On the Concept of Nature in Philip Loersch’s Works

“For the nature surrounding us, certainly, is already a product of history and society.”

Gernot Böhme

Lines scan across roaring masses of water, a fountain of water is measured using a scale, lines are accompanied by their own reproduction, mountains of waves create a formation within the squares of a grid. Branches and trees are treated as “naturally grown” lines, but subordinated to geometry which takes effect in the background. In Philip Loersch’s works, natural phenomena are sorted, measured, and made seemingly calculable.

“As a human being, I attempt to introduce order into turbulence.” But what turbulences are meant here? As he begins to develop a drawing, Philip Loersch operates in an area of conflict ranging between his reading about the natural sciences – e.g. an introduction to the flowing and dripping motion of fluids –, his artistic designation – whereby he attempts repeatedly to “trick” himself in order to cause an irritation, i.e. to draw contrary to his initial intention – and actual coincidences, like when he drops paint onto the picture carrier, for example. Further processing through the means of drawing, but in places also through scratching and sanding down, he subsequently searches for his own order in this “self-created contingency”. He wishes to know what lies behind such chance occurrences and to develop an understanding of them by “perceiving similarities and regularities and so searching for fundamental principles”. Loersch seems to have cultivated a preference for the methods of natural science. However, it is not evident in the related field of natural science with it precise aims, but in his drawings. And this gap distinguishing him from the physicist is interesting. The criteria by which he is able to perceive regularities and analogies in the chaos he has fabricated are different – perhaps they constitute approaches – from the prevalent criteria in scientific discourse. The context is still the artistic medium of the drawing. A natural scientific method is translated and made into fertile ground for the generation of images.

A motif of these works, therefore, is not nature or an image of nature – but a model of nature. Caspar David Friedrich and his romantic colleagues pointed to nature’s infinite quality, driven by their desire to create a counter position to the enlightening thought of the age. A religious experience of nature seems to be different from an expedition to catalogue and order numerous natural phenomena. And if we ask one of our contemporaries about his idea of nature, perhaps the answer will be precise information about how many litres of oil are now floating in the Gulf of Mexico. Or he may whip out his mobile phone, take a photo of an adjacent tree and read the following text from his phone display: “Birch tree – 10 years old – 4.52 m”: augmented reality. These are indicators of an understanding of nature that is different in each case, constructed by the media. It is problematic for our perception to differentiate between technically manipulated and artificial nature. Indeed, perhaps it is no longer possible at all.
In many respects, Loersch’s works can be viewed as reflection concerning our concept of nature, and as “poetic or romantic” aspects are not paramount for him, the viewer himself is left to ascertain either a loss of the beautiful and sublime in nature or to perceive the calculated elegance of a model operating in the background.

Oliver Kraft