



MYCOLOGY IN THE ART OF GOLDSMITHERY

Comments on the 'Armillaria' exhibition by Peter Bauhuis

Fungi are sui generis, a world apart. They were long thought to be plants. Of late, though, biologists have classed fungi in the domain of living organisms with a nucleus (eukaryotes), where they are part of an independent kingdom distinct from animals, plants, protists (chromista) and unicellular protozoa.* Recent biological taxonomy places fungi near animals and assigns both to a supergroup.** There are microbiological similarities, and the two are also connected by their heterotrophic means of sustenance: Fungi, like animals and humans, survive by eating other organisms. Scientific taxonomy and microbiological insights aside, in our everyday experience fungi would seem to populate a parallel universe: Something is clearly there where nothing appears to be. Omnipresent yet invisible to the naked eye, fungal spores are the unseen triggers when rot suddenly sets in on a lemon; when athlete's foot is contracted at the indoor swimming pool; when a hiker in the forest comes across growths he calls mushrooms, which are merely the fruiting body, the tiny visible part of the fungus. Its true dimensions are mapped out by the mycelium, a network of filamentous cells (hyphae) in the soil or wood.

When goldsmith/artist Peter Bauhuis chose *Armillaria* for the exhibition's title, he name-checked a fungus noted for the sheer magnitude of its mycelium. An investigation into the mysterious demise of trees in a national park in Oregon fourteen years ago uncovered an *armillaria* two and a half millennia old, covering nine square kilometres and weighing six hundred metric tonnes. Bauhuis is surely fascinated with the malleable form of fungi as his 'Blob Rings' and 'Blob Chains' would attest, but it is the mycelium, that although invisible at first glance, affords us greater insight into his work. The mycelium can be considered a prototype of a rhizome, a wildly proliferating network of roots in which any point is connected to any other. In the discourse of philosophy, Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze have declared the rhizome to be an epistemological model that – in contrast to the binary logic of the traditional tree model with its superorders and suborders, its inclusions and exclusions - is not hierarchically structured, but always open on every side for a variety of associative and cognitive processes. The aforementioned biological taxonomy has gradually evolved along these lines. Today it is this non-hierarchical, rhizomatic property that plays an important role, especially in the debate over hypertexts.

Bauhuis addresses this rhizomatic property explicitly with the tangle of fine lines in a drawing made in 2006. His book *ABCDEARIUM* does not follow an overarching narrative; instead it tracks an arbitrary path determined by its alphabetical order, with diverse types of text and content arranged side by side and given equal ranking much like in Guattari and Deleuze's *One Thousand Plateaus*. In keeping with this spirit, his *Armillaria* exhibition features more than

merely decorative objects. Unlike conventional presentations where the hierarchies are clear and everything that is not jewellery serves as decoration on top of decorations to enhance the visuals and value of gems, Bauhuis gives equal billing to all, presenting the precious and the cheap, the found and the handcrafted, the well-cast and the off-cast, and postcards, texts and stamps alongside rings, chains and vessels. Echoes of this principle of rhizomatic simultaneity also resound in Bauhuis' methods. A case in point is his practice of casting individual vessels simultaneously with different alloys in one go, which he has applied to several series. Jewellery's effect would appear to be immediate and yet it is embedded in discourses that determine its perception, meaning and function. Here too, armillaria provides a fitting analogy: Its perceptible fruiting bodies are connected to an imperceptible underground network. Peter Bauhuis has a keen interest in that which cannot be seen. He presented his Galliumhort [Gallium Treasure] with fictitious narratives that declared jewellery he had made to be an archaeological find from the Hallstatt period, and exhibited it alongside notes and photographic evidence in Munich's Bavarian State Archaeological Collection. During a sojourn in Russia, Bauhuis referenced ornamental bands that he associated with the shape of the pretzel to devise a cultural and historical phantasm with the help of objects he crafted, found and patinated.

The irony of his Galliumhort is that gallium jewellery begins to melt when exposed to body heat for any length of time. The melting point of gallium is 29.77 degrees. The close relationship between the body and jewellery, and how the former leads to the latter's dissolution, resurfaces in his Avancen [Advances], in this case, as the mere suggestion of a touch. These brooches made of silver and gold are the imagined imprint of two fingertips touching the wearer. His Fussel [lint] brooches, in contrast, practically beg to be flicked away with a real rather than an imagined touch, which leads to the discovery that the speck of fuzzy debris is actually gold. This play of presence and absence in the bodily context also figures prominently in his Outis brooches and Orifice necklaces. They thematize the notion of a hole, an opening and emptiness in juxtaposition to the malleable material.

From the armillaria's hidden mycelium grow dense groups of fruiting bodies. Armillaria, also called honey fungus, shimmers in various shades of brown and gold. In the dark, it can glow with a cold, ghostly light. This glow is attributable to a substance called luciferin, which translated literally means 'light-bearer.' In Christian parlance, the light-bearer became Lucifer, the devil. If Peter Bauhuis' remarks are anything to go by, he takes divine pleasure in the devilish name that armillaria has lent to his exhibition.

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* Cavalier-Smith holds that the sixth kingdom consists of bacteria from the domain of prokaryotes (organisms lacking a nucleus). S. Thomas Cavalier-Smith: A revised six-kingdom system of life. In: Biological Reviews. Volume 73, 1998, pp. 203-266

** A more recent classification distinguishes among six supergroups in the domain of eukaryotes: Amoebozoa (lobose amoeboids and slime moulds), opisthokonta (including animals and fungi), rhizaria (amoeboid protists with pseudopods), archaeplastida (land plants, green algae, red algae, etc.) chromalveolata (many algae) and excavata (various flagellate protozoa);
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