

HANS RUDOLF REUST

Fabulous Art

Keith Tyson's Research into Voids for a *Weltbild*

a) *Weltbild* - 'world picture', 'world image' - a strange turn of phrase. Any attempt to arrive at a picture of the world in the current deluge of instantly accessible data, seems faintly ridiculous, or at best naive. An inadmissible watering down of complexities seems unavoidable. Nevertheless any 'picture' - despite Barnett Newman - is still inextricably bound up with notions such as overview, coherence, and availability. The concept of *Weltanschauung* would be much more open, in that it relates to a continuous process of cognitive perception. With their scratchy matchstick figures and formulas, A. R. Penck's 'world pictures' and 'system pictures' from the 1960s and early 1970s seem today like relics from an earlier age when political dissent could still be represented in simple opposites. The pseudonym 'Penck' was the surname of an ice age scholar.

b) For his exploration of unknown and possible worlds and their pictures, Keith Tyson is constantly devising new equipment and experiments for the human mind, such as his TELEOLOGICAL ACCELERATOR (2003): A disc with hundreds of terms from the encyclopedia, arranged like the spokes of a wheel - from abstract categories in the centre to concrete phenomena and names of people at the periphery - can be endlessly cut across by a movable straight edge. Each possible line combines concepts which together summarize the remit of an artistic work. 'Homeopathy, pollution, social change, biological science': This selection led to a bronze blossom, with stamens that release minute quantities of poison into the surroundings. Placed in an infants' school, this sculpture might lead to ecological debate, particularly when it becomes clear how low the level of pollutants in the artificial flower is compared to that of the air the children breath in on their way to school. While Tyson's device to accelerate our purposive rationalism, may at times also generate ludicrous responses, above all it opens up an unlimited number of ways of conceiving art. But Tyson is not content with the concept alone. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*: Tyson is familiar with the views of Magritte and of Foucault after Magritte. At work he enjoys a pipe of his own, for real, explaining, discussing points with team members, questioning. It is only the translation of his concepts into the visible that makes the palpable difference. His sensuously precise, often

opulent application of certain rules can manifest itself in the most diverse of media and materials - drawings, objects, installations, videos, dance performances, paintings - in such a way that his work will never submit to formal description, although every possibility is only ever realized once, and simple repetition, even in series, is deliberately avoided.

c) According to Georg Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), in the infinitude of endless possibilities God chose the best of all worlds. Although from our limited human perspective it may seem bewildering in some ways, a picture of it could potentially be made from each one of the unique, indivisible and windowless monads: by its very difference, by the sum of its specific 'perceptions' a monad reflects the whole world, in which everything is teleologically ordered. Keith Tyson today is confronting the existential *Angst* induced by an ever expanding universe. Bubbles and their accumulation into molecules are the ingredients of a primal soup of realities, from which art - with precisely chosen extracts - can gain fleeting insights. An encyclopedia is no longer a thinkable option. Understanding and knowing the world is all about moving on and between *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented. At any rate, what a vapid idea, the book as the image of the world. In truth, it is not enough to say "Long live the multiple," difficult as it is to raise that cry. Not typographical, lexical, or even syntactical cleverness is enough to make it heard. The multiple *must be made*, not always by adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available - always $n - 1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at $n - 1$ dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome.'¹) With his *Oggetti in meno* (1965/66) and the idea of the *Artista in meno* Michelangelo Pistoletto has already taken up this notion. Every work of art is ultimately a subtraction: the realization of just one of an infinity of possible formulations, which now no longer exists as a purely intellectual possibility.

In the boundlessness of possible worlds, the possible ones are also real. Bearing this in mind, Keith Tyson has created landscapes from still unknown worlds, from which plastic fetishes - or are they everyday objects? - can be collected to make an exhibition. And bearing the same thing in mind, the

world of the miller Menocchio in the Friuli would also be a possibility, that miller who, sometime around 1600, declared that all of the cosmos 'was chaos . . . and out of that bulk a mass formed - just as cheese is made out of milk - and worms appeared, and these were the angels. The most holy majesty decreed that these should be God and the angels. . . This God was in the chaos like one who is in water and wants to expand, and like one who is in a forest and wants to expand: thus, this intellect having received knowledge wanted to expand to create this world.'²⁾ Faced with the contradiction inherent in the notion that the infinitude of all possibilities should be grasped by the finite structures of our minds, and consequently that the expanding universe is purely an extrapolation of a finite universe, Keith Tyson devises strategies to invent rules. He neither comes up with static 'world pictures' nor with linear sequences of pictures, instead he seeks completely new rules by which a major player could generate his own worlds. Albeit always mindful of the fact that time itself, that development is an illusion which only arises from the evolution of a lasting structure for human perception. Since time is reversible, it is perfectly possible that the phenotype could determine the genotype. All that comes to light is only what was ever there. Even chance and control are not true opposites. They are simply two moments in a thinkable world. Accordingly they step onto the stage as equals. Technical equipment provokes chance, coincidences determine firm rules - for the time being - for the artist-explorer in data space.

d) Tyson's wide-ranging praxis assumes that art and the natural sciences are also no longer polar opposites, as recent developments in the theory of science have shown: 'The choice of a style - a reality, a form for truth, taking into account criteria of realness and rationalism - is the choice inherent in what humans do. It is a social act, it depends on the historical situation, at times it is a relatively conscious process - a person considers various possibilities and decides on one - more often it is a direct response to a strong intuition. It is only "objective" in the sense that ensues from the historical situation. . . And since people have believed up until now that only the arts are in this position, since people have only really recognized this situation in the arts, then the analogous situation in the sciences and the many areas where the two overlap . . . is best described if we say that the sciences are arts in the sense of this advanced understanding of art.'³⁾ Keith Tyson moves with supreme ease between different areas of learning, between economics, the natural sciences, politics, and art. 'Resisting the compulsion of method', as

Feyerabend puts it, Tyson is developing his own delight in method. 'The fortress of rationalism⁴) cannot be contained, but is that grounds to risk the Sleep of Reason that bears monsters, as Goya has shown us? Keith Tyson's capriccios also take both into account and would never be caught up in exclusivities.

e) Keith Tyson's cosmologies are a far remove from the stretto of recent artistic sensibilities and attitudes. The plantlike beauty-and-wellness-lounge mood of the 1990s has dissipated, the deconstructivist reflex is undermining its own meaning by the relentless repetitions of a diagnosis of impossibilities. Tyson counters this with an analytic energy that allows his thought processes to venture into a multiplicity of worlds. His artistic ego recedes behind concepts, without denying that it was the trigger for the search. The *Artmachine* is a highly subjectively motivated process to operationalize questions to the world. The artist may have an identity, but - like the blurred edges of a physical given - all its various aspects can never be seen simultaneously.

In art today there are many makers of complex systems - Jason Rhoades, Thomas Hirschhorn, Verne Dawson, Wilhelm Sasnal . . . - the common denominator being the fact that each is using his own hand-writing to write the world. Mark Manders is developing his SELF PORTRAIT AS A BUILDING (Jahr?) as a parallel process: building parts of his imaginary self-building at the same time as creating it in words. As part of an attempt to write a universe - not just to write one down - Tyson's research is also related to the drawn universe of Raymond Pettibon. Maps, plans, sketches, diagrams appear in the wake of Tyson's cognitive processes: forms of communication just like his research. They come together on wall drawings in his studio, on hasty notes, in alliterations and sketches on walls, and on tables, in tabular form and as tableaus, as tondos on the wall. Distributed throughout the space, the *Tabletop Tales* form an archipelago of world models. 'Archipelagic thinking suits the course of our worlds. It borrows from there all that is ambiguous, fragile, derived. It consents to the practice of making detours, which is neither evasion nor renunciation. . . We realize what was continental, slow-witted, and weighed us down in the sumptuous thought processes of a system that hitherto had ruled the history of humanities, but which was no longer adequate to our explosions, our stories and our less sumptuous wanderings. The thought processes of the archipelago, of the archipelagos, opens up these oceans to us.'⁵)

f) Between the tables, as between two points, stretches the space for numerous other places, which the artist can only ever express as approximations, iterations of the *Artmachine*, in unendable loops. The limit of those approximations is emptiness, a void, a blank. Keith Tyson's art has the status of a fable as understood by Jean-François Lyotard⁶): 'a fable is an organization of language, and language is a very complex state of energy, a symbolic technical apparatus. Now, in order to be deployed, fabulation calls for a kind of spatiotemporal and material emptiness, in which linguistic energy is not invested in the direct constraints of its exploitation as making, knowing, and know-how.

In the fable, linguistic energy is expended for imagining. It therefore does fabricate a reality, that of the story it tells, but this reality is left in suspense with regard to its cognitive and technical use. It is exploited reflexively, that is, referred back to language in order to link onto its topic (which I am in the process of doing). This putting into suspense distinguishes poetics from practice and pragmatics. Fabulation maintains this reality in reserve and *apart* from its exploitation within the system.⁷) . . . in addition to criticism, the blank also authorizes the imagination. It allows, for example, that stories be told in complete liberty. And I would love to describe the present situation in a way that had nothing of critique, that was frankly "representational", referential rather than reflective, hence naive and even puerile. . . My excuse would be that my story is adequately accredited in very serious places, among physicians, biologists, economists. In an informal fashion, of course, even a bit timid, as if this fable were the unavowable dream the postmodern world dreams about itself. A tale that, in sum, would be the great narrative that the world persists in telling itself after the great narratives have obviously failed.'⁸)

In a void, the chosen rules cease to apply, any decisions regarding change are already inherent in the system. Every work of art is above all also the chance to open up a void, or, as it says on one of Tyson's *Studio Wall Drawings*: 'A kite for flying in the void, upon the winds of its own potential . . . watch it swoop and dive!' (21 June 2001).

Footnotes:

1) Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus (Mille Plateaux*, Paris 1980), trans. by Brian Massumi, Athlone Press, London, 1988, p. 6.

2) Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-*

Century Miller (Il formaggio e i vermi: il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500, Turin 1976), trans. by John and Anne Tedeschi, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1980, p. 53.

3) Trans. from Paul Feyerabend, *Wissenschaft als Kunst*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp. 77-78.

4) Keith Tyson, in *Tabletop Tales: 'Who could have imagined that a breach would have occurred within the walls of the fortress of rationality?'* (2001), mixed media, 121" diameter.

5) Trans. from Edouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1997, p. 31.

6) Auf den Inhalt von Lyotards Fabel weist Michel Archer referts to the contents of Lyotard's fable in his essay on the work of Keith Tyson, see exh. cat., Kunsthalle Zürich, 2002, pp. 11ff.

7) Jean-François Lyotard, 'A Postmodern Fable' in: idem, *postmodern fables (Moralités postmodernes*, Paris 1993), trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis/London, 1997, pp. 94-95.

8) Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Wall, the Gulf, the System', in: *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.