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**Arts festival as a global cultural product**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I address ephemerals – namely temporary displays in the form of festivals and exhibitions belonging to the field of contemporary art. The most appropriate criterion with which to select and discuss the ephemera, i.e., the data in which I analyse in this thesis, is the notion of the ‘event’. ‘Event’ is a philosophical concept, and therefore does not belong to artistic or aesthetic categories. However, two main characteristics are particularly relevant in considering it, and these are also pertinent to the field of art. Firstly, the tandem contingency and necessity. Secondly, the fact that no one can control the reach and impact of an event, which is also the case with an artwork and its interpretation.

In this thesis, I am creating a confrontation between what is usually described as abstract thought (a work of philosophy for example) and the production of contemporary art, which is so often culturally and economically dependent on the art market and hegemonic power structures such as institutions, as well as the apparatus of historians and experts to evaluate and legitimise it.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to state my understanding of art. This latter has strong propinquities with that defined by Kant when he coined the term ‘fine art’, namely a cultivated, context-aware and sensitive art, one’s reflection on which provides pleasure exceeding the pure enjoyment or satisfaction produced by erudition or technical virtuosity. Secondly, the artistic manifestations that I discuss are always produced by a collective, group or organisation of which I am part. Consequently, what unfolds is an organisational discourse originating in my praxis of art. Finally, the very fact that I am a member of the group of people whose activities are discussed leads logically to autoethnography, a field of inquiry that I am also contributing to.

## Table of contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>I.I</b>	<b>The Event as a concept, a dilemma and common thread</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>I.II</b>	<b>Structure of the thesis</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>I.III</b>	<b>External factors becoming assets for the thesis</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>I.IV</b>	<b>Autoethnography and Carla Lonzi</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>I.V</b>	<b>Geography, temporality, position and bias</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Event as a selection criterion for my data</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Event and positionality</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Event and embodiment in organisation theory</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Defining event through contingency and necessity</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Contingency and necessity in the context of art making</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Event's time</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Event and artist</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>1.8</b>	<b><i>Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event), 1936–38, 1989</i></b>	<b>42</b>
<b>1.9</b>	<b>How to read Heidegger</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>1.10</b>	<b>Heidegger: artistic event</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>1.11</b>	<b>Ontological understanding of art: Heidegger and Kraus</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>1.12</b>	<b>Shoes: between ontology and materialism</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>1.13</b>	<b>Liotard, Badiou, Deleuze</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>1.14</b>	<b>Jean-François Lyotard: event beyond structuralism</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>1.15</b>	<b>Alain Badiou: Being and Event</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>1.16</b>	<b>Gilles Deleuze: event and immanence</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>1.17</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>CARLA LONZI AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Postmodern paradigms</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Globalisation and contemporary art</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Feminism and philosophy</b>	<b>77</b>

<b>2.4</b>	<b>Feminism, bodies, ethics</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Positionality and methodology</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Postmodern anthropology</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>2.7</b>	<b>Carla Lonzi</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b><i>Autoritratto</i></b>	<b>96</b>
<b>2.9</b>	<b>Lonzi, different kinds of ethnography and what to do with it</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>2.10</b>	<b>Analytic autoethnography</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>2.11</b>	<b>Integrating my PhD research into my art practice</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>2.12</b>	<b>Time, consciousness and emotion</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>2.13</b>	<b><i>Eternal Tour, 2008–12</i></b>	<b>121</b>
<b>2.14</b>	<b>The programme, its milestones and positionality</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>2.15</b>	<b>Rome as a starting point and the <i>Eternal Tour</i> team</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>2.16</b>	<b>The ‘same’, the ‘different’ and the ‘out of the box: the event’</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>2.17</b>	<b>The ‘same’: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his guests</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>2.18</b>	<b>The ‘different’: Angela Marzullo as a witch in Brazil</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>2.19</b>	<b>‘Out of the box: the event’. I got a manicure</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>2.20</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>CURATING NARRATIVES</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Postmodernism and punk hypermodernity</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>From festival to event</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Retrospectively and empirically</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Lonzi curated in <i>Smoking Up Ambition!</i></b>	<b>144</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>‘Piece-Discussions’</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Aline Morvan’s <i>Elle s’emploie</i> and <i>Abouchement</i></b>	<b>151</b>
<b>3.7</b>	<b>The Kiss and the Bite</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>3.8</b>	<b>A banker in latex suit, Masoch, the fold and <i>potentia gaudendi</i></b>	<b>159</b>
<b>3.9</b>	<b>The impossibility of curating a banker’s orgasm</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>3.10</b>	<b>How does the organisation become concrete?</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>3.11</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>ECHO-EVENT</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Heterogeneous material and institutionalisation</b>	<b>176</b>

<b>4.2</b>	<b>Robert Cooper's <i>The Open Field</i></b>	<b>179</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b><i>The University without Condition</i> and <i>The Open Field</i></b>	<b>190</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Organisation and action as a creative escape from the dichotomy between praxis and theory</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Prison, confessional, echo</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>Situated knowledge as an intellectual escape from the dichotomy between praxis and theory</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>4.7</b>	<b>The echo of neo-classicism, orientalism, modernism, postmodernism and postcolonialism: Palmyra and Josephine Baker</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>4.8</b>	<b>Proximal view</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>4.9</b>	<b>Information given to the visitor</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>4.10</b>	<b>Biological genealogy does not guarantee authorship or legitimacy</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>4.11</b>	<b>From the body event to the eco-event</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>4.12</b>	<b>Self-awareness: a public diary as liberation</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>4.13</b>	<b>Heterogeneity as an essay</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>ECO-EVENT</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>From embodiment to environment</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>1989: three curatorial projects and two books</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Dematerialisation and embodied discourse</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Dematerialisation and constellation</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>A double nationalist representation or a Swiss pavilion?</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Escapism through poetry</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>When art facilitates an eco-event</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>5.8</b>	<b>The tempest</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>5.9</b>	<b>How does it feel to author an eco-event?</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>5.10</b>	<b><i>Franz Treichler Plays Dada</i></b>	<b>238</b>
<b>5.11</b>	<b>Helvetic Zebra: signifier and signified</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>5.12</b>	<b>'Eco-', 'eco-feminism' and 'eco-event'</b>	<b>242</b>

<b>6.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Form, chronology, contributions</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Necessity and contingency, echo and ecology</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Dematerialisation</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Critical management theory</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Feminism: from postmodernism to eco-feminism</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>Institutional critique</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>6.7</b>	<b>The relationship between art studying, art making and the university</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>6.8</b>	<b>Carla Lonzi, Martin Heidegger and Robert Cooper</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>6.9</b>	<b>Epistemology, kinship, delays and unique event</b>	<b>262</b>
	<b>FIGURES</b>	<b>266</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>276</b>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Festivals, residencies, workshops, summer schools, inter-relational ephemera, time-based, service-based, project-based or process-based art: these widely discussed and established *participative*<sup>1</sup> art and cultural productions have been highly visible since the mid-1990s. Biennales, in particular, have played an increasingly crucial role as the barometer that helps define the contemporary art field, intense and periodic structures involving on-going relocations and removals of people and objects. In an art system that is constantly being displaced and reshuffled, how can we deal with the current debate on *sustainability*?<sup>2</sup> Is it appropriate to continue to speak about or claim an era of dematerialisation?<sup>3</sup> This term has been regenerated since the 1970s through discourses on digitalisation, liquidity,<sup>4</sup> flexibility,<sup>5</sup> fluidity,<sup>6</sup> mobility, network society and art,<sup>7</sup> speed and acceleration.<sup>8</sup> Is it valid to claim that ‘real time’ methods of storing big data are equal to immateriality?<sup>9</sup> These issues, as well as climate change and the ‘refugee

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *L'esthétique relationnelle*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon, 1998; Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, in *October 110*, Fall 2004, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, pp. 51–80.

<sup>2</sup> See also Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis (eds.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, 1998; T J Demos, ‘The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology’, in Francesco Manacorda and Ariella Yedgar (eds.), *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet, 1969–2009*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2009, pp. 17–30; Joy Morray et al. (ed.), *Enough for All Forever: A Handbook for Learning about Sustainability*, Common Ground, Champaign, Illinois, 2012; Maja and Reuben Fowkes, ‘Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art’, in *Praesens, Central European contemporary art review*, Budapest, 1, 2006, pp. 5–12.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object, From 1966 to 1972 ...*, Studio Vista, London, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, Jeremy Gilbert (ed.), *Experimental Politics, Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age*, trans. Arianna Bove, Jeremy Gilbert, Andrew Goffey, Mark Hayward, Jason Read, Alberto Toscano, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Bettina Steinbrügge, Nina Möntmann, Vanessa Joan Müller, *Fluidity*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 30.1–10.4.2016, [www.kunstverein.de/englisch/exhibitions/past/2010-2019/2016/20160129\\_Fluidity.php](http://www.kunstverein.de/englisch/exhibitions/past/2010-2019/2016/20160129_Fluidity.php) (accessed 31 December 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Lars Bang Larsen (ed.), *Networks*, Documents of Contemporary Art, Whitechapel Gallery, London, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (ed.), *#Accelerate#, The Accelerationist Reader*, Merve Verlag, Berlin, Urbanomic, London, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Immaterial Labor’, in Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, *Radical Thought in Italy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 132–147.



crisis',<sup>10</sup> urge us to acknowledge and think about the condition, use and misuse of bodies, human and non-human, as well as natural resources. Anatomies, souls, displaced human beings, but also water, forest, animals, mountains, plants, seem to have neither *dematerialised* nor *accelerated*, but rather to have taken another turn, at least in terms of visibility, representation and in certain cases, self-awareness.

Following the path of what can last as opposed to what can be achieved through constant speed, I put forward in this thesis the hypothesis that some form of resistance, persistence, active remembering, coupled with a reflective sense-making, can be found and reflected upon even in the most intangible manifestation of reality, in particular in the context of contemporary art. In the proposed sustainable political and conceptual economies, what is the function of the body – the body of the artist, the body of the organiser as well as the bodies of the audience members? How far can one control the impact of an artwork, its duration and interpretation? What kind of aesthetics can we formulate by placing art at the crossroads between permanence and versatility?

## **I.I The Event as a concept, a dilemma and common thread**

Before the writing process began, I did not know the exact form this thesis would take, bearing in mind its mixture of heteroclitite and heterogeneous material ranging from outcomes in the field of contemporary art to art-theoretical analysis, organisational and critical management theory, philosophy and sociology. Thinking thematically proved helpful. After a few months of enquiry, doubt, questions, struggling, searching for and collecting references in order to situate my interests and inscribe myself within an academic field while producing the literature review, the notion of the *event* appeared. It surfaced initially as a theme, but soon it also became a dilemma because of the difficulty of the subject, as well as the limited time available to dig into the large amount of literature on the subject. While carefully scrutinising the term 'event' from a philosophical perspective, a term that is also a concept, I had to first accept and then engage with a complexity that would not be the only topic of this research, since the thesis is not meant as a monographic study of this concept alone. Nevertheless, the event

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<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

was the most prominent and consistent common thread to follow, regardless of the inherent intellectual difficulty in writing a coherent text. My endeavour in reflecting on the concept of event while working with a corpus linked to artistic production, and to the organisation of artistic production, has been a successful one. One of the major contributions of my work is the actual invention of two new philosophical concepts, which are two derivatives of the event: firstly, the *echo-event* and secondly the *eco-event*. Although only one letter distinguishes the first from the second, these concepts are spatially almost antithetical to each other. As it will become clear in Chapter 4, the *echo-event* activates an enclosed space where ricochets and distortions create a new sort of meaning. In Chapter 5, the *eco-event* considers a multi-layered perception of the environment, bringing into play not only visual and audio perceptions, but time and atmosphere as well, including meteorology, and conceptual thought descending from *eco-feminism*. But before coming to the point of creating new concepts out of a given one, it is necessary to delineate some important aspects of the ‘simple’ event.

As explained and synthetised by Slavoj Žižek,<sup>11</sup> the event encapsulates the complementary notions of necessity and contingency. These two factors seem to merge in art and beg the question: why should a piece of art appear? Rather than following the expected route that leads to the use or value of art, I believe that necessity – the need for art – is interesting to think about, precisely because it depends on contingency. The same goes for the event. Indeed, in both cases, necessity and contingency, even if diametrically opposed, seem to go hand in hand. This juncture becomes evident when an artwork and its conditions of existence are questioned, researched and challenged, as much as in reflecting on the event itself. These necessary as well as contingent aspects of art and event are discussed throughout this thesis.

## **I.II Structure of the thesis**

And yet an artwork is not an event, and vice-versa. Even if they share the characteristics described above, they are not equivalent to each other. These similarities and differences become apparent in my text through a variety of methods, examples, case studies and sources. On the one hand, as shown by the literature that I have considered

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<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Event, Philosophy in Transit*, Penguin Books, London, 2014.

valid for this thesis, the concept of ‘event’ isn’t always connected with art. Furthermore, for many philosophers, it has nothing at all to do with it. Artworks can be conceived and produced by an artist under particular conditions (this thesis provides a variety of examples of this), while the event does not happen voluntarily. The event relies on too many external factors to be brought into existence by only one creative mind. This gap between the event and art will become obvious in the course of the discussion of each case that is put forth, as well as through a comparison of the two.

In Chapter 1, I begin by looking at the theoretical basis of the term and concept of the event, engaging with Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), Alain Badiou (b. 1937) and Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). Their interest in and views on the event are presented in a synthetic manner, an abstract form that I found relevant for this thesis, in addition to other authors who illuminate the issue in various ways.

Badiou is remarkable for his interest in the impossibility of the event, which happens nonetheless: the event is the impossible becoming possible.<sup>12</sup> He elaborates on the identification, delineation and creation of an event retrospectively, addressing the notion of history-writing and the role, function and incidence of naming the event. He claims that once things are named, their yet unknown potential tends to disappear. Giving the event a title will guarantee, condition, frame and sometimes limit its existence simultaneously.<sup>13</sup>

For Gilles Deleuze, the event is a leakage that delivers new potential, happening on the ‘plane of immanence’: carrying sense and being sense at the same time. Such an event, sense as meaning, should be welcomed, experienced and thoroughly embraced, being the boundary between the thing and the proposition. ‘Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs.’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 1988, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, London, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, The Athlone Press, London, 1990, p. 22.

Taking another angle on the event, Jean-François Lyotard uses this concept as a powerful tool to build a critique of structuralism, mainly based on a reflection on language. For Lyotard, structuralism is a system, a kind of stable or binding grid that cannot process, integrate or contain certain kinds of extraordinary elements that exceed it; these extraordinary elements are precisely what he names ‘events’.<sup>15</sup>

Outside of the framework of postmodernist thinking, Martin Heidegger had much earlier associated the event with art (poetry), with thinking (philosophy) and also with deed. In order to do so, he composed a long poetic essay, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, published posthumously in 1989. As if believing that for a study of the event, language must be used differently than in a regular philosophical text, he builds this essay from a myriad of short and long paragraphs, and uses many repetitions, a form of expression that strongly distinguishes the German philosopher from the other three authors.

In complement to the work of the twentieth-century thinkers quoted above, I have taken as a conceptual lever a pivotal point formulated by a key figure of eighteenth-century Western philosophy. This has strongly conditioned the rest of my thesis and is thus worth mentioning in this introduction. In paragraph 44 of his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), entitled ‘Fine Art’, Immanuel Kant argues that art can be a source of original understanding beyond craft, erudition and knowledge of the classics. A current actualisation or implementation of such a statement can be found in the field of artistic research that questions how knowledge can be displayed, and whether text-based language is the only way to formulate and enunciate interpretation and understanding of reality. But I name this thesis ‘PhD Fine Art’ because it does not belong to artistic research (that nascent academic field promotes other kinds of monographs). Rather, it has provided me with an occasion to reflect upon my art practice and its relationship to institutionalisation, and to document art projects and aspects of art-making that are not usually included in the history of art, art theory or in the art system in general.

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard, Writing the Event*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998; Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993; Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011.

Following Kant's path, I believe that fine art is a way to produce a kind of knowledge that distinguishes itself, through its methods and results, from the natural sciences or academic humanities. This thesis aims to demonstrate Kant's position. The art system forces artists to produce at such a high tempo that post-production processes such as self-reflection are hardly possible, logistically, financially or temporally. Beyond this backstage dynamic, the 'event' is a powerful tool with which to think about the reception of a piece in connection with other factors that might have inspired it, or that will even insufflate it with unexpected semantic meaning. This thesis is an example of such an unexpected text from the point of view of the art system, in the sense that it delineates an on-going creative process. It is an enquiry into how to discuss a series of ephemeris produced in the context of art. The philosophical concept of event is a strong theoretical tool with which to engage with such a subject, but to discuss a series of ephemeris through the lens of the event would not be enough. In order to confront these ephemeris concretely, issues of methodology and organisation must be addressed, and the context of their production – very often a collective dynamic – must be taken into consideration, as well as the way in which they inscribe themselves in, and even reveal certain aspects of, an institutional or academic context. How to tell the story of these ephemeris, and furthermore, what will develop from this narrative? How to use a reference, not only literally but also creatively? How to make good use of transdisciplinarity as a way of studying a subject, while analysing and investigating a corpus of ephemeris and experiences where I myself consistently played an active role, as an artist and organiser? How to orchestrate philosophy as well as organisational theory around a set of artistic episodes? These are among the main questions raised by this thesis.

Having outlined the theoretical basis of the event in Chapter 1, in the four following chapters I analyse and discuss specific case studies, namely art pieces to which I have contributed or have authored myself. In Chapter 2, I refer to the artistic, scientific and nomadic festival *Eternal Tour* (Rome, 2008; Neuchâtel, 2009; Jerusalem/Ramallah, 2010; from New York to Las Vegas, 2011, Geneva, 2012 and São Paulo, 2012). This festival toured six different regions for five years, involving a multiplicity of venues and collaborators. Originating at the Swiss Institute in Rome in July 2008, with an evaluation of cosmopolitanism inherited from Immanuel Kant and revisited by Hannah Arendt, it

indirectly generated a highly significant ephemeral event just after its closure in Brazil in 2012. It was this very particular and strong episode that led me to think about the nature of event. In the context of this thesis, I considered *Eternal Tour* through the prism of that event.

In Chapter 3, the second case study *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2010–14), is inspired by an event that consists of a news item: a banker found dead in a latex suit in Geneva on 1 March 2005, after a sadomasochistic ritual.<sup>16</sup> Treating this tragic event as an allegory of the violence of capitalism under the paradigm of Protestantism, I found a way to develop, in collaboration with the French independent curator Fabienne Bideaud, an exhibition as well as a programme of talks and lectures, by displaying in a former fire-extinguisher factory a hundred pieces from the contemporary art collections of the State and City of Geneva. Local art production is then comparable, for the most specialised audience, with what is produced on a global scale.

In Chapter 4, the third case study is *Morgenröte, Aurora Borealis and Levantin* (2015), an exhibition held at the Kunsthalle in Bern, entirely generated out of a reflection on the event. Taking into account what I had learned so far in the frame of this thesis, the event was discussed together with art students in the form of a public workshop in the institution. Furthermore, I orchestrated a series of evolving art pieces, produced for and influenced by the ideas of the audience. The event revealed itself through an unresolved resonance between a piece of family archive and an almost forgotten wall painting in the basement of the institution. I name this unique case an ‘echo-event’.

In Chapter 5, the fourth case study *Helvetic Zebra* (2014) is discussed. This was a show and a mini-festival that I curated in Beirut, Lebanon, which generated an event out of a performance by the Swiss musician Franz Treichler, bringing together Dada, Fluxus and abstract music. Using sonic and visual experimentation to address the perception of dilated or accelerated time, the performance took place on the roof terrace of the independent art centre STATION. This outdoor setup was characterised by a panoramic

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<sup>16</sup> Valérie Duby and Alain Jourdan, *Mort d'un banquier, Les dessous de l'affaire Stern*, Editions Privé, Paris, 2006.

surrounding of building sites, under heavy clouds and an impending storm – a context that could not be separated from the event. I call this second unique case ‘eco-event’.

It is worth mentioning that the four case studies presented are projects that I organised, curated and produced, sometimes with others, sometimes alone, differing in size, cost and format. As an artist, I shape ideas into form by considering their context, whether institutional, financial, logistic or organisational. Site-specificity, which is the ability to integrate the outside within the artwork, is a way to turn any external factor, even a constraint, into a parameter to play with and to embrace. These four case studies do not correspond to my full artistic production of 2012–16: they represent a selection that serves the purpose of discussing what an event can be, in the context of this thesis.

### **I.III External factors becoming assets for the thesis**

In parallel to my decision to choose a philosophical concept as a tool in the frame of a thesis inscribed in the field of critical management theory, I also decided to acknowledge three external factors in the thesis, rather than ignoring them. Firstly: my initial training in contemporary art and the history of art before studying at the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary University in London. If the university system allows such a shift in disciplines, motivated by professional experience that leads many students educated in the humanities and art to develop a variety of skills and accumulate proficiency outside academia, why not use my previous academic curriculum (in this case an MA in History of Art at the University of Geneva) to nourish the next one?

Indeed, after having graduated in Fine Art in Geneva (ESBA, 2001) and Hamburg (HfbK, 2001), I obtained an MA in Art History and Philosophy at the University of Geneva (2006). This second training ran in parallel with my artistic practice. Such a balance between two complementary activities – making art and studying – was repeated when I started a PhD programme at the Queen Mary University in London in January 2014, financed by the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Kungl. Konsthögskolan, where I was employed as a Professor of Fine Art from January 2010 until December 2016. Almost nine years separate the end of my artistic training in Geneva and Hamburg from the beginning of my postgraduate cycle in London. During this time period I developed my artistic practice, in part in the frame of residency programmes (the Swiss Institute in

Rome and the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht), and then I became a teacher. At the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, most of the teaching employees are asked to sit on a range of boards (education, research, equality and diversity, admission and recruitment committees for new students or new teaching staff, etc.), and therefore actively participate in orienting the current and future life of the institution for which they are working. Interestingly enough, the critical management theorist Robert Cooper points out that institutions and organisations, unlike individuals, do not have external goals, but what is often called ‘institutional politics’.

We have to get rid of the practical–useful idea that institutions and organizations have purposes and goals. As Mary Douglas<sup>17</sup> has pointed out, institutions do not have purposes – only individuals have purposes.<sup>18</sup>

In Stockholm, I quickly became one of these individuals more or less explicitly pursuing my goals, which sometimes conformed to those of my colleagues who were focusing on institutional politics. Not all the institution’s staff members engage openly in structural and executive concerns, some having decided to focus exclusively on their teaching, if such a clear division can be made.<sup>19</sup> Any art school participates in the art system, just as much as the museum, the gallery or the art fair, by producing knowledge, influencing and sometimes shaping the work of the students, who will then integrate into the art scene and, in the best possible scenario, become active protagonists in nourishing and reshaping it. Since the emergence of artistic research and the acknowledgement of ‘art as research’, meaning also the allocation of money and resources to it, academia and the art school have become newly interesting for practising artists, as stated by Efva Lilja, Swedish artist, choreographer and director of Dansehallerne in Copenhagen.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1986.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Cooper, *Institutional Aesthetics: The Case of ‘Contestation’*, presented at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, January 1991, unpublished, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> To give an example of the complexity and ambiguity of remaining exempt from politics while working in a power structure such as a university or higher art-education school, one can refer to Edward Said discussion in his introduction to *Orientalism*, 1978, Penguin Classics, London, 2003, p. 9–12, about whether any university discipline can escape a form of politicisation.

<sup>20</sup> ‘As artists we need academia, artist-driven fora, the commercial as well as the non-profit market as long as it creates interaction and meetings with an audience [...] Art is power. Money is power. Positions, decision-making, large commissions, market demand



Indeed, artists are very often involved in institutional politics, in parallel to the development of their oeuvres, but what could it mean if academia were to support the production of their art? To engage in such a debate doesn't guarantee good individual art, but aims at the general improvement of the field (or at least, it should).<sup>21</sup> The more artists advance, the more they will be integrating with a community and asked to peer-review their colleagues' work. Artists who sit on boards, admission and recruitment committees will have their personal criteria and affinities, taste and biography in mind, but should be able to put these individual factors aside in order to recognise qualities and assets that will serve the institution for which they are working and ally themselves with a broader context than their respective singular and unique practices. Such strategic detachment isn't always easy to achieve, due to the fact that affects, friendships, comfort zones or other psychological factors, conscious and unconscious, outspoken and mute, constantly influence what is discussed during a selection process. Artists cannot escape the rules and mechanisms related to power structures and competition, and they contribute actively to the system, allowing, financing and making possible further representations of the world to arise.

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and network too. If more of us gain more knowledge we can also make better use of the system and develop it with an eye to the needs for frontline artistic endeavours nationally and internationally.' Efva Lilja, *Art, Research, Empowerment, The Artist as Researcher*, Regeringskansliet, Stockholm, 2015, p. 12. A few years earlier, Lilja formulated what kind of drive she personally projects and expects from an integration of her artistic practice into the academic system. What she is seeking throughout institutionalisation is what an artistic community provides spontaneously. What does her testimony about artists' capacity to relate to each other reveal, particularly in the Swedish context? 'Through being forced to put my thoughts into images or words in relation to the form and content of the work, I learn more about my own methods. By applying them and making them comprehensible, others can determine whether they are useful or to be discarded. I want to make good art. I want to be able to articulate what I mean by good and measure my criteria against those of other people. I want to do what I have not yet done, known, proved able to do. I want to draw attention to the formation of knowledge that occurs in artistic practice and I want to do it through artistic creations.' 'Throw the stones really hard at your target or rest in peace', in *Art and Artistic Research*, Zurich University of the Arts, Scheidegger & Spiess, Zurich, 2010, p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> 'When you apply for funding, or when you want to make a presentation or publication, you are subject to competition. As peers we must be able to discuss and examine each other's projects from quality criteria set up through intra-artistic fora. Not primarily to decide what is good art, but to make a stand on which projects make our specific fields move forward by adding new insights, knowledge and "tools"' Lilja, *Art, Research, Empowerment, op. cit.*, p. 28.

If I choose to briefly summarise my own trajectory, including the ‘political’ or ‘institutional’ side of myself, it is because this autobiographical résumé (of my training and institutional belonging)<sup>22</sup> leads to a clearer picture of my position within my own field: what kind of artist I am. In my case, as the four case studies described and addressed in this thesis will exemplify, pedagogy and research became part of my artistic practice, since for me the difficult and exciting task for an artist consists in framing and expanding what art is, conceptually as well as formally. Such a posture, working method and epistemological stand about the very notion of art, and the resources, fields, activities and social relations or organisations used, are not shared by every artist, nor recognised or acknowledged unanimously by art historians, critics, curators and art dealers. Nevertheless, they do exist and are currently labelled ‘artistic research’,<sup>23</sup> which has too quickly been compared with the scientific system, in which a recognised and acknowledged researcher aims to contribute to his or her field of study by experimenting and innovating.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Rosi Braidotti’s autobiographical narrative, ‘Contexts and Generations’, in *Nomadic Subjects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 69–90, which she introduces and legitimises as follows: ‘To explore the legacy of 1968 and the chronology of post-structuralism and French feminism, I have chosen to mix the theoretical with the personal so as to provide a reasoned cartography of my generation. [...] Let me tell you my tale, then – against all odds.’

<sup>23</sup> For a pragmatic synthesis of the situation, the different institutional partners, protagonists and positions, among many titles and articles, I can point to Lilja’s small book *Art, Research, Empowerment*, *op. cit.*, and the fact-based article by Giaco Schiesser, ‘What is at stake: qu’est-ce que l’enjeu? Paradoxes: Problematics: Perspectives in Artistic Research Today’, in Gerald Bast and Elias G. Carayannis (eds.), *Arts, Research, Innovation and Society (ARIS)*, Vol. 1, Springer, Vienna/New York, 2015, pp. 197–209. Even though published more than a decade ago, it is also worth considering Sarat Maharaj, ‘Unfinishable Sketch of “An Unknown Object in 4D”: Scenes of Artistic Research’, in Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (eds.), *Artistic Research, L&B (Lier en Boog)*, *Series of Philosophy of Art and Art Theory*, Vol. 18, Amsterdam, 2004, pp. 39–58. Exclusively in French, a recently published state of the art about ‘artistic research’ focusing on epistemology, university disciplines and how artists practice ‘research’ independently from any institutional labelling or structure: Sandra Delacourt, Katia Schneller and Vanessa Theodoropoulou, ‘Introduction’, in *Le chercheur et ses doubles*, Editions B42, Paris, pp. 5–21; in the same book, see the selective bibliography on ‘art and research’, pp. 174–175. Exclusively in German, a companion compiling more than sixty short articles or essays by philosophers, artists, pedagogues, etc., structured in three main parts: ‘epistemology and aesthetics’, ‘practices’ and ‘institutions and contexts’, Jens Badura, Selma Dubach, Anke Haarmann, Dieter Mersch, Anton Rey, Christoph Schenker and Germán Toro Pérez (eds.), in *Künstlerische Forschung, ein Handbuch*, Diaphanes, Zurich, Berlin, 2015.

But the question about hybridisation between practising and researching remains: what is the function of studying, in this case attending a PhD research programme at the School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University in London? How does it complement my consistent and demanding engagement in the development of an art practice as well as its institutionalised pedagogy and its methods? There are obviously many gains to be made by shifting perspective: one of them is that it allows for an investigation into universals that are created, thought and discussed in the field of philosophy, as in Chapter 1, or the facts and interpretations handled by a field such as art history, or even created through contemporary art. These latter can be studied through the lens of organisational study, and this is also precisely one of my main interest in this thesis, while using knowledge acquired previously in my life.

History of art, as a scientific discipline, allies, combines and juxtaposes the formal and the conceptual, the study of depictions and representations, frozen or moving pictures as well as three-dimensional objects, in order to group, cluster or rank them in a meaningful way. When adopting this methodology, the orientation might be chronological, genealogical, iconological, iconographical, semiological, hermeneutic, sociological, comparative, etc. In complement to this classifying endeavour, art historians have to negotiate a parallel task: to discuss, scrutinise and elaborate on the intrinsic quality of an isolated art piece. Therefore, history of art, at its best, is an accumulative as well as a discursive science. This explains why I will refer to a variety of artworks in this thesis, and obviously not only mine. Furthermore, art history tries to capture with words what artists do with a plethora of materials, formats and media. To a certain extent, this science, established at the end of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 2), tries to reduce to words that which cannot be wholly contained within a text, and the same goes for philosophy. From this perspective, it is interesting to consider the type of philosophy developed by Jean-François Lyotard. As discussed in Chapter 1, he curated the show *Les Immatériaux* (1985) as a postmodern gesture, or another way to investigate what postmodernism can be, in particular the phenomena related to

dematerialisation as well as transmission and communication, a material statement of what he was witnessing and theorising.<sup>24</sup>

There is, then, permeability between thinking and doing, or what you can do with a text and what you can do with an exhibition or the programming of a festival. From the point of view of the artist, this kind of oscillation is perfectly legitimate, and this thesis mirrors such a balancing. Contemporary art, even though not strictly academic, since also belonging to the cultural industry and politics, or even tourism, is well known to be self-referential, part of a complex net of proficiency, official and unofficial know-how, hardly graspable by those not belonging to the profession. This thesis, by addressing contemporary art from an interdisciplinary perspective, provides some insights into a field that has a tendency, like many others, to discuss itself in a closed circuit.

The second factor that I chose to use in the frame of the research engaged for this thesis, instead of putting it aside, is my current artistic practice, producing artworks and exhibitions on a regular basis that pertain to the current canon of Western cultural production. Having identified the event as the common thread to follow and explore during my time as a PhD Candidate at QMUL, I found that my artistic practice became a laboratory. What could happen if art could drive new philosophical concepts? At that stage, the very fact of being involved in a Business and Management programme helped me tremendously. Indeed, by looking at the event and my art practice from a managerial perspective, and using literature from this field, I found a way to separate practice and theory, and even more, to reconsider references, for example post-structuralism, thanks to the work of Robert Cooper. Therefore, in this thesis, artworks especially produced for this occasion contribute to pushing forward a theoretical endeavour.

The third factor to reflect upon is that prior to my QMUL PhD studies, I have worked as a professional within art institutions. I am obviously affected by this working context, to which I have also actively contributed from an educational perspective as a teacher at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, an institution particularly helpful towards my further professional development, including the provision of the financial support

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<sup>24</sup> *Les Immatériaux*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris, 1985; Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann (eds.), *30 Years after Les Immatériaux – Art, Science and Theory*, Meson press, Lüneburg, 2015.

required for completing this degree. Most of the higher art-education institutions of our time, at least in Europe, Britain and Scandinavia, are involved in artistic research. This relatively newly constituted field struggles, among many things, to conceive how artists can balance research with art production and to comprehend what kind of relationship they have with erudition, expertise, connoisseurship, data collection, information and understanding given the fact that they always act towards the creation of something that doesn't yet exist, and in this sense cannot rely on any form of tradition or givens. Organisation theory as well as critical management theory provide interesting answers to such points by applying knowledge in the context of a reflection on organising, producing and letting things happen. The process leading to art consists precisely in these three steps, which evolve systematically but also organically, having to take into consideration many contingent and uncertain parameters.

The feminist component of this thesis is already apparent in my philosophical approach – referring to the work of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Sarah Ahmed, Paul B. Preciado and Catherine Malabou, in my art-critical perspective in referencing Carla Lonzi, a key figure introduced below, and in the very fact that I engaged with many organisations that had a feminist character. It is equally noticeable in the manner in which I refer to organisation theory and critical management studies. The importance of the body and its inherent consequences, i.e. leading to gendered organisation and management theories that cite Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, as well as queer theory at large, indeed anchors my thesis and its transdisciplinary aspects radically to a feminist position, which is an epistemological one. Feminism is here a given, theoretically as well as pragmatically. It wouldn't make sense to apply it only to select aspects of the research. Bringing together such a number and variety of feminist components, and the manner in which they are connected together into a sole work, is a contribution to feminism in general, but also to its philosophy, its organisation and its critical management studies.

#### **I.IV Autoethnography and Carla Lonzi**

As can be seen from the above, I am deeply involved, institutionally and professionally, in the subject of this study and research. As a way of acknowledging this, self-ethnography as well as postmodern anthropology will be elaborated upon as amongst

the methodologies used. These two disciplines help one to find a correct standpoint by studying and, at the same time, acknowledging one's own participation as a member of the group or organisation that one is studying.

In order to fulfil my interest in the event in the context of art, I could have taken many different approaches. I could have conducted a series of interviews with my former collaborators, other artists or institutional curators or directors, or even colleagues in the school in which I am currently teaching. Apart from some interviews that are reported and contextualised here, for example two with independent artists, Aline Morvan and Franz Treichler (Chapters 3 and 5), I gave preference to what had been achieved through art, thanks to art and while making art. I quickly realised that the collected material was sufficient to develop an interesting analysis, which was then enriched with further readings.

Envisioning the interesting issues that self-ethnography and postmodern anthropology address (how to describe a structure while you are participating in it), the work of Carla Lonzi (1931–1982), until now known almost exclusively in art-historical and Italian feminist circles, is introduced and discussed in this thesis, in particular her *Autoritratto* (Self-portrait, 1969) (see Chapters 2 and 3). I retrace her career as an art historian, including the fact that very early on she was interested in works of art produced for theatre sets, anticipating what we would nowadays describe as ephemeral installation art. While studying and retracing these pieces, she engaged as an undergraduate on a series of visits and interviews. This interest in the group and the importance given to the relationship between the art historian or critic with living artists also characterises, or even conditions, *Autoritratto*. Indeed, Lonzi creates her 'self-portrait' by producing a text that recounts a discussion with a group of 14 artists belonging to the Arte Povera group, while she, as the art critic who asks them questions, follows, records and reflects their work and contemporaneously addresses her position as a woman struggling in the field of contemporary art, the university, the media and the art system in general. Lonzi's self-portrait assumes and claims the community with which she interacts. Furthermore, the way she composes the final edition of *Autoritratto*, ordering the discussion not chronologically but according to sense-making and the unfolding of different themes, inspired the structure of this current thesis. The case studies that I mention above are

distributed among the chapters according to the function they have in my analysis of the concept of the event.

Autoethnography, postmodern anthropology as well as Lonzi's *Autoritratto* are methods or models to inscribe oneself in a context, certifying which kind of 'I' is telling the story. Lonzi inspires us to push the limits of authenticity while still producing a valid historical document: it is not sufficient to conduct a series of unedited interviews, since an exact transcript tells the reader very little if not contextualised, interpreted and introduced. For this thesis, I opted for two long interviews instead of multitude, and I included a series of 'piece-discussions'. I considered this interview-based material beyond a strict chronology, integrating it into other sources or diverse kinds of rhetoric. Quoting Lonzi as not only an interesting historical case, but also a source of inspiration for developing new formats of research and narration, is a further contribution of this thesis, alongside the two concepts echo-event and eco-event, as well as a transdisciplinary take on feminism, mentioned previously in this introduction.

#### **I.V Geography, temporality, position and bias**

The first event discussed in this thesis happened in September 2012, just after the closure of *Eternal Tour*, in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil (see Chapter 2), and the last one in Spring 2015, at the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, in the frame of *Morgenröte...*, prolonged by the related publication *Into Your Solar Plexus*, which was released the following year (Chapter 4). Four years and four case studies crystallise the temporal dimension in which the events I am interested in took place.

The Brazilian context, historically, politically and culturally, is, then, a point of departure, with stopovers in Geneva, Bern and Beirut. The map and descriptions of events that are henceforth narrated, art projects taking place between 2012 and 2016, are symptomatic of my scale of action, which oscillates between the most local and the most global. This thesis provides, from a personal point of view, a testimony to the experience of globalisation within the art system that is still conditioned by Western habits, parameters and ways of doing things. Biennales are playing a key role – mostly in

Europe,<sup>25</sup> but also elsewhere – together with the rise of the exhibition-organiser or maker, the so-called curator, whether an artist or not. As Stuart Hall declared in 2003:

There has been a certain, rather ambivalent, ‘globalisation’ of the art world. [...] The agendas of inclusion are short-term and have a limited life and scope. There remains a surplus of resistance within the system, which checks, constrains, and absorbs the shock of the breakthrough.<sup>26</sup>

The year 1989 is a key historical reference point through which to understand this current globalisation in the art world and to reflect on my own artistic production in this thesis. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, 1989 was a year during which three milestone exhibitions were produced and recognised by the art establishment as opening up the contemporary art field beyond the hegemonic West: *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Havana Biennial and *Another Story*. In the context of this thesis, and driven by my reflection on the event and its importance in analysing some contemporary art pieces, I can add to these three elements the posthumous publication, also in 1989, of Martin Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*. Furthermore, *The Natural Contract* by Michel Serres was also published in this year. Both texts, written by two very different philosophers, helped form my thinking when dealing with the globalised art discourse as a nomadic artist sometimes taking on a curatorial role – a role that involves the creation of ephemeral yet powerful showcases that must keep in mind the condition of the globe, at least on an ideological basis.

The event, possibly located in art according to Heidegger,<sup>27</sup> is envisioned here within the environment of globalisation arising in 1989, as well as within eco-feminist philosophy,

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example: Larissa Buchholz und Ulf Wuggering, ‘Kunst und Globalisierung’, in Heike Munder and Ulf Wuggenig (ed.), *Das Kunstfeld, Eine Studie über Akteure und Institutionen der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich, 2012, pp. 163–188.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the Context of Globalization’, in Okwui Enwezor, Ute Meta Bauer and Carlos Bausaldo (eds.), *Créolité and Creolization. Documenta 11\_Platform 3*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruint, 2003, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> ‘By no means, however, may the event be represented as an ‘incident’ or a ‘novelty.’ Its truth, i.e., *the truth itself*, essentially occurs only if *sheltered* in art, thinking, poetry, deed.’, Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2012, p. 201.



whose beginnings can be traced back to mid-1970s, and that will be addressed at the end of this thesis, in Chapter 5. If event is the thematic thread of this research, feminism and its different aspects is the position or even bias that I have chosen to adopt. This gendered analytic stand, inspired by my own condition, will unfold in every chapter, bringing different postures or tendencies, according to the artworks, case studies and events that I am discussing. But beyond the many voices that will be heard thanks to the quotes that punctuate this text, it is what I experienced and analysed, first in Beirut in October 2014 and then while formulating my thoughts for this thesis, that has culminated in the creation of the term ‘eco-event’, one of the inventions that this thesis proposes.

## **1. EVENT**

### **1.1 Event as a selection criterion for my data**

In this thesis, I address ephemerals – namely temporary displays in the form of festivals and exhibitions developed in and belonging to the field of contemporary art. The word ‘ephemera’ is fitting here because it avoids any sense of spectacle or entertainment, and thus suits the data that I have chosen to analyse. But how to discuss ephemerals, namely time-based artistic productions, materialised in a variety of media and formats of expression?

I have found that the most appropriate criterion with which to select and discuss the ephemera, i.e., the data in which I analyse in this thesis, is the notion of the ‘event’. In the sense in which I use the word here, ‘event’ is a philosophical concept, and therefore does not belong to artistic or aesthetic categories. However, two main characteristics are particularly relevant in considering the concept of event, and these are also pertinent to the field of art. Firstly, the tandem contingency and necessity. Secondly, the fact that no one can control the reach and impact of an event, which is also the case with an artwork and its interpretation. Interestingly enough, this interaction and exchange between event and artwork has nothing to do with the participative dynamic, but is a spontaneous reaction between two distinguishable entities, leading to unpredictable production: of thought, of feeling, of memory in the case of the event; of analysis, discursivity and creation in the case of art.

One of my main interests in writing this thesis is to create a confrontation between what is usually described as abstract thought (such as logic or mental inquiry – a work of philosophy for example) and the production of contemporary art, which is so often culturally and economically dependent on the art market and hegemonic power structures such as the institutions responsible for its conservation and archiving, as well as the apparatus of historians and experts to valuate and legitimise it. Philosophical concepts allow an escape from such materiality.

At this early stage of the discussion, it is also necessary to state my understanding of art and the way it has been practised through the ephemeral events that are the objects of

my interest in this thesis. The art to which I allude has strong propinquities with that defined by Kant when he coined the term ‘fine art’,<sup>28</sup> namely a cultivated, context-aware and sensitive art, one’s reflection on which provides pleasure exceeding the pure enjoyment or satisfaction produced by erudition or technical virtuosity. Secondly, the artistic manifestations that I discuss here are always produced by a collective, group or organisation of which I am part. Consequently, what will happen during the unfolding of these chapters is an organisational discourse<sup>29</sup> originating in my praxis of art. Furthermore, the very fact that I am a member of the group of people whose activities are discussed leads logically to autoethnography, ‘a field of inquiry that has become eclectic, to say the least. Nevertheless, in all autoethnographic work, in some way or other, “the self and the field become one”.’<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2 Event and positionality

In this chapter dedicated to event, I briefly address the interpretation of this philosophical concept by some important Western thinkers of the twentieth century, in

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Fine art in its full perfection requires much science: e.g., we must know ancient languages, we must have read the authors considered classical, we must know history and be familiar with the antiquities, etc. [...] If art merely performs the acts that are required to make a possible object actual, adequately to our *cognition* of that object, then it is *mechanical* art; but if what it intends directly is [to arouse] the feeling of pleasure, then it is called *aesthetic* art. The latter is either *agreeable* or *fine art*. [...] It is fine art if its purpose is that the pleasure should accompany presentations that are *ways of cognizing* (*Erkenntnisarten*). [...] Fine art [...] is a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication. The very concept of the universal communicability of a pleasure carries with it [the requirement] that this pleasure must be a pleasure of reflection rather than one of enjoyment arising from mere sensation. Hence aesthetic art that is also fine art is one whose standard is the reflective power of judgment, rather than sensation proper.’, Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Indiana, 1987, § 43–50, in particular § 44, Fine Art, pp. 172–173.

<sup>29</sup> Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, David Grant, ‘Discourse and collaboration: the role of conversation and collective identity’, in *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Briarcliff Manor, New York, 2005, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Learmonth and Michael Humphreys, ‘Autoethnography and academic identity: glimpsing business school doppelgängers’, in *Organization*, 19 (1), Sage, London, 2011, p. 103. They quote Amanda Coffey, ‘Ethnography and Self: Reflections and Representations’, in T. May (ed.) *Qualitative Research in Action*, Sage, London, 2002, p. 320.

particular Martin Heidegger, Jean-François Lyotard, Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze.<sup>31</sup> My gaze on their work will help analyse four ephemeral or ‘artistic events’ that I have co-produced and that have been selected as case studies for this thesis. Differing in scale, duration and location, all have already taken place, and a complex, dense, but at the same time, accessible archive of documents (texts, images, publications, reports) has crystallised around them, ready to be investigated and analysed. These four artistic events, namely *Eternal Tour* (2008–12), *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2010–14), *Helvetic Zebra* (2014) and *Morgenröte, Aurora Borealis and Levantin: Into Your Solar Plexus* (2015), constitute points of departure as well as discursive objects for further investigation. Treating them in light of the notion of the *event*, examining the different ways in which this concept has been theorised, and reframing the debate through new case studies will constitute one of the main elements of this thesis. The event will become a milestone to which to return while describing and analysing, as well as a tool that will become enriched and intensified by being used.

Rooted in our global contemporaneity and addressing the highly specialised contemporary art field, *Eternal Tour*, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, *Helvetic Zebra* and *Morgenröte...* each have in common a strong historical referent. In the case of the first, this is the Grand Tour, while in the second, it is the city and state of Geneva, and in the third and the fourth, Switzerland and its self-representation. Indeed, explicitly inscribed in a broad context of investigating European modernity at large, the development (managerial and economical) and aesthetic shape of these art events responded to the postmodern and contemporary parameters conditioning the places where they were developed. History as well as a site-specific and time-specific dynamic<sup>32</sup> are three common streams. A fourth is the fact that these projects were conceptualised, initiated and produced mainly by women, myself included, which will raise the question whether women think and work differently from men, as well as issues of feminism. Because we were often many women working in the context of a curatorial or artistic organisation

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<sup>31</sup> For the relationship of these four philosophers to the concept of event, see Sven-Olov Wallenstein, ‘Framing the Event’ in Sigrid Gareis, Georg Schöllhammer and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Moments, Eine Geschichte der Performance in 10 Akten*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2013, pp. 361–367.

<sup>32</sup> Irene Calderoni, ‘Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties’ in Paul O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, de Appel & Open Editions, Amsterdam, 2011, pp. 63–79.

(although this is not the only reason), this question of identity and gender orientation can be discussed with relevance through the frame of organisational-theory literature, but also philosophy and art history. By doing so, I base my analysis of identity on a common practice where to be a female artist is not a solid or fixed thing, but rather subject to evolution and change, in interaction with others through various activities.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to this gender particularity, the strong connections between postmodernism and feminism will be addressed in Chapter 2, but to introduce this dimension, I will sporadically quote in this chapter some fragments of Chris Kraus' novel *I Love Dick* (1997), a literary work that I consider highly relevant within the frame of this analysis addressing event, contemporary art and feminism. I set this fictional work in a dialogue with certain philosophical texts that deal with language as a vehicle for the apprehension of reality.

And who is the 'I' writing this text? Firstly, on a biopolitical level, the 'I' is a Western female artist trained in Switzerland and Europe, writing in a postmodern era. The implications of this epistemological period, at least my way of interpreting it while working on my subject, will unfold throughout the text. Secondly, on a geographical, political and economic level, globalisation is the dimension in which I am evolving. These facts might be so obvious that it may seem redundant to state them here, but it is a way of situating myself within the standards and expectations of academic disciplines. By doing so, I also hope to clarify the difficulty, or at least share the complexity, with which I am confronted. On the one hand, I lean towards a philosophical concept embedded within ontology, because it provides me with the best and most powerful intellectual tool with which to reflect upon and grasp my subject. On the other hand, the

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<sup>33</sup> 'The social processes implicated in identity formation are complex, recursive, reflexive, and constantly 'under construction'. The appearance of stability in any given 'identity' is, at best, a transient accomplishment: discursive construction and reconstruction emerge as a continuous process and stability appears to be either a momentary achievement or a resilient fiction. Thus, we suggest, 'identity formation' might be conceptualized as a complex, multifaceted process which produces a socially negotiated temporary outcome of the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self-presentation and labeling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance.', Sierk Ybema, Tom Keenoy, Cliff Oswick, Armin Beverungen, Nick Ellis, Ida Sabelis, 'Articulating identities' in *Human Relations*, Volume 62 (3), SAGE Publications, London, 2009, p. 301.

use of the history of art and the work of the critical management scholar Robert Cooper in the following chapters affirms my strong materialistic relationship to contemporary art and the way I have practised it so far. This concrete gaze, belonging to a producer, would seem, at least at first sight, to have nothing ontological about it.

### 1.3 Event and embodiment in organisation theory

This thesis will be therefore contextualised both historically and conceptually by postmodernism, by feminism, by my own personal positionality and by critical management, finding its theoretical focus in philosophy throughout the concept of event. Taking these factors into consideration, especially the author's position of working with women artists, art and curatorial or producer collectives, imposes a specific anchoring within organisational study related to embodiment, and that of women's bodies in particular. Embodied sense-making, embodied knowledge and embodied organisation, from a female perspective, are tied together and belong to the same dynamic: how does the field of organisation study address this theme? The literature on gender in organisations or 'gendered organization'<sup>34</sup> produced thus far by such scholars as Emma Bell, Heather Höpfl, Alison Pullen and Jo Brewis, nourished and inspired by such writers as Hélène Cixous,<sup>35</sup> Julia Kristeva,<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Rosi Braidotti,<sup>37</sup> and

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<sup>34</sup> Joan Acker, 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations', in *Gender and Society*, Volume 4 (2), Sage, London, 1990, pp. 139–158.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example: Mary Phillips, Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, 'Writing Organization as Gendered Practice: Interrupting the Libinal Economy', in *Organization Studies*, Volume 35 (3), Sage, London, 2014, pp. 313–333.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example: Heather Höpfl, 'The Suffering Mother and the Miserable Son: Organizing Women and Organizing Women's Writing', in *Gender, Work and Organization*, Volume 7 (2), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, April 2000, pp. 98–105; Heather Höpfl, 'The Codex, the Codicil and the Codpiece: Some Thoughts on Diminution and Elaboration in Identity Formation', in *Gender, Work and Organization*, Volume 14 (6), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, November 2007, pp. 619–632.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, Torkild Thanem, 'Affective politics in gendered organizations: Affirmative notes on becoming-woman', in *Organization*, Volume 24 (1), Sage, London, 2017, pp. 105–123.

Judith Butler,<sup>38</sup> and generally inspired by queer theory,<sup>39</sup> constitute a relevant theoretical anchoring for the research and the reflexion exposed, narrated and unfolded in this thesis.

The way things are experienced and done in organisations within the parameters of being a woman influences the way one can write. What kind of language can be developed in the context of the academy? How can one position herself in relation to normative written language in the field of social science? ‘Embodied sense-making’, ‘embodied knowledge’ and ‘embodied organisation’ may be complemented here with a formula for embodied writing. As Alison Pullen summarises in her evocatively titled *Writing as Labiaplasty*<sup>40</sup>, a woman’s body indeed has an influence on the way a woman, even in the normative academic sphere, writes: ‘Spaces have been created for embodied writing, leaky writing, dirty writing, feminine writing’.<sup>41</sup> If we accept this fact, the first point to consider would be to understand and to measure which kind of impact it could have, and how to handle it.

Writing differently, writing in embodied ways, violates the writer because academic writing requires some level of conformity (...). When I think of my body with all the sensations that it involves, and my vagina, labia, vulva, they do not seem silent to me; until I become socially and culturally co-opted into rendering them silent. Women’s writing is the same... it invokes the body, with all its leakiness, and yet I write over this materiality to accommodate the institutions who publish my work.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example: Eloisio Moulin de Souza, Jo Brewis, Nick Rumens, ‘Gender, the Body and Organization Studies: Que(e)rying Empirical Research’, in *Gender, Work and Organization*, Volume 23 (6), John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, November 2016, pp. 600–613.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example: Alison Pullen, Torkild Thanem, Melissa Tyler, Louise Wallenberg (eds.), ‘SPECIAL ISSUE ON Sexual Politics, Organizational Practices: Interrogating Queer Theory, Work and Organization’, in *Gender, Work and Organization*, Volume 23 (1), John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, January 2016, pp. 1–87.

<sup>40</sup> Alison Pullen, ‘Writing as Labiaplasty’ in *Organization*, Volume 25 (1), Sage, London, 2018, pp. 123–130.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

This text asks one to mark the importance of women’s genital anatomy, while reflecting on the potential of women’s writing practice. Should we then understand that everything starts with the anatomy? The philosopher Catherine Malabou, well known for her interest on the plasticity of the brain, relates the answer to this question, to the perspective of her PhD thesis supervisor, Jacques Derrida.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, according to the latter in regard to a “priority of anatomy over ontology”:

[...] this priority of the vulva (woman) over the concept (the feminine), is no contradiction. The lips of the vulva form a schema that places flesh *between* the sensible and the concept, without being one more than the other.<sup>44</sup>

Derrida reads the lips of the vulva and their appearance as a ‘schema’ from which something can be learned. The analogy between the lips of the mouth, i.e. those pertaining to language, and those of the vulva, i.e. those pertaining to sexuality, menstruation and giving birth, allows for the consideration of the flesh constituting these two kinds of lips as a subtle bridge or connexion between elements that are often placed in opposition to each other: namely, the mind and the physical senses. The parallel, or even equivalence, between these lips, as portrayed by Malabou (‘women’s lips are as much those of the mouth as those of her vulva’<sup>45</sup>), is unique and does not have any equivalent in the body of the cis-male. His penis has nothing to do with the shape or design of his mouth. No one would contest this obvious difference between the anatomy of a cis-man and that of a cis-woman. Nevertheless, sexual organs do not dictate who a woman or a man can be while interacting in a social and relational context. This difference between biology and behaviour is contained and discussed in gender theory<sup>46</sup>. The context of an organisation at large (whether it be a business, an artist

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<sup>43</sup> Catherine Malabou, *L’avenir de Hegel ou: de la plasticité temporelle en dialectique*, submitted in 1994, Paris, EHESS (first published in English in 2005: *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Doring, Routledge, London).

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference, The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. Carolyn Shread, Polity Press, Malden, Massachusetts, 2011, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> ‘From the perspective of gender theory, the question presents itself in the following terms: must we really avoid the mark of sex in order to think gender? Is all sexualizing of gender outdated? Do beings and bodies benefit from being deneutralized, or should we think, on the contrary, that a certain transcendental disincarnation does harm to both the flesh and the concept of difference?’, in *ibid.*, p. 9.



collective, an art institution or a university), and how to write about it, is ideal for addressing the complexity and richness of the relationship between *sexualised* biology and *gendered* behaviour. In the work of the organisational theorists mentioned above at the beginning of the section 1.3, various thematic strands are identifiable. In the context of this thesis, my interest will not be to choose between, or to argue for, one over another, stating for example that the more ‘sexualised’ perspective is more relevant than the ‘gendered’ one. To this point, the lips’ flesh lying *between* the sensory and the conceptual, as formulated by Derrida, is simultaneously very brave, wise and smart as a status quo, so to speak. So, rather than taking a position, I shall briefly present some recent ideas in gendered and embodied organisational theory and link them to crucial concepts in this thesis, anchoring this research to the field of organisational studies through a gendered and embodiment-centred lens. This focus will then interact with my approach to the field of philosophy in discussing the concept of event and the case studies presented throughout chapters 2–5.

On a spectrum spanning between sexualized embodiment and gendered embodiment, Pullen’s ‘Labiaplasty’ essay<sup>47</sup> is one of the works most strongly linked with sex and anatomy, namely where the woman’s bodily attributes contribute actively and literally to her argumentation and where, as a counterpart to it, an importance is given to ‘the blood that drips down my leg, the pungent odour of being sexually aroused, the gashes and scars of childbirth’.<sup>48</sup> Paradoxically, constant corrections and adjustments have to be made to fulfil a desire to the male standard.<sup>49</sup> Pullen actually draws a direct equivalent between scientific writing and phallogentrism and claims that ‘the feminist management and organisation literature have established an important body of work’ to challenge these two intertwined aspects.<sup>50</sup> Facing such a vision—that academic writing

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Writing as Labiaplasty’, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Women are judged by others and by ourselves and we continue to engage in a long history of correcting, containing, pacifying our bodies through hygiene management, corrective surgery and so on. With writing it is not different; we tidy up our embodied writing which leaks – we edit, cleanse, correct and say what other people want to say. (...) This desire for the normal in writing is the male standard. We desire the male standard. Writing for women thus becomes labiaplasty.’, *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

belongs to men and that women write differently, ‘from the margin’<sup>51</sup>—how does one find a way to contribute to the academic discussion without having to constantly correct or exclude oneself? In Chapter 2, some potential paths or strategies are listed, including that of Rosi Braidotti for example: a form of feminist transdisciplinarity, not only a juxtaposition of different fields or concepts, but also a mix of theoretical, poetic and lyrical modes, a ‘knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers, and levels of the self.’<sup>52</sup> This juxtaposition, or decentralisation from a sole discipline, and this multi-layering allow firstly, in the space of an academic work, the use of a multiplicity of materials, in a non-standard, non-‘masculine’ way, thanks to the different rhetoric at one’s disposal. Secondly, such a semantic and decentralised juxtaposition transforms the negativity often projected onto marginal or peripheral concerns, and themes and perspectives into something acceptable and valuable. Pollen’s dichotomy between the male standard and female ‘labiaplasty’ can then be skirted in a rich and creative manner. This thesis, by bringing into play a variety of fields, materials and forms of approach, is hopefully a good example of such a method.

On our spectrum between sexualized embodiment and gendered embodiment, the bisexual writing on the body proposed by Hélène Cixous<sup>53</sup> finds its place somewhere in the middle. As is well summarized by Mary Phillips, Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes, her bisexuality isn’t about ‘androgyny, nor (...) its everyday meaning of sexual or romantic attraction to both men and women. Instead this bisexuality participates in a playful displacement of gender and sex.’<sup>54</sup> The case study presented in Chapter 2, ‘I got a

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Heather Höpfl’s writing always encouraged ways of writing from the margin, the power of women’s writing on the margin and the centrality of the maternal in women’s writing’, *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects, Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, second edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 66–160.

<sup>53</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Bisexuality: that is, each one’s location in self (repérage en soi) of the presence-variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this “self-permission,” multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body. Now it happens that at present, for historico-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn’t annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number.’, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, in *Signs*, Volume 1 (4), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Summer 1976, p. 884.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Phillips, Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

manicure’ is a good example of the richness generated by a play engaged between sex and gender, but also a narration where the importance of the body is made obvious, as it is the case in any kind of field research: the body of the researcher and her possible assistant, translator and partial guide, but also the body of a performer and his audience. Pollen writes about a ‘corporeal approach’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, ‘whether we like it or not, our bodies are involved in the research methodologies we pursue.’<sup>56</sup> With the body’s engagement follows an exploration of the self as a social practice, and this is where gender, coupled with queer theory, accomplishes a great deconstructive advancement. ‘Gender’ and ‘queer’ in the context of organisation, what finds itself at the very opposite of the sexualized anatomy on our sexualised-gendered embodiment spectrum, engage us in a very postmodern zeitgeist and ‘offer[s] an invitation to those concerned with developing reflexive undoings of gender and of organizational life’<sup>57</sup>. In Chapter 3, the presentation of Aline Morvan’s art projects *Elle s’emploie* and *Abouchement*, as well as an interview that I conducted with her, offer an example of how a young artist reflects on her own condition as a woman engaged in the field of contemporary art, producing artefacts, installations and relational performances and addressing, precisely by deconstructing, her gender in a social practice and context. In Chapters 4 and 5, the body that had so far a key function in the emergence of the events described in Chapters 2 and 3 become more sophisticated. It presents alternately as a vehicle for confession or, depicted in the basement of an art institution, ignored, unseen and at the same time loaded with post-colonial significance (two takes of what embodied knowledge brought to the creation of the ‘echo-event’ concept) in Chapter 4. Or, in the case of Chapter 5, it is finally inscribed within an environment that brings together art, music, film, architecture, sky, tempest and history, and leads to the invention of the ‘eco-event’.

#### **1.4 Defining event through contingency and necessity**

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<sup>55</sup> Alison Pullen, ‘Gendering the Research Self: Social Practice and Corporeal Multiplicity in the Writing of Organizational Research’, in *Gender, Work and Organization*, Volume 13 (3), Blackwell Publishing, London, May 2006, p. 290.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>57</sup> Alison Pullen, Torkild Thanem, Melissa Tyler, Louise Wallenberg, ‘Postscript: Queer Endings/Queer Beginnings’, in *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Although everyone knows more or less what an event is, I will introduce here some definitions formulated by philosophers in order to clarify my own reflections. According to the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2005), an event is:

roughly, a happening, occurrence, or episode [...] Events need not be momentous: the fall of a sparrow is as much an event as the fall of the Roman Empire.

According to most accounts, events need not be instantaneous, nor even of brief duration. Ordinary language attempts to distinguish events from processes, but most modern theories of events show no interest in this distinction.<sup>58</sup>

In the common sense, event is understandable as a rupture in the expectable, or as Alain Badiou states it, an impossible in the possible<sup>59</sup> that appears as an ideal crossroads between 1) the life of the mind that helps us to filter and make sense of reality, and 2) the artistic production born out of instinct, intuition or creativity and materialised thanks to craft and know-how. According to Sven-Olov Wallenstein, the event is the ultimate accident that separates the past from the future,<sup>60</sup> and for Slavoj Žižek, the ‘point of bifurcation’ between ‘solidity’ and ‘mutability’, or between what is and what ‘will be’.<sup>61</sup> With the event, the reasonable, namely what we can expect or understand from reality and its normalcy, is suddenly challenged; in other words, the balance between necessity (what is) and contingency (what could be) is at stake. Here again,

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<sup>58</sup> Penelope Mackie, ‘Event’, in Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2 ed.), <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed 18 July 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Alain Badiou, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, PUF, Paris, 2015, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> ‘This notion [event] viewed in its full generality, is as old as Western metaphysics itself, and could be included in oppositions like being and becoming, substance and accident, eternity and time, intelligible and sensible. The event is that which upsets the solidity of being; as accident it is that which befalls, falls on or over (*ac-cadere*); it arrives so as to separate the past from the future by designating the present as a point of bifurcation; it is that which belongs to the mutability of sensible particulars rather than to the permanence of intelligible universals.’, Wallenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>61</sup> ‘*The effect that seems to exceed its causes* – and the *space* of an event is that which opens up the gap that separates an effect from its causes. Already with this approximate definition, we find ourselves at the very heart of philosophy, since causality is one of the basic problems philosophy deals with: are all things connected with causal links? Does everything that exists have to be grounded in sufficient reasons? Or are there things that somehow happen out of nowhere? How then, can philosophy help us to determine what an event – an occurrence not grounded in sufficient reasons – is and how it is possible?’, Slavoj Žižek, *Event, A Philosophical Journey Through a Concept*, Melville House Publishing, Brooklyn and London, 2014, p. 5.

even if we have a common understanding of the meaning of these two terms, in philosophy, they can have different senses and applications. In the field of logics, for example, Edward Jonathan Lowe uses the terms in his text ‘Contingent and Necessary Statements’, where he distinguishes between a true statement and a false one.<sup>62</sup> From an existential point of view, as expressed by Jack Mackintosh, the criterion by which to make a distinction between the necessary or contingent is an entity’s sustainability.<sup>63</sup>

Are these criteria, whether logical (true or not) or existential (sustainable or not), applicable and relevant in the context of contemporary art? Indeed they are, and they can lead to interesting reasoning and elaboration. For example, a work of art is a fiction, a fantasy, a vision, an intuitive projection, a research project and a process before coming into existence. In that sense, it is neither true nor false. Furthermore, whether object, project or performance, the artwork can be intended to disappear, or to transform over time, and thus need not be sustainable in a physical sense. Once it has been formulated, the work of art is made, titled and signed, and on the ontological level, it exists, and will still be seen as a singular work of art even if destroyed, stolen or lost.

These few lines quickly show the numerous questions raised when considering the event and these two corollary notions, necessity and contingency, as a framework through which to approach four case studies of contemporary art.

## **1.5 Contingency and necessity in the context of art making**

*Contingency* greatly influences artists’ productions, as well as their archiving and documentation: every artist knows that logistics, economics, network, access to

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<sup>62</sup> ‘A necessary statement (or proposition) is one which *must* be true – where this ‘must’ may be understood as being expressive of logical necessity [...] such as epistemic, physical, or metaphysical necessity. A contingent statement is one which *may* be true and may be false – that is, which *need not* be false and *need not* be true. Thus, if a statement is contingent, neither it nor its negation is necessary’, Edward Jonathan Lowe, ‘Contingent and necessary statements’, in Honderich, *op. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> ‘Entities are held to exist necessarily if natural processes will not lead to their cessation, contingently if such processes will lead to their cessation. This distinction stems from Plato, who, concentrating on the contrast with mathematical and other abstract entities, emphasized the corruptibility of ordinary spatio-temporal objects.’, Jack Mackintosh, ‘Necessary and contingent existence’, in *ibid.*

materials and intellectual resources dictate and limit what he or she can achieve. Since it is so rooted in its material and cultural context, is it relevant, therefore, or even possible, to use a philosophical concept such as metaphysical necessity to address artistic production? I believe that it is challenging, interesting and enriching to do so, since both art and philosophy are driven just as much by *necessity* as by contingency. I make the distinction here between metaphysical necessity and epistemic necessity (often expressed in terms of certainty, as a knowledgeable statement) or logical necessity (what follows from the laws of logic alone, e.g. ‘If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal’).<sup>64</sup>

The possible alliance, conjunction, articulation or confrontation between contingency and necessity through art making and reflecting on art is the conceptual cornerstone of this thesis. To phrase it another way: if you can produce reality, then how does it work?

In his discussion of necessity and contingency mentioned above, Žižek characteristically refers to many different sources. He begins by summarising Hegel’s thesis ‘that, in the course of the dialectical development things become “what they are”’,<sup>65</sup> as well as reminding us, quoting the philosopher Peter Hallward, of the pivotal event of Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon: ‘Caesar’s only task is to become worthy of the events he has been created to embody. *Amor fati*.’<sup>66</sup> He then goes on to consider love as a major event, providing another way to help us understand the transition from contingency to necessity:

Falling in love is a contingent encounter, but once it occurs, it appears as necessary, as something towards which my entire life was moving. Lacan described this reversal of contingency into necessity as a shift from the ‘stops not

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<sup>64</sup> Lowe attributes this distinction to the logician Saul Kripke: ‘The notion that there is a kind of objective necessity which is at once stronger than physical necessity and yet not simply identifiable with logical necessity owes much to the work of Kripke. Logically necessary truths are, it seems, knowable a priori, but Kripke argues that metaphysical necessity is, typically, only discoverable a posteriori – that is on the basis of empirical evidence.’, Lowe, *op. cit.*; see also Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

<sup>65</sup> Žižek, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Hallward, *Out of This World*, Verso Books, London, 2006, p. 54, quoted by Žižek in *ibid.*, p. 128.

being written’ to the ‘doesn’t stop being written’: first, love ‘stops not being written,’ it emerges through a contingent encounter; then, once it is here, it ‘doesn’t stop being written,’ it imposes on a lover the work of love, the continuous effort to inscribe into his/her being all the consequences of love, to structure his/her love around the fidelity to the event of love.<sup>67</sup>

But, as we shall see with Heidegger, and to a certain extent also with Deleuze – in particular when it comes to the event, due to its ontological character – the temporal succession from ‘contingency’ to ‘necessity’ as a chronological cause and effect need not apply. Deleuze and Guattari write: ‘There is a dignity of the event that has always been inseparable from philosophy, as *amor fati*: being equal to the event, or becoming the offspring of one’s own events – my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it.’<sup>68</sup> Or, as Heidegger put it: ‘The event is the self-eliciting and self-mediating center in which all essential occurrence of the truth of being must be thought back in advance. This thinking back in advance to that center is the inventive thinking of being. And all concepts of being must be uttered from there.’<sup>69</sup>

Necessity and contingency, two strong corollary components of the event as well as of Heidegger’s formula ‘to think back in advance’, reveal the importance of the *time* factor in the frame of the reflection that I am developing. Time is chronology and is also the place to question chronology. With time, ephemeral or sustainable items can be measured and valued. The real has to exist in time in order for event to occur. In which time does event inscribe itself? Does it have a duration, a beginning or an end? Who can state better what time is than those who experience it? I cannot see or think time; I can only get an intuitive idea of it while considering its effect on things and beings: they grow older. In that indirect perception of time, event has a very particular function.

## 1.6 Event’s time

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<sup>67</sup> Žižek, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>68</sup> Joë Bousquet, ‘Ma blessure existait avant moi. Je suis né pour l’incarner.’, *Les Capitales*, Le Cercle du livre, Paris, 1955, p. 103, quoted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 159.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2012, pp. 58–59.

Over recent years, the French philosopher Claude Romano has published several books on the subject of the event (and its relation to time),<sup>70</sup> while making extensive recourse to the writings of Heidegger. As he explains, following Augustin, philosophers as diverse as Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger have maintained that the subject determines time. According to them, time is not to be found in things, but rather, originates from the subject's acts, attitudes or behaviours when expecting or remembering, anticipating or taking decisions, and therefore *temporising*, as a whole, the future, past and present. Romano wonders how such a 'subjectivation' of time occurred in metaphysics. Could phenomenology and hermeneutics make another path possible, in order to apprehend the event differently as a human experience, as a *phenomenon* in time? Such a shift of attention from subject to phenomenon is close to the approach that I will adopt while describing and discussing artistic events in the following chapters.

Encompassing necessity, contingency, time, 'subjectivation', phenomenon, even art according to Heidegger, the event is a rich and consistent philosophical concept.

## 1.7 Event and artist

Technically, I could have analysed the four cases studies featured in this thesis from the perspective of the artist's intention, motivation or curriculum. But I am much more interested in the artistic event as something thrown into the world, offered to the audience and to history, and in how this might differ from the initial projection of what it could be. I wish to make a shift in focus away from the concern of the 'I', the self, the biography, the artist's heroism or victimisation, narcissism or desperate need for attention – all the concerns about what the artist has endure in order to create her work – towards an interest in what actually happens when the artwork goes out into the world, letting it be just that in its own right. As Deleuze writes:

The event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us [...] It is what must be understood,

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<sup>70</sup> Claude Romano, *L'événement et le monde*, PUF, Paris, 1998; *L'événement et le temps*, PUF, Paris, 1999.



willed and represented in that which occurs [...] to become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event.<sup>71</sup>

For a numbers of years, mostly in collective, self-organised structures, I have curated exhibitions and initiated, organised and produced art festivals. This PhD thesis gives me the opportunity to elaborate on these past experiences through the prism of the event, and through other theoretical and discursive material, intersecting with diverse fields. In the context of contemporary art, I have created ephemera, moments, sometimes documented by publications. I have worked towards what I now consider, with a retrospective gaze, to be ‘artistic events’. *Event*, is not to be understood here as performance or spectacle, but rather, an artistic phenomenon strongly connected to, nourished by and worked out through philosophy, in a phenomenologist tradition. The discipline of phenomenology is concerned only with the consideration of phenomena and their description,<sup>72</sup> excluding as irrelevant any hypothetical thought, causes, analysis or metaphysical enquiry. The phenomenological method presupposes that a valid description is not just a *way* to understand, but is actually already an understanding. Taking a step further in this descriptive discipline, hermeneutics has stated that mere description will not suffice. In hermeneutics, there is no immediate, pure and transparent phenomenon: rather, the phenomenon has to be apprehended and interpreted in order to be correctly ‘seen’.<sup>73</sup> The artistic events that will be discussed in this thesis will be approached as complex phenomena deserving a hermeneutic treatment.

The event contains and depends upon its reception, comment or reflection, embracing diverse temporal milestones and interfaces that can even be stretched out of the event’s actual, mechanical and technical development. In this sense, there is no direct need for simultaneous recognition, understanding or interpretation, which can be applied at a later date. Indeed, an event can be identified and nourished remotely, without becoming a documentation or an archive of itself, but instead becoming more and more what it is.

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<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, with Charles Stivale, The Athlone Press, London, 1990, p. 149.

<sup>72</sup> Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, Hamburger Ausgabe, Munich, 1968, Bd. XII, p. 432.

<sup>73</sup> Claude Romano, *L'événement et le temps* (second edition), PUF, Paris, 2012, pp. 2–3.

This process of intensification seems to require a return to the event, a constant reconsideration of what it can or could be. Do these interpretative endeavours towards this phenomenon, the artistic event that you create or assist, guarantee or provoke any possession or attribution by its creator or viewer? Can it be just my own? The notion of property is too passive to be considered relevant. The event means appropriation: a creative process, conceptual and material, a powerful moment of transformation from one stage to another one. In that sense, a fitting metaphor for the event is the notion of puberty. This is a time when surprising things happen to you, when childhood is transformed and suddenly gone forever, when there are no words to describe what you are experiencing, when your body is no longer that of a child, and nothing can be done about it, since the pubertal event has already taken place. This is the power of the event: it is lost forever, but it also stays radically in and with you as a shaping experience. Or, as I have written elsewhere, 'If time equals flesh, an event may shape anatomy.'<sup>74</sup> Can you ever fully recover from your puberty? Is it possible to completely grasp, rather than simply accept, what it really means to be a sexualised or a gendered body? The artistic events on which I have worked over the years were not economically sustainable nor reasonable. Unbalanced for so many reasons, they are able to be – and, thanks to their artistic consistency, they have been – a driving force by which I could not but be transformed. They had an impact on my existence. What about writing about event: is it part of the event or just a comment on it? Can it be part of the artistic event while engaging in a retrospective process? Can you possibly differentiate the event from its recognition, analysis and narrative? Can you delay the interpretation of an event, as Heidegger did with part of his philosophical oeuvre, if you consider that this oeuvre, or at least his book about 'event', constitutes an event?

### **1.8 *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event), 1936–38, 1989***

Although written in 1936–38, Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* was not published until 1989. Thus it belongs to his posthumous oeuvre, for which he arranged in his will and which still continues today, firstly under the supervision of his son Hermann Heidegger and now of his grandson Arnulf Heidegger. Interestingly, this delay in the public release of such a work, considered his second magnum opus after

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<sup>74</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, Humboldt Books, Milan, 2016, p. 31.

*Sein und Zeit* (1927), took place in the same year as the fall of the Berlin Wall and what is identified as the rise of the globalised art world.<sup>75</sup> Since readers are conditioned in their reception of a text by the epoch in which they live, can this book be considered contemporary to the moves and ideas at stake in 1989 in the Western world or elsewhere, beyond the technical, material and mechanical aspects of its fabrication and distribution? And if yes, how?

When I read the book's frontispiece:

What was held back in long hesitation  
Is herewith made fast in an indicative way  
As the straightedge of configuration<sup>76</sup>

and later, 'Philosophy *opens* experience but for that reason can precisely *not* ground history *immediately*',<sup>77</sup> I answer yes to that question. I understand that Heidegger was highly conscious of the complex character of his book, as well as aware of the consequences of its delayed reception and interpretation when published years after it was written. When I read: 'in the age of transition from metaphysics to the thinking of being in its historicity',<sup>78</sup> or 'The great philosophies are towering mountains, unconquered and unconquerable. Yet they bestow on the land its highest, and they point into its rocky depths. As they stand they focus the gaze, and in each case they form a sphere of vision: they endure visibility and concealment',<sup>79</sup> as well as:

As for those who will some day grasp this, they do not need 'my' attempt, for they must have paved their own way to it. They must be able to think what is attempted here *in such manner* that they believe it comes to them from afar and is nevertheless what is most proper to them, to which they are appropriated as ones who are needed and who therefore have neither the desire nor the

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<sup>75</sup> Charles Esche, 'Making Art Global: A Good Place or a No Place?', in *Making Art Global (Part 1)*, The Third Havana Biennial 1989, Afterall Books, Vienna and Eindhoven, 2011, pp. 8–13.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

opportunity to focus on ‘themselves’ [...] And therefore what is in effect there throughout is *history*, which denies itself to historiology, for history does not simply let the past appear but, instead, in all things thrusts over into the future.<sup>80</sup>

I understand Heidegger as being a postmodern thinker,<sup>81</sup> encouraging readers to practise or even *experiment* with their own thought, in their own time, as well as thinking retrospectively while reading him.

## 1.9 How to read Heidegger

Heidegger’s assistant, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, with whom the *Complete Works* were generally conceived and initiated, always made clear that the author expressly wanted his texts to be published without any critical apparatus or index, for a pedagogical reason: readers should find their way by themselves.<sup>82</sup> Chris Kraus also formulates, in her novel *I Love Dick*, the complexity of finding one’s own way while reading demanding texts such as Heidegger’s, without footnotes or secondary literature.<sup>83</sup>

In my own case, I must have the courage to invest in and use material that I can hardly grasp – is Heidegger even graspable? – but still find so inspiring and challenging with regards to my own interests, work and art practice. Is this use of Heidegger in the frame of this PhD thesis inappropriate, or is it just an example of the way in which academic culture promotes transdisciplinarity in these postmodern times? How far does philosophy belong to its self, its system, its field and expertise – what Nietzsche has

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.

<sup>82</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann, ‘L’édition des cours de Heidegger dans son édition intégrale de dernière main’ in *Etudes heideggeriennes*, n°2, Dunker & Humblot, Berlin, 1986, p. 170.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Looking at the text as *the way in*. Given that disposition, no text is too difficult or obscure and everything becomes an object of study. (Study’s good, because it microcosms everything – if you understand everything within the walls of what you study you can identify other walls too, other areas of study. Everything’s separate and discrete and there is no macrocosm, really. When there are no walls there is no study, only chaos. And so you break it down.)’, Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, 1997, Serpent’s Tail edition 2016, London, p. 116.

called its *Unzeitgemäß* (untimely dimension) – and how far is it applicable or connected to other disciplines, whether the natural or social sciences or humanities? Can philosophical terms, formulas, paragraphs or excerpts be simply appropriated and made use of in a fragmentary and utilitarian way, as in this thesis? Who can license this kind of usage, if not the philosopher himself? Reading Robert Cooper, for example his texts where organizational analysis is enriched and discussed together with post-modernism,<sup>84</sup> I found an encouraging way of doing so, compiling, recomposing, readjusting, and using different kinds of theoretical material in parts, yet for a precise goal. This was done while remaining perfectly conscious of having a foot in some other fields, following neither thoroughly nor exhaustively the intellectual path that these concepts would require in their traditionally relegated scientific or artistic fields. Furthermore, and in light of this question, does it matter in the case of Heidegger that his philosophical *œuvre* is not yet fully available to us (there are still some volumes to be published), and that its size and complexity already make its great evolution through the years almost impossible to grasp?<sup>85</sup>

An example of this difficulty is raised by the posthumous publication of Heidegger's work *Black Notebooks* in 2014,<sup>86</sup> where the philosopher's anti-Semitic views become explicit.<sup>87</sup> The release of *Black Notebooks* has provoked lively discussion and debate among philosophers and the Western cultural field in general, particularly of the recurrent issue: how far was Heidegger's thought or philosophy contaminated by the Nazi ideology, becoming itself an ideology?<sup>88</sup> When confronting the content of the *Black*

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Cooper and Gibson Burrell, 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: an Introduction', *Organization Studies*, 9/1, London, Sage, 1988, pp. 91-112; Robert Cooper, 'Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 3: the Contribution of Jacques Derrida', *Organization Studies*, 10/4, London, Sage, 1989, pp. 479-502.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Philippe Arjakovsky, François Fédier, Hadrien France-Lanord, 'Avant-propos' in *Dictionnaire Martin Heidegger, Vocabulaire de sa pensée*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2013, pp. 9-20.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII-VX (Schwarze Hefte 1939-1941)*, Gesamtausgabe 96, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> See Peter Trawny (editor of Heidegger's *Complete Works*), *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung (Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy)*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 2014, and *Freedom to Fail: Heidegger's Anarchy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Taminiaux, 'The Philosophical Stakes of Arendt's Genealogy of Totalitarianism', in *Social Research*, The New School for Social Research, New York, vol. 69, n°2, 2002.

*Notebooks*, which no one can ignore, one should operate some clear distinctions between what belongs to philosophy and what is ideology, what should be reflected upon and what is an illegitimate, wrong and ill-considered belief. When dealing with past and also current fascist ideologies, this is perhaps the best one can do. Indeed, do we have any other option? All important twentieth-century philosophical productions, at least Continental ones,<sup>89</sup> arise from an implicit or explicit reaction towards Heidegger. By following the censors and, for example, erasing Heidegger from educational programmes, access to a great part of the Western contemporary intellectual patrimony would be denied. Those practising philosophy have no choice but to cope with what is nowadays acknowledged as his anti-Semitism. Luckily, there are other criteria by which to measure the interest, quality or scope of an intellectual work, or Nazism's triumph over thought would have to be retrospectively celebrated.<sup>90</sup>

Ultimately, without even getting into the discussion opened up by Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1962), *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes (1967) or Michel Foucault's *What Is an Author?* (1969), we must ask what control an author or artist can expect to command once their work becomes public. We can assume that Heidegger's decision to allow certain of his texts and his thinking to come to light only after his death was so that he did not have to personally legitimise or explain more than what he had already written.

### **1.10 Heidegger: artistic event**

Undeniably, Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* is the most fruitful, powerful and deep source, although the most difficult, and challenging – 'esoteric' Wallenstein would say – all of which qualities are fantastically entangled in this extract:

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<sup>89</sup> A milestone postcolonial example of this, where both the writings of Heidegger and Marx are used in order to study India, is Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Claude Romano, 'L'idée d'antisémitisme philosophique est un non-sens' in *Critique, Heidegger: la boîte noire des Cahiers*, vol. LXX, n° 811, December 2014, Paris, pp. 1008-1018. See also, in the same review: Marc Cerisuelo, 'Notre jeunesse? Lost in Heidegger', pp. 964-972; Jean-Claude Monod, 'La double énigme des *Cahiers noirs*', pp. 973-987.

To speak of the relation of the human being to beyng and, conversely, of the relation of beyng to the human being makes it seem as if beyng essentially occurred, with regard to the human being, as something *over and against*, as an object.

But the human being as Da-sein is appropriated by beyng as the event and thus belongs to the event itself.

Beyng 'is' neither round about humans nor does it merely vibrate right through them as through beings. Instead, being appropriates Dasein and only thus essentially occurs *as event*.

By no means, however, may the event be represented as an 'incident' or a 'novelty'. Its truth, i.e., *the truth itself*, essentially occurs only if *sheltered* in art, thinking, poetry, deed. It therefore requires the steadfastness of the *Da-sein* that repudiates all the semblant immediacy of mere representation.

Beyng essentially occurs as the event.<sup>91</sup>

What does 'beyng' mean in comparison with 'being'? How to interpret 'Dasein' and 'Da-sein'? What about 'truth' and 'event'? These words, the most commonly used concepts in Heidegger's system of thought, and the object of multiple studies and investigations,<sup>92</sup> are constantly recalled, reinvested and repeated throughout *Contributions to Philosophy*. Gaining intensity and depth each time they are reiterated, they become more and more interwoven and interdependent, escaping any stabilised and final definition, at least in my perception. Thanks to this constant repetition and reworking of certain concepts, with the slow addition of further layers, many variations<sup>93</sup> regarding *event* unfold. Heidegger's work forms a kind of poetic incantation driven by a circular dynamic rather than the linear methodology of classical philosophical treatises. In that sense, the extract quoted above is almost metonymic.

What interests me here? Why do I consider Heidegger the most appropriate source for investigating contemporary artistic events? On the one hand, according to him, an event

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<sup>91</sup> Heidegger, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>92</sup> For an introduction to certain of Heidegger's key concepts, see, for example: Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries, Blackwell Publishers, Maiden, Massachusetts, 1999.

<sup>93</sup> Massin, *De la variation*, Le Promeneur, Gallimard, Paris, 2000.

is an occurrence ‘*sheltered* in art, thinking, poetry, deed’, and not ‘an incident’ or a ‘novelty’.<sup>94</sup> An event does not take place on its own, but is something that the artist or the thinker makes happen. An event is something for which we, as artists, thinkers, poets and doers, work. But on the other hand, Heidegger’s event is ontological, precisely because *sheltered* in art. His ontological understanding of art, his way of binding art together with ontology, is stated in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, originally presented as a lecture course at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau in the summer semester of 1935:

*Technē* means neither art nor skill, and it means nothing like technology in the modern sense. We translate *technē* as ‘knowing’. But this requires explication. Knowing here does not mean the result of mere observations about something present at hand that was formerly unfamiliar. Such items of information are always just accessory, even if they are indispensable to knowing. Knowing, in the genuine sense of *technē*, means initially and constantly looking out beyond what, in each case, is directly present at hand. [...] For this reason, the Greeks call authentic artwork and art *technē* in the emphatic sense, because art is what most immediately brings Being – that is, the appearing that stands there in itself – to stand in something present in the work. The work of art is work not primarily because it is worked, made, but because it puts Being to work in a being. [...] Because art, in a distinctive sense, brings Being to stand and to manifestation in the work as a being, art may be regarded as the ability to set to work, pure and simple, as *technē*. Setting-to-work is putting Being to work *in* beings, a putting-to-work that opens up. This opening-up and keeping open, which surpasses and puts to work, is knowing. The passion of knowing is questioning. Art is knowing and hence is *technē*. Art is not *technē* merely because it involves ‘technical’ skills, tools, and materials with which to work.<sup>95</sup>

### 1.11 Ontological understanding of art: Heidegger and Kraus

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<sup>94</sup> Heidegger, 2012, *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000, pp. 169–170.



Delivered to students more or less a year before the elaboration of *Contributions to Philosophy, Introduction to Metaphysics* was published for the first time in 1953,<sup>96</sup> without footnotes or index. It elegantly reveals Heidegger's use of Greek words and his way of translating them. Translation equals interpretation, and in this case, I would even add hermeneutics. For example, in the paragraph above, the word '*technē*', written 'τέχνη' in the German version of 1953, can signify know-how or technology, among other meanings. By deciding to associate or combine 'knowing' with 'art' in 'τέχνη', Heidegger introduces a concept that is now fundamental to current discussions in the newly arising academic field of 'artistic research', namely knowledge production achieved through art practice (see Chapter 4). His understanding of τέχνη, knowing and art, articulated with this precise statement: 'The passion of knowing is questioning. Art is knowing and hence is *technē*', has some connection with Kant's: 'aesthetic art that is also fine art is one whose standard is the reflective power of judgment, rather than sensation proper', briefly discussed at the very beginning of this chapter. For Heidegger, questioning is reflecting, and 'the *questioners* – alone and without resorting to any magic charm – place the new and highest degree of steadfastness in the middle of being, in the essential occurrence of being (the event) as the middle'.<sup>97</sup> Interestingly enough, the questioner might be philosopher or poet.<sup>98</sup>

Heidegger's emphasis on the 'necessity of thinking and questioning' in art-making seems to be by far his most unique and original contribution to 'artistic event'. Furthermore, the study of the principles of pure being, or rather the tendency to experiment with being through art or philosophy, is for those practising art, a necessity. Similarly, Chris Kraus, the central character in *I Love Dick* by the author of the same name, states a need to write in order to survive.<sup>99</sup> A few pages later, she quotes from an 'amazing text

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<sup>96</sup> Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen.

<sup>97</sup> Heidegger, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup> 'Who, for instance, joins in traveling the long path of the grounding of the truth of being? Who surmises anything of the *necessity* of thinking and questioning, that necessity which requires neither the crutches of the 'whence' nor the supports of the 'whither'? [...] The poet, more easily than others, veils the truth in images and presents it that way to the gaze for preservation. Yet how does the thinker shelter the truth of being, if not in the ponderous slowness of the course of questioning steps and their attendant consequences?', *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>99</sup> 'I can't stop writing even for a day – I'm doing it to save my life. These letters're the first time I've ever tried to talk about ideas because I need to, not just to amuse or entertain. [...] To be female still means being trapped within the purely psychological.

written in 1976' by another female artist, Hannah Wilke, who describes a comparable ontological intensity, where the struggle to find an appropriate form for one's own existence is at stake.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Kraus writes: 'I think our story is performative philosophy'.<sup>101</sup> *Performative philosophy* is a powerful alternative to Heidegger's words, when it comes to describing the necessity, the deepest drive felt by artists or thinkers, when working for their *event*. Kraus is not only concerned with the epoch of which she is part – i.e. postmodernism – but also, and very deeply, with how women (not just herself, but the many colleagues and peers that she chooses to depict), work and formulate what they need to make public.

I will not discuss here whether or not Heidegger's 'Being', or 'beyng', is gendered, nor whether ontology can escape sexualised or ethnic terms, since this would require another thesis. Rather, I will address this issue as one of 'positionality' – how do women practice art, write about art or philosophy, under the postmodern paradigm? I will refer not only to Kraus's work, but also to that of Carla Lonzi and Rosi Braidotti (see Chapter 2).

Beside the question of the artist's or thinker's sexualised body, Kraus' formula *performative philosophy* in relation to the event according to Heidegger, also reveals the importance of words and languages in the work one has to do while facing ontological questions. Doesn't ontology, based on Ancient Greek philosophy, a language no longer spoken, automatically involve translation? Obviously Heidegger and his German-speaking predecessors needed to translate Greek to German, as seen with τέχνη/technē, Derrida Greek to French, and I Greek to English for this thesis rooted in the dominant Anglo-Saxon academic standard. Translation is not only a highly complex linguistic

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No matter how dispassionate or large a vision of the world a woman formulates, whenever it includes her own experience and emotion, the telescope's turned back to her. Because emotion's just so terrifying the world refuses to believe that it can be pursued as discipline, as form. Dear Dick, I want to make the world more interesting than my problems. Therefore, I have to make my problems social.', Kraus, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–180.

<sup>100</sup> 'Rearranging the touch of sensuality with a residual magic from laundry lint or later loosely laid out like love vulnerably exposed ... continually exposing myself to whatever situation occurs ... Gambling as well as gambolling ... To exist instead of being an existentialist, to make objects instead of being one.', *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

process, but also entails transformation of the very meaning, as clearly stated by Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936): ‘Roman thinking takes over the Greek words without the corresponding and equiprimordial experience of what they say, without the Greek word. The rootlessness of Western thinking begins with this translation.’<sup>102</sup>

How should one operate such a translation when describing and analysing artworks as ontological *event*? What kind of narrative should one develop when it comes to describing them? Which kind of information is useful while describing or referring to them? How do philosophy and the history of art oppose and complement each other? What does someone actually want to know – which kind of knowledge – while looking at an artwork or any artistic component? How do analytical and historical components nurture themselves?

### **1.12 Shoes: between ontology and materialism**

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger raises these questions while analysing Van Gogh’s painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1885): ‘The artwork lets us know what the shoes, in truth, are.’<sup>103</sup> But what kind of truth is actually at stake? The American art historian Meyer Shapiro responded to Heidegger with his famous essay, ‘The Still Life as a Personal Object – A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh’ (1968), criticising what he judged to be a flawed, superficial and inconsistent analysis of the painting because it ignores basic facts relating to Van Gogh’s life and intentions. At the very beginning of his text, Heidegger asks whether one can find the origin of a work of art only by thinking about art. Of course, the work of art has to be made by someone, a person defined as an artist, but beyond this initial gesture by the maker, what is it about this newly created thing that belongs to the art and not to something else? In a way, Heidegger is asking, what is it that makes this piece of work ‘art’, and by extension, what is the thingness of a thing? After a number of tentative approaches, he faces a dead end, since his logical approach fails to project him further:

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<sup>102</sup> Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–17.

This effort of thought seems to meet with its greatest resistance in attempting to define the thingness of the thing, for what else could be the reason for the failure of the above attempts? The inconspicuous thing withdraws itself from thought in the most stubborn of ways. Or is it rather that this self-refusal of the mere thing, this self-contained refusal to be pushed around, belongs precisely to the essential nature of the thing? Must not, then, this disconcerting and uncommunicative element in the essence of the thing become intimately familiar to a thinking which tries to think the thing? If so, we should not force our way into the thing's thingness.<sup>104</sup>

The next move for Heidegger, whose quest remains consistent, is to describe an object created by art: 'quite apart from any philosophical theory [...] To this end, a pictorial presentation suffices. We will take a well-known painting by van Gogh.'<sup>105</sup> For Heidegger, then, an artwork will allow him to pursue his thoughts with new questions, still related to ontological matter, and never concerned with the artist's intention or attachment, materialistic or affective, to the depicted object. This is precisely the point on which Shapiro voices his objection, claiming the importance of another truth – that of attribution: who has painted this, why and how? 'In his account of the picture he has overlooked the personal and physiognomic in the shoes that made them so persistent and absorbing a subject for the artist (not to speak of the intimate connection with the specific tones, forms, and brush-made surface of the picture as a painted work).'<sup>106</sup>

In the fourth and last section of *The Truth of Painting* (1978), 'Restitutions of the truth in pointing [*pointure*]',<sup>107</sup> Jacques Derrida confronts 'the professors' Heidegger and Shapiro, further enriching the possible interpretations of Van Gogh's painting by adding information about the intentions of both authors and their two kinds of truth. He demonstrates how philosophy and art history can operate differently but in a complementary manner if one adopts a postmodern epistemology where one discourse,

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> Meyer Shapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object – A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh', *Theory and Philosophy of Art, Style, Artist, and Society, Selected Papers IV*, Georg Braziller, New York, 1994, p. 139.

<sup>107</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth of Painting* (1978), trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987.

deemed pertinent in its own terms, does not prevail over another equally valid discourse whose criteria belong to another field. In this methodological milestone, which takes the form of a ‘polylogue’, Derrida uses the subtleties of language to let us understand the deep implications of wording. He achieves not only a new interpretation of the painting, but also an extended piece of literature, nourished by philosophy as well as the history of art. As a methodological case study that considers both Heidegger’s ontology and the writing of art history – Shapiro being emblematic of this field – Derrida’s text is an encouraging example of how erudition and a thorough reading of the ‘authors considered classical’,<sup>108</sup> can lead to a new and interesting piece of art, both in terms of content and form, dealing with art, and expressing the polyphonic truths of postmodernism. In the present thesis, philosophy and art history will be complemented by organisational theory and autoethnography. Such fields can help grasp how artworks are produced collectively, and illuminate the concrete side of art-making: how things are made, and what they provoke within the team of protagonists.

Due to his intensive preoccupation with metaphysics and his acknowledgement of the crucial function of art in his understanding of ‘event’, Heidegger has been an important example with which to begin this study, however brief the analysis. But what of other philosophers of the twentieth century?

### **1.13 Lyotard, Badiou, Deleuze**

Numerous thinkers, philosophers and theorists have attempted to untangle and articulate the event’s multilayered ontological nature, but of those who have focused on this question, I have chosen to briefly examine the interpretations put forward by Jean-François Lyotard, Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze Lyotard, as a complement to Heidegger.<sup>109</sup> None of these three thinkers has directly framed his analysis in art, as Heidegger does, but switching to them allows us to make a mental adjustment, or translation, in order to study our subject through the lens of other terminologies and

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<sup>108</sup> Kant, *op. cit.*, § 44, *Fine Art*.

<sup>109</sup> To a lesser degree, Geoffrey Bennington (e.g. *Lyotard, Writing the Event*, 1998), Benjamin Noys (e.g., *The Provocations of Alain Badiou*, 2003) and Nicolas Truong (e.g. *Eloge de l’amour*, 2014) could be added to this list, although the latter two tend to defend or otherwise engage with the theoretical contributions of my chosen three thinkers.

systems. Lyotard will help illustrate the way in which one can write about artistic event by means of the constant oscillation between signifier and signified. The retrospective aspect of any event, including its titling, will be considered via Alain Badiou. The ontological dimension of the four events chosen as research corpus will be explored in relation to Gilles Deleuze's system of thought, as well as that of Heidegger. Through the contributions of these three principle thinkers, contoured and garnished with the critical observations of other commentators, I hope to establish a panorama of the tenets of the event that I will later apply to art events and specifically to my body of research.

The positionality and reflexivity implied by my initiation, production and participation in the events *Eternal Tour*, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, *Helvetic Zebra* and *Morgenröte ...* require me to remain on what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have defined as the 'plane of immanence' directly correlated with the event itself. Indeed, if we have seen that for Heidegger the concept of event is art and/or thought, according to Deleuze and Guattari, concepts are events, and therefore events are concepts:

Concepts are events, but the plane [of immanence] is the horizon of the events, the reservoir of purely conceptual events: not the relative horizon that functions as a limit, which changes with an observer and encloses observable states of affairs, but the absolute horizon, independent of any observer, which makes the event as concept independent of a visible state of affairs in which it is brought about.<sup>110</sup>

As previously explained, I am interested in shifting from a focus on the author (or, for that matter, the observer – I am not concerned here with participatory art) towards a focus on the generating function of the event itself. Given this, a study in the field of organizational and social theory of art and aesthetics, is fruitful, and this will be conducted in Chapter 3 as a parallel or complementary track.<sup>111</sup> More than 'observing a

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<sup>110</sup> *What is Philosophy?*, 1991, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 36.

<sup>111</sup> Antonio Strati, 'Organizations viewed through the lens of aesthetics', *Organization*, 3,2, 1996, pp. 209–218; Wolfgang Welch, 'Aestheticization processes: phenomena, distinctions and prospects', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13, 1, 2011, pp. 1–24.

design work’,<sup>112</sup> this thesis is about designing a work after having analysed some works previously made. More than an ‘empathic understanding of a practice’,<sup>113</sup> it is about producing an event that affects or has an impact. Or, in the terms of Kant and Heidegger, and inspired by Derrida, it is geared towards a fine-art piece.

Following such an orientation, and given my active role in the creation of these events, I have opted to pursue an ontological analysis. Defining and understanding the event on an ontological level is a somewhat daunting and complex task, especially when calling on four thinkers – Heidegger, Badiou, Lyotard and Deleuze – whose respective works are very different even if they can all be considered postmodern. Furthermore, their descriptions and analyses of the event depend on the broader structures that support their thought, impossible to summarise here. The approach is not to follow a single track, but almost to get lost within many, and, as with Heidegger’s use of Van Gogh’s painting in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, about spinning instead of forcing; daring to appropriate in order to enrich one’s own thinking. Such an experience is described by Chris Kraus when she writes to Dick about her experience of getting lost in the woods.<sup>114</sup> Kraus will eventually find her way back home, at least in the novel. But is this also a way to refer, by analogy, to Heidegger’s introductory note to *Off the Beaten Track* (1950), a series of essays, of which the first is ‘The Origin of the Work of Art?’:

‘Wood’ is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden.

They are called *Holzwege*.

Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so.

Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Boris Ewenstein and Jennifer Whyte, ‘Beyond words: aesthetic knowledge and knowing in organizations’, *Organization Studies*, 28, 5, 2007, pp. 689–708.

<sup>113</sup> Antonio Strati, *Organization and Aesthetics*, Sage, London, 1999.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Woods-woods-woods and frozen ground. I saw no way out, no animals markings, which in any case I don’t know how to read. So carefully I traced my way back again to the chainlink fence. I felt as though my eyes had moved outside my body. By now I’d left so many boot marks on the scattered snow I didn’t know which tracks to follow home. I looked out in the woods and felt alone and panicky.’, Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>115</sup> Heidegger, 2002, *op. cit.*

In this thesis, the concept of event is an anchor that allows me to call within a single work on various philosophies, such as phenomenology, metaphysics and its end (Heidegger), post-structuralism and stoicism. Furthermore, the concept of event, taking in necessity as well as contingency, can logically lead to a discussion of the materiality and pragmatism of the artwork and its making, as will be discussed later. Even the most general definition of an event, without referring specifically to a critique of Western metaphysics, can quickly devolve into a long string of interconnected concepts such as time, space, site, situation, being, becoming, meaning, sense and truth – not to mention the myriad of immediate social and political consequences of such ontological experience. At the end of this thesis, there will be no clear conclusion or single formula about the artistic event, but some paths off the beaten track will have been explored, and perhaps some glade discovered. Even if there is constant perplexity, the development of the concept of event as a *dispositif* that can be utilised to examine the production of a living corpus of artistic events seems to be worth the challenge.

#### **1.14 Jean-François Lyotard: event beyond structuralism**

Jean-François Lyotard was a philosopher perhaps most noted for his role in the ‘linguistic turn’ of contemporary French thought. His writing is metaphorical, rich in illustrations, descriptions and examples. Reading his works often feels like being caught in a waterfall of words and thoughts that constantly arise, unfold and develop, being formulated in a highly literary way. Sentences are sometimes as long as paragraphs, but as the translator Iain Hamilton Grant comments: ‘Lyotard’s sentences may be long, but they are intensive rather than extensive.’<sup>116</sup> Hailed as one of the pioneers of postmodernism, Lyotard wrote extensively on a wide variety of subjects, from knowledge, communication and the human body to modernist and postmodern art, literature and critical theory.

Lyotard’s versatility throughout his life and career exemplifies the shared interests and implications of philosophy and art. In May 1986, during his Welles Library Lectures at

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<sup>116</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, ‘Introduction’, in Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993., p. ix.



the University of California, Irvine,<sup>117</sup> he revealed that he had considered becoming either a monk, a historian, an artist or a novelist. 'In each case he was to meet with various frustrations, until "in the end", as they say, he became a philosopher.'<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, he did make an important contribution to the field of contemporary art with the show *Les Immatériaux* (co-curated with Thierry Chaput), 1985, Centre Georges-Pompidou,<sup>119</sup> an important complement to Jean-Hubert Martin's *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (1989, Centre Georges-Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette) that brought non-Western artists into the field of contemporary art. By intertwining art and technology, Lyotard's exhibition foresaw the new media, electronic art, interactive and even internet art that would be developed in the 1990s and 2000s. It manifested postmodernity by questioning the dichotomy of materiality-immateriality through media, computing and code, and not, as Lucy Lippard wrote in 1973, through conceptual art.<sup>120</sup>

When assessing Lyotard's œuvre, one can broadly characterise it as a refusal of 'grand narratives', i.e. a meta-narrative discourse that attempts to understand and unify all of human thought and history under one specific banner or 'universalism', and thus it is no surprise that he believed 'that reality consists of singular events which cannot be represented accurately by rational theory'.<sup>121</sup> However, as Geoffrey Bennington makes clear, a distinction must be made between singularity and individualism.<sup>122</sup> Bennington also asserts that 'the fundamental drive in all of Lyotard's work is [...] to account for the

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<sup>117</sup> Published later in English as *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988 and in French as *Pérégrinations*, Galilée, Paris, 1990.

<sup>118</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

<sup>119</sup> *Les Immatériaux*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris, 1985; Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann (eds.), *30 Years after Les Immatériaux – Art, Science and Theory*, Meson press, Lüneburg, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years – The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Praeger, New York, 1963.

<sup>121</sup> Ashley Woodward, 'Jean-François Lyotard', *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, The Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy, Melbourne, 2010, pp. 86–92.

<sup>122</sup> 'It would be a gross mistake to assume that because Lyotard is engaged in questioning unities and totalities, he is promoting some form of individualism. If it is true that totality is a negatively marked term in his thought, the corresponding positive term is, rather, *singularity*. A singularity is not so much an individual as an *event*.' Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard, Writing the Event*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998, p. 9.

fact that there are events, or, more literally, that there is (some) event.’<sup>123</sup> Although Lyotard's major publication *Discourse, figure* (1971) covers a wide variety of topics, including phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structuralism, poetry, art, semiotics and philosophy of language, one could argue that the main thrust of this work is a critique of structuralism through the use of the event. For Lyotard, structuralism is a system, a kind of stable or binding grid that cannot process, integrate or contain certain kinds of extraordinary elements that exceed it. These extraordinary elements are actually events.

In *Libidinal Economy* (1974), Lyotard expresses a debt to semiology more than once, in the sense that he makes recourse to the structure of signs in order to define and write about the event. However, he recognises in structuralism a manifestation of nihilism that he criticises and contests.<sup>124</sup> He aims to introduce a singularity or event that resists being just one more sign integrated into an encompassing structure. It is not the sign that he rejects, but rather the way in which the structure captures and reduces signs for the sake of a transcendental programme.<sup>125</sup> Lyotard is seeking ‘difference’, even ‘passion’, and situates his research on the side of ‘obscurity’, where things dissimulate themselves. On the one hand, he rejects transcendence, recognising the necessity to stick to a system or structure of signs, without then granting to it, on the semantic level, anything more than what it is. On the other hand, he attributes to certain signs the

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Semiotics is nihilism [...] It is a religious science because it is haunted by the hypotheses that someone speaks to us in these givens and, at the same time, that its language, its competence, or in any case its performative capacity transcends us: the very definition of the unconscious we find in the boldest semioticians, Lacan, Eco. [...] We know your objection, semioticians: whatever you do or think, you tell us, you make a sign of your action or reflection. [...] Fair enough, we don’t deny it, we’ve been through it and go through it all the time, it is no way a matter of determining a new domain, another field. [...] We must first grasp this: signs are not only terms, stages, set in relation and made explicit in a trail of conquest; they *can also* be, indissociably, singular and vain intensities in exodus.’, Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993, pp. 49–50.

<sup>125</sup> ‘That the structure be merely something that ‘covers’ the affect, in the sense that it acts a cover: that it is its secret and almost dissimulation. This is why we must dearly love the semioticians, the structuralists, our enemies, they are our complices, in their light lies our obscurity. [...] Let us be content to recognize in dissimulation all that we have been seeking, difference with identity, the chance event within the foresight of composition, passion within reason – between each, so absolutely foreign to each other, the strictest unity: dissimulation.’, *Ibid.*, p. 52.

quality of exceeding the structure, as ‘extraordinary’ signs or events. The structure of signs as well as some extraordinary signs are what we have at our disposal. But, he asks:

How does signification stand in relation to its signs? Before them since they are but its by-products; always behind since their decoding is endless. In this apparently senseless pursuit, the constitution of meaning, however, there will be some hermeneut or pessimist who will say to us: look, we never *have* meaning, it escapes us, it transcends us, it teaches us our finitude and our death [...] [T]he Bergsonian–Husserlian–Augustinian conscious unfolding, is fabricated in the double game of this despair of lost-postponed meaning, of the treasure of signs which are simply ‘experiences’ happened upon, run through, the *Odyssey*.<sup>126</sup>

According to Lyotard, structuralism hardly explains or even takes into consideration signs outside or beyond the structure or the system.

Divided into two parts, the latter of which uses Freudian psychoanalysis to undermine both Lacanian psychoanalysis and certain aspects of phenomenology, *Discourse, figure* has less bearing on the issue of the event. The first part uses Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to challenge structuralism. At the beginning of this chapter, we briefly explored the dependency between phenomenology and hermeneutics: the phenomenological method presupposes that a valid description is not just a *way* to understand, but is actually already an understanding. According to hermeneutics, one should go further than the description, since there is no immediate, pure and transparent phenomenon: rather, the phenomenon has to be apprehended and interpreted in order to be correctly ‘seen’. How, therefore, to articulate or associate a text with an image, or more broadly, a text with a non-text sign – both those assignable to a structure and those that are not, such as the event?

In the first part of his *Discourse, figure*, Lyotard begins with an opposition between *discourse*, related to structuralism and written text, and *figure* (a visual image), related to phenomenology and seeing. He suggests that structured, abstract conceptual thought has dominated philosophy since Plato, denigrating sensual experience. The written text

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

and the experience of reading are associated with the former, and figures, images and the experience of seeing with the latter. Part of Lyotard's aim is to defend the importance of the figural and sensual experience such as seeing. He proceeds to deconstruct this opposition, however, and attempts to show that discourse and figure are mutually implicated. Discourse contains elements of the figural (poetry and illuminated texts are good examples), and visual space can be structured like discourse (when it is broken up into ordered elements in order for the world to be recognisable and navigable by the seeing subject). He develops an idea of the figural as a disruptive force that works to interrupt established structures in the realms of both reading and seeing. Ultimately, the point is not to privilege the figural over the discursive, but to show how these elements must negotiate with each other. The mistake of structuralism, he suggests, is to interpret the figural in entirely discursive terms, ignoring the different ways in which these elements operate.

Considering Lyotard's ambition to challenge the traditional dichotomy operating between form and discourse, an event situated in the contemporary art field seems to be a perfect case study. On the one hand, everything operating in this field is *a priori* discursive because of its self-historicising process dating back to modernism.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, even in its most conceptual form, art cannot avoid its aesthetic and poetic qualities thanks to the necessary physical and sensual shape that enables it to exist. Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen argue 'that exhibition making is a form of writing too: but a form of writing with visual, spatial properties, and one whose further existence always hinges on its reception and "translation" into academic or critical text.'<sup>128</sup>

Here I should emphasise that since postmodernism, any contemporary art production, whether visual, graphic, sound, noise, sculpture, scenography, poetics or music, is inscribed in the conceptual art field that established the importance of process since the end of the 1960s,<sup>129</sup> as well as in the post-medium dynamic proclaimed by Rosalind

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<sup>127</sup> Keti Chukhrov, 'On the False Democracy of Contemporary Art', *E-flux journal*, #57: 1-10, 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen, 'The Middleman: Beginning to Talk About Mediation', in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, de Appel & Open Editions, Amsterdam, 2011, pp. 20–30.

<sup>129</sup> Lippard, *op. cit.*; Harald Szeemann, *Plans and projects as art*, Kunsthalle Bern, 1969.

Krauss. To continue to be effective, traditional categories (painting, sculpture, film, video, performance, etc.) have to become ‘almost infinitely malleable’ and need to be extended so as ‘to include just about anything’.<sup>130</sup> These extensions, inclusions and hybridisations of different creative formats do not erase the semantic component of any material: it is more about the possible ‘space’ created by contemporary art, a space where different media contribute to art-making while a constellation of objects produce a diversity of signs to be read, interpreted and critiqued. (Such ideas had in fact manifested themselves more than a decade before Krauss’s post-medium statement, when in 1947, artists Beniamino Joppolo, Lucio Fontana, Giorgio Kaiserlian and Milena Milani signed the *Primo Manifesto dello Spazialismo* and this will be discussed in the context of Carla Lonzi’s *Autoritratto* in Chapter 2.)<sup>131</sup>

In this short presentation of the event according to Lyotard, I have mentioned only two of his books, *Discourses, figure* and *Libidinal Economy*, even though the theme of event traverses all his work.<sup>132</sup> We have highlighted Lyotard’s views on semiology in the perspective of his poststructuralist approach and by recalling his early career ambition we have drawn some links with curatorial and artistic practices, thus stressing the affinities between philosophy and art.

### **1.15 Alain Badiou: *Being and Event***

If Lyotard’s reflection on the event is intertwined with and inscribed in linguistics, Alain Badiou in *Being and Event* (1988) emphasises that the event can be reflected upon only retrospectively. Since the event is something of a higher order, happening without our full comprehension, he suggests, it is only once it has occurred that we can see that a site was fertile for that event: ‘a site is only “evental” insofar as it is retroactively qualified as such by the occurrence of an event’.<sup>133</sup> We cannot therefore know where an event will take place (the site), nor what causes that event, nor exactly what the event itself means. In Badiou, merely recognising the event is a feat in and of itself.

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<sup>130</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1979.

<sup>131</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, De Donato editore, Bari, 1969, pp. 138–139.

<sup>132</sup> Wallenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

<sup>133</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 1988, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, London, 2006, p. 179.

Once that identification has been made, Badiou speaks about an event being ‘localised’ in a ‘situation’. This alternative take on the event will be helpful when reflecting on the *site-specific* works that will be studied and discussed in this thesis. ‘An event can always be localized’, he writes, but ‘no event immediately concerns a situation in its entirety’. For Badiou, an event ‘is always in a point of a situation [...] a matter of [...] an eventual [*sic*] site (or a foundational site, or a site on the edge of the void)’.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, while Badiou’s event resides in a localised site, that place is less a constellation of concepts and more a specific point in time and space, an ontological address, if you will. ‘The event is attached, in its very definition, to the place, to the point’, Badiou writes, ‘in which the historicity of the situation is concentrated. *Every event has a site which can be singularized in a historical situation*’.<sup>135</sup>

Translated into the contemporary art field, this specificity of time and space can be directly related to the pioneering decade of 1965–75, when, as specified by Irene Calderoni, in certain instances ‘the spatial and temporal context of artistic production would coincide with the context of the exhibition. In most cases, the works did not pre-exist the shows, but were created for and within them (...) The artwork operates as a function of, and is limited to, that place and moment.’<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, by 1969, the Conceptual artist Robert Barry stated: ‘The word art is becoming less of a noun and more of a verb.’<sup>137</sup> If art acts, with all its potential tenses, then exhibition would equal event.

Badiou is careful to distinguish between the event, the event’s site and the situation in which the event takes place. Before any event can occur, a particular type of situation must hold in a specific site, and meet with a precise set of conditions (what Badiou calls a ‘multiple’), or what one could call a ‘perfect storm’. The simple existence of a site does not necessarily guarantee that an event will take place, because ‘there must be the local determination of a site’ and the ‘confusion of the existence of the site [...] with the necessity of the event itself is the cross of determinist or globalizing thought. The site is

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.

<sup>136</sup> Calderoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–79.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted by Irene Calderoni, *ibid.*

only ever a condition of being for the event.’<sup>138</sup> *Site, situation* and *set of conditions* will be good tools for the analysis of *Eternal Tour, Smoking Up Ambition, Helvetic Zebra* and *Morgenröte...*

However, Badiou does not stop here, warning against considering, for example, ‘the working class, or a given state of artistic tendencies, or a scientific impasse’ as naturally given sites for events. Within any given site, there must also be ‘a situation in which at least one multiple on the edge of the void is presented’.<sup>139</sup> Something unusual or extraordinary must be at stake, and the situation must have one foot outside the site itself, although where that foot is cannot be determined. In other words, as Badiou claims in *Métaphysique du bonheur réel* (2015), the new affirmation, the big ‘yes’ declared by the real under the pressure of an event, is always the premise that something impossible so far could actually happen, and therefore be possible. Furthermore, Badiou writes in italics: ‘*happiness is always the enjoyment of impossibility*’.<sup>140</sup>

This is where we begin to observe a conception of the event that radically differs, if not opposes, Deleuze’s. For Badiou, not only does the event require all the above conditions (a site and a situation bordering on an unknown ‘void’), but he also states that ‘the existence of a multiple on the edge of the void merely opens up the possibility of an event. It is always possible that no event actually occurs.’ In this sense, the probability of an event occurring is ever more remote. ‘However’, Badiou concedes, ‘we do know one of [an event’s] ontological characteristics, related to the form of presentation: it is always an abnormal multiple, on the edge of the void.’<sup>141</sup>

What, then, is the Badiouian ‘void’, on which all possibility of an event transpiring depends? In his most synthetic formula, Badiou states that ‘the void [is the] proper name of being’.<sup>142</sup> Essentially, through a long analysis of the nature of ontology, he concludes that ontology itself must have a condition in which it operates, but that this condition

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<sup>138</sup> Badiou, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Alain Badiou, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, PUF, Paris, 2015, p. 50. My translation.

<sup>141</sup> Badiou, 1988, p. 179.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

cannot *be* in the ontological sense, since otherwise it would, in a figurative sense, host itself. Badiou thus firmly roots himself in the Heideggerian philosophical tradition of negative metaphysics, concluding that ‘the void, is, in a sense that which will always remain enigmatic, the proper name of being’.<sup>143</sup>

What, then, is relevant to the discussion at hand is that for Badiou the event is precisely where the situation – i.e. ontological being – touches the void – i.e. preontological non-being – which is actually the true nature of being (or what is sometimes called, after Heidegger, *Dasein*). The event is a kind of tear in the fabric of reality where what is beyond ontological presence presents itself, where a rupture of being takes place. The event ‘will interpose itself between itself and the void, and thus be determined as ultra-one’.<sup>144</sup> The event is ‘ultra-one’, or in other words, the event ‘belongs to that-which-is-not-being-qua-being’ and if it is truly an event, ‘ontology has nothing to say about the event. Or, to be more precise, ontology demonstrates that the event is not.’<sup>145</sup> Playing with Badiou’s words and system of thought, I would be interested to further investigate whether the event, because ‘it is not’, might thus be artificial, constructed, necessary for its own sake and useless at the same time, both fictional and part of our real production of affects and memories.

Badiou’s conception of the event will be interesting to apply to our present research, in order to determine how and under which conditions an art production can be an event (or not). Here, the event I am describing belongs to art and not to culture.<sup>146</sup> In the art field (mimicking and reflecting science and its nomenclature), as soon as an artistic object is given a title, it acquires enough legitimacy to be classified. It becomes institution.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the naming, labelling, indexing or titling of an art piece is

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189–190.

<sup>146</sup> To distinguish art from culture, see for example Jean-Luc Godard *Je vous salue Sarajevo* (1993): ‘For there is a rule and an exception. Culture is the rule and art is exception. Everybody speaks the rule: cigarette, computer, T-shirt, television, tourism, war. Nobody speaks the exception. It isn’t spoken. It is written: Flaubert, Dostoyesky. It is composed: Gershwin, Mozart; it is painted: Cezanne, Vermeer. It is filmed: Antonioni, Vigo; or it’s lived, and then it’s the art of living: Srebrenica, Mostar, Sarajevo.’

<sup>147</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mal d’archive*, Galilée, Paris, 1995.



semantically part of the work, even in the case of ‘untitled’.<sup>148</sup> The titles of *Eternal Tour*, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, as well as *Helvetic Zebra* and *Morgenröte...* function at different levels, respectively referential, metonymical and subversive through absurdity.

How, according to Badiou, does the nomination of this event associated in a complex dynamic to the void operate? In the end, the crux of his argument lies in the nominal field: ‘make a name out of an unrepresented element of the site to qualify the event whose site is the site’ or, in other words, ‘the name of the event must emerge from the void’.<sup>149</sup> Badiou states that naming the event is always a ‘wager’ and risks both misidentifying a non-event situation as an event and, in the worst-case scenario, proving that the event was, in fact, not an event at all (since it can be named). In any case, whether one chooses to run these risks or not, Badiou reminds us, ‘the entire effort lies in following the event’s consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence’. Staying true to his Platonic and Heideggerian transcendental foundations, the event and the being-meaning-sense of that event, is out of our hands: ‘There is no more an angelic herald of the event than there is a hero. Being does not commence.’<sup>150</sup>

To briefly summarise, Badiou will be interesting and useful in the frame of our study for two main reasons: 1) the importance of event titling (this point can be linked to Lyotard’s linguistic interest); 2) his idea that acknowledging the event can be done only retrospectively. This claim to the impossibility of grasping the event discursively in the present moment, while it is happening, is greatly at odds with Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘plane of immanence’, which will be addressed below, being the *sine qua non* of their take on the event. Clearly then, Heidegger, Lyotard, Badiou and Deleuze contradict and complement each other, and their analysis of the event must be extracted out of complex systems of thought. Such an operation is always problematic and it should be openly acknowledged here that I am taking elements for my own purposes out of the classical and specialised philosophical field.

### **1.16 Gilles Deleuze: event and immanence**

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<sup>148</sup> Gérard Genette, ‘Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Summer, 1988), pp. 692–720.

<sup>149</sup> Badiou, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

One of the most useful thinkers to have written extensively on the nature of the event is the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. He has even gone so far as to say that ‘In all my books, I’ve searched for the nature of the event.’<sup>151</sup> Indeed, for Deleuze, the key concept of event goes well beyond simply attempting to understand what ‘has happened’ or what any given event may or may not mean. In his major work *Logic of Sense* (1969), it becomes clear why the event has such an important status in his work:

*Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs. It turns one side toward things and one side toward propositions. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things. It is this *aliquid* at once extra-Being and inherence, that is, this minimum of being which befits inferences. It is in this sense that it is an ‘event’: on the condition that the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs. We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself.*<sup>152</sup>

*Logic of Sense* is composed from thirty-four series of paradoxes, and as many study cases or short essays written by Deleuze in order to develop a philosophy of event and becoming. Three main topics are discussed: stoicism, psychoanalysis and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Deleuze also quotes and analyses the works of other figures, mainly literary ones, such as Pierre Klossowski and Emile Zola. *Logic of Sense* is a crucial text for our interest in the concept of event, in particular Deleuze’s relationship to stoic thought. He claims that ‘event is sense itself’ by using the theory of incorporeal entities in Stoic philosophy.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers*, Editions de Minuits, Paris, 1990.

<sup>152</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, The Athlone Press, London, 1990, p. 22.

<sup>153</sup> As Sven-Olov Wallenstein summarises: ‘For the Stoics, the event is separated from the interactions and states of bodies, and just like the sense of words, it is an incorporeal entity hovering over their material instantiation, although it is always connected to them, since they are what actualize it. Where bodies and their actions exist in *Chronos*, the extended present, event and sense belong to *Aion*, the infinity that extends beyond them as virtual dimension and fractures every particular actuality.’, Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

Beside this strong Stoic genealogy, where time, duration and actualisation clearly pertain to the event as sense, let me briefly attempt to unpack and contextualise this Deleuzian conception of the event. In a first step down a descending hierarchical order of analysis, one could say that the event is held on two levels in Deleuze's thought. Firstly, 'the condition under which condition thinking thinks', and secondly the meeting with an outside that forces thought, an element of 'chaos that cuts a plane of immanence' and 'specific objects of thought', the plane being populated by events or becoming and each concept being the construction of an event on that plane.<sup>154</sup> In this way, on an ontological level the event itself is simultaneously *where/when* meaning enters the world and *what* meaning enters the world.

Here it is important to note the implicit refusal of any and all negative metaphysical conceptions: ontology, events, sense and concepts all inhabit a common or unified place, a space and time where being *is*, or to be more precise, where being *becomes*, since 'chaos is not an inert or stationary state. Concepts are like multiple waves, rising and falling, but the plane of immanence is the single wave that rolls them up and unrolls them'.<sup>155</sup> How to guarantee intensity, complexity, consistency if so much is located in a unique plane of immanence? How to operate distinctions? Deleuze and Guattari conclude in their chapter dedicated to the plane of immanence in *What is Philosophy?* that 'the problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which thought plunges'.<sup>156</sup>

But the plane of immanence is not the only possible plane. It is distinct from the 'plane of reference' – which characterises science, is formed by facts and renounces the infinite – and the 'plane of consistence' – which characterises art, which in turn is shaped by affects and percepts and which is created by the finite that gathers the infinite.<sup>157</sup> The

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<sup>154</sup> François Zourabichili, 'Plane of Immanence (and Chaos)', *Deleuze, A Philosophy of the Event, together with The Vocabulary of Deleuze*, 1994 and 2003, trans. Kieran Aarons, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, pp. 188–199.

<sup>155</sup> Zourabichili, *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 1991, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill, Verso, London, New York, 1994, p. 41.

<sup>157</sup> Manola Antonioli, 'Vitesse', in Robert Sasso and Arnaud Villani (eds.), *Le vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Les Cahiers de Noesis, n°3, 2003, pp. 52–67.

‘plane of immanence’ characterises philosophy, which is made up of concepts and saves the infinite. We will retain it here because it directly concerns events as concepts. Furthermore, in relation to my corpus of research that deals with cultural production in the age of globalisation, the Deleuzian ‘plane of immanence’ and its events as concepts will empower me in my endeavor to escape the reporting of a series of facts. Indeed, my thesis does not consist in the historicisation of what might have happened, but in the understanding of what that could have meant and still means today.

Why did Deleuze formulate this idea of a plane of immanence? There are, of course, historical and genealogical reasons. The concept was formulated to substitute the ‘transcendental field’ of Kant and Husserl.<sup>158</sup> The ‘plane’ is no longer the ‘field’, because there is no longer an ‘outfield’, a limit to where the field opens based on the model of perception. The movements on the plane are contrary to the verticality of a foundation or to the rectilinearity of progress. ‘Immanent’ replaces ‘transcendental’ because the plane does not precede what inhabits or fills it, but is constituted and remains within experience, in as much as there is no longer any sense in talking about *a priori* forms of experience, or of an experience in general for times and places (just as we can no longer be content with a universal and invariable concept of space-time). In other words, the conditions are ‘no larger than they condition’, and that is why this radicalised critical philosophy attempts to enunciate the principles of a veritable genesis and not simply an external, indifferent to the nature of what it conditions. The plane of immanence could be the place where the arts festival takes place, including not just the architecture and scenography, but the artists, producers and technicians, as well as the audience. In order to make possible the event, every element of the plane of immanence must be involved in the process. The traditional vertical organisational chart can be torn down and replaced with the horizontal plane of immanence consisting of the site, situation, time and space of the event. Those bringing the event about are anchored in the horizontality of the plane of immanence, like a collective for whom power no longer consists of hierarchical relations run by a dynamic of domination-submission, discipline-control, but by a common need and desire for the artistic void to arise.<sup>159</sup> In anticipation of what will be developed further in the methodology section, I will note here that Lonzi’s

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<sup>158</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 1969; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1991, *op. cit.*

<sup>159</sup> Badiou, 1988, *op. cit.*

*Autoritratto* (1969) seems to be a perfect example of what a plane of immanence could be in the contemporary art field.

Returning to the event (part of the plane of immanence) as our more precise object of interest, we could say, according to the Deleuzian system of thought, that the event is sense itself. Deleuze is the first to have attempted to consider sense, distinct from meaning, without resorting to the transcendence of the subject or the conscious (in regards to the signifying system). Deleuzian sense is not the nominal of a conscience, an essence. Indeed, Deleuzian sense emerges from non-sense and does not possess any 'sense' (with a supplementary signification). It *makes* sense, it *acts out* sense or is agency (with an agent). All its (active, productive) signification must be handed over to the verb 'to do'.<sup>160</sup> If Lyotard helps us to refine the language of the event, Badiou to bring us to the event's acknowledgment retrospectively as well as its titling, Deleuze is the thinker who will empower us to act.

What is found throughout this conception of sense is the idea that, in the gaps of coherent discourse, in the failures or stratified social wholes, in the cracks in well-formed organisms, something else is always happening; another type of thinking is outlined, a line of flight is traced. Sense as event attempts to name and ponder this active and creative 'leaking'. In the Deleuzian corpus, sense, or the concept, or the event, is 'always about liberating life where it is prisoner', the event being therefore tied to the invention of 'new vital possibilities'.<sup>161</sup>

### **1.17 Conclusion**

In this first chapter, I have examined how Heidegger, Lyotard, Badiou and Deleuze have attempted to identify and expand on what the theoretical limits of the event could be, albeit in very different ways. There are common elements between Badiou and Deleuze: both attempt to identify the site, the location and the specificity of the condition for thinking. Both regard the phenomenon of the event as a fundamental ontological

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<sup>160</sup> Philippe Mengue, 'Logique du sens', *Le vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Robert Sasso and Arnaud Villani ed., Les Cahiers de Noesis n° 3, 2003, pp. 66-74.

<sup>161</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1991, *op. cit.*; Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1993.

question at the heart of their philosophical reflections. The event therefore occupies a central place in their writings on different subjects, from ontology itself to literature and art, to all social and political questions. For Heidegger, event is also highly ontologically crucial, but intrinsically to art, which is not the case for Badiou and Deleuze.

One cannot help but notice the similarities between Deleuze and Badiou's attempts to understand the event both as the condition and the object for thinking, although with clear methodological and conceptual differences. For Deleuze, the event is both the condition for thinking on a plane of immanence and the (albeit complex) ontological presence of sense. It is interesting to note, then, that for Badiou, the event is also 'localised' in a certain way, but partially – if not wholly – escapes comprehension while it is happening.

Thus, while Badiou's ideas on events provide an interesting philosophical exercise and can shed light on how events are epistemologically employed in a system of thought tied to Western philosophical traditions, perhaps Deleuze's materialist thought is more pertinent to the assumption of the production of events – and therefore sense – as a project. Likewise, the implications for the methodological consequences suggested by a Deleuzian framework appear much more conducive to an active, creative and productive approach to researching the event itself. In order to analyze the *Eternal Tour* as an event that is continually changing, to theoretically understand how *Smoking Up Ambition!* could be an event that was local and simultaneously global and to see the multiplication of sense and contradictions within *Helvetic Zebra*, it is clear that Deleuze's work will be the most useful.

Heidegger, by bringing the activities of the artist and the philosopher together on an ontological level, offers the more coherent framework for thinking about the event as a philosophical concept rather than a cultural product belonging to the performance-art genre. The German philosopher also points to the question of the possible translation between two languages, Greek and German, as well as art as a unique possibility to rescue thought when it is somehow blocked in its own logical dynamic. His case study around Van Gogh's painting of shoes, later critiqued by Shapiro and Derrida, also makes understandable the difficulty or complexity – not the impossibility – of confronting and juggling with different systems of thought while trying to keep one concept as a solid

anchor, i.e. the event as a cornerstone in this thesis. Words can have very diverse meanings, and the postmodern episteme poses strong linguistic issues, even if everything can be translated into a single idiom, namely English. Furthermore, how do you write about event from a philosophical perspective while analysing facts and data from contemporary art and curatorial fields? Can you use and consider the work of male philosophers without asking if women philosophers would have thought differently? Whether philosophy is gendered or not is a very delicate issue to investigate, but it is still relevant and interesting to approach how such a complex question may be addressed; this will be done in the following chapter. At the same time, given the tension between a strong analytical, philosophical and theoretical interest and a corpus composed of circumstances, contingencies and narratives, responding to the logic of artistic or curatorial work, the organizational analysis employed by Robert Cooper, conceivably situated at a crossroad between these two rather opposite poles of interest, presents as a very useful tool, and for two main reasons. Firstly, Cooper addresses the heterogeneity of elements at stake in the organization and management of activities by discussing and arguing for a proximal rather than a distal view of organization.<sup>162</sup> Secondly, he describes structures leading to creative processes by alluding to contingency,<sup>163</sup> a conceptual milestone equally important to the concept of event in philosophy.

In the following chapters, artistic events will be then discussed using the tools mentioned above, among others, employing various methods of reading phenomena and data. Among different factors, it will be interesting to see how the postmodern paradigm manifests itself in the process.

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<sup>162</sup> Robert Cooper and John Law, 'Organization: distal and proximal views', in *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 13, JAI Press, London, 1995, pp. 237–274.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Cooper, 'Open Field', in *Human Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 11, 1976, Sage, London, pp. 999–1017.

## 2. CARLA LONZI AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

### 2.1 Postmodern paradigms

In the first chapter of this PhD thesis, I presented some views on the philosophical concept of event put forward by four different postmodern philosophers: Heidegger, Badiou, Lyotard and Deleuze. In this second chapter, in which I will reflect on how to write about event as art, and will address postmodernism and feminism in the context of philosophy, art-making and art-writing, referring to the work of two women, Carla Lonzi and Chris Kraus. If event as a philosophical concept is my chosen theoretical frame, then the works of Lonzi and Kraus are relevant as methodological examples. How, as a woman, does one narrate a story in which one is simultaneously engaged, being not only in dialogue with its protagonists, but also one of them? Can one easily claim a certain exteriority or enter a process of detachment? Philosophy is often considered a remarkably ‘detached’ thinking activity, one of the most analytical and logical, and at first glance very far away from any bodily, social, anthropological or political concern. But even in this case, things are not that simple. In Chapter 1, the concept of event was discussed on the basis of the work of four white males. Is this to say that philosophy is a discipline practised by men, for men, as Catherine Malabou has claimed while asking: ‘What is the life of a woman philosopher?’<sup>164</sup> And do female art historians or writers, such as Lonzi and Kraus, engage more diversely with their disciplines, not only by investing in it, but also by questioning the precise way in which it is practised? Lonzi’s stance and work provide an opportunity to introduce into this thesis, by means of comparison, autoethnography or even ‘at-home’ ethnography.<sup>165</sup> These fields are very

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<sup>164</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference, The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011.

<sup>165</sup> ‘At-home ethnography is a study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a ‘natural access’ and in which s/he is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants. The researcher works and/or lives in the setting and uses the experiences and knowledge of and access to empirical material for research purposes. The research is, however, not the individual’s major preoccupation, apart from the time when the empirical material is targeted for close scrutiny and writing [...] The term at-home ethnography draws attention to one’s own cultural context, what goes on around oneself rather than putting oneself and one’s own experiences in the centre. At-home ethnography, then, is a bit different from some recent work in which the deeply personal experiences of the researcher are in focus. This kind of work is often labelled autoethnography.’ Mats Alvesson, ‘At-home



close to my methodology, the subject of this second chapter. My interest in Lonzi's work, *Autoritratto* in particular, is precisely the fact that she intertwines what may be seen as a kind of ethnography with an original mode of tracing a series of unique moments, through technology and producing a creative, binding body of editorial and writing work. She also operates while considering her position within the very context she describes, addressing not only her professional role but also her positionality as a woman. Once the theory – event– and methodology – Lonzi – have been established, I will then be able to introduce and discuss the first study case, *Eternal Tour* (2008–12).

In Chapter 1 I put into practice some of the possibilities afforded by postmodernism, which allows the combination, juxtaposition and intertwining of diverse positions (such as those of the four philosophers mentioned above), as well as the use of diverse disciplines in the frame of a single body of research (as in this thesis). When adopting such an eclectic approach to sources and materials, where one explores different fields simultaneously, certain shortcuts must inevitably be taken, since within the format of a PhD thesis – as opposed to that of a monographic study, for example – there is neither time nor space to enlarge upon each system, discipline or source. What does it mean to extract out of these complex systems of thought, some of them life-long oeuvres, a small selection of fragments and elaborate on them in the form of a linear text? Those who, like myself, openly practise this kind of eclecticism, have been described by the postmodern feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti as 'nomadic' subjects: moving from one field to another while engaging in transdisciplinarity.<sup>166</sup> Braidotti's term might prove relevant for the kind of academic writing adopted in this thesis, where diverse fields

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Ethnography: Struggling with Closeness and Closure', in Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, Frans Kamsteeg (eds.), *Organizational Ethnography, Studying in the Complexity of Everyday Life*, Sage, London, 2009, p. 159.

<sup>166</sup> 'Transdisciplinarity is an important feature. This means the crossing of disciplinary boundaries without concern for the vertical distinction around which they have been organized. Methodologically, this style comes close to the *bricolage* defended by the structuralists, and especially Lévi-Strauss; it also constitutes a practice of 'theft' or extensive borrowing of notions and concepts that are deliberately used out of context and derouted from their initial purpose, as Cixous put it. Deleuze calls this technique 'deterritorialization' or the becoming-nomad of ideas. A related feature of this style is the mixture of speaking voices or modes: I deliberately try to mix the theoretical with the poetic or lyrical mode. These shifts in my voice are a way of resisting the pull toward cut-and-dried, ugly academic language.', Rosi Braidotti, 'By Way of Nomadism', in *Nomadic Subjects, Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, second edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 66.

such as: philosophy (Chapter 1); the history of art<sup>167</sup> (Chapter 2,5 ), autoethnography (Chapter 2), organisational analysis (Chapter 3) and artistic research (Chapter 4) are called upon. Last but not least, in *Critique of Judgment*<sup>168</sup> Kant presents fine-art practice as a way to produce innovative knowledge through the work of art. In his view, a solid acquaintance with the classics is necessary, but fine-art practice must go beyond erudition, as well as craft and know-how or any technical virtuosity. Did Kant foresee what is nowadays called ‘artistic research’? (This relatively recent academic field will be discussed in Chapter 4.)

In Chapter 1, Heidegger, the philosopher with a Nazi past whose anti-semitic statements have recently been published, is set in dialogue with the Maoist Badiou, if one can situate them in this brutal way. Can their works be relevant to each other, given their diverse political positions and personalities? Postmodernist critiques have answered this kind of difficulty by avoiding modernism’s emphasis on the position of the individual author and by relying instead on the criteria of truth and falsity set by the context of modernity.<sup>169</sup> This double postmodernist move – on the one hand the

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<sup>167</sup> When referring to the history of art, I am defining the discipline in the terms established by Jacob Burckhardt in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Burckhardt and his followers, art became a crucial element for the study of history in general (see Felix Gilbert, *History: Politics or Culture? Reflections on Ranke and Burckhardt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1990; Jörn Rüsen, ‘Jacob Burckhardt: Political Standpoint and Historical Insight on the Border of Postmodernism’ in *History and Theory*, Wesleyan University, Wiley-Blackwell, 24, 3, 1985, pp. 235–24). When ‘art history’ was formally implemented as a new university discipline by Burckhardt’s pupil, Heinrich Wölfflin, at the University of Basel in 1893, cultural history was equally at stake. (See for example: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy*, 1860, Penguin Classics, London, 1990.) Referring to such figures as Pablo Picasso, Giorgio Vasari, Roberto Longhi, Hal Foster and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, I take this same all-encompassing approach to grasping the contemporary postmodern condition, as well as the feminist orientation of my work.

<sup>168</sup> § 44.

<sup>169</sup> As summarised by Linda J. Nicholson in *Feminism/Postmodernism* (1990): ‘Postmodernists have gone beyond earlier historicist claims about the inevitable ‘situatedness’ of human thought within culture to focus on the very criteria by which claims to knowledge are legitimized. The traditionalist historicist claim that all inquiry is inevitably influenced by the values of the inquirer provides a very weak counter to the norm of objectivity. The response can be made that while values and culture might affect the choice of questions the scholar brings to her or his inquiry, they cannot affect the truth or falsity of the answers the scholar gives to such questions. This is because the criteria which determine the truth or falsity of such answers are themselves independent of the specific perspective of the inquirer. But the more radical move in the

rejection of the ‘situatedness’ of human thought, and on the other hand the belief that the criteria used to distinguish true from false belong to the apparatus of modernity – puts philosophy in an interesting and unique situation. This discipline has tried, mostly under the conditions of modernity, to set the general criteria for knowledge production, i.e. has worked on epistemology, as well as ethics and aesthetics. But is a theory of knowledge, justice or beauty even possible? Can philosophy offer some help in that struggle? Instead of trying to answer this question, I opt in this thesis to look at the reactions it can provoke among artists.

## 2.2 Globalisation and contemporary art

In the postmodern era, the rise and establishment of the global contemporary art system<sup>170</sup> and the creation of academic fields such as world art history<sup>171</sup> appear as actuations of a new gaze on the works of art hailing from non-Western environments. What were once considered ethnographic objects, would become artworks from Africa, Asia, South America, Australia or the Middle East. But is it that simple? Can geographical origin alone be a parameter? Can modern or contemporary art be something other than a Western-based discipline? Clearly a distinction must be made between traditional or folkloric cultural productions and how ‘contemporary art’ is understood in the places outside those in which it was initially institutionalised and academised. I would argue that global art is a version of contemporary art that has been influenced and nourished

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postmodern turn was a claim that the very criteria demarcating the true and the false, as well as such related distinctions as science and myth, or fact and superstition, were internal to the traditions of modernity and could not be legitimized outside of those traditions ... Postmodernists describe modern ideals of science, justice and art as merely modern ideals carrying with them specific political agendas and ultimately unable to legitimize themselves as universals.’, Linda J. Nicholson, ‘Introduction’ in Linda J. Nicholson ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, London, 1990, pp. 3–4.

<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Harris, *Globalization and contemporary art*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 2004; Charlotte Bydler, ‘A local global art history’ in James Elkins ed., *Is art history global?*, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp. 316–322.

<sup>171</sup> Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987; Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, ZKM/Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, London, England, 2013; Jean-Hubert Martin, *Magiciens de la terre: retour sur une exposition légendaire, 1989–2014*, Xavier Barral, Paris, 2014; Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 2004.

by non-Western criteria, parameters and proficiency. As these non-Western works have been recognised in the art system, new genres or categories have appeared in art and academia, such as performance art, electronic art, digital media, participative art, postcolonial and women's art. It is no surprise that a consciousness of media, space, body and audience has arisen together with the discourse surrounding what was traditionally considered subaltern due to gender or ethnicity. This can be seen in two milestone curatorial initiatives at the Centre Georges Pompidou that are separated by only four years: the exhibitions *Les Immatériaux* (co-curated by Jean-François Lyotard, 1985) and *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, 1989). These two emblematic shows, programmed by the same institution, reveal the overarching concerns of postmodernism: 1) How? Which media or vehicle?; and 2) Who? How does the contemporary art field change with new mediatisation, means or tools, as well as when non-Western, women or non-white artists become the protagonists? What are the epistemological implications of such a move for a broader audience? Feminists have undoubtedly been pioneers in answering that question. What kinds of strategies and narratives can be developed while confronting this new double paradigm: a yet unknown cartography, physical and conceptual, that brings closer what was previously remote, exoticised or ignored through the participation of new stakeholders? Facing such a situation and the complexity it generates, the art field borrows working methods, research and reflections from other fields (and in some cases reciprocally),<sup>172</sup> such as

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<sup>172</sup> 'Richardson and St. Pierre observe that the narrative genres connecting to ethnographic writing have, in the past decade, "been blurred, enlarged, and altered ... These ethnographies ... are produced through creative analytical practices (CAP)". These new writing practices include autoethnography, fiction-stories, poetry, performance texts, polyvocal texts, reader's theater, responsive readings, aphorisms, comedy and satire, visual presentations, allegory, conversation, layered accounts, writing stories, and mixed genres. Creative nonfiction, performance writing, mysteries, memoirs, personal histories, and cultural criticism can be added to the list of narrative forms that can be used by the creative analytic ethnographer.' Norman K. Denzin, 'Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà Vu all Over Again', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 35, Number 4, Sage, London, August 2006, p. 420.

ethnography,<sup>173</sup> anthropology, social science,<sup>174</sup> but also philosophy and its fundamental questions.

### 2.3 Feminism and philosophy

Since the 1960s, feminist philosophy has developed to become a ‘distinctive field of philosophy’ in its own right, an academic discipline debating ‘the nature of sex, gender, and the body; the relation between gender, sexuality and sexual difference; whether there is anything that all women have in common; and the nature of birth and its centrality to human existence.’<sup>175</sup> These issues inscribe themselves logically in the postmodern critique of Western thought with:

its binary dualism (mind/body, reason/passion, male/female, culture/nature, and so on) as the cornerstone of reason. Embedded in this dualist thinking is the essentialism of categories, the denial of difference (or its acknowledgment only

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<sup>173</sup> ‘Ethnography has gone from a relatively unreflective, closed and general description of a “whole way of life” – not too difficult to depict/portray in a text – to an undertaking that, instead, emphasizes a more tentative, open and partial interpretation, drawing attention to matters of uncertainty and style in writing. The text is seen as the central part of the research project. It tells a story, it uses a particular style, and includes much more than simply the reporting of data and a description of objective reality. Things going on in social reality “out there” may inspire the author but put highly uncertain imprints on the text. The final academic text is an outcome of many other things: the choice of theory, political struggles and fashions within the academic community, the researcher’s idiosyncracies, established conventions for writing, the use of language, format, etc. Of course, these problems hold not only for ethnography, although they are possibly more pronounced and apparent there, but are relevant for practically all qualitative research.’ Mats Alvesson, ‘At-home Ethnography: Struggling with Closeness and Closure’, in Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, Frans Kamsteeg (eds.), *Organizational Ethnography, Studying in the Complexity of Everyday Life*, Sage, London, 2009, p. 156.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Qualitative research is often seen in geographic terms: as a movement when a researcher, initially at a distance, comes closer to the lived realities of other people. The geographic terminology is not solely metaphoric. In anthropology the ethnographer may travel long distances in order to come into physical contact with those being studied, making observations at, perhaps, 5–10 yards from the “natives”. In qualitative social science fields that address less “exotic objects of study”, the researcher perhaps travels a few miles and then carries out fieldwork at microphone-holding distance – say 2 yards – from the “subjects”.’ *Ibid*, p. 159.

<sup>175</sup> Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*, Polity, Cambridge, 2007.

as an absence – nature as the absence of culture, darkness as the absence of light), and the presumption of a hierarchy of one term over the other.<sup>176</sup>

On the epistemological level, one could ask: is feminist philosophy, having developed a variety of viewpoints,<sup>177</sup> a sub-category of philosophy, or is it a way of practising philosophy that has integrated a critique of modernity through the lens, tools, pitfalls, successes and knowledge of feminism? Or both? This question is equally relevant in the context of art: is feminist art a sub-category of contemporary art, like outsider art, for example? In the context of this thesis, I am using the interpretation of event offered by four male postmodern philosophers in order to analyse artistic productions initiated by women, including myself. Does my background as a postmodern feminist artist influence my reading of Deleuze or Heidegger, for example? How does my understanding of their work differ from that of feminist philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, Alice Jardine,<sup>178</sup> Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, who have found Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on 'becoming woman' in *Thousand Plateaus* (1980) unconvincing?<sup>179</sup> Butler has strongly objected to Deleuze's concept of desire,<sup>180</sup> as expressed, among many other works, in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), written together with Guattari, where the space of representation is left behind in favour of the space of production or fabrication:<sup>181</sup> 'Desire is not the

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<sup>176</sup> Eleanor McDonald, 'Review on Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality*, 1991', in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 26 / Issue 01 / March 1993, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 200.

<sup>177</sup> Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

<sup>178</sup> Alice Jardine, 'Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)', *SubStance*, 13 (3-4), 1984, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, pp. 46–60.

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, Erinn Cunniff Gilson, 'Responsive Becoming: Ethics between Deleuze and Feminism', in *Deleuze and Ethics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2011.

<sup>180</sup> Dorothea Olkowski, 'Can a Feminist Read Deleuze and Guattari?', in *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, pp. 32–58.

<sup>181</sup> 'Desire is typically opposed to its realization, which pushes it back onto the side of the dream, of fantasy, of representation. Here, however, we see it brought back onto the side of production, where its model is no longer the theatre – the eternal representation of the story of Oedipus – but the factory, and 'if desire produces, its product is real ... the objective being of desire in the Real in and of itself.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, pp. 26–27.

representation of an absent or missing object, but an activity of production, an incessant experimentation, an experimental montage.’<sup>182</sup>

I find these comments on desire helpful, however, in the context of art and creativity, where this concept is one of the most discussed in terms of the artist’s inspiration. Why do artists create? Is the necessity to do so constituted from desire? These questions are perhaps unanswerable, and thus I have shifted the focus from the ‘why’ to the ‘how’. If I cannot define or locate what is magic (in Chapter 5 the word ‘magic’ will be thoroughly analysed) in and about art, I can work, like many others, on the ‘how’: the creation, appearance and description of this very precious particularity. In this respect, and regarding my interest in the concept of event, I have highlighted the importance to my thesis of Deleuze’s ‘plane of immanence’, a metaphor that can express the fact that the writer can also be a part of the story. The plane of immanence – i. e., the ‘how’ – circumvents any ambition to transcendence – i.e., the ‘why’ – as the main focus of research.<sup>183</sup>

The plane of immanence is also interesting in the context of this thesis because it suggests that I cannot claim an external point of view, a way to escape my own condition, while relating this story. Was Deleuze addressing this difficult task of remaining objective while standing amongst the objects to be scrutinised? Are artists the best possible art critics and art historians because they understand art-making first hand, or are they unable to remain sufficiently objective? In the frame of this PhD, the plane of immanence is an inspiring way in which to think about the event and about art without transcendence, inscribed in pragmatism, materiality, language, social reality and geopolitical conditions.

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<sup>182</sup> François Zourabichvili, *Deleuze: A Philosophy of the Event, Together with The Vocabulary of Deleuze*, Gregg Lambert and Daniel W. Smith (eds.), trans. Kieran Aarons, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 164.

<sup>183</sup> Interestingly enough, Lyotard formulates such transcendence as the ‘big Zero’: ‘How does *force* [*puissance*] give rise to *power* [*pouvoir*]? How does searing affirmation become circumscribed around a zero which, inscribing it, annihilates it and assigns it meaning? This is our great interest (political interest amongst others, since this is the entire political question). And the hows that we address to it are not whys. The why is galling, nostalgic, treacherous, always nihilistic.’ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993, pp. 18–19.

In the case of Heidegger, we have seen that the event acts like a cornerstone that relates the activities of thinking and writing. On an ontological level, this nexus implies the contingency-necessity tandem. When it comes to writing about the event, Heidegger's approach to analysing Van Gogh's painting of shoes seems more relevant than Shapiro's, since the artist's take on his own creation is not the most important or interesting to analyse. The artist's job is to create a work of art that once made public has, so to speak, its own existence or ontology. How does one negotiate this fact when one is both the co-producer of the event and is also writing about it? Is the author, in this case myself, a subject? And if yes, what kind of subject?

Some feminist philosophers have questioned Heidegger's position as a male thinking subject, asking not only whether gender, but also race or socio-political background, influences the philosopher's thinking. Tina Chanter states that 'in *Being and Time*, there is a progressive move away from the concrete starting point of Dasein's world and towards a disembodied understanding of Dasein'.<sup>184</sup> At the end of her article, after having compared Heidegger's thought with Marx's, she affirms:

Dasein remains solitary, without much allegiance to others, in its alleged neutrality with regard to race, sex, gender, and ethnicity [...] Since Heidegger's Dasein is allegedly neutral, there is no room for him to acknowledge the political implications of the division of labor that is implied by his account. Since his ontology is one that has universal pretensions, there is no place for acknowledgment of the sexist, racist and classist structures on which his account implicitly relies.<sup>185</sup>

On another level, very different from Chanter's because not based on her agenda of multicultural ethics, Patricia Huntington addresses Heidegger's view of the practice of thinking that 'defies containment in every system of ideas and values'.<sup>186</sup> This is a

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<sup>184</sup> Tina Chanter, 'Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology', in Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2001, p. 81.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>186</sup> Patricia Huntington, 'Stealing the Fire of Creativity', in *ibid.*, p. 374.



‘releasement from all conceptual horizons’ that ‘obtains on condition that I negate the habit of regarding my “self” as the one who is or is not critically aware of the limits of perspective, as the one who creates and produces systems of ideation or their replacements, ideational systems’.<sup>187</sup> According to Heidegger, the activity of thinking does not belong to the thinker, but to the thought itself, and therefore, is not concerned with the embodiment of the thinker. This freedom achieved while thinking ‘can harmonize the human heart to the demands of the time’,<sup>188</sup>and in that sense, goes beyond gender or race.<sup>189</sup>

What Huntington states goes hand in hand with Heidegger’s idea that the origin of the work of art is art. Just as the intellectual must negate the idea of being the source of thought, the artist must equally renounce the idea of being the source of creativity. In this sense, one can read an artwork without considering the author’s intentions.

While reviewing Huntington’s work, Leslie Paul Thiele claims that the crucial ‘problem, for feminists, or for anyone concerned with Heidegger’s shortcomings as a socio-political theorist, is not misunderstanding Heidegger, but misunderstanding oneself as a thinker’.<sup>190</sup> What kind of thinker do I want to be and, furthermore, what kind of thinker do I want to read and follow? Equally, what kind of artist do I want to be? Whether one agrees that Heidegger’s Dasein is ‘disembodied’ and that we must negate the idea that we are ‘the source of thought, of creativity’, I find Heidegger’s contributions to the concept of event relevant to the context of art due to his emphasis on logical thought

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Beyond all perspectives, beyond the conceptual distinction between rational system and embodied perspective, lies freedom ... [T]o be an intellectual is to be a contradiction [...] We are to think, and yet radical thinking is not an activity that lies within our power to undertake through will. [...] The primary and key issue that Heidegger teaches is this: *we, intellectuals and by extension all humans, enter into a coincidence with the activity of thinking on condition that we take seriously the possibility of a nonanxious relation to groundlessness.* And that act requires a yet more basic condition: *that we negate the idea that we are the source of thought, of creativity,* *Ibid.*, pp. 358-361.

<sup>190</sup> Leslie Paul Thiele, ‘Review of Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2001’, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, Vol.36, No. 5 (Dec., 2003), Cambridge University Press, p. 1115.

rather than a quest for attribution,<sup>191</sup> which can lead to anecdotal information that, rather than shedding light on an artwork, can only nourish the biographical description of its creator.

## 2.4 Feminism, bodies, ethics

Postmodernism, following the tracks of phenomenology towards hermeneutics, teaches us that there is no clear or neutral way to restore the emphasis on the interpretation of the work by the author/artist even when the author is known. This was Derrida's position, for example, when writing about the different approaches of Heidegger and Shapiro to analysing Van Gogh's painting of shoes. If this is no longer an option, how should the first-person subject be treated? Both the feminist art critic Carla Lonzi and the feminist artist Chris Kraus have developed interesting strategies to deal with the issue of describing a situation, a scene, a milieu, an era to which they belong. Both consider their physical incarnation, presenting themselves as bodies in the room, in their working environment; they hear their own voices speaking. Enunciating an idea requires a certain incarnation, and for Lonzi and Kraus, this is self-reflected. When writing about an avant-garde movement of the 1960s, Lonzi inscribed herself into the narrative, while in Kraus's novel she is the central character. In this way, they both clearly expose their subjectivity while not allowing it to become the subject of the work. This stance towards oneself – becoming an object among other objects, or a subject among other subjects, and making the reader understand such self-reflexivity and detachment towards the obvious, the familiar, the taken for granted and the unquestioning acceptance of things as they are – can be compared with Bertolt Brecht's alienation or estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).<sup>192</sup> The German dramatist wanted to make the spectator conscious of what was at stake on stage. Simple illusion or seduction were deconstructed in order to confront the viewer critically and to undermine any notion of art as escape from reality. In Brecht's method, I cannot identify with those I am looking at. I remain perfectly conscious of my position as a viewer looking at an actor playing a role. Nevertheless, I can be entertained or moved by his words, as well as learning about the context with which he is dealing. The same applies

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<sup>191</sup> See, for example, Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1989.

<sup>192</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *A Short Organum for the Theater*, 1948.

to the texts of Kraus and Lonzi. They do not give me the opportunity to identify myself with their function (the main figure of a story or a dialogue) in the novel or in the interview they each respectively create. But, thanks to the subtlety of their work, they give me access to their auto-consciousness or auto-analysis of the situation they are confronted with: they give me clear access to the strategy or the solution they choose in order to cope with their struggles. In the field of contemporary ethnography and organisational studies, such a *Verfremdungseffekt* could be termed a ‘critical strategy of defamiliarisation’: ‘To discover or to emphasize the need for effort and construction, to *create* revealing situations, in one vital element [...] to try to get away from the inclination to see things only in a specific light.’<sup>193</sup>

I, too, am an author writing about art, using certain resources that I am revealing to the reader. From this perspective, media and interfaces play an active part in the construction–deconstruction. On the one hand, one’s chosen medium and interface create a prism through which one can analyse any cultural production.<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, as a complementary path rather than a contradictory one, Brecht’s idea of estrangement can lead to reconsidering the body of the thinking or writing subject as a cultural and objectified construction. Lonzi used a tape recorder while working on her *Autoritratto*, a text piece that will be further discussed below. Kraus plays with a range of literary formats in *I Love Dick*, such as letters, faxes, answering-machine recordings, diary entries and art criticism. These material parameters obviously have an impact on what is said and how. The double entendre in the title of her work signals her media consciousness. (Just as important as the phallic joke is the fact that the character referred to is popularly thought to be Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall’s former student as well as professor of film and media studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.)

Ever since Simone de Beauvoir’s remark that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ and her ground-breaking contribution to women’s studies, a huge number of important feminist texts have unfolded. There is no scope to try to conduct a coherent

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<sup>193</sup> Mats Alvesson, ‘At-home Ethnography: Struggling with Closeness and Closure’, in Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, Frans Kamsteeg (eds.), *Organizational Ethnography, Studying in the Complexity of Everyday Life*, Sage, London, 2009, p. 168.

<sup>194</sup> See, for example, *New German Media Theory*, Grey Room, Fall 2007, No. 29, 4–5, MIT Press Journals, Cambridge, MA.

survey of these works here.<sup>195</sup> In the frame of my interest in art and event organisation and production in the age of globalisation, and of the four case studies chosen for this thesis, I will mention only four of their authors, to exemplify the diversity and richness that they can contribute to my subject: Donna Haraway, first a biologist and then a historian and philosopher of science, and known for her interest in technology and ecology; Rosi Braidotti, Deleuzian and posthumanist; Paul B. Preciado, transgender writer, philosopher and curator, who is interested in the socio-political dimension of sexuality, and Sarah Ahmed, expert in the cross-linkages between gender, race, migration and postcolonial issues as well as psychoanalysis, affect and emotion. These four feminist philosophers are briefly alluded to in this thesis in relation to Lonzi's oeuvre, particularly *Autoritratto*. Indeed, although extremely diverse, they share a strong and complementary anchoring of their thought and work in the body: the body thinking, speaking, writing and also the body studied and reflected upon. How does one represent or give an account of the female body, which simultaneously constitutes a vehicle for the activities of the mind and the object of enquiry? How does one make a self-portrait of it? The female body can be an anatomical one, but also of the collective, of the group or community. Even more radically, one can state that everything is thought thanks to the female body.

Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) is particularly remarkable in reflecting on new technologies and their impact on science, communication and biology, and in identifying the potential of such a shift for women. One such impact in the field of employment is the ability to work remotely from home thanks to computers and the internet. She predicts that this will transform family life and the identity of workers, as well as extending time and space. This 'homework economy', she writes, 'indicates that factory, home and market are integrated on a new scale and that the places of woman are crucial'. Inspired by what she observed in Silicon Valley, Haraway's grasp of these issues as early as 1985 is visionary, anticipating what Maurizio Lazzarato called

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<sup>195</sup> See (among so many dictionaries and anthologies), as a methodological example of how to classify the relevant entries for such a field, and who is going to write about them, Helen Tierney (ed.), *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1999.

‘immaterial labor’ in 1996.<sup>196</sup> Such immaterial, flexible and affective labour is what artists undertake, most of the time in precarious conditions. Furthermore, the mobility allowed by digital and internet technology has deeply changed what it is to be an artist nowadays. *Eternal Tour*, which will be discussed below, is a good example of this. Most of the participants involved in the project had other jobs and engagements, communicating through email as well as Skype exchanges, and very rarely meeting physically. New technologies have led to a new kind of labour that could perhaps particularly benefit women artists and academics. What are the success factors for such women, while having to take care of many things outside their jobs? Talent, will, strength, intuition, luck, sociability, availability, reliability, ‘connectivity’. How much influence did these factors have on *Eternal Tour*, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, *Helvetia Zebra* and *Morgenröte...*, which were organised by women?

Perhaps we should at this point define what we mean by ‘feminism’. For Rosi Braidotti

speaking ‘as a feminist woman’ does not refer to one dogmatic framework, but rather to a knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers, and levels of the self. Feminism as a speaking stance, and consequently as a theory of the subject, is less of an ideological than an epistemological position. [...] I see feminism as the strategy of working through the historical essence of ‘Woman’ at a time in history when it has lost its substantial unity.<sup>197</sup>

While accepting this loss, or perhaps mourning the idea that there was some kind of agreement on a historical essence of Woman, Braidotti inscribes her work within postcolonial theory. By doing so, she automatically discusses cosmopolitanism, a subject matter inherited from the Enlightenment period that requires elaboration in the globalised era, as we will see later in the case of *Eternal Tour*. Co-organised by people originating from the centre of old Europe, namely Switzerland, this artistic project seems, retrospectively, to be a humble exemplification of what Braidotti describes as the

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<sup>196</sup> Maurizio Lazzarotto, ‘Immaterial Labor’, in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2006, pp. 132–147.

<sup>197</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project’, in *Nomadic Subjects, Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, second edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 160.

philosophical nomadism that ‘addresses, in both a critical and creative manner, the role of the former “center” in redefining power relations. Margins and center shift and destabilize each other in parallel, albeit dissymmetrical, movements.’<sup>198</sup> Braidotti’s interest overlaps here with Haraway’s feminist and environmentalist approach, specifically in the field of ‘eco-feminism’.<sup>199</sup> The use of feminist theory as a tool with which to address sustainability issues will be developed in Chapter 5, from an artistic point of view, taking *The Tempest* as an extended metaphor.

Any discussion of ‘eco-philosophy’ means discussing the anthropocene and issues of climate change, as addressed by artists Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind in *Tsunami Architecture*.<sup>200</sup> Ecology, migration, postcolonialism, technology and transgender are among the most interesting connections to feminism, which I enlist here as an intelligent agent, a sharp tool enabling a discussion of art: ‘thinking through feminism’<sup>201</sup> – or, in the case of artists, acting through feminism.

As already explained in Chapter 1, my focus of interest, the event, takes a stand against a too simplistically introverted, subjective, biographical, narcissistic, individualistic or intimate approach to art that does not have the capacity to analyse and confront the situation, the context, the group, the circumstances, surroundings and conditioning influencing its creation. Without abandoning, neglecting or ignoring the position of the author or the researcher, I opt instead to focus on more conscious attitudes and positions towards the creative environment – what happens, when and how? I am interested in phenomena in the art field that take into consideration any relationship to power structures, any work and play with events external to one’s body – and any approach to environment as a reactive given, where embodiment is a fabulous tool for

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<sup>198</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Introduction’, in *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>199</sup> Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler, Saskia Wieringa and Rosi Braidotti, *Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development: Theoretical Synthesis*, Zed Books, London, 1994.

<sup>200</sup> Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind, *Tsunami Architecture*, video, HDV, 60 min., 2012, <http://christophdraeger.com/projects/video/tsunami-architecture> (accessed 25 July 2016).

<sup>201</sup> Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil and Beverley Skeggs, ‘Introduction’, in Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil and Beverley Skeggs (eds.), *Transformations, Thinking through feminism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 19.

investigation, experiment and interaction. In that sense, a key figure for engagement regarding relationship of the body to the sociological, political, historical and cultural world that ‘situates material processes in and through which corporealities are shaped, experienced and lived in dynamic and complex ways’ is Paul B. Preciado,<sup>202</sup> who has adopted a radical approach that has been labelled *somatechnics*, ‘the bodily being and the technological context in which it occurs’.<sup>203</sup> Preciado’s strategies go far beyond the textual format of, for example, Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975) or *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction (Will to Knowledge)*, (1978), where he writes on the one hand about the processes of power and control, and on the other about ‘the “somato-political” mattering of the body that exercises techniques of control and resistance’.<sup>204</sup> In *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in a Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013), Preciado describes swallowing pills and self-administrating testosterone as part of an investigation into gender construction by the pharmaceutical industry.<sup>205</sup>

A different approach to somatechnics has been taken by the British academic Sara Ahmed. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), she starts by analysing a racist, anti-

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<sup>202</sup> Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray, ‘Editorial’, in *Somatechnics*, 1.1, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2011, p. v.

<sup>203</sup> About the *Somatechnics* journal, <http://www.euppublishing.com/loi/soma> (accessed 25 July 2016).

<sup>204</sup> Eliza Steinbock, ‘The Somatechnics of Willfulness, Review of Sara Ahmed (2014) *Willful Subjects*’, in *Krisis, Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, Issue 1, 2016, online journal, <http://www.krisis.eu/content/2016-1/krisis-2016-1-09-steinbock.pdf> (accessed 25 July 2016), p. 75.

<sup>205</sup> I’m not taking testosterone to change myself into a man, nor as a physical strategy of transsexualism; I take it to foil what society wanted to make of me [...] The invention of the notion of gender in the 1950s as a clinical technique of sexual reassignment, and the commercialization of the Pill as a contraceptive technique, characterized the shift from discipline to pharmacopornographic control. This is the age of soft, feather-weight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled – “incorporated.” The testosterone that I use belongs to these new gelatinous biopolitical technologies. When I take a dose of testosterone in gel form or inject it in liquid form, what I’m actually giving myself is a chain of political signifiers that have been materialized in order to acquire the form of a molecule that can be absorbed by my body. I’m not only taking the hormone, the molecule, but also the concept of a hormone, a series of signs, texts, and discourses [...] The consumption of testosterone, like that of estrogen and progesterone in the case of the Pill, does not depend upon any ideal constructions of gender that would come to influence the way we act and think. We are confronted directly by the production of the materiality of gender.’, Beatriz Preciado, *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in a Pharmacopornographic Era*, e-flux journal #44, 04/2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/testo-junkie-sex-drugs-and-biopolitics/> (accessed 25 July 2016).

immigration slogan from a British National Front Poster and goes on to explore ‘how emotions work to shape the “surfaces” of individual and collective bodies’,<sup>206</sup> addressing pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame, love and queer feelings, analysing the role of emotions in debates on international terrorism, asylum and migration, among others. In *Willful Subjects* (2014), grounded in feminist, queer and antiracist politics, she analyses the ‘figure who wills wrongly or wills too much’. Ahmed’s focus on emotional and psychological characteristics and Preciado’s strategy of hormonal manipulation are rooted in Descartes’ last published work, *Passions of the Soul* (1649), in which he states that he wishes to reflect on passion not as philosopher, but as a physicist, from the point of view of natural science. This use of human biology to address wonder, love, hate, desire, joy and sadness, is particularly interesting when reworked centuries later through feminism, enriched by biotechnological and postcolonial perspectives.

Embodiment is the starting point for initiating and producing art, and also for involving the concept of event in regard to these artistic projects. From an organisational perspective, this embodied sense-making and embodied knowledge, an anchoring in the body, implies in addition and de facto an embodied organisation: more precisely, a gendered, embodied organisational analysis. In this thesis, the four case studies, which are partly works of my individual artistic production alongside a majority of works produced collectively, have also an important and strong connection to the body. This includes my body and others – bodies of both individuals and group entities. These include the body and bodies of my collaborators, of the audience and of the people participating in projects, as well as the bodies, and with them the voices, of the people with whom I hold discussions or interviews, revealing the importance of the encounter and its orality through initial exchanges – the moment where bodies are face to face in the same physical space. These inter-body relationships and interactions concretise what Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes call ‘corporeal ethics’, namely ‘[resisting] domination and oppression in favour of the enactment of care and respect for difference as it is lived and experienced.’<sup>207</sup> The body is then a tool, the assurance of staying in

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<sup>206</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>207</sup> Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, ‘Ethics, embodiment and organizations’, in *Organization*, Volume 22 (2), Sage, London, 2015, p. 159. See also, for example: Nick Rumens and Melissa Tyler, ‘Towards a queer politics and ethics within organization studies’, in Alison



contact with oneself, with the environment and through self-reflection and analysis, the guarantee that the body won't be split from the mind, and vice-versa. When I use the work of others in the context of this thesis, which is obviously my personal academic work, like Lonzi who transcribed and edited the words of a group of artists and eventually signed *Autoritratto* as her book, assuming her position as a singular author, I am quoting the work of others, giving them credit and in the best possible way transmitting their positionality and perspective. Such an ethic implies ongoing relating and dialogue, before the research, during it and even after the writing had been accomplished as well. This thesis is only the moment of materialisation of a broader frame, one of constant discussion and negotiation about how we interact with each other, in a context of art and organisation. It is also an academic discussion, where our bodies are a grounding parameter and factor for consideration.

## 2.5 Positionality and methodology

Having established the theoretical framework for this research project, as well as having drafted its feminist epistemology, the fundamental question of methodology – how to go about writing it – immediately poses itself. If the event is meaning-for-itself, i.e. the immediate creation and production of meaning, the participant at once finds herself on the event's own plane of immanence as set out by Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>208</sup> That is to say, in personal terms, as a practising artist and curator as well as a professor of Fine Art at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm (until 2016) and then Head of the Master Fine Arts program at Zurich University of the Arts (2017–), while writing this PhD thesis, how can I objectively approach a field to which I am simultaneously contributing, as well as creating and defining? What position can I possibly take when I cannot step out of the event in order to adopt an ideal neutral scientific point of view? Most importantly, how can a participating agent, articulating her contribution through group and collective mechanisms, analyse the event produced if it is itself a partial extension of her labour that is inextricably intertwined and ultimately lost within that of many others?

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Pullen, Carl Rhodes (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Ethics, Politics and Organizations*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 447–461.

<sup>208</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994.

This interesting and complex situation distinguishes my venture from what Hal Foster describes in his famous essay ‘The Artist as Ethnographer?’, part of his collection of texts *The Return to the Real* (1996). Stating that his essay is an updating of Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Artist as Producer’ (1934) – where the philosopher calls upon the artist ‘to side with the proletariat’ – Foster suggests that for the postmodern artist, it is now ‘the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the artist often struggles’. According to Foster, the dilemma presented by adopting this ‘quasi-anthropological paradigm’ in the field of art and its institutions is the removal of possible political transformation. Such a displacement of any potential subversion stems from a ‘primitivist fantasy: that the other has access to primal psychic and social processes from which the white (petit) bourgeois is blocked’.<sup>209</sup>

Taking into account Foster’s doubts about the appropriation of ethnography in the field of art, and in order to address the above questions regarding my particular positionality and methodology, this research project must necessarily begin with a critique of the techniques developed in postmodern anthropology in order to focus, more specifically, on autoethnographic research. Implying de facto the vulnerable position of the storyteller or narrator, this approach is defined by its originator Carolyn Ellis as ‘research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political’.<sup>210</sup> However, in an attempt to move beyond the somewhat egotistical notions and techniques of the autobiographical and to remain inscribed in the field of art, I will introduce Lonzi’s *Autoritratto* [Self-portrait]. Not only does this work provide a way to move beyond self-centred methodological techniques, but as an unique assemblage of texts and images it signals a strong rupture in her career as art historian and critic. Indeed, *Autoritratto* can be interpreted as the crystallisation of an event in the practice of art history by women: a collision between research, art criticism, oral history, social and scientific document, diary and feminist epistemological

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<sup>209</sup> Hal Foster, ‘The Artist as an Ethnographer?’, in George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (eds.), *The Traffic in Culture, Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, pp. 302–309.

<sup>210</sup> Carolyn Ellis, *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, 2004. p. xix.

enquiry. *Autoritratto* will also be placed in relation to the field of autoethnography, or more precisely ‘analytic autoethnography’, as defined by Leon Anderson.<sup>211</sup>

## 2.6 Postmodern anthropology

From a classical ethnographical standpoint, to gain an objective, scientific perspective on these questions would have meant stopping any professional artistic activity and distancing myself from the art world and my engagement in its educational system. Indeed, it isn’t easy to reflect upon something without having a certain distance from it.<sup>212</sup> As a complement to the varied research already conducted on the topics of globalisation, biennales, the artist as curator and self-organisation presented here, the most interesting new contribution would have been an investigation into a selection of stakeholders in the artistic field such as artists, art critics or historians, as well as sociologists or cultural managers, the protagonists in the artistic field and their interpretation of the four events designated as objects for our research: *Eternal Tour*, *Smoking Up Ambition*, *Helvetic Zebra* and *Morgenröte...* and contextualising them within the current contemporary art world. I would have had to conduct a series of interviews with these protagonists and to analyse them in order to reach a scientific conclusion about their functions and roles.

There are multiple social-research methods usually referred to under the heading of postmodern anthropology.<sup>213</sup> One possible process that might have enabled me to

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<sup>211</sup> ‘Leon Anderson: Analytic autoethnography has five key features. It is ethnographic work in which the researcher (a) is a full member in a research group or setting; (b) uses analytic reflexivity; (c) has a visible narrative presence in the written text; (d) engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; (e) is committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena’, Norman K. Denzin, *op. cit.*, p. p. 419, and see also Leon Anderson, ‘Analytic Autoethnography’, in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 35, Number 4, Sage, London, 2006, pp. 373–395.

<sup>212</sup> ‘It is rare that academics study the “lived realities” of their own organizations. There may be good reasons for this. It is difficult to study something one is heavily involved in. One may fear that those targeted for study might experience breaches of trust.’ Mats Alvesson, ‘At-home Ethnography: Struggling with Closeness and Closure’, in Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, Frans Kamsteeg (eds.), *Organizational Ethnography, Studying in the Complexity of Everyday Life*, Sage, London, 2009, p. 156.

<sup>213</sup> Martyn Hammersley, *The politics of social research*, Sage, London, 1995; Martyn Hammersley, *Methodology: who needs it?*, Sage, California, 2011; Mats Alvesson,

undertake this kind of research is the technique of participant observation as initially developed by Bronisław Malinowski in Melanesia and Britain in the 1920s, and then by the students of Franz Boas in the United States, and later in the urban research of the Chicago School of sociology. Common in cultural anthropology, the aim of participant observation is to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through intensively interacting with them in their cultural environment, usually over an extended period of time.<sup>214</sup> Such research involves a range of well-defined, though variable methods: informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analysis of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, results from activities undertaken off or online, and life histories. Although the method is generally characterised as qualitative research, it can (and often does) include quantitative dimensions. In the case of my research, such long-running investigative and collective processes, as well as informal interviews inspired by postmodern anthropology might seem relevant and fruitful. However, the frame of the event discussed above allows me to take a more autoethnographical, or at least, auto-conscious path. I needed a method that would allow me to invent a new formalisation, or an unexpected way of redesigning my artistic and curatorial activities while investigating the concepts of event and ephemera, as well as how to write about them. I found in Lonzi a kind of role model: not someone to simply copy, but rather by whom I could be freely inspired.

## 2.7 Carla Lonzi

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'Methodology for close-up studies: struggling with closeness and closure', in *Higher Education*, 46, pp. 167–193, 2003; Robert G. Burgess, *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1984; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, Sage, London, 1998; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, Sage, London, 1998; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, Sage, London, 1998; Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Routledge, London, 2007; Norman K. Denzin, 'Performing [auto] ethnography politically', in *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 25, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 257–278; John van Maanen, *Representation in Ethnography*, Sage, London, 1995; Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*, Sage, London, 2002; David Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research, Theory, Method and Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Sage, London.

<sup>214</sup> James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1980; Morrie S. Schwartz and Charlotte Green Schwartz, 'Problems in participant observation', *American journal of sociology*, Chicago, LX, 4, 1955, pp. 343–353.

Unlike the models in postmodern anthropology drafted above, *Autoritratto* directly engages methodology: the researcher assumes a central role in the creation and organisation of the data being collected, and at the same time allows the interviewees to participate actively in the process of data production. Clearly, this model encourages commitment and engagement and leads to collective writing through a flexible notion of the author: being interviewee and interviewer at the same time, orchestrating the recording as an event and choosing from different options to transcribe, edit and make it public (chronologically or not, in a more or less fictional way), complemented by images. Since Lonzi's oeuvre has rarely been translated into English, a brief presentation of her trajectory as well as the content of *Autoritratto* is appropriate here.

That Lonzi's name has remained etched into postwar Italian cultural history is mostly due to her radical take on feminism. The visionary scope of her activity as an art critic began to emerge only after it had been reframed through a reading of her feminism. This double aspect of her oeuvre is what makes her work and her biography unique. It seems that it was her experience of art that led to her feminism. *Autoritratto* is situated right in the middle of these two different activities, Lonzi having worked as a contemporary art critic from the time she completed her art-history studies at Florence University, and having ceased to do so after the publication of the *Autoritratto*, which constitutes a paean to art, artists and creation as well as her farewell to art criticism and the art scene.

In three of her essays from the 1960s, all published in mainstream fine-art reviews or exhibition leaflets,<sup>215</sup> one notices the attention and the care that Lonzi devotes to describing the environment, community and socio-cultural conditions and parameters surrounding the artist, including the reception of the work among peers and audience. The following review of the pointillist painter Georges Seurat is particularly relevant in the frame of my interest in event:

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<sup>215</sup> Carla Lonzi, 'Dipinti di Shiraga', *Notizie, International Center of Aesthetic Research and Associazione Arti Figurative*, Turin, 1962, pp. 4–12; 'Georges Seurat, Una nuova origine nella società della tecnica nascente', *I maestri del colore*, 178, Fratelli Fabbri Editori, Milan, 1966, pp. 2–6; Carla Lonzi, 'Henri Rousseau, L'imagier nouveau' di Jarry e il 'gentile Rousseau' di Apollinaire', *I maestri del colore*, 148, Fratelli Fabbri Editori, Milan, 1966, pp. 2–6.

Contrasting the charcoal drawings that [Seurat] completed in the Cafés Concerts (1887–88) with those made for *La Grande Jatte* (1884–86), one notes that he arrives ever closer at some result of dynamism, though not in the methodical manner that had been effected by Degas, nor that later exhibited by the Futurists. Seurat's dynamism is not linked to the object, but to an intuition about the structure of light and space in which we, and the data of our experience, are implicated during a certain state of events. At its core, this is the important element of truth inherent in [Charles] Henry's theory of dynamogeny. Stabilising fertile intersections between aesthetic and physiological perspectives, Henry intuited a new significance of subjectivity, while the world's established illusions ever continued to fall away with objective detachment. One should not forget that Flaubert had already completed his work in this period. Notwithstanding a wealth of existing theoretical formulations, Henry was for Seurat a harkening to the concrete nature of his experience lived through things, or rather, an element of harmony between theory and tangibility.<sup>216</sup>

It is interesting that Lonzi notices that the subject of a painting like *La Parade* (1887–88, 100 x 150 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), is not objects, but light streams – a physical and ephemeral phenomenon – an event. From this perspective she unfolds the scientific as well as literary context in which Seurat is living, while later quoting other art critics and making comparisons with her own period, demonstrating very clearly to the reader the time gap between her existence and the work of art she is discussing: 'Today, a painter dedicated to the study of light must, presumably, be an op artist, living

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<sup>216</sup> Carla Lonzi, 'Georges Seurat, Una nuova origine nella società della tecnica nascente', *op. cit.*, p. 5., 'Se si confrontano i disegni a carboncino che esegue nei Cafés Concerts [1887–88] con quelli per *La Grande Jatte* [1884–86], si nota che giunge sempre più a dei risultati di dinamismo, ma non in una maniera programmatica come avveniva in Degas o come sarà più tardi nel Futurismo. Il dinamismo di Seurat non è legato all'oggetto, ma all'intuizione di una struttura spaziale-luminosa in cui siamo implicati e in cui sono implicati, allo stato di eventi, i dati della nostra esperienza. In fondo questo è l'importante elemento di verità inerente alla teoria di Charles Henry: la dinamogenia. Nello stabilire tra il fatto estetico e la fisiologia fecondi punti di contatto, Henry intuiva il significato nuovo della soggettività in un momento in cui cadevano sempre più le illusioni di porsi di fronte al mondo con distacco obiettivo. Non bisogna dimenticare che Flaubert a quest'epoca ha già terminato la sua opera. Pur con dovizia di formulazione teoriche, Henry è stato per Seurat un richiamo alla concretezza della sua esperienza viva delle cose o, per dir meglio, un elemento di accordo fra concretezza e teoria.' Trans. Megan Bredeson for this PhD thesis.

in a society that immerses him in the quality of its expressions, and he will conceive his work as a series of objects to partake in the complex phenomenology of modernity.’<sup>217</sup>

Where does this interest in a precise contextualisation of the artistic production, as well as a clear statement about her contemporaneity, which prefigures what she will accomplish later, come from? Lonzi’s writings reveal a great interest in living artists: a curiosity about their existence, their interpretation of the world as well as working methods. Born in Florence in 1931, she studied in the early 1950s under Roberto Longhi (1890–1970), one of the most influential art historians of the time, who developed an innovative writing style sometimes compared to that of the poet Carlo Emilio Gadda, where writing about art becomes an art form in itself.<sup>218</sup> Lonzi perfectly integrates her master’s method and erudition: she demonstrates rigorous historical proficiency and a well-developed writing style – unlike the ‘ugly academic language’ complained of by Braidotti.<sup>219</sup> She graduated in 1956 with the thesis *Rapporti tra la scena e le arti figurative dalla fine dell’800* [Associations between Setting and Figurative Art in the Late Nineteenth Century], which was extremely well-received by her professor and the jury, although unconventional because dedicated to scenography, an ephemeral art format unusual in history of art studies. Professor Longhi suggested that she should publish the text, after some reworking of the manuscript. She refused, claiming that the academic world no longer interested her.<sup>220</sup> Moving to Rome, she frequented theatres and galleries, becoming deeply involved in Arte Povera in the 1960s, at that time amongst the most important avant-garde groups in Europe. In 1994, her University thesis was rediscovered by Giovanni Agosti in the archive of one of the examiners, the art historian Giulia Sinibaldi. Because of its relevance even forty years after its creation, the text was

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<sup>217</sup> Carla Lonzi, *op. cit.*, p. 3., ‘Oggi un pittore dedito a studi di luce sarà, presumibilmente, un op-artista: vivendo in una società che lo sommerge con la qualità delle sue manifestazioni, concepirà la sua opera come una serie di oggetti da far partecipare alla complessa fenomenologia della modernità.’ Trans. Megan Bredeson for this PhD thesis.

<sup>218</sup> Giovanni Previati (dir.), *L’arte di scrivere sull’arte, Roberto Longhi e la cultura del nostro tempo*, Editori Riunito, Rome, 1982; Enzo Raimondi, *Barocco moderno, Roberto Longhi e Carlo Emilio Gadda*, Mondadori, Milan, 2003.

<sup>219</sup> See note 2.

<sup>220</sup> On the relationship between Carla Lonzi and Roberto Longhi see Vanessa Martini, ‘Gli inizi della “straordinaria stagione” di Carla Lonzi: 1953-1963’, in Lara Conte, Laura Iamurri and Vanessa Martini (eds.), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità, Dalla critica militante al femminismo di Rivolta*, ETS, Pisa, 2011, pp. 11–43.

published in 1995, its author having died thirteen years earlier.<sup>221</sup> The conjunction between visual art, theatre, ballet and opera sets, made by diverse artists such as Pierre Bonnard, Giacomo Balla, Pablo Picasso, Enrico Prampolini, George Braque, André Derain, Giorgio de Chirico or Vladimir Tatlin is clearly stated, and Lonzi (who was twenty-five years old when she submitted her thesis) handles her subject matter thoroughly. This posthumous publication is interesting for two further reasons. Firstly, the 150 sketches, paintings and photographs of theatre sets and costumes complementing the text show the rich variety of works by artists involved in such a fundamentally ephemeral activity, where sets and costumes are made for the sake of a performance. Secondly, Lonzi's working method is unusual in classical art history, where students spend most of their time looking at artworks or in the library. As explained in an introductory text by Moreno Bucci,<sup>222</sup> Lonzi travelled Italy to record interviews with every possible Italian artist engaged in set or costume design about whom she wanted to write. Furthermore, in order to understand the context of their production, she also spoke with scene painters, stage directors and other theatre personnel. This research, including real encounters around art and life, would be a constant methodological approach and strength during her entire career, first as a young art-history student, then as professional art critic in the 1960s, and during the 1970s in the framework of feminist consciousness-raising (*autocoscienza*) with the group Rivolta Femminile.<sup>223</sup>

During the 1960s, several factors contributed to the significant development or even transformation of this 'encounter-interview' methodology that took Lonzi definitively away from her classical training and writing, and provided an original way to include the method in the result, i.e., to integrate and reveal the importance as well as influence of the process into the finalised text.

## **2.8 *Autoritratto***

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<sup>221</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Rapporti tra la scena e le arti figurative dalle fine dell'800*, Moreno Bucci (ed.), with contributions by Marta Lonzi and Anna Jaquinta, Fondazione Carlo Marchi, Studi 7, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Florence, 1995.

<sup>222</sup> Moreno Bucci, 'Carla Lonzi: un ribaltamento di scena', in *ibid.*, pp. vii–xiii.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.



*Autoritratto*,<sup>224</sup> originally published in 1969,<sup>225</sup> was Lonzi's last work as an art critic and arguably her first as a feminist. It signals an unprecedented epistemological and methodological shift in the art world and beyond. Between 1964 and 1969, availing herself of the new technology of the tape recorder, she conducted a number of conversations with some of the most important, emerging or promising artists of her time, including many of those involved in Arte Povera: Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Luciano Fabro, Pino Pascali and Giulo Paolini, among others. She then transcribed the interviews and assembled fragments of the conversations into a collage of voices, which overflow into one another and alternate with evocative black-and-white images (a mode of image/text juxtaposition reminiscent of W.G. Sebald and constituting elegant printed matter that brings orality, textuality and iconography into the same corpus). In her introduction, penned just before submitting the text to her editors, Lonzi wrote that these conversations with artists were essentially a way of connecting – of conversing with someone in a communicative and humanly satisfying way, of accepting the invitation to participate that, for her, was the scope of art itself. Exchange, instead of interpretation or attribution, giving the floor to artists rather than explaining the reasons and the meaning of their work, are the ways in which Lonzi unravels the art critic's authority. She does so in order to find a different role for herself, a role where creativity is not kept at arm's length as an object of study.

This collective dimension is at the heart of the book's composition. Lonzi uses montage as a means to allow the artists to dialogue amongst themselves, often through thematic sequences that juxtapose exchanges regarding one topic or another tied to the artistic or political events at that time. She invites all the participants into an imaginary scene that immediately stresses the multiplication of voices and a strongly subjective dimension, where each artist speaks for himself, in the first person, about his work and existence.

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<sup>224</sup> For an excellent introduction to *Autoritratto*, which strongly inspired these paragraphs, see Giovanna Zapperi, 'L'autoportrait d'une femme', in *Autoportait*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich and Maison Rouge, Paris, 2012, pp. 7–30. For the English translation by Jason Francis McGimsey, see Giovanna Zapperi, 'Self-Portrait as a Woman' in Laurent Schmid with Jonathan Frigeri and Ceel Mogami de Haas (eds.), *LapTopRadio: La Radio Siamo Noi*, Link editions, Brescia, forthcoming.

<sup>225</sup> De Donato Editore, Milan.

The conversations uncondescendingly examine the difficulties encountered by artists in the 1960s and the critical debates of that decade. Larger questions – the 1968 revolts, the struggles of women and Black Americans for civil rights, or the political and cultural life in Italy at the time – all occupy an important place in the text. In this way, it opens a unique door to the whole epoch, an entire generation and a precise social and geographic context.

This approach marks on the one hand Lonzi's dis-identification with the profession and the figure of the art critic, as it was seen at that time, while on the other, signals a potentially new condition of a becoming subject. Lonzi herself is one of the characters in the book. Rarely posing questions, privileging listening and participation, she expresses her opinion on the topics addressed in the same way the artists do. She never mediates or offers interpretations of what the artists say, but creates exchanges that are more like conversations, where roles are not clearly established. Critics, Lonzi declares, are 'obsessed': they insist on transforming what arises first and foremost from experience and thus from life itself – into institutionalised knowledge. Art criticism is therefore a deformation of the artist's work, fruit of an 'unnatural' effort, i.e. an obsession. Picking up a tape recorder and recording conversations consequently becomes an act of liberation; participation replaces intellectual control.

This is similar to the positions we find in postmodern anthropology, and precisely how this type of anthropology differs from the classic participant observation, where the subject assumes intellectual control over the subject, which postmodern anthropologists would call authority.<sup>226</sup> It is interesting to note that Lonzi's methodology also anticipates postmodernism's emphasis on rendering the researcher's position explicit in their findings.<sup>227</sup> As stated by Spiro:

For if subjective interests are formidable obstacles to objectify, for example in physics, then surely they are even more so, for example in anthropology, in which the potentiality for ideologically motivated distortion – imperialist and anti-

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<sup>226</sup> Melford E. Spiro, 'Postmodernist Anthropology, Subjectivity, and Science: A Modernist Critique', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 759–780.

<sup>227</sup> Zapperi, *op. cit.*.

imperialist, racist and anti-racist, ethnographic and multicultural, sexist and feminist – is much the greater. Thus, if ethnography, as postmodernists (and others) insist, is an interpretive enterprise and if the ethnographer's interpretations are processed (as they surely are) through all those and other ideological filters, then without objective assessment procedures, how much credence can be placed in any interpretation, no matter how emphatic and insightful the ethnographer?<sup>228</sup>

However, the conversational methodology distinguishes Lonzi from participant observation and postmodern anthropological models. Furthermore, her approach requires the observant to be a fundamentally active part of the research, as much as she is a partisan proponent coming from a specific subjective position.<sup>229</sup> The very fact that she published a book such as *Autoritratto*, composing out of her data a comment on a possible position for an art critic or art historian, allows me to claim that she is posthumously contributing to the field of analytic autoethnography, defined by Leon Anderson as 'research in which the researcher is (a) is a full member in a research group or setting; (b) uses analytic reflexivity; (c) has a visible narrative presence in the written text; (d) engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; (e) is committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena'.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, Lonzi's text leads us to reflect on the complex relationship between the ecosystem needed to let art practices flourish and contribute to the public debate, and the specificity of the art, belonging, following Heidegger, to art. I choose, in this thesis, to embrace these two poles (art as a symptom of a human-based organisation and art as a powerful ontological thing), and to assume an in-between stance, as an artist, educator and analyser.

Besides discussing Lonzi's work within postmodern anthropology and autoethnography (even if the latter was born in another context and field of research), and this for the sake of a methodological enquiry, it would be difficult not to mention the immense work

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<sup>228</sup> Spiro, *op. cit.*, p. 769.

<sup>229</sup> On a theoretical level, a parallel could be drawn here between the work of Carla Lonzi and another contemporary Italian activist and intellectual, Romano Alquati and his concept of '*conricerca*', 'working-class science', the 'methodology of a constitutive breach'.

<sup>230</sup> Leon Anderson, *op. cit.*, see note 190.

done by the Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in an apparently similar fashion: namely, using the interview format to write contemporary art history.<sup>231</sup> Featuring 2,000 hours of interviews, Obrist's fascinating archive is an endless conversation. The first series of these interviews was released as *Interviews Volume 1* in 2003 while *Volume 2* was published in 2010.<sup>232</sup> A total of sixty-nine artists, architects, writers, filmmakers, scientists, philosophers, musicians and performers share their unique experiences and frank insights, and together form an impressive and unique document of the contemporary period. Obrist is keen to follow his subjects' work over a long period of time, and this relational consistency is noticeable in the quality of his work.

So why privilege or emphasise Lonzi's work over Obrist's in this thesis? In simple terms, Lonzi differentiates herself by presenting an epistemological and methodological break, moving beyond a simple collection and accumulation of materials, while Obrist's work could be compared to that of quantitative ethnography, the accumulation of a series of voices, without any self-reflection about the how and the why. Can you, and if yes, how do you transcribe and edit single conversations into a collective discussion? What kind of body do you then construct and reflect upon by composing a polyphony? How do you bring into the space of a single book distinctive moments of an exchange that took place over a period of five years? Lonzi found a form to crystallise this complexity: a technology-based, creative and fictional solution (this group of people never had the opportunity to speak all together in the same space and moment), an assumed and thoroughly constructed dispositive, whose complexity isn't far from the endeavours of Haraway, Braidotti, Preciado or Ahmed. Obrist, meanwhile, remains trapped in bilateral dichotomies that force his interviews to remain portraits in a tradition that can be traced back to the monumental Renaissance artist Giorgio Vasari's creation of personified art history through the description of exemplary artistic figures, *The Life of the Artists*.<sup>233</sup> This compilation featuring more than 200 artists is sometimes considered

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<sup>231</sup> Michael Diers, Lars Blunck, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Das Interview, Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Fundus Band 206, Philo Arts, Hamburg, 2013.

<sup>232</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews, Volume 1*, 2003, *Interviews, Volume 2*, 2010, both at Charta/Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery, Florence.

<sup>233</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, 1550–1568* (*The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008).

the advent of art history due to its historical as well as biographical approach, and as in Lonzi's self-portrait, Vasari also depicts himself.

Obrist's *Interviews*, in terms of their amplitude and variety of speakers, can also be associated with what Gustave Flaubert in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* satirised as an obsession with encyclopaedic collecting, leading to absurdity or madness.<sup>234</sup> Lonzi goes beyond Obrist's dialectic in order to recompose a situation that is alive and immanent to the event that is the conversation, a narrative that, as a methodological mode, manages to create a dialogue that overlaps, intertwines and contaminates multiple subjectivities on a single plane of immanence. The re-qualified subject, now in a collective, horizontal position turned outward to society, poses the question of art, creation and process as a directly social question.

This Lonzian methodology is also attractive due to its immediately political, feminist and creative character. *Autoritratto* foregrounds the main features of feminine and feminist literature: self-narration, the importance of subjectivity, and the pleasure of conversation. The forms practised in *Autoritratto* would be used again (and transformed) by Lonzi in the 1970s, especially in the feminist practice of *autocoscienza* – an Italian version of American *consciousness raising* – focused on exchange and conversation, as well as in her diary writing between 1972 and 1977.<sup>235</sup> In the pages of *Autoritratto*, women's rights are directly addressed, and suggestively associated with the fight against racism through numerous references to the civil rights struggles of African-Americans.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Alphonse Lemerre, Paris, 1881.

<sup>235</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla, Diario di una femminista*, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, Milan, 1978; for a synthetic and very partial presentation of this feminist diary, as well as Lonzi's views on feminism, their implications and consequences, see Claire Fontaine, 'We are all clitoridian women: notes on Carla Lonzi's legacy' in e-flux journal #47, 09/2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/we-are-all-clitoridian-women-notes-on-carla-lonzi%E2%80%99s-legacy/> (accessed 27 July 2016).

<sup>236</sup> Artist Carla Accardi declares: 'Yeah, what really interests me is the problem of the other, the other in respect to the white male. Who is the other in respect to the white male? Women ... They say: 'why do Blacks interest you?' ... that's the thing that most interests me, you see? Because I feel closer to their side, the side of the other.', Italian edition, Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, De Donato editore, Bari, 1969, p. 158; French edition, Carla Lonzi, *Autoportait*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich and Maison rouge, Paris, 2012, p. 108.

I will come back to this milestone text throughout this thesis. In this chapter, I aim to inscribe it in a postmodern, anthropological as well as a feminist perspective, while giving some basic information about its content.

## 2.9 Lonzi, different kinds of ethnography and what to do with it

Other strands of ethnography are worth mentioning for this study, such as the work of Beverly Skeggs, a feminist sociologist interested in women and class.<sup>237</sup> ‘Longitudinal ethnographies’,<sup>238</sup> namely immersive ethnographic fieldwork conducted diachronically over an extended period of time, or through appropriately timed revisits, may be relevant to *Eternal Tour*, an arts festival running over several years. ‘Life history’ research could also be relevant, since in my case studies the border between art and life is blurred and sometimes even overwhelmed<sup>239</sup> in a dynamic resembling that described by Haraway and Lazzarato above. Some strands of cultural studies into visual media may also be of interest or inspiration, such as a photo-based analysis of *Smoking up Ambition!*, the most photographed project in my research corpus.<sup>240</sup> All these elements are relevant to consider in the frame of an international art festival such as *Eternal Tour*, which might even be considered a festival of tourism as well as art. (In recent autoethnographic tourism research, Lonzi’s methods have unwittingly been echoed.)<sup>241</sup> Beyond the autoethnographic, there are, of course, related discursive approaches, where objects can be analysed through certain media and interfaces such as global

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<sup>237</sup> Among many publications, see, for example: Beverly Skeggs, ‘Seeing differently: ethnography and explanatory power’, *Australian Educational Researcher*, Springer Netherlands, 26, 1, 1998, pp. 33–52.

<sup>238</sup> See, for example, Hazel Tucker, ‘Peasant entrepreneurs: a longitudinal ethnography’, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Elsevier, The Netherlands, 37, 4, 2010, pp. 927–946; Stephen Barley, ‘Images of imaging: notes on doing longitudinal fieldwork’, in *Organization Science*, INFORMS, Catonsville, Maryland, 1, 3, 2010, pp. 220–247.

<sup>239</sup> Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma, ‘From ethnography to life history: tracing transitions of school children’, in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Routledge, London, 6, 3, 2003, pp. 245–254.

<sup>240</sup> See, for example, Brian Garrod, ‘Exploring place-perception: a photo-based analysis’, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Elsevier, The Netherlands 35, 2, 2007, pp. 381–401.

<sup>241</sup> Caroline Skarles, ‘Where words fail, visuals ignite: opportunities for visual autoethnography in tourism research’, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Elsevier, The Netherlands, 37, 4, 2010, pp. 905–926.

magazines,<sup>242</sup> as well as audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions between people, objects and technologies.<sup>243</sup> These take a variety of semiotic, cognitive, emotional, metaphorical, pragmatic and interactional approaches to understanding the emergence of meanings amongst and between people and things, artistic events included.

Going through these various options, albeit quickly and superficially, reveals the numerous possibilities that I could have adopted in order to process my culturally produced experience after the event, as in a post-production mode. ‘Post-production’ does not mean here ‘historicisation’ (not only to write the history, but furthermore to inscribe my art events in a clear historical context that would legitimate and frame them). Post-production implies producing new material out of that already produced. In a traditional filmmaking project, a script is written, the scenes are shot (production) and then the material is edited (post-production). At this point the narrative takes on a new shape as visual and audio are combined. Did *Eternal Tour*, produced from 2008 to 2012, need such a post-production phase in the shape of a PhD thesis based on an autoethnographic methodology? Would that even have been possible?

Nearly three years ago, while envisioning conducting a series of interviews with people involved in the sectors embedded in my chosen research field, namely collective and long-running cultural projects in the global cultural field, I began to realise that this prescribed academic distancing between subject and object would have required me to cease my activities and involvement in the international art system. My direct, active and participative role in this research is the *sine qua non* condition of these projects, and postmodern anthropological models would not allow me to address the singularity of my position as a participant creator, producer and manager of arts festivals because, in

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<sup>242</sup> David Machi and Theo van Leeuwen, ‘Language style and lifestyle: the case of a global magazine’, in *Media, Culture & Society*, Sage, London, 27, 4, 2005, pp. 577–600.

<sup>243</sup> Marjorie Harness Goodwin and Charles Goodwin, ‘Emotion within situated activity’, in Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, Malden, Blackwell, Oxford, MA, 2000, pp. 239–257; Christian Heath, Paul Luff and Marcus Sanchez Svensson, ‘Overseeing organizations: configuring action and its environment’, in *British Journal of Sociology*, London School of Economics and Political Sciences, 53, 2, 2002, pp. 181–201; John Hindmarsh and Alison Pilnick, ‘Knowing bodies at work: embodiment and ephemeral teamwork in anaesthesia’ in *Organization Studies*, Sage, London, 28, 9, 2007, pp. 1395–1416.

postmodern anthropologic terms, I would enter into complete participation, where I would lose all objectivity, thus putting my analysis at risk.<sup>244</sup>

More importantly, another limit posed by postmodern anthropological research methods – including those incorporating the even more personal model of autoethnographic research methods – is the individualist conditions under which they place the researcher. The vast majority of autoethnographic models presuppose that the analysing subject is an individual, whereas in nearly all of my artistic and curating activities, I act as part of a group or collective and the end result is inevitably the product of collaboration. Furthermore, the very fact that I am more interested in the events than the subjects who created them, their biographies, intimate motivations or stories, encouraged, or even forced, me to choose a slightly new direction and explore alternative possibilities. My art practice and its diverse potentials facilitated the envisioning of another track. This was to put the event – as a tool in analysing artistic ephemera – at the centre of the enquiry, rather than singular autobiographical autoethnographical perspectives. Of course, borders are permeable, and throughout the entire thesis I am the one selecting, presenting and discussing what I relate to event and why. My voice, as the one telling the story, is then highly perceptible, as is that of Lonzi in *Autoritratto*, or that of Kraus in *I love Dick*. It is for example very obvious that what constitutes the end of this chapter, the episode, ‘I got a manicure’, is an autobiographical epiphany; it is ‘a remembered moment perceived to have significantly impacted my trajectory’, revealing the way a person like me ‘could negotiate “intense situations” and “effects” that linger – recollections, memories, feelings – long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished’.<sup>245</sup> The entire thesis is precisely driven by this particular autobiographical moment, because it pinpointed the fact that the concept of event would be useful in understanding a bit better what actually occurred: something in tension between art, contingency, necessity to perform, necessity to attend such a performance (in this case for Giorgio and me), exoticism and a profound closeness or empathy. This is then the case for this present chapter, in which event and autobiography are strongly

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<sup>244</sup> Kathleen M. DeWalt, Billie R. DeWalt and Coral B. Wayland, ‘Participant observation’, in H. Russel Bernard (ed.), *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California, 1998, pp. 259–299.

<sup>245</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, in *Forum Qualitative Research*, Volume 12, Number 1, Art. 10, January 2011, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



connected. For the following chapters, I will take less the tone and narrative style of telling a story, like that of ‘I got a manicure’, in turning my attention to collective phenomena or experiences. Indeed, this first moment of self-consciousness, provoked by a transforming episode in Salvador da Bahia as the creation and affirmation of someone researching and writing about contemporary art and event, is crucial in the construction of the thesis. This is because it revealed event; just ‘telling [my] story’ won’t be enough or relevant. As Mitch Allen formulates it: ‘Why is your story more valid than anyone else’s? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use.’<sup>246</sup>

From autobiography I will then move toward something more closely related to ‘autoethnography’, which combines *autobiography* with *ethnography*, amounting to ‘retrospectively and selectively [writing] about epiphanies [...] being part of a culture and/or possessing a particular identity’.<sup>247</sup> By switching from autobiography to autoethnography, what Leon Anderson calls ‘analytic’<sup>248</sup> and Norman K. Denzin ‘reflexive’<sup>249</sup> becomes very important to consider. Anderson’s five criteria are already mentioned above, and I will briefly discuss them here, in relation to Lonzi as well as my work in the present thesis. This discussion will allow me to set some vicinity between these two works, according to their methodological qualities.

## 2.10 Analytic autoethnography

The first and most obvious feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is a complete member in the social world under study, i. e., a ‘CMR’, or a complete member researcher. As noticed by Anderson,<sup>250</sup> Patricia A. and Peter Adler make a ‘useful distinction between two types: “opportunistic” and “convert” CMRs. In the first case, ‘group membership precedes the decision to conduct research on the group’. In the second case, ‘convert CMRs [...] become converted to complete immersion and membership during the course of the research’. In the case of Lonzi and myself, it is

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<sup>246</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, *ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Leon Anderson, ‘Analytic Autoethnography’, in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 35, Number 4, Sage, London, 2006, pp. 373–395.

<sup>249</sup> Norman K. Denzin, ‘Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically’, in *The Review of Education*, 25, Taylor & Francis Inc., Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 257–278.

<sup>250</sup> Leon Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

evident that both of us belong to the art system we are describing and studying, years before Lonzi started working on *Autoritratto*, and myself on this thesis. To be opportunistic CMRs is obviously a great advantage, as observed by Patricia A. and Peter Adler: ‘CMRs come closest of all... to approximating the emotional stance they study.’<sup>251</sup> This matter of fact does not guarantee a perfect perception on things: on the one hand, even as CMR, your point of view remains yours. On the other hand, being at the same time member of the group and one observer of it creates some ambiguity or at least a phase of adjustment, or what I would call a ‘mirroring double consciousness’, while you are observing yourself as a member, and vice versa, accepting a sociological gaze on what is very often taken for ontological and escaping a certain number of external parameters. Art is often surrounded by a veil of self-proclaimed rules and convictions for those practicing it. To pull aside such a curtain, with the help of feminism, was one of the Lonzi’s tasks. Thanks to the concept of event, I am proceeding to another kind of disclosure, inscribing a series of artistic ephemera onto a broader landscape of parameters, whether academic, historical, philosophical or organizational.

The second feature of autoethnography, still according to Anderson, is reflexivity. Discussed widely from the beginning of the 1990s in interpretative sociology and cultural anthropology, ‘in its most transparent guise’, Charlotte Davies has clearly written: ‘reflexivity expresses researchers’ awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it.’<sup>252</sup> Impact on the situation may manifest in the choice of a particular technological medium (for example a voice recorder in the case of Lonzi, where the exact words are kept, transcribed and edited), or dictating the length of the research itself, meaning the duration the persons involved will interact with each other (5 years in the case of *Autoritratto*). But beyond these logistical facts, it is also a matter of being conscious of one’s own voice, or one’s own body: the answers will be different according to the implication of Lonzi. At certain moments of her dialogue with the others, she literally explains her status, who she is, while asking questions. In my case, I deliberately refer to my position throughout the thesis, and the research itself has had a real impact on the development of my artistic

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<sup>251</sup> *Membership roles in field research*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California, 1987, p. 67.

<sup>252</sup> Charlotte Davies, *Reflexive ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 7.

and curatorial practice, from 2014 to the final redaction of the thesis. Reflexivity is further discussed by Norman K. Denzin, and I will elaborate on this point below.

The third feature of autoethnography, as formulated by Anderson, is ‘that the researcher is a highly visible social actor within the written text. The researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered as vital data for understanding the social world being observed.’ This visibility, already addressed somewhat in regard to the second feature of reflexivity, isn’t meant to be static, but rather changing and evolving. Indeed, the researchers should be ‘vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds’.<sup>253</sup> In the case of Lonzi, such a social implication within the work is highly visible, not only throughout the text, where her words are as transcribed and edited as those of the people she is interviewing, but also on a visual level. Indeed, among the series of black and white pictures reproduced in the book, one can see her, sitting on a working table in Minneapolis, transcribing from the sound produced by the tape recorder, well recognisable on the photograph. This picture is rather impressive and reveals also the time spent on a rather mechanical and hands-on activity. It shows Lonzi in deep concentration, bent over her notebook; it is actually reproduced twice in the French edition of *Autoritratto*, once in the introductory part, and a second time mounted in the dialogue itself, rather at the beginning of the conversation, where Lonzi addresses the issue of recording and orality together with the artist Carla Accardi. Some pages after, she even reproduces a picture of herself as a teenager, and elaborates on her childhood, adolescence and how she became an art critic<sup>254</sup>. Regarding her evolution and participation in ‘fluid’ rather than ‘static’, *Autoritratto* gives her the opportunity to reflect on her function as critic, how it should traditionally be done and also how she conceives this work, in relation to the group of artists in whom she is interested. Beyond the limits of this singular book, a very strong shift appears in her career following its release, with a strong engagement in feminism. This transition is already perceptible at certain moments of *Autoritratto*’s dialogue, a very conscious gendered position not only claimed by Lonzi but also by Accardi, the only other woman participating in the long interview. In my case, in this thesis, my voice and

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<sup>253</sup> Leon Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>254</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Autoportrait*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich, 2012, pp. 27, 57, 60.

my point of view are clearly present on various occasions. My intervention as a clear ‘I’ may sometimes be informative, but also self-reflexive, allowing me to clearly state the different decisions I make, and from which options, throughout the various chapters. The research that this thesis allowed me to conduct clearly saw me evolve in the perception of my own work as an artist, curator and teacher in an art school, but also of how to best use the possibility offered by transdisciplinary dynamics and, even more, of how to cope with heterogenic material. It is not only about gaining knowledge and insight, but also changing the way I work and write. This thesis has had this double impact: not only of an evolution regarding the what, but also the how and even the why.

The fourth feature consists of a ‘dialogue with the informants beyond the self’. Indeed, when you are constantly confronted with ‘self-related issues at every turn, the potential for self-absorption can loom large.’ Conscious of such a risk, it is indeed the duty of the researcher to communicate with others, and also take into account their points in the elaboration of the discourse hence produced, otherwise ‘autoethnography loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self-absorption.’<sup>255</sup> As Charlotte Aull Davies writes, it should be seen ‘not in terms of self-absorption, but rather [in terms of] interrelationships between researcher and other to inform and change social knowledge’.<sup>256</sup> Lonzi does engage in complex dialogue, as do I, by conducting interviews, for example one with Aline Morvan (Chapter 3) and another with Franz Treichler (Chapter 5). Those two dialogues, which I haven’t recorded but rather wrote according to my notes, are providing complementary information to what I think and the way I analyse for myself. Furthermore, in Lonzi’s case, many references are made to the context of art at that time: not only to that of Italy, but of North-America as well. Some people are also specifically mentioned, so that the group constituted by Lonzi and the 14 artists she interviews permanently mirrors and reflects the social context of which they are all part. In my case, beyond a collection of other voices, the field of art and its history also gives me the opportunity to contextualise how and where my autoethnographic work is taking place.

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<sup>255</sup> Leon Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp. 385–386.

<sup>256</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 184.

The fifth, last and possibly most important and significant feature of autoethnography, according to Anderson, is its commitment to an analytical agenda, as

‘the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. [...] The definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization.’<sup>257</sup>

Lonzi's *Autoritratto* actually fulfils more than one analytical agenda: it is a solid historical document about Arte Povera, the Italian art movement, in comparison with art in the United States. The book also gives clear insight into the function of an art critic, his or her training at the time, and its limitations as assessed by the author – she attacks mainly the authoritative and distant posture of the critic toward artists, in particular her colleagues and the environment to which she bore witness. She deems this milieu to be too institutionalised – much too close to the academy or market – inaccessible, unwilling and incapable of listening to artists, yet judging them and imposing a hierarchy of power over them. Some parts of the dialogue also concern the life of an artist, how to organize oneself regarding studio, time, family, and the implications such a profession can have on everyday life – a rather pragmatic and sociological perspective – but also the mystical or idealistic dimension of the activity. The book is also a thoroughly aesthetic and reflexive consideration of contemporary art at that time, discussed and looked upon as an experimental field of research – something absolutely visionary considering the book's date of publication – a field of speculation bringing into objects, spaces and installations a combination of ideas, narratives, references, quotes, allusions, materials and technologies. Thus, beyond the unique method and editorial quality of *Autoritratto*, an orchestrated polyphony, challenging thanks to the potential of writing the dimension of time, the book is also fascinating from a series of analytical perspectives. In my case, with the present thesis, the theoretical point of the event, as a tool to analyse a selection of ephemera that I name ‘case studies’, is obviously one of my analytical agendas. Besides this inquiry, bringing my experiences and data from the field of art and

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<sup>257</sup> Leon Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 387–388.

curatorship in a dialogue with organizational theory like that of Robert Cooper is another ‘transcending’ – to use a word of Anderson’s - attempt, perhaps not in the direction of a ‘generalization’, but more in the view of two diverse fields enriching each other. Indeed, rather than a strategy leading to ‘generalization’ (which might make sense in the field of sociology), while considering the field of art, I would rather propose the notion of complexification. Indeed, general ideas hardly help to understand better an artistic or cultural phenomenon because, as is nicely formulated by Norman K. Denzin, ‘power (like culture) is always local, contextual, performative, linking ideologies, representations, identities, meanings and contexts’.<sup>258</sup> In this sense, gaining a multi-perspective on things by multitasking (being part of the group as well as conducting research on the group) as well as elaborating on and inventing new situations that respond precisely to my previously identified interests, but also by asking further questions, so to say, is what I mean by a process of complexification.

Lonzi’s *Autoritratto*, as a methodology, represents an original literary way to cope with complexity: to synthesize in a single book five years of interviews, by keeping them at the core of the opus and not retelling them, but rather finding a very particular way to edit them, is incredibly unique. Furthermore, it is a creative and original solution that corresponds, in an astonishing anticipatory manner, to what Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner call a ‘crisis of confidence’ inspired by postmodernism in the 1980s, a period during which ‘scholars began illustrating how the “facts” and “truths” scientists “found” were inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them.’<sup>259</sup> Autoethnography, as defined by the five features discussed here above, is what binds together Lonzi’s endeavour with mine, as well as an interest in finding a creative solution to questions and in reflecting on one own work, implying the production of a new work (whether it be a publication, a piece of art, a particular manner of curating), as well as getting beyond the simple ‘meta’ discourse, a voice talking about something already existing. If Lonzi’s *Autoritratto* is an undeniably a model and a source of inspiration for this thesis, it does not mean that copying it as if it were a manual for use, or for conduct, would be noteworthy, or even possible. Firstly, its historical time plays a role on many levels: not only has technology changed, but the way

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<sup>258</sup> Norman K. Denzin, ‘Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically’, in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 25, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 266.

<sup>259</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, *op.cit.*

art is produced and the way it circulates as well. I rather insist in this thesis on the year 1989 as a milestone that dictates, or at least marks a shift, in geopolitics, including eventually the art sphere. Secondly, my autobiographical function is very different from Lonzi's: I am not an art critic following the work of a group of artists in a set, stable context and geography, but an organizer (artist, curator, teacher) who runs varied projects with diverse personalities in locations across Switzerland, Europe and the rest of the world. Thirdly, beyond situating myself and questioning my function – how it is meant to be and how I would like to have it – I am interested in a series of ephemera, or phenomena. These differences between her work and mine allow me to imagine further strategies, while taking advantage of whatever situation I am currently in, and even to influence situations to nourish my reflection and research in real time.

### **2.11 Integrating my PhD research into my art practice**

Interestingly enough, as soon as I started my doctoral research at the School of Business and Management at the Queen Mary University, London, in January 2014, I became drawn to various important collective projects in the contemporary art field. To step back from these would have been to remove myself from the plane of immanence necessary for understanding events, as well as renouncing the network through which my art practice is partly made. I also had to consider the requirements of my pedagogical role at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm: namely being a practising artist, exhibiting and publishing on a regular basis. Following this multiple incentive, I opted to accept the projects in which I had been given the opportunity to participate, resolving that if there was any possibility to make them so, they would be influenced and nourished by my research on art event – namely, this thesis. This was certainly the case with *Smoking Up Ambition!* and *Helvetic Zebra*, both concretised in the second half of year 2014. *Morgenröte...* (2015) and its related publication *Into Your Solar Plexus* (2016) were even shaped by it.

In the written format of this thesis, while facing this impossibility of becoming a researcher subject looking at other people like objects of investigation, four options presented themselves: 1) assuming the position of an author obviously writing her own story; 2) writing a 'collective story'; 3) doing both of the above; 4) writing the story as well as the story of the story. All four options automatically imply that the tool used in

such a process is one's own performing body, immanent to the production of the meaning of the event. In this sense, it became clear that an alternative methodology for studying this particular kind of object would be necessary: a methodology that in itself poses the question of the difficulty – if not impossibility – of the separation of subject and object, between the written document and the art piece, of the closure in time and space of passionate exchanges. It would need to be a methodology capable of recognising the social and cultural immanence of art projects such as mine, and therefore of envisioning the potentiality of an 'event'. It would be a methodology able to connect the production of artistic meaning with the geopolitical conditions to which it is at once subjected and conditions. Finally, it would need to be an inspiring methodology, creative and radical enough to suggest the potential of any work to constitute a milestone, sometimes a rupture, leading to a re-evaluation of the many ways of looking at or practising one's own work, whether object-, event- or text-based. I found that all these conditions crystallised in the work, career and methodology of Carla Lonzi (1931–1982), which I attempt to apply here to my corpus, condition and situation.

Issues related to pedagogy and academia should also be raised in this methodological discussion of the thesis. Besides my artistic, curatorial and organizational activities, I am also a teacher, and part of the academic world, namely that of higher education art schools (Professor of Fine Arts at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, 2010–2016 and from January 2017, Head of the Master Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts). To address these points, I will briefly allude to the work of Denzin, including his thoughts on reflexivity, as well as Mats Alvesson's considerations regarding the study of academic structures while being part of them.

Following the consequences of September 11, 2001, Denzin proposes a form of politically engaged, performing autoethnography, inscribing it in a seventh 'moment': that of the future (2000–) in relation to the performative turn<sup>260</sup> succeeding the traditional (1900–1950), the modernist (1950–1970), blurred genres (1970–1986), the crisis of representation (1986–1990), postmodern or experimental (1990–1995), and post-experimental (1995–2000). This historical classification, created with Yvonne S.

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<sup>260</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler, *Excitable speech, a politics of the performative*, Routledge, New York, 1997; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction*, Routledge, New York, 2006.



Lincoln,<sup>261</sup> is very relevant as it highlights yet again the importance of the historical period to which a work of research is always confined. If Lonzi's belongs to the 'modernist' period, according to Denzin and Lincoln, what I am currently doing belongs to that of the 'future'. Would that mean that the type of autoethnography I am practicing is the one defined by Denzin under his paradigm?

Performance [auto] ethnography is the future of ethnography, and ethnography's future is the seventh moment. In the seventh moment the dividing line between [auto] ethnography and ethnography disappears. The reflexive ethnographer becomes the guiding presence in the ethnographic text. [...] It is necessary to join several discourses, including: critical pedagogy, cultural studies, the performative turn in [auto] ethnography, critical race, and radical democratic pedagogy.<sup>262</sup>

If I am indeed interested in event – which can be related somewhat to performance, as well as joined to several other discourses – the way I envision my pedagogy is not as radical as the one promoted by Denzin. Indeed, referring more than once to Paulo Freire, the concept of hope and the socio-political impact of [auto] ethnography, Denzin aims for 'a radical democratic imagination which redefines the concept of civic participation and public citizenship.'<sup>263</sup> My relationship with institution and the way I teach both aim to broaden what art can be -- for example the field of artistic research and my interaction with students, who sometimes become the protagonists of my projects (this was the case in *Morgenröte...* and *Into Your Solar Plexus*), by being introduced to the material and further interpreting it while also producing their own artworks. Civic participation and public citizenship aren't at stake primarily, but could be only considered indirectly. In any case, in this thesis, it isn't a subject in itself, as I choose to select my case studies according to the 'event' criteria and not what could have been 'social' or 'political'. But the performativity of my work, organizing and producing new situations out of the corpus (for example scheduling a series of 'piece-discussions' in the frame of *Smoking Up Ambition!*, Chapter 3), would be an argument to accept Denzin and

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<sup>261</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, Sage, California, 2000, pp. 1–29.

<sup>262</sup> Norman K. Denzin, 'Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically', in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 25, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 259.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 259–262.

Lincoln's historicizing proposal. The seventh moment, claimed already in 2003, seems to be the right one – now that we are in 2017, an eighth moment could be designed, in relation to recent crises, including migration and Trumpism, but it isn't my subject of inquiry here. Complementing this relevant aspect of autoethnography, and following the work of Doug Foley,<sup>264</sup> George Marcus<sup>265</sup> and Barbara Tedlock,<sup>266</sup> Denzin distinguishes at least three types of reflexive ethnography: a confessional reflexivity, a theoretical reflexivity and a deconstructive reflexivity.

The first implies a non-distinction between self and other, 'creating a space for feminism, racial, indigenous and borderland standpoint theories and inquiries'.<sup>267</sup> Obviously this means having the capacity for empathy, that is for getting the point of view and position of somebody else, and it is clear that in the formulation of Denzin the reference point is a 'white, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective.'<sup>268</sup> I address this kind of reflexivity in the Chapter 5, by referring to ecofeminism, while contextualising and reflecting on the case study, *Helvetic Zebra*.

The second reflexivity is theoretical. It is associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant<sup>269</sup>, who 'advocate an epistemologically reflexive sociology and ethnography grounded in everyday cultural practices', and where 'the sociologist works back and forth between field experience and theory'.<sup>270</sup> Such a balance requires time and most probably some geographical or physical moves to gain some kind of distance. Even if you are a CMR (Complete Member Researcher), can you work on your theory at

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<sup>264</sup> Doug Foley, 'Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn' in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Routledge, London, 15, 2002, pp. 469–490.

<sup>265</sup> George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, University of Princeton Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998.

<sup>266</sup> Barbara Tedlock, 'Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, Sage, California, 2000, pp. 455–486.

<sup>267</sup> Norman K. Denzin, 'Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically', in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 25, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 269.

<sup>268</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview', in *Forum Qualitative Research*, Volume 12, Number 1, Art. 10, January 2011, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

<sup>269</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

<sup>270</sup> Norman K. Denzin, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

the same place as where the group or community you are studying is located? Do you have even the facilities and resources to do so? Most of the time, two places at minimum are needed, and the researcher goes from one to another. Different kinds of data are also collected. Indeed, if it is rather logical that field work consists in recording, taking notes and photographs, namely an accumulation of new things to be classified and analysed, what does that entail for theory? It is highly predictable that during the evolution of the research, and according to its results and evolution, the respective theory will evolve. It will not only concern the way things are written and analysed, but also the need to seek out new references and literature to contextualise the ongoing work. In that sense, nothing is static, and as proposed by Phil Francis Carspecken,<sup>271</sup> the collection of these different pieces of data will lead to a discovery of systems relations and help to explain findings. Such interconnections are at stake in this thesis, where my positionality implies the confrontation of a certain set of issues, for example how feminists address and practice philosophy, or the evolution of the concept of ‘event’ which will become ‘echo-event’ in Chapter 4 (relating to an endless confession that doesn’t find any receiver, but still finds its temporary place in the Kunsthalle Bern), or ‘eco-event’ in Chapter 5, because of the characteristic of the atmosphere created by a music concert accompanied by a film projection.

The third form of reflexivity is deconstructive<sup>272</sup> and contests the stable identities of the observer and its subject. It presents as a synthesis of the two first forms of reflexivity mentioned here above and ‘is postmodern, confessional, critical and intertextual’.

Deconstructive reflexivity is something I strive to achieve in writing this thesis; indeed, I see it as a necessary quality. Hopefully this latter is noticeable throughout its pages, moving from one case study to another, experiencing different voices and the evolution of a concept. Together with the notion of analytic autoethnography as defined by Anderson here above, Denzin’s deconstructive reflexivity more or less coins the tenets of the methodology I have chosen while first engaging with my research, and then afterward in writing this thesis.

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<sup>271</sup> Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography Educational Research*, Routledge, New York, 1996.

<sup>272</sup> Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994.

To complete this presentation and reflection on autoethnography in regard to Lonzi's work, as both a historical case and source of inspiration, as well as a framing of my own endeavour in this present thesis, it remains for me to discuss some of Mats Alvesson's ideas in his article, 'Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure'.<sup>273</sup> Primarily interested in engaging self-ethnographical research in the University world, he ponders the strengths and weaknesses of such a method according to the given context of loyalty that one researcher may have toward his or her own faculty, department or institution, and the timing of engaging with such work. At which moment of someone's career should such research be conducted, in order to not jeopardize the academic path already undertaken? Indeed, Alvesson makes a distinction between self- and auto-ethnography, excluding the autobiographical component, but he states clearly that the researcher he envisions for his proposal is a 'CMR', a complete member researcher. Alvesson's proposal is relevant to consider in comparison to my own initiative, as I have also been a member of some higher education faculty since January 2010. I also write about artistic research as an academic field (Chapter 4) and what is at stake for artists when they engage in such an environment where art, research, institutionalization and power should find an intelligent and relevant balance. Nevertheless, two major distinctions must be made between his proposal and what I am analysing in this thesis.

Firstly, the University and the art world have very few things in common when it comes to structure, population, ways of functioning, tempo, localisation, career development, system of assessment, failure, success and evolution. Even if Alvesson does not depict universities as 'homogenous', they are still approachable with common denominators, such as 'department', 'school', 'faculty' and what Alvesson describes as at best their 'multiple cultural configurations'.<sup>274</sup> An art school isn't a simple copy of any University, but is dedicated to art. Indeed, I personally consider that any art school is part of the art world at large, nourishing it and strongly influenced by it: the art component is a driving force that must extend far beyond an institution, whether it be a school or a museum.

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<sup>273</sup> Mats Alvesson, 'Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure', in *Higher Education*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 46, 2003, pp. 167 – 193.

<sup>274</sup> Mats Alvesson, *Cultural Perspectives on Organizations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993; Paul R. Trowler, *Academics Responding to Change*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

The art world does not provide geographical stability (with obviously some cadences, such as biennales, etc.), and its members will not be judged like academic scholars. Reading Alveesson’s proposal, it is obvious that there is a clear framework to integrate, the difficulty consisting in delineating and scaling the research territory. In contemporary art, the rules are constantly reshaped by artists and their work, taking into consideration the contingency that conditions their production. This fact encouraged me to integrate my PhD research into my art practice, as it would not have been possible to work the other way around. Indeed, art can be ‘institutionalised’ (in certain instances labelled as ‘institutional critique’, for example) or ‘commercialised’, but never completely defined by a sole attribute. That is to say, art won’t be exclusively ‘institutionalised’, ‘commercialised’, ‘applied’, ‘site-specific’, ‘conceptual’, ‘post-internet’, etc., but constantly redefined by its unique manifestations. It is hardly possible to compare what is produced by the University and what it is produced by the art system, and this great and interesting difficulty is part of the current debate on artistic research.<sup>275</sup> Taking into consideration this difference between University and art world, I opted to concentrate mainly on the latter, and this fact leads me to the second distinction between Alveesson’s proposal and mine.

‘The researcher does not find the empirical material, it finds him or her’,<sup>276</sup> according to Alveesson. In my case, I opted to acquire the material I was looking for by organizing and curating projects, activities’ schedules or publications that would nourish and challenge the notion of ‘event’ in relationship to art. I believe in using art as a tool to generate, and especially following the ‘I got a manicure’ experience, I did so to find situations that would correspond to my PhD research. Following this path, I sought out my empirical material.

## **2.12 Time, consciousness and emotion**

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<sup>275</sup> Sandra Delacourt, Katia Schneller, Vanessa Theodoropoulou, ‘Introduction’, in *Le chercheur et ses doubles*, Editions B42, Paris, 2015, pp. 5–21.

<sup>276</sup> Mats Alveesson, ‘Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure’, in *Higher Education*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 46, 2003, p. 182.

With *I love Dick*, Chris Kraus describes the trajectory of a single subject, whom we presuppose to be herself, as part of an artistic and intellectual scene. If her narrative technically starts on 3 December 1994 and ends on 19 September 1995, the novel recalls some past episodes in New York and New Zealand. Written in the mode of a diary, sometimes recording the intensification from one hour to the next of a passionate sexual drive, it also calls on episodes from other people's lives. In *Autoritratto*, four years of dialogue with fourteen artists are unfolded in a continuous discussion where every conversation has been edited and reassembled according to theme, each leading to another, punctuated by an iconography of private and professional relationships. The relation to time in the framework of this thesis is both non-linear, i.e. achronological, and 'a posteriori.' Firstly, the four case studies discussed throughout these chapters are not addressed according to their order of production, but rather according to a logic that serves my reflections on event in the context of contemporary art: from the most literally embodied works to the most sophisticated and environmental. Secondly, the writing of this thesis is happening years after some of these case studies and their respective events took place, which makes sense according to Badiou (an event can be recognized and acknowledged as such only retrospectively). This 'a posteriori' dynamic when applied to a practice of autoethnography is comparable to what Ilaria Boncori calls 'autoethnography *a posteriori*'. Indeed, in her research on Chinese culture and expatriate Italian workers in the Middle Kingdom, she uses material produced up to five years before the actual research process began.<sup>277</sup> In my research, I even quote material 'a posteriori' that I have not produced myself, dating back to 1950–1951 [fig. 2 of Chapter 4]. This journey in time, including flash-backs for example, underlines the complexity and potential of any embodied piece of knowledge or research. It is able to address the present condition of a subject while at the same time describing and commenting on its environment, and to portray the temporal dimension and depth carried by any embodiment of emotion, sensation or memory when it becomes the vehicle of not only its own story, but of others' stories as well.

Following a rather opposite dynamic, in *I Love Dick*, a strict chronology is the regulating parameter. Chris Kraus, the main character, writes extensively about her artistic

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<sup>277</sup> Ilaria Boncori, *Expatriates in China, Experiences, Opportunities and Challenges*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, New York, 2013, p. xvii.

production, but we have no access to her films, so can never see what she is actually trying to do as an artist. We can only read about the everyday problems with which an artist has to deal: technique, money, distribution, acceptance and, most of the time, rejection. The fees received by her husband Sylvène Lotringer for jobs in different institutions are openly communicated (e.g. 2,500 dollars for a lecture). All these pragmatic facts are comparable to that to which Lonzi openly gives us access in her book, and belong to the wider question of how artists live and support their families. Neither Lonzi nor Kraus present us with a catalogue of answers: in both cases it is about the ‘how’ and the ‘why’, from a humble, pragmatic stance: namely, what they understand from a given situation—the one they are each currently experiencing. But neither of the two relate to autoethnography or even ethnography in their work. Lonzi confronts her own field, art criticism, by producing a unique and original piece, *Autoritratto* (1969), which I inscribe in, or at least connect to, the field of autoethnography in this thesis, nearly five decades after its original publication. Kraus writes an auto-fictional novel claiming her voice, a voice addressing her condition as a woman artist, evolving in a specific North American academic art scene. This endeavour may be interesting to an autoethnographic gaze, but such a perspective on *I love Dick* isn’t at all the intention of the author. In my own case, my level of awareness of the potential of an autoethnographic method arose during my PhD programme at Queen Mary University of London. Indeed, I wasn’t conscious of this field before engaging in the research and only became aware of it after having decided to quote and be inspired by Lonzi’s *Autoritratto*. This increase in awareness occurred over the first months of research, between January and October 2014. The same goes for the identification of the philosophical concept of event as a necessary theoretical key to building the entire thesis. This explains why the case study *Eternal Tour* (2008-12), and even *Helvetic Zebra* (2014), initiated and conceptualized between May and August 2014, were not initially formed or conditioned by the concepts of event or autoethnography. As previously stated, however, retrospectively and ‘a posteriori’, it was possible to make something out of them in both cases. *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2014) was a project that could be much more easily adapted, from a curatorial point of view, to my interest in Lonzi’s relationship with language, to interviewing with artists, and to gendered behaviour in the artistic field. Finally, the fourth case study, *Morgenröte, ...* (2015), and its respective publication, *Into Your Solar Plexus* (2016), were entirely shaped by the research conducted for this thesis, running temporally parallel, even synchronous, to it, with academic work actively

nourishing and influencing the double project from its inception. This last project, presented and discussed in Chapter 4, is without any doubt the most personal and emotionally loaded of those discussed in this thesis. Based on a family archive, leading on the one hand to an inconceivable confession and, on the other, thanks to art and its potential, to what I call an ‘echo-event’, appearing in the context of a famous art institution as well as in an artist’s book, this case study, and the autoethnographic way in which I scrutinise it, fits the format in Carolyn Ellis’ *Heartful Autoethnography*, where

action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories impacted by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language.<sup>278</sup>

Obviously, the limitations of the format of this thesis have not allowed me to present every single aspect of the project, nor to call upon the psychological states it provoked while producing and performing it. Such an enquiry would merit a further work, dedicated only to this Kunsthalle Bern case study. In Chapter 5, for example, the event linked to *Helvetic Zebra* (2014) could be read as romantic, a contemporary Sturm und Drang phenomena strong enough to inspire my creation of the ‘echo-event’ concept. In Chapter 3, emotions and feelings are part of some of the artists’ testimonies and biographical remarks, an emotive aspect shared by so many. The episode *I got a manicure* in Salvador da Bahia, which will close this Chapter 2, was overwhelming enough to inspire this entire thesis, and hopefully the way it is narrated will have an equally powerful impact on the reader.

Beyond the historical paradigms explored in this chapter – namely postmodernism and feminism, which have served to introduce my first case study, *Eternal Tour*, 2008–12 – I wish to make no further comment on how the project should be interpreted. I have chosen a kind of autoethnographic mode with which to write about it, as well as including some historical facts and references, filtered through the notion of the event. When I began the project in 2008, at the Swiss Institute in Rome, I did not know that an

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<sup>278</sup> Carolyn Ellis, ‘Heartful Autoethnography’, in *Qualitative Health Research*, Sage, London, September 1999, p. 673.



unexpected event in Salvador da Bahia would reshape my entire perception of the project. Different registers of texts will appear during the following pages, bringing together the basic and general information needed to understand the situation, as well as more sophisticated material, such as the reconstruction of a discussion, some Kantian philosophical notions, as well as a final piece, *I got a manicure*, which resembles a short story (from a strictly formal point of view, I am going beyond Lonzi's *Autoritratto* interview format by using other textual forms). The following paragraphs present a selection of episodes from a five-year long project, *Eternal Tour*, 2008–12, narrated here in a way that is geared to my focus in the present thesis: reflecting and discussing artistic ephemeras, as well as revisiting and expanding Lonzi's oeuvre.

### **2.13 *Eternal Tour*, 2008–12**

What am I doing here? Do others know? Can I ask them? Can my questions be answered by art or science?

The five-year collaborative project *Eternal Tour* started with a question: what am I doing here? What did it mean to be on a national residency at the Swiss Institute in Rome in 2006? Very quickly, I realised that answering such a question fully would probably not be possible, but the problem persisted and still remains an on-going and durable issue about research and cultural production, Europe and its patrimony in the exploitation and promotion of knowledge as a value and as a diplomatic agent.

In November 2007, I co-founded an association in Geneva, *Eternal Tour*, to answer this question, 'What am I doing here?', by sharing it with others. As a little group of artists and humanities researchers, we quickly set up a double strategy, using theory and practice. In terms of theory, we started by reflecting that the Swiss Institute was one of many national entities in Rome. We asked: what is it like to be a Swiss resident in Rome, hosted and promoted by one's own government? Can you compare your status and function in the cultural system with your Dutch, Belgian, Romanian, Spanish, German, French, North American, Finnish or Swedish peers? Based on clear Nation-State reciprocity, is this constellation of national cultural institutes an application of cosmopolitanism? And if yes, is it possible to retrace the roots of such a phenomenon to better react to one's present status? I had the feeling that those who made up the group

were not citizens serving the interests of their flag (I was never asked by my Government to do anything in particular; a cultural institute is not an embassy<sup>279</sup>), but were driven by an interest in an international cultural phenomenon where knowledge and culture-construction were intertwined with travelling and tourism. Thus, rather than referring to the creation of Western nationalistic identities that took place in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries,<sup>280</sup> we decided to inscribe the Swiss Institute in Rome in the global contemporary context by recalling and actualising the Grand Tour. On a practical level, by adopting a multidisciplinary approach spanning art and the humanities, we took the initiative to organise a series of events – namely an annual festival, nomadic, independent and self-funded, moving around the planet with minimal and efficient economy, driven by creativity and entrepreneurship. Six editions of the *Eternal Tour* festival took place: 1) Rome in 2008, 2) Neuchâtel, 2009, 3) Jerusalem and Ramallah, 2010, 4) From New York to Las Vegas, 2011, 5) Geneva, 2012 and 6) São Paulo, 2012.

For the last, Brazilian edition, I invited Dr Denise Ferreira da Silva, an Afro-Brazilian philosopher and ethics professor, to participate as a specialist on past and contemporary Brazilian slavery. Out of this encounter arose the idea for this PhD thesis, and in October 2014 I met Dr Stephen Fox. Both Dr Ferreira da Silva and Dr Fox were supervising this thesis. From the five intense years of activity, I have chosen to present three episodes that are worth analysis and discussion in this data section, together with some other art projects developed in the following years.

## **2.14 The programme, its milestones and positionality**

*Eternal Tour* was an artistic and scientific festival, conceived, produced and programmed by a collective of artists and scholars from Geneva. We chose to adopt a form of long-term nomadic research in order to question and experiment with issues of cosmopolitanism and creolisation (based on the work of Edouard Glissant). Over these

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<sup>279</sup> Noëlle-Laetitia Perret, *L'Institut suisse de Rome, Entre culture, politique et diplomatie*, Editions Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses, Neuchâtel, 2014.

<sup>280</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991; Marcel Mauss, 'Nations, nationalités, internationalisme', in *Oeuvres*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1969; Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1999.

years, *Eternal Tour* involved over 400 people and around thirty institutions, and was financed by public grants as well as private foundations from several countries. Similar to the five-year creative experience by Carla Lonzi (1964–69), the process was punctuated by moments of intense work (in our case, the two-week festivals themselves) and long stretches of mostly diasporic research that was not necessarily directly connected to one specific production.

Along these lines, each event included many organisers from the festival sites themselves, who joined the project for the production of the art festival in their home city. Each team member, each event, each moment was specifically conceived, initiated and completed based on contingent conditions. Likewise, the final output of every event or tour varied widely, resulting in anything from publications to archives, including films, musical scores and sounds, as well as a plethora of different artistic and social experiences for all those involved in the project.

In order to reflect the continuous spirit of *Eternal Tour*, we chose the Möbius strip as our logo, a mathematical figure that we represented differently every year. These three-dimensional figure-eights have two possible paths, one above and one below. This is important in reflecting the dual nature of travel: Lord Byron, a wealthy aristocrat, travelled from the North to the South very much by choice, looking for adventure and inspiration. Migrant workers, on the other hand, undertake perilous journeys from the South to the North due to economic or vital necessity. On a personal level, my father was exiled from Italy many years ago, and thus returning, for me, was an interesting experience. As a privileged Northern artist, a Swiss citizen enjoying a luxurious residency, after living for some weeks in Ostia near the Fiumicino international airport together with several employees of Alitalia, I was able to see the real living and working conditions on the other side of our Möbius strip. I myself participated not only as co-founder and co-director, but also as fundraiser, manager, curator and artist. However, the decision-making processes and productive efforts were always collective.

## **2.15 Rome as a starting point and the *Eternal Tour* team**

A very particular illustration of this dual dynamic can be seen in our choice to travel to and work in Rome. This decision was made for many reasons, several of which were

motivated, at least in part, by my own personal experiences and relationships. On a historical plane, Italy (and Rome more specifically) has always been one of the conjunction points that connect North and South. In this sense, though, it is interesting to note that today, of the over thirty state and official cultural institutions present in Rome, only one is from the African continent (Egypt).

The interdisciplinary core team included five people, who were artists, social scientists and scholars: myself, working mostly as an artist; a historian of eighteenth-century art; a historian specialising in twentieth-century Mediterranean studies (whose research on the Middle Passage and the sea as mediator proved fruitful), and two scholars of international law. As mentioned above, this team expanded to include a native coordinator for our production in the various cities. The team itself changed and adapted to the needs of the project, and members' roles and contributions changed with it.

Like a parallel to Lonzi's tape-recorder technology (new at the time), for us the medium of the internet was fundamental: hundreds of emails were written and exchanged in order to organise and coordinate our global team, and we even made several publications solely from email correspondence. On a material and geographical level, our team was nomadic and nebulous: we continually moved around while maintaining an extra-institutional (outside cultural institutions) form. The team found a way to fund the festival every year through public and private grants. In this way, we observed that often artists are the best managers, since necessity breeds creativity. In addition, our creative work was driven by passion and personal interest, not motivated by economic gain, thus we often experienced the paradoxical situation in which local organisers (who, in a traditional, hierarchical organisation would have occupied a lower position than the core members of the collective) were always paid, while we organisers were unpaid. We functioned on a minimal economy and purposefully sought to empty out the team's bank account every year, preferring a gift economy<sup>281</sup> to the paradox of neoliberalism. Working for free might be the greatest luxury – the luxury of aristocrats. It is also significant that all the people who were in a position to make important

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<sup>281</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift, (Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques)*, L'Année Sociologique, Paris, 1925; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share (La part maudite)*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1949.

decisions for the project were women. Although this did not necessarily mean that we were a feminist organisation, since the team was predominantly female, women's issues and a feminist perspective were an inevitable part of our daily discussions and interactions. This, of course, became significant when the context for our identity matrix changed based on where the itinerant festival took us. Our conditions of otherness led us to questions like: how much do minority groups have in common, if at all? How far are the complexities of identity and power based on place and context? As women who were ex-pat or migrants, we reinforced our research through Edward Said's 'orientalism' in order to explore power differences.

Our feminism was, then, associated with a collective dialogue developed over many years and focusing on the organisation of an artistic and scientific festival. From 2008 to 2011, feminism was considered as a working method, as in the case of Lonzi's *Autoritratto*, and as a reflection of our particular desire for an alternative and critical dynamic. In 2012 in Geneva, we decided to organise a Feminist International Forum to explore the hypothesis of an international or cosmopolitan feminism. The international guest list of the two-day conference clearly indicated the trickiness of any generalisation and common statement about feminism and gender. Today, I would simply state that *Eternal Tour* was more concerned with the positionality of Grand Tourists than feminists, but used feminism as a method and a tool in terms of organisation and the relationship to minorities and subjects experiencing discrimination.

In our critical approach to the issue of identity in the context of globalisation, *Eternal Tour* began with the premise of turning the Grand Tour tradition on its head. The 'Grand Tourists' did not interact with indigenous residents during their visits. Instead of taking an interest in local practices and customs, their aristocratic aim was to achieve cultural refinement through the contemplation of the glorious ruins of a long-fallen Greco-Roman Empire. *Eternal Tour*, however, defined itself as a participatory and collaborative festival, where the audience was invited to interact with the programme's elements. Visiting artists and social scientists spent two weeks deeply immersed in the local context, participating in intense workshops or laboratories, including installations, performances, lectures, concerts, guided tours, radio transmissions, while blogging and finally publishing their findings. Tiny in comparison with the scale of established biennales, international art fairs or other global events or institutions, *Eternal Tour* has a

particular status in the current cultural production through the confrontation it provoked and nourished between its participants and the audience, between theory and practice, as well as being nomadic both conceptually and physically, and interested in experiences and events.

In the context of this thesis, I have selected three episodes from the *Eternal Tour* project: 1) *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his guests*: a historical fact that I learnt about during the preparation time for the *Eternal Tour 2009*; 2) *Angela Marzullo as a witch in Brazil*: a performance that I co-organised during the *Eternal Tour 2012* festival in São Paulo; 3) *I got a manicure*: an event experienced after the closing of the project in Brazil.

### **2.16 The ‘same’, the ‘different’ and the ‘out of the box: the event’**

I made this selection according to my particular interest in the different types of events experienced during the *Eternal Tour* project. I qualify the first episode as the ‘same’: a repetition of certain hegemonic behaviours that does not allow any disruption in the expected narrative (Lyotard) as if one is riding on just one of the two sides of the Möbius strip. The second episode could be qualified as ‘different’, stemming from a misunderstanding or an error that is at the same time an interesting case, as if one has slipped off the ‘secure’ Möbius track. The third episode is a very precious ‘out of the box’ episode, an unexpected and generous event leading to the discovery of the second side of the Möbius strip.

### **2.17 The ‘same’: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his guests**

Our 2009 Neuchâtel edition also passed through Môtiers, a Swiss city famous for its absinthe and renowned for hosting Jean-Jacques Rousseau during his three years in exile in 1762–65. Today, his lodgings have been converted into the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Museum, with whose director, the ethnographer Dr Rolad Kaehr, I took the train from Neuchâtel to Môtiers on 31 July 2009. While we were discussing what could be done during the *Eternal Tour* festival at the Rousseau Museum in the coming September, Kaehr informed me that during Rousseau’s three years in the city, owing to his fame throughout Europe as a political and philosophical intellectual, Môtiers became a stop along the Grand Tour. Grand Tourists were not interested in meeting with the local

populations of their destinations – they were interested in finding people homogenous to their own social and intellectual traditions, seeking to confirm what they already knew or should know – and in this case Rousseau’s status as an attraction on the Grand Tour was sufficient to motivate visitors to join him in Môtiers, no matter what he had written or thought. In the end, Rousseau became fed up with holding endless salon discussions with people who sometimes were not even aware of his writings.<sup>282</sup>

## **2.18 The ‘different’: Angela Marzullo as a witch in Brazil**

As part of our *Eternal Tour* in São Paulo in 2012, the Italian/Swiss artist Angela Marzullo participated in the multi-layered and collective performance *Homenagem à Meret Oppenheim* (Tribute to Meret Oppenheim), inspired by Oppenheim’s performance *Spring Feast* (1959) and by Oswald de Andrade’s *Cannibal Manifesto* (1928). The performance was imagined and realised by Fabiana de Barros, Sandra Belucci, Eliane Maria Guimarães, Silvia Lucchi, Angela Marzullo, Enrico Natale and myself, a hybrid group of Swiss artists, fashion designers and a historian constituted for the sake of this performance. The following is an extract from the printed festival programme:

This project starts with Meret Oppenheim’s *Fruhlingsfest*, or ‘Spring Feast’, to shift towards Brazil’s culture of cannibalism, the question of skin colour and its political implications, our relation to nourishment and the dialectic between creolisation and camouflage. In April 1959, the artist Meret Oppenheim organised a performance in Bern that she called *Fruhlingsfest* (Spring Feast). The original work consisted of a young girl lying naked on a table decorated with wooden anemones, her throat and face covered with golden paint. Meret Oppenheim arranged different foods on various parts of her body, and then some of her friends were invited to eat the food arranged on the girl’s anatomy. On 28 August 2012, in the SESC Consolação’s Sala Möbius, eight performers will be dressed in two-piece swimsuits specially created for the occasion at a workshop with the SESC Consolação’ public, a Brazilian fashion designer, and artists in a collective work. The bikinis are produced with a craft technique of Portuguese origin,

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<sup>282</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book XII (*OC I*), Gallimard, Paris, 1959, pp. 611–12.

crochet. Their hues are adapted to the colour tones of the performers' bodies, who are arranged on human-sized pedestals, covered with flashy, multicoloured plastic tablecloths. A series of edible jellies of all colours is placed on their bodies. Ranging from pineapples, cacao, coffee, sugarcane, limes, oranges, corn, manioc, passion fruit and soya, these evoke different aspects of Brazil's agricultural history and put certain Brazilian economic and social circumstances into perspective (colonization, slavery, immigration, naturalization, industrialization, hybridization). Among other things, the work represents a symbolic geography of the different social groups with Brazilian foodstuffs.

Angela Marzullo's performance included the act of sweeping with a broom. The audience reacted to this with some interest, because they saw her as an upper-class woman performing a task normally reserved for lower-class, darker-skinned members of Brazilian society. In this way, the broom became a semiotic symbol that triggered a specific reaction. This reaction was not, of course, expected, and constituted the most interesting part of the performance's reception by the audience. Marzullo's broom had been interpreted quite differently in Europe. In the specific societal case of Brazil and its codifications, the global cultural levelling had ceased to function (being white-skinned and from a European background, Marzullo could only be subverting an *a priori* social class by using a broom in Brazil).

In contemporary Western culture, a woman with a broom might readily be related to the misogynist practice of witch hunting.<sup>283</sup> In a European context, Marzullo's performance would therefore be more closely tied to a feminist critique of patriarchy. The same artist has, for example, previously staged herself mounting a broom for the video *Makita Witch* (2008), obviously dealing with this iconography; she is wearing black leather trousers and carrying a submachine gun on a shoulder strap, with two tiny black-star stickers, inspired by the rock band KISS, covering her nipples. In Brazil, judging from what we perceived during our time there, feminist discourses are somewhat less prominent, urgent or visible than another critiques rooted in the questions of race and class.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> See for example, Merry E Wiesner, 'Witchcraft', in *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1993, pp. 218–38.

<sup>284</sup> Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 1933; José Jorge Carvalho and Kabengele Munanga (anthropology); Carlos Hazenbalg, Sergio Guimarães and Rosana Heringer



Furthermore, as a Swiss/Italian artist whose mother comes from a small rural town in southern Italy, practising mainly in central Europe, Marzullo considers herself a female heir of Pier Paolo Pasolini's sub-proletarian tradition. However, in the context of São Paulo, her racial appearance – her skin being very pale – immediately rendered her as belonging to a higher socio-economic class. Thus her performance was both a great failure and a surprising success in terms of our initial intentions, provoking both attraction and repulsion for various reasons.<sup>285</sup> In this way, *Homenagem à Meret Oppenheim* can be categorised as the 'different'. This example illustrates both the difficult question of the transposition of transnational identity, and the potentiality of crossing global class identity lines by provoking a very site-specific reaction from the audience. What is really at stake here is positionality, resisting a simple nomadic dynamic.

Between Jean-Jacques Rousseau's visitors to Môtiers during the eighteenth century and the broom of Angela Marzullo – an imagery displaced from the European to the Brazilian continent for the sake of a twenty-first-century festival – phenomenological relationships and, thus, the idea of truth itself have been destabilised. At its best, a festival event like *Eternal Tour* produces something akin to a utopic, oneiric existential experience, essentially fictionalising life. The phenomenon of the suspension of disbelief takes hold and festival participants are transported, even if temporarily, to a different place where the fixed laws and norms governing reality are revealed in all their contingency. But is it enough to be considered an 'event'?

## **2.19 'Out of the box: the event'. I got a manicure**

Slavery, post-colonialism, racism and creolisation were the keywords and the focal points of the Brazilian edition of the *Eternal Tour* Festival, involving more than fifty local and international collaborators. For the first time in my life, I was able to employ a

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(sociology); João Feres (political sciences); Ricardo Henriques and Sergio Soares (economy) and Carlos Alberto Medeiros and Helio Santos (Black Movement). For a global perspective, see Julius O. Adekunle and Hettie V. Williams (ed.), *Color Struck, Essays on Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*, University Press of America, Maryland, 2010.

<sup>285</sup> Dr Ferreira da Silva communicated to me her interest in listening to the commentaries of the audience.

personal assistant, Giorgio Pinheiro. This *Eternal Tour* was a success, both professionally and emotionally.

In the middle of the ten-day programme, on Monday 3 September 2012, as the director of the festival, I attended a party at the home of the São Paulo Biennale's director. That day, after having listened with great interest to a lecture by Dr Ferreira da Silva, the Afro-Brazilian philosopher from London whom I had invited as a specialist on past and contemporary Brazilian slavery, I had to quickly change clothes and hop into a taxi to reach the famous gated community Alphaville. I had been advised by the woman introducing me to this social event to wear the most elegant clothes I could find. Once in the São Paulo Biennale director's villa, I understood why: either you're wearing a \$10,000 dress with the right haircut and manicure, or you're not, and you can't pretend otherwise. We were standing on a parquet floor, mounted on the surface of the swimming pool to gather and contain this dense and important crowd. From this platform, I could see the vast and elegant bay window, which revealed the gigantic living room where a crowd of chic white people dressed in elegant black suits were mingling. Here were the directors of MoMA, New York, and Tate, London. The only black-skinned people were the cooks, the servants and the DJ. One thought came to my mind: 'Let's bomb this place, right now!'

As I was reflecting on this visceral and pubescent desire and tears were welling up in my eyes, there, from the undifferentiated talking mass appeared the highly respected Danilo Santos de Miranda, director of the SESC, a former Jesuit and a great intellectual, who has been managing the only functioning cultural entity in São Paulo for the last twenty years, the host institution for *Eternal Tour*. We were happy to see each other and suddenly everything made sense. Basically, I had succeeded in my mission. As the person responsible for the project that he had invited, produced and promoted as his parallel event to the São Paulo Biennale, I was present and visible at the most exclusive party of the week. I gave him a hug and reached the villa's interior. While standing in front of some paintings decorating the walls, I was introduced to a *very famous Brazilian artist* of whose existence I was totally unaware of until then, and whose name I promptly forgot. A fat art critic was staring at me. Eating a snack, he sputteringly tried to explain to me the importance of this *very famous Brazilian artist*. In a panic, I asked the person who had brought me here to call me a cab.

The following day, some of the artists and scientists in the *Eternal Tour* crew asked me about this glamorous social gathering. Envy was recognisable on certain faces. Of course, they could not understand why I had absconded from this privileged setting and even less why I had then spent an awful guilt-ridden night. I had not honoured my opportunity, and I had even betrayed the person who had granted me access to the famous Alphaville house and its guests.

Once the festival finished, the team went home or continued their journeys. I had stayed for six weeks in a hotel room at the top of a tower in São Paulo's historical centre; São Paulo, a 'white' polluted town in Brazil, extensively developed by Italian immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century and culminating in a concrete tropical forest of skyscrapers thanks to the car industry of the 1950s. Giorgio and I decided to go to Salvador da Bahia before returning to Europe. Landing there after a two-and-a-half-hour flight meant suddenly seeing the sea and understanding something about Brazil: this was the beach where the Middle Passage journey had finally ended for thousands of Africans who were to start their new lives as slaves in the New World. Nowadays, one can observe mostly Afro-Brazilians on the beach and some white-skinned tourists who might get a massage from the young locals, and more if such is their desire. The downtown itself was partially renovated and historicised. Far from São Paulo modernism, Salvador da Bahia maintains a baroque colonial quality.

We arrived on 7 September 2012, late at night. The next day, we found some documentation about the *Semana da Diversidade Sexual* at the Tourist Information Centre. We spent a few busy days visiting museums, historical places, and interviewing a university researcher and expert in affirmative action. Some free hours were left on the Sunday night to go to one of the *Semana da Diversidade Sexual* activities in the *Beco dos artistas* (artists' alley). It intrigued us enough to draw us up the hill, crossing an area where luxury buildings and the associated security barriers and guards dominated the sea view. We then reached a square, where we saw a parade like gay pride coming from afar. People were dancing in the street, some on huge decorated trucks with extremely loud and joyful music. We had to go on for several hundred metres more down the boulevard that the street parade was occupying. The crowd became denser. It was hard to move. The revellers were young, between sixteen and forty years old, some of them

drunk and very excited, some walking in groups, moving forward as a line, holding onto each other and singing. Eventually we had to climb a low wall to continue. I couldn't climb it by myself. People took hold of me from either side and lifted me up. The feeling of being carried by unknown arms was as frightening as it was liberating. Once again, in the middle of this agitated crowd, we had to press on. There were no other tourists or foreigners. I was following Giorgio by keeping sight of his hair. Losing him would probably mean dying: I had no idea how to get back to the hostel or how to survive without his presence. I felt a hand fast approaching my neck. I was quicker. I held on to the two little pendants bound by a thin golden chain. I locked them both in my right fist. I looked the guy who was trying to steal from me straight in the eyes. As he was passing me by, he forcefully tried to tear off my golden chain a second time. It broke but I still have it today, somewhere on a shelf in my office in Stockholm.

Giorgio decided that we should get out of the main street in order to avoid the crowd and we found ourselves in a small parallel street where someone was pissing against the wall while two policemen arrested another person. After some time, we reached a bigger avenue that looked like a beltway. We were the only pedestrians. We crossed the beltway. I felt as light as a child as we ran across the asphalt. Giorgio was searching for our way on his iPhone. We found it, and ended up by the side of a favela. I was going to ask someone for directions but Giorgio said not to. Then we saw a little stairway climbing to the top of the beltway's tunnel, covered with wild grass. We quickly reached the top. The moon was almost full, the sky totally black, and cars were rapidly passing above us. I saw a small cat. The air was fresh and free. I felt so powerful, being alive in the right place at the right time and in the right company, and found myself commenting loudly on the beauty of the moment. But Giorgio did not feel so secure, since his iPhone was no longer showing us either the correction direction or our location. We passed a family, who encouraged us to continue on our way down a little street beyond the tunnel. We really wanted to reach the Beco dos artistas. We were entering a poor suburban neighbourhood, announced Giorgio. The street was extremely animated: all the shops were open and food was being cooked and prepared on the street. As I followed Giorgio as fast as I could, I observed the scene with great fascination (so many people, from children to elders; so many objects, cars, lights, cafés; so many gestures, dialogues, games and social acts happening simultaneously, like a thousand micro parties going on everywhere at the same time). My gaze encountered the stare of a

lonely woman, perhaps in her mid-sixties: she was very skinny, short-haired, dressed in a dirty white t-shirt and short pants, squatting in a corner, urinating in plain sight, but no one seemed to remark her, except me. I was struck by her strong expression. She looked scared and angry. Once more Giorgio asked where the Beco dos artistas was located. 'Right here', said a young girl, gesturing.

And there it was: a small dead-end alley like a corridor, leading nowhere but giving access to a series of clubs, bars and little cabarets on either side. We entered it, squashed by costumed bodies bearing extravagant props. The people I was passing and observing looked both exhausted and exalted. It was the last evening of the *Semana da Diversidade Sexual* and I imagine that the party had been going on for many days and nights. It became so suffocating that Giorgio and I decided to enter a little cabaret to rest. On the threshold we were welcomed and informed that a show was taking place. Entry was free, and through a window I could already see the black face and blond wig of a performer. Kitsch lighting illuminated the set. It looked exciting and I encouraged Giorgio to enter. Inside we quickly found a little table to sit at and got two beers at the bar. The place was small, containing approximately eight square tables with people seated around them. A huge fan was suspended above us, providing some welcome air. Groups of teenagers were constantly entering and exiting the room to use the stinking toilet in the corner. Two bare-breasted people swaggered around: they had surreal jutting bosoms, stretching their perfectly waxed skin. Their abdominal muscles were acutely defined, their nipples hidden by pompoms, their jaws massive under their foundation, and their long hair perfectly artificial.

The show's main performer was the one visible from the window: the young black male with the blond wig. He was dressed in a long-sleeved skin-tight red top, ornamented with gold-tasselled shoulder pads and buttons. The reference for his costume was Michael Jackson's *HIStory*, I guessed. He had extremely long legs, wore fishnet stockings and black polished stiletto heels. This gorgeous, sweaty drag queen gleefully sang pop songs into a microphone. He seemed to be enjoying his performance, as if he were all alone in his bedroom, self-sufficient and self-satisfied. Was it narcissism or pure generosity towards his audience? Periodically, two young men in jeans and sneakers danced in front of him, making precise breakdance movements with great seriousness and elegance. As the two boys executed these perfectly synchronised gestures, the drag

queen supported them from the stage with expansive and hysterical body language. Between choreographed musical sets, the blond-wigged black performer repeatedly asked members of the audience to answer the same question: ‘How’s your job going?’ The answers were unclear, but the people were basically declaring they had no job and no income at all. Both performer and audience laughed. After collecting these vague negations of any professional activity, the performer administered some kind of benediction, based on a parody of Catholic and Candomblé rituals. Giorgio helped me to understand the dialogue, explaining to me that most of the audience members – apart from us and the family of four sitting beside us – as well as the performer himself, were probably prostitutes. That’s why they were laughing at the negative answers regarding their professional situation: it was an open secret. Finally, a fourteen-year-old girl was asked to show her bra to the audience and her lesbian group of friends, and when a white girl wearing denim mini shorts started performing an incredible belly dance to an oriental soundtrack, moving her entire body, including two enormous cellulite-ridden thighs, with great dexterity in front of her boyfriend, the mood became frenzied. She was enjoying it all immensely. I was laughing in wonder, deeply admiring these performers and their audience.

I could have stayed all night long, sitting under the fan and discovering a new aspect of Brazil. But we had to move out of the poor little cabaret because of unexpected and unwelcome pepper powder that had been thrown in by the police to force everyone to evacuate. We were all out in the street now, coughing and crying. We then quickly left the Beco dos artistas and finally found a bus going in our hostel’s direction.

It’s not easy to understand exactly why I felt so welcome in that cabaret, why it was such a privilege for me to be a part of it, why I experienced so much relief in the presence of these people, why it gives me hope, why this September night in Salvador da Bahia was perhaps a turning point in my existence, and how important it was to share it with Giorgio. The first, easy answer would be to say that I felt accepted and automatically part of an experience. The second one might be the humour and derision that gives drag queens such sovereignty, whatever situation they find themselves in, sharing a sense of freedom and pride, even if they may be condemned to prostitution.

The next day, Giorgio helped me to close my overloaded suitcases and then we went by taxi to the Guarulhos International Airport in São Paulo. At the Turkish Airlines desk, as I dragged my luggage to the conveyer belt, I felt all my back muscles contracting, hard. In a second, they were burning like wildfire. Stifling cries of pain, I was almost unable to move around with my hand luggage full of bricks: a computer, some hard drives, cameras, other electronic devices, and documents. I was bringing home the entire *Eternal Tour* archive, including some new and unique files. Noticing a beauty service corner, I decided to treat myself to the first professional manicure and pedicure of my life before boarding my plane. Nearly paralysed by back pain, my vision was to calm myself and slow down my departure, or at least to fully inhabit it. I wanted to imprint a physical reminder of this place on my body. As soon as the total amount needed was withdrawn from my credit card, I was installed near a small artificial waterfall. One woman took care of my hands, another of my feet. They commented with disgust on the amount of skin around my nails. After coating my fingers and toes with some chemical products and creams, they tore at my cuticles with great energy and concentration. It hurt more than I'd expected it to. It was like making love for the first time. I listened to their voices: I wanted to drink in their words and encapsulate them in my memory. They were smoothly speaking that unique derivation of the Portuguese language that, according to Gilberto Freyre, had become transformed by the tonality of the African idioms brought by the deported.

## **2.20 Conclusion**

Despite the differences in approach between the Grand Tours and our *Eternal Tour*, and despite their powerful political potential as ontological *dispositifs*, I must recognise that our *Eternal Tour* is a part and product of the global cultural industry (the more globalised you are, the more credible you become), mimicking the biennale and residence-programme circuit on a smaller scale. This raises questions about how the festival's goals and concepts were actualised under these conditions: how did *Eternal Tour* address its local partners and collaborators in places as different as São Paulo, Ramallah and Las Vegas? What form did hospitality take in light of the economic and intra-structural conditions in each site? Can you escape power relationships by setting up a management structure composed of people endorsing a humanistic agenda? These questions were constantly addressed and sometimes answered in a practical sense

during the five-year project and will not be directly developed here. What interests me here is what *Eternal Tour*, as a subtle and small-scale imitation of the global art system, produced and provoked as a series of events, and whether it reinforced the links that can be drawn between the global art system and the contemporary philosophical concept of event.



### 3. CURATING NARRATIVES

#### 3.1 Postmodernism and punk hypermodernity

In Chapter 1, I introduced the philosophical concept of event with reference to the work of four different philosophers, towards an inquiry into a possible definition of ‘artistic event’, and in order to discuss a selection of ephemera that I co-produced, co-curated and co-authored as an artist between 2008 and 2016. In Chapter 2, to contextualise my first case study *Eternal Tour* 2008–12 historically and epistemologically, I made some observations about postmodernist and feminist paradigms.<sup>286</sup> This served to nourish my reflections on my choice to inscribe my work in the fields of philosophy and art history, as well as autoethnography, with some incursions into postmodern anthropology.

In this chapter, I will elaborate further on the event by analysing what I wrote about *Eternal Tour* in Chapter 2 in contrast to the idea of festival, and privileging the concept of event. I will further elaborate on event, linking it to the notion of the news item. Having identified connections between postmodernism and transdisciplinarity, it is important to state here that the colliding of high and low, of popular and educated, of mass-produced and exclusive, of democratic and elitist culture, of good and bad taste, has been a central issue in the cultural field for more than four decades.<sup>287</sup> Two contemporary artists who have been particularly concerned with these issues are Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, and thus their work will be briefly touched upon to complement my second case study, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, which stemmed from a Geneva news item as a media product or format. Furthermore, to illustrate another

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<sup>286</sup> ‘Paradigms’ is a word that allows me to situate myself within ‘postmodernism as an epoch’, i.e., ‘to identify features of the external world that support the hypothesis that society is moving towards a new postmodern era’, and ‘postmodernism as an epistemology’ that ‘reflects developments in post-structuralist philosophy’, as clearly distinguished by John Hassard, ‘Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: an Overview’, in John Hassard and Martin Parker eds., *Postmodernism and Organizations*, Sage, London, 1993, pp. 2–3.

<sup>287</sup> In architecture theory and in culture in general: Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972, is acknowledged as a milestone in addressing this matter. See also, for example: Hal Forster ed., *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 1985. In this debate, the 1944 work by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they coined the term ‘culture industry’, is prescient.

artistic tendency when dealing with social concerns, the use of artistic language and fiction, I will cite a feature film by Liliana Cavani, an Italian intellectual interested in history and morality, themes that directly correlate with *Smoking Up Ambition!*. This latter curatorial project, tinted, like Cavani's movie, with a sadomasochistic hue, brings the body and biopolitics into the centre of my reflections, as was already the case, but in a different way, with 'I got a manicure'. With the second case study, I move from cosmopolitanism towards Geneva capitalism. I will also return to the strategies of Paul B. Preciado and to Chris Kraus's autobiographical fiction in order to further develop my reflections on event and contemporary art by inscribing it in a feminist perspective that is constantly evolving, enriching and updating itself.<sup>288</sup>

From Preciado's feminist perspective, the impact of a technology that, following the industrialisation of the Western world, is now operating on a global scale sustained by economic and political powers, isn't just a question of evaluating what culture can mean and to whom (as, for example, a depiction of Mickey Mouse will signify many different things according to the viewer's knowledge or background). Much more radically, it has brought about a new historical epoch in which politics, technology and art, understood here in the sense of the *technē* defined by Heidegger (Chapter 1.10), are controlling nature to the extent that there isn't anything left to discover in it.<sup>289</sup>

Can my second case study, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, based on a news item, be inscribed not only in the postmodern paradigm, but also in this 'pharmacopornographic' period of punk<sup>290</sup> hypermodernity described by Preciado? Through *Smoking up Ambition!* I am

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<sup>288</sup> "Embodiment is significant prosthesis." To borrow the terms of the American feminist Donna Haraway, the twenty-first-century body is a technoliving system, the result of an irreversible implosion of modern binaries (female/male, animal/human, nature/culture). Even the term *life* has become archaic for identifying the actors in this new technology. For Foucault's notion of 'bio power', Donna Haraway has substituted "techno-biopower". Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie, Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Brenderson, Feminist Press, New York, 2016, p. 44.

<sup>289</sup> "There is nothing to discover in nature; there is no hidden secret. We live in a punk hypermodernity: it is no longer about discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political and technological processes through which the body as artefact acquires natural status." Preciado, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>290</sup> It is perhaps useful here to clarify Preciado's view of punk: "The sudden emergence of the punk movement in 1977 was not a simple microphenomenon, but the last lucid explosion of what seems today to be the only ideal shared by the members of what has

developing a metaphorical critique of capitalism on a very local scale: the State and City of Geneva, using the banal but symbolic story of a banker murdered during a sadomasochist session with his mistress. Firstly, I will write about this journey from postmodernism towards punk hypermodernity (characterised by what Preciado has called the *potential gaudendi* or ‘orgasmic force’ of pornography),<sup>291</sup> from ‘I got a manicure’ to ‘The kiss and the bite’, alluding as much to Lonzi’s relevance to this second case study as to the pain desired and endured by the banker.<sup>292</sup> Secondly, after presenting some historical facts about Geneva’s environment, I will report concretely and pragmatically on the making of my second case study, from the perspective of an organisation, namely a constellation of bodies and minds working together towards the same goal, and for sometimes very different reasons and motivations.

### 3.2 From festival to event

My first case study, exposed through a synthetic and selective overview of a five-year-long project, ended with the narrative ‘I got a manicure’, an episode that I assessed and conceptually encapsulated as an artistic event, by narrating the steps that led to this moment, as well as offering its interpretation and analysis. This appreciation has been made retrospectively,<sup>293</sup> with about three years between the closure of the *Eternal Tour* festival in September 2012, and the writing of these pages between the summers of 2015 and 2016, as well as some adjustments made during the fall 2017.<sup>294</sup> This

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been called the human species: the pleasure instinct as a death instinct.’ Preciado, *ibid.*, p. 344. In this chapter, I will associate this ‘pleasure-death instinct’ with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, Liliana Caviani’s *The Night Porter* and a Geneva news item about a sadomasochistic incident that led to a death.

<sup>291</sup> Preciado, *ibid.*, pp. 41–50.

<sup>292</sup> Some of the ideas in this Chapter 3, in relation to the Edouard Stern news items and its possible curatorial application, are partially voiced in Donatella Bernardi and Fabienne Bideaud, ‘Golden Brain, Scar(f), Shower. Échantillon poudreux d’une société rigide et moulante’, in Noémie Etienne and Agnès Vannouvong eds., *À bras le corps – Matérialité, image et devenir des corps*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon, 2013, pp. 73–89.

<sup>293</sup> See ‘Differance’ as introduced by John Hassard in *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>294</sup> The post-*Eternal Tour* episode ‘I got a manicure’ in Salvador de Bahia was first written about in English to introduce my artistic research funding application ‘Drapetomania’, submitted to Vetenskapsrådet (the Swedish Research Council) in spring 2013. I then produced a second version, in French, slightly elaborated and integrated into an illustrated essay for a cultural magazine: Donatella Bernardi, ‘Lettre de Suède (via São Paulo et Salvador da Bahia)’, in *La Couleur des jours*, 7, summer 2013, pp. 21–25.

particular kind of writing, like any kind of writing, obviously has an impact on what is being written about. This fact is nicely summarised by Robert Cooper in his introduction to Derrida's work – in particular to his three abiding themes of deconstruction, writing and 'difference'.<sup>295</sup>

When reading Kraus's *I Love Dick*, one has the feeling that the pages have been written instantaneously, in an action even more direct than a diary where one compiles and summarises everything that happened during the day. When reading the letters that Chris writes to Dick, one even has the sensation that one is sitting beside the author while she is typing on her computer, seeing the text appear at the same moment as she does, as if one is sharing her biorhythms. The constant reiteration of certain obsessive patterns (mostly her declamations of sexual desire) adds nothing new to the narrative in terms of information, but expresses the frenetic mindset of the narrator. In Lonzi's *Autoritratto*, spoken words are transcribed and solidified into black signs on white sheets having been enunciated during dialogues, interviews and talks spread over a period of five years. They are edited according to themes rather than in chronological order, in the form of bold text in a continuous flux with no titles, sections or paragraphs, interspersed sporadically with a selection of black and white pictures where family and personal situations are intertwined with depictions of art. Both Kraus and Lonzi have found specific literary and editorial forms to transcribe and transmit to the reader their vivid and to some extent autobiographical experience. What kind of impact, like a domino effect, will the process of writing about *Eternal Tour* have on the further elaboration of this thesis and the unfolding of the other four case studies? The function of discourse is crucial here, being far more than simply the expression, witnessing or recollection of certain facts, but rather forging an identity, a field, through knowledge production. This happens not only in written form, but also through oral exchanges that occur during artistic and curatorial processes, when a group of people, a working team, debate and take decisions in order to put together a project, contributing, elaborating

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<sup>295</sup> 'Derrida's analysis of writing would compel us to admit that it is the motorway that 'drives' (directs) us in our vehicles just as much as we think ourselves to be consciously in the driving seat. We are driven as we drive or, as Derrida would say, we are written as we write.', Robert Cooper, 'Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 3: The Contribution of Jacques Derrida', in *Organization Studies*, 1989, 10, 4, Sage, London, pp. 485–486.

and refining in various manners on the basis of their field of expertise.<sup>296</sup> In that sense, the preparation, the research phase of the project, as well as its development and even its closure and post-production – when one compiles a final report of one’s activity – are equally important. I consider this discursivity an ongoing, continuous process, and what one fails to solve or achieve in a given project, whether a book or an exhibition, will be invested in the next one.

Or, as in the case of ‘I got a manicure’, it could turn out to be the most important and unexpected learning experience, even though it happened after the project itself. The experience, the making, the process, consciously acknowledged, as opposed to the product, could be the ultimate result. Such positions, inherent to the art field, trigger the function of narration in the production of a form of truth, a kind of ‘narrative research’.<sup>297</sup> By the same logic, I wonder if Seurat understood a cabaret better as an enlightened environment after having painted it, or if Lonzi, having written about Seurat’s painting, linked it with her deep interest in extending the potential of art beyond a single analysis of an artwork (Chapter 2.10). We can also transfer this notion to the pedagogical realm, as stated by Barend van Heusden and Pascal Gielen: ‘Instead of teaching how to look at art, we should teach how to look at life – through art.’<sup>298</sup>

### 3.3 Retrospectively and empirically

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<sup>296</sup> ‘We define a discourse as a set of interrelated texts that, along with the related practices of text production, dissemination, and reception, bring an object or idea into being’; ‘Discourses therefore help to constitute a material reality by producing “identities, contexts, objects of value, and correct procedures”, which lead to particular practices through the way they shape what can be said and who can say it.’ Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, David Grant, ‘Discourse and collaboration: the role of conversation and collective identity’, in *Academy of Management Review*, 2005, Vol. 30. No. 1, Briarcliff Manor, New York, p. 60.

<sup>297</sup> ‘We were not so much interested in defending or legitimating art based inquiry as we were in showcasing useful products of this kind of work, products that reveal how art as narrative inquiry can function as a mode of constructing, generating, and representing knowledge as well as contributing to the goals of self-understanding and narrative truth. We believe that art-based research will be judged not so much by what it promises as by what it delivers – its ideas, insights, values and meanings.’ Arthur P. Bochner, Caroline Ellis, ‘An Introduction to the Arts and Narrative Research: Art as Inquiry’, in *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 9, Number 4, Sage, London, 2003, p. 510.

<sup>298</sup> Barend van Heusden and Pascal Gielen eds., *Arts Education Beyond Art*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2015.

During the summer of 2014, while thinking about a possible method towards a collective understanding of *Eternal Tour*, I looked closely at Lonzi's *Autoritratto* for inspiration. This book is not only a precious and original historical document for anyone interested in the Arte Povera movement, but is also an inspiring example of how an art critic reacted and found a solution to a complex question, i.e.: how to describe an art scene and its development over five years. But Lonzi's solution of conducting and collaging individual discussions with fourteen artists was difficult to apply to *Eternal Tour*. What more could I ask of my collaborators, since everything had already taken place, and in a precise context? Each of them, whether artist or scientist, had been contacted and invited to participate for a precise reason and time period. How could I suddenly redirect the conversation with these collaborators into a general theoretical reflection on the event as philosophical concept? The more I thought about engaging in such a process, the more unwarranted it seemed. Firstly, if I saw the 'I got a manicure' event as the most promising, intriguing and enriching episode of the whole *Eternal Tour* corpus, precisely because it came from 'the edge of the void', where something impossible became possible (Badiou, Chapter 1.14), my peers would remember and value other points that would apply to their own work, analysis and journey through art, whether with 'ugly academic language' or any other personal strategy. Engaging in a discussion about aspects of *Eternal Tour* with my former collaborators would have meant undertaking another project in the frame of this organisation, and this was not possible given that we had decided to close our activities.

I believe that in art-making, there can be no universals, but only single, autonomous proposals, solidified or intensified through various objects, situations or experiences: the meta-discourse isn't part of the art, but rather a comment on it. Let me briefly refer here to two artists – William Shakespeare and J.W.M. Turner – to whom I will return in Chapter 5 in the frame of my extended metaphor around Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Do Shakespeare's series of plays and Turner's series of landscapes teach us about theatre or painting, or about narrative, poetry and Romanticism as universals? Is it our interest, drive or scope to learn about such universals when we read or perform Shakespeare's plays or when we look at or study Turner's pictures? It isn't mine, at least. Instead, I look at Shakespeare and Turner because I am interested in what theatre or painting can be; how theatre and painting take shape in time and space, and how they can challenge my understanding of these two artistic formats through their multi-layered dimensions. On

the one hand, among many different aspects, these two artists have produced historical documents and socio-political commentaries about their respective contemporary situation through their art. On the other hand, they have contributed, as dramaturge and painter, to their respective fields through the production of artworks. How does this knowledge, i.e. a constant re-evaluation of what I thought I knew about theatre, painting – or, in the case of my own discipline, contemporary art – take place, if not through and thanks to singular examples? If I cannot base my judgement of my practice on any universal or preconception, I at least need a former and a following occurrence in order to differentiate and compare: a serial dynamic is necessary. A single case, as interesting, beautiful or powerful as it can be, is not sufficient.

Interestingly, Robert Cooper, in the context of organisation analysis, associates his rejection of universals with the rejection of ‘simple location’, a concept defined by the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead as a place where: ‘material can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time, or *here* in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time’.<sup>299</sup> Cooper’s thought, as summarised by Sverre Spoelstra,<sup>300</sup> is interesting in the frame of art-making and thinking. It helped me to conclude that the artistic event as complex phenomenon, discovered thanks to *Eternal Tour’s* epilogue, could not be treated as a universal that could be discussed with my former collaborators. Instead, I needed to find a way to explore and research it further through my artistic practice. Rather than being an experience to be shared and analysed with others, *Eternal Tour’s* epilogue acted as a catalyst to create further ephemera, using the language and tools of contemporary art and curatorial practice, as well as writing about it in the frame of this thesis. And what about the potential and inspiration that I had found in Lonzi’s *Autoritratto*? Could I, as

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<sup>299</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Free Association Books, London, 1985, p. 62.

<sup>300</sup> ‘Cooper’s dismissal of simple location is equally directed against the idea of the universal in general: the idea that nature consists of a fixed set of laws which determine the “simple movement” of “clear-cut, definite things”.’<sup>300</sup> The social and technical world we inhabit, says Cooper, cannot be understood on the basis of universal laws. The idea of the universal, again, is an example of simple location – an abstraction in thinking of the concrete – resulting in the representation of partiality as wholeness.’ Sverre Spoelstra, ‘Robert Cooper: Beyond organization’, in *The Sociological Review*, London, Volume 53, October 2005, p. 109.

she had done, set up a dispositive to test what a discussion can be, in and of itself, as a textual art piece, an artwork made out of words, reflections and encounters?

### **3.4 Lonzi curated in *Smoking Up Ambition!***

In consequence, and for the sake of staying on the plane of immanence where things are equally thought, said, made and processed (Deleuze, Chapter 1.15), I proposed to Fabienne Bideaud, the French independent curator with whom I was preparing the long-running project *Smoking Up Ambition!*, that we should organise a series of eight ‘Piece-discussions’ (*Pièce-discussions*) inspired by Lonzi’s work. These would be an integral part of the project and not added on after the event. The research and work around this show had started in 2010, and it was scheduled for public presentation in Geneva at the end of August/beginning of September 2014. These eight conversations, mostly between a pair of artists (with two exceptions: one with a museum curator and another with an art dealer), were as important as any artwork exhibited in the space, but the works served as a starting point to engage in a dialogue about art-making, past and present practice, conceptual and material parameters.

The artwork was first discussed from the point of view of its author: why I wanted to do it, how I managed to get it done, and what it is to look at this object that was once in my head as a vision, then took shape in my studio and after a couple of years became a public property. Secondly the artwork was discussed from the perspective of the audience, whether specialised or amateur: the significance of this object in the field of contemporary art and its impact in the current show. The semantic importance of these discussions, bringing together two very different entities (the maker and the viewer), is comparable to the polarity identified by Derrida in the argument opposing Heidegger to Shapiro in the context of an analysis of Van Gogh’s painting of shoes (Chapter 1.11). Derrida created a third critique, a textual ‘piece’, following those by Heidegger and Shapiro, in order to embrace and then challenge both points of view. This explains why we decided to create a portmanteau word associating ‘piece’ with ‘discussion’. Each ‘Piece-discussion’ implied the presence of at least four people: the two artists, as well as Bideaud and myself, joined by the audience.



This series was easily organised, since *Smoking Up Ambition!* almost exclusively presented local artists based in Geneva, available without too much complication or expense (travel and accommodation costs would have been beyond our budget). Scheduled every weekday evening, each ‘Piece-discussion’ attracted a different kind of audience, according to the artist’s professional and social sphere. None of the discussions was recorded, for the main reason that while some of the artists could articulate their ideas and reflections about their work and references well, for others the exercise was reminiscent of a school exam or an uncomfortable interrogation. Putting a recording machine, whether audio or video, in the middle of the room would for certain artists have been a hindrance to spontaneity. Even though Bideaud and I had carefully paired the artists in order to create a possible encounter, confrontation or cross gaze and analysis, each seemed to concentrate on his or her own presentation and didn’t actively interact with the other. Nevertheless, the ‘Piece-discussions’ did intensify and activate the exhibition. Something meaningful and unique happened every single day on the perimeter of the show, and transformed it into an event dedicated equally to objects and spoken words. Verbalisation, text, physical encounters and discussions between the exhibiting artists, the organisers as well as the audience, were part of the project as complex and semantically meaningful language-based objects, not as an optional educational programme.

The ‘Piece-discussions’ brought together two main aspects: the field of contemporary art and the life circumstances allowing or impeding an artistic career. These circumstances are highly specific and can lead to consideration of the most personal, intimate and idiosyncratic factors and parameters. From a sociological point of view, an artistic community is made up of these complementary aspects, binding together artists as protagonists engaging in a public way with their field of specialisation, as well human beings trying to cope with their creative drives and their everyday lives, from social class to sexuality, from paid job opportunities to precariousness, from independence to institutionalisation. The ‘Piece-discussions’ effectively communicated such reality and limitations, bringing any kind of speculation back to a down-to-earth materiality. Each participant spoke (sometimes consciously, sometimes not) on these two distinct levels, these two different ways to nurture a collective discourse, which – following an organisational way of looking at them – could be called *generalised* as well as *particular* membership ties. The former ‘revolve around membership in a community based on a

connection to some issue or problem’ (in this case, the problems associated with being an artist); the seconds ‘involve routines, procedures, and structures that delineate, for instance, what roles individuals take in problem solving or idea generation processes’.<sup>301</sup>

As I will explain below, *Smoking Up Ambition!* had the institutional function of promoting the Geneva state and city contemporary art collections. Besides their individual and intrinsic artistic qualities, these artefacts, selected over the years by public bodies and bought with tax-payers’ money, constituted, thanks to text, narration, classification and indexation to social and political referents, i.e. the thorough institutional documentation of the works in the collections,<sup>302</sup> an archive and not solely a pile of aging objects kept in closed storage. The ‘Piece-Discussions’ automatically added a philological layer to the artwork, as subject or pretext of the encounter, and contributed to the official documentation of the works through the partial storytelling of a community in need of culture. Some of these discussions are worth relating here, where Lonzi’s *Autoritratto* is discussed as a potential methodology, or at least an inspiration for this thesis (Chapter 2.10). In order to help me recall them, I consulted Bideaud via a Skype discussion on 9 August 2016.

### 3.5 ‘Piece-Discussions’

Being an artist as a life-long career is neither an obvious choice nor mandatory. The commitment is huge, although made principally only with oneself – who else can oblige one to become an artist, an engagement likely to lead to professional precariousness, independently from talent or commitment, and a drastic adaptation to an unstable context where the art practice is developed throughout a multiplicity of other activities, or in parallel with them? Idealism and pragmatism are two sides of the same coin in the constant search for meaning through objects, installations and experiences, whether tangible, solid, ephemeral, time-based or immediate. The consistency of such patterns,

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<sup>301</sup> Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, David Grant, ‘Discourse and collaboration: the role of conversation and collective identity’, in *Academy of Management Review*, 2005, Vol. 30. No. 1, Briarcliff Manor, New York, pp. 63–64.

<sup>302</sup> See, for example, the two catalogues: *Une ville collectionne, 1950–1990*, Fonds municipal de décoration, Genève, 1992 and *Fonds d’art contemporain de la Ville de Genève, Collection 1991-2003*, La Baconnière / Arts, Fonds d’art contemporain de la Ville de Genève, Genève, 2005.

dilemmas or issues that predictably resurface in the artist's dialogue with himself were raised on 4 September 2014, during 'Piece-Discussion VII', by Fabrice Gygi (born in Geneva in 1965), who has made both monumental installations and jewellery pieces during his career. This on-going dialectical and critical conversation with oneself, and its possible developments, affirmations, advances or results, is regularly or sporadically materialised and presented publicly, in a sharing gesture towards an audience or a readership. To exhibit, to present to the gaze of a viewer a materialised product emerging out of this constant spiritual enquiry, momentarily closes the discussion that Gygi described having with himself. This process, not specifically art-related, but more about the general conduct of one's life as an individual interacting with others, was identified by Socrates and wonderfully described by Hannah Arendt as the 'two-in-one ego', which splits into two in order to debate with itself.<sup>303</sup> In contrast to this discussion of the life-long dialectical and intimate contract to produce art, during 'Piece-discussion IV' on 1 September 2014, Jérémie Gindre (born in Geneva in 1978), discussed how he would be using another kind of typeface for the realisation of his text-based panel, produced in 2009. This commentary on a detail ('at that time I liked that typeface, today I would rather use this one') reveals how strongly a piece is dependent on, or even constituted from, context, taste and trend.

'Piece-Discussion I', held on 27 August 2014, allowed the Italian artist Lorenza Boisi (born in 1972) to express her desperate need (*necessity*) to practice art. Her installation [figs 1a and 1b], to which she refers as a self-portrait, composed out of small ceramic pieces displayed directly on the floor and representing, in a rather naïve way, fruit leftovers, solidified a raw desire and intuitive passion for life, as well as its perishable vanity. Boisi saw her piece as an unfinished work in progress, to be continued over time, as long as she felt this drive towards existence, symbolised by eating and simultaneously producing waste. In my interpretation, by doing so, she was acknowledging and therefore finding a way to accept or at least confront the inevitable wasting and fading away of her body.

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<sup>303</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Thinking*, in *The Life of the Mind*, 1971 (Edition Harcourt, New York, 1981, pp. 185–193).

In the case of Birgit Dam (born in 1963), a Swiss artist of Danish origin, the two exhibited works [figs 2 and 3] recalled her past artistic career, a creative period of her life dedicated to contemporary art, which she had abandoned. Dam's 'Piece-Discussion II', on 28 August 2014 unexpectedly unfolded in a highly emotional mode. When asked about the nature of her artworks, as well as their potential signification in regards to other pieces in the exhibition, she remained silent for little while before tears welled up in her blue eyes. She explained that looking again at these artworks that were no longer in her possession, belonging respectively to the State and City of Geneva collections, had brought her back to the very intimate moment of their creation, who she was and what she was going through twenty-four and nineteen years ago respectively. In this sense, her artwork functioned like Proust's madeleine,<sup>304</sup> whose taste generates an involuntary childhood memory and then its interpretation, followed by creation and literature.

A past episode of one's life was also at stake during Swiss artist Carmen Perrin's 'Piece-Discussion III' on 29 August 2014. More in control of her emotions, probably because, unlike Dam, she was still practising art with recognition by her peers, her talk consisted of a detailed description of the material and logistic conditions (*contingency*) under which she was producing her sculptures during the period in which they were made. At a certain point, while moving constantly from one studio to another in Marseille, she had to develop a solid sculptural form that was easily dismountable without the risk of encountering damage. Wishing to create a sphere, she came up with the idea of using clamps to attach long, flexible metal slices to two small round discs [fig 4]. While clamps are usually removed once an object's parts are correctly glued and fixed, in this case, they were intrinsically integrated into the body of the sculpture. Although exacerbating the object's sense of equilibrium and tension, the clamps were not initially motivated by aesthetic or narrative necessity. This is an example of the contingency discussed in (Chapter 2.2). Perrin (born in 1953 in La Paz, Bolivia) was explaining her practical options to an inter-generational audience composed in the majority of her former students, some of them also practising artists. In complement to her successful artistic career, Perrin had been for many years a professor at the fine art school in Geneva.

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<sup>304</sup> Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913.

The art world can be considered an organisation, but I would rather understand it as a system, since, while an art organisation both shapes and is shaped by the conditions of visibility, legitimation and the conservation of certain established art forms, a system is more introverted, turned towards its originators and their work, as well as towards its discipline, the art. This system is a social structure (a scene, a crowd, a nebula, a milieu and for some, a world) as well as a productive structure (managerial, financial, political, creative and scientific) structure. From this perspective, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, including the series of ‘Piece-discussions’, was a curatorial exercise about the different components from which a local art system (of a city or a region) is made, including art schools and their employees, current and past. Art schools educate and hopefully generate artists; at least this is one of their ambitions. Art schools also reinforce artists’ practices by letting them teach. For many, a teaching position guarantees economic survival, a way to continue working and producing by granting access to facilities, knowledge, sometimes usable resources but also a community and a network. Furthermore, an art school benefiting from a curatorial and critical studies programme can contribute to knowledge *about* artists, and not only work *by* artists. This kind of knowledge production, based ideally on practical experiences such as exhibition-making or cultural-activities programming, as well as on the writing of critical texts or essays, rather than the historical or expert papers traditionally produced in university art-history departments, is empirically and discursively speculative.

The *Smoking Up Ambition!* organisational team, directed by Bideaud and myself, included the art student Viola Lukács (born in 1986), a young Hungarian woman studying on the curatorial and critical programme of the fine art school in Geneva. She volunteered to join us in May 2014, after I had given a talk about some of my projects in her class. While helping during the construction of the display, as well as the hanging of the pieces, she met another Hungarian woman, one of the exhibiting artists, Klára Kuchta, born in 1941 in Budapest and arriving in Geneva in 1970. Both women share a language, a common geographical and cultural background, as well as a feminist consciousness. Kuchta, known for her gigantic tapestry pieces, but still a prolific, evolving and heteroclitic artist, having integrated conceptual art trends as well as performance and video into her work over 50 years, had many pieces in the *Smoking Up Ambition!* exhibition. She also attended most of the ‘Piece-Discussions’.

On 3 September 2014, in ‘Piece-Discussion VI’, she herself was a participant, paired with Pierre-Philippe Freymond (born in 1961), a Swiss artist primarily trained in natural sciences and holding a PhD in molecular biology. Because of tight scheduling, Freymond had to speak first, and left before Kuchta gave her talk. His piece *Chimère 2 (d’après Ambroise Paré)*, (2004) [fig 5] is made of a boar’s body, immortalised thanks to the art of taxidermy, and crashing into the wall, the entire head having already disappeared. The viewer’s fantasy reconstructs the face on the other side of the wall, whether as a boar’s head or a human one. Freymond chose this animal in reference to Ambroise Paré’s chimera,<sup>305</sup> but in his talk he alluded less to his hairy sculpture than to the competition and ambition inhabiting, equally but differently, the scientific and artistic fields.

Fur and hair would have been an obvious and relevant link for discussion between Freymond and Kuchta, whose abstract compositions, both in medium and monumental formats are made from fabrics, textiles, wool, etc. Weaving is traditionally associated with femininity, and Western feminist artists in the 1970s consequently used all kinds of formats, know-how and crafts related to fabrics, quilts, embroidering, knitting, etc., literally but also metaphorically in their work.<sup>306</sup> Kuchta has added hair, both natural and artificial, to this fibre art, and in her research-based conceptual practice has used sociological tools like questionnaires, statistics and targeting in order to study, for example, blondness and its cultural value.<sup>307</sup> Such associations and developments, from the feminist appropriation of handcraft textile production to hair, its colour and the care a woman dedicates to it, have nourished a dialogue between Lukács and Kuchta since their encounter during *Smoking Up Ambition!* in September 2014. This series of discussions between the two Hungarian women has inspired Lukács to dedicate her final Master’s thesis at the art school in Geneva, CCC Research-Based Master Programme, Critical Cross-Cultural Cybermedia, to Kuchta’s practice, its historical and cultural contextualisation, as well as its interpretation.

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<sup>305</sup> Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis L. Pallister, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982.

<sup>306</sup> Among many references: Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (various editions: 1984, 1996, 2010); *The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago: an exhibition conceived by Judy Chicago and executed by her in cooperation with a working community of women and men, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, March 16–June 17, 1979*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1979.

<sup>307</sup> Viola Lukács, *Do Not Trust the Mirror, Curating in Conversation with Klára Kuchta*, violuk contemporary, Geneva, Zurich, 2016, p. 11.

### 3.6 Aline Morvan's *Elle s'emploie* and *Abouchement*

Even if *Smoking Up Ambition!* was mainly a show of works collected by the City and the State of Geneva, some of my former students from the CERCCO, Experimentation and Research Centre for Contemporary Ceramics at the Geneva art school, were also selected to contribute (Lorenza Boisi and Aline Morvan being two of them). This invitation, originating from a pedagogical context (I taught at CERCCO from 2009 to 2014) was meant to anchor our initiative even more firmly in the local scene by tracing a possible genealogy between Geneva's current ceramic practitioners and Setsuko Nagasawa (born in Kyoto in 1941), a Japanese artist who was formerly professor of ceramics at Geneva art school and who had a piece in the exhibition. Her sculpture, made out of a metallic square supporting a black ceramic triangle, was one of the most subtle, beautiful and interesting works in the show [fig 6]. Nagasawa, now based in Paris, unfortunately could not join us for a 'Piece-Discussion'. Nevertheless, Aline Morvan (born in 1982 in Courbevoie), a French artist currently working in Geneva discussed both of her exhibited pieces on 29 August 2014. *Abouchement* (2014–), using words and ceramics, and *Elle s'emploie* (2014–), a feminist textile work, were presented on the same wall as Kuchta's *Vitesse* (undated) [fig 7]. Both of Morvan's works are currently in process and were initiated before *Smoking Up Ambition!*. In consequence, rather than tracing back what she said about her work two years ago, I contacted her and we met for an hour on 10 August 2016. My curiosity to know more about her works originated in the associations with my interests: firstly event (or its diametrical opposite, non-event) in the case of *Elle s'emploie*; secondly Lonzi's *Autoritratto* in the case of *Abouchement*.

According to Morvan, *Elle s'emploie* (a roll of embroidery canvas, a metal table, white cotton, 300 x 150 cm) is her main and favourite piece, the boldest work she has produced so far. In her own words: 'tout est là' in this piece – what she is thinking about and struggling with in her two-in-one dialectical and critical thinking about her artistic practice and contemporary art at large. Despite this feeling of wholeness and accomplishment regarding this single artwork, she is currently developing other projects in parallel. *Elle s'emploie* means both 'She uses herself' and 'She employs herself'. Unlike Penelope in the Ancient Greek *Odyssey*, who undoes her day's weaving every night in order to postpone the advances of her suitors and give time for her

husband Ulysses to return home, Morvan strives to cover the whole canvas with thousands of small and repetitive stitches. Such long, lonely and boring work can be delegated by the artist-author, when there are sufficient financial resources, to craftsmen and assistants. This kind of delegation is very common in the contemporary art world and the names of these collaborators, who might be responsible for the execution of an entire work, remain largely unknown to the public, the institution, the collector, the art critic and the art historian. Hirst and Koons are among the most famous current delegators, functioning as art directors of their creative enterprises.

Interestingly, this recalls the workshops of the Middle Ages, where many artists were grouped around a single master's name. In such structures, one can ask, how does the knowledge of the hand, the empirical and practical knowhow, interact and interfere with the artist's intentions and needs?<sup>308</sup>

To delegate, however, implies having capital to invest in the service of others. When one does not benefit from such a budget (the situation for most), one has to do the work oneself. In the case of Morvan – the 'She' of her title referring very consciously to the common female aspect of this kind of activity – she herself fills the canvas from time to time with lines of white cotton stitches. She practises this embroidery work on an irregular basis. There is no pattern to execute nor a design to render. What could be more neutral and abstract, in a confrontation with figuration, than stiches made out of white cotton? *Elle s'emploie* represents nothing other than time, repetition and predictability: the brownish canvas, produced industrially and bought by the metre, provides a basis for a grid that will be slowly completed, without disruption, the very opposite of an event. Nothing more is expected than what will be consciously done, one line after the other one, like a machine. There is no room for composition or improvisation in the labour.

*Elle s'emploie* refers to a practice that has had a social binding function over the centuries. As we have seen, Donna Haraway (Chapter 2.4) wrote about the home work economy during the rise of the desktop computer, and its impact on the labour market, especially for women, but embroidery, weaving, making lace and quilting are historical examples of domestic labour, traditionally developed by women, primarily in the family

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<sup>308</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008.



circle. Mothers, daughters, cousins, etc., spread and shared a familiar knowledge<sup>309</sup> that has now been mostly abandoned in Western countries.

For two years, alone in her studio, Morvan has pursued her repetitive gesture, presenting the canvas in the form of an installation. Even if the piece is labelled with her name, she shows no trace of her presence or physical implication in this labour. She further removes the piece from this implication through the way in which the canvas roll is attached to the wall, unfolding onto a table until reaching the floor, so that the stitches to be continued are on the ground: it becomes obvious that this is not a realistic or practical working situation, or the canvas to embroider would be stretched on a frame.

In *Smoking up Ambition!*, this installation was shown alongside signed and authorised finished pieces requiring a curatorial infrastructure for their appropriate conservation, objects that were required to remain exactly the way they were at the time of their acquisition. Quite the opposite is at stake in *Elle s'emploie*, a work in progress that alludes to textile-based feminine and domestic labour and takes the shape of a sculpture. The body of the artist, like that of a worker, an artisan or a woman labouring at home, remains invisible and anonymous.

*Abouchement* is also an on-going piece where the artist's presence remains absent, apart from the traces of her teeth. Its inspiration is the play *Le baiser et la morsure* [*The Kiss and the Bite*], 2014, written and directed by the Swiss dramaturge Guillaume Béguin, whom Morvan encountered in 2014, when she started a project that today has seen 54 reiterations.<sup>310</sup> Morvan was intrigued and inspired by Béguin's exploration of verbal and body language, and recognised in it a general enquiry into means of communication, whether in humans or animals. Her work adopts a protocol that is pretty straightforward: the artist invites someone in whom she is interested to meet for a discussion, and at the end of this verbal exchange, which can take place in her studio or any other private place, Morvan bites into a piece of clay and asks her interlocutor to do

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<sup>309</sup> Monique Haicault, 'Perte de savoirs familiaux, nouvelle professionalité du travail domestique, quels sont les liens avec le système productif?', in *Recherches féministes*, Consortium Érudit, Montreal, vol. 7, n. 1, 1994, p. 126.

<sup>310</sup> <http://www.denuitcommedejour.ch/site/index.php/le-baiser-et-la-morsure/opus-2-note-dintention> (accessed 15 August 2016).

the same. The two small pieces of clay moulded by both mouths are then fired in a ceramic oven. After that, Morvan creates a double of them in order to offer one copy of the two bites to her interlocutor as a solidified memory of what has been said during the past hour.

I myself was invited to participate in this experience on 13 August 2014. We met in Morvan's studio and spoke, among many things, about the exhibition to come, *Smoking up Ambition!*. I can remember very little of this encounter, besides the walls and the windows of the room where I sat facing Morvan, and the strange texture of the clay with which I was asked to interact: soft and sandy, tasting almost of nothing. On 10 August 2016, Morvan gave me a little box containing my copy of our two bites. Mine is much smaller than hers, looking intimidated, squeezed, shifty and slippery: I can now see that I was shy about the experience. A label on the package records the number 21, as well as my initials and those of Morvan [fig 8].

In the *Smoking Up Ambition!* exhibition, three pieces of earthenware were exhibited by Morvan: her bite, Bideaud's and mine. These three tiny objects, approximately 3.5 x 2 x 2 cm each, were placed on a small black granite shelf, and as background or décor, a photograph of an colourful embroidery scene: two birds that appeared to be having a discussion.

*Abouchement* constitutes a bridge between the objects exhibited in museum conditions throughout the show, the spoken words exchanged every day in that space, the 'Piece-Discussion' programme, and to this analysis of some of the works in the show. This series was produced through the same ritual, repeated over and over again by an artist wondering how to capture and objectify the exchange of words, how to record an encounter between herself and another with her own tools and artistic language (namely ceramics and conceptual art), how to transform it into something unique and historic and, simultaneously, how to let us understand that when one has a full mouth (in this case with earthenware), one cannot speak. When I am using my mouth to bite (or to kiss), I cannot verbalise or express with language what is currently happening. Physicality and sensuality seem speechless.

### **3.7 The Kiss and the Bite**

On 10 August 2016, Morvan spoke about how she chooses those with whom to participate in *Abouchement*. Her current difficulty is in finding people to contact. She is also thinking about starting to record future conversations. This recording would not be part of the work, but would complement it like a document. I asked her: ‘What would be the function of these audio files? Who would listen to them? Are you going to edit them? Who has the time to listen to all this? Do they concern anyone other than you and the person you were talking to?’ Morvan does not yet have the answers. Exhibiting audio-files not only incurs technological issues due to the challenges of acoustics and the problem of potentially creating a cacophony in the exhibition space, but is equally a time-based dilemma. When reading a book, even if I decide to start at its very end or in the middle, I know where the beginning is to be found. But when entering a sound installation, should I wait until the soundtrack loops back again to its start?<sup>311</sup>

The idea of the bite in *Abouchement* can be linked with the news item about the banker killed by his mistress during a sadomasochistic session referred to above, a scandalous anecdote that has inspired and nourished *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2010–14).

On 1 March 2005, at 17 Adrien-Lachenal Street in Geneva’s city centre, the corpse of French banker Edouard Stern is found wrapped in a latex suit at the foot of his bed, bathed in his blood, next to a knocked-over Louis XV armchair from which he has apparently fallen. The bound body is equipped with a mountaineer’s harness. A rope lies nearby, along with a whip and other props. The suit is punctured by nine bullet holes, four of which have passed completely through the body – two in the face, now unrecognisable, one in the stomach, another through the heart. The 9mm Smith & Wesson that was responsible for ripping into the 50-year-old banker’s body belonged to Cécile Brossard, 36, an amateur painter-sculptor who is now famous for being mixed up in the assassination or passionate murder of her lover, or even his suicide, depending on one’s interpretation of events. In 2000, Stern had paid 10 million Swiss francs in cash for

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<sup>311</sup> A comparable challenge is the displaying of artworks with moving images. The Steve McQueen exhibition in the ‘City of Cinemas’, Schaulager, Basel, 2013, remains one of the best solutions that I have witnessed so far, <http://stevemcqueen.schaulager.org/smq/en/exhibition.html> (accessed 16 August 2016).

the building in which he lived. He had reinforced the security himself with a video camera in the building's parking lot and entry hall, as well as rigging his apartment with a complex alarm system. His home was decorated with paintings by Basquiat, Soulages and Bacon. The furniture, including eighteenth-century pieces, as well as decorative objects, was valued at 100 million francs. The announcement of this peculiar death spread rapidly through the world of international finance.<sup>312</sup>

Stern's collaborator, Alexandre Koifmann, a mathematician turned trader, discovered the body and gave the following account:

I must admit that my first reaction was to think that this was one of those modern artworks. The French would probably say it was Surrealist art. Something I had to step over, just a piece of art. I had seen so many bizarre things in some apartments. It took me a moment, one minute, thirty seconds, five seconds, to realize that I was face to face with a lifeless body in Edouard's apartment.<sup>313</sup>

The death of the Swiss banker constitutes a 'signpost', the starting point for an exhibition for and about Geneva combining artworks and installations from the city's collections. The goal was not to explain or illustrate the banker's death through these works, but rather to gravitate around it, like a scavenger circling the cadaver – encased in latex and bathed in blood. This most contemporary (but entirely conceptual) installation of a figure on the floor, with its exacerbated uncanniness, recalls Gregor Schneider's sculptures, where bodies are half concealed in black bin bags, revealing parts of legs, the grotesque protuberances in the plastic surface suggesting erections.<sup>314</sup> This half-veiled anatomical vision exacerbates the body's volume, and it is hard not to affiliate these works iconographically with examples such as Andrea Mantegna's

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<sup>312</sup> Valérie Duby and Alain Jourdan, *Mort d'un banquier, Les dessous de l'affaire Stern*, Editions Privé, Paris, 2006.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16, translation by Patrick Morency for this PhD.

<sup>314</sup> See, for example, Gregor Schneider, *Mann mit Schwanz in Sack [Man with Cock in Bag]*, 2001, <http://www.dominikmerschgallery.com/artist/gregor-schneider/dominik-mersch-gallery-gregor-schneider-mann-mit-schwanz-im-sack-2001/> (accessed 7 September 2016).

*Lamentation of Christ* (c. 1480), Ettore in *Mamma Roma* by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1962) or Che Guevara photographed by Freddy Alborta (9 October 1967).

That life is equally made up of pain and pleasure is a universal given, as is the acknowledgement of the suffering generated by love, and the animal instincts driving and conditioning our human interactions. The question is: how far do you go with this? Why did Morvan choose an embodied trace to conserve her conversations with others? Why a bite? Does to speak with someone injure as much as allow, emancipate and empower? To kiss and to bite / to love and to kill: at which point do you start hating your lover because you admire her or him so much? Do you feel better alone, anonymously working on your embroidery, bored but safe? By being identified as a woman or any kind of historically suppressed or minority subject, how do you create, organise and manage a sensation, an environment or a space of safety, not only for your own sake, but also for those with whom you interact? The 'safe space' tradition inherited by the women's movement at the end of the twentieth century has been used in many different contexts since then.<sup>315</sup> Do closed boundaries and rules of membership really prevent violence, or do they incite it, as well as hampering free speech? In the case of artists, the studio could be considered as a 'safe space', even if the place of production (a 'factory' in the case of Warhol)<sup>316</sup> and sometimes a semi-public one (the studio visit being an important interface for the intimate and exposed exchange between artist and guest)?<sup>317</sup> In the context of a curatorial project, can an exhibition constitute, together with its 'Piece-Discussions', an open 'safe space' in which to address very specific and usually taboo issues such as the failure to become an artist, the passing of time, finitude and limitation, the economical and managerial aspects of producing art pieces, the world

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<sup>315</sup> The Roestone Collective, 'Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization', in *Antipode, A Radical Journal of Geography*, Wiley-Blackwell, New York, Volume 46, Issue 5, November 2014, pp. 1346–65.

<sup>316</sup> Steven Watson, *Factory made: Warhol and the sixties*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2003; *The Eternal now: Warhol and the Factory '63-'68*, catalogue edited and compiled by Sarah Glennie et al., Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo, 2008; Caroline A. Jones, 'Andy Warhol's "Factory": The Production Site, its Context and its Impact on the Work of Art', in *Science in Context*, The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, Tel Aviv University, 4, 1, 1990, pp. 101–131.

<sup>317</sup> Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice (eds.), *The Fall of the Studio – Artists at Work*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2009; see also the monumental and allegorical painting by Gustave Courbet, *L'Atelier du peintre. Allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique et morale*, 1854–1855.

of art as a place to comment on the real and equally introverted or auto-referential, the complex rules and power relationships in Geneva or elsewhere? All these questions, which may seem superficial, vain or anecdotal, as well as unlikely to lead anywhere, are actually among those that artists continuously ask and struggle with, even if they don't always dare to formulate them openly. Art, which can be materialised in the form of a series of objects, but also a programme, following a curatorial logic, gave us the possibility to make the 'Piece-discussions' – predictable in format and nature, oscillating between *generalized* and *particular* components, but at the same time unique and genuine discursive events.

I have described Morvan's *Elle s'emploie* as a perfect non-event. Its format prevents anything extraordinary from happening; its fulfilment will be a gesture of closure. Once the stiches of white cotton have covered the entire surface, the installation will come to its end. It will be one more white monochrome or tapestry on the planet, but one with a feminist touch made in intimate relation with Morvan's life, even though the viewer has no direct or sensory access to this information. This very fact might be the most critical aspect of Morvan's entire oeuvre: *Elle s'emploie* leads nowhere but to a self-reflexive activity taking the shape of the unifying covering of a surface.

In an opposite way, as explored in Chapter 1, an event, namely art according to Heidegger, is a disruption of a regular structure or system. Can a news item, as a raw product extracted from reality, constitute such a valuable event? Or is it because I pay attention to it and appropriate it for my own social, cultural and artistic agenda that it becomes an event?<sup>318</sup> According to Roland Barthes, the *fait divers* (news item) is a moment where the event is fully experienced as a sign whose content is uncertain. Its consumer doesn't need any reasonable explanation in order to enjoy it spontaneously.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> In cinematic history, *La femme d'à côté* (1981) by François Truffaut is a brilliant example of how a passionate crime can lead to a cinematographic oeuvre.

<sup>319</sup> 'The *fait divers* [...] is total news, or more precisely, immanent: it contains all its knowledge in itself; no need to know anything about the world in order to consume a *fait divers*; it refers formally to nothing but itself; of course, its content is not alien to the world: disasters, murders, rapes, accidents, thefts, all this refers to man, to his history, his alienation, his hallucinations, his dreams, his fears: an ideology and psychoanalysis of the *fait divers* are possible, but they would concern a world of which knowledge is never anything but intellectual, analytical, elaborated at second-hand by the person who

Where is the event to be found in this news item about the Geneva banker's corpse? I will develop that point further on, with the help of some history of art and an aesthetic analysis of materials, from marble to latex.

*Smoking Up Ambition!* is born out of a banker's corpse, as described in a news item that I saw in a newspaper and in online blogs. But because the scandal is a real one, and the banker's privacy, as well as that of his family, has to be protected, not a single picture of the cadaver was made available for the public. The description of the scene was sufficient to provoke and lead to the construction of other images and stories. Indeed, ever since *Rhetoric to Herennius* (first century BC), in particular its book on memory, we have known that bruised flesh, blood and human atrocity are among the easier images to recall, in order to build efficient memory techniques. Antiquity called these *imagines agentes* or mental models. It was essential that each individual should create his/her own, since the ancient sources of the art of memory wished to provide directives and examples, and not catalogues of ready-to-use images,<sup>320</sup> as was the case for instance in the Middle Ages, a formatting that blocked and reduced the imagination of mnemonic-technique users.

### **3.8 A banker in latex suit, Masoch, the fold and *potentia gaudendi***

I interpret the news item of 1 March 2005 about the banker found dead in his second-skin suit as a local piece or symptom, a synecdoche for something bigger, addressing

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speaks of the *fait-divers*, not by the person who consumes it,' Roland Barthes, 'Structure du fait divers', in *Essais critiques*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1964, pp. 186–197.

<sup>320</sup> 'We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in the memory. And we shall do so if we establish likenesses as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague, but doing something; if we assign them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily. The things we easily remember when they are real we likewise remember without difficulty when they are figments, if they have been carefully delineated.', *De ratione dicendi ad C. Herennium*, Liber III, 28-40. (*Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium) / (Cicero)*, trans. Harry Caplan, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1964).

power relationships and other societal issues of our time. A scene, a picture, an installation, an object to step over, a news item: Edouard Stern dead in a latex suit. This notion of the second skin, as well as the SM theme brings to mind Sacher-Masoch's remarkable fiction *Venus in Furs*, a cult novel using the codes of cruelty and masochism,<sup>321</sup> which concludes with a claim for gender equality and women's rights to education and decent working conditions. Indeed, this book dealing with the desire to be 'completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex, and being treated by this person as by a master, to be humiliated, abused, and tormented',<sup>322</sup> ends with the following question and answer:

But the moral?

That woman, as nature has created her and as man is at present educating her, is his enemy. She can only be his slave or his despot, but never his companion. This she can become only when she has the same rights as he, and is his equal in education and work.<sup>323</sup>

In Sacher-Masoch, the violence inflicted on the body of the narrator, following his will and request, is not free from political intention. It illustrates, serves and represents a cause – the feminist one – or at least, sets into its narrative of a couple's story, as well as its aesthetic terms, an enquiry about the construction of sexuality and gender.<sup>324</sup> This process of disrupting the established power relationship between a man and a woman, Sylvain and Wanda, implies overthrow and inversion, as well as injuries, bitterness and rancour, in particular from the side of the Wanda, having been asked to bite the man.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, trans. Jean McNeil and Aude Willm, Zone Books, New York, 1991.

<sup>322</sup> Fernanda Savage, 'Introduction' in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, trans. Fernanda Savage, The Project Gutenberg EBook, file:///Users/bernardi/Downloads/Leopold-von-Sacher-Venus-in-Furs%20(1).pdf (accessed 16 August 2016), p. 4.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>324</sup> Katharina Gerstenberger, 'Her (Per)version: The Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch', in *Woman in German Yearbook*, vol. 13, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1997, pp. 81–99.

<sup>325</sup> 'I could make you see sense', she replied mockingly, 'but I prefer this time to answer you by argument rather than with the whip. You have no right to blame me; I have always been honest with you. Have I not warned you more than once? Have I not loved you with all my heart, passionately, and have I in any way hidden from you the danger of lowering yourself before me? Have I not told you that I want to be dominated? But you



It is indeed entirely his fault, an experiment committed for the sake of research. This recalls Preciado's introduction to *Testogel*, the third chapter of *Testo Junkie*, where s/he quotes from the writer Hervé Guibert: 'As always I'm inside writing, simultaneously the scientist and the rat he's ripping open to study.'<sup>326</sup> By entering into such self-experimentation, one of the conclusions of *Venus in Furs* is that there is no coming back to any a priori healthy state or balance in the couple's relationship: love and even mutual respect seem compromised. Necessity and contingency have produced a new and powerful piece of irreversible reality. The contract between Sylvain and Wanda – Sylvain's desire to be Wanda's slave – once having been performed, affects the characters' psychology, and the way they consider and interact with each other. As a result, Wanda loses respect for her husband and the humiliation turns from contractual to real. In that sense, no equilibrium, comfort or solace can be brought to the gender-unbalanced state.

What status should be accorded to the news item about the Geneva banker and how should one situate his contribution in the curatorial project *Smoking Up Ambition!*? I consider that the event, and therefore, following Heidegger, the art, happened backstage of this show, before it. Nothing truly artistic happened during the exhibition and its making. Should I feel sad or ashamed when facing this self-assessment of my work and that of my collaborator Bideaud? Does it lose its value or importance? With my first case study, *Eternal Tour*, the event happened after the end of the project. Thanks to this PhD thesis, I now have the occasion to put the pieces together, including those that were not visible to the viewer. In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!*, the story begins with a consideration of the double skin that the banker bought for himself, and the sensation that the latex provoked as the final result of his intimate quest. My hypothesis, my belief in the aesthetic quality of this news item, lies in wondering about the feelings generated

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wished to be my plaything, my slave! Your greatest delight was to be kicked and whipped by a proud and cruel woman. What do you want now? Dangerous tendencies were lurking in me, and you were the one who awakened them; if I now take pleasure in hurting and tormenting you, it is entirely your fault. You have made me what I am, and you are so weak and unmanly that you are now blaming me.', Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, trans. Jean McNeil and Aude Willm, Zone Books, New York, 1991, pp. 259–260.

<sup>326</sup> Preciado, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

by this second skin, no matter how much pain or violence was involved. Indeed, the latex skin doesn't constitute an end in itself. It is rather an accessory used towards epidermal sensation, that powerful and almost intangible object of consumption. As formulated by Preciado: 'Although we're accustomed to speaking of a society of consumption, the objects of consumption are only the scintilla of a psychotoxic virtual production. We are consumers of air, dreams, identity, relation, things of the mind.'<sup>327</sup>

In *Logic of Sense* (1969), Gilles Deleuze discusses the sense that takes place on the surface, the event per se, while referring to stoic philosophy (Chapter 1.15). In his 'Second Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects',<sup>328</sup> he discusses the Möbius strip, the conceptual figure that we chose for *Eternal Tour's* logo (Chapter 2.16), in this case assimilated to a surface encapsulating all the world: 'and Fortunatus' purse, presented as a Möbius strip, is made of handkerchiefs sewn *in the wrong way*, in such a manner that its outer surface is continuous with its inner surface: it envelops the entire world, and makes that which is inside be on the outside and vice versa.'<sup>329</sup> He also discusses the skin as an extension or layer to be cut or bruised, with reference to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871).<sup>330</sup>

Between bodies, skin is obviously the place of encounter, and where erotic potential is manifested. In Preciado's autobiographical philosophical treatise, in which a love story also unfolds, s/he concludes the description of a second sexual encounter with his/her lover VD with the phrase: 'She tears off my skin, every time.'<sup>331</sup> The banker Stern chose a second skin of latex for his sadomasochistic congress with Bossard, a necessary

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<sup>327</sup> Preciado, *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>328</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, The Athlone Press, London, 1990, pp. 4–11.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>330</sup> 'Here events, differing radically from things, are no longer sought in the depths, but at the surface, in the faint incorporeal mist which escapes from bodies, a film without volume which envelops them, a mirror which reflects them, a chessboard on which they are organized according to plan. Alice is no longer able to make her way through to the depths. [...] Paul Valéry had a profound idea: what is most deep is the skin. [...] It is the discovery of the little girl. [...] She knows that the more the events traverse the entire, depthless extension, the more they affect bodies which they cut and bruise. [...] History teaches us that sound roads have no foundation, and geography that only a thin layer of the earth is fertile.', *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>331</sup> Preciado, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

accessory for what can be considered as a sexual subculture, or a practice where the mind/body dualism is challenged through sexualised and fetish-based rituals.<sup>332</sup> It is while contained within this epidermal extension that he is found dead. Deriving from rubber trees as natural latex, or more often synthesised artificially through polymerisation, latex is part of what Preciado summarises as the general plastic and transuranic industry inscribed within the ‘pharmacopornographic’ era.<sup>333</sup> Fetishists who have a sexual fixation on latex call themselves ‘rubberists’. By compressing the body, fitted latex clothing cuts off the skin’s ability to breathe or to register the signs of aggression. Encasing the wearer in a sort of cocoon, latex allows them to be whipped with no visible trace, scar or stigmata, while the sensation of pain is increased and better distributed throughout the body. In the case of the marble drapes, one aesthetically enjoys the surface that is made to look soft but consists of one of the most time-resistant materials. When assessing a fold, the narrative (mythological, biblical or hagiographical) is temporarily put aside in order to enjoy the relationship with the material. By sculpting a series of folds – and a fold can hardly be an isolated form – an artist gives shape to variation, rhythm, void, addition, subtraction, movement, life, air, sensuality, desire, abstraction, curves, concave, convex, composition, symmetry, balance and excess. For the person wearing the suit (and not the one looking at it, like the discoverer of Stern’s body, Koifmann, where the experience might perhaps engender a new perception of one’s own body in the world), the sensation is pain (pain being in this context mainly a means to something else, which some might call transcendence or ecstasy). In this sense the experience is beyond time or place, hardly located or situated apart from in the present cognitive moment. This exclusive and hyper-personal amnesic sensation is one that no one else can see or notice. It is internal, highly private, and paradoxically, is a force for ‘transformation for the world in pleasure.’<sup>334</sup> This second case is comparable to orgasm, a perfect analogy with what Preciado coins *potentia gaudendi* or ‘orgasmic force’, ‘the (real or virtual) strength of a body’s (total) excitation’, a ‘new philosophical concept in the pharmacopornographic domain that is equivalent to the force of work in

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<sup>332</sup> See, for example, Andrea Beckmann, *The Social Construction of Sexuality and Perversion: Deconstructing Sodomasochism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009; Richard Meyer, ‘Imagining Sodomasochism: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Masquerade of Photography’, in *Qui Parle*, vol. 1, no. 1, *REEDING SEEING*, Fall 1990, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, pp. 62–78.

<sup>333</sup> Preciado, *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

the domain of classic economics'.<sup>335</sup>

### 3.9 The impossibility of curating a banker's orgasm

The definition of the *potentia gaudendi* quoted above implies an orgasmic force that depends neither on the body nor the biological impetus generating it in a way that is comparable to the idea envisioned by Heidegger about a thinking liberated from any corporal entity and its related anxieties (Chapter 2.3). Nevertheless, Preciado attributes this particular force to the period in which we are currently living.<sup>336</sup> But it is not my task here to discuss the way in which s/he coins such a concept or its particular and singular attribution to the present condition and its unconditional links to economy. Towards my concern with cosmopolitanism and the challenge of hosting – and even more being hosted by – foreign people and ideas (Chapter 2.15), postcolonialism, the narratives of Arab women artists and Sherpas from the Himalayas (Chapter 4), I can only briefly quote Preciado as s/he honestly acknowledges an anchoring in his/her own biographical, cultural, scientific and bodily condition,<sup>337</sup> the administrative and legal conditions and clear pragmatic frame s/he sets for the research: 'Obviously, such a position is one of political arrogance. If I'm able to take such a liberty at this time, it's because I don't need to go out and look for work, because I'm white, because I have no intention of having a bureaucratic relationship to the state.'<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> 'This strength is of indeterminate capacity; it has no gender; it is neither male nor female, neither human nor animal, neither animated nor inanimate. Its orientation emphasizes neither the feminine nor the masculine and creates no boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality or between object and subject [...]. *Potentia gaudendi* unites all material, somatic, and psychic forces and seeks all biochemical resources and all structures of the mind.', in *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41–50.

<sup>337</sup> Preciado establishes the narrator of *Testo Junkie*, the 'I', as a white female European citizen, currently living in Paris, having spent some years in New York, belonging and surviving thanks to queer micro communities in diverse urban centres. The postcolonial component of this study on pharmacy and politics becomes clear in Chapter 8, *Pharmacopower*, pp. 144–235, where s/he traces the story of the birth-control pill and its trials in Puerto Rico by a poor population located in social housing. Throughout the entire story of the Pill, where it is compared with Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, for example, the voice or viewpoint of the Puerto Rican is never stated.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

It is due to this self-exposing positionality that Preciado claims for him/herself, that I refer to *Testo Junkie* in this chapter, where I am dealing with a clear white Western context. Without directly illustrating a political and societal reality because busy with concepts and their internal challenge, because working things out through abstraction and virtual figures, philosophy can be a great help, even for a non-specialist like myself, to grasp an epoch and its manifestations.

Because I am myself struggling with such a dilemma, let me briefly underline here the relevance of Preciado's methods, intelligence and arguments, which successfully challenge the classical dichotomy traditionally made between theory and practice (a dialectic that I will discuss further in Chapter 4), or in Preciado's case, while working on gender and queerness, between the mind and the body and their culturally and scientifically constructed realities. The forces that Preciado deploys include a knowledge nourished both by a journalistic overview and by a grasp of popular science, his/her study of the sensations and behaviour of her body, to which s/he voluntarily administers testosterone,<sup>339</sup> a solid capacity for compiling and ordering data, as well as not only philosophical erudition, but also an ability to put philosophy to practical use, not to mention the romance with 'VD' that provides some relief from the analysis-based intensity of the text. This is a unique example of how, in the frame of the academy but also in life, codes and norms can be challenged by philosophy. Does philosophy have to be academic and specialised, centred and exclusively peer-oriented? Does philosophy concern disciplines other than philosophy itself? Preciado has turned it into an activist tool against normativity and capitalist exploitation. In this PhD thesis, my own concern is using philosophy towards some case studies of contemporary art, and to explore how a theoretical and essayistic text can be developed, acknowledging postmodern and feminist paradigms. Preciado is relevant for two reasons: what s/he investigates and how s/he does so.

In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!* and its origin in the circumstances of the banker's

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<sup>339</sup> According to the Italian critic Manuela Caserta, such a process is traceable back to Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin and others, <http://caserta.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2016/03/24/lera-farmacopornografica-spiegata-in-testo-tossico-di-paul-b-precियो/> (accessed 21 August 2016).

death, Preciado's concept of *potentia gaudendi* constitutes one more conceptual layer with which to frame my curatorial work. I argue that the show was based on the banker's orgasm shortly before his death, or perhaps leading to his death. This orgasm, is a metaphor for capitalism (or for a critique of capitalism). Achieved with the help of a latex skin, the orgasm recalls the moment when the bullet penetrated the first and then the second skin of Stern, to finally explode into his flesh. From an aesthetic, sculptural and philosophical perspective, it is a perfect and powerful exemplification of a radical event (see 3.8). In the case of *Eternal Tour*, the event took place afterwards, as an epilogue explaining the whole, remaining private except through a textual account. In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!*, the event happened before, as origin, never presented in the conclusive curatorial project.

The answer to the question of whether Bideaud and I succeeded in finding some way of literally curating the banker's orgasm, either metaphorically or aesthetically, is unfortunately, no. Our first applications to the State, as well as to the City of Geneva in order to develop such a curatorial project by exhibiting some of their artworks was rejected in 2011 as well as in 2012. In 2013, we finally won, to our great surprise and delight, a competition for curatorial initiatives launched by the Geneva State Contemporary Art Fund with a modified project, based on the banker's death and related research, but carefully avoiding any specific mention of him. The result was a rather formalist investigation of material, surfaces, opacity and transparency. This way in which contemporary art projects evolve and adapt to the public institutions or private entities that finance and host them is common (at least in my experience), and the question is obviously how much one can negotiate and how far one should concede. William Bergquist, in *The Postmodern Organization* (1993), touched on this complexity when he wrote:

Many organizations that could be labelled postmodern are poised on the brink of chaos – not chaos as it is commonly defined, as anarchy or complete disorganization, but according to its emerging use,<sup>340</sup> as a state of

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<sup>340</sup> James Gleick, *Chaos: Making A New Science*, Viking Penguin, New York, 1987; John Briggs and F. David Peat, *Turbulent Mirror*, Harper Collins, New York, 1989.

unpredictability and complexity.<sup>341</sup>

### 3.10 How does the organisation become concrete?

What I have so far related in this chapter regarding the intellectual journey that Bideaud and I undertook while developing our show and its 'Piece-Discussions' programme exemplifies how one can think about and grasp a contemporary-art project in a creative, associative, mind-mapping, transdisciplinary and trans-historical way, rather than with a linear dynamic. The constellation of ideas, cultural products and references, research and travel that are part of the organisation of any project are not visible in the final result, but structure it like scaffolding that is taken away once the architecture is built and presented to the audience. This method of researching and associating sources from different possible fields, each time challenging one's intellectual and physical limitations by exploring new territories with the help of experts and specialists, is the approach I have used for the artworks developed since starting my art studies. In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!*, it was necessary to achieve conceptual consistency in order to develop a project involving public art collections, together with the needed funds. The dynamic of such an initiative, which may be driven by a curator or an artist, corresponds to the criteria of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* § 44 regarding Fine Art. It also corresponds to the essayist dynamic constituting a fundamental critical exercise, recalling Theodor Adorno's words in the *Essay as Form* (1958):

[The essay] owes its freedom in the choice of its objects, its sovereignty in the face of all priorities of fact or theory, to the fact that for it all objects are in a certain sense equally close to the center – equally close to the principle that casts its spell over all of them.<sup>342</sup>

In Chapter 4, I will further reflect on Kant's view of Fine Art by comparing it with Adorno's essay, as well as other references in the field of artistic research. But let me elaborate here a little more around what kind of knowledge can be produced through an

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<sup>341</sup> William Bergquist, *The Postmodern Organization, Mastering the Art of Irreversible Change*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1993, p. xii.

<sup>342</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature 1*, Rolf Tiedeman ed., trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 19.

artwork. Erudition and technical know-how are needed to build a proposal aiming at an embodied and materialised form (contemporary art can be text-based, yet this still has the fundamental potentiality of an object), but not only this. A central question around which the proposal can hang is very important and can be expressed (but not answered, since then the speculative aspect of art would be twisted into an ideology or science) thanks to a scenario, a script, a manifesto, a poem or any kind of statement, as long as it can be understood by the institution or foundation called upon to support the initiative. The presentation of the idea, with a clear vision as to where and how much financial support is needed (a precise budget and realistic financial plan are always requested), is one of the deciding factors leading, or not, to the project's realisation. At a certain point, intuitive ideas, sources and references have to concretise into reality, in the shape of suggested artworks, artists, institutions, in order to construct a solid proposal. The administrative structures for conducting such projects are often ephemeral, created exclusively for the realisation of the project. In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!*, we created a legal organisation, Golden Brain, in order to meet the requirements of the Swiss law.<sup>343</sup> This allowed us to fundraise as well as to facilitate the hiring and remunerating of participants. I will discuss the recruitment process of our association's members later, as well as identifying at which stage it was meaningful to set up such a structure. Indeed, the following pages of this Chapter are now dedicated to the making of the *Smoking Up Ambition!* curatorial project.

Bideaud and I conducted research in the Geneva City and State art collections in order to identify artworks that would serve our interests. At the end of the Summer 2011, with the precious help and collaboration of the respective curators and scientific collaborators of each institution,<sup>344</sup> we had identified circa 300 artworks that we believed would be interesting to exhibit. We had the opportunity to look at three particular collections, two specifically dealing with the contemporary period: 1) Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain de Genève (Art Fund of the Canton of Geneva – FCAC); 2) Fonds d'art contemporain de la Ville de Genève (Art Fund of the City of Geneva – FMAC) and 3) the Société des Arts (Society of Arts) held at the Cabinet d'arts graphiques du

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<sup>343</sup> Articles 60 *et seq.* of the Swiss Civil code.

<sup>344</sup> Anne-Belle Lecoultré and Manuella Denogent for FCAC; Yves Christen and Thomas Maisonnasse for FMAC; Mayte Garcia-Julliard and Christian Rümelin for the Print Room of the Museum of Art and History.



Musée d'art et d'histoire (Print Room of the Museum of Art and History), this latter being dedicated to the nineteenth century and providing us with a panorama of the major artistic and cultural influences of that time for Geneva-based artists. Our selection criteria were set according to the themes described above, having in mind a list of leitmotifs such as 'from drapes to latex suit', 'Stockholm syndrome', 'offshore banking', as well as the passion for hunting that Stern pursued during his life, a practice that Brossard also adopted.

Throughout history, hunting has had many roles, from an aristocratic sport of strategic competition, to a search for food, as well as to show one's strength, social status and capacities, to keep busy, or to relax, as in the case of Stern. Bideaud and I were interested in the aesthetics of camouflage, of tracking, hunting, trophies, still-warm cadavers, hair and fur. In art history, what do Flemish still-life paintings with dead game, such as those of Frans Snyders, tell us about fetishism, the market and symbolic value under the new Protestant order?<sup>345</sup> How do these relate to Roy Lichtenstein's still-lives? What can be deduced from this transfer of motifs? Does it make sense to link these images? Why, and especially how, did Delacroix paint exotic lion hunts, or did Courbet depict red foxes in the snow of the Jura Mountains?

These questions were typically part of the discussion while looking at catalogues, digitalised databases, slides and original works, having been given generous access to the latter. It is unnecessary to go through our selection process here, where sometimes an artwork was chosen because it belonged to more than one of our loose categories, or because it contributed to a refining and reshuffling of our preconceptions.<sup>346</sup> It is enough to mention a discussion that we had on 13 May 2011 with Diane Daval, director of FCAC, where she expressed her fear that the artworks would be arranged in clusters according to our categories, made visible by didactical panels such as 'capitalism', 'sodomasochism', 'hunting and fishing', 'drapes' etc. During another encounter, on 13 September 2011, with Daval and Stéphane Cecconi, curator in chief of FMAC, as well as

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<sup>345</sup> Hal Foster, 'The Art of Fetishism, Notes on Dutch Still Lives', in *Princeton architectural journal*, Hudson, 4, 1992, pp. 6–19.

<sup>346</sup> <http://ge.ch/culture/media/localhost.dipcultureinternet/files/smokingupambition-digital.pdf> (accessed 23 August 2016). This printed as well as digital journal released on the occasion of the *Smoking Up Ambition!*, gives an impression of the heteroclite selection.

the conservationists of both collections, where we presented our concept as well as the list of elected works, fear and doubt regarding our reference to Deleuze were expressed. Nothing was said about the banker's corpse. According to our interlocutors, the project seemed to illustrate abstract ideas while disregarding the a priori intrinsic quality of the artworks: we were subjugating art to our own critical agenda. Anne-Belle Lecoultre, curator for decades of FCAC, having developed a strong attachment to certain pieces in the collection, asked if we loved the selected works. More than loving them, we needed them to construct the show.

Ironically enough, since the very beginning, Bideaud and I had in mind an orientation that was radically opposed to both of these scenarios: even if loaded with literature and trans-historical references, the final display of artworks was to be as naked as possible, presenting the viewer solely with the pieces and as an option, if she or he expressed the need, their author, title and date of production. The conceptual frame of our curatorial project was to have been given in a separate publication, in the form of a series of essays.<sup>347</sup> Such discussions continued with those in charge of FMAC and FCAC until the very end of the project's development, and were obviously part of the process and our work. The questions and doubts formulated on 13 September are common and legitimate, not only in terms of our initiative, but also with regard to the function of the curator in general, as a producer creating out of this use of someone else's work and knowledge, her or his own narrative, statement or position. But is this such a bad thing? Isn't it possible to fulfill the agenda of the curator as well as that of the artist? To further illuminate the complexity of the case, what happens when artists themselves curate: Cindy Sherman, for example, in the Arsenale during Massimiliano Gioni's Venice Biennale in 2013, or Christian Jankowski curating Manifesta 11 in Zurich 2016?<sup>348</sup> Such an issue is a permanent and interesting debate in the field, and *Smoking Up Ambition!* was just one humble example.

The major institutional crisis took place with the compiling of the journal accompanying the show, where Bideaud and I presented a short reflection on the function of collecting contemporary art in Geneva with public money, mostly by buying the work of living

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<sup>347</sup> This publication has so far not been produced.

<sup>348</sup> Christian Jankowski (ed.), *What people do for money, Manifesta 11, die Europäische Biennale für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Zürich*, Lars Müller, Zürich, 2016.

artists. On the one hand, we asked, what kind of aesthetic rigour, coherence or strength can be obtained in an art collection when there is no historical distance or very few possibilities to purchase international pieces to complement the locally produced ones? And on the other hand, buying the work of living artists also means supporting them, and thus, how far does her or his personal and social capacity to manipulate or charm interfere with the decision made by the committee? These questions, alluding unavoidably to the mediocrity of certain work preserved by these institutions, had to be rewritten or even totally removed before the journal was printed. Such institutional reactions, as well as the refusal to lend us some of the requested pieces, were sadly predictable. In a sense, and retrospectively, the title *Smoking Up Ambition!* is fitting to this aspect of what became a four year-long enterprise, full of negotiations, frustrations and renunciations, where our initial ambition, that of curating a banker's orgasm, had to be slowly withdrawn from visibility.

Our constant dialogue and email exchanges with the institutions mentioned above, between Geneva, Stockholm (where I was based) and Paris (where Bideaud was based) until the finalisation of the project, constituted an oral and informal dynamic corresponding further to what Bergquist describes as the postmodern organisation: 'Communication in the postmodern organization tends to be oral (as in premodern times), although often electronically mediated rather than face-to-face and based on temporary rather than long-term relationships.'<sup>349</sup>

In parallel to this institutional exchange, while working on the selection of works, Bideaud and I met the local art personalities of Geneva and its surroundings in order to create the Golden Brain association, allowing us to open a bank account in its name as well as to apply for certain grants. In order to do so, we needed for our committee a small group of established figures in the art field, guaranteeing for the reader of our applications, seriousness and reputation through a network of recognised and capable experts. These people weren't meant to do anything, except to allow their names to be placed on an official administrative list and for three of them (we needed a president, a secretary and a treasurer), to sign our statutes, and if they wanted, to join us for the opening of the show and its dinner. But in this sector, where the network you can gather

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<sup>349</sup> William Bergquist, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

around you is a major factor in the success of your projects, our list of people known for their expertise and knowledge already communicated our filiation and anchoring. The network system of contemporary art provides great satisfaction once you manage to get inside it, since it continuously reaffirms itself by exposing and legitimising through repetition the same groups of people. The feeling of belonging to a group of capable practitioners is the pleasant component that counterbalances the precariousness of the working life of artists and researchers and the power politics inherent to any (cultural) institution. 'Capital in the postmodern organization takes the form of information and expertise, and knowledge workers are often much more influential and expect more intrinsic satisfaction from their work than did workers in either the premodern or the modern organization.'<sup>350</sup>

In Spring 2012, we received a formal refusal from FMAC to host our project in their exhibition hall Le Commun, without being told the reasons (the motivations of the decisions taken by the FMAC executive board are never communicated). However, on 13 June 2013, having developed a consistent conceptual presentation of our project, as well as a precise list of the artworks we were aiming to exhibit, and having set up Golden Brain, Bideaud and I won FCAC's newly founded curatorial bursary. We received, as award and curatorial fee, CHF 6,000 to split between us, as well as a budget of CHF 15,000 for the exhibition, which was to be presented in Geneva in the following 18 months. In January 2014, we sent out a series of applications to complete our budget, after having found a space, the Sicli Pavilion, big enough to house our project. We succeeded in collecting CHF 40,000 from the Loterie Romande and CHF 8,000 from the Ernst Göhner Foundation, two private organisations supporting cultural projects. Together with the CHF 15,000 from FCAC, this budget was sufficient to rent the Sicli Pavilion for 23 days, from 18 August to 9 September 2014, from 8am to 7pm (installation from Monday 18 to Monday 25 August; exhibition from Tuesday 26 August to Sunday 7 September; dismantling from Monday 8 to Tuesday 9 September), and to secure a basic and efficient working team for the project. The high cost of this extraordinary exhibition space (CHF 630 for 1410 m<sup>2</sup>, total: CHF 15,640) set the parameters for our curatorial programme and encouraged us to optimise the visitors to the show by turning it into a constant space for discussion, exchange and learning:

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

something had to happen every day (an excellent example of how contingency can radically shape a project). During the week, we presented the ‘Piece-discussions’, and during the two weekends, a ‘transparent summer school’ (alluding to the glass architecture of the Sicli Pavilion) was held on the following themes: ‘Collections’, ‘Architecture’, ‘Transparency and invisibility’. In order to communicate our intentions clearly, we hired the graphic designer Noémie Gygax to conceive and realise our journal and the translator Deborah Fiette to achieve a bilingual French-English edition.<sup>351</sup> We could pay a good print company, Musumeci, since the volume was an artistic editorial work. We hired a chief set designer, the Geneva-based artist Beat Lippert, to adapt the exhibition display from our plans. It was built by the team – Jérémy Chevalier, Aymeric Tarrade, Eddy Scarabello, Florian Saini, Pablo Sacristan, Juanma González and Joshua Teegarden – Geneva-based artists or members of the autonomous community Le Terrain to be found on the outskirts of Geneva Canton. They also installed the artworks and dismantled the exhibition.

The budget also had to cover accommodation, food during the mounting and dismantling of the show, the opening dinner, material for the display structures, insurance and transport costs from FMAC, small fees for our lecturers during the two weekends of the show, extra guards during the opening etc. Additional fees received for guided tours given by Bideaud and myself to teenagers from Geneva and nearby French high-school classes allowed us to cover all the costs. Due to the very short duration of the exhibition, the amount of space we were renting and our tight budget, we decided to leave on show the wooden crates in which the artworks are stored and transported, like exhibited art pieces.

Bideaud and I therefore took on almost four years of part-time work, a creative, conceptual and administrative mandate also implying research, management and

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<sup>351</sup> Containing a keywords grid; four mini essays: 1) *Idea*, 2) *Space*, 3) *Exhibition*, 4) *Contemporary and public collections*; more than 60 artwork reproductions and their details; a list of the exhibiting artists as well as the programme of our ‘Piece-Discussions’ and ‘Transparent Summer School’. See the PDF digital version: <http://ge.ch/culture/media/localhost.dipcultureinternet/files/smokingupambition-digital.pdf> (accessed 25 August 2016).

institutional diplomacy, for CHF 3,000 each.<sup>352</sup> It might seem rather ironic to receive such a small sum of money when your initial idea was to curate a banker's sadomasochist death, but Bideaud and I developed this project for the sake of doing it, by *necessity*, trying to make it happen in the best possible conditions.

Enough has been said to grasp the amount and type of work we achieved in term of institutions and costs. To conclude, let me finish by stating that *Smoking Up Ambition!* was a cultural and political success, and we fulfilled the wishes of the Art Funds of the City and State of Geneva by exhibiting their work without damage.

### 3.11 Conclusion

*Smoking Up Ambition!* is a show that became very different from how it was originally conceived. We were first inspired by Edouard Stern's death and its powerful evocation of Geneva's cultural context. Stern's dead body was the piece of art, the event, that we wanted to exhibit, having the quality of an event, or the remnants of an event: Cécile Brossard's crime. The event is a body that is still warm and not yet stiff. However, without the possibility to work directly with this news item as a thematic for a show, the body of the banker became symbolically transferred to the body of the Pavilion Sicli, the gigantic walls we had built in order to support the artworks, as well as the body of each piece of art exhibited, and a series of discussions and a summer school. Facing these different bodies that replaced the body of our initial interest – Stern's latex-clad body – we then experienced what can be directly perceived while observing an artwork, and what erudition, knowledge, information or even the words of its author can bring to it.

In this chapter, three main threads have been developed: firstly, after their respective introduction in Chapters 1 and 2, the re-evaluation of event, as well as Lonzi's *Autoritratto* in the context of *Smoking Up Ambition!*. Secondly, the reflection on the period and the philosophical frame of this thesis, i.e., postmodernism and feminism, has been enriched by a glimpse into the queer branch of the latter with the use of Preciado's

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<sup>352</sup> Our pedagogical work at the Royal Institute of Art was decently paid: I received my salary as a full time professor and Bideaud as a teaching guest. I do not mention the fees or salaries of our collaborators for the sake of discretion. All these numbers are in any case part of the official book-keeping of Golden Brain.

work *Testo Junkie*. Thirdly, I have described how a curatorial project such as *Smoking Up Ambition!* is actually made: from the gathering of material (following a transdisciplinary and trans-historical method) to the concrete procedures, including institutional negotiations, administrative, managerial and financial steps. Such a detailed account will be made solely for *Smoking Up Ambition!*, as an example: the methods used for the other case studies in this thesis are similar. This chapter has also made explicit how much research is done in any artistic set up. In Chapter 4, I will further develop the artistic research field with the help of Robert Cooper's thought, in particular his essay *Open Field* (1976) and, as mentioned above, by using Kant's view of Fine Art as well as Adorno's of the essay. I will also introduce my third case study, *Morgenröte...* (2015), and its related publication *Into Your Solar Plexus* (2016), an artistic, curatorial and editorial project based on event.

## 4. ECHO- EVENT

### 4.1 Heterogeneous material and institutionalisation

During the first three chapters of this thesis, it has become clear through explanation, description and demonstration how the heterogeneous materials involved in the conception, production and reception of contemporary art (such as ideas, references, concepts, artworks, material, archive, pedagogy, fundraising, logistics and management) are entangled and interdependent. In this fourth chapter, I will look at this heterogeneity of elements by alluding to some of the multidisciplinary methods that an artist develops during art-making as well as its institutionalisation, artistic research included. Kinship, literally and metaphorically, will be part of my reflection. The writings of artists and thinkers will be referred to, but also the critical organisation theory developed by Robert Cooper.

After *Eternal Tour* (2008–12) and *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2010–14), my third case study is another curatorial and organisational project, *Morgenröte, Aurora Borealis and Levantin* (2015) and its related publication, *Into Your Solar Plexus* (2016). While this thesis layers and even brainstorms many notions, ideas and influences, it anchors itself in the event, identifying and using it as a common denominator that binds the artistic experiences discussed within it. In the context of the first experience, *Eternal Tour*, the cabaret scene in Salvador de Bahia that I have interpreted as an event happened straight after the finalisation of the project and allowed me to reconsider the five-year-long artistic and scientific festival. Indeed, due to the strong impression that this powerful Brazilian performance made on Giorgio Pinheiro and myself, it functioned as a catalyst. As Cooper has pointed out: ‘the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz [...] argues that the construction of meaning is time-based: it is based on looking back at the action we accomplished’.<sup>353</sup> In the second case, *Smoking Up Ambition!*, a news-item that I identified as an aesthetic event became the historical and conceptual origin of a project whose visual manifestation was an exhibition in a former fire-extinguisher factory, the Pavilion Sici in Acacias, Geneva. For the third case study, presented in the following pages, my

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<sup>353</sup> Robert Cooper, *Institutional Aesthetics: The Case of ‘Contestation’*, presented at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, January 1991, p. 5.



project for a guest curatorship at the Kunsthalle in Bern, event as method, as theme, as a subject to investigate by materialising it into an aesthetic experience was one of the major points of departure.

The episode in Brazil that I turned into ‘I got a manicure’ allowed me to pinpoint my interest in *event* – as a philosophical concept and not an element of the cultural industry. Having identified this theoretical point, methodology came into play and found its anchor in the work of Carla Lonzi, particularly *Autoritratto*, and concretely influenced the programme of *Smoking Up Ambition!* in the form of a series of *Piece-discussions*. In Bern, event was spoken about, experienced and put into motion when, in September 2014, I was asked to propose a project that would run from January until June 2015 at the Kunsthalle. This time-period overlapped with my ongoing PhD research, started in January 2014. Taking into consideration the complete freedom that I was given while developing the project at the Kunsthalle, I decided to use the institution as a playground for the reflections engaged so far in the PhD programme at Queen Mary University in London. Furthermore, I established two other complementary institutional collaborations: the first with the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, where I was concurrently teaching, and the second with the Hochschule der Künste in Bern. A group of students selected from these two schools were given the opportunity to participate in a workshop concerning ‘event’ and to develop a series of performances for the public programme. It would be interesting to discuss these pedagogical aspects, as well as the possible interface that could be created between diverse entities, but in the following pages I will concentrate my reflections on the themes already introduced in the previous chapters: event, feminism, embodiment and autoethnology. I will also take the opportunity to look at the relationship with academia that artists have developed during the last 20 years, with the rise of ‘artistic research’ or ‘research as art’. From an institutional point of view, this is the landscape that I observe and of which I am also part.

At this point it is important to state that event is a phenomenon that would be difficult to create intentionally as a piece of art, and that can only retroactively be recognised as such due to its aesthetic quality, strength and impact. Why is this so? Simply because the constitution of an event depends on some contingent factors that cannot be totally controlled, even by the best production team. From an organisational perspective, I can

complement my argument by referring to Cooper and his essay *The Open Field* whose study of human structures enriches the philosophical complexity linked to the notion of ‘contingency’ that I addressed in Chapter 1. In his discussion of the ‘wavering balance between structure [stability] and process [change] in understanding human action’, Cooper claims that the key lies in the concept of ‘purpose’, which ‘binds together and gives direction to the system’. Purpose concerns conditions that are imbedded in two different types of human systems: 1) *instrumental* and 2) *expressive*. If the former systems stress structure over process and serve relatively specific purposes, the second ‘use environmental resources as means to cultivate their own varied possibilities (e.g. creative artists). Their organizational form is of “structure–process balance”; their purpose diffuse.’<sup>354</sup> Cooper attributes to the *instrumental* system the quality of being linear and proceeding from the known to the known. Almost as an opposite, or at least alternative approach, the *expressive* system welcomes and exploits contingency.<sup>355</sup>

Having explored these two possible systems – instrumental and linear, and expressive and contingent – Cooper presents them in a tone that sounds almost absolutist, as a dichotomy, as two entities from which one must choose: “The existential choice for man lies in understanding himself and his institutions in terms of instrumental/expressive systems and in deciding which of these should characterize his social forms.”<sup>356</sup>

At first sight, the event, whether provoked or recognised and interpreted as such, belongs to the second category of systems, due to the fact that its reception or interpretation, the way the viewer considers it and makes something out of it, cannot be fully controlled. However, the dichotomisation or polarisation drawn by Cooper between these two options does not help us to investigate or achieve a deeper understanding of how structured and dialectical thought on the one hand, such as art history or philosophy for example, and speculative and empirical practices on the other

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<sup>354</sup> Robert Cooper, ‘Open Field’, in *Human Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 11, 1976, Sage, London, p. 1000.

<sup>355</sup> ‘Contingent development explicitly rejects the restrictions of prior purpose and structure; every contingency is valued as a potential source of growth. The system is viewed as a mosaic of possibilities whose actualization depends upon chance factors; its growth is multiform, dependant on adventure and discovery. Development occurs through a strategy of revelation whereby the system, abandoning conscious purpose, experiences its environment as an ingression of unfolding forms.’ *Ibid.*, p. 1000.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1001.

hand, can complement each other. Indeed, the blurring of these two systems, the *instrumental* and the *expressive*, their overlapping, is precisely what happened at the Kunsthalle in Bern, and this will become obvious during the following pages.

#### 4.2 Robert Cooper's *The Open Field*

Many comments and remarks could be made at this stage about Cooper's 'The Open Field'. I shall present below mainly only one, pointing to an important weakness directly relating to enactment. It also concerns what I have discussed from the very beginning of this thesis, in the implication of the gendered body (in the case of philosophy for example), but also in its initial statement, namely my own positionality in engaging with my research as well as writing this thesis. Indeed, many decisions were also made regarding issues of gender, strongly influenced by the work of Lonzi and the feminist component that it entails. Beyond this comment, I will also discuss two patterns of relationships, namely two structures combined with process, as drawn by Cooper,<sup>357</sup> namely the 1) *instrumental* and 2) *expressive* systems, respectively 1) *linear* and 2) *contingent*, in regard to the two case studies already introduced in the former chapters, *Eternal Tour* and *Smoking Up Ambition!*, and anticipating the two following case studies presented in the this current Chapter 4, *Morgenröte...*, as well as in Chapter 5, *Helvetic Zebra*. Indeed, the strength and originality of this thesis is its confrontation and linkage between texts and material spanning from ethnography, organisational analysis and the contemporary art field toward the analysis of a series of events as artistic ephemera; it is neither an investigation, exegesis, reception nor study of the reception of Cooper's work. Nor is it even a review of interpretation, practise, and comments by Cooper's former pupils, like Eric Lefevbre<sup>358</sup> and Robert Chia,<sup>359</sup> or that of the many other interesting scholars inspired by his work. Without a doubt, my entry and interest in Cooper's

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<sup>357</sup> 'Structure is the invariant pattern of relationships among functional points in a system, while process is the continuous emergence of new elements from those already existing. Structure concerns itself with stability or quasi-stability; process, with change.', Robert Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 999.

<sup>358</sup> Eric Lefevbre organised an international conference entitled 'Uncertainty, Knowledge and Skill' at the Limburg University Centre in Belgium dedicated to Cooper, in November 1997.

<sup>359</sup> Robert Chia (ed.), *In the Realm of Organisation: Essays for Robert Cooper*, Routledge, London, 1998; Robert Chia (ed.), *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*, Routledge, London, 1998.

thought is slightly different from someone very familiar with organisational theory and critical management theory, as I obviously come from another background and consequently have other motivations in considering him.

Let me then remark first on what I qualified as weakness here above, and I am not the first one to think so. This opinion was already written by Torkild Thanem in 2001<sup>360</sup> and formulated thus:

Though inscribed in a highly gendered and male-centred language, Cooper's paper 'The Open Field' is an unusually creative piece of work. Creativity is not, however, a guarantee for clarity and rigour, and Cooper's argument is, as we shall see, sometimes opaque and under-developed.

Indeed, the way Cooper renders the female subject absent by his constant references to 'man' and 'he'<sup>361</sup> (and by not using the term 'human', for example), is rather shocking or at least surprising, as his interests are so broad, including post-structuralism where the body figures as a key dimension. If body is in play, feminism, gender, minority and identity politics cannot be ignored, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world post-1960s.<sup>362</sup> Facing this surprising reality, Thanem states that 'Cooper is consciously neglectful of feminist research, which means that the stream of thought that has been most significant in turning the body into a research object in the social sciences and humanities is apparently unknown or of no interest to him.'<sup>363</sup> It is however an interesting fact, and important to specify here, that during the decades following the publication of 'The Open Field', feminist thinkers have still been considered in some of his research, at least in the case of Donna Haraway, who was quoted in 'Organization:

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<sup>360</sup> Torkild Thanem, 'Processing The Body: A Comment on Cooper' in *Ephemera, Theory & politics in organization*, Volume 1, Number 4, Warwick Business School, Coventry, 2001, p. 349.

<sup>361</sup> For example, Robert Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 1001 and 1005.

<sup>362</sup> Carol R. Berkin, Judith L. Pinch, and Carole S. Appel, *Exploring Women's Studies: Looking Forward, Looking Back*, Pearson, London, 2005; Marilyn J. Boxer, *When Women ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 1998.

<sup>363</sup> Torkild Thanem, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

Distal and proximal views’, an article co-signed by John Law and published in 1995.<sup>364</sup> Beyond Cooper’s linguistic clumsiness, or his affirmation that women must not be concerned or active in ‘The Open Field’ (as protagonist in the field or as reader), how should one react and consider his text today? The excluded feminist corpus is not only at stake, but also the credibility of his work. For example, in the essay’s conclusion, Cooper advocates for ‘a self-management to all our activities’ in order to ‘mak[e] space for the definition of our real selves’, and to ‘manage ourselves all ways, in and out and right across, not to be steered, however benignly, by that which is external and above. Democracy is not enough.’<sup>365</sup> This injunction isn’t so easy to understand, and it corresponds to what Thanem describes as ‘opaque and under-developed’. Opacity and under-development aren’t positive attributes for an academic text, if Cooper’s ‘The Open Field’ is meant to be one. But if one considers it instead as a kind of artist’s statement, then its ‘opacity’ and ‘under-development’ aren’t so disturbing. It is rather a contradiction in its final conclusion – how to put into action ‘our self-management’ – that lets the reader wonder about the real address of this text. As summarized well by Thanem, firstly the high theoretical level and complexity of the argument might turn it into ‘an appeal confined to a small intellectual elite’; secondly its ‘malestream’ language could easily discourage a female readership, and thirdly, the heavy emphasis on process ‘leaves little feel for the permanency of social relationships and the boundaries that obstruct resistance and prevent things from changing.’<sup>366</sup>

Complexity and allusiveness don’t constitute an obstacle for anyone interested in contemporary art, as curators’ or artists’ texts are often written on an essayist mode, leaving the reader much free room for interpretation or appropriation. ‘Malestream’ language is often a notable weakness in the context of this current thesis, particularly when ‘the validity of the Open Field lies in its *enactment*.’<sup>367</sup> or ‘The Field becomes homotropic, open to man’s proper use.’<sup>368</sup> How does one proceed to any enactment without reflecting on body, embodiment, incarnation, or as it seems to be the case, how

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<sup>364</sup> In *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 13, JAI Press, London, 1995, pp. 237–274.

<sup>365</sup> Robert Cooper, ‘The Open Field’, in *Human Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 11, 1976, Sage, London, p. 1016.

<sup>366</sup> Torkild Thanem, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

<sup>367</sup> Robert Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 1001.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1011.

to consider an act of enactment if the body is de facto that of a man? More than opaqueness or under-development, we face a hole in the argumentation, like a missing step in its theoretical development. This issue raises the question of Cooper's credibility at large, throughout his entire essay, to its very end. From a feminist perspective, is it acceptable or even possible to use an essay excluding women by its formulation? Does it mean that his essay should not be used at all in this thesis – simply ignored in this thesis? Given the fact that I found some of his ideas interesting, I decided to still discuss them here, opting for a clear enunciation of my doubt, following the example of Torkild Thanem. Cooper's final view of 'The Open Field', based on an invitation to 'self-management' is difficult to embrace because so many would be excluded from it: those who aren't 'men', those who don't want to recognize themselves as 'men', those who refuse to participate to a 'self-management' bringing together exclusively 'men', etc. Who could be this 'self'? This reluctance based on an exclusive gender issue doesn't support or consolidate the last and third doubt identified by Thanem, i. e. a notion of process that would injure social relationships or ignore how difficult it is to change things. In the context of art, socialisation is constantly in flux, according to financial conditions, network and opportunities, projects, mandates and institutional constellations, and change is actually what is sought and constantly needed. Taking into consideration this matter of fact, a particular emphasis on process constitutes the strongest reason to develop an interest in Cooper's 'The Open Field', once applied to a performative and experimental way of practicing art: 'to find out' and 'to make'. "To "find out" is to explore and discover the possibilities of a situation through un- (or semi-) structured action, chance connections, projection, etc., while to "make" is to construct a form which will show these discoveries as happenings in a field of process."<sup>369</sup>

*Instrumental and linear system or expressive and contingent system, to find out or to make*, will then be the four analytical elements to play with while considering my four case studies. Indeed, these four conceptual points correspond to poles of tension between the situations that contemporary art can produce and those that result from such situations, as in a cause-effect chain, sometimes in the form of an event, sometimes crystallizing in a new understanding of things; it may be instantly, with a time delay, or following a reorganisation of ideas, references and considerations.

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1011.

*Eternal Tour 2008–12* was constructed and realised under a definite *instrumental* and *linear* system, developed intensively over a rather long stretch of time with the clear goal of producing an annual artistic and scientific festival. Even though many unexpected factors emerged along the way, as a team we enunciated our intentions, set our locations of interest in advance, and did our best to get there. We ‘managed ourselves’ intensely, assigning team members’ roles according to proficiency, time availability, expertise and, most importantly, a will and desire to learn. Learning was to be facilitated through research (principally on cosmopolitanism, and then creolisation), fundraising, scheduling, preparation and anticipation of dysfunctionality, but also getting in contact with the various guests, artists and scientists invited to contribute. Emotions, effects, and other human encounters were as present and valued as the production of knowledge or aesthetic result – tangible, perceptible, enjoyable. In some cases, locations were chosen via the invitation of participants from previous editions of the tour (for example in the case of Neuchâtel 2009 and São Paulo 2012). The *expressivity* and *contingency* of our initiative, enterprise and experience, were of course part of the game, but more as a side effect than something we built intentionally into the structure of the organizational process. The parameters were indeed complex enough without having the express need to design a space for spontaneity or unpredictable occurrences. Imagining, planning, organizing and nurturing a determined logistical framework, which entails per se and by default the potential of undetermined things to happen, belongs to any project conducted in an unfamiliar place, together with a constantly changing work team. ‘Unfamiliar place’ does not denote, in any case, somewhere exotic or far away. Having Geneva as a base, Neuchâtel (2009) and Rome (2008) were obviously physically nearer than Jerusalem-Ramallah (2010), New York and Las Vegas (2011) or São Paulo (2012). And geographical proximity does not mean institutional vicinity or acquaintance with the habitus of the place with which you are required to interact. One of the major strengths of *Eternal Tour 2008–12* was its performative component – rather than its contingent or efficient one – the very fact that it was announced as and remained a festival: an ephemeral collective project, archived and traceable in some publications but, more importantly, more vividly remnant in the mind of those contributing and participating. This collective memory is meant to change, evolve and end in a variety of versions of the same story, and at best reused as learning experience in the context of other projects. For all these reasons, we statistically ‘made’

more than we ‘found out’ (as defined by Cooper). Indeed, we planned much more than we let go or improvised; we followed procedures according to time and money pressures, as we were responsible for persons beyond our own team of organizers. But what are statistics in comparison to ‘sense making’ (as defined by Deleuze)? The sense, the meaning of *Eternal Tour*, unexpected and unpredictable, arrived right after its end, out of the territory we set for the festival, in Salvador da Bahia and not in *São Paulo*. It constitutes therefore the very starting point of this thesis and Deleuze’s definition of event: ‘We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself.’<sup>370</sup>

*Smoking Up Ambition!* (2014) is a Geneva-based project, initiated concretely in 2010 with research into the City and State of Geneva’s contemporary art archive, but originally inspired by a powerful news item made public on March 1, 2005. This latter, at the same time vernacular, banal, vulgar and spectacular – the banker Édouard Stern’s corpse found dead in a sadomasochist latex suit after having been shot nine times by his mistress – represents this ‘impossible becoming possible’<sup>371</sup> as described by Badiou, when reflecting on event: the corpse wasn’t a piece of art, but a real body. Indeed, the scandalous episode, even if handled with extreme caution and discretion by the Genevan authorities, became for me a picturesque event, i.e. a scene notable enough to function as a metaphor for the City of Geneva and relationships with power that remain very often invisible. Here it was performed between a woman and a man, embodying a broader violence connected to finance and private, offshore banking. We had the ambition to open our contemporary art production in Geneva with the Stern image as a leitmotif. But how could we formalize it concretely? Because of the subject, simultaneously distant and familiar to the cultural stakeholders we were contacting, our *Open Field* started in 2010 by being an *expressive* structure highly conditioned by *contingency*. Access to the archive, which required a pre-defined purpose, was seriously questioned by the diverse curators, concerned about the contextualisation we would lend the different artworks. The financial and logistical conditions that would allow the project to take shape also oscillated, between conceptual doubts as well as major local

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<sup>370</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, The Athlone Press, London, 1990, p. 22.

<sup>371</sup> Alain Badiou, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2015.



decisions influencing the cultural sector. The entire process gave many cultural protagonists the opportunity to perform their respective functions, to argue for and defend the art pieces for which they were responsible, and to question our professionalism and real intention. The *contingent* difficulties were coupled with a scepticism about using Stern's narrative (the actual image of his corpse has not been shown to anyone, but imagining it sufficed) and constructing a curatorial project from it. None of these Genevan cultural figures, however, explicitly denied us at any stage. They commented on our conceptual draft, contesting our method to the very end, even correcting and asking for a partial rewrite of our texts for the condensed journal. We entered this institutional series of negotiation, from the very beginning of the process. We were nurturing '*intensive relationships*' as part of the use of the *Open Field*:

'literally, relationships in tension [...]. Intensity is got by realizing and maintaining (i. e., not resolving) a variety of contraries while eliminating incompatibilities or those opposites that would cancel each other. The whole is a field of process in tensive order, not just change or novelty, rather the *dance* of things. The point of the Field is its use, not analysis.'<sup>372</sup>

After four years of negotiation, we could finally choreograph the *dance* of art works (of different sizes, materials, characteristics, styles) and enter a second phase of the process, where the structure switched to something absolutely *instrumental* and *linear*. The exhibition space required perfectly clear, efficient logistical planning (regarding the scenography, transport and installation of the pieces, etc.). In the context of this thesis, my use of Lonzi's *Autoritratto* and the setting of an autoethnography was proposed to some artists; they entered the process with enthusiasm and interest, as we invited them to speak freely about themselves and their exhibited piece however they wished, always presented in the form of a 'piece-discussion'. From a 'to make' dynamic qualifying the set-up of the show, including heavy construction work for the hanging display, we truly enjoyed 'finding out': 'to be in form, i.e., literally be inside it, be part of.'<sup>373</sup> Without a doubt, the artists provided us with the best contributions. They bore witness to their personal relationship with their work, and what it meant at the time of its respective

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<sup>372</sup> Robert Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 1011.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1012.

realisation and production, and speculated how such considerations would come into play today. They also reflected on what how the life of an artist has manifested over the years and any new shape it may take in the future, as well as any evolution (past or future) in their methods.

*Morgenröte* (2015) and *Into Your Solar Plexus* (2016), whose exhibited objects and accompanying analysis are covered in this chapter, began, and remained until the end, a process developed in the frame of an *expressive* and *contingent* structure, particularly given the short notice I had. I was first contacted in September 2014, and got the final confirmation in November, two months later: the exhibition was set to open at the end of January 2015. This very limited timeframe meant that I had to work without the possibility of true anticipation or preparation, using and developing concepts that I had already begun researching and developing, which could be adapted rather easily to such a sudden exhibition paradigm. Content was therefore dictated by contingency: I would project in the exhibition space what was currently on my working table, re-sorting things belonging to the history of the place, for connexion and contextualisation. In having to act so fast, I was convinced that the unconscious would play a role, and I decided to accept *de facto* what could happen beyond my direct demands and requests. The space was still unfamiliar to me — the employees, colleagues and students I would interact with, as well as the building, its location and its idiosyncrasies. Everything would have its importance, and I was counting on and looking forward to these possible surprises and unexpected factors. As formulated by Cooper in the case of the *Open Field*:

How men project their unconscious forces depends on their ability to manage them. If the appropriate skills are there, projection is expressed in the form of a creative act which enriches the projector and his world.<sup>374</sup>

Beyond the time constraints – encouraging me to work real-time without cultivating too many afterthoughts – the invitation and instructions that I received (what I should do and how) from the Kunsthalle trustees imparted a very particular status. This provided me with a rather exceptional institutional frame – a second *expressive* and *contingent* structure beyond the one already built into the exhibition calendar. Indeed, they asked

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<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

me to imagine an experimental project that would last until the beginning of June 2015, something that would evolve throughout the months without having to close the exhibition space. The manual labour needed for the production of a piece of art should be shown to the public. It was even a request, or at least, a suggestion. The trustee members actually wanted a project emphasizing a particular aspect of my mandate, mingling between two institutions' directors and their rather classical curatorial projects (monographic or collective shows, but about two months' duration): they wanted a project extending in time, engaging various partners (institutions, art schools, museums, etc.) outside the contemporary art world. Everything became then consequently orientated towards this goal: how would it be possible to exhibit a working process, something that would happen only once? Is it possible to translate the question of time, geology, genealogy, duration, repetition and rupture through a series of art works, installations and displays? How can one achieve such a thing inside the walls of an apparently quite established institution? I worked out the case by 'making': I orchestrated two impressive and monumental wall paintings that would be executed during the opening hours of the Kunsthalle, for the eyes of the viewer. I even offered to art students a philosophical workshop on event in front of the biggest fresco, while it was made. But the actual event, that I call 'echo-event', occurred somewhere else, of course unexpected, as described and analysed further on. Originating in a text, and exceeding the expected grid of significance, my 'echo-event' was much like the event described by Jean-François Lyotard, dissimulated in the composition:

Let us be content to recognize in dissimulation all that we have been seeking, difference with identity, the chance event within the foresight of composition, passion within reason – between each, so absolutely foreign to each other, the strictest unity: dissimulation.<sup>375</sup>

*Helvetic Zebra*, my last case study presented in Chapter 5, and the eco-event that occurred upon this occasion, is something that I 'found out'. Following Cooper's formulation, 'to find out is to get knowledge of process as is, rough and not through the neat telling of another's logic or self-interest.'<sup>376</sup> *Helvetic Zebra* per se, the curatorial

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<sup>375</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993, p. 52.

<sup>376</sup> Robert Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 1011.

project, created the necessary conditions, via a concert played on a rooftop in Beirut, to experience and to recognize an *eco-event* (so-called in reference to eco-feminism), as something exceeding the sphere of art, gaining the dimension of the environment surrounding us and our impact on it, and vice versa: an event where art and its extension reaches out to fundamental issues like ethics, politics or history, without expressly illustrating these concepts. Interestingly this excess, surprisingly powerful and complex in its occurrence, neither interrupted nor perturbed the regular *instrumental* and *linear* structure of the artistic activities on which it depended. Everything unfolded the way it was supposed to do, despite the power or amplitude of this eco-event. How could such a thing even be possible? The definition of event by Heidegger could explain it, or suggest a possible interpretation, by bringing into play the relationship between necessity, contingency and temporality. Indeed, Heidegger describes event as a self-contained phenomenon where the temporal succession from contingency to necessity as a chronological cause and effect need not apply and where 'the truth of being must be thought back in advance.'<sup>377</sup> His view on event relies then on the 'inventive thinking' capacity – how the mind can process it on a creative manner. The eco-event of the Beirut rooftop is clearly a production of my mind, something, as already written here above, that I 'found out'. This invention of thought need not consider the pragmatic conditions that made it possible, neither the *instrumental* and *linear* system nor the *expressive* and *contingent* one. Indeed, the chain of cause and effect is contracted in a mental twist: to think back, in advance. Consequently, there is no overlapping, contradiction or concurrence between the eco-event and the surrounding context, neither before nor after. I had the occasion to confirm this fact by conducting an interview with the musician performing in the concert, a few months following the eco-event. In his perception, he was simply fulfilling his role and delivering to the public the sounds he was supposed to produce at the given moment. The creative process of receiving, feeling and interpreting was then the task of a listener, viewer, or even, in this case, of a citizen – the basic work, actually, of someone like me conducting autoethnographical research, as both a CMR member and the organiser of *Helvetic Zebra*. As already quoted in Chapter 2, 'the researcher does not find the empirical

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<sup>377</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2012, pp. 58–59.

material, it finds him or her',<sup>378</sup> according to Alvesson. In my case, I opted to acquire the material I was looking for by organizing and curating projects. Considering the eco-event as one of the major results of this thesis, as experience but also as a concept, the reflection and discussion could be taken one step further: an eco-event isn't a simple 'material', but something more. This last case study furthermore reveals a major discrepancy, or perhaps a near independency, between a process based on a highly defined and predetermined *instrumental* and *linear* structure, and something that will hold a significant value without eliminating or perturbing the basic structure allowing it to happen. Finally, I would also remark that *Helvetic Zebra* and the eco-event demonstrate the possible double function of someone implicated in a community, in a group: acting as an organiser and in parallel, reflecting on and digging into his or her field of research, pondering afterwards elements of interpretation and sense-making that other community members have perceived differently, forgotten already, or had not noticed in the first place. In this regard at least, autoethnography, in all its complexity, is a possible and valid methodology.

This quick overview of my case studies, analysed thanks to a selection of Cooper's 'The Open Field' ideas, is also an occasion to return to the input regarding event introduced in the first chapter, referring alternatively to Deleuze, Badiou, Lyotard and Heidegger, according to respective relevance to each case study. These few pages illustrate how artistic projects are actively worked out from the very beginning, and how they gain meaning and depth with further work and reflection. The latter, however, actually happens upon inception, when the creative process starts. Indeed, someone has to decide what kind of structure will first be implemented or followed – that is 1) the *instrumental* and *linear* one, or 2) the *expressive* and *contingent* one. If this can't be decided – sometimes the creative process is given, or highly conditioned by external factors – then one must find a way to learn to cope with the situation and make the best out of it. The learning process, adaptation, and sometimes letting the unconscious project emerge in order to access unexpected data, etc. are some possibilities of the 'Open Field'.

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<sup>378</sup> Mats Alvesson, 'Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure', in *Higher Education*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 46, 2003, p. 182.

### 4.3 *The University without Condition and The Open Field*

My point of view and proficiency are those of a practitioner who has worked within the field of contemporary art for approximately two decades. In order to better analyse and enlarge upon my work within this field, I have used and engaged with two other fields belonging to the Humanities: philosophy and the history of art. The first is a sharp and demanding thinking tool, while the second is a relatively new academic category of knowledge (see Chapter 2, footnote 4) made up of many others like history, sociology, semiology, iconography, anthropology, ethnography, literature, cultural studies etc. The development and establishment of the field of artistic research at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is comparable to that of art history at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. I am unable to discuss here the reasons why art history emerged at this time, although it is a subject worthy of attention elsewhere.

Artistic research currently places an emphasis on both performativity and criticality, so that artists must inscribe themselves in two realms – the art world and the academic institution – while distinguishing themselves from both of them, but without excluding themselves. This seems to go hand in hand with, or at least to correspond to, what Jacques Derrida has described in the *University without Condition*<sup>379</sup>, where performativity and criticality are two important aspects of the production of singular oeuvres.<sup>380</sup> To what kind of performances or events does Derrida allude? As a

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<sup>379</sup> First as lecture in English, ‘The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the “Humanities,” what *could take place* tomorrow)’, part of the series *Presidential Lectures* at Stanford University, California, in 1998. Published in French with the title *L’Université sans condition*, Galilée, Paris, 2001.

<sup>380</sup> ‘The university without condition does not, in fact, exist, as we know only too well. Nevertheless, in principle and in conformity with its declared vocation, its professed essence, it should remain an ultimate place of critical resistance – and more than critical – to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation. When I say “more than critical,” I have in mind “deconstructive” [...] I am referring to the right to deconstruction as an unconditional right to ask critical questions not only to the history of the concept of man, but to the history even of the notion of critique, to the form and the authority of the question, to the interrogative form of thought. For this implies the right to do it performatively, that is, by producing events, for example by writing, and by giving rise to singular *oeuvres* (which up until now has been the purview of neither the classical nor the modern Humanities).’ Jacques Derrida, ‘The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the “Humanities,” what *could take place*

philosopher, language, whether written or spoken, is obviously the main activity or format that he could address. In his essay *The Open Field*, which I associate with artistic research as much as Derrida's *University Without Condition*, Cooper insists on the importance of enactment in any expressive system.<sup>381</sup>

'Performance', 'as if', 'criticality',<sup>382</sup> 'events', 'oeuvres', important elements listed by Derrida, as well as Cooper's 'enactment', are components in the context of contemporary art, its education and research, that can be used by the artist in parallel with a multiplicity of disciplines or fields in order to develop his or her practice. I understand enactment as a form of embodiment, solidification, concretisation, action dependant on performance and the engagement of a subject. This latter, as a body, sexualised or racialised, is crucial in the relationship between the teacher and the student, or between an employee and his/her superior or subaltern in any hierarchy, from the perspective of what is studied as well as the transfer of knowledge, research and creation of singular oeuvres (see my allusions to the work of Braidotti, Ahmed, Preciado and Haraway in Chapter 2). If it implies more than one artist and his or her creation of a non-human object, then enactment can also be applied to organisation, since 'organizing consists of the resolving of equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviours embedded in conditionally related processes'.<sup>383</sup>

With Derrida's notion of performativity, as well as Cooper's enactment, one gets a sense of the importance of embodiment in any knowledge and research from an artistic perspective.<sup>384</sup> Voice and body are highly necessary for performativity and enactment,

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tomorrow),' in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: a Critical Reader*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 25–26.

<sup>381</sup> 'The *Open Field* defines the conditions necessary for process and the emergence of expressive systems. But definition itself is never enough; though its purpose is to put sense on experience, it unwittingly serves to arrest the course of process, to freeze it in a concept. The validity of the *Open Field* lies in its *enactment*.' Cooper, 'Open Field', *op. cit.*, p. 1001.

<sup>382</sup> See, for example, Suhail Malik, 'Art education and the predicament of professionalised criticality', in Sidsel Meineche Hansen and Tom Vandeputte (eds.), *Politics of Study*, Open Edition / Funen Art Academy, Amsterdam, 2015, pp. 49–68.

<sup>383</sup> Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, Addison-Wesley, Boston, 1969.

<sup>384</sup> Artistic research shares a common stand towards embodiment and 'situatedness' or 'positionality' with feminist gender-questioning and queer thought. 'Die Frage nach dem Un- und Nicht-Wissen, d. h. dem von der Institutionalisierung künstlerischer Wissensproduktion Ausgeschlossenen, Marginalisierten und Abgewerteten ist jedoch

but cannot function without a historical and theoretical consciousness of where the speaker stands, the context from within which the performer is expressing herself and, to some extent, to whom.<sup>385</sup> In my case, the history of art has provided some interesting milestones with which to frame my case studies historically. This is neither exceptional nor remarkable and rather than discussing ‘interdisciplinarity’ as an epistemological project,<sup>386</sup> I will briefly reflect on the relationship between making and reflecting, or doing and analysing.

#### **4.4 Organisation and action as a creative escape from the dichotomy between praxis and theory**

One way of legitimising the hybridisation or heterodoxy of perspectives and competences is to adopt and stick to an organisational stand dedicated to action. What kind of action occurs when creation is constantly confronted and nourished by erudition? What kind of rapprochement or sometimes entanglement is produced

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keineswegs erklärt, geschweige denn aufgehoben. Auch der Prozess der Institutionalisierung feministischer, postkolonialer, queerer, ökonomiekritischer und emanzipatorischer künstlerischer Forschungen vollzieht sich nicht außerhalb der Felder der Macht, sondern geht mit neuen Disziplinierungen, Ausschlüssen und symbolischer Gewalt einher. Ein konsequentes Fortführen kritischer künstlerischer Forschung erfordert eine kontinuierliche Befragung der Situiertheit künstlerischwissenschaftlicher Forschungspraxis und der kontextuellen Verortung der begrenzten, partialen und prekären Positionen. [The question concerning unknowing or non-knowledge, i.e. concerning what has been excluded, marginalized and denigrated by the institutionalization of artistic knowledge production, is far from having been answered, let alone having become obsolete. The institutionalization of feminist, queer, critical economist, and emancipatory artistic research does not proceed outside of the fields of power, but entails new forms of disciplining, exclusion, and symbolic violence. A consistent continuation of critical artistic research requires a continuous examination of the situatedness of artistic and scientific research practice and of the contextual situatedness of the limited, partial and precarious positions].’, Anette Baldauf and Ana Hoffner, ‘Methodischer Störsinn’, trans. Marius Henderson for this thesis, in Jens Badura, Selma Dubach, Anke Haarmann, Dieter Mersch, Anton Rey, Christoph Schenker and Germán Toro Pérez (eds.), *Künstlerische Forschung, Ein Handbuch*, Diaphanes, Zurich, Berlin, 2015, p. 84.

<sup>385</sup> To know oneself is a work in itself. To master, control, predict or even get access to reception and the way an art piece will be received is even more difficult.

<sup>386</sup> See, for example, Tanya Ausburg, *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* (2nd ed.), Kendhall/Hunt Publishing, New York, 2006; Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinary: History, Theory, and Practice*, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1990.



between what is often dichotomised as on the one hand ‘praxis’ and on the other hand ‘theory’? According to Efva Lilja,<sup>387</sup> generalisation as well as methodological or cultural homogenisation should be avoided, although she also alludes to the danger of specialisation (which interdisciplinarity is already challenging). By targeting generalisation while discussing ‘creation crossing erudition’ or ‘praxis crossing theory’, Lilja questions by default the predominance and sustainability of the universal over singular cases.

The Swedish phenomenologist and current director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Daniel Birnbaum, addresses the relation between artwork and theory by referring to the ‘I’ as a fulcrum on which to build an unique understanding of each single artwork.<sup>388</sup> In order to develop his thinking, he starts by referring to the work of Samuel Beckett, whom he claims allows the self to hear itself, to perceive its own voice and furthermore acknowledge it as its own. This self gains in strength thanks to this conscious proximity, complicity and intimacy and will hardly question its self-identity:<sup>389</sup> I hear my voice speaking inside myself and to myself as an internalised monologue, as well as speaking outside my body in relation to others, and I know it is mine. By gaining such an awareness, I, as an artist or author, can allow many voices to speak on my behalf in the form of a cast of characters that can express many diverse arguments, languages and considerations. All this can originate from one mouth and

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<sup>387</sup> ‘In philosophy there is theorizing about the creation of reality, in artistic research it is put in practice. At the same time there are practice-based philosophic disciplines and artistic processes that produce theories. The inherent danger in generalization is that it implies simplifications that sometimes are more confusing than helpful. [...] Development and innovation come from the dynamics of dissent, different practices, cultures and expressions – if we are able to illustrate them.’ Lilja, *Art, Research, Empowerment, op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>388</sup> Who is me today? [...] Who is speaking, receiving, perceiving? Who is the subject established (constructed, assembled or taken for granted) in the works scrutinized here [...]? Can we still characterize the positions here in question through the grammatical ‘persons’ and traditional indexicals of discourse, or are we forced into a kind of neutrality preceding all persons (not yet an *I*, not a *you*, not a *we*, *she* or a *he*), perhaps comparable to the mode of speaking described by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti as ‘the fourth person singular’?, Daniel Birnbaum, *Chronology*, 2nd ed., Sternberg Press, New York, Berlin, 2007, p. 67.

<sup>389</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, ‘Wiederholungen’, in Julia Stoschek (ed.), *Number One, Destroy, She Said*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2008, pp. 17–19.

mind, a self capable of producing a multitude of different discourses and developing a variety of points of view, just as a conductor directs an orchestra.

One can compare this emancipating and empowering journey of self-awareness with that undertaken by feminists in the 1970s. Carla Lonzi's *Diary*, which will be introduced below, is just one example and is the echo of myself as a historical subject to which I decided to give voice at the Kunsthalle in Bern with the curatorial project *Morgenröte...* and its related publication *Into Your Solar Plexus*. How rewarding when an art institution, even a modernist cube like the Kunsthalle, can become a symbolic grotto, a cavern in which you can scream out the voice of the self – the self you think you are and that you project on others – by hanging their pictures on the wall, displaying objects in the space, asking them to join you for precise reasons and at certain moments, inviting them to produce the artworks that you need at that particular instant but could not create yourself due to lack of time, skill or proficiency! The sound of your voice, the voice of yourself, returns to you, conveyed by artworks, performances, talks and music, distorted by the angle of the cave's walls. How do your collaborators and audience react to this, and to the uncontrollable irregularity of the mineral, its invisible recesses? How can you measure the impact of your work in the short and long run? In this sense, the metaphor of the grotto is far richer than that of a labyrinth of mirrors, where the reflection of oneself, even into infinity, is simply and mechanically inverted rather than distorted, transformed and enriched by unpredictable reaction and comment. My experiment corresponds to the construction of identity from oneself, the construction of the self, implicating an introspective process towards and with others, individuals and also organisations, whether art institutions or schools, in a continuous process, as acknowledged, described and analysed by certain organisational theorists interested in the discursive analysis of identity. 'For the individual, identity formation involves processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present. [...] A discursive perspective frames identity as being constituted through the situated "practices of talking and writing"'.<sup>390</sup> In my case, my identity construction was achieved with the resources and tools of contemporary art.

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<sup>390</sup> Sierk Ybema, Tom Keenoy, Cliff Oswick, Armin Beverungen, Nick Ellis and Isa Sabelis, 'Articulating identities', in *Human Relations*, Volume 62(3):299–322, Sage, London, 2009, p. 303.

This phenomenon, which I will compare here to an echo, and which I am grasping more fully while writing this thesis than I did during my time at the Bern Kunsthalle, is in fact the ultimate and unexpected event of this case study. I call it an ‘echo event’, while in Chapter 5, I will introduce my fourth case study, *Helvetic Zebra*, which I call an ‘eco-event’ in reference obviously to ecology and the environment, but also to ‘eco-feminism’, a branch of feminist thought that will be useful to bring into my discussion.

The kind of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary activity that I have developed very empirically over the years, namely the appropriation or vulgarisation of complex and specialised ideas, concepts or methods, in order to pump them into an innovating process of artistic enactment and embodiment,<sup>391</sup> is not motivated by postmodern methodology – an epistemological position (see Chapter 2.1) that considers that nowadays the only responsible way for a researcher to address a subject is by merging or bringing more than one scientific discipline into its methodology or ethic of work. My motive here is purely practical, convenient, handy, goal-oriented, and so far successful (the art projects that I aimed to realise did in fact take place).

#### **4.5 Prison, confessional, echo**

What happens, then, in the process of turning images as powerful agents of the invisible becoming visible, or the unconscious becoming conscious? How does one even get to that point? A straightforward method, of which Edward Said reminds us thanks to Antonio Gramsci, is to start with what one has direct access to, namely oneself:

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci says: ‘The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.’ The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci’s comment at that, whereas in fact Gramsci’s Italian text

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<sup>391</sup> I might even consider this transformative move from one kind of knowledge towards the production of another one as my own definition of artistic research, if I had to provide one.

concludes by adding, ‘therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory’.<sup>392</sup>

Said applies Gramsci’s imperative to his own personal and deep drive to engage with his past in *Orientalism*.<sup>393</sup> In my own case, the task I chose to pursue at the Kunsthalle in Bern as a way to gain consciousness of what I was or I am from a historical point of view, was also an archive, or an already existing inventory: that of my father (1920–2001). Once inserted into an innovating process of artistic enactment and embodiment, in the context of an art institution, it became an example of the historical period experienced by those born in Italy or even in Europe in the 1920s, a testimony from a historical subject who historicised himself that I chose to curate or display visually, a translation of an autobiography into an aesthetic format (that of the show, the curated and the editorial work). This father with whom I could engage and challenge thanks to an archive stood also and eventually as an authority<sup>394</sup> or a patriarchal voice with which I decided to enter into dialogue.

Among many documents, visual and textual, that could have been handled with academic theoretical tools as ‘twentieth-century Italian history’ (and this could in fact still be done since art doesn’t replace science), I isolated a single image [fig. 1] that became the first in the inventory of almost 100 items in my exhibition *Morgenröte*, which took shape in three successive versions during the time of my guest curatorship. This single image [fig. 2], a digitalised slide from the 1950s, which I printed and framed, is described and reproduced in my book *Into Your Solar Plexus*,<sup>395</sup> accompanied (and equally the picture illustrates the text), by a fragment of my father’s unpublished novel *Rioni e Riani alla conquista del mondo nonché Le confessioni d’un quinquagenario* (Rioni and Riano off to Conquer the World or The Confessions of a Quinquagenarian, 1969) [fig. 3]. This fictionalised autobiography is set in what he calls

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<sup>392</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1978, Penguin Classics, London, 2003, p. 25.

<sup>393</sup> ‘Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an ‘Oriental’ as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of the Orientals.’ *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Mal d’archive*, Galilée, Paris, 1995.

<sup>395</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, Humboldt Books, Milan, 2016, p. 33.

the ‘purgatory’ years following World War II, when his central character, working as a botanist in Venezuela and other Latin American countries, recalls his early childhood up to Italy’s entry into the war. I selected this particular excerpt from the 300-page manuscript because it chimes with my interest in time and its retrospective interpretation in relation to event.

In Spring 1954, the novel’s protagonist experiences a flash-back to when he was a teenager in 1937, gathering with his comrades at Piazza Venezia in Rome to listen to Mussolini. Seventeen years later in Latin America, these reflections help him to better understand his younger years in Rome. Since I read his novel in 2013, more than a decade after he had passed away, I never had the occasion to ask him if he saw the event in the same way I see it. Nevertheless, my father’s memory of this evening in Piazza Venezia in 1937 becomes, through my father’s incorporation of it into his novel of 1969 and through my decision to publish it after having it translated into English in 2016, metonymic for his ‘lost’<sup>396</sup> generation. From the point of view or subjectivity of the ‘I’ writing this thesis, handling texts and visuals from an archive as raw material to be transformed thanks to art language and strategy, the event becomes one only once transposed into the art institution<sup>397</sup> or published in a book. And this event is a multiple confession, as the title of the novel indicates.<sup>398</sup> The unpublished confession was performed quietly in the art institution, then published on a double-page spread of the book, and I even spoke about it during two book releases, on 17 May 2016 at the

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<sup>396</sup> This adjective is used by my uncle in a letter sent to my father at the end of the 1970s, as he questions the reasons why an entire generation became trapped in the Fascist ideology, incarnated and performed by Benito Mussolini. In his novel *Rioni and Riano off to Conquer the World or The Confessions of a Quinquagenarian*, my father described the group dynamic experience on Piazza Venezia: ‘All individuality has disappeared [...] We were a phalanx, an organism within a superindividual body, a single voice and a single spirit’, trans. Bennett Bazalgette-Staples, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>397</sup> I had the occasion to give several guided tours of this exhibition and to point out to the viewer the ‘#1 Moustache in exile’ picture and my interpretation of it. See Donatella Bernardi, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>398</sup> The nature of the ‘confessions’ narrated by my father vary, spanning from childhood memories until the entry of Italy into World War II. What makes the fragment I chose particularly ‘confessional’ is his own self-reflection on the scene: ‘After more than 30 years since that fever, should I now pedantically add the democratic corrigenda, should I contest that moment in Rioni’s life? Memorable, enviable, an experience even dearer than the recollection of a night-time stroll through the old town, having left the arms of Dalia, the unfaithful newlywed, when Rioni’s feet barely touched the ground’, Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Kunsthalle Bern and a few days later, on 29 May at Fylkingen in Stockholm, when the confession found an embodied voice, namely mine, following my father's choice of a written one.

Three pages after the excerpt regarding the 1937 Piazza Venezia episode, I write: 'In a reverse allegory of Cronus cannibalising his own children, I ate up my father's story, which then became mine.'<sup>399</sup> I confessed on the one hand to an act of cannibalism, and on the other hand to a feeling of guilt. But who can decently reproach me for being the daughter of someone who had committed to Fascism? Do I have to justify myself to anyone other than my own conscience for how I deal with my genealogical and historical patrimony? This unsolved point echoed – and to some extent continues to echo throughout this thesis – as an endless event in the Kunsthalle metamorphosed into a grotesque (from grotto) white cubic confessional. Catholics confess to a priest, Protestants directly to God, while some artists confess via their artworks, other people to a psychoanalyst, and many writers, professional or amateur, to a diary or on an online blog or forum under a pseudonym, because narration seems the only way to deal with certain situations. Like Echo, a Greek nymph famous for her beautiful voice and her intense storytelling, who distracted Zeus with her chatting and was punished for it by Hera, condemned to become only an echo, in *Morgenröte...* and *Into Your Solar Plexus*, in parallel and in complement to my still unsolved echo, I let my father confess publicly and posthumously what he had consciously chosen to express in his archive. In this case, the confession ('to confess' comes from the Latin word 'fateor', to admit, to acknowledge, to avow, etc.), resulted in a multifaceted and trans-generational echo event, thanks to an artistic *enactment* (through curated and editorial formats) of a historical fact anchored in the first part of the twentieth century.

#### **4.6 Situated knowledge as an intellectual escape from the dichotomy between praxis and theory**

Donna Haraway 'argues for an alternative, pluralistic, context-dependent view of knowledge, what she calls "situated knowledges"'.<sup>400</sup> I see a double meaning in this

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>400</sup> Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Oxford, 2000, p.34.

notion of ‘situated knowledge’, two diverse and complementary paths. Firstly, as has already been exemplified and discussed above, ‘situated knowledge’ can be a shift of perspective that occurs when certain types of knowledge are called upon according to the context with which one finds oneself confronted: when writing a fundraising application, a press release or an academic thesis, for example, or producing, responding to or participating in an artwork. All these activities take into account and play with the conditions (logistics, managerial and financial) that will allow them to succeed in the best possible manner. Secondly, ‘situated knowledge’ is a way to accept that our subject, our ‘I’ as Birnbaum would formulate it, will be affected, touched, moved, transformed by the object we are studying, to be ready to welcome it as a potential echo of oneself, an object of investigation driving and pushing us further than we might initially have hypothesised. As Haraway puts it: ‘Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor or agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship or “objective knowledge”’.<sup>401</sup>

In order to exemplify this second meaning and the enormous potential of ‘situated knowledge’ when its object is an active protagonist to play with and to be played from, I will discuss the double-page spread 26–27<sup>402</sup> of *Into Your Solar Plexus* [fig. 4],<sup>403</sup> an assemblage made out of four different elements. Here, the invisible is made visible, and brotherhood, echo, self-consciousness, appropriation and an inventory of oneself are displayed, organised and curated, unfolding into an architecture and institution. The title of the show is formulated like a short poem, a haiku, a declaration of intent or proposal for a journey. The pictures can be interpreted together with texts, whether side by side, printed over each other or assembled digitally thanks to InDesign software. The double page is, then, an example of visual language but not only that, since it also contains words, and I would argue that such a combination intensifies and enriches

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<sup>401</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, in *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3, Fall 1988, University of Maryland, College Park, p. 592.

<sup>402</sup> No printed page numbers nor table of contents are provided in the publication, designed as an artist’s book made up of full-bleed picture pages and a central section in the form of a diary. Nevertheless, for the purposes of clarity in this thesis, I here number the pages, with page 1 being the very first after the cover. The illustrations, marked ‘[fig.]’, will also help the reader to locate pages to which I am referring.

<sup>403</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*

what can be said by a series of data through working out this ‘mutual relatedness’, as Cooper calls it, achieved by ‘neither the parts nor the whole but the active separation – joining that *goes on between* the parts’.<sup>404</sup> This double page from my artist’s book nourishes my inquiry into the different ways in which things can be expressed.<sup>405</sup> Indeed, in the space of this thesis, where words are the exclusive constitutive elements I can use (even if they actually index and refer to something other than words), arranged and structured in sentences, paragraphs and footnotes, the double page that I discuss is an example of a language made out of my artistic praxis, and the views and interpretive tools that I have gathered from theoretical sources.

#### **4.7 The echo of neo-classicism, orientalism, modernism, postmodernism and postcolonialism: Palmyra and Josephine Baker**

Let’s start with a simple description of this double page 26–27, a printed diptych that the classical nomenclature used for captions providing a technical description of what is to be seen would describe as follows:

Left: Alfonso Bernardi,<sup>406</sup> Palmyra, 20 October 1975, Kodachrome slide, 35 mm.

Right: Donatella Bernardi, series of titles given to each exhibition room in the Kunsthalle Bern for the exhibition *Morgenröte, aurora borealis and Levantin: Into Your Solar Plexus*, Kunsthalle Bern, 30 January – 7 June 2015 (opening 29 January). Ground floor: ‘Mother-Daughter’, ‘Sisyphus’,

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<sup>404</sup> Robert Cooper, ‘Assemblage Notes’, in Robert C. H. Chia (ed.), *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 112.

<sup>405</sup> ‘Language is radically contextual. It is not just a matter of context affecting the system; the system has no existence outside a context. Thus language cannot be abstracted from time and space, or from the extralinguistic dimension of the situation in which it is embedded. Just as modern biologists regard even simple organisms’ behavior as produced by incredibly complex interactions of genetic and environmental phenomena, so even the simplest linguistic exchange involves a constellation of factors – linguistic, contextual, social, and so on – which is always more than the sum of its parts. And this also implies, of course, that meaning is radically indeterminate and variable.’ Joan Swann, ‘Yes, but is it gender?’, in Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland (eds.), *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*, John Benjamins B.V., Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2002, p. 46.

<sup>406</sup> Alfonso Bernardi is my uncle, the older brother of my father, who also left behind an archive. See Donatella Bernardi, ‘In the absence of fire, eat up!’, in *op. cit.*, p. 37.



‘Homesickness’, ‘Alps’, ‘Syrian Portico’; lower level: ‘Botanical Synthetic Material’, ‘To Let it Go’.

Fragment of an anonymous wall painting in the basement of the Kunsthalle Bern (nowadays a deposit, archive, library, boardroom and administrative rooms) depicting a dancing figure identified as Josephine Baker, probably painted in 1936 as decoration for a party, 231 x 72.5 cm. Photo: David Aebi.

This double page is located in the book straight after a series of pictures from my uncle’s archive of an expedition to the Himalayas and a trip to Syria made in the 1970s, and just before the introduction to my curatorial project by Christian Gossweiler, Chair of Kunsthalle Bern’s Executive Board in 2015.<sup>407</sup> Obviously, his introduction is his own interpretation of what I presented at the Kunsthalle. In complement to it, I proposed an alternative narration of my work as a curator of *Morgenröte ...*: alternative to Gossweiler’s take but also alternative in its formulation (it would have been very delicate to propose a second ‘introduction’ by myself, since Gossweiler was the main sponsor of the publication). The Palmyra photograph, documenting the gaze of my Italian uncle on the Palmyra ruin, capturing the light of the setting sun and recreating a well-known Western and orientalist view of this Roman ruins located in the Syrian desert,<sup>408</sup> once juxtaposed with the depiction of Josephine Baker’s naked dancing body, became a representation of neo-classicism, its phallogentrism accentuated by the shininess of the standing columns.

The architecture of the Kunsthalle Bern, inaugurated in 1918, a ‘self-composed cube’ as Gossweiler aptly puts it,<sup>409</sup> is a modernist adaptation of a classical temple, and recalls the European trend for Antique and Imperial architecture and culture, particularly in Germany and Italy, under the Hitler and Mussolini regimes. Neoclassicism therefore marks the Kunsthalle’s design and the cultural patrimony into which its founders wanted to inscribe it. As every artist or curator is well aware, budget greatly conditions what can be done, as does available space. I had two storeys of the Kunsthalle at my disposal, the first of which was the ground floor, providing for a circular reading of what would be displayed, since the viewer could experience the show by starting with the

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<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

right, central or left rooms. The second space was two underground rooms that, ultimately leading nowhere, function as a dead end. I played around with this given,<sup>410</sup> and gave each room a programmatic name, like a title, a key word, a clue to guide viewers on the journey in which I was inviting them to participate: from the heroic Alps ‘Morgenröte [Aurora]’ to the embodied self, the solar plexus.

This blueprint of the exhibition, conceived for the cubic Kunsthalle architecture, was overprinted with an anatomy – a fragment of a wall painting found in the basement of the Kunsthalle, near the current archive storage zone, that seems to have been done in 1936, if the number ‘36’ beside the woman’s right ankle is indeed a date. In this assemblage, it incarnates postcolonialism, self-awareness and at the same time a certain institutional naïvete or unawareness of sexism or even pornography. I draw this conclusion after having spent months at the Kunsthalle, asking the archivist Nicolas Brulhart and others such as Julia Jost, in charge of the education and mediation activities, about this picture, which has apparently become invisible for those working in the institution. The fragment of decoration has been preserved, and yet no information about it is available in the archive. And nor does it seem to be considered an archive in itself, a fragment of history documenting the mentality of its time.

My hypothesis that this is a depiction of Baker is simply based on popular photographic documentation of the dancer, as signalled later on in the publication, among other female representations.<sup>411</sup> On page 27, the face of the dancer cannot be seen, only her neck and the back of her ornamented head. Her body seems to be naked apart from a ribbon around her waist, as well as bracelets around her wrists and ankles. This creates a voyeuristic position for the viewer, and simultaneously a vulnerable one for the dancer, whose buttocks are conspicuously represented and seem to be the real subject of the painting, as indicated by the right hand of the dancer. This uncomfortable way of

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<sup>410</sup> Indeed, each floor was treated very differently, since I was inspired by the two floors of the Baroque home described by Gilles Deleuze in ‘The Pleats of Matter’, in *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, The Athlone Press, London, 1993, pp. 3–13. In my case, the ground floor was dedicated to verticality, ascension, mineral and stones, Alps and Himalaya, sedimentation, ruin and death, while the basement focused on horizontality, shore, ocean, vegetation, regeneration, the cycle, flowers and plants, tropics and eternal renewal.

<sup>411</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

representing a dancing body is reinforced by the fact that the rest of her anatomy is cut off, erased, or symbolically amputated with white paint. Baker (1906–1975), of Afro-American descent,<sup>412</sup> often acknowledged as the first black celebrity and therefore media-depicted figure, was very well aware of her exoticisation, ironically performing on stage with her notorious banana skirt, and later on supporting Martin Luther King in his campaign for black civil rights. (One could easily draw a parallel between Baker performing with humour and deconstructing stereotypes that could be projected onto her, and the pseudo Michael Jackson performer in the Salvador de Bahia cabaret). But what happened to Baker (and if it isn't her, then it can only be her doppelganger) when represented in this wall painting in the basement of Kunsthalle Bern in 1936, at the precise moment when she was developing her artistic career as a highly successful 30-year old woman, having moved to Paris where she would obtain French nationality the following year? She was depicted as a faceless body, staged and framed in a distorted and tendentious manner. What does it say about an institution dedicated to contemporary visual art that it decided to frame this fragment of wall decoration without comment or contextualisation? This depiction is simply part of the building, and raises little concern, as if it were invisible and unreadable, even for those working at a professional level in the cultural sector.

Once edited into my diptych double page 26–27, the painting becomes a clear marker of the patrimony or legacy with which one has to deal as a contemporary artist exhibiting at the Kunsthalle Bern. Indeed – and this is where I argue that the objects of my 'situated knowledge' are provocative 'actors or agents' as described by Haraway' – on the one hand, the Kunsthalle's Eurocentric architecture is revealed by an Italian orientalist photograph of Palmyra; on the other hand, the inheritance of Western domination of women and of African bodies during the slave trade is easily readable on a backstage wall painting from the 1930s, in the Kunsthalle itself. My diptych assembles, then, two of the major elements of the white male hegemony dominating the Western world with

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<sup>412</sup> This biographical given of Baker's trajectory inspired my students at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm to reflect on intersectionality while developing a series of performances and actions for the 8 March 2015 International Woman's Day. 'Royal intersectionality', in *ibid.*, p. 41.

which everyone has had to deal, certainly until recently, in the field of contemporary art.<sup>413</sup>

#### 4.8 Proximal view

Before giving some practical and basic information about the case study featured in this chapter, a show complemented by a publication, I would like to briefly mention another text by Cooper, 'Organization: distal and proximal views' (1995),<sup>414</sup> co-written with John Law, addressing the notion of heterogeneity, in complement to what I have discussed above. One of the major ideas in this article is the authors' interest in processes rather than results. By quoting other authors, such as Alfred Korzybski, known for having developed the field of semantics, as well as phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, or Bruno Latour, sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher of sciences, they establish a clear distinction between a distal view, which stresses 'boundaries and separation, distinctness and clarity, hierarchy and order',<sup>415</sup> and a proximal one, which sees 'organizations as mediating networks, as circuits of continuous contact and motion – more like assemblages of *organizings*'.<sup>416</sup> In Chapter 3, while presenting the different steps from an initially fascinating news item into what became *Smoking Up Ambition!*, a contemporary art show displayed in a former fire-extinguisher factory, it became obvious that current art and curatorial practices are structurally comparable with the activity of an entrepreneur – getting what you need in order to produce your goal.<sup>417</sup> Curatorship or art organisation, at least in my experience so far, does not necessarily imply an *a priori* social or political commitment, where, as stated by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay about Bertolt Brecht's theatre, 'the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality',<sup>418</sup> but only a kind of lip service facilitating the

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<sup>413</sup> In the case of the Kunsthalle Bern, the first female director, Valérie Knoll, was appointed and took her position after my guest curatorship in late Spring 2015.

<sup>414</sup> Robert Cooper and John Law, 'Organization: distal and proximal views', in *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 13, JAI Press, London, 1995, pp. 237–274.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>417</sup> Kevin Daum, 'Entrepreneurs: the artists of the business world', in *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 26, No. 5, Grady Parsons Publishing, Emerald Group, Bingley, 2005, pp. 53–57.

<sup>418</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, 1966 (*Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, Verso, London, New York, 1998, p. 86).

production of the work. Most of the time, this kind of organisation is unfortunately characterised by precarious conditions made acceptable only by the necessity for survival of its protagonists. It is precisely in this kind of circumstance that a strong relationship between the different protagonists acquires a particular importance in order to guarantee the emotional and affective sustainability of the entire enterprise or endeavour.

One could easily relate to this proximal view while assessing *Smoking Up Ambition!* (Chapter 3.4–3.13) and its ‘material heterogeneity’, and by extension the other three case studies presented in this thesis.<sup>419</sup> Cooper and Law continue their analysis of ‘heterogeneous engineering’<sup>420</sup> by referring to ‘certain feminists’ who ‘press the materially heterogeneous and relational character of social life by talking of cyborgs’, as well as introducing Lyotard’s *The Inhuman* (1991)<sup>421</sup>, where interaction between actors, machines, buildings and texts is enabled.

This proximal view, encouraging us to understand an art project as a heterogeneous process, a conglomerate of concrete objects, persons, facts, documents and more abstract elements like desire, drive, luck or opportunity, leading to a complex relationally dependent production, is close to what the German philosopher Dieter Mersch describes as ‘reception’s aesthetics’, ‘production’s aesthetics’ and ‘event’s aesthetics’<sup>422</sup> in his contribution to a recently published companion to artistic

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<sup>419</sup> Cooper and Law, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>420</sup> ‘We are saying that it is a pattern of relations. But we are also saying that it is a pattern of *materially diverse relations*. We are looking, then, at a process which we might call *heterogeneous engineering* (Law 1987), a process which, at least in the first instance, ignores the distinctions between people, technologies, texts and natural objects, and combines them all together to create an effect or a product.’, *ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>421</sup> ‘Lyotard suggests that there is something strangely ‘inhuman’ about the cybernetic approach to communication and control – though perhaps ‘un-human’ would be a better word to use. Representation and translation are ‘un-human’ processes that enable communication and control between heterogeneous elements like actors, machines, texts, buildings and all the rest. And human actors – like non-human actors – are simply points in a system that acts through and beyond them.’, *ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>422</sup> A good example of the aesthetics described by Dieter Mersch when applied to an artistic project is Florian Dombois, Mira Fliescher, Dieter Mersch and Julia Rintz (eds.), *Ästhetisches Denken. Nicht-Propositionalität, Episteme, Kunst*, Diaphanes, Zurich, 2014.

research.<sup>423</sup> According to Mersch, throughout art's evolution during the postmodern period, where 'subjectivity', 'creativity' and 'originality' have been replaced by the 'temporality of the cut', the 'presence of the non-presence', 'materiality', 'performativity' and 'perception/scent/cognition' (from *aísthēsis*), an aesthetic of the event could even be claimed as a general condition for contemporary art.<sup>424</sup>

What could this aesthetic of the event be? Above, I discussed the echo-event created by an image and the fragment of a text found in a family archive, a powerful side effect, even if intimate or spiritual because intertwined with confession. But is it possible, as suggested by Mersch, to embrace this 'reception's aesthetics', 'production's aesthetics' and 'event's aesthetics' and actively create, produce and organise something out of it? If it is possible to work artistically with such a concept, then what could the result be? This is in fact what I tried to do with *Morgenröte...* at the Kunsthalle in Bern, and the way this experience is related in the publication *Into Your Solar Plexus*, as far as I can judge, made its constitutive proximal elements visible [fig. 5]. As an artist, it was a way to think by doing, by making and experimenting empirically, in parallel with the different readings and discussions with my supervisors: instead of interviewing people as a sociologist does, what happens when you address your subject through an 'event aesthetic'? Just as I took the opportunity to inject into *Smoking Up Ambition!* a possible interpretation, adaptation and actualisation of my interest in Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto* through a series of *Piece-Discussions* (Chapter 3.4), in the case of *Morgenröte...* and its related editorial format, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, I welcomed the opportunity to shape the entire project according to my interest in event as art.

#### **4.9 Information given to the visitor**

After the invitation card (in printed or electronic format) and the poster for an exhibition, the information sheet available at the entrance of the art institution (public or private), is one of the most important interfaces or filters given to the visitor. This latter may greatly condition how the show will be perceived, read and reflected upon. Usually, the institution's director writes such a document, but in my case, since I was

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<sup>423</sup> Dieter Mersch, 'Rezeptionsästhetik/Produktionsästhetik/Ereignisästhetik' in *Künstlerische Forschung, Ein Handbuch*, see note 20, pp. 49–57.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

curating in the gap between two directorships, the communications officer Denise Baumgartner proposed a text, which I then edited. In the context of this thesis, I thus quote myself, and treat the reader like the visitor to the show.

During her time as a guest curator at Kunsthalle Bern, multi-disciplinary artist Donatella Bernardi (born in Geneva, 1976) has conceived a process-oriented exhibition project that connects three distinct narratives: it deals with politically loaded questions of national identity, signified by the alpine motifs in several works, while pictures from the artist's private archive foreground more personal myths – and last but not least, the exhibition undertakes a visual journey to the Middle and the Far East, to Lebanon and to Nepal.

These three perspectives are represented by works that stem from disparate artistic traditions and contexts. The exhibition features historical objects from the Swiss Federal Art Collection (BAK), framed photographic prints from the 1970s, a projection of countless digitized slides and monumental murals. The project's stylistic breadth encompasses classicist kitsch, geometric abstraction, graffiti on the Kunsthalle's naked walls, as well as small- and medium-scale objects scattered on pedestals, which could be considered sculptures in their own right.

Each room bears its own thematically relevant name that signals or acts as a key to its content. Drawing on the different, loosely linked exhibits, visitors can choose their own personal paths through the exhibition. Since the project was designed as a kind of 'event', a work-in-progress, an ever-changing series of snapshots, visitors had the opportunity to watch fresco artist and conservator Sara Baldi paint the mural 'Dhaulagiri 1976' over the course of the exhibition. This composition is an amalgamation of 1,000 slides recorded by Bernardi's uncle and godfather Alfonso Bernardi (1914–2010) on a trip to the Nepalese mountain Dhaulagiri. They function as an anthropological documentation of this Italian-led expedition, which took place from February until May 1976. The depictions of Western alpinists and local Sherpas and porters shed light on an emergent touristic 'event economy' – while the Himalaya sky seems to recall the Venetian school of painting. The fresco also metaphorically alludes to the endless

cycle of ascension and decay, to familial and cultural heritages, and, quite simply, to the cycle of life.

The next room over, named ‘Mother – Daughter’, establishes a contrast between works by two Lebanese artists, Saloua Raouda Choucair (born in Beirut, 1916) and her daughter Hala Schoukair (born in Beirut, 1957).

This is the first time mother and daughter are exhibited alongside each other: which connections, apart from those concerning their individual production, can be drawn between the two women and their conceptions of ‘art’ – modernist for the former, perhaps almost therapeutic for the latter?

Downstairs, the tropical botany by the artist’s father Luciano Bernardi (1920–2001) replaces the mineral foundation of ruins and sediments visible in a Syrian frieze near the museum’s entrance: the photographs in the Kunsthalle’s atrium show the citadel of Aleppo, already damaged by the war, and the excavation site of Palmyra, which is acutely threatened by it. These supposedly imperishable stone formations have suddenly become fragile, while the transitory blossom of a plant gains in presence and strength through the sheer fact of its aliveness – some examples on show here appear almost supernatural or hallucinatory.

#### **4.10 Biological genealogy does not guarantee authorship or legitimacy**

The use of archive, in the broader sense, the active interaction into which artists enter with documents that aren’t their own creation but lead to novel and original pieces, crystallising in very different results from the work of historians for example, is nothing exceptional in the field of contemporary art, as Okwui Enwezor and Chieka Okeke-Agulu pointed out even a decade ago: ‘What emerges as contemporary is an art of the supplement and citation, set between diverse archives: between and among traditions; set in its own invented traditions: colonial and post-colonial, local and global, regional and transnational, diasporic and cosmopolitan spaces.’<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Okwui Enwezor and Chieka Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Damiani, Bologna, 2009, p. 26.



Luciano and Alfonso Bernardi both published books during their lifetimes, Luciano on botany, starting in Venezuela and ending in Geneva,<sup>426</sup> and Alfonso, who worked as a journalist for the Bologna newspaper *Il resto del Carlino*, mostly on mountains. One of these publications addresses the Italian expedition to the Dhaulagiri mountain in 1976, of which he was part. The diary of this adventure, narrated from the point of view of the Western alpinists, was published in Trento in 1978.<sup>427</sup> *Into Your Solar Plexus* arrives, then, after my family members had signed previous articles and books, and thus my own work can be interpreted as a reshuffling of material already gathered.

So who am I to dare to use, expose and publish my family archive? In terms of legitimacy, was it so crucial that I was appropriating, quoting, editing, projecting or recalibrating that of my own biological ancestors? The creation of a fictional archive would have been a tangible option.<sup>428</sup> Indeed, I could have turned my family members into fictional characters. But what would I have gained? It was the fact that they had documented their own lives as conscious subjects through images and texts, being aware of their own history and biography, that made them so relevant to use. Obviously, as their descendent, I had free access to their personal archives and the right to use them, after having spoken with my relatives. But while Luciano and Alfonso had already gone public with their thoughts and their works while alive, something different was at stake here. Alfonso's Syrian pictures had never been compiled, exposed, edited, mounted and printed together with the image of Josephine Baker,<sup>429</sup> as I presented one of them on the spread analysed above. If Alfonso was aware of postmodernism and its implications, as some of his letter exchanges with Luciano suggests, he never dreamt that one of the major events of his life, namely the expedition to Dhaulagiri in 1976, would become the backdrop for the introduction of some philosophical notions about the postmodern event to younger generations – mine, but also my students at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm.<sup>430</sup> This interpretation or actualisation happened posthumously, beyond his

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<sup>426</sup> [http://www.ville-ge.ch/cjb/publications/cando562/C562\\_363-376.pdf](http://www.ville-ge.ch/cjb/publications/cando562/C562_363-376.pdf) (accessed 23 September 2016).

<sup>427</sup> Alfonso Bernardi, *Trentini sul Dhaulagiri I, 8172m*, Alcione, Trento, 1978.

<sup>428</sup> The Lebanese artist Walid Raad has produced one of the most brilliant examples of such a strategy. See, for example: Nicolas Lambouris, 'Fabricating, Facts and fiction in the work of the Atlas Group', in *Photographies*, 7:2, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 163–180.

<sup>429</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

will. However, the archives of my father and uncle offered me the possibility to produce and present them as artworks in an institution that carries its own history, a place in which to address these historical records in the most contemporary manner – in the field of contemporary art.

Viewers, whether specialist or not, were asking for genuine works of mine, confused about where to locate my authorship. But I wasn't speaking about myself. I simply wanted to explore issues such as archive, document, discipline, complementarity, assemblage, heterogeneity, conceptual and formal expression, ideas and materials. Rather than exposing myself, I was inscribing myself in a broader story. I was a vehicle carrying the testimonies of others in an active acceptance of the archive and the lives of my ancestors, witnesses of their own generation. As an artist working with representation, my subject here is the staging of history, the questions raised by art and depiction, and the creative process arising from contingency and necessity. As already introduced and discussed in chapter 2, this thesis contributes to autoethnography by presenting and discussing the work of Lonzi, as well as what I have done with it in the field of contemporary art. In the case of *Smoking Up Ambition!* and the series of *Piece-discussions*, it is about the bibliography of others. In the present chapter, it is about a particular reading and use of a family archive. Obviously, the process is somewhat autobiographical, but it is also analytical in the sense of its use and reflection on the means and impact of contemporary art. When you are staging a time-based art project, what can you achieve? What can you predict or not, and what values do you attribute to these different aspects of the work?

The interaction between contingency and necessity is what we are made of: the very first and fundamental event we have to cope with. Somehow and somewhere we had to come into being, incarnated and embodied within a historical order that we didn't choose, with a body shape subject to so many interpretations, regulated by so many laws and rules. I am the subject of a body that I did not choose, in a biological and genealogical chain that I haven't validated or invalidated, as much as my body is the basic condition of my existence. Many other events will unfold out of this original event, the only one in one's life for which one cannot claim responsibility.

#### **4.11 From the body event to the eco-event**

I have to remark here that the body, and the diverse shapes it can take – in Chapter 2 dancing and singing in a cabaret in Salvador da Bahia and then narrated in a text; in Chapter 3 as a dead banker’s cadaver draped in a latex skin lying in a luxurious living room; and in Chapter 4 at the Kunsthalle as postcolonial paintings on the wall, already in place as in the depiction of Josephine Baker, or produced following my curation, like the ones of the Sherpas [figs. 6, 7 and 8]<sup>431</sup> – has a particular function towards the event, within the perspective of ‘somatechnics’ (see Chapter 2.4), where the ‘technology, techniques and technics of that world’<sup>432</sup> are related to representation, just as to Robert Cooper: ‘technology and representation are immemorially connected’.<sup>433</sup> Performing and self-consciousness in the case of the first example; witnessing and solidifying a tense and dramatic relationship in the second; and in the third case, a series of representations of extra-Western anatomies in a famous laboratory for new exhibition formats in the nomenclature of Western canons under the direction of Harald Szeemann,<sup>434</sup> these bodies and their respective (technologised) representations are particularly interesting because they were activated and became entirely or partly implicated in an art event. These bodily acts and enactments, “non-referential” because [the bodies] do not refer to pre-existing conditions, such as inner essence, substance [...] no fixed, stable identity exists that they could express’,<sup>435</sup> simply appear and are envisioned in this thesis *as if* (Derrida) *enactment* (Cooper) is also a gesture of ‘doing something with bodies’,<sup>436</sup> or allowing them ‘to generate identity, “individually, sexually, ethnically, and culturally marked”’.<sup>437</sup> Transposed into an art world supposedly global

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<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>432</sup> <https://somatechnics.wordpress.com/about-somatechnics/> (accessed 30 September 2016).

<sup>433</sup> Robert Cooper, ‘Technologies of representation’, in Pertti Ahonen (ed.), *Tracing the Semiotic Boundaries of Politics*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1993, p. 279.

<sup>434</sup> Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann, exhibition maker*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin, 2006. Some of Szeemann’s exhibition posters were shown during *Morgenröte...*, in particular those dedicated to Tibetan Art (1962), outsider artists (1963) and Conceptual art (*Plans and projects as art*, 1969, curated by Zdenek Felix, since Szeemann had by then left the Kunsthalle after his seminal *Live in your head, When attitudes become form*).

<sup>435</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The transformative power of performance*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain, Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2008, p. 27.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>437</sup> Aino Rinhaug, ‘Adoptee aesthetics: a gendered discourse’, in *Race/Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Autumn 2010, The Kirwan Institute, Office of Minority Affairs, The Ohio State University, Columbus, p. 17. This ‘bodily’ act as a constitution of body ‘identity’ is

but still rooted in a Western art tradition, the performance of oneself can shortcut the trap of essentialism: the *enacted* body is this object of Haraway's 'situated knowledge' that the subject, the artist, can use in order to deconstruct what it commonly expected from someone, i.e. authenticity. As framed by the famous thinker of global art Hans Belting: 'Artists are redefining their ethnicity [...] as a migration experience that leads to multiple identities [...] It is a post-ethnic position to perform as an "artist from Africa" rather than to suffer the label of an "African artist"'.<sup>438</sup>

#### 4.12 Self-awareness: a public diary as liberation

As a complement to what happened inside the walls of the Kunsthalle in Bern, the book *Into Your Solar Plexus* disseminates textual material that I was unable to include in the exhibition, such as the event described by my father of listening, when he was seventeen years old, to Mussolini together with his companions on the Piazza Venezia in Rome. How long did it take him to realise the importance of such an incident? According to his novel, it was decades later, on another continent while looking at insects in a Latin American garden. The words and formulations that he uses to relate this 1937 event, while writing an autobiographical novel in the Swiss mountains in 1969, trying to deal with his memories from his early childhood until Italy's entry into World War II in 1939, are highly sophisticated. He embroiders his narrative with many historical references, creating an almost poetic historicisation of his life, inscribing his subject, his body, into the wider experience of many other soldiers and troops. This novel, written in Italian, remains unpublished apart from four fragments from it, including the Piazza Venezia event, which I had translated into English to be included in *Into Your Solar Plexus*.<sup>439</sup> I had my father's novel in mind while hanging and installing the diverse art pieces in January 2015 and what happened in Bern and during the elaboration of the book will continue as memory and time open up and stretch out, with no precise plan about when exactly they will come to an end or find any resolution, like an echo.

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developed by Judith Butler in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1990.

<sup>438</sup> Hans Belting, 'Contemporary Art as Global Art. A Critical Estimate', in Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009.

<sup>439</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33, 43, 57, 67.

Out of so many possible memories recalled in my father's 45-year long diary enriched by pictures, I had the opportunity in the context of the Bern project publication to present only one constellation: a summary of a single day, 7 October 1973, in Cape Town, South Africa, where he made a tour of a botanical garden with two botanist colleagues, where he had taken a photograph of a flower, which I also included in the book [fig. 10]<sup>440</sup> On the frame of the slide, he had written some information, which I transcribed into the caption for the image, along with the text in his diary:

Luciano Bernardi, *Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, Cape Town, South Africa*, 7 October 1973, Kodachrome Duplicate, slide, 35 mm. Luciano Bernardi, Diary, page for Sunday 7 October 1973: 'Out and about with Oliver [Ted] and Jones [Idris] at the University, aligned beneath the mountain. Then to Kirstenbosch, where the sun comes out. I leave my jacket in the Herbarium. Then around the peninsula, from Muizenberg to Table Mountain (by cable car). Sun and cool winds. Not unlike Cabo San Vicente. Dinner at Oliver & Jones's home, very tired and a little chilly. Lots of photos taken at speed. And a coastal road with baboons on it. It's the end of a world, not only in the geographical sense, but in all senses: socially, with this mix of races and the Apartheid. Rules are still English style: Oliver & Jones could not take me, as they had planned, onto the terrace of the tallest building in Cape Town, for they didn't have a tie.'

By choosing one single day of my father's life, I was able to associate two aspects of existence that constitute our perception of life: 'nature' (botany) and 'culture' (South African society, Apartheid and its codes of conduct), balancing that which we consider 'given' by the environment, and that which we see as constructed by mankind. The events of everyday life, whether a small detail like a tie or a major catastrophe like Apartheid, can offer a way to shift perspective between the two (who can really determine or clearly differentiate between what is 'natural' and what 'constructed?'), and to focus on what happens during a time lapse.

Time can, then, be revealed by a single page from a diary, where this scale, this unit of a day, can act as a starting point to trace the long story of one's own existence. Whether

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<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

one is recording a banal day or an outstanding one, it is still a day and it will never repeat itself. During the run of the exhibition, an earthquake took place in Nepal on 25 April and ISIS captured Palmyra on 20 May.<sup>441</sup> Many other events influenced the reception of what was on display in the space, events from everyday life, events like magic such as the visit of Quasimodo. In my entry for the last week of the show in the diary part of the book *Into Your Solar Plexus*, Quasimodo, the unnamed, non-addressing and non-addressed assistant librarian, is actually the main protagonist of the project's grand finale, and he is still very often the one who closes the windows and doors of the library in which I spend hours writing this thesis – a silent working space that I have to leave every late afternoon, chased away by this guardian when the time comes.<sup>442</sup>

If the event as art, or event in art, was what I wanted to explore as a conceptual tool to expand in space, time and materials (can you represent an event?), the very fundament of my being came to the surface when working on this exhibition. For many, thanks to its history, the Kunsthalle Bern is the model of what a contemporary art space can be. Facing this mythical and prestigious institution, I needed a consistent story to tell inside its walls. However, because of the nature of the material I used, among which were thousands of slides from the 1950s to the 1970s, depicting many non-European and non-Western parts of the world, i.e., non-hegemonic zones, the words 'sociology' and 'ethnography' dominated visitors' responses. I wasn't so much a 'artist as ethnographer' in the sense Foster uses this term, but rather the material I was displaying looked ethnographic simply because it represented non-Western bodies or landscapes. Does this say anything about the aesthetic category or artistic discipline to which my initiative at the Kunsthalle Bern belonged? Can a picture of a person climbing the Dhaulagiri look different from an ethnographical document? Interestingly enough, a recently published book about artistic research, the French study *Le chercheur et ses doubles* (2016), edited by three women art historians, Sandra Delacourt, Katia Schneller and Vanessa Theodoropoulou, focused on the artists Mathieu K. Abonnenc, Kantuta Quirós & Aliocha Imhoff, Kapwani Kiwanga, Otobong Nkanga and the curator, Emilie Villez, a group of people developing art practices whose corpus can be related to postcolonialism and the

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<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55, 62–63.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

complexity of addressing and representing extra-Western contexts.<sup>443</sup> This common denominator of the selected group of protagonists is not even remarked upon by the editors. Nevertheless, I don't think that it is by chance that such artists and cultural producers found themselves under the umbrella of this book related to research.<sup>444</sup> The complexity inherent to post- or neo-colonialism cannot be discussed without recognition of the historical process of domination, exoticism, appropriation, displacement, translation or even spoliation of cultural forms other than the dominant white, Eurocentric one. To expose extra-Western visual codes in the contemporary art field is to confront, face and reflect upon how this could have happened, or which forms are then generated through the collection of historical facts and other data, because nothing can be taken as granted, as is often the case when we use common materials and resources that are part of our direct environment. The journey into exoticism is a journey of self-awareness. Indeed, when moving into non-Western territories, there is no way that an artist or curator can escape the process of researching who she is, her 'positionality' or 'situatedness'. This work done on oneself, as in *Morgenröte...* and *Into Your Solar Plexus*, leads one to become aware of what one considered one was conscious of but was actually unconscious of, because it was taken for granted. Such a movement, oscillating from consciousness/certainty to unconsciousness/uncertainty and again to consciousness/certainty, requires a moment of loss of self-control or active subjectivity. In my case, this shift into the uncertain corresponds to the moment of exhibiting and becoming highly vulnerable, being part of the events that I organised; inscribing my person as an object into a narrative where the contingency of my own birth as the daughter of my genitor, like that of Hala Schoukair, became apparent, and finally taking

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<sup>443</sup> Sandra Delacourt, Katia Schneller and Vanessa Theodoropoulou (dir.), *Le chercheur et ses doubles*, Editions B42, Paris, 2016.

<sup>444</sup> Sarat Maharaj writes in *op. cit.*, see note 20, 'Visual art as knowledge production is about engaging with "difference and the unknown" in both "artistic" and "social-political" terms. The latter concerns "writing the foreign" or xenography. It touches on the "other, outsider, non-citizen-named asylum seeker, refugee, illegal, sans papier, clandestine, detainee, deportee – who is increasingly now an object of xenophobia. Getting to know 'the other' is an ethical tussle: how to cope with the 'other's difference' without imposing our epistemic frame? For this, we have to come up with 'other' think-feel know equipment—a quest in Duchamp's paradox: "Can one make a work of art that is not of Art?" It proposes a 'delay', a holding back from 'known' genres, keeping them at bay – circumventing known forms that reduce "difference" to "sameness"', pp. 45–46.

into consideration the ‘aesthetic of reception’, welcoming and integrating as part of the authorised project the viewers’ and spectators’ point of view.

This shift and also acceptance of moving from a controlled to an uncontrolled situation in order to gain clarity on one’s own situation, is according to Cooper the process of psychoanalysis.<sup>445</sup> In professional terms, a displacement from one’s usual cultural and socio-political environment implies a reevaluation and assessment of one’s own discipline: the more explicit, the more complexity is made visible.<sup>446</sup> In my case, of course, I knew that I was a bi-national citizen, a Swiss-Italian woman born a little bit too early to be a digital native, whose father was a systematic botanist specialising in tropical plants and whose uncle was an alpinist, journalist and anthropologist, both having taken part in World War II. This I already knew when I started to speak with Spicher in 2009. But what is the implication of this genealogical chain on my decision to address, as an artist, my political origins as well as a trip to the East in the frame of a guest curatorship and its related publication, i.e., an artist’s book? The answer to this multilayered question is eventually the art event of the entire project, from my own point of view.

From a less personal and autobiographical perspective, I also inscribe this self-consciousness or self-awareness in the feminist tradition to which Carla Lonzi alludes while introducing her diary *Taci, anzi parla* (*Shut up, or Rather Speak*, 1978) covering

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<sup>445</sup> ‘The paradox of self-identity is that seeing and thinking can never see or think itself, for when it tries to do so it must necessarily take itself as its own object and thus lose sight of its active subjectivity. It is appropriate, therefore, to distinguish two forms of the subject: the primary subject, unconscious and indeterminate, and the secondary subject which is in effect the object of conscious, determinate thought.’, Robert Cooper, ‘Information, Communication and Organisation: A Post-Structural Revision’, in *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1987, The University of Maine, Orono, Maine, p. 407.

<sup>446</sup> The boomerang move of leaving and coming back (even if there is no possible coming back, since time will pass even in one’s own home country and therefore things will change), and its consequences (shift, gap), not necessarily in relation to territory but also to organisation (for example, to which group I belong, what ‘filiation’ can mean) have been analyzed and discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in terms of ‘territorialization’, deterritorialization’ and ‘reterritorialization’, in their philosophical project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972–1980). See, for example, ‘The Primitive Territorial Machine’, in *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 145–153.



the years 1972 to 1977.<sup>447</sup> In the first paragraph, she notes how the diary, as a literary genre, has often been used as an emancipatory platform by the traditionally subjugated female author, and underlines the time and work needed to acquire the state of consciousness for which she was aiming (in her case six years of intense work).<sup>448</sup>

Published after *Autoritratto* (1969) and her feminist manifest *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Let's Spit on Hegel, 1970),<sup>449</sup> her diary traces her experience of co-founding the Italian radical feminist movement. Her medium, namely text, could be considered a feminine way of writing, a sort of stream-of-consciousness appropriation of writing. My father kept a diary from 1956 to 2001. Out of these 45 years, I published only one day: 7 October 1973. *Into Your Solar Plexus* also takes the form of a diary, following a proposal by the graphic designer Noémie Gygax, because it was the best possible structure to transcribe

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<sup>447</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla, Diario di una femminista*, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, Milan, 1978.

<sup>448</sup> 'There is a difficulty in exposing oneself publicly, in writing freely about oneself and involving everyone who somehow takes part in one's practice. This has discouraged and largely silenced women, who have always privately taken up the diary as the most agreeable form of expression in the search for themselves. I was prompted to the diary by a need to introduce myself to myself, motivated in the act of doing what I do. This motivation, which I uncover with ever greater conviction, raises a need for awareness of self and others for which I take full responsibility [...] Everything is in its place: beyond the subjective effort, the objectivisation of oneself is perturbing. I did everything on my own, typing included. I put an incredible amount of time into it, but I believe that the lack of assistance allowed me to mature [...] For me, creating one thing has value to the degree that it impedes the making of a second. I needed to bring out all dissatisfaction with the image I had felt forced to display for others: unexpressed and happy to represent something other than myself [...] Now I exist: this certainty justifies and confers to me that freedom in which I alone believed, and which I found the medium to obtain.' [La difficoltà a esporsi pubblicamente scrivendo liberamente di sé e coinvolgendo tutti coloro che in qualche modo fanno parte del proprio iter ha scoraggiato e infine fatto tacere le donne che in privato hanno sempre adottato il diario come la forma di espressione più congeniale alla loro ricerca di sé. Al diario sono stata spinta della necessità di presentarmi a me stessa motivata nel fare quello che faccio. E la motivazione che io stessa scopro via via con sempre maggiore convinzione, risale un bisogno di conoscenza di me e degli altri di cui prendo tutto la responsabilità [...] Tutto è al suo posto: al di là dello sforzo soggettivo, l'oggettivizzazione di sé è sconvolgente. Ho fatto tutto da me, battitura a macchina compresa. Ci ho messo un'infinità di tempo, ma ritengo che la mancanza di aiuto mi abbia permesso di lasciare maturare. [...] Per me fare una cosa ha valore in quanto impedisce di farne due. Avevo bisogno di tirare fuori tutto il mio dissenso sull'immagine in cui mi sentivo costretta a essere vista dagli altri: inespresa e felice di rappresentare qualcosa, non me stessa.[...] Adesso esisto: questa certezza mi giustifica e mi conferisce quella libertà in cui ho creduto da sola e che ho trovato il mezzo di ottenere.'], trans. Megan Bredeson for this thesis. *ibid.*, pp. 7–9.

<sup>449</sup> <http://femrad.blogspot.ch/p/blog-page.html> (accessed 28 September 2016).

a curatorial project made up of a constant evolution of events. Furthermore, this literary format, in this case a double-page spread for each of the 19 weeks of the project,<sup>450</sup> suggests a condensed way of presenting what was at stake and how to describe it, using pictures and text, selecting and ordering them according to the available space. In this context, as was the case in the exhibition space, the discursive or theoretical rhetoric was tributary to the passage of time and the limitation it generates.

Lonzi dedicated six years of her life to writing about her time on the planet by investing in a particular literary genre; my father more than four decades (but obviously with another methodology: on the first page, in 1956, he simply states that he is beginning his journal, which he had always dreamt of keeping), and having decided to use my research into the art event as a tool to frame this endeavor, I had 19 weeks of public presentation in an art institution as well as 19 double pages to develop, produce and edit, a self-awareness process that wasn't strictly mine alone, since other working partners were involved, whether individuals or institutions.<sup>451</sup> I used my collaborators' contributions for my own sake, in a strictly *authoritarian* manner, namely that I was an *author* signing a piece of text composed out of many quotes and references to others' works, a structure where the hierarchy is strictly set. It was more an orchestration than anything else: an orchestration rather than a collaboration stemming from discussion and negotiation. Indeed, all my collaborators performed the function they already had in their usual life or career before integrating with the project. They were invited to join the project according to the way in which I had recognised and acknowledged their capacities before (of course, some may have had other qualities or competencies of which I was not aware). Like an orchestra director whose role it is to bring out the general melody of the score, I was aiming to address what I synthesised in the first week of the diary pages: 'If time equals flesh, an event may shape anatomy.'<sup>452</sup> In parallel, by turning to my autobiography, the space between the private and the public sphere, between the anecdotal and the authored data, collapsed or merged into an unique self-concept. 'Self-

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<sup>450</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–67.

<sup>451</sup> As I discussed with some groups of teenagers in Bern (*ibid.* pp. 42–43), such an exercise was not an obvious one for me personally, and will in all likelihood will be a one-off case to explore within my artistic work. As self-representation, I chose to appear only once in the publication: photographed beside Dr Andreas Münch, curator of the Swiss Confederation Fine Art Collection, as we discuss the function of the artist in relationship with his or her home country, *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

concept is a double notion with a public as well as a private side. The latter – our personal identity – is associated with individual qualities specific to a person, whereas the former is based on a sense of belonging to a certain social group.<sup>453</sup>

In parallel to this vertiginous smash-up and the solidification of my self-concept through the confessional echo-event, I addressed someone outside myself, wishing for a certain resonance that, if distorted, had remained until now silent or even unnoticed for many viewers. In that sense, even if the *Morgenröte...* curatorial project and its related publication are enclosed in a clear period of time, namely 19 weeks in an art institution and 100 pages in a printed, hard-cover book, the double-bind process of the self-concept as well as its echo-event (co-dependent in their existence), isn't in fact closed, but has actually just started. This chapter of my thesis provides a thinking tool and a reflective moment to better pursue and develop its potential, in a classic, banal and at the same time ambitious instance of Duchamp's *l'art, c'est la vie*.

#### **4.13 Heterogeneity as an essay**

In this chapter, introducing some of the thoughts of Robert Cooper has given me the opportunity to expose the interactions of a contemporary art practitioner like myself with critical management theory, but also with institutional critique. Taking into consideration post-structuralist concepts to better analyse the interaction of people, ideas and facts when it comes to organisation, this has been articulated through the lens of my practice as research. Indeed, in the current academic institutionalisation of art, of which I am actively part, artistic research has emerged as a field challenging the classical use of archive, documents or historical facts, as well as the way to approach interdisciplinarity. If the proficiency that results from the conglomerate of sciences is an academic given, what happens when experience-based knowledge is confronted and enriched with something like Western philosophy? What kind of kinship binds them? Does it imply independence? I would argue for a cousinage, a brotherhood or a sisterhood in order to escape the kind of hierarchical genealogy where one has to come

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<sup>453</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross dressing, Sex, and Gender*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1993.

first, and therefore another has to be second. In that sense, the heterogeneity that I am describing is related to the assemblage that is mentioned above in the way Cooper uses it, or – if one wants to remain on a text-based level – to the essay form as formulated by Theodor Adorno, whose considerations can also be understood metaphorically or transposed in curatorial terms.<sup>454</sup>

The artist researcher producing the *ontic* is using and challenging *ontology*. In order to exemplify what can be learned from such an encounter, I have explored the concept of event in an art institution during a period of five months. Out of this experience and its reflection in the context of this thesis has emerged the notion of time created by the human mind. How long does it take to paint the panorama of an expedition on the Dhaulagiri? How long will the viewers remember this painting, already covered up by an amnesiac thin white layer of paint? The ‘I’, the one creating time by inhabiting it, recording and archiving it, engages in a process of self-awareness affecting his or her own way of looking at an artefact, a picture, a text or whatever form an object can take. This conscious ‘I’, projecting itself into the world by creating a partial representation of it (the very function of the artist), also situates itself better by interpreting its own history. In my case, it resulted in a double event: an echo as a way to cope with an apparently unsolvable and impossible confession, and the unavoidable evidence of the self-concept. Indeed, turning a father’s archive into a public curatorial programme, and developing this through the mirroring effect of motherhood, is a way to confront and expose my ‘I’; the private and the public subject has become one, at least in the diary of the show published some months later under the form of an artist’s book. In that case, can one be something other than an echo of one’s own voice and narrative?

In the following and last chapter of this thesis, I will move, with the fourth case study towards a less incarnated kind of event, or at least an event not related to any human

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<sup>454</sup> [The essay] starts not with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to talk about; it says what occurs to it in that context and stops when it feels finished rather than when there is nothing to say. [...] All its concepts are to be presented in such a way that they support one another, that each becomes articulated through its configuration with the others. In the essay discrete elements set off against one another come together to form a readable context; the essay erects no scaffolding and no structure. But the elements crystallize as a configuration through their motion.’ Theodor Adorno, ‘The Essay as Form’, in *Notes to Literature, Volume I*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, pp. 4–13.

body in particular, namely a tempest. Here, temporality is no longer that of the diary or other written or archival record, but that of the experience, remembered, recalled but unpreserved. Here, the echo-event will turn into an eco-event.<sup>455</sup>

This bridge between the respective case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 will be a transition that opens up towards more common matter, since I will be switching from a familial, cultural and political legacy bound to my person through citizenship and genealogy, towards an atmospheric phenomenon that is shared by the multitude. At first take, an atmospheric phenomenon such as a tempest, during which one is reduced to the role of a viewer facing the spectacle offered by nature, addresses the eternity of the world, at least from mankind's perspective. But, as I will explore in Chapter 5 on the basis of phenomenology, time is something invented by the human mind. In this current chapter, the time I have worked with has been that of the day as a basic unit of our existence (as in my father's diary, as in Lonzi's, and as in my diaristic artist's book), since my interest has been in analyzing the process of self-awareness undergone by my family members, by Lonzi as a classic feminist example, and also in the context of my third case study, a curatorial project translated into an artist's book on the basis of my diary as an artist orchestrating an exhibition that developed over the course of some months, describing a show by taking time as measure. From this chapter to the following, a switch will take place between time as a clock measurement and time as weather, taking in consideration the duration of a storm, of a sunrise or sunset, thanks to an event that took place on a roof terrace in Beirut in October 2014.

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<sup>455</sup> 'Eco-' from the Greek *oikos*, 'house', 'dwelling'; element used to form substantives with meaning related to 'natural environment' or 'house', in Alain Rey (dir.), *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française*, Le Robert, Paris, 2005, Vol. 2, p. 272.

## 5. ECO-EVENT

### 5.1 From embodiment to environment

In this fifth and last Chapter, I present as my case study *Helvetic Zebra* (2014), an art project where the ephemera in which I am interested is entangled with dematerialisation, disembodiment and conceptual art. Its language involves the classic signifier/signified duo that I would argue is entailed in any kind of language – not just the verbal one, but also that created through artworks, leading to the elaboration of new ways to express and to describe. In order to underline the lessons learnt through this thesis – how to distinguish between different events and learn what kind of reflections and knowledge can be extracted from them – let me briefly recall them through the prism of tangibility towards intangibility, from the most embodied to the most ethereal, independently from the art produced around them, whether before or afterwards.

The first ephemera on which I elaborated (Chapter 2.21), the one that happened in Salvador de Bahia, was clearly dependent upon a performer and an audience, and even upon an entire carnival, which made it possible. Thousands of bodies, including Giorgio Pinheiro's and mine, first invaded the public space of the streets and boulevards of a town, and thereafter less than 30 persons, clustered into a tiny and intimate cabaret, were involved in an unexpected and unforgettable phenomenon.

The second event (Chapter 3.7) relied on the dead body of a banker in Geneva, conditioned by a sadomasochist ritual – a corpse that was seen only by a very few: the murderer herself, the cleaning lady who found it, one of the banker's collaborators and some police officers. In the Salvador de Bahia cabaret, the performers used their bodies to represent and transcend their social condition, through parody and a sophisticated and refined burlesque language, highly conscious of being watched by an audience. The spectators influenced what was happening on the stage through the intensity of their gaze, their words and the energy thrown into the space. The ritual involving the banker's body, on the other hand, wasn't intended as a performance for anyone other than the two people involved in it: the one administering the pain, and the one enduring it. This

ritual was as closed as a Leibniz monad,<sup>456</sup> highly intimate, with no spectators, but reflecting both in itself and on a metaphorical level the world to which it belongs: the secret world of Swiss banking and tax regulations guaranteeing invisibility and discretion, the violence provoked by an unbalanced situation between men and women, and by the capitalist spirit infiltrating any kind of relationship. The latex-clad body of the dead banker was imaginable through the press reports of the event, a news item that became a monstrous *Ekphrasis*, a rhetorical description of an image (in this case, more precisely, a sculpture).

The third event (Chapter 4.5) discussed in this thesis consisted of a confession that had not found a direct hearer or receiver, and was instead processed through literature and contemporary art. Indeed, this narration, first reported in a written format, became what I called an echo-event presented in the frame of an art institution, making use of the curatorial possibilities at the disposal of an artist. The initial confession, which occurred in 1937 in the context of Italian fascism, found no specific answer or resolution, but as is characteristic of any echo dynamic, resonates, in this case with the representation of a black female body painted in 1936 in the basement of the building and even though perfectly conserved as a colourful wall painting, was never properly acknowledged (Chapter 4.7), as if invisible to those looking at it or, rather, seeing it. The echo-event henceforth produced isn't graspable at the first take: the confession is only readable in an unpublished manuscript of 1969, inaccessible to the public, and the painting, a body trace, is nowadays only visible to the institution's staff, if they take the time to look at it during their working hours. The exhibition *Mörgenröte*, followed by the artist's book *Into Your Solar Plexus*, as well as this thesis, was not only an occasion to make visible what had so far remained invisible or unread, but also to create some meaningful links and connections, leading to the concept of the 'echo-event'.

In Chapter 5, the ephemera in which I am interested no longer relies directly on the body, but on the environment where the bodies find themselves. More precisely, the body does not produce the event that has retained my attention, but the bodies of the viewers, of the witnesses, are still needed to sense it, register it, and finally elaborate on it. From Chapter 2 to Chapter 5, there has been an evolution from a clear and active

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<sup>456</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 1714.

incarnation of the body that logically points to the question of representation and the degree of consciousness of the person using her or his body in this context, towards a more atmospheric and environmentally orientated event that I have called ‘eco-event’. As I will describe later on, the work of a musician, Franz Treichler, made a considerable contribution to the appearance and quality of the event. In order to explain my thinking more clearly, I will mention a couple of other artworks that I associate with the eco-event, such as texts by Chris Kraus, Virginia Woolf and Shakespeare. Furthermore, besides making a clear reference to the dematerialisation that appeared in the 1970s, long before digitalisation (which can be seen as another form of dematerialisation, although I would describe it more precisely as ‘numeric translation’), the event linked to *Helvetic Zebra* is clearly related to the environment and ecology. From Chapter 2, characterised by a reflection on Kantian cosmopolitanism, the path of this thesis, dictated by the series of case studies that I have chosen, leads to what is usually called ‘nature’. This is often tightly connected or even confounded with what surrounds us, like a landscape in which we find ourselves. This chapter will be an occasion to reflect upon the different relationships that one can have with one’s own environment, which no longer corresponds with any natural given, but a complex constructed one. Furthermore, in relation to the ephemera discussed in this thesis, I will also elaborate on my own relationship with artistic projects, and the fact that in certain cases an organiser might exhibit her own work in the show she is curating. Such auto-inclusion, or assuming a double position, is what Carla Lonzi did with *Autoritratto*.

Taking into account the feminist context within which I have chosen to inscribe this thesis (Chapter 2.3–2.4), I will introduce here some ideas, concepts and notions of eco-feminism, an interdisciplinary field that merges ecological concerns with feminist ones. In order to do so, I will briefly explore eco-feminism from a theoretical and philosophical point of view and illustrate my point more pragmatically and in relation to my field of specialisation – contemporary art – using artworks as examples or applications of eco-feminist thought. By inscribing feminist issues in a spectrum that goes beyond ‘women’s studies’ and traditional Western dichotomies such as body and mind, or nature and culture, eco-feminism is able to propose other paradigms.<sup>457</sup> To deconstruct such

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<sup>457</sup> Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*, Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford, 2000.



rationally constructed divisions is precisely the point of departure taken to open up and disclose our relation to the world, and even more, our belonging to the world.

The event analysed and spoken about in this chapter is an atmospheric one that I experienced during an art project I organised and set up in Beirut, in October 2014. How to situate an atmospheric event within the artistic and cultural field, or the history of ideas (including science) at large, will be the main subject of this chapter, where a detailed description of the exhibition and its context will unfold.

## 5.2 1989: three curatorial projects and two books

In Chapter 1.7, I alluded to 1989 as the year of the publication of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* as well as the year marking the advent of globalisation, noticeable in the contemporary art sector in the form of three emblematic shows: *Magiciens de la terre*,<sup>458</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> Havana Biennial<sup>459</sup> and *The Other Story*.<sup>460</sup> The first exhibition opened up the field of contemporary art on a global scale by exhibiting non-Western artworks without adopting an ethnographic or exotic gaze. The second exhibition put on display representatives of the 'Third world' and the 'Global South', as well as the works of artists whose countries were the political allies of Cuba at that time. The third exhibition gave visibility to the artists of postcolonial Britain. As referenced by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares in their project and installation *Forest Law (2014)*,<sup>461</sup> a fourth element can be added to these three curatorial initiatives investigating the global territory and its representation: a book by Michel Serres serves as the pivotal agent in Biemann and Tavares' artwork, in which the forest becomes a subject for which rights can be claimed. Published by Serres in 1990, the *Natural Contract*<sup>462</sup> claims that

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<sup>458</sup> Jean-Hubert Martin (ed.), *Magiciens de la terre*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989; Annie Cohen-Solal, Jean-Hubert Martin et al., *Magiciens de la terre, 1989–2014: retour sur une exposition légendaire*, Xavier Barral, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2014; Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (Part 2), 'Magiciens de la Terre', 1989*, Afterall, London, 2013.

<sup>459</sup> Rachel Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1), The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, Afterall, London, 2011.

<sup>460</sup> Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, South Bank Centre, London, 1989.

<sup>461</sup> <http://www.geobodies.org/art-and-videos/forest-law> (accessed 27 November 2016).

<sup>462</sup> Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel*, François Bourin, Paris, 1990 (*The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, The University of Michigan Press, Ann

the end of the Cold War, having implied for many years the political splitting of the world into two parts, will, once the world is reunited, encourage mankind to reflect on the planet at large, not as a passive natural object to exploit for resources and other goods, but rather as an active subject to consider in an ecological way.

I inscribe Helvetic Zebra in this chain of thought, and have therefore named it an ‘eco-event’ – not to be cofounded with the ‘echo-event’ of Chapter 4. It is interesting how one ‘letter’ – ‘h’ – makes the difference between something totally open and based on one’s broad surroundings (eco) and a phenomenon evolving only through closed feedback and its distortion (echo).

### 5.3 Dematerialisation and embodied discourse

‘Dematerialised art’ appeared in the 1970s – the era of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Women’s Liberation Movement and the counter-culture – in the United States and Europe as a reaction to hegemonic institutional power structures, market mechanisms and the increasing commodification of artworks. In the introduction to her seminal publication *Six Years – The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (1973), Lucy Lippard explains: ‘Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or “dematerialised”.’<sup>463</sup> In the section on the year 1966, she makes reference to George Brecht’s book *Chance-Imagery* (New York, 1966) and summarises his work as follows: ‘Independently and in association with the Fluxus group, Brecht has been making “events” that anticipate a stricter “conceptual art” since around 1960.’<sup>464</sup> The word ‘event’ as used by Brecht is more or less synonymous with ‘performance’ or ‘happening’, namely an action involving an audience, whether participatory or not, limited in time and nourishing Mersch’s hypothesis of ‘reception’s

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Arbor, 1995); Michel Serres, *Retour au ‘Contrat naturel’*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, 2000.

<sup>463</sup> University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1973, p. vii.

<sup>464</sup> One of the three examples that she quotes is as follows: ‘*Two Exercises*, fall, 1961: Consider an object. Call what is not the object “other.” Add to the object, from the “other,” another object, to form a new object and a new “other.” Repeat until there is no more “other.” Take a part from the object and add it to the “other” to form a new object and a new “other.” Repeat until there is no more “object.”’ *Ibid.*, p.11.

aesthetics', 'production's aesthetics' and 'event's aesthetics' (Chapter 4.8). Indeed, the creation of events as artworks has been an important practice ever since the 1960s and continues to be so in the context of global contemporary art. While the art object dematerialised, the body of the artist took its place, not as a sonic instrument nor playing a role in a narrative, a dramaturgic piece or a choreography, but performing the artwork itself. Gestures, movements, affects, ephemeral change or influence on the environment replaced solid and transportable objects. The traditional artefact that can be too easily turned into a commodity or a piece of decoration for a bourgeois interior evolved, at least partially,<sup>465</sup> into the creation of time-based art practices, involving in many cases the body of the artist, often in league with feminist self-awareness and the construction of a different self through the objectification of one's own body.<sup>466</sup> The artist's body is not only made visible, but is even part of the signification of the piece. More than an instrument, as in the case of an opera singer (the voice being produced by the musician's anatomy), the performing artist's body is simultaneously the vehicle, the facilitator as well as a clear statement about the positionality or situatedness of the author.<sup>467</sup>

Under the year 1970, Lippard asks an interesting question, very much related to my endeavour in Beirut with the *Helvetic Zebra* project, but also to my other curatorial projects described in the previous chapters of this thesis: 'Is a curator an artist because

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<sup>465</sup> It would be wrong to believe that art pieces as objects stopped being produced and sold during those years.

<sup>466</sup> Kelly Dennis, 'Historical Overview' in 'Performance Art' article, in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 467–74. 'Known variously as "live art", "body art", "post-object art" or even "event art", performance art initially referred to artistic events wherein the body of the artist functioned as a medium in addition to, or in lieu of, paint, canvas, or sculpture as raw material. Additionally, performance art describes a diverse array of contexts and events that emphasize the process or event of art and art making rather than the resulting object, thereby raising questions as to the nature and function of art and the accompanying institutions of the market, gallery, and museum. The term performance art has been applied retroactively to describe cabaret, theater, and "live art" in the context of early twentieth-century avant-garde movements such as Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, and the Bauhaus, suggesting a historical and political lineage for the art of performance. Further, the notion of the "performative" has become a strategic description of contemporary social and cultural processes of signification, including the performance of gender and sexuality, in order to denote the arbitrary and constructed nature of identity and its ability to disrupt ideological boundaries.'

<sup>467</sup> See, for example, the performances of Rebecca Horn and Marina Abramovic.

he uses a group of paintings and sculptures in a theme show to prove a point of his own?<sup>468</sup> Lippard questions the need, requirement or obligation for an artist to produce his or her own authored objects in order to be recognised and acknowledged by the profession.

#### **5.4 Dematerialisation and constellation**

Today, as briefly mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, we are witnessing a shift from the dematerialisation that took place in the 1970s to a contemporary virtual and digital situation dominated by what has commonly been described as ‘accelerationism’ through ‘immaterial phenomena’ such as digital data, liquid capital, fluidity, algorithms, social media, the deep-web economy and surveillance.<sup>469</sup> For *Helvetic Zebra*, however, and throughout my artistic practice in general, I took a different path, seeing painting or sculpture as a precious and available resource, as opposed to the internet or electronic art, which can be expensive and technically challenging. Instead, I preferred to revisit the discursive dimension of a constellation of objects as formulated by Lippard, together with scheduling a series of events. By using physical objects and bodies, I was aiming to transmit to the audience the meta-discourse of what you can read from an artwork set in a particular context, and the space between the signifier and the signified. In this sense, *Helvetic Zebra* aimed to create a dematerialised artwork out of a series of tangible objects (sculptures, books, wall painting, installation, workshops, projection and music), by exploring what links could be created by such a constellation, as indicated by Lippard. My interest in language and its materialisation, formalisation and aestheticisation through typography and graphic art, an important tool for many Conceptual artists such as Laurence Weiner, was manifested in the show through certain artworks and artists’ books but also through an interest in calligraphy, an art of writing that is highly visual, as found in a video by Ali Kazma [fig. 1]. In such a context, I wanted the art object’s materiality or stability to be challenged by the narrative it could evoke.

#### **5.5 A double nationalist representation or a Swiss pavilion?**

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<sup>468</sup> Lippard, *op. cit.*, p.188.

<sup>469</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Immaterial Labour’, in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds), *Radical Thought in Italy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, pp. 132–46.

*Helvetic Zebra*, which I developed and curated in Beirut in October 2014, and which ran for one month in two ground-floor rooms in the cultural space STATION, took as its point of departure the richness of Lebanon's polyglot culture as a common and inspiring thread shared with Switzerland, a country characterised by its cultural diversity and political neutrality. I organised *Helvetic Zebra* after having been invited in April 2014 by Nabil Cnaan, the owner and director of STATION, to present something 'Swiss'. I took this proposal as a great opportunity to challenge nation-state propaganda. But how to address Helvetic nationalism in a Middle Eastern country such as Lebanon? And why had Cnaan formulated such a demand in the current global context, where the national pavilions at the Venice Biennale, for example, are constantly discussed and contested?<sup>470</sup>

Cnaan's positionality in Lebanon as well as in Switzerland might provide part of the answer. Born in Beirut to Lebanese parents, raised in Nigeria and then in Geneva, where he obtained Swiss citizenship, working there for years in a multinational company, he had a sense of belonging both to Switzerland and to Lebanon and thus experienced a constant longing for stability and self-identity. My question in 2006 at the Swiss Institute in Rome had been: 'What am I doing here?' In Beirut in May 2014, my host was asking 'Who am I?' I noticed this very quickly when we were developing the project – for example, in the way he introduced himself, myself and the project during a meeting with our Swiss Embassy collaborators. Facing such existential complexity – a complexity shared by many Lebanese people – Cnaan paradoxically forbade me from directly addressing the Lebanese political climate in the show and insisted that I deliver a contemporary Swiss showcase. I therefore opted for abstraction and formalism, having in mind some reflections about semantics and meaning developed during the previous months in *Smoking Up Ambition!*. In Geneva, Edouard Stern's body had remained invisible. In Beirut, a 'Helvetic Zebra' appeared in answer to Cnaan's identity quest.

## 5.6 Escapism through poetry

*Helvetic Zebra* was an interdisciplinary group exhibition including contemporary artists not only from Switzerland but also from Lebanon, Turkey and Morocco. The artworks

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<sup>470</sup> See, for example, Okwui Enwezor, *All the World's Futures, 56 International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, catalogue of the Biennale Arte 2015, Vol. 1, Marsilio Editore, Venice, 2015.

challenged the limits of, and overlaps between, visual, audio, textual, figurative and abstract languages. Starting with the presentation of *The Most Beautiful Swiss Books* design award (a display of the 20 winning art books of 2013, awarded in 2104), *Helvetic Zebra* extended into hybrid forms of artistic languages, drawing connections between Latin typography and Arabic calligraphy, radio art, cinematic and optical art, graphic design and music. All these formats recalled, reiterated and played with different artistic movements and traditions often associated with Switzerland, such as Constructivism, Surrealism, Dada and design. *Helvetic Zebra* crystallised an effort to communicate beyond any specific message, whether political or cultural. The artworks were united by their multidimensional forms, the radical monochromatic power of black and white, the art of creating letters ad infinitum (when the signifier is as important as the signified), the tessitura of a voice – unique every time it is performed – and experimentation with abstract, geometric and hypnotic systems.

Thanks to my Geneva-based association Golden Brain, I was able to raise half of the money for the show with a grant from Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council. This allowed me to engage with the architecture of STATION itself, by means of a powerful as well as ephemeral medium: wall painting. Stepping outside of my role as curator, organiser and co-producer of *Helvetic Zebra*, I conceived these works myself, selecting three strategic paintable surfaces: a large flat area carved up by three small windows, highly visible as part of the background of the tables presenting *The Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, as well as two pillars. Would the Syrian workers Abed, Houran and Khaled Sheikh Ahmad, two brothers and their cousin, who were realising my wall paintings [figs. 2, 3, 4, 5] be aware of the visual codes to which I was referring? In this case, I was appropriating the artistic language of two Western women artists belonging to the same generation: Bridget Riley (b. 1931), the leading British Op artist, whose screen print *Fête* (1989) I quoted literally, and the French fashion designer Sonia Rykiel (1930–2015), recognisable for her black and coloured stripes. When watching my Syrian collaborators applying the coloured skin to the rough surface, sometimes marred by missing plaster, as if covering scars with tattoos, I thought about Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1942) and the way it manages to achieve an incredible rhythm, despite the fact that it is a static picture. Thanks to Canaan, who helped me to communicate with my Syrian collaborators, I discovered that they enjoyed painting the two non-equivalent polychromic stripe systems on the pillars, which I wanted to be unequal and asymmetric in order to create a

dynamic between the two, even though their volumetric shapes were the same. However, when approaching the flat surface, as Canaan reported to me, the painters felt slightly awkward, because to them, windows belong to the external architecture of a house, and thus it was as if they were working on the street, outside in the public space. This feedback from those making my two pieces shows how diverse interpretations can be when one moves from one context to another, or one sphere of competencies to another, even when working on a common project.

There are no indigenous zebras in Switzerland. The hybrid metaphor of the Helvetic zebra was thus a fictional and seductive unknown. In the context of STATION in Lebanon, fiction and formal seduction were for me a way to sidestep national, historical or political representation.

## 5.7 When art facilitates an eco-event

*Helvetic Zebra*, a project driven by Swiss contemporary cultural production and thus automatically by its self-representation, constituted a chance to work with artists and peers on postmodern notions developed by Jean-François Lyotard<sup>471</sup> and Gilles Deleuze:<sup>472</sup> how do signifier and signified function? Can you read art specifically through the double lens of content and form? It also explored the fact that today, any contemporary art production, whether visual, graphic, sound, sculpture, scenography, poetics or music, is on the one hand still inscribed in the conceptual art field,<sup>473</sup> and on

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<sup>471</sup> *Discourse, Figure*, Klincksieck, Paris, 1971.

<sup>472</sup> *Logique du sens*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1969.

<sup>473</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object, From 1966 to 1972 ...*, Studio Vista, London, 1973; Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (ed.), *Conceptual art: a critical anthology*, The MIT Press, London and Cambridge, MA, 1999, pp.46–51. This essay was written in late 1967 and first published in *Art International*, 12:2 (February 1968), pp. 31.36; Catherine Morris & Vincent Bonin (ed.), *Materializing Six Years, Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, book published for a show at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, MIT Press, London and Cambridge, MA, 2012; Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, 'After Pop, We Dematerialize: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism', in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *Listen Here Now!, Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2004, pp.156–72.

the other hand in the ‘post-medium’ dynamic first identified by Rosalind Krauss<sup>474</sup> and that we can nowadays update with the works of the post-internet generation.<sup>475</sup>

In the Lebanese context, such research was enriched by a strong intellectual and theoretical background, but also by the sensitive environment that we created. For example, on 10 October 2014, the performance of the rock and experimental musician Franz Treichler in front of James Riddle’s *Fluxfilm No. 6*<sup>476</sup> allowed for an experience of a form of urban romanticism that went beyond the simple artistic performance to embrace broader concerns and scales, becoming an ‘eco-event’. It took place on the roof of STATION, a one-storey former furniture factory that Canaan had inherited from his grandfather. The rough concrete building resembled a New York or Berlin loft, or museums and art centres that occupy former industrial architecture.<sup>477</sup> Treichler had decided to perform outdoors, where the organisers could provide no protection against the rain. The video projector and the sound system could have been destroyed at any moment if the heavy clouds that we were scrutinising with some concern had suddenly released their drops. While listening to the music, seated alongside the Swiss artists whom I had brought to Beirut for the occasion, I could hear distant thunderclaps as well as observe the skeletons of the skyscrapers, such as Bernard Khoury’s *PLOT #4371*, live-work lofts for Beirut’s emerging creative classes<sup>478</sup> that were being built all around the venue. We were at the core of an area that was undergoing extensive gentrification and included the Beirut Art Center, as well as the Ashkal Alwan, The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, located in front of STATION. A polyglot and multicultural audience intensified this feeling of social upgrade.

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<sup>474</sup> ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring), 1979, pp.30–44.

<sup>475</sup> Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You are Here – Art After the Internet*, Cornerhouse & SPACE, London, 2014.

<sup>476</sup> In Treichler’s piece *Franz Plays Dada*, the guitarist re-scores films by the instigators of Dada (Hans Richter, Man Ray), artists affiliated with Fluxus like James Riddle, and works by Jean Painlevé, Martin Arnold and Stan Brakhage. The films featured are: *Starfish* (Man Ray, black & white, 15 min, 1928); *Black Ice* (Stan Brakhage, colour, 2 mins, 1994); *Rythmus 21* (Hans Richter, black & white, 3 min, 1921); *Fluxfilm No. 5* (John Cavanaugh black & white, 3 min, 1966); *Fluxfilm No. 6* (James Riddle, black & white, 9 min, 1966); *Delicacies of Molten Horror Synapse* (Stan Brakhage, colour, 9 min, 1991); *Affected Part* (Martin Arnold, black & white, 16 min, 1989); *LCD* (Jean Painlevé, colour, 6 min, 1978).

<sup>477</sup> E.g. Tate Modern, London, installed in the former Bankside Power Station.

<sup>478</sup> <http://www.bernardkhoury.com/project.php?id=232> (accessed 26 December 2016).



James Riddle's *Fluxfilm No. 6* consists of a simple countdown of nine minutes: on a totally black background, white numbers indicate the seconds, which pass in the form of a minimalist clock without a dial. The 'retinal persistence' of this visual display (a physiological phenomenon that made the white numbers seem to linger on the black screen), coupled with Treichler's abstract electronic soundscape, distorted the passing seconds. All of a sudden, the entire event, orchestrated on a roof top under heavy clouds surrounded by massive developing architectures, became about the intensification of time and therefore made one highly conscious of an ephemeral situation on the brink of drastic change.

How long would the sky hold before the first raindrops fell, and before it developed into a tempest? How long would the foreman of the building site leave the lights off so that the projection could be properly seen? How long would the war in Syria continue, and how many refugees and migrants would cross the borders? How long would Canaan run STATION before selling the building to real-estate investors?<sup>479</sup> How long can art nourish hope and contain its powerful imaginative strength that turns life, entangled in politics and economy, into something bearable – even the cruelly managed socio-political existence that I was acknowledging, witnessing and engaging with in Beirut, based on exploitation and inequality?<sup>480</sup> To what extent were the heavy clouds hanging over our heads intensifying the apparent duration of the seconds counted down by Treichler?

The rainclouds crossed by lightning became more than a pressurising factor: the atmospheric conditions combined with the performance became an eco-event, where we understood that human beings are part of a complex bigger picture: the physical space in which we existed, including the humid air that we were breathing, and equally time, this dimension that we create in order to better grasp, understand, organise and

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<sup>479</sup> The next day, 11 October 2014, Canaan told me that after the eco-event, while having a drink at the bar, a man had asked him how much he wanted for STATION's site, providing another insight into the new landscape of skyscrapers that would soon be built in the area. The STATION owner confided in me that he would pursue his cultural activities for one or two more years before selling the land occupied by the art centre.

<sup>480</sup> Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury calls the city a 'hyper-contemporary version of the capitalist city in a state of anarchy, a fantastic but terrifying product of Western influences gone out of control.', in [http://archiv.hkw.de/en/Pressearchiv/Architektur\\_Erinnerung/c\\_index.html](http://archiv.hkw.de/en/Pressearchiv/Architektur_Erinnerung/c_index.html) (accessed 26 December 2016).

produce our lives. Indeed, without time-measurement, labour, upon which human survival depends, would be unmanageable.

## 5.8 The tempest

The tempest, one of nature's most impressive spectacles, is a phenomenon that has been depicted throughout the ages in fiction and visual art, Turner's storm scenes being amongst the most famous examples. This kind of depiction has become almost a genre in its own right, invested with many diverse intentions, and playing with different functions depending on the context. In Kraus's *I Love Dick* (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3), the tempest serves as a metaphor for her feelings and state of mind, which seem to be as intense or violent as a storm. By associating an environmental phenomenon with the intimacy of one singular human being – in accordance with the postmodern resistance to grand narratives – Kraus plays with scale, showing that it is possible to domesticate a tempest, not in order to reduce it or diminish its potency, but on the contrary to use it on an anthropomorphic psychological level:

Memories of domesticity when Chris was young, 20 years before: a China eggcup and a teacup, painted people circling around it, blue and white. A bluebird at the bottom of the cup, seen through amber tea. All the prettiness in the world contained in these two objects. [...]

S [Sylvère]: But then we couldn't get hold of you, and, well, I don't know if you had a sense of it but we had such storm in a teapot here. (Laughs).

D [Dick]: You mean – a tempest?

S: Yeah (Laughs).<sup>481</sup>

Taking another stand by using the amplitude of what a tempest can create, even in the sense of changing the political order of things, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) is a canonical use of the motif. Denise Ferreira da Silva, in *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007), 'when revisiting *The Tempest*, like other postcolonial critics, reads [it] as an allegory of conquest', and furthermore, on the basis of Prospero's magic, interprets

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<sup>481</sup> Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, 1997, Serpent's Tail edition 2016, London, pp. 14–33.

Shakespeare's work 'as an account of engulfment',<sup>482</sup> showing the gap between what can be made in the New World and the very different rules that prevail in Europe. Here, I refer to *The Tempest* not in order to apply this sort of postcolonial reading – which I do not consider relevant to the situation in Beirut, even though Western political powers still have great influence on the region – but to draw a different link between Shakespeare's work and what happened in Beirut on 10 October 2014, and to contrast it with Kraus' metaphorical application.

Shakespeare identifies the tempest with which the play opens, and which causes a shipwreck, as a creation of the mind, a manifestation of Prospero's magical powers:

Miranda:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have  
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.

[...]

Prospero:

Hast thou, spirit,  
Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?

Ariel:

To every article.<sup>483</sup>

For Shakespeare, the tempest is an initial condition for the story to start, while in Beirut, the storm occurred after Treichler's performance. Thus the chronology is inverted: for me in Beirut, it was a moratorium during which the event could be acknowledged and reflected upon (and the artwork couldn't have been performed while the storm was raging). However, in both contexts the storm has a real function: it is a storm with agency. Indeed, any tempest, whether already in the past or about to happen in the

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<sup>482</sup> 'When reading *The Tempest* one cannot miss how it describes the process Foucault (*The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, 1966) calls the demise of resemblance, the kind of knowledge that magic signifies, which is how Prospero's sorcery and the subject he governs belong in the New World. Back in Naples, Prospero's unbecoming power has no utility, nor does he need his subject in exile, Caliban.', Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, 2007, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, pp. 173–179.

<sup>483</sup> Act I, Scene II, <http://sparks.eserver.org/books/shakespeare-tempest.pdf> (accessed 1 January 2017).

future, will act and have an effect on human beings, who cannot avoid its impact. Like the forest discussed by Biemann and Tavares to which I alluded at the beginning of this Chapter (5.2), a non-human entity functions autonomously and is part of a constellation of diverse and heterogeneous elements, constitutive of an action. In contrast to Kraus' reduction of the tempest to a storm in a teapot, where it is humanised and domesticated, laughed about with tenderness and complicity, the tempest in Shakespeare's play, as in Beirut, is a real phenomenon, maintaining its size and amplitude, and remaining profoundly foreign and alienating in the damage that it can do.

### **5.9 How does it feel to author an eco-event?**

Obviously Treichler had not envisioned that this performance of his work would be any other than just one more recurrence in his repertoire. Curious about whether his own perception and interpretation of the eco-event that happened on 10 October 2014 was different from the way in which I have summarised it above, I met him on 2 December 2016 at his flat in Geneva and asked him the following questions:

Do you remember the clouds and the storm that was on the verge of exploding just before the beginning of your performance? Did this particular condition affect you and your way of performing? Does it make any difference for you to play music indoors or outdoors?

He gave a long and multi-layered answer, intertwining the conceptual aspects of making music with the pragmatic ones – fulfilling certain demands, ideas or requests from institutions – as well as what he learns from the different cultural contexts with which he is invited to interact. This answer, oscillating between the contingent and the necessary, between the materialistic and creative aspects of practising art and making things happen, fits perfectly with what I designated as 'heterogeneous' in Chapter 4, referring in particular to Robert Cooper and John Law's paper 'Organization, Distal and Proximal Views' (1995).

He remarked that because the piece *Franz Treichler Plays Dada* follows a precise protocol and written score, and doesn't rely on any improvisation, it is mainly the spectators' perception rather than his own that is affected by external conditions, such

as the huge building site surrounding STATION, whose lighting had to be switched off for the duration of the projection (Canaan had offered the building-site foreman a bottle of wine in exchange), as well as the meteorological context. But more than anything else, he underlined the strong feeling of danger or at least tension represented by Beirut itself, a location that signified for him more of a risk than participating in a rock or music festival in Switzerland, for example. According to him, the question of playing outdoors or indoors is less important than the programme of which one is part: being scheduled among many other music groups in a festival, or being invited to perform in a contemporary art institution, a museum, on stage with a contemporary dance production or even creating a soundtrack for a movie. Where and how the music will be played is actually the crucial factor, from his point of view. If the programming is very tight (and each group has to finish on time in order to accommodate the other artists), very few interactions with the present moment or the audience will be possible. And in opposite cases, things can turn out very differently. He gave the example of an intimate festival in Wallis, a Swiss alpine Canton, in Summer 2016, during which he and his band played under the sun in the middle of the afternoon in front of a crowd of less than 2,500: such a context, where there were no big sponsors or other groups, allowed for much more exploration and experimentation on the part of the musicians. In opposition to this intimate and engaging set-up, the bigger festivals, during which one group is followed by another, is for most rock musicians a way to earn good money (big and popular festivals pay well), but without having high artistic or creative expectations.

Besides the obvious programming or scheduling factor, I asked him whether the influence of environmental or ecological dimensions on the musician is as important (although obviously different) as the people listening to him. Treichler referred to his contribution to the *Aubes musicales* (Musical Sunrises),<sup>484</sup> which took place on 27 July 2014, less than three months before the eco-event in Beirut. In order to prepare for such an occasion, which was centred around the sunrise and located at a popular public bath by Lake Geneva, Treichler attended two or three earlier concerts in the programme.<sup>485</sup> Here, water and sky were the setting that the artist had to consider, as well as the

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<sup>484</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvQnR5-MOqw> (accessed 21 December 2016).

<sup>485</sup> For ten years, from the end of July until the end of August, music concerts have been organized at the Bains des Pâquis in Geneva, in the early morning. The timing and duration of the concerts are synched with the sunrise.

weather. Architecture and population can also be a decisive factor, as in the case of the Baz'Art festival,<sup>486</sup> starting on a Friday afternoon and finishing at midday on Sunday, in Lissignol – a building that had been squatted in the 1980s and 1990s, was famous for its self-organised alternative cultural activities, and whose diverse inhabitants coloured the atmosphere in different ways throughout the day. The institutional context within which an artist reacts, in parallel or in complement to the industry or the market, is also important. Treichler referred to my invitation to perform for eight consecutive hours at the Kunsthalle Bern in June 2015, in the framework of the curatorial project *Morgenröte...* (see Chapter 4).<sup>487</sup> We had some preparation meetings, discussions and email exchanges that took the form of brainstorming, but the core of his work found its resolution during the performance itself. According to Treichler, music is ultimately a matter of time: to render the temporal perception shorter or longer for the listener.

### **5.10 *Franz Treichler Plays Dada***

Treichler is an artist dealing with many contingencies, and trying to make the best out of the diverse conditions with which he is confronted. Having co-founded the rock band Young Gods in the 1980s, how did he end up performing to a Fluxus movie in the context of contemporary art? Besides his rock career with Young Gods, he has for many years developed collaborations with artists, from choreographers to filmmakers. But how did he encounter Dada? In 2008, the programmer of the cinema theatre The Bourg in Lausanne invited him to compose music for a silent movie. Trichler declined the offer, judging a canonical silent movie like *Nosferatu* too narrative for his abstract approach. But the proposal to work with moving images was still on his mind when he saw some Dada and Fluxus movies screened by another cinema theatre, Bio in Carouge, a few months later in a programme curated by art history and theory professors of the HEAD, University of Art and Design in Geneva: *Un parcours dans l'histoire du cinéma d'artistes et des expérimentations filmiques des années 20 aux années 1970* (A journey Through the History of Artists' Cinema and Movie Experimentation from the 1920s to the 1970s).<sup>488</sup> Fluxus, claiming Dada as their ancestors, used movies and projections as an

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<sup>486</sup> <http://www.baz-art.ch/2016/> (accessed 21 December 2016).

<sup>487</sup> Donatella Bernardi, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, Humboldt Books, Milan, 2016, pp. 67–67.

<sup>488</sup> [http://www.cinema-bio.ch/FILMS/HorsSerie/HEAD\\_08/HEAD-PRG1.htm](http://www.cinema-bio.ch/FILMS/HorsSerie/HEAD_08/HEAD-PRG1.htm) (accessed 22 December 2016).

artistic medium, but rejecting the frontal situation that the viewer traditionally adopts in cinema. Fluxus movies were ‘wall paintings’ to be projected on cubes, or within installations and other spatial languages. Where does art start and stop when a movie, a time-based artwork, is part of an environment that is not only a sculpture (an object perceived by the viewer externally), but affects the entire space and includes the body and perception of the viewer in the work itself? This question, which doesn’t necessarily have any definitive answer or conclusion, was at stake on the rooftop terrace of STATION, Beirut. The hypothesis that I can provide is precisely contained in the formula ‘eco-event’. But let me continue to discuss Treichler’s answer to my initial question before getting back to my own thoughts.

Out of the silent movies screened by the HEAD, Treichler chose for his own work the most ‘abstract’ (those without a recognisable narrative). All of them are humorous. *James Riddle’s Fluxfilm No. 6*, with its countdown of 9 minutes in white numbers on a plain background, particularly points to the perception of time – a crucial element in Treichler’s interest in music making. It is well known that the perception of time is linked to emotion, so if time seems to go slower than usual in Riddle’s film, does this imply that we are bored? Is it possible to prolong an enjoyable moment or, on the contrary, when sounds, melody or rhythm provoke pleasure, must time appear shorter than it is? Perhaps time can be seen as the ultimate and most acute measurement tool to fathom our feelings, from the greatest happiness to the deepest despair or desolation.

In order to further his initial and persistent enquiry into the perception of time, Treichler added to his Dada and Fluxus series a film by the Austrian artist Martin Arnold. Here, a simple everyday action lasting for 6 seconds is repeated without variation for more than 10 minutes. Made in 1989, this work anticipates the infinite gifs that we create and share with our smartphones.<sup>489</sup> But when using Arnold’s work, Treichler isn’t interested in commenting on our digital condition; rather he is interested in the repetition of the action itself. Through a simple time-based act – for example, a person opening a door in order to leave the room – one is encouraged to think about the routine and repetition that everyone experiences: waking up each morning and going to sleep each night, coupled with the passing of time and our constant evolution from birth to

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<sup>489</sup> <http://giphy.com/> (accessed 23 December 2016).

death. By looping the footage, the Austrian artist manages to give to a simple action, opening a door, a double semantic encoding: on the one hand we immediately understand that Arnold has ‘copied and pasted’ a single frame of found footage rather than filmed an actor repeating the action, while on the other hand, in consequence of this, the film reflects the repetitive character of an action that happens so many times in a single life. This paradox is wonderfully expressed by Virginia Woolf, but in a more romantic or expressionist manner, when referring to the cycles of weather conditions, something that was touched upon above, regarding event.<sup>490</sup>

After having selected the movies for his performance *Franz Treichler Plays Dada*, and having composed the music, the artist presented this piece at The Bourg (the venue that had initially approached him to interact with silent cinema) in January 2009, and in September at the Geneva-based Festival La Bâtie, as well as the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris, and some years later in Beirut. Out of his multiple and complex repertoire, Treichler proposed this piece to me, associating his interest in Dada and Fluxus, two artistic movements famous for having challenged notions of rationality through poetry and collage,<sup>491</sup> with the surrealistic figure of an imaginary ‘Swiss Zebra’, a geographically impossible animal. The association was, then, based as much on the signifier as on the signified.

### **5.11 *Helvetic Zebra*: signifier and signified**

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<sup>490</sup> ‘Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference. Listening (had there been anyone to listen) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself.’ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 110.

<sup>491</sup> See, for example, Robert Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 1951; Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002.



The title of the show, comprised of two words, the adjective ‘Helvetic’ and the noun ‘Zebra’, creates a dadaist or surreal juxtaposition, almost an oxymoron, where the signification of the two associated elements cancel themselves out in an impossible notion. A Swiss nationality was attributed to an animal considered exotic from a Western perspective. As the author of this title, I would claim that, beyond its more functional role as one of the necessary elements of an exhibition (venue, museum director or gallery owner, curator, artist, title, artworks, floor plan, labels, opening, audience), it stood as my autonomous conceptual language-based artwork.<sup>492</sup> What is signified is, then, an impossible animal, if one considers national belonging from a legal point of view – and nationality cannot be more than a legal matter. Indeed, Swiss citizenship is based on the *jus sanguinis* law rather than *jus soli*: even those born in Switzerland are not Swiss unless at least one parent is a citizen of the state. Thus a zebra, even if born in a Swiss zoo, cannot be Swiss. Furthermore, an animal can hardly apply for ‘naturalisation’ without the help of a human being who owns and patronises it. In this way the exoticism that characterises the zebra becomes tainted with colonialism. The animal originating from Africa is transferred to Europe and subjected to superficial aesthetic judgement of its stylish stripes, which are now devoid of any practical function. But beside this absurd truth, communicated thanks to the assemblage of two words, an elegant and singular animal is nevertheless signified. More than a humble horse, generating as much fantasy as the unicorn but real, it is dignified by its highly photogenic pattern, often recreated in the field of applied arts and crafts, such as textile design, and borrowed for the zebra crossing, a codified sign that tells vehicles to stop for pedestrians. One of the most famous depictions of a zebra crossing is the Beatles’ Abbey Road album cover.<sup>493</sup> This single example shows the powerful visual quality of zebra stripes as a highly simplified graphic device: a series of black and white rectangular surfaces. Due to this common agreement among the members of a community designed for the sake of good traffic regulation (everyone knows to interpret a zebra crossing as a functional floor painting and not as a public art intervention), bodies and vehicles can pursue their journeys safely in perpendicular vectors, as if walking or rolling on a zebra skin spread out on the soil, just as animal pelts decorate bourgeois interiors as

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<sup>492</sup> See, for example, Laurence Weiner (ed.), *Laurence Weiner*, Phaidon, London, 1998; Gerti Fietzek and Gregor Stemmrch (eds.), *Having Been Said: Writings & Interviews of Laurence Weiner 1968–2003*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin, 2004.

<sup>493</sup> Photograph taken by Iain Macmillan on 8 August 1969.

embodiments of very different codes. With what kind of concession or dialogue must one engage, in order to oscillate from one human code – the rules of the road – to another – exotic loot as evidence of class? How to bridge the signifier – the title of the show or of the music to be performed by Treichler – with the signified – the absurdity communicated by ‘Helvetic Zebra’, or the audience’s perception of time while looking and listening to Franz Treichler Plays Dada? Helvetic Zebra and its metonym Franz Treichler Plays Dada (the musician’s piece being one part of my curatorial proposal for STATION), proposed a connection, a relationship between these two poles that are most of the time seen as a clear dichotomy.

The eco-event that happened on the rooftop terrace of STATION on 10 October 2014 needed both of these poles in order to become the powerful moment that I am discussing here: the music and film had to allow me to experience a distortion of time in order that I, as an artist, human being and citizen, could fully grasp the heaviness of the clouds, their possible rupture, as well as the intensity of the situation. For Treichler, this occurrence of the piece was unique because happening in Beirut, a politically unstable location, but musically, he performed what was written in his score and did not adapt his music to the situation. The event dimension, which means the uniqueness of this situation, relies on the context and the environment into which the performance was inscribed. Treichler did not plan the clouds, nor the dramatic feeling generated by the surrounding building site, and nor did he take them into account while playing. I am the one claiming this ‘eco-event’ that came out of the situation, just as I was the one who wrote about an ‘event’ in Salvador da Bahia after *Eternal Tour*, an ‘event’ before *Smoking Up Ambition!*, and an event as a collateral effect of *Morgenröte...* Here I will clarify the notion of ‘eco-’ and my understanding of the term ‘eco-event’, which I have coined in order to describe in the best possible manner what I witnessed in Beirut on 10 October 2014.

### **5.12 ‘Eco-’, ‘eco-feminism’ and ‘eco-event’**

Following my interest in and use of feminism in the previous chapters, I have referred in this chapter to ‘eco-feminism’, an activist and philosophical movement. The term eco-feminism (‘eco’ being taken from the ancient Greek for house or environment) was coined in 1974 by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne to draw attention to women’s

potential in creating an ecological revolution.<sup>494</sup> According to eco-feminists, questions of class, race and gender as well as the rights of trees, water and animals are all feminist issues because they highlight the interconnections between the domination of women and of other subordinate groups of humans, as well as the domination of non-human nature by humans. This unbalanced situation is obviously not only a matter of concern for women, but Western women have an almost ‘historical’ role to play, having already reflected on their position in relation to their dominators, Western men. How to formulate a language and thinking with which to address this? Catherine Malabou writes in her essay *Changer de différence, Le Féminin et la question philosophique (2009)* about the challenge of practising philosophy as a woman, and in doing so traces the different paths that women thinkers have opened up, sometimes antagonistic ones. She doesn’t hesitate to recall her journey as a philosophy student in the misogynist French higher education system<sup>495</sup> and her later career as an academic.<sup>496</sup> What better way is there to describe the environment, whether professional, geographical or socio-political, that women and other groups are dealing with than to describe, like Chris Kraus or Carla Lonzi, one’s own situation?<sup>497</sup> In such an enquiry, the body is inevitably a pivotal point to address. Assessing the last decades of institutionalised feminism, deconstruction and gender theory, and stating that ‘perhaps women have changed nothing in institutional authority and the exercise of such authority’, Malabou renounces power in order to prioritise what is *possible*.<sup>498</sup> Women might not become dominant, or even equal, but *there are other possible ways to evolve and achieve.*

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<sup>494</sup> To introduce some of the ideas of eco-feminism, I refer mainly in this chapter to Karen J. Warren’s *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, Oxford, 2000. Warren’s book, mainly focused on philosophy, has the quality to present, summarize and expose many thoughts and works of others, while still discussing their relevance.

<sup>495</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference*, trans. Carolyn Shread, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 113–114.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–116.

<sup>497</sup> Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (1997), is an example of a woman facing the male hegemony of her direct surroundings (the North American artistic and academic system), and trying to become the subject of her own novel while remaining inscribed in the time and space of which she is part. Writing a novel, whether auto-biographical or fictional, becomes the tool and the space to elaborate on her interaction with men, but without restaging a dominated-dominating dynamic.

<sup>498</sup> ‘We must open new paths, but we must not reject, in the name of a radical “anti-essentialism,” the work that led to this insistence on the feminine. Once again, anti-essentialist violence and deconstructive violence work hand in hand to empty woman of herself, to disembowel her. In this sense, they match ordinary violence. Perhaps women

There is no room here to discuss whether what eco-feminists call ‘domination’ and what Malabou refers to as ‘authority’ and ‘power’ are exactly equivalent in the specific context of feminism, but all argue for the renunciation of such terms in order to engage in other kinds of relationships. Indeed, eco-feminism encourages a rethink, an attempt to find an alternative not only to the gendered power relationship, but also to the more generic equation: to dominate or to be dominated. Is domination or oppression a sustainable way of living? Can or should human beings and living things be exclusively considered as either active or passive creatures? Is it possible to separate the different elements of nature? In the case of the planet and the way human beings have interacted with it so far (exploiting natural resources in order to fulfill the requirements of everyday consumption), Michel Serres answered this question in 1990, by referring to the technologies of communications and by pointing at ‘the cords that tie us together’, whether ‘nutritive, material, scientific and technological, informatical, aesthetic, religious’.<sup>499</sup> The ‘eco-event’ created by *Franz Treichler Plays Dada* and the storm in becoming, is a perfect example of the fusion or amalgamation described by Serres.

Among eco-feminism’s many interesting concepts and ideas are a rejection of ‘speciesism’;<sup>500</sup> an embrace of ‘stewardship’<sup>501</sup> instead of domination; a belief in ‘social

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have changed nothing in institutional authority and the exercise of such authority, but then again nor has deconstruction and gender theory. After all, perhaps that’s not even the problem. There comes a time to “do without”, to leave behind the masculine, the feminine, and all the other models. A time to abandon the question of authority. [...] We must go off on our own, move on, break with, clear new spaces, become possible, in other words, give up power. Power can do nothing against the possible.’ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140.

<sup>499</sup> ‘Our technologies make up a system of cords or traits, of exchanges of power and information, which goes from the local to the global, and the Earth answers us, from the global to the local. I am simply describing these cords so as to speak, in several voices, of science, technology, and law. [...] Bound together by the most powerful web of communications lines we have ever spun, we comprehend the Earth and it comprehends us, not just on the level of philosophic speculation, which wouldn’t have been all that important, but in an enormous play of energies that could become deadly to those who inhabit this contract. [...] The cords that tie us together form, in all, a third kind of world: they are nutritive, material, scientific and technological, informational, aesthetic, religious.’ Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995, pp. 109–110.

<sup>500</sup> Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

ecology'<sup>502</sup>, i.e. experiencing the other ecologically and not hierarchically, and the kinship of all creatures;<sup>503</sup> a celebration of American-Indians' disregard for any notion of property;<sup>504</sup> the argument that sentience (the faculty of suffering) and not rationality (Aristotle) or ability to use a language (Descartes) is what qualifies a being for moral consideration.<sup>505</sup> As the organiser, producer and manager of my art and therefore as someone constantly struggling to find an ethical stand regarding leadership, I consider eco-feminism's attempt to address, connect and envision things differently from the 'dominating' versus 'being dominated' equation to be one of its major assets. Eco-feminists enunciate a variety of possibilities, and as remarked by Malabou above, power or authority can do nothing against the possible. Thus eco-feminists propose 'contextualism' instead of a series of 'isms' based on domination, such as sexism, classism, naturism,<sup>506</sup> inclusiveness;<sup>507</sup> recognition and acceptance of imperfect knowledge (such a vulnerable posture prevents any declared domination) and institutional constraints, leading to the development of current theories that become like quilts whose patches will fray, tatter and need to be replaced;<sup>508</sup> and an ethic of care rather than a traditional perspective of justice.<sup>509</sup> Countering the human-centred logic of Western thought, Donna Haraway suggests that we should consider nature as an active subject, which creates a different kind of relationship between the human and the non-human world. She conceives this relation to the non-human world as an interaction with a 'coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse'.<sup>510</sup> She and other eco-feminists such as Barbara McClintock have been most insistent on reflecting on the world as an active subject, to listen to, rather than to use in a way that we think will benefit our interests.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

<sup>510</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' in *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988), p. 593.

<sup>511</sup> E.g. Warren, *op. cit.* 'Nobel Prize-winning cytogeneticist Barbara McClintock is an example of a scientist who exemplifies Haraway's view on relating to nature as active subject or agent. Reflecting on her research on the maize plant, McClintock describes how she became 'friends' with each kernel of corn over her twenty years of research with the maize plant. [...] McClintock encourages scientists to "let the material [in her

Could we say that this shift of perspective was exactly what happened on the roof terrace in Beirut on 10 October 2014? Here, we experienced the clouds and the building site, not as barrier, nor a side factor to take into account while producing a performance (no matter what might happen with the clouds or the building-site lights, the show must go on), but as part of the work of art itself, powerfully bringing in the loaded political context, where time has its particular and unique intensity. Even if the performance of *Franz Treichler Plays Dada* wasn't a unique occurrence, and the activities on the STATION roof terrace continue to repeat themselves, *this moment was unique*. The 'eco-event' is an intersection between a stable and predictable set of data, know-how and products of the human will, and the instability and unpredictability of the environment. Being aware of the time passing isn't something that we can summon at any moment; such a meta-reflection would prevent us from conducting our lives.

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case, the corn plant] speak to you" by developing a "feeling for the organism." McClintock meant this literally, not figuratively or poetically.' Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Women, Science, and Popular Mythology', quoted in Joan Rotschild (ed.), *Machina Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology*, Pergamon, New York, 1983, p. 141.

## 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Form, chronology, contributions

The form taken by this thesis is straightforward and sophisticated in equal measure. On the one hand, it is straightforward in the sense that it consists of five chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The images are used to illustrate my words and are therefore subordinate to the text. This neither exceeds nor challenges the framework of an academic thesis as an artistic-practice-based PhD would have done, where the visual material as well as the curatorial projects produced in the framework of the research would have been handled very differently and the final text-based thesis could have been turned into an exhibition, a performance etc. On the other hand, this thesis is sophisticated in the sense that its text is multi-layered, bringing together heteroclitic and heterogeneous material, even if linked by an overall theme – the 'event'. Different threads, such as feminism and contemporary art are developed throughout the chapters, in complement to my main subject of interest and inquiry. In addition to this conceptual polyphony, the selected case studies – four of my artistic projects *Eternal Tour* (2008–12), *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2014), *Morgenröte...* (2015) and *Helvetic Zebra* (2014) – are not addressed in chronological order, but according to the events to which they relate, from the most embodied to the most environmental.

In this conclusion, I propose to summarise some of the ideas and data introduced and discussed in this thesis. One of the most important of my own contributions to research and the production of knowledge is the creation of two novel concepts, the 'echo-event' (Chapter 4) and the 'eco-event' (Chapter 5). These concretize my form of approach and extension of the philosophical concept of event, thanks to analysis of two of my case studies, *Morgenröte...* (2015) and *Helvetic Zebra* (2014). While nurtured by two artistic endeavours, this double invention is a truly philosophical one and is a very good example of what philosophy should be doing, according to Friedrich Nietzsche and later to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who reflect and extend Nietzsche's statement in their famous essay—or even manifesto—*What is Philosophy?* (1991).

Nietzsche laid down the task of philosophy when he wrote, '[Philosophers] must no longer accept concepts as a gift, nor merely purify and polish them, but first make and create them, present them and make them convincing.'<sup>512</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari consider this creation of concepts as a method for understanding what is at stake in conceptual analysis, even in regard to the initial concept provided or studied (in my case the event), or put differently: the only way to practice any kind of philosophy entails the creation of concepts, a process of 'construction of concepts within possible experience on the one hand and through intuition on the other. For, according to the Nietzschean verdict, you will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them – that is, constructed them in an intuition specific to them.'<sup>513</sup> The creation of concepts obviously requires the use of language, because any newly created concept needs to be named. A concept is embodied conceptually to become linguistically flesh:

Some concepts must be indicated by an extraordinary and sometimes even barbarous or shocking word, whereas others make do with an ordinary, everyday word (...). Some concepts call for archaisms, and other for neologisms. (...) In each case there must be a strange necessity for these words and their choice.<sup>514</sup>

In my case, I choose to add a prefix to the word 'event': firstly 'echo' and secondly 'eco-'. Neither are equivalent linguistically, as the first one is a word in itself, and the second a prefix. Nevertheless, these assemblages have the particularity of differing from each other only through one letter: a 'c' missing in the second. This subtle differentiation is something that I clearly opted for as a remarkable, noticeable and therefore precious feature in the context of a single PhD thesis. These two concepts are indeed very closely tied to each other, possessing almost equal orthographies. Each is totally dependent on the 'event', extending and specifying it in a complementary manner, in the first case featuring an introverted, confessional and self-reflective dynamic, the second an extroverted energy.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 1991 (trans. Hugh Tomlison and Graham Burchill, Verso, London, New York, 1994, p. 5.)

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>515</sup> 'In any concept there are usually bits or components that come from other concepts (...) Here concepts link up with each other, support one another, coordinate their



Another valuable and novel contribution of this PhD thesis, this time in the field of qualitative research, is the discussion of Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto* in regard to autoethnography. Until now, while Lonzi is recognised for her important contribution to art history as well as to Italian feminism, *Autoritratto*, her contribution to autoethnography has never before been acknowledged, either by Lonzi or by others. To put it differently, even if Lonzi did not contextualise her work in the ethnographical field, but was rather searching for a working method that would suit her inquiry in writing and witnessing a chapter of contemporary art history, she does contribute with this work to the field of autoethnography (even analytical autoethnography). Having been greatly inspired by the creativity and freedom that characterises the processing of her data – the editing of a series of interviews into one unique discussion, a text that rather than respecting the chronology of the recordings is arranged thematically – I scheduled eight 'Piece-discussions' in the context of *Smoking Up Ambition!*. Consequently, my way of presenting, analysing and approaching the event and the work of Lonzi is not only thoroughly embedded within the context of this academic text; it leads concretely, through a kind of active appropriation, to new terms – in correlation with particular ephemera, as well as new curatorial formats. Thanks to this thesis, I contribute to Lonzi's corpus in a unique way by expanding potential interest in her work to new disciplines, apart from those in which she is already recognized (art history, art criticism and feminism). It is important to note here that over the last decade, a renewed interest for Lonzi's oeuvre has been taking place, not only in Italy, where a considerable number of philological works, editing and reeditions of Lonzi's texts, as well as historical contextualisations have been published,<sup>516</sup> but also in France, with the release for

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contours, articulate their respective problems, and belong to the same philosophy, even if they have different histories,' *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>516</sup> See, for example: Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, foreword by Laura Iamurri, et al. / EDIZIONI, Milan, 2010; Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla, Diario di una femminista, Volume primo 1972–1973, Volume secondo 1974–1977*, postscript by Annarosa Buttarelli, et al. / EDIZIONI, Milan, 2010; Carla Lonzi, *Scritti sull'arte*, foreword by Laura Iamurri, eds. Lara Conte, Laura Iamurri, Vanessa Martini, et al. / EDIZIONI, Milan, 2012; Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti*, postscript by Maria Luisa Boccia, et al. / ECONOMICA, 2010; Carla Lonzi, *Vai pure, Dialogo con Pietro Consagra*, et al. / EDIZIONI, Milan, 2011; about the work of Carla Lonzi, see, for example: Maria Luisa Boccia, *Con Carla Lonzi, La mia opera è la mia vita*, Ediesse, Rome, 2014; Laura Iamurri, *Un margine che sfugge, Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955–1970*, Quodlibet Studio, Macereta, 2016; about a direct

example of a translation of *Autoritratto* into French.<sup>517</sup> In the English-speaking world as well, more specifically in England and in the United States of America, Lonzi is studied, taught in some universities, written about and contextualized in the historical period to which she belongs and debated by young artists, academics and cultural producers. The work done so far, absolutely important, has positioned itself as a rather historical, theoretical, curatorial and artistic, without engaging in fields beyond art history, contemporary art and feminism. It has obviously taken into consideration important issues such as translation and the updating of works from the corpus of the 1970s into our current context, to include for example queer theory,<sup>518</sup> but certainly not considered Lonzi's legacy as a potential method for sociological, organisational or management studies as in this thesis.

The creation of two concepts, echo-event and eco-event, fulfilling the requirement of philosophy as stated by Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the inscription of Lonzi's *Autoritratto* into the field of autoethnography, are the two first contributions of my thesis. The third one consists of a specific and original insertion of the field of embodied practice and knowledge making into that of critical management studies and organisation theory. Indeed, the body, as much as feminism, is a constant parameter that delineates and fosters my research. The body in use as a tool, as a measure, is mine of course, crossing different institutions and geographical places, but I also bring others' bodies into consideration: some performers and spectators in Salvador da Bahia, a confessional voice in the Kunsthalle in Bern, Josephine Baker's painted on a basement wall, and those of interviewees Aline Morvan and Franz Treichler, just to quote a few examples. The body in this context isn't neutral but gendered, in the case of the one that

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use of Lonzi's text in an artist film, Angela Marzullo, 'Let's Spit on Hegel', in *Home Schooling*, NERO, Rome, 2015, pp. 205–229.

<sup>517</sup> Carla Lonzi, *Autoportrait*, Giovanna Zapperi (ed.), trans. Marie-Ange Maire-Vigueur, JRP|Ringier, Zurich, 2012.

<sup>518</sup> Francesco Ventrella, Giovanna Zapperi, *Feminism and Art in Postwar Italy: The Legacy of Carla Lonzi*, I. B. Tauris, London, not yet published; Judith Russi Kirshner, 'Voices & Images of Italian Feminism', in *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, pp. 384–399; Helena Reckitt, 'Generating Feminisms: Italian Feminisms and the 'Now You Can Go' Program', in *Art Journal*, Volume 76 (3–4), 2017, Taylor & Francis Online, pp. 101–111, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00043249.2017.1418495> (accessed 21 May 2018); the research and teaching of Teresa Kittler at the University of York, Department of History of Art.

writes this thesis, mine, as well as the one that it reading it. You need a body in order to do your research, to feel and write emotions. Emotions like curiosity, empathy and wonder are important factors that influence different stages of research and analytical processes: various aspects of embodiment are taken into consideration in this thesis, in the context of philosophy, of art criticism, of autoethnography as well as organisation. This gendered embodiment, keeping a critical distance from what one can expect from a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’, rather than involving a labiaplasty to conform to the standard and normalised way of writing an academic thesis,<sup>519</sup> leads to a unique and multiform textual formalisation and redaction. In so doing, it explores new manners of writing, namely ‘the possibility of learning, and the political opening up of a space within organization studies where we can play with the fluctuating possibilities of gender.’<sup>520</sup> This thesis, with its strong commitment to various disciplines, voices and an intersectional method or even epistemology, is an exemplification of how ‘a gendered mode of research praxis (...) might destabilize, undermine and confuse the implicit yet powerful dominance of masculine theorizing in organization studies.’<sup>521</sup> Narrative and storytelling are part of this destabilization, and they are consciously used in this thesis, the latter definitely contributing to the field of embodied practices, including gendering and queering, in organisation and critical management theory.

## **6.2 Necessity and contingency, echo and ecology**

The event implies an engagement with necessity and contingency. Certain things have to exist in order for others to appear. This thesis has been an occasion to think about whether and how these two entities interact together. Time, repetition and evolution, rupture and persistence, become part of an artwork when it is addressed and reflected through the lens of the event. Indeed, the event challenges the lasting quality of the artwork as much as its apparent autonomy: reception is at stake, because an event cannot be noticed and elaborated upon without a viewer or a listener. The event also implies a reflection on historical construction, the naming of certain milestones and

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<sup>519</sup> Alison Pullen, ‘Writing as Labiaplasty’ in *Organization*, Volume 25 (1), Sage, London, 2018, pp. 123–130.

<sup>520</sup> Mary Phillips, Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, ‘Writing Organization as Gendered Practice: Interrupting the Libidinal Economy’, in *Organization Studies*, Volume 35 (3), Sage, London, 2013, p. 315.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

phenomena, the way in which past episodes, when they gain in significance and consistency, allow one to learn about the present moment but also encourage one to create new art pieces or other initiatives (Chapters 1 and 4). The event doesn't have to be public or accessible to the public per se – a news item might be enough (Chapter 3). An artwork, however, does have to be made public in order to be considered, acknowledged, recognised and legitimised as such.

Out of the four case studies that I have chosen to discuss in this thesis, the notion of event has transpired in two opposite directions, which I have crystallised through two terms: the introverted *echo-event* (Chapter 4), continuously coming back to itself, and the extroverted *eco-event* (Chapter 5), opening up towards the environment surrounding it, including the notions of time and space (physical and geo-political). Both are the result of a combination of what has been done in the field of art, and what this thesis has given me the possibility to explore intellectually and physically.

In the case of the 'echo-event', in order to explore the differences between the event and the artwork, I conceptualised an entire art project, having in mind the event as a meta-level that could structure and influence my artistic practice. *Morgenröte...*, discussed in Chapter 4, was shaped according to a constant formal evolution, resulting in a powerful 'echo-event', as a product of an artwork whose origin was found in a family archive and happened to resonate with an artwork embedded in the Kunsthalle Bern's walls. In that case, I needed to take two steps in order to delineate the ins and the outs of this particular event. Firstly, I published an artist's book, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, related to the curatorial project instead of a classical exhibition catalogue – a book structured around time, with a double page per week, like a diary of the exhibition. Secondly, in the context of this thesis, I analysed some of the pages of this publication in order to point even more precisely to how the 'echo-event' came about, how directly I was involved in its creation and how much the institution itself influenced it. Therefore, if the event implies thinking about time, it also challenges the notion of the subject, the idea of a singular point of view in relation to art, and how an artwork affects a subject. If things are unstable, they still rely on a combination of materiality and immateriality, physical bodies, emotions and desires, just as a production depends on economic as well as political factors. Once associated with art making, the event amplifies all the elements that are needed to provoke something that is most of the time intangible.

In the case of the ‘eco-event’, my interest in feminist literature, particularly in post-modernist feminist philosophy, brought me to consider ‘eco-feminism’. However, I was addressing artworks and situations where the woman’s position wasn’t the only one. For example, in Brazil, skin colour was a crucial element to take into consideration along with the gendered identity: the witch performed by Angela Marzullo at SESC Consolação in São Paulo and the cabaret artist in Salvador de Bahia are representative of such complexity (Chapter 2).

What happened in Beirut on 10 October 2014 during the performance *Franz Treichler Plays Dada*, led me to consider the function of time as well as that of landscape in escaping the human domination of nature, and from there, I came up with ‘eco-event’, a composite term that associates the event, in the context of art (Heidegger) with its environment, as a new formation.

### **6.3 Dematerialisation**

Discussing the event in the context of contemporary art, a non-materially based but highly discursive process, required a particular attention to conceptual art and the importance of language or enunciation of ideas, over the traditional supremacy of the physical art object. In the 1970s, some art historians identified this kind of artistic practice as ‘dematerialisation’. Thus this enquiry brought me back to that period, during which many artists developed performances, happenings and other artworks based on gestures and actions, and where the body of the artist, in particular the bodies of female artists, became visible to the viewers’ eyes. By analysing such works, and comparing them with some of my own, I came to think about a shift in materialisation or embodiment, rather than a simple dematerialisation. Indeed, if no object is produced in order to escape a materialistic conception and consumption of art, the gesture of the artist gains in importance, as well as the presence of the viewer’s body. In order to illustrate this shift – to show what or whom becomes materialised or tangible – it suffices to mention the many bodies – of the performer and her or his audience – visible in any performance documentation. ‘Embodied gesture’ could be a formula to describe such a fact.

The curatorial act was also included in such an evolution. Indeed, at a certain point in history it became accepted that the creation of a constellation of artworks by others had enough intellectual value to be authored and credited. Physical objects are still there, but another layer is added: the intention or the narrative that brings them together. My relationship to the event and the way in which it allows me to think about art (my own or other people's) isn't so far removed from such a move. Even though I associated the philosophical notion of the event with some of my own artistic productions, this did not result in additional physical objects, but rather turned into sense-making and discursive production. In parallel to this way of reflecting on dematerialisation, digitalisation, the binary encoding of data, the new quality and aesthetic thereby produced, and its impact on communication technology, can be indirectly connected to the event through the influence it exerts on our perception of time, space and the way we interact. Anthony Giddens, in synchronicity with Michel Serres, states, 'Globalisation can [...] be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.'<sup>522</sup>

The relational impact of products acting on a molecular scale, such as hormones that reach into the core of our intimacy and desire, is elaborated by Paul B. Preciado, quoted in this thesis not only as a major feminist influence, but also as a way to discuss philosophical and political notions anchored in the exploration of gender and the reading of the environment. The Spanish thinker, particularly in *Testo Junkie, Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in The Pharmacopornographic Era* (2008), manages to combine auto-fictional narratives of everyday life, as well as historical and theoretical material in a simple publication. Some might say that Preciado's book is a product of the testosterone that was self-administrated by its author. Nevertheless, the work is also an example of how different kinds of registers can be associated, like a literary collage, in the frame of a unique body of work, showing that the personal scale can be of help when thinking more generally and universally. As mentioned previously, heterogeneity – i.e., the combination of different disciplines and the assemblage of different types of sources, such as personal data, historical and theoretical references, as well as transcriptions of interviews –

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<sup>522</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990, p. 64.

constituted one of the challenges of writing this thesis. I found some very helpful methodological points in self-ethnography and postmodern anthropology (in relation to the work of Lonzi, on which I will elaborate below), and also in critical management theory, in particular in the essays of Robert Cooper.

#### 6.4 Critical management theory

How much do artworks cost, not economically, but in terms of energy and human resources? How do they come about? Certain projects take years to materialise, and others need time to become interesting and graspable for an audience. Scale or size has little correspondence with the quality of a body of work: a single poem can be as powerful or meaningful as 20 volumes of an encyclopedia, and a single performance or painting can have more impact than a festival featuring dozens of artists. Art is made from a variety of ingredients that are down-to-earth, hands-on, logistically orientated but also at first sight quite abstract, such as the internal drive or desire of the artist, the psychology of working partners, her or his network, and the context of the work – commercial, political or institutional. All these factors that have to be taken into consideration by the artist, as the project leader of his or her initiative, come together in a logistical machinery that escapes neither time nor bookkeeping.

In the limited format of this thesis, I chose two art pieces to exemplify this ‘proximal’ perspective on things, to quote Robert Cooper and John Law’s *Organization: Distal and Proximal Views* (1995),<sup>523</sup> one of the critical management texts that helped me to formulate my ideas. The first, a project made in collaboration with the French independent curator Fabienne Bideaud, *Smoking Up Ambition!* (2010–14), discussed in Chapter 3, had to be rethought many times in order to find its concretisation and final shape, which happened after four years of research, discussion with institutions and fundraising. The second, *Franz Treichler Plays Dada* (2009), explored in Chapter 5, was an occasion to transcribe, after an exclusive interview, the working method, creative process and context in which the Swiss composer oscillates between his own need for music making, the impulse given by certain institutional programmers (the latter having

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<sup>523</sup> In *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 13, JAI Press, London, 1995, pp. 237–274.

the power to produce and make public new art pieces), and also the different artistic influences that a creative mind considers while developing a career. One other interview, in Chapter 3, with artist Aline Morvan, was further opportunity to illustrate the complex processes that are at stake. These two interviews also represented the voices of those trying to make sense of cultural products both locally and internationally. The proximal view of creative management that I adopted, visible through these testimonies, also shows how projects of limited scope and major, predefined strategies, including their predictable or at least expected results, intertwine and nourish themselves like interconnected vessels.

## **6.5 Feminism: from postmodernism to eco-feminism**

I have written about the event as a complex thematic that is sufficiently multi-faceted to bring in heterogeneous material. But I have also asked how and from which point of view it should be addressed. As stated in the introduction, I chose to include in this thesis my own positionality as a female artist as well as a female professor of fine art in a Scandinavian institutional context where artistic research has a very particular and foregrounded position, as clearly acknowledged by the Swedish choreographer Efva Lilja.<sup>524</sup> Starting by looking at how feminism can be compatible with philosophical texts written by male authors, such as those quoted in Chapter 1 – Heidegger, Deleuze, Badiou and Lyotard – I continued to refer to the work of feminist thinkers, such as Ahmed, Braidotti, Haraway or Preciado, in particular their relationship towards embodiment, when, in Chapter 2, I addressed an event that took place in a cabaret. In Chapter 3, a news item, which I evaluated as an event that was powerful and inspiring enough to form the basis of an art project, characterised by sado-masochist behaviour, allowed me to reflect a little more on the unbalanced power relationship between men and women, as reported by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in his moral lesson at the very end of his novel *Venus in Furs* (1870). In Chapter 4, my constant reliance on feminism brought me to consider which familial relationships and kinships, such as motherhood, sisterhood and brotherhood, as an alternative to fatherhood, so deeply embedded and associated with hierarchy and patriarchy, can be used to rethink and elaborate on more productive

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<sup>524</sup> Efva Lilja, *Art, Research, Empowerment, The Artist as Researcher*, Regeringskansliet, Stockholm, 2015.



and emancipating forms of genealogies. Finally, in Chapter 5, while referring to Catherine Malabou's *Changing Difference* (2009) and her proposal to go beyond the established separation between essentialism and existentialism, eco-feminist philosophy allowed me to formulate one of the major academic contributions of this thesis: the notion of 'eco-event'.

'Eco-event' is based on a reflection developed thanks to the impact and the reach of the event that happened on the evening of 10 October 2014, on the occasion of the performance *Franz Treichler Plays Dada* on STATION's rooftop terrace in Beirut, just before a tempest, together with the intellectual speculation that art, if it becomes an event, need not limit itself to an art production offered to the audience's attention. So, if the audience is not the only factor to consider when thinking about an event 'sheltered in art' (Heidegger), there are obviously more factors to consider. What or who are they, and how do they interact within the 'eco-event'? Learning from 'eco-feminism', the 'eco-event' is the manifestation of a dynamic transcending the traditional Western dichotomy made between nature and culture, body and mind, rational and irrational etc., or an acceptance that any relationship is driven by a dominating–dominated power structure. A follow-up question would be: can power be defined outside domination? I have no space to reflect on this question here, but my instinctive response would be 'no'. For the time being, we can conclude that neither power nor domination is part of the conceptual and ideological constellation of semantics surrounding the eco-event, which relies on other dynamics, such as agency, stewardship, social ecology or experiencing the other ecologically and not hierarchically.<sup>525</sup> Such a gaze in no way negates criticality. On the contrary, out of the 'eco-event' of 10 October in Beirut, I elaborated a critique of the high capitalist system at stake in Beirut, in the context of the Syrian war.

## 6.6 Institutional critique

Any kind of thought or object needs a framework in which to exist and in which it can be noted as existing. Permanent institutions such as schools of art or universities, but also nomadic ones like biennales or festivals, provide good frameworks for production and

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<sup>525</sup> Karen J. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, Oxford, 2000.

for the dissemination of scientific as well as artistic works: they are financial and communicational devices. I have mentioned some of them in this thesis in relation to the artworks produced: the Swiss Institute of Rome, Kunsthalle Bern, STATION in Beirut, and FCAC (Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain de Genève). Any artist has the option to integrate into her or his projects certain characteristics of the institution hosting their art. Depending on the way in which this a priori external factor is addressed, this comment might be critical or not, eventually bringing some extra meaning to the work. Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how each of my projects was site-specific, addressing in their final visual results the circumstances in which they were embedded, either as a source of inspiration or taken as an occasion to subvert some kind of expectation. In parallel and in complement to these already existing structures, artists sometimes generate their own managerial entities, such as associations, in order to organise the work collectively and raise money to pay themselves and their collaborators. I co-founded and co-managed such independent and non-profit structures in order to achieve three of my four projects: *Eternal Tour* (produced thanks to an eponymous association that was dissolved in July 2016), as well as *Smoking Up Ambition!* and *Helvetica Zebra* (co-produced by the association Golden Brain). This thesis has looked at the different organisational structures that allowed the realisation of the projects I was developing, and in the process it has become clear that their degree of stability, sustainability and professionalism greatly varied from one to another.

The association *Eternal Tour*, for example, the financial skeleton of a five-year long project that made six stops around the planet, was funded and run by artists and scientists. No trained manager was part of the initial organisation and no one actually became a member or employee of the association during our five-year evolution, although we consulted professional cultural producers from time to time. The institutional and self-organisational accounts that I have given in the framework of this thesis support the opinion that the quality of an artwork is more or less independent of the good or bad functioning of the structure from which it emanates, as long as the artist finds a way to reflect on his or her work.

This thesis, as an academic and institutional product, has given me the intellectual space and time to think about my work, philosophically but also pragmatically, since I chose the path of critical management, and it also pushes forwards the potential and

possibilities of my work. Even if the case studies that I have used were collective and shared initiatives, this thesis is strictly individual and engages only my personal reflections. Such a step – to turn results obtained through art into theoretical research about the event, positionality and aspects of critical management – demonstrates the potential as a ground for study that any art production holds, because of its constant oscillation between what I called *signifier* and *signified* in Chapter 5.

## **6.7 The relationship between art studying, art making and the university**

As an enunciating subject, I have claimed above my belonging as a woman while referring to many recognised feminist thinkers whose ideas have helped me to formulate and sharpen my own thoughts as well as to inscribe my work in an academic context. Furthermore, this feminist anchorage, opening up towards the potential of eco-feminism, has helped me to develop my research on the event. In complement to this move, I also evaluate my positionality or ‘situatedness’ as a methodological one. Indeed, as described in Chapter 4, since 2001 I have developed an art practice in parallel with studying in a university context, which has empowered me through reading and writing – first at the University of Geneva (2001–2006), and secondly on the occasion of the PhD programme at the School of Business and Management (SBM) of Queen Mary University in London (QMUL) (2014–2017). On the one hand, this kind of double employment is obviously problematic in terms of time investment and balancing between the two. On the other hand, it corresponds to the contemporary need for artists to be able to formulate their thinking as well as developing their writing skills, particularly in the English language. In the art field, since the dematerialisation period of the 1970s, great emphasis has been placed on the discursive capacity of the visual artist. Since the 1990s and the enlargement of the art scene to a global scale, developing a social network has become crucial. The rise of artistic research in the 2000s, and the new requirement for artists to hold a PhD in order to work in a higher education institution such as an art school or a university faculty of fine art, announced a particular move towards the institutionalisation of the creative protagonists of Western societies. Facing this multi-layered reality, I realised that the university, even though its pedagogical goals and knowledge production are not formatted for the development of artists’ practices, could be an empowering tool, if used and approached interestingly. By engaging in a university context, and therefore in the knowledge economy, in this case at the SBM of

the QMUL, a practising artist can nourish, by referring to his or her own practical and effective experience, the discussion that began more than a decade ago on the creative class<sup>526</sup> in the context of post-industrial societies, or of cognitive capitalism.<sup>527</sup> How do artists manage to combine their creative drive and needs with the systems of education, institution, art market, grant and fellowships within which they have to inscribe themselves in order to pursue their practice? How do they relate to knowledge production and the Academy? How do conditions, which may be precarious or more comfortable, influence their work? And how can capitalist enterprises learn from artists, who are very often excellent organisers, experienced in figuring out solutions in a variety of contexts? My thesis provides four case studies where the most pragmatic and conceptual aspects of art-making are exposed and discussed.

This thesis is an example of how artists, having developed entrepreneurial and managerial skills – I am only one example out of many – can contribute to an academic field by confronting the results of their work through reference to management literature, sociology or philosophy. As nicely put by Robert Cooper in *Open Field* (1976), any creative process is based on previous references that, though daunting and too massive to grasp in their entirety, are also crucial to consider in order to develop one's language in the long run.

## **6.8 Carla Lonzi, Martin Heidegger and Robert Cooper**

Any work produced by the mind at a certain moment in history must deal with a number of challenges: the different forms it can take in terms of its materiality, format, temporality and reception, and the fact that creative and intellectual personalities must attempt to make money through the possibilities they are offered during their life time. I identify each of these dilemmas and challenges through the example of three emblematic figures enlisted in this thesis.

Carla Lonzi was a major figure of the Italian feminist movement, an acute art historian and critic, and the author of *Autoritratto* (1969). I introduced the main components and

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<sup>526</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*, Perseus Book Group, New York, 2002.

<sup>527</sup> Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012.

qualities of this illustrated text, sadly not yet translated into English, in Chapter 2, underlining its originality. Over the course of five years between 1964 and 1969, Lonzi made excellent use of technology, recording the voices of 14 Arte Povera artists, and adding to them her own persona as a strategy to be heard as an active and participating agent of the group. Out of this material she produced a highly important document not only about the Arte Povera movement, but also about how artworks are made, how artists think and manage their lives. By finding a new way to write about contemporary art and simultaneously to claim her own position and agency in the textual space of the transcribed and edited dialogue, Lonzi contributed to her field of expertise in post-World War II Italy, but also towards the field of autoethnography, as already mentioned. Through a very particular use of words, whether oral or written, in the form of articles, essays or even a diary, she also demonstrates how language contributes not only to the construction of identity,<sup>528</sup> but also to the writing of art history, which continuously has to reinvent how to rewrite itself.

Martin Heidegger, by intentionally delaying the publication of his *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, written in a poetic and allusive style between 1936 and 1938, but released posthumously in 1989, added an effective real-time dimension to his text that has the merit of intrinsically binding the event to art (something that none of the other philosophers whom I have so far consulted have done). The delayed publication of this important part of his oeuvre on the subject of the event happened to coincide with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The fact that the German philosopher refused to have any footnotes or critical apparatus added to his texts, even the most difficult ones, is well known. Nevertheless, in the case of his *Contributions to Philosophy*, the history of his native country – with which he entertained a complex relationship, as is noticeable in his philosophy, poetry and also his recently published *Black Notebooks* (2014) – became a tremendous backdrop and context for reflection on the impact of his work. From a conceptual artistic point of view, this conjunction between his text and its year of publication is a vertiginous one.

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<sup>528</sup> See, for example, Sierk Ybema, Tom Keenoy, Cliff Oswick, Armin Beverungen, Nick Ellis, Ida Sabelis, 'Articulating identities', in *Human Relations*, Volume 62 (3), Sage, London, 2009, pp. 299–322.

Robert Cooper, by creating a bridge between his interest in poetry, art, aesthetics, literature, post-structuralism and the field of management theory, and furthermore by integrating these disciplines, greatly contributes to, nourishes and enlarges the working methodology of any artist or curator dealing with organisation and production in the creative realm. Like Lonzi and Heidegger, Cooper manages to give to his texts more qualities and consistency than the most demanding academic texts. Still profoundly tied to their fields of departure, the works of Lonzi, Heidegger and Cooper gave me the opportunity to think thoroughly about what art can be, in comparison and confrontation with art history, self-ethnography, event and management.

## 6.9 Epistemology, kinship, delays and unique event

Epistemologically, I have invented the concept of ‘eco-event’ (Chapter 5) and discussed its challenging relationship with time. We cannot reflect on an event without thinking in retrospect, or without taking into account the possible impact of this event on our future. Heidegger formulated this fact as follows:

The event is the self-eliciting and self-mediating center in which all essential occurrence of the truth of being must be thought back in advance. This thinking back in advance to that center is the inventive thinking of being. And all concepts of being must be uttered from there.<sup>529</sup>

Thanks to what happened in Beirut on 10 October 2014 in the frame of the *Helvetic Zebra* project, I thought, for example, about Lebanon and its hyper-capitalist society, emblematised in the building sites, and wondered where this economical and political system would lead, and in fact whether it is actually leading anywhere beyond the perpetual speculation of investors and workers dying because of the lack of safety measures on their gigantic scaffolds made out of fragile slices of wood. The clouds and the thunderbolts intensified and loaded with tension as well as passion the sense of time I was experiencing. This intensification was reinforced by the countdown created by the *Fluxus* movie: the duration of a war that you wish would end soon, but where even nine

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<sup>529</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2012, pp. 58–59.

minutes seem so long, not running quickly enough to avoid the storm announced by the heavy clouds. ‘To think back in advance’, to quote Heidegger, meant for me to rethink what Shakespeare allows us understand in *The Tempest*, and how he handles the depiction of an ecological phenomenon in fiction – not as décor nor as an ornamental dramatic motif, but as an active agent, in line with eco-feminist philosophy.

The eco-event on STATION’s roof terrace made me ask myself how to situate an event in a certain chronology, and in terms of a variety of different elements: what I knew about Bernard Khoury’s architecture and what kind of power it reveals, the experience I had with the Syrian workers realising my paintings who had fled their country because of the war, the interview with Treichler to grasp his reading of the performance and compare it with my initial perception, and other pieces of art, such as classical plays. All of these elements, as heterogeneous as they are, contributed to the shaping of my eco-event. I also considered this assemblage of elements – seen, listened to, experienced, read or products of my own thinking – metaphorically: what happens with such a rapprochement of ideas, objects and experiences? Can anything be associated with anything? What kind of kinship or legacy is possible? What can be compared, associated and thought about together? According to Donna Haraway knowledge should be ‘situated’ through analysing one case after another, and taking into account their environment and external influences.<sup>530</sup> This kind of method is what ‘eco’ entails: the event I am interested in deserved to be scrutinised thanks to its physical, historical, but also intellectual environment, and even more, my own subjectivity, reflections and knowledge process, which differ from those of Treichler. The event, by being inscribed in a chronology ‘back in advance’, adds a layer of complexity to Haraway’s methodology. Indeed, without this lodging in time, how could one think about displacement, progression, evolution or change, or produce relevant anachronistic correlations between elements? In Chapter 5, for example, I explained that Kraus’ postmodern use of the tempest as a metaphor wasn’t relevant to my eco-event in Beirut and yet that it makes sense to analyse a historical work such as Shakespeare’s from an eco-feminist perspective. In consequence, I argue that in an enquiry about the event that contains by definition diverse temporal and historical parameters, assemblages of diverse formats

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<sup>530</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, in *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3, Fall 1988, University of Maryland, College Park, p. 592–599.

and kinds of data are possible. The question is always how to associate things: which aspects do you select and plug together?

In this thesis, I go back, in Chapter 4, as far as the generation of my father, represented by his confession of 1937 (resulting in an echo-event that led nowhere except to an account of its impossible resolution), almost contemporary with the seemingly invisible wall painting of Josephine Baker in the Kunsthalle basement (1936). Between the 1930s and today, we have reached some highly important transformative milestones such as 1989, as well as the different manifestations of dematerialisation described above. Beyond my concerns about interdisciplinary and heterogeneous materials, the question has been how to find some coherence when analysing a series of cultural products emanating not only from diverse geo-political origins, but also within the constant evolution of the world in general, and the perception we can have of it. Relying on Karen J. Warren's eco-feminism and her view of 'theory as quilting'<sup>531</sup> and selves as selves-in-relationship [...] where the context features prominently',<sup>532</sup> this thesis has offered a chance to think about art as an epistemological agent between these different elements, whether facts, data, persons, words or artworks. How does one do and think things from a subjective point of view, as 'situated knowledge', but also from a retrospective point of view inherent to any 'event' analysis, embracing the uncertainty that led to the creation of the artwork?

This thesis refers to concrete examples, bringing together both material and conceptual results. Through the juxtaposition of different kinds of knowledge, it also identifies new potentials, even of so-called finished and closed objects, such as artworks. If one considers and unfolds the proximal elements of the latter, and enlarges the scope of their development over time (considering when they really started and if they even

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<sup>531</sup> "The metaphor I use for the conception of theory I endorse is that of a quilt: Theories are like quilts. The "necessary conditions" of a theory (say, ecofeminist philosophical theory) are like the borders of a quilt: They delimit the boundary conditions of the theory without dictating beforehand what the interior (the design, the actual patterns) of the quilt does or must look like. The actual design of the quilt will emerge from the diversity of perspectives of quilters who contribute, over time, to the making of the quilt. Theory is not something static, preordained, or carved in stone; it is always *theory-in-process*.", Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, Oxford, 2000, p. 91.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.



stopped), they transform into interdisciplinary containers whose reception can be newly elaborated upon. Through immersion in such an intellectual process, I propose an alternative to accelerationism<sup>533</sup> and its side-factors such as a ‘dematerialised’ perspective, which impedes seeking, finding and evaluating precious entities from which to learn. These are inscribed in time, past and present, and encourage us to think about a criticality sheltered in a reconsideration of things, challenging our fear of uncertainty,<sup>534</sup> and beyond a linear reading of chronology. Nature as an active partner to take into account is one of them.<sup>535</sup> The constant fluctuation of the subject experiencing an artwork is another.<sup>536</sup> Delays in the production of a piece, but also in its release or reception, are eventually powerful because they promise a constant reshuffling of what one has perhaps taken for granted. This time-based and environmental consideration proves that even if deeply materialised, or on the contrary highly ethereal, an artwork has the potential to transform, at any time, into a unique event.

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<sup>533</sup> Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (eds.), *#Accelerate#, The Accelerationist Reader*, Merve Verlag, Berlin, Urbanomic, London, 2014.

<sup>534</sup> Jochen Volz and Júlia Rebouças (ed.), *32nd Bienal de São Paulo, Incerteza Viva: Catalogue*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2016.

<sup>535</sup> Donna Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 593.

<sup>536</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, *Chronology*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2005.

**FIGURES**

**Chapter 3**

Figs. 1a and 1b



Lorenza Boisi, *Portrait of the Artist as Asarotos Oikos*, 2014.



Lorenza Boisi, *Portrait of the Artist as Asarotos Oikos*, 2014.

Figs. 2 and 3



Birgit Dam, *Untitled*, 1990.



Top of the front panel, Birgit Dam, *Rion et Périllat I*, 1995.

Fig. 4



Carmen Perrin, *Untitled*, 1986.

Fig. 5



Pierre-Philippe Freymond, *Chimère 2 (d'après Ambroise Paré)*, 2004.

Fig. 6



Setsuko Nagasawa, *Ombre*, 1994.

Fig. 7



Top left of the front panel, Klara Kuchta, *Vitesse*, undated; bottom right of the front panel, Aline Morvan, *Elle s'emploie*, 2014.

Fig. 8



Aline Morvan, *Abouchement*, 2014.

## Chapter 4

Fig. 1



Front, Luciano Bernardi, *Untitled*, Venezuela, 1950–1951.

Fig. 2



Luciano Bernardi, *Untitled*, Venezuela, 1950–1951.

Fig. 3

2/19 Week 2016

Wall painting

03 Tuesday February

04 Wednesday February

05 Thursday February

06 Friday February

07 Saturday February

08 Sunday February

We were born tough on the inside, and while a certain Romagnolo from Predappio wanted to convince us that we were the direct descendants of the Republicans of Rome who defeated Hannibal, it was if nothing else a nice story, like a book by Salgari, whose adventures enchanted us all, despite our knowing them to be nothing but flights of fancy.

Nevertheless, there are many strands to the rope of a single human existence; there are many notes – not all entirely in tune – in the concert of a nation or of a living national body.

That evening, after the Duce had made his speech from the balcony – and we had the impression that he was addressing us directly, the Accademisti of the Farnesina, in our elegant black beaver uniforms, with our galatese and big white belts, soaked to the skin in the rain – we all burst into flames like a box of sulphur matches in the hands of a child or a pyromaniac. Why? Most likely, each one of us had an anti-Fascist cousin Guido (and tritone) at home; each one of us knew the anti-Fascist jokes off by heart and was well aware of the arrogance of the dim-witted vice-Duce to be found in each of our home towns. In our own vital cord, many strands were dark, sceptical, servile, foolish but unimflammable. And yet that night – it wasn't the first time we had gone to play bullboys in Piazza Venezia – we were overflowing with cries which poured forth from us against our will: we rattled our muskets, with which we had never shot a round, just as the Bacchae shook their thyrsi, we were all leaning towards that balcony, willing our leader to appear once more, and alas, his truly fatal words were indeed to continue to rain down onto the Italians for another lustum.

From the point of view of a seventeen-year-old Rioni, how could these disturbing minutes be explained? All bucking and snorting was Massenzio, or Guzzoni or that perverse Grandi fellow. All this was of little importance: we were a phalanx, an organism within a superindividual body, a single voice and a single spirit. It was then that Rioni understood the Battle of Thermopylae and the ambiguous term 'the communion of the Saints'. In actual fact, it was by no means a union of luminous and ascetic spirits, but perhaps it was thus that the Spartan hoplites, a few hundred brave and ferocious warriors, fought shoulder to shoulder against the other Greeks or the Barbarians: as a single body. Perhaps that's how the ten thousand felt when Clearchus, weeping like Memo Benassi before the film camera, revealed the magnitude of the situation and the great ambivalence to be undertaken. After more than 30 years since that fever, should I now pedantically add the democratic corrigenda, should I contest that moment in Rioni's life? Memorable, enviable, an experience even dearer than the recollection of a night-time stroll through the old town, having left the arms of Dalla, the unfaithful newlywed, when Rioni's feet barely touched the ground, the taste of that insalubrious little blonde still lingering on his lips, the suburban crickets chirping in the ditches along the avenue, and the stars of the Milky Way like Zeus' spermatozoa.

In the midst of winter 1937, towards the end of December I believe, the Accademisti, led by the military band in the freezing rain, went on foot to the dull thrud of drums right up to Piazza Venezia. The Duce was announcing what we might call Italy's posthumous exit from the League of Nations. Duce, Fascism: we were all afloat in that same rather lean beef broth, yet with all the indifference of tadpoles squirming around in a puddle, without asking too many questions on the origins of that vital liquid surrounding us. Tadpoles, after all, are just waiting to lose their tails and turn into frogs. We were waiting to leave that Roman prison and get out into the big wide world. Eastern Africa was as good as ours, so close and promised by the Duce, and not just by him: by Titus Livius, Tacitus, Suentonius, etc. etc. Dante and D'Annunzio. We swam around in the puddle, wriggling in our uniforms and black shirts, but there was simply no enthusiasm or blind fanaticism. There were no zealots, grasses, favourites or protégées pushed forth by the federals or hierarchs of the province. We lived a healthy life, despite the meagreness of our cutlets and Rioni's oversized pimples; even without the raptures of St. Augustine, we believed in the legend of our Ventennio; the British, with all those colonies misappropriated here and there, only made us laugh. France was perennially in trouble, and as such was amikably detestable. On Sundays we were allowed to go to mass, and sometimes the Bolognese would go together to eat pizza or cream buns in a café near the church. Once we took part in a collective communion. Rioni was overwhelmed with communion and love for Christ, the Family, Miss Violoncello, the children to be had by Miss Violoncello, the rolling prairies and highlands in an African future. This is the stuff of the Italian spirit: no point seeking out the asping heads of a chosen people along the white corridors of that Academy. Ever since the battle of Cerignola, or perhaps even before, since the death of Romulus Augustus, the Italians have lost any blind enthusiasm for their homeland along the wayside. We are aroused by flashes in the pan – Garibaldi, Bivio – but these are desert fires, unable to set ablaze the damp forests, dripping with indifference. Too much history, too many cases like those of Maria & Sulla, Caesar & Pompey, Octavian & Mark Antony, the Borgias & Machiavelli, not to mention the French nobility, the Spanish Viceroy, the House of Lorraine and the Austrians.

#1 – A moustache in exile

The first item listed on the exhibition floor plan is a printed and framed photograph selected from my father's 12,000-slide archive. I found this picture in a wooden box labelled: Slides from Venezuela, landscapes, Andes, Guyana. Mostly not very interesting. General shots of people excluded. Indeed, in the box, containing pictures from the early 1950s, only one portrait remained. The man, shot in silhouette, wears a Panama hat and carries bunches of pomegranates. The pomegranate-seed must be dead by now, but his smile remains. His moustache follows the fashion of the 1930s. He quickly became the mascot of the exhibition going by the nickname 'Little Hitler' etc.



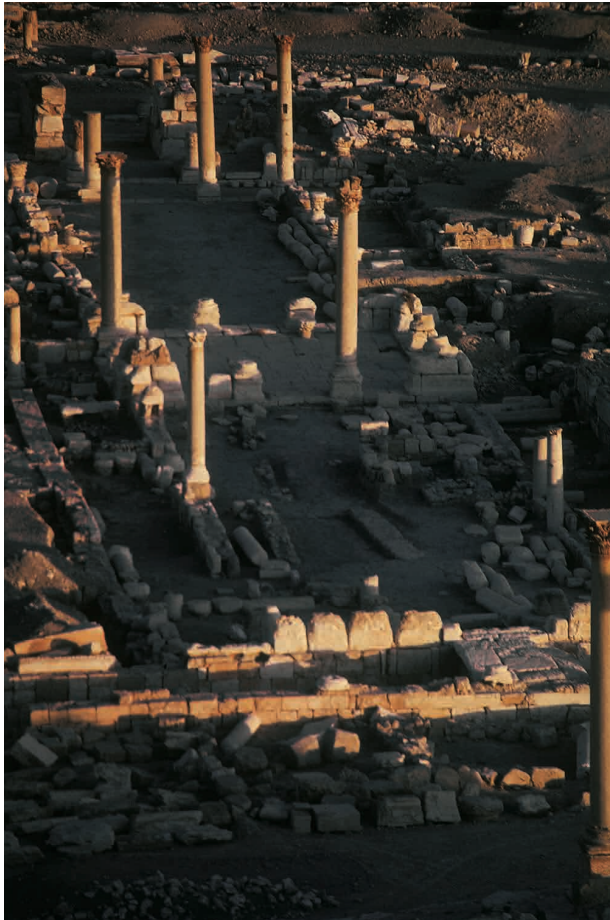
Later on, in the green Purgatory of his life as a botanist, Rioni found another explanation, an entomological one, for that damp and fiery night in Piazza Venezia. In a poor village in the Andes, during the rainy season of 1954, thus in June, he found himself taking great interest in a quite unremarkable little garden on the patio of the house where he was a guest. The Semiramis accompanying him, an Aboriginal botanist, feisty and full of pride in her vegetable garden, was a know-it-all little girl of perhaps ten years of age, who would say to Rioni: 'This plant is called the "Marvel-of-Peru"; this bush is an Indian jasmine: you mustn't touch this plant as it's poisonous and it's called "Desfontana"; this is a sunflower, and this tree is a star apple but it has no fruit at the moment; this is a little pomegranate tree...'

Rioni stopped to examine the pomegranate tree: one branch was all covered in six-legged soldiers sucking away, side by side, their proboscises like bayonets plunged into the thin reddish bark. Rioni lifted a finger to one of those little soldiers, and all the others, without having even been touched, marched off in an orderly fashion. That group wondered, or rather responded instantly to the question: what's happening? After a while, convinced that there was no threat to be had, those aphids, again standing shoulder to shoulder, began to suck once more. They were all equals and always had been – as a species, long before the cranky theories of François-Noël Babeuf – they were brothers, the children of a virgin, for those insects are born of a female, the great mother, who has no need to be fertilised. Were they happy, those tiny creatures of the Lord? They died on fine sap, they sported a uniform like that of the Sardinian grenadiers, yet they made neither love nor war: they lived a peaceful life in the garden of the Semiramis child, with no fear of solitude, and without the urges of the flesh. Rioni wished to absolve them, to bless them; and so in that miserable group of aphids, among those equals bereft of individuality, he found an explanation for that gust of crazy superindividual fervour. What did any of those Accademisti care about the regions of Italy, with such dissimilar bodies and souls, of whether the country would leave a League of Nations which – as the embargo, as pointless as it was unfair, had demonstrated – was no longer worth a rotten fig. Nothing! Every one of them, in their daily lives, waited impatiently for letters from relatives or fiancées, or a package with salamis and sweetmeats to share among their companions. Victor Emmanuel, Mussolini, Pope Ratti, Starace, Graziani and Badoglio all had the same importance for us as the kings on the Tarot cards. And yet – on that soaking wet night – there they were, all out of their minds, dervishes, almost murderers, rattling their muskets. In the end, the square was cleared and the ranks reformed, but Rioni couldn't keep in step, unable as he was to march straight, and almost risked falling flat on the ground.

Barone Luca Rioni (Luciano Bernardi). Rioni e Bianchi alla conquista del mondo nonché Le confessioni d'un quinquagenario (Rioni and Bianchi set to conquer the world or The Confessions of a Quinquagenarian). Montana and Leyvin, 1969

Donatella Bernardi, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, 2016, pp. 32–33.

Fig. 4



30.01-07.06.2015  
Kunsthalle Bern

Morgenröte Aurora borealis and Levantin Into your solar plexus



Donatella Bernardi, *Into Your Solar Plexus*, 2016, pp. 26–27.

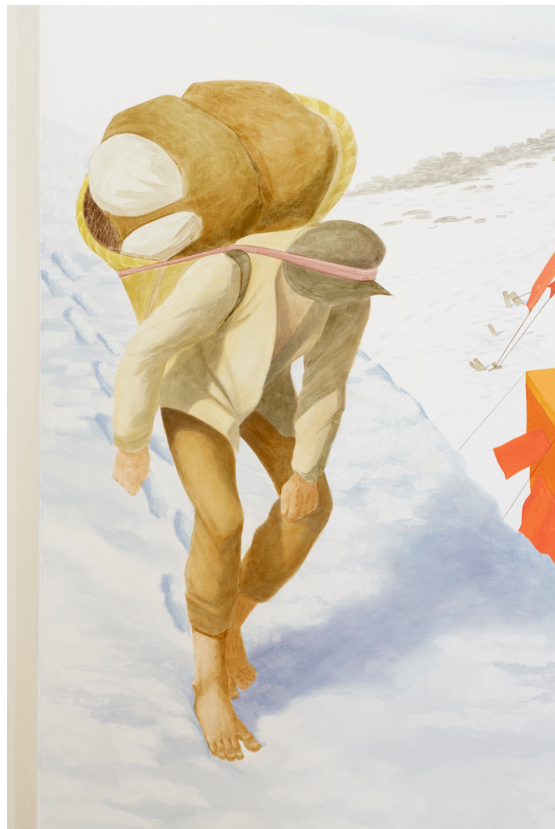
Fig. 5



From left to right, Roland von Gunten, Anne-Gabrielle von Gunten, Wiefried von Gunten, executing the wallpaintings *Zytpizza* and *Fishbone Floor Variation* by Frederick Fermelin, 2015.



Figs. 6, 7, 8



Sara Baldis and Donatella Bernardi, *Dhaulagiri 1976* (details), 2015.

## Chapter 5

Fig. 1



From left to right, Maximage (David Keshavjee and Julien Tavelli), posters for *Helvetica Zebra*, 2014; Ali Kazma, *Calligraphy*, 2013.

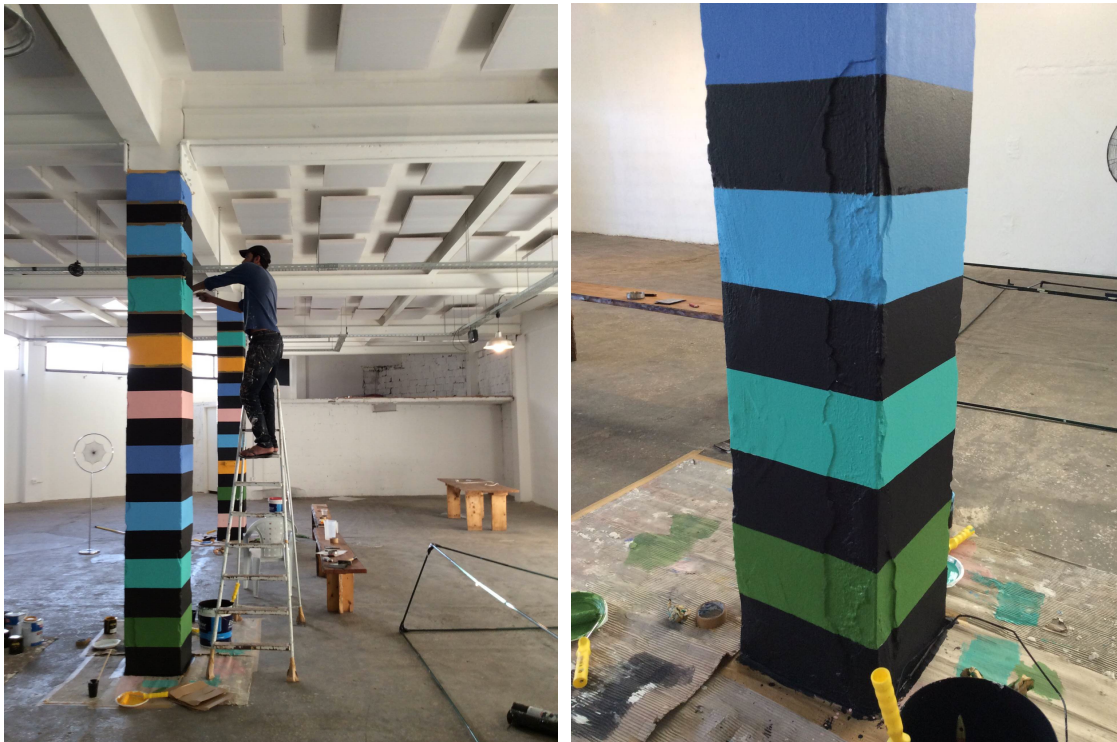
Figs. 2, 3





Donatella Bernardi, *Tribute to Bridget Riley*, 2014, wall painting, mural, in collaboration with Abed, Houran and Khaled Sheikh Ahmad.

Figs. 4, 5



Donatella Bernardi, *Tribute to Bridget Riley*, 2014, wall painting, columns, in collaboration with Abed, Houran and Khaled Sheikh Ahmad.

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