as we learn from the extensive opening interview. Reading Köhler's texts out loud uncovers the rhythm of breathing that fosters the physical experience of signifiers – syllables, words and sentences. *Spracherkennung* [Speech recognition] is activated by *Not I* – an installation that converts the TV version of Samuel Beckett's one-person drama of 1972 into a spatial event. Köhler's essay, *Die Aufrechterhaltung der Wellenfunktion* [Maintaining the Wave Function], is further proof of the productive 'pas de deux' of wielding form and language. It was part of **NO ONE'S BOX**, a joint project of 2007, also published by Edizioni Periferia.

This book has inherited the format and the philosophy of combining picture book with reader, and monograph with reference work, from **ZEIT-LUPEN** (2007), the first survey of Wolfensberger's oeuvre. Its appearance is indebted to the thoughtful and precise work of designer Ulrike von Dewitz; successfully sifting through the sheer boundless material, he has skilfully set decisive accents. Photographer Werner J. Hannappel from Essen, who has worked with the artist since 1988, has once again made an essential contribution to the visual impression of the pages that follow. His pictures communicate a closeness, intensity and profound understanding not least of the diversity of complex relations between the works and their respective location.

By starting with the title *Beziehungsweisen* [Relational Modes], we foreground a group of recent, large-format works quasi as 'pars pro toto' and thus clearly make manifest a fundamental aspect of Wolfensberger's approach: she examines the phenomenology that lies at the core of unfolding dialogue, thus making an enduring impact through and in the breaking waves of resistance and permeability.

Andrea Wolfensberger
in conversation
with Isabel Zürcher

Models of Unfolding Dialogues

Isabel Zürcher **Your video *Stare* [Starlings], (1995) in the exhibition *Deep Distance – Die Entfernung der Fotografie* [The Distance of Photography] at Kunsthalle Basel (2000) was such a striking event. I found it utterly mesmerizing – the indistinguishable micro and macro movement, the simultaneity of pulse and linearity, of tightknit and scattered whole. One never tires of watching the dynamics of this gigantic flock of birds. But this phenomenon in the skies over Rome can also be read as hatching: drawing and recording are closely related. What did you discover in the flight of the starlings when you made that video?**

Andrea Wolfensberger They were drawings in the sky, constantly new drawings, ceaselessly transformed and repeated, created by incredibly dynamic movement. I was spellbound by the drama of it. The animals were giving a live performance of how to find form. I didn't want to add anything to it; I just wanted to look and learn. I saw my task as pure observation and tried to record this natural spectacle as precisely as possible – as a work of art but also to bear witness to a process that was so extraordinarily captivating, even though I didn't understand it.

At the time I was already interested in studying how non-hierarchical self-organizing systems work, because that's what a swarm is: how do birds communicate with each other? Who decides on the shape of their flight? What is the relationship of a single starling to the swarm as a whole? Now, 30 years later, there is talk of swarm intelligence and chaos theory. We know that hawks hunt for their prey in a swarm of starlings. The swarm as the 'umbrella' organization tries to corner and confuse the hawk. The dynamic shapes are created by the dance between the hawk in chase and the swarm closing in on it.

According to the latest research, starlings communicate through eye contact. Each bird always keeps sight of the same six others, acting in accordance with their movements. Each individual decides independently whether to follow the majority or not. The goal of the swarm as a whole is to chase away the hawk. But each single member sees only its immediate surroundings. No one can really explain why they engage in such a dance every evening. I think, though, that a play instinct and the need for movement contribute. Whatever the case, hawk and starling train together day after day during the winter months, becoming the greatest aerial acrobats in the sky – and we become witness to indescribable images that can also be read as a visualization of complex natural laws.

Your recordings, driven by what might be called unsentimental curiosity, show bodies of movement that seem positively Baroque. Everything starts with your observation, your analytical, matter-of-fact presentation of movement and its inner laws – almost as if you were taking notes.

In the 1980s, I observed molecular movements in beeswax. When it cools down, beeswax changes from a liquid to a solid state. The bonds within the molecules change – this process interests me. With the starlings, it's about the transition from acting as an individual to being a member of the swarm. The way the birds relate to each other changes. Both in the beeswax works and the swarms of starlings, I show processes of re-formation, of revamping or reorganizing mutual relationships. Patterns of movement in the beeswax molecules and in the swarms of starlings are based on curves and spirals. The rounded shapes, in particular, are reminiscent of the Baroque and they are the ones that I incorporate in my work.

You were so enthusiastic when you told me about the Baroque space that you discovered in Rome – alongside the starlings. Every inch of *Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza*, a church designed by Francesco Borromini, demonstrates how potentially unstable and relative our understanding is of top and bottom, open and closed, back and front. Are your sculptures models that challenge us to acknowledge relativity?

Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza is an extraordinary experience. It is a sacred space whose architecture is designed to enable people to experience the miracle of the Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sunlight falling through the so-called lantern at the very top of the room is directed past convex and concave white walls, down to the faithful. The verticality is crystal clear: divine light from above, the receiving faithful below. The ground plan of the space is a regular hexagon directly centred under the lantern overhead. The walls are subject to a complex geometry that makes the room vibrate, creating the impression that the light is spiralling downwards from above. The dynamics of light and space become stronger and stronger as we move through the space. This architecture turns sense perception into a direct, transcendental experience.

I have incorporated the play of convex and concave surfaces into *Ten-fold Symmetry* (2016). I used the surfaces of concave spheres; depending on the angle of vision and independently of the incidence of light, they look as if they were convex. The arrangement of these spherical surfaces corresponds to the arrangement of atoms in quasicrystals. At first sight, the arrangement looks perfectly comprehensible. It takes a closer look to recognize how complex it is. The sensual experience is immediate and astonishing: the entire spatial configuration starts moving simply by turning one's head.

16.07 → page 111

What we perceive as relative is always related to our subjective sense perception. I believe that sense perception is a source of our feelings and sensations. If something is relative, it makes us feel uncertain since we have no safe points of orientation; we are exposed and vulnerable but also receptive and open. It makes us wide-awake – like the individual starling that has no overview within the huge swarm and still feels related to the whole. In that respect, my sculptures actually could be seen as models that assist in recognizing relativity.

You have described one impetus of your work as the desire to 'understand phenomena'. What have you learned from your art so far?

First and foremost, that it is always worth taking a second look. Reality is so much more complex than anything I can envision or imagine. So I try to put my ideas aside and perceive as precisely as possible, in the classical sense of studying nature. The less I presume to believe and the more open I am in observing, the richer are the discoveries. In addition, in the act of making art, I realized how quickly I reach the limits of intellectual understanding and that it is fruitful to trust intuition and respect things that I don't understand. From my own experience, I can confirm the insight of quantum physicists: the very act of looking defines reality.

Your recent works, all of them 'Audio Sculptures', are depictions of replicas of sound, so you have shifted from showing to constructing and have made decisions regarding dimensions, materials and site-specific references.

My first work based on sound curves is *Jusqu'à ce qu'il fasse rire [until he burst out laughing]*, (2009). The sculpture is based on the recorded sound of my son's abandoned laughter. I let the resulting curves rotate on the temporal axis and a shape emerged that is reminiscent of a megaphone or an ear trumpet. I selected a material that is easy to work with, honeycomb cardboard. Besides, it absorbs sound, which I really appreciated, because I wanted the sculpture to address but not to generate sound. I made the dimensions life-size – in juxtaposition to viewers, without being monumental. It's an autonomous sculpture in the traditional sense of the word.

In the first work that I made, I used Swap honeycomb boards. The honeycomb structure is inserted perpendicular to two outer layers of cardboard. Later I made the sculptures out of ordinary corrugated cardboard since the visible sinus curve of the material seemed to make more sense. I also like the impermanence of cardboard; it's casual and vulnerable.

I wanted to actively start making things again, building shapes of my own but not ones that are arbitrary. That's why I took recourse

to human sounds like laughing and sneezing or, in later works, spoken texts. The act of breathing was very important to me, too.

At the Propriété de Szilassy, the open air sculpture triennial in Bex, you showed *Eine Beziehungsweise. Distanzrufe der Steinkäuze* [*How to Relate. Distance Calls of Little Owls*], (2020). You stored the distance calls of little owls in the sculpture. The expansive shape with an undulating structure inside is similar to the swarm described above. What is the relationship between your observation of starlings and recent works of this kind?

20.01 → pages 50 ff.

The experience of observing the starlings and the insights from it have been incorporated directly into my current work, as in the play between transparent and opaque zones that we perceive depending on the position of the birds' wings in flight. And there's a connection not only in form but in content as well; the dynamics and complexity of the shape are important to me and in order to perceive them, viewers have to move around the sculpture. The principle of duality that defines the shape is also relevant along with the strong spatial quality and the feeling that a body can overcome the pull of gravity.

Since, as a human being, I will never be able to have the same experience of space as a bird in flight, I resorted to my personal experience of space which is related to music. My perception of music is extremely spatial. That's why I used sound curves in defining the form of *Eine Beziehungsweise. Distanzrufe der Steinkäuze*. To retain reference to birds in flight, I used the sound curves of bird calls, in this case of little owls. In Latin the little owl is called *Athene noctua*, the nocturnal Athena. This bird, which is endangered in Switzerland, is indigenous in the neighbouring Savoy Alps. It is named after the goddess of wisdom.

Describing your recent works poses a challenge: the linearity of language falters when faced with the three-dimensional object, a challenge that is counteracted by resorting to metaphor. Understanding how sound is incorporated in the material or how two movements in space enter into dialogue is often at a great remove from sensual experience. So understanding has to mean something different from being able to describe. To me your work also undermines our constant attempt to grasp connections intellectually and linguistically.

I don't see anything negative about trying to grasp connections intellectually and linguistically, if we can manage to do so. But in addition to the intellect, we should also train our perceptive faculties. As I see it, good artistic endeavour should go beyond intellectual understanding without negating it.

By reducing language in the digital universe to zero and one, to yes and no, we are in the process of creating an artificial

intelligence that has already far surpassed human intelligence. We have manoeuvred ourselves into a situation of overwhelming complexity, well beyond our ken. It leaves me speechless. And it is this speechlessness that my most recent works 'talk about'. But, importantly, speechlessness is not tantamount to hopelessness. Sometimes it means a moment of mental rest and an ability to apply a clear mind to sense perception. In coming years, science will probably find out how the intellect and consciousness relate. It does not bode well for humanity if consciousness is actually coupled with the intellect. But if it turns out that consciousness is a complex network of intellect and sense perception, then I hope that humankind will be capable of exploiting artificial intelligence as a tool to solve problems – and not to aggravate them.

You speak of speechlessness although you yourself have worked intensely with language by lending spoken words visibility in space. *Not I* (2011) was the score for a project of that kind.

The point of departure for *Not I* was Google's plan to digitize all of the world's literature. Literature is based on form; in art, form and content are inseparably entwined. Technically speaking, however, digitization means the dissolution of form. Although I am very happy to be able to tap into literature on the Internet, I have been thinking about what this separation of form and content might mean and what consequences it could have.

In Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, a woman speaks who has been without speech for years and has just begun to find her way back to language. She speaks in fragments, in hastily formulated, almost explosive and breathless repetitions. A television version¹ of the extremely rhythmic text was produced in 1972 for the Westdeutsche Rundfunk. The woman speaks about herself in the third person, there is no 'I', no subject and therefore no other, no 'you', either. Words come out of her, aimlessly, with no beginning and no end, as she proceeds to reconquer her own voice, running a gamut of emotions from surprised to indignant. "... Scream ... [*Screams.*] ... then listen ... [*Silence.*]" : whispering, murmuring, questioning, laughing, screaming, this anonymous subject – 'she' – calls upon us to listen with concentration but without making cognitive understanding possible.

I transcribed this recording in so-called soundwaves that I stretched into the third dimension through rotation. I made the shape of the single utterances out of thousands of discs of micro corrugated cardboard that I strung up like pearl necklaces and suspended on threads in the room. It was like air bubbles rising up from the bottom of a lake or drops of water beading down from above. The reading direction is not fixed.

Text recognition programs can read such soundwaves, we human beings cannot. It is a machine language. We can no longer

11.01 → pages 151 ff.

1 *Not I*, Samuel Beckett, 1973 (starring and introduced by Billie Whitelaw → https://ubu.com/film/beckett_not.html)

glean any meaning and are excluded from the content. What we see is the way the text was recited: speed, volume and stress are pictured in the profile of the wave – which means that we can indirectly follow the woman's breathing but we no longer understand what she is saying. We are as lost, disoriented and speechless as 'she' is.

You base the interaction between your entirely analog approach and the digital recording technique on a binary system. There is not only zero and one, yes and no; there's also utterance and response or 'you' and 'me'. It seems that opposites are at the origin of every extension in space. How did you come across the principle of expansion?

On one hand, the starting point is the observation of the starlings whose flight does not take interesting shape until the hawk comes into play. It is the relationship between the two protagonists that leads to form. On the other hand, the binary system is the basis of computing. Every signal is governed by whether it will be permitted to 'pass' or not, yes or no. But this binary principle has its limitations; it allows for nothing in between. In contrast to an ordinary computer, a quantum computer works with the entire spectrum of possibilities between the binary yes and no. *Zwischen JA und NEIN [Between YES and NO]*, (2012) is an attempt to visualize this principle in simplified form by having a two-dimensional line (the recording of a spoken "yes") wander along a second two-dimensional line (the recording of a spoken "no") that is not parallel to the first. This generates a three-dimensional curved plane, which corresponds with the principle advanced by Wassily Kandinsky in *Point and Line to Plane* (1926). A curved plane is spatial, it is three-dimensional; an undulating line, however, is confined to a single plane, it is two-dimensional. So I generate a three-dimensional field of potentiality between the two-dimensional curves of the spoken "yes" and the spoken "no". Thus, *Zwischen JA und NEIN* is a model, an aid to understanding.

This model is also meant to assist in understanding successful dialogues. To do that I want to conduct a thought experiment: if the two curves are on the same plane and superimposed, we get a good old Swiss compromise that does not contain yes or no, but rather a new two-dimensional curve that shows the average of the two. But if we keep the two curves at a distance so that they touch at one point and we let one curve wander on the other, we get a space of potential, an in-between space. This space is more complex by one dimension than the two initial curves and represents other opinions that would also be permitted to prevail in this configuration. So it is not an either-or and not a compromise, but rather an as-well-as, including the entire space in between. The position in the room is crucial: who is speaking to whom and in which direction? Those who are speaking have a clear standpoint,

12.05 → page 126

03.04 → pages 154, 156

speaking not past but to one another and placed at a distance from one another. The different position, the different opinion or the foreign culture can and should be perceived, and should continue to be perceived, as not being the same. One curve wandering on the other indicates a mutual interest in learning about the other world without eschewing one's own, so that both opinions can be woven into a larger whole.

In your case, digital recordings seem to be two things at once: a documentary tool and another means of showing things more precisely. Simply by slowing down the video, picture and sound appear quite new and different. What are the consequences for us if we can digitally adjust – indeed manipulate – rhythm?

Electromagnetic waves or electrical signals are bodiless and placeless. When we generate sound in electronic music, we are as little dependent on mechanical laws, as we are in the digital universe. The laws of gravity or a heartbeat no longer apply. But we, as perceiving beings, are still dependent on our bodies. The way our bodies function have so far determined art and music. Prior to digitization, every time-based medium, like music, literature or film, was defined by a rhythm based on our breathing and heartbeat. This basic rhythm, the *batito*, gave us orientation in time.

In *Hitzewelle [Heat Wave]*, (2003), I did nothing but film the air flickering above the stone desert on the Aeolian Island of Vulcano. Then I digitized the Super-8 film and permanently varied the speed, subjecting the filmed images to ceaseless and unpredictable change. It feels like a kind of visual cardiac arrhythmia. Although there is practically nothing visibly happening, it is an utterly disconcerting experience that physically affects our bodies. *Hitzewelle* premiered at the Gare du Nord in Basel in the summer of 2003 when, coincidentally, the first extreme heat wave hit Europe with temperatures rising above 40° Celsius.

I was only 20 when the Internet became accessible to the public at large; the change must have been a different for you, having experienced it at an older age. Did that radical transition affect your work at the time?

I was in Rome in 1990/91 and was interested in the commercial spread of the Internet. There was quite a lot of enthusiasm among art practitioners about the networking potential of computers. At the time, I thought a driving force behind these new developments was CERN's interest in furthering research through the speedy, worldwide communication of scientific discoveries. As in a flock of starlings, networks rest on non-hierarchical principles much like those of an ideal democracy. We thought it would give great impetus to democratic ideas, especially since the introduction of

the Internet coincided with the end of the Cold War. That was the mood that prevailed when I made the *Stare* video. I thought that observing a natural phenomenon would help me understand what was happening socially and politically.

In addition to the social aspect I was also interested in finding out more about how we think. Thinking is a networking process. A network of calculating machines might make it possible to better understand our thought processes and maybe even our consciousness. What is thinking, what is a thought, and to what extent are thinking and consciousness related? The development of artificial intelligence is based on this age-old question. But what is artificial intelligence doing to us? Are we perhaps classical sorcerers' apprentices?

We have been given a marvellous tool in the form of digitization, through which our knowledge of nature has grown exponentially. But how do human beings cope with these new possibilities and realities? To what extent does technology veil social conditions that lead to exploitation and climate change? And to what extent is technology itself bringing about these changes?

I rarely work with the new media, but when I do, it's on a very modest basis; I work with age-old analog techniques and intentionally 'tinker' when I make my sculptures. Although they think about digital developments loud and clear, they are largely made by hand. As in *Stare*, I want to remain an observer. I have no faith at all in the developers and operators of platforms in the new media – but I still want to be able to follow what's happening, though fully aware that I can't really understand it. This dilemma probably underpins all of my work.

How do you find adequate materials for your projects today? You probably didn't find corrugated cardboard and fibre cement by accident. The inner structure of both materials already includes movement in waves.

Stability, form and content influence the choice of material. Corrugated cardboard consists of three layers of paper, not cardboard as mistakenly suggested by the name. The curved arrangement and the way it is glued gives the paper tremendous stability. This stability is related to a minimum amount of material. Paper can be produced sustainably and is easy to dispose of; even extremely large formats can be worked by hand. In terms of form, it has direction. You can look through the curves or they can block the view. By cutting it differently, you can generate extremely interesting and complex visual curves. In terms of content, the sinus curve refers to the soundwave. The disadvantage of corrugated cardboard is that it is vulnerable; it can easily be damaged by humidity or fire. But the transience of paper is also an aspect that I love; it shows the fragility of our, or rather my knowledge.

19.09 → page 59

17.03, 17.04 → pages 99ff.
18.01, 18.10, 18.11

Since works made of paper can only be shown indoors, I wanted to find corrugated material suitable for outdoor use. The corrugated boards of fibre cement are one attempt, aluminium panels another. Fibre cement is brittle but has the appealing property of hosting moss and lichen. It is a weave of synthetic fibres and cement that allows for extremely sparing use of cement; cement gives it necessary stability. The idea of fabric is extremely important to me in terms of content and I like the mineral aspect of cement. I used fibre cement for the bird call sculptures because they are made for a park-like environment. The association with stone and petrification are additional aspects that led to the choice of this material.

I used aluminium for *Alexa*, sculptures based on the computer voice of the same name, because it is more immaterial and ephemeral, and it can play with light and shadow; it is more beautiful than fibre cement and also smoother – like the voices of digital speakers.

By 'capturing' bird calls, your sculptures address the threat to biodiversity. Bird calls or human voices lend contours to the waves that are inherent in the material itself. So they are manifestations of potential loss or, as said, repositories of past movements.

Selecting the song of birds that have largely disappeared in our region is, of course, related to the loss of biodiversity. The most advanced recording technology is of no use if the birds are extinct. The sculptures are about memory and also the loss of memory, but they are primarily about the absence of the 'speakers' – namely, those who produced the sounds, perhaps even long ago.

In the works titled *Disc* I explicitly deal with means of storing digital data. Nowadays these tend to be Clouds but a few years ago they were compact discs and even earlier, vinyl records. The goal of these devices is to record and store ephemeral sounds for posterity so they can later be played back with suitable equipment. If my three-dimensional works were digital sound recordings of frequency, volume and time (3D sonograms), it would be technically possible to scan the sonogram sculptures and make the sound audible again. I deliberately undermine this objective by superimposing the waves of two voices, by working with two soundtracks. But there's still a kind of notation involved – a recording system that neither human beings nor machines can read.

Several times in the course of our conversation, we talked about a method of translation. Spoken words and sentences but also bird calls become part of the material and visible as movement in space. What does translation mean to you?

In the case of the sound sculptures, it means modifying the fabric of time and space. The flow of time is arrested and solidified into a spatial volume; you might describe it as the aggregate state

changing from liquid to solid. Maybe I can best explain this in reference to *In der Einsamkeit von Zweimilliarden Lichtjahren musste ich unvermutet niesen* [In the Loneliness of Two Billion Light Years I Had to Sneeze Unexpectedly], (2012). The loneliness in the title refers to silence, emptiness and being alone in a room, which is here defined by the number of light years, i.e., the speed of light, which makes it a unit of space that transcends human experience. This in itself makes manifest the dual reality of space and time. Then there is the word 'I'. Who is this 'I' and where is it? Who is speaking and from where? And then this 'I' had to 'sneeze unexpectedly'. The unexpected sneeze is like a reflex, involuntary, generated by an impulse I can't control. We usually have to sneeze if we feel a tickle in our nose, in other words, if something comes from outside, causing an immediate physical sensation. Our body is related to the space that was defined in light years. Sneezing corresponds to an explosion that uncontrollably hurls the sound (and the germs) into the room, like a big bang. The movement of the soundwaves causes disturbances and turbulences in the hitherto still waters of the space of eternity. It is about time. Temporal spaces that are seconds long but also temporal spaces that give birth to stars or in which shock waves generate mountain massifs. As indicated, it's about relations, relative relations or relationships that are in movement.

You have participated in several competitions for site-specific art for such widely different buildings as the new Zürcher Kantonalbank on the Steinfels premises (2004), the altar of St. Trinitatis Church in Leipzig (2011) and most recently the Hôtel Cantonal in Fribourg (2020). How has the creation of such rooms affected your work? And don't implemented projects have a kind of after-life in your studio?

Concrete, physical spaces enable me to think much more directly and clearly about certain questions. For example, the brief for the new St. Trinitatis Church in Leipzig was to design the entire chancel. My proposal consisted of using the spoken word to give shape to the altar, the baptismal font, the everlasting light and the cross. It was a response to the opening words in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the word." The soundtrack was based on Pier Paolo Pasolini's Film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* [The Gospel According to St. Matthew], (1964). So it was an actor's voice to which I wanted to give shape. The work was never realized but I elaborated on the principle of working with spoken spiritual texts in the group of works titled *Disc*.² It's quite literally a question of the relationship between body and spirit. It's a question I would never have addressed so explicitly if I hadn't participated in that competition.

In my most recent competition for Fribourg, I collaborated with Esther Maria Jungo. The City Hall of the city and canton of Fribourg is housed in a fortress-like building of the fifteenth century.

12.04 → pages 124f.

17.03, 17.04 → pages 99ff.

2 17.03 and 17.04 are based on the prayer of Niklaus von Flüe (1417–1487)

My Lord and my God,
take from me everything
that distances me from you.

My Lord and my God,
give me everything
that brings me closer to you.

My Lord and my God,
detach me from myself
to give my all to you.

20.36 → page 33

20.37 → page 31

In future, the large room on the ground floor is to accommodate meetings and debates. Over the past 500 years, the building has housed the army, the courts and the government. I was particularly intrigued by its earlier existence as a granary, which could also be considered an early form of banking. So we started thinking about grain, specifically wheat, and the role it played both in earlier and contemporary times. Significantly, scientists succeeded in decoding the bread wheat genome in 2018.

The genome architecture of bread wheat and wild emmer served as the basis of our project. The number of chromosomes in genome architecture are arranged in a circle and the connection of the genes between the chromosomes are drawn as lines. We used these representations for a knotted tapestry (wild emmer), as a kind of technological reflection of the linking genes, and also for a bronze plaque (bread wheat) that is perforated and resembles the punch cards once used to store digital data in computers. The two objects refer to the social evolution of humankind: the tapestry stands for the nomadic nature of early civilizations, while in the Bronze Age, the introduction of agriculture and the cultivation of bread wheat brought about sedentary civilizations, therefore the disk. In contemporary terms, one wonders about the connection between digital knowledge and biotechnology – which field has the upper hand. And the circular representation of genome architecture reminds me of Norman Foster's architecture for Apple Park in Cupertino (CA). It is crucial to repeatedly revisit and debate the organization of corporations or governments, especially in a political venue like a City Hall. Once again, I would never have come up with these forms and ideas without the City Hall in Fribourg. And I still think about them.

Looking back, all my involvements with a specific architectural situation have been extremely fruitful and have given my work great impetus. But there are derivations that precede the striking, distilled and illustrative outcome and are not necessarily met with open arms in competitions. So a lot of my work remains 'nomadic', propelling my thoughts and finding shape outdoors and apart from specific spatial functions and outdoors.

The fibre cement 'Audio Sculptures' placed outdoors in Bex or in the courtyard of the Schönthal monastery evoke multiple associations. They play with the light, respond to the rugged mountains, resemble the structure of organ pipes and weave nets in space. Do you have any open questions regarding these recent works?

Yes, lots! To begin with, formal questions: how big do these sculptures have to be in proportion to the landscape and the people; how and where does the shape end? I worked out the sculpture in Bex on site and the way it relates to the horizon is deliberate. Can I have this sculpture become a nomad again? What about the aging of the sculptures? Insects apparently feel quite at home in these

‘honeycombs’, which actually become a habitat for a diversity of organisms. To what extent would it be good for the sculpture be reconquered?

A crucial question is their vulnerability. I welcome it because it applies to all of us and this fragility ties in with my perception of the world. Do these sculptures really need a fragile, vulnerable side? And what about the technique? Does the use of an industrial product, the façade panel, take up too much space? Would more contemporary, additive procedures like 3D printing be more timely and appropriate?

I really welcome the wealth of associations that you come up with in your perception of the work. I want the spectrum to be as broad as possible and I also want people to be able to understand the content of the sculptures. How explicit, how legible should or must the content and the underlying thoughts be?

You have long been teaching at the Bern University of the Arts. Working with budding artists presupposes faith in what, ideally, art can achieve today. Given that your work has repeatedly been described in analogy to research, I ask you: what can fine art do that is more than the natural sciences and the humanities?

Fine art is distinguished from classical philosophy and exact sciences like mathematics and physics in that it fulfils a practical, sensual role. It offers immediate and subjective access. And it makes no claim to universality. The tendency to formulate binding generalizations and commonalities is therefore less marked. On the other hand, fine art can chart completely unexpected territory; it can stake out its own boundaries and produce a reality that is different from the ‘real’ world. There are no musts in art; it has no direct use and therefore no power. Its ‘impotence’ makes it a perfect playing ground, a free and open field of experimentation in which modes of conduct, ideas and questions of living together can be asked and practiced with different, new means and methods. There is no right or wrong; art is its own benchmark. Fine art is full of ambiguities, sometimes full of contradictions, but also full of potential. It is a wonderful vehicle for learning to take a loving, attentive approach to oneself and the world.

Jörg van den Berg

Relational modes between seeing and knowing

On (finding) form in two sculptures by Andrea Wolfensberger

before seeing I

A fundamental problem regarding art and our appreciation of it comes to a head in Andrea Wolfensberger’s work: the relationship between seeing and knowing or, to put it differently, between sensuous and rational perception (of world). The question whether one is possible without the other is quickly answered because we can engage separately in either. Can’t we?

But I can only acquire in-depth insight into Wolfensberger’s works if I am prepared to chart anew the territory that lies between seeing and thinking. Appreciation is challenged because, in this case, the relationship between knowledge and sculptural articulation is hardly obvious. And, in fact, it cannot be, for not even the artist can conceive of it in the process of developing her sculptures.

So how do references to extra pictorial prior knowledge relate to the pictoriality of the completed sculptures? This question calls for clarification, inasmuch as the very process of clarification itself becomes a parallel process that steadily accompanies appreciation of Wolfensberger’s works, contributing substantially to epistemological gain as it is a path of much productive perplexity.

In his book about Giotto’s Arena frescoes – a cycle of biblical events and scenes from the life of Mary and Christ and, in consequence, images underpinned by unambiguous texts that dominate because of their presumed certainty – Max Imdahl spoke of the “expressive might of pictoriality”. Its impact is measured by “the extent to which the respective referentiality is transcended by the semantic unity of the picture itself.”¹ What a challenge for the image.

In the case of Wolfensberger’s sculptures, one might speak of a paradox since their formal appearance, the form they have found, is inconceivable without substantial references while the “pictoriality” of many of her works becomes so self-contained that their “expressive might” not only transcends but even obliterates all prior knowledge. What is seen and what is known are separated but need to be mutually related again.

The attempt will here be made to trace the relationship of knowing and seeing specific to each of two, ultimately very different works, by Wolfensberger. Between 2018 and 2019, Wolfensberger was invited to create installations specific respectively to the location

¹ Max Imdahl: *Giotto Arenafresken. Ikonographie, Ikonologie, Ikonik.* Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1980, p. 52.