

Even if many years have sometimes passed between visits, the road from Färjestaden in the west of Öland to the village on the island's south-eastern coast is strangely familiar. If a stone wall had been taken away, a house re-built or a turn-off changed direction, I would notice immediately. But very little has been altered here. I notice a cluster of new holiday cottages and a hypermarket that was not there before. The filling station and shop have been closed down. By the eastern highway there now stands a sign bearing the international World Heritage symbol. The odd thing about this is that the sign that says Southern Öland points North. After a while, I see that it does not point to a direction, but to the fact that Southern Öland's landscape is now classed as a piece of world heritage. I drive through the slightly gusty drizzle and think about how Southern Öland's special, barren, desolate nature has in many ways been created by poverty and devastation. What we want to preserve more than unspoilt nature is the traces of human progress.

My family moved here at a time when the environmental movement and the dream of creating a life in balance with the earth's ecological system was in its heyday. Our move was in many ways a part of that dream and of its antimodern romanticization of a more original, simple life outside of industrialized, specialized society. An ideology that was driven by a powerful belief that self-sufficiency and renewable energy really would save the world. Towards the end of the seventies, the future grew darker, the wind turbines slowed down, and the utopias faded. The stories told by my father – the researcher, the visionary and the sceptic – increasingly frequently took the form of gloomy future scenarios that we children listened to terror-stricken, and then tried to forget. How could everything we knew as eternal – the landscape, the changing seasons, the heat of summer, the cold of winter – change? For us, nature was the constant. A sure fount of reality, against which the changeable human world plays out. Today, his stories have in many respects come true. The vast time in

order to be able to heal. The science of our time and the biotech industry's increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the structure of life are opening up possibilities for creating afresh things that we have thought given, making it hard to draw a self-evident boundary between the original and the artificial. It is increasingly hard to distinguish raw material *nature* from controlling, creative *culture*. Distinctions that we believed were nature-given become increasingly porous and difficult to maintain.

When we observe this changed situation in art, we see a continuation of the rewriting and questioning of our attitudes to nature and culture, art and landscape, humanity and its relationship with its physical surroundings, which were begun by Smithson's generation, but marked by contemporary experiences. The art of the present speaks about the same issues, but via the technical developments that spin a web of visibility and accessibility around the world, humankind, time and history. It has seen increasingly widespread ecological catastrophes. Something that Tue Greenfort addresses in the photographs in the book, showing the intense flames in incinerators in Germany, as part of the global trade in waste, burning garbage from strike-bound Naples. The art of the contemporary moment sees a nature that to an increasing extent has been transformed into being part of the experience industry, like the orchids that Henrik Håkansson has grown in the exhibition space as domesticated, decorative exhibition objects.

In three of her film works, Rosa Barba has taken as her starting point the Mojave Desert, an important place in the history of land art. In the film installation *Western Round Table* she places two film projectors opposite each other like dysfunctional monuments to a now played-out technology. The title is an allusion to a seminar at which, as late as 1949, giants of modernism, such as Marcel Duchamp and Frank Lloyd Wright, were brought together to discuss art, literature, philosophy, music and science. The work becomes a ghostly greeting from an aesthetic, political and social utopia that had already then begun to fall apart. *They Shine* takes one of the world's largest solar-power plants as the starting point for a film in which fiction and reality, history and the present are fused into dazzling, flaming sunlight. As to what the enormous screens

catalogue, archive and sort the world is a recurrent theme in Mirra's art. In this ritual, the repeated action uncovers the possibility for a special sort of attention to the world, and to the widely ramified and complex system of which our world consists.

This book and exhibition are in a way a continuation of an exhibition, *Mot tiden* (Against Time), which was shown at Bonniers Konsthall, and a book *Anachronisms*, which I made in collaboration with Magnus Bergh at Albert Bonniers förlag two years ago. That book, too, was a collaboration between visual art and literature, and centred on the contemporary fascination with anachronistically reconstructed time. After our work was finished, I continued to come across artists and authors who worked with similar questions. But the giving of visual form to time and history that seemed to preoccupy them was not primarily about the time of human history. Instead of our own overseable context, the gaze was directed at contexts, and time spans infinitely greater or totally different from the human scale. Katie Patterson etched maps of all the dead stars into large sheets of enamelled aluminium. Or she listened to the sound of melting glacier ice and played it back on a disk made of ice.

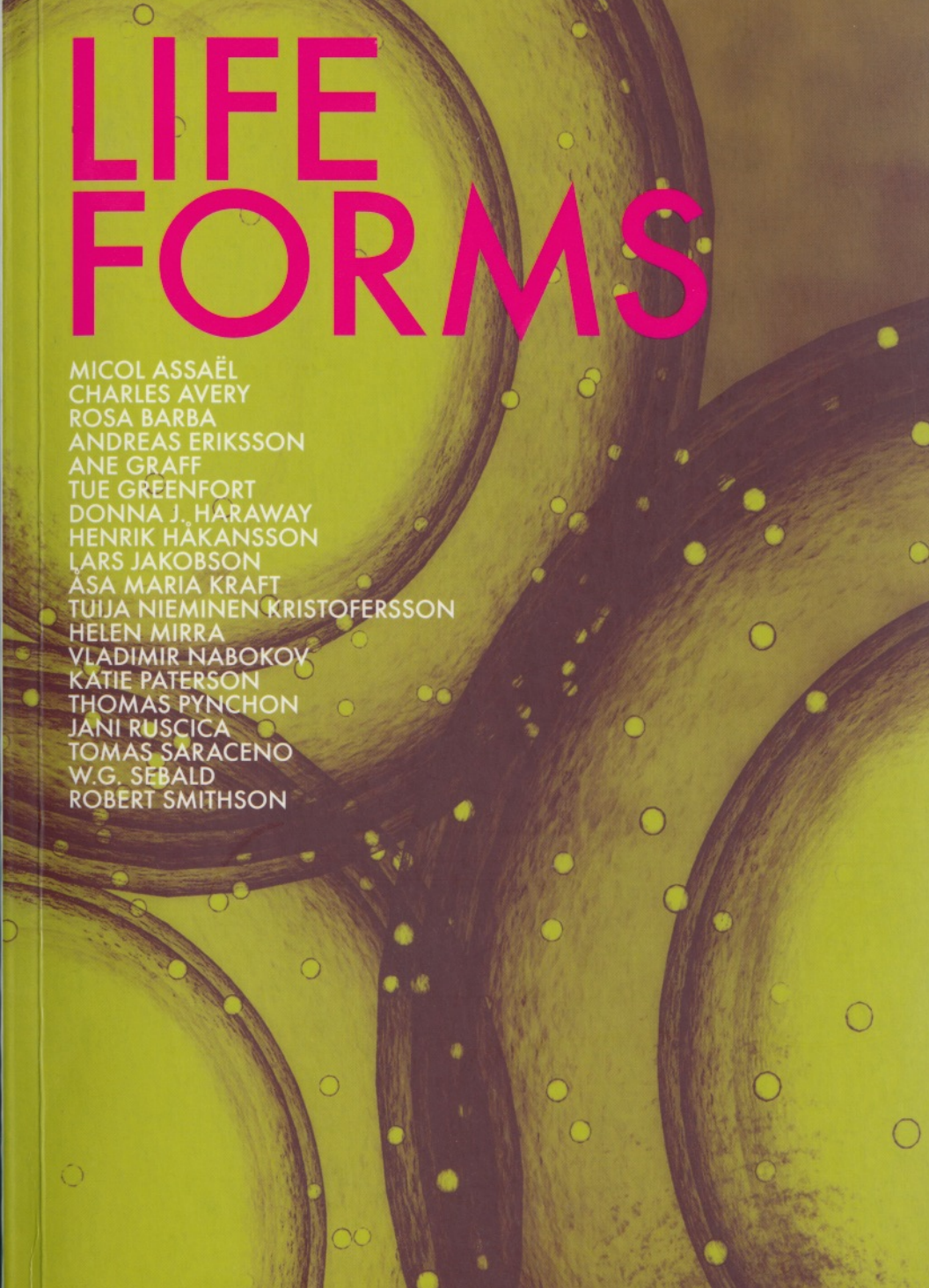
Andreas Eriksson made casts of birds that were crushed when they flew into his studio window, photographed a lump of snow that slowly changed shape as the spring sun thawed the earth, and made series of paintings that were factual segments of the changes in the landscape around his house. Charles Avery has for many years used sculptures, drawings and text to create a world, a remote island, somewhere. Like the explorers of old, he charts all its aspects with a precise exaltation. He describes the world's cosmology, geography and climate. He documents the cultural manners and customs of the inhabitants, and the biological characteristics of strange creatures. The place becomes an odd, distorted mirror-image of our own, and relativizes our notion of ourselves as unique and alone in the world.

In her essay *Crittercam*, Donna Haraway writes about the nature programmes that use cameras attached directly to wild animals to give viewers a feeling of experiencing the world through the animal's eyes. Thus, even the animal's gaze onto the world can become a spectacle for viewing.

from a critique of large-scale industrial solutions, architects, artists and technicians presented alternative energy-saving and resource-friendly proposals for a future ecological human life. The exhibition was a continuation of the museum's tradition of seeking out collaborations between new art and technology, but as an expression of the contemporary critique of modernity's rationality, the exhibition promoted a vision of small-scale, hand-made solutions, rather than futuristic perfection.

In a present-day continuation of that vision, as a proposal for the exhibition architecture for *Life Forms*. Klas Ruin and Ola Broms Wessel have made a sun screen powered by solar energy. The heat of the sun unfurls a balloon of spinnaker cloth that, when needed, will cover the Konsthall's southern façade. The sun's powers visibly influence the exhibition's architecture and give it a living, moving aspect that responds to the fluctuations of the day and to the intensity of the sun. The desire to have art be a possible place for trying out and developing ideas for future life forms is a driving force for the work of architect and artist Tomas Saraceno. Alluding to architectural visionaries such as Buckminster Fuller, he develops utopian schemes for possible dwellings for a human life of the future, existing in balance and in exchange with the organic systems. In flying cities that move over the surface of the earth driven by solar power, straight across geographical and national boundaries, art becomes a possibility for doing and trying to get us to believe in the impossible. Saraceno's works contain a possibility for having art and architecture build dreams of the future. A status and a role that art once held under modernism, and which can be glimpsed like an eroded memory in Rosa Barba's filmic work *Western Round Table*. Thus, perhaps, the circle is closed. Perhaps we dare once again to have art propose new utopias and future life forms. It is high time.

Translation: Mike Garner.

The background of the cover is a complex, layered composition of organic, rounded forms in shades of olive green and brown. These forms overlap and curve, creating a sense of depth and movement. Scattered throughout the composition are numerous small, bright yellow circles, some of which are outlined in black, resembling cells or microscopic organisms. The overall aesthetic is scientific and biological, consistent with the title 'LIFE FORMS'.

# LIFE FORMS

MICOL ASSAËL  
CHARLES AVERY  
ROSA BARBA  
ANDREAS ERIKSSON  
ANE GRAFF  
TUE GREENFORT  
DONNA J. HARAWAY  
HENRIK HÅKANSSON  
LARS JAKOBSON  
ÅSA MARIA KRAFT  
TUIJA NIEMINEN KRISTOFERSSON  
HELEN MIRRA  
VLADIMIR NABOKOV  
KATIE PATERSON  
THOMAS PYNCHON  
JANI RUSCICA  
TOMAS SARACENO  
W.G. SEBALD  
ROBERT SMITHSON