



precarious sculpture?

Christoph Bruckner

Social Forms OR SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Sculpture in the Post-Fordist Era: The Work of Christoph Meier

WHY 20 YEARS? ↑ like who?

Architecture

Pedestal

Over the last twenty years, a new class of “creatives” has come to see “the artist” as a role model—a role model that, moreover, has acquired more significance than the utopias of modernity for all their striving to impact society ever achieved: “Today there appears to be an unlimited ‘interest’ in the areas of art and culture.” Since the 1990s, the terms in which we usually describe artists—a demanding work ethic (bordering) on self-exploitation, spontaneity, innovation, ability to network, complete identification with their work—have been adopted and transformed by management literature as it seeks to define the standards for a neoliberal organization of labor: “Artists and their area of activity are considered role models [...] particularly when it comes to future forms of labor organization.” The basis for the rise of the artist as a role model can be found in the transition from a Fordist industrial society to a post-Fordist, knowledge-based society that has taken place over the course of the last forty years. Fordist models of production and labor are characterized by the centralization of information and decision-making processes as well as a clear distribution of tasks, functions, and positions. Factories typically had strict hierarchical structures that, while offering few opportunities for promotion, also gave Fordism’s salaried employees a certain degree of security. Looking at power structures in Fordist labor organization, it is useful to consider Foucault’s distinction between the pre-industrial “model of sovereign power” and Fordism’s “disciplinary power.” Though it is true that the post-Fordist labor regime arose in the art world before being adopted into the discourse of neoliberal management—from a cost-effectiveness point of view, of course—in their extensive study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello highlight another way in which artists played an important role in overcoming Fordism. They refer to a form of “artistic critique” undertaken by intellectuals, students, and artists: “But whereas the artistic critique had hitherto played a relatively marginal role, [...] it was to find itself placed at the centre of protest by the May movement.” As opposed to social critique, which mainly took place within the factories and was primarily directed against restructuring and modernization measures as well as the unfair distribution of profit, artistic critique was actually a “critique of alienation.” Originating among the avant-garde—here the authors refer to the Situationist International—this critique suddenly thrust itself into the

EVER IMPORTANT REFERENCE FOR EACH CRITICAL TEXT

center of society: “The dominant themes were denunciation of ‘hierarchical power’, paternalism, authoritarianism, compulsory work schedules, prescribed tasks, the Taylorist separation between design and execution, and, more generally, the division of labor. Their positive counterpoint was demands for autonomy and self-management, and the promise of unbounded liberation of human creativity.” Based on an examination of Christoph Meier’s works within the context of contemporary sculpture, this article will investigate how the post-Fordist project resurfaces in the artistic production of the present.

Big leap?

Meier’s works consist of a number of objects composed of an equally large number of heterogeneous materials. The meaning of these objects usually emerges from their interaction with other, usually multiple, objects. This principle of combination references the concept that—next to creativity and self-fulfillment—is key to neoliberal invocations of the creative subject, and it references both sides of this venerated coin. On the one hand, the great number of objects which Meier uses generates a potentially endless number of combinations. On the other, the artist’s approach leaves him “no other choice [...] than to go on choosing.” Post-Fordism’s creative subjects are “forced to be free.” Although the idea is of immense significance to the post-Fordist theories in which creativity is tamed and used for profit, when set against this backdrop the idea “as a machine that makes the art” clearly emerges as a Fordist mode of artistic production: “The Taylorist ‘model’ of labor organization is founded upon a mechanistic view of human labor.” However, in Meier’s work—as well as in that of many of his contemporaries—one finds no ideas, concepts, or methods that determine the nature of the work *a priori*. Although one can imagine situations—the sale of a work, for example—in which Meier’s principle of combinations might no longer apply, it establishes a sense of interminability unaffected by the constraints of the individual exhibition: “It is not the principle of interminability in and of itself, but rather its specific modus that distinguishes this organization of labor from existing programs of self-organization: Unlike the traditional subject of discipline, which never ceases to begin, the self-employed entrepreneur is never finished.” Set against this form of artistic production, in which the work of the self-employed entrepreneur is conceived as an endless work in progress, Meier’s exhibition is particularly important in that it offers a brief respite from interminability.

IS THAT SO?

Combining sculptural elements in potentially endless permutations to generate real and intermedial transformations requires components that are both light and movable. Like many of his contemporaries Meier travels light. His works are generally assembled in a provisional

SO WHAT MAKES CHRISTOPH'S WORK SPECIAL? OR UNSPECIAL?

fashion: the individual elements lie, lean, or stand on top of or against one another, but the artist rarely welds or glues the pieces together. Stability—and the accompanying relative lack of freedom—was part and parcel of salaried work under the Fordist system; in contemporary sculpture it is rarely to be seen. What is quite clearly reflected in Meier's works, however, is post-Fordism's demand for flexibility and mobility. The pieces are even mounted on wheels. In the notional sense the precarious nature of Meier's sculptures certainly points beyond the new creative class—active in promising areas of work such as computer and communication technology, in further education and consulting, and in the enterprises that constitute the new economy—to the swelling ranks of the self-employed. ¹⁴ While these workers are subjected to the normative pressures of neoliberalism, they have no opportunity to share in the social prestige that has always been associated with a career as an "artist" and is now associated with creative careers in general. Nor do they have prospects of at some point in time achieving the affluence that was once associated with the entrepreneur. ¹⁵ The social form that serves as the basis for this attempt at a sociology of contemporary sculpture includes not only the new creative class but also all of the "part-time workers, temporary workers, or the employees of subcontractors, ¹⁶ who ¹⁷ are forced ¹⁸ to adopt the "artist model." For them this merely means to work for little pay and with no insurance, however, while having no share in the promises of self-fulfillment and self-development offered by this model. Though part of an aesthetic ¹ system, the naked, unadorned, and bedraggled appearance of contemporary sculpture—and Meier's work is no exception—also reflects the dark side of the post-Fordist organization of labor. The pressure to see everything in economic terms extends to every aspect of daily life, ¹⁹ and it would be naive to believe that the choice of materials used in contemporary sculpture could resist this pressure. Meier often incorporates leftover and discarded materials—also from his studio colleagues—into his works, and if his method is effective it is mainly because the sheer breadth of the semantic field makes it easy for artists to activate aesthetic codes. ²⁰ If a causal relationship between work performance and wages no longer exists in post-Fordism, then by the same token there is no reason for artists to work with expensive or elaborate methods or materials.

The work form most congenial to the post-Fordist requirements outlined above is the ~~the~~ project ²¹: "On the one hand, this involves a sequencing of work (as well as one's entire life) in temporally limited undertakings that demand a maximum of flexibility on the part of the entrepreneurial self. On the other hand, it is based on a specific mode of cooperation (project teams) that permits and requires a similarly high degree of self-organization. ²² The accepted currency in the "projective city" ²³ is the ability to either initiate projects or

join existing ones. A key aspect of post-Fordism, the project model promises to level the hierarchies characterizing the Fordist industrial landscape: "Now no one is restricted by belonging to a department or wholly subject to the boss's authority, for all the boundaries may be transgressed through the power of projects." ²⁴ The same is true of the artist's studio praxis. ¹ Meier's studio, which is tellingly located in a disused steel mill on the outskirts of Vienna, isn't just a branch location of the gallery's white cube. It is firmly integrated into a social context, ¹ as is demonstrated by Meier's incorporation into his work of materials left over or discarded by his studio mates or other tenants. His studio praxis is not only not a ~~pure~~ studio praxis (the dominant mode of project work that established itself in the course of the 1990s has also left its mark in artists' studios) but he also uses group projects as a means of leaving behind the self-imposed formal ¹ and conceptual frameworks ¹ of the studio. For example, together with Søren Engsted, Meier installed a table covered with banana peels in the foyer of the Kunsthaus Graz, an object whose function visitors could only decode once they were handed a banana on their way back to the foyer. Although Meier has created other works with participatory potential, this work can only be reconciled with his practice if it is interpreted as a finished ~~the~~ project ¹ which allowed him to take part in an exhibition without exhibiting any of the sculptures produced in his studio.

The term ~~the~~ project ²⁵ is also closely connected to that of the ~~the~~ network ²⁶, as the extent of their network is what enables creative subjects to initiate projects, solicit participants, or join existing projects. Boltanski and Chiapello define a project as "a highly activated section of network." ²⁷ In networks one finds the manifestation of the much-trumpeted notion of social competency as symbolic capital. ¹ While the network metaphor does not readily lend itself to describing the compositional structures ¹ in Meier's sculptures, looking at the ideological implications that such a metaphor entails is useful in this context. The network metaphor primarily serves "to identify structures that are minimally hierarchical (if at all so), flexible and not restricted by boundaries marked out a priori. ²⁸ However, Meier's sculptures are mainly made up of interrelated ~~the~~ hierarchical ²⁹ pieces, a sculptural structure which one could describe as relational. Hierarchies are hierarchies, be they social or ³⁰ sculptural, even in networked societies, no matter how flat. The seamlessness and evenness suggested by the network metaphor, however, cannot serve to create "legitimate orders" ³¹ or distribute symbolic or material goods. The fact that differences exist between Meier's works and the works of sculptors such as Rachel Harrison, Gedi Sibony, or Ida Ekblad, to name only a few, does not mean that it is impossible to speak of a sociology of contemporary sculpture based on findings from an examination of Meier's work. In as far as they refer to the

creative subject, the standardization¹—or similarities—and the individualization¹—or the differences—can only be taken as a single idea. As much as the creative subject¹ is subjected to norms, it is impossible to completely normalize this subjectification¹. The normalization¹ of the creative subject always results in an individual interpretation of norms. Referring to the subjectification of the creative self, Bernadette Loacker speaks of “post-disciplinary paradigms.”² “Entrepreneurial self[sic!] are not generated through strategies of supervision and punishment, but by activating the potential for self-control.”² By the same token, it is impossible to focus solely on individual interpretations of norms, as in the end “becoming a subject” is not only “something which no one can escape,” but it is also something at which “no one ever succeeds.”²

Notes

- 1 Bernadette Loacker, *kreativ prekär: Künstlerische Arbeit und Subjektivität im Postfordismus*, Bielefeld 2010, p. 86.
- 2 Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), p. 86.
- 3 See Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), p. 86.
- 4 See Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), p. 25.
- 5 See Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), pp. 22–23.
- 6 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London 2005.
- 7 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 169.
- 8 See Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 169.
- 9 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 169.
- 10 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 170. Ulrich Bröckling also refers to the countercultural roots of the post-Fordist creative subject in *Das unternehmerische Selbst: Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform*, Frankfurt am Main 2007, p. 58.
- 11 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 12.
- 12 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 12.
- 13 Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford 1992, p. 846.
- 14 Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), p. 25.
- 15 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 71.
- 16 See Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 49.

17 See Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 49.

18 Niels Spilker, *Die Regierung der Prekarität: Zur neoliberalen Konzeption unsicherer Arbeitsverhältnisse*, Münster 2010, p. 68.

19 See Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 48.

20 See Rainer Metzger, “Sichtbarkeit und Evidenz,” in Renate Wiegner (ed.), *Heimo Zobernig*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1998, p. 8.

21 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 17.

22 See Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), pp. 103–164.

23 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 90.

24 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 104.

25 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 104.

26 Boltanski and Chiapello, *Capitalism* (see note 6), p. 30.

27 Loacker, *kreativ prekär* (see note 1), p. 82.

28 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 61.

29 Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst* (see note 10), p. 30.

And terms

1. popular words in critical art writing

editorial questions and suggestions:

- * Without the references, how much text would be left?
- * How much is really about the work of Christoph?
- * Wouldn't it be a better text if the reference to Christoph's work would be eliminated? i.e. a more general text on post-Fordism in regards to artistic production?
- * 29 references in a 1500 word text?!?
- + the ~~fact~~ expectation that we would know all of them



Christoph Bröckling

Social Praxis
Response to the Post-Fordist Era: The Work of Christoph Meier

Over the last twenty years a new class of "creative" has come to see "the artist" as a role model—a role model that, however, has acquired more significance than the original of modernity. For all their striving to impact society even achieved. Today there appears to be an unbridled "desire" in the name of art and culture. If it were the 1990s, the issues in which we usually describe the artist—a demanding work ethic bordering on self-exploitation, spontaneity, innovation, ability to network, complete identification with their work—have been adopted and implemented by management literature as it seeks to define the standards for a multitalented organization of labor. Artists and their area of activity are considered role models. I particularly refer to those artists who have taken the transition from a Fordist industrial society to a post-Fordist, knowledge-based society that has taken place over the course of the last forty years. For the Fordist model of production and labor are characterized by the centralization of information and decision-making processes as well as a clear distribution of tasks, functions, and positions. In factories typically had strict hierarchical structures that, while offering few opportunities for promotion, also gave Fordist's salaried employees a certain degree of security. Looking at power structures in Fordist labor organization, it is useful to consider Foucault's distinction between the pre-industrial "model of sovereign power" and Fordist's "disciplinary power." If it is true that the post-Fordist labor regime arose in the art world before being adopted into the discourse of neoliberal management—then a cost-effective point of view, of course—in their extensive study *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2006), the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello highlight another way in which artists played an important role in overcoming Fordism. They refer to a form of "artistic critique" undertaken by intellectuals, students, and artists. "That whereas the artistic critique had hitherto played a relatively marginal role, [...] it was to find itself placed at the center of protest by the May movement." As opposed to social critiques, which mainly took place within the factories and was primarily directed against restructuring and modernization measures as well as the unfair distribution of profit, artistic critique was actually a "critique of alienation." Originating among the avant-garde—here the authors refer to the Situationist International—this critique suddenly thrust itself into the

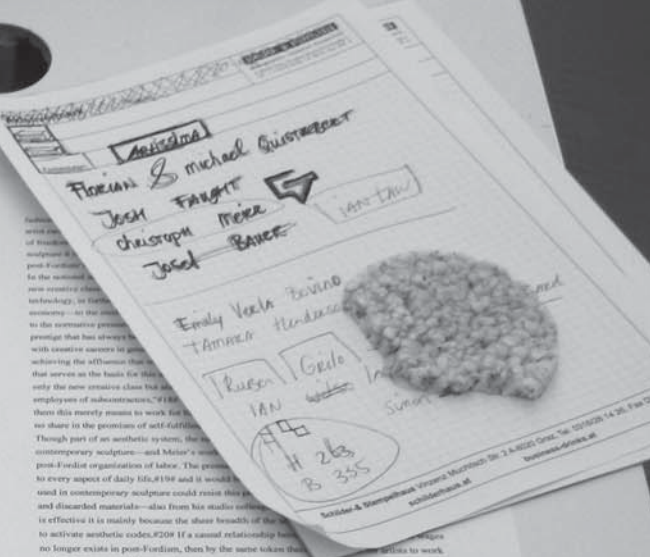
join existing ones. A key aspect of post-Fordism, the project model promises to level the hierarchies characterizing the Fordist industrial landscape. "Now no one is restricted by belonging to a department or wholly subject to the boss's authority, for all the boundaries may be transgressed through the power of projects." The same is true of the artist's studio praxis. Meier's studio, which is tellingly located in a disused steel mill on the outskirts of Vienna, isn't just a branch location of the gallery's white cube. It is firmly integrated into a social context, as is demonstrated by Meier's incorporation into his work of materials left over or discarded by his studio mates or other tenants. His studio praxis is not only not a "studio praxis"—the dominant mode of project work that established itself in the course of the 1990s but also left its mark in artists' studios—but he also uses group projects as a means of leaving behind the self-imposed formal and conceptual frameworks of the studio. For example, together with Soren Engsted, Meier installed a table covered with banana peels in the foyer of the Kunsthaus Graz, an object whose function visitors could only decode once they were handed a banana on their way back to the foyer. Although Meier has created other works with participatory potential, this work can only be reconciled with his practice if it is interpreted as a finished "project" which allowed him to take part in an exhibition without exhibiting any of the sculptures produced in his studio. The term "project" is also closely connected to that of the "network," as the extent of their network is what enables creative subjects to initiate projects, solicit participants, or join existing projects. Boltanski and Chiapello define a project as "a highly activated section of network." In networks one finds the manifestation of the much-trumpeted notion of social competency as symbolic capital. While the network metaphor does not readily lend itself to describing the compositional structures in Meier's sculptures, looking at the ideological implications that such a metaphor entails is useful in this context. The network metaphor primarily serves "to identify structures that are minimally hierarchical (if at all so), flexible and not restricted by boundaries marked out a priori." However, Meier's sculptures are mainly made up of interrelated "hierarchical" pieces, a sculptural structure which one could describe as relational. Hierarchies are hierarchies, be they social or sculptural, even in networked societies, no matter how flat. The seamlessness and evenness suggested by the network metaphor, however, cannot serve to create "legitimate orders" or distribute symbolic or material goods. The fact that differences exist between Meier's works and the works of sculptors such as Rachel Harrison, Gedi Sibony, or Ida Ekblad, to name only a few, does not mean that it is impossible to speak of a sociology of contemporary sculpture based on findings from an examination of Meier's work. In as far as they refer to the

status of society. "The dominant theme were demarcation of 'biomedical power', postmodernism, self-determination, compulsory work schedules, prescribed tasks, the Fordist separation between design and execution, and, more generally, the division of labor. These positive counterpoints now detract from the autonomy and self-management, and the promise of unbridled liberation of human creativity." If it is based on an examination of Christoph Meier's work within the context of contemporary sculpture, this article will investigate how the post-Fordist project contributes to the artistic production of the present.

Meier's works consist of a number of objects composed of an equally large number of heterogeneous materials. The meaning of these objects usually emerges from their interaction with color, usually multiple, objects. This principle of combination references the concept that—next to creativity and self-fulfillment—is a key to neoliberal invocations of the creative subject, and it references both sides of this coin. On the one hand, the great number of objects which Meier uses generates a potentially endless number of combinations. On the other, the artist's approach leaves him "no other choice [...] than to go on choosing." In post-Fordist's creative subjects are "bound to be free." Although the idea of immense significance in the post-Fordist theories in which creativity is lauded and used for profit, when we again think back to the idea "no machine that makes the art" clearly emerges as a Fordist mode of artistic production. "The Taylorist 'model' of labor organization is founded upon a mechanistic view of human labor." However, in Meier's work—as well as in that of many of his contemporaries—one finds no ideas, concepts, or methods that determine the nature of the work "in advance." Although one can imagine situations—the sale of a work, for example—in which Meier's principle of combinations might no longer apply, it establishes a sense of interminability unaffected by the constraints of the individual exhibition: "It is not the principle of interminability in and of itself, but rather its specific modes that distinguishes this organization of labor from existing programs of self-organization. Unlike the traditional subject of discipline, which never ceases to begin, the self-employed entrepreneur is never finished." Set against this form of artistic production, in which the work of the self-employed entrepreneur is conceived as an endless work in progress, Meier's exhibition is particularly important in that it offers a brief respite from interminability. Combining sculptural elements in potentially endless permutations to generate real and intermedial transformations requires components that are both light and movable. Like many of his contemporaries, Meier travels light. His works are generally assembled in a provisional

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Onderwerp: your text

Van: Krist Gruijthuijsen

<kg@grazerkunstverein.org>

Datum: 24 juni 2013 10:58:36 GMT+02:00

Aan: Christoph Meier cm@christophmeier.net

Dear Christoph,

I agree with Christoph B. when he says your work is social. Even though abstracted and reduced to form, it's necessity to exist is honest and sincere. Everything seems to start with a set of yet undefined conditions. You are an architect, hence down. The notion of a ›pedestal‹ is your oyster. Re-defining and re-using is undeniably your vicious circle. You undermine value. You undermine criteria. I told you, the first time we met, that your work might only need ONE text. One that is used and abused over and over again. It would suit you. Attached is my first attempt in doing so. The picture shows the article Christoph wrote for your exhibition at Secession a few years ago, taped to my desk, which has been used over the past month as my ›support structure‹ to work on (yes, I do like rice crackers, Christopher Williams and my colleague's snail tape-holder). I gradually added some comments and remarks and met up with him for coffee (or tea, in my case) to discuss the article. Enclosed is the edited transcription of this conversation. Curious to know what you think! After all, this, including this email, will be the new addition to your one, and hopefully only, text.

With love, courage and support,
Krist

Krist Gruijthuijsen in conversation with
Christoph Bruckner about his written article
›Social forms – sculpture in the Post-fordist era:
the work of Christoph Meier‹

Krist Gruijthuijsen Can you describe contemporary sculpture within the framework of your research on Post-Fordism?

Christoph Bruckner Well, the term contemporary, as I use it, refers to a work, which is in some way rooted in the time in which it is made. I remember a sentence by Breton in his ›Anthology of Black Humor‹ where he says that the artist is the willing victim of his time. One can also consider contemporary work as something connected to the society in which it exists. This approach, to me, is more interesting than seeing it as only taking place in the field of art. Such work is always linked to the social and political fields, and of course, the economic field.

KG Can you elaborate on the economic aspect?

CB Well, I read a great sentence in the second part of Foucault's history of governmentality ›The Birth of Biopolitics‹ where he says that living in a Neo-Liberal society is a ›permanent economic tribunal‹. When I read this, I thought it was one of the best definitions of what making art is for young artists that I had read in a long time. The problem is that everybody is forced to take an economic perspective, but when you look at the work of Christoph, the work of Rachel Harrison, or Ida Ekblad, Alexandra Bircken, Gedi Sibony – all of these people who work with discarded material and leftover parts...

KG Yes there is a long tradition of this type of sculpture making, isn't there?

CB Of course. All these people, like almost all artists, are forced to come up with an economic approach. The problem is that this approach doesn't *show* the artist as an economic subject, instead it becomes second to aesthetics and consequently makes the artists as an economic subjects invisible.

KG And you think that's what makes it contemporary?

CB I found something very interesting in the library of the Austrian Workers Union. It is a book that links all the contemporary modes of working of the creative classes, with people who had until recently been working stable salaried jobs their whole lives. It's not only people from the creative classes and from economic backgrounds who are working in these precarious, self-exploiting, network-dependent ways – but also people who are craftsmen, contractors, even maintenance workers. This is why I liked your Mierle Laderman Ukeles exhibition – because of its link between artistic work and maintenance.

There's a nice German word for when someone appears to be self-employed but actually isn't – *scheinselbstständig*. People are working exclusively for one contractor, but are self-employed persons, which is paradoxical in a way. You see these people in Vienna, selling newspapers at every street corner.

KG Do you mean that it's more like a gesture of employment?

CB No actually it is real employment, but legally they are entrepreneurs. So legally they are self-employed. They are told where to stand, they have a specific pallet of goods to sell, they even have to wear a uniform, but legally they are self-employed. The other nice example for this spreading of an artistic mode of working, an artistic form of organisation of labour – is when contractors and craftsmen sell their labour through websites. But this is not like an auction with upward bidding – this is downward bidding – the one who charges the least gets the most work. This reminds me of an exhibition of Gedi Sibony at Meyer Kainer where the artist with the lowest cost of production was the winner. It's almost like a contest.

KG I would actually like to talk more about this idea of what you consider precarious sculpture. Can you illustrate that for me?

CB Well, it looks like it could crumble or fall down any minute! It's not something stable. In the first text I wrote about Christoph, which is more about practice itself and less about my theorising, I wrote that you can easily call this mode of working ›verb sculpture‹ – the performative aspect is not only a function of the works but also a function of the viewer since the leaning, hanging, and covering is legible in the finished works. It is not stable in the way that it's bolted or screwed in or welded. It looks pretty beaten up in a way.

KG You seem to be talking more literally about the physical setup of the sculpture, while I also think it is very much about the relationship towards materiality, and about intuition. When you talk about precarity, and about this idea of the uncertain and the instable or unstable, I wonder, what defines the criteria for the work itself? What actually gives it the right to be presented?

Previously you mentioned self-exploitation, spontaneity, innovation and the ability to network. Are those perhaps the main criteria of artistic labour these days? Do you think that these are also applicable to this type of work?

CB I think these have always been applicable to artist's work. But the point is that today, not only artists have to work this way. This is what I'm interested in. I mean, artists have always worked this way, ever since they were set free from having a paid position under the church or a count of an emperor. They have no other options, they can only work this way. There are no paid position for artists, except a few teaching jobs. I don't think that this is something that distinguishes artistic work today from artistic work in the 60s or the 20s.

KG If you take Christoph Meier as an example for this?

CB You mean how he got his foot into the art world?

KG Yes, how he got recognised, in what way his work got received?

CB He is a very social person, he knows a lot of people. He has the ability to deal with, even befriend, a lot of strange people. He has done a lot of ›projects‹ (to mention another key term of Post-Fordism). Not really exhibitions in a sense, but really ›projects‹ – like stage designs for performance evenings, displays, playing with his band, issuing a fanzine etc.

KG Why do you consider this Post-Fordist?

CB Because the ability to have a network is basically the thing you need to get projects off the ground. Chiapello and Boltanski wrote in ›New Spirit of Capitalism‹, that a project is just part of a network charged with very high energy. So you have to have both the network and the ability to start new projects yourself or to link up with existing projects. They define a project as a highly activated section of a network.

KG Interestingly, had I not been familiar with Christoph's work, I would have still been clueless as to what his work was about after reading your text. The text could easily exist without mentioning the work, but alongside the work, if you know what I mean. That it could just have been a

text on sculpture in the Post-Fordist era, without even mentioning anything about Christoph or other artists. Because it's the subject you are addressing that relates to his work, but the text is not necessarily about his work.

CB Well, I hope this doesn't sound snappy, but if you want to know what his work is about, you'll have to talk to him, because I'm not explaining the work. I'm writing theory, which is parallel in a way. This is not what his work is about.

KG Of course, but I'm now sitting and talking with you about his work. We are both in the same position of looking and working with an artist and reflecting upon it. So the first text you wrote about his work, what was its focus? When we sat down, you mentioned how his work is dealing with re-appropriating discarded material. What other aspects, do you think, his work incorporates?

CB Perhaps the fact that it is happening in a social field.

KG Can you explain the term ›social field‹ to me?

CB Well, he is always picking up materials, for instance, his studio colleagues leftovers. So he makes things out of discarded artworks from other people. It appears to be very formal but it also has a social aspect to it. This was one thing I was writing about and giving examples – like a present he got on the first day at his job, or a present he got from the artist group he was working with. I told some of the stories behind the social aspects – the stories behind the very formal objects he is using and how he is combining them.

KG Do you think that the social aspect is that he wants this to be transparent? **CB** It is transparent if you know him.

KG Exactly, but if you don't?

CB To be honest, I don't know to what degree he is revealing this. I don't know if he is telling people that these painted posters and plastic sheets that he used to stuff sculptures, came from his studio colleague, who used them as dust-sheets while painting. I don't know to what degree he is communicating this.

KG Do you think that some of his work might sometimes get stuck with exercises on formality or exercises on creation? I mean, if you are not overcoming the formal exercises, what defines the work to be presented? What makes a good exercise and what makes a bad exercise? What is that, and how can one define it?

CB I once read that someone said that art is a *Verabredungsbegriff* – I don't know the English term for it.

KG I think I understand what you mean.

CB What art is, what is legitimised, and what is also honoured in an economic sense, is the result of a discursive process between an enormous amount of people. It's basically what we are doing right now. We are taking part in this discursive process, whether it is good or not. I don't think that its up to a single person. Every artist has to decide for him or her self, if it's good and it makes sense. I don't think it's up to a single person to answer these questions, it's just part of the ever changing result of a discursive process.

KG Is that why one always looks at the whole body of work, instead of looking at just one work? In a way you are looking at the complete position of someone, with all its various outcomes?

CB The complete position, of course, is contemporary. Or not. It depends. You can look at a single work and decipher it conceptually, or formally, to make sense. It is not exclusively the result of a huge, on-going discursive process, and it's also never only one task or one process. Your approach to ones' work changes all the time. My approach to Christoph's work changed during this interview, and yours as well!

KG I think that's a good final sentence.

