

“Methodological reconstruction” as a way of conceiving reality

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Referencing, quoting, excerpting, copying, contextualizing – this artistic methodology of a generation that has grown up with an extended concept of art (and the blurring of borders between genres that comes with it) is just as multifaceted as its frame of reference. Historical events are reanimated, systems of social order are questioned, formal aspects are adopted, and the borders between photography, drawing, installation, architecture, and sculpture are effortlessly overwritten while areas such as film, music, and theater become new references.

The Austrian artist Christoph Weber describes his artistic strategy as “methodological reconstruction.” The basis for this idea is not the creation of a signature artistic style that stands alone, or limiting oneself to a single artistic medium, but the search for a specific technique of realization and for criteria of applying a specific artistic method. Weber looks for the point in his works where several things form a unit, where conceptual analysis and perceptible form are one.

In his In-Wall Drawings (*Schlitzungen*), for instance, the template dictates the technique of execution. Weber copies photographs of destroyed architectural forms onto a wall by cutting the outlines directly into the wall’s surface. This gesture of destruction creates something new, translating photography into spatial drawings and borderline areas of architecture and sculpture while also turning the original constructive character of architectural drawings into the opposite. In this performative act, the “drawing” that is inseparable from the wall is the result of damaging the exhibition wall, originally intended for presentation. Removing the work to a different spatial or contextual situation would wreak even more havoc. Like his historical predecessors in Minimal, Conceptual, and Context art, Weber hereby probes institutional conditions and their forms of representation as well as the mobility of traditional artworks as commodities.

Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, and Sol LeWitt are Weber’s primary artistic points of reference, and their formal idioms are virtually “part of today’s artistic vocabulary.”¹

Weber’s “Objets Externes” (2007) are silicone casts of structures on the surface of building facades. These are molded in wax and then formed into seemingly hermetic cubes before they are simply laid out on the floor of the exhibition space, reminding us of Minimalist sculptures by Robert Morris. And yet, because of the intermedial transfer from the hard, persistent stone via silicone to the easily formable, but also perishable wax, we are invited to reflect on certain materials’ ability to convey meaning while questions arise regarding the mutual dependence and exchangeability of the categories of public and private, exterior and interior space.

Similar sculptural techniques come into play in Weber's installation "Untitled (Ramponeau)" (2008), in which papier-mâché cobblestones are arranged in several groups on the floor, but this time with an underlying historical and socio-political discourse. The model for this roughly executed series was a cobblestone taken from Rue Ramponeau in Paris. The cobblestones there served both as weapons and building blocks for one of the last barricades of the Paris Commune of 1871. The conceptual importance of Weber's choice of materials for his "methodological reconstruction" of this historical event becomes clear when we realize that the papier-mâché is solely made of books published before the year of the revolution. What is therefore at stake are questions of fiction and reality, the ambivalent position between the idea of an object and its specific form in relation to the space around it, as well as reflections on the objectivity of personal and general historiography.

History and memory are seldom based on immediate observation. They are conveyed through different media, are subjective, and their reconstruction in hindsight is not an act of simply affirming the past, but rather of realization and differentiation. This is the theme of Weber's work "The First Minutes of October" (2007), a piece which refers to Sergei Eisenstein's film *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, produced in 1927 on commission by Stalin to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917. Eisenstein wrote film history with the first scene: A step-by-step dismantling of a statue of Czar Alexander III rendered from different camera perspectives and with a precise editing technique.

Christoph Weber analyzed every camera position used by Eisenstein to dramatically lead the viewer around the statue. Using architectural software, he created a drawing in the shape of an irregular star representing the visual pyramids of Eisenstein's camera, hence the filmed space. Finally, he transformed the shape into a flat sculpture of individual, unconnected steel segments mounted on a wall. "Methodologically, the reconstruction of Eisenstein's shots is the retracing of constructivist time," says Weber about this work.² But this "reconstruction" does not stop at the application of a Constructivist technique – at the fragmentation, the confrontation, or the assembly of individual elements. The transformation of the temporal progression of the film sequence into a seemingly martial steel sculpture – one which appears to be closed within itself, stoutly defending its place on the wall – leads to contextual displacement. This can be interpreted as a symbol of violence, abdication, and vigor, or from today's point of view, as a reference to the communist star and as a visual metaphor for a socialist utopia.

Memory is crucial for the "reconstruction" of a historical or personally experienced event. In 1914, Sigmund Freud proposed remembering, repeating, and working-through as methods allowing us to process a traumatic event by making the past present again. In 1953, Jacques Lacan reinterpreted and radicalized Freud's theory insofar as he posited repetition as a symbolic act against remembering as an imaginary act. In postmodern philosophy, repetition is regarded as the positive potential of action, as an act of difference, because the "re-" never takes place at the same time. Repetition in itself therefore creates a difference. Memory is produced through the act of repeating, which establishes a difference from what is repeated and makes possible something other, something new.

In works such as “Untitled (Chunks)” (2004), “Trauma” (2008), and “Stack” (2008), Christoph Weber deliberately grapples with repetition as a means of bringing suppressed fears and memories back to the present. Repetition is preceded by a destructive act in each work. In “Untitled (Chunks),” the artist took a broken block of concrete, which can be read as the greatest possible symbol for the effects of destructive violence caused by war, and created gray, plaster-esque plastic casts of the block and lined these up in an exact row in an absurd twist on the underlying violence. In “Trauma,” Weber hewed a door with an ax and formed exact casts of the edges of the chopped crack in silicone. He then mounted these on six identical doors, which he arranged to form a closed space. The copies with the seemingly identical cracks can only be seen through the hole in the original door. This installation reflects the destructiveness within humans and the psychological trauma of the perpetrator as well as the victim. In the installation “Stack” (2008), Weber produced copies of a dented aluminum panel, which he assembled into a stack. This work can be understood as a reference to an industrial system which, unaffected by human actions, malfunctions and causes a chain reaction through the production of mistakes.

Within this artistic methodology of the repetition of destruction, we can recognize a connection to the capitalist theory of economics, which generally assumes that the only solution for economic problems is the obliteration of value through the destruction of systems and markets. In other words, growth and rebuilding require a preceding destruction.

Christoph Weber, on the other hand, pursues a far more general question in all of his works. He is interested in realities and their mechanisms of reproduction and perception – and in the analysis of terms, conceptual patterns, socio-political structures, and systems of order. Formal quotes, repetitions of destruction, and contextual displacements through the transfer of materials are merely the artistic methods of a methodological reconstruction that has for some time become a way of conceiving realities.

1 “Christoph Weber im Gespräch mit Thomas Trummer,” *Nach Schiele*, Atelier Augarten (Cologne: DuMont, 2006).

2 “Christoph Weber, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Jan Wenzel im Gespräch,” *Christoph Weber: The First Minutes of October* (Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2009), p. 249.