Tales of a Place
*Words, Site-specific, and Changes
in Perceiving Visual Arts from
the 1990s to Today*

project curated by Lorenzo Bruni

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Nedko Solakov, Christian Jankowski,
Suzanne Lacy, Cuoghi Corsello,
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Changes in the way we perceive reality and art in the current state of globalization is the starting point that has given rise to the publication/exhibition project *Raccontare un luogo* (Tales of a Place). Our being, that is, as a society, "in touch with everyone and everything"[1] has become over the past decade a reality on equal footing with the awareness of enjoying the world in an "expanded present."[2] Fostered by Western models, this is a symptom of systematizing new things from electronic screens, from expanding communication as translated by Google Translate, with widespread knowledge thanks to Wikipedia and expanded memory through portable archives like video-telephones or the enveloping systems of iCloud. In short: all that is related to the transition from an analogue-type reproduction system to digital-type diffusion.[3] This condition leads us to consider all places as layers, in an unspecified and generic whole, and to enjoy the facts of history as being coexistent[4] though also independent. This is the great freedom that a world bound to the Western model possesses with respect to rigid twentieth-century ideological structures. However, all this must be followed by a new strategy with which a group may consider the place from which to observe the world and with which to give, this interaction, new concreteness.[5] Identifying the nuances or the limits each person may occupy between physical space,

1. ". . . in touch with everyone and everything, but present to nothing," in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*. London: Polity, 2000.

2. This condition is the necessary evolution of humans with respect to the "short century" we have just lived and which can be found, even though as an hypothesis, in ideas like the ones by Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988, and by Jack Goody, *Representations and Contradictions. Ambivalence Towards Images, Theatre, Fiction, Relics and Sexuality*. London: Blackwell, 1997.

3. According to Deal, the creator of the Gawker gossip blog: "Every forty-eight hours, on the Internet, the number of contents created is the same as from the birth of humanity to 2003." Frédéric Martel, in *Smart: Enquête sur les internets*, analyzes the work of some businesses like Gawker to reveal that they do not create contents, but only systems of information customization for each user, thus giving him or her the illusion of staying in touch with the world online.

4. This dimension of coexistence has led scholars of aesthetics to state that there no longer exist parameters with which to judge art, or better, with which to place it in a unilateral historical/technical/artistic evolution, as also discussed by Mario Perniola in his latest book, *L'arte espansa*. Turin: Einaudi, 2015: "What is taking place is an epistemological change concerning the notion of art. The fact is that art, as it has been intended by modernity, is not enough on its own anymore. The dynamics of enhancement and credibility no longer revolve around this, but rather around personal or group experiences of a social, moral, or philosophical kind."

5. Naturally, this hypothetical new strategy has nothing to do with the act on the part of ISIS to recruit young Europeans by giving them new parameters of identity based on the oppositions of varying religions/cultures, which has replaced the one between the capitalist and communist worlds during the Cold War.

perceived space, and expressed space seems to have now become the fundamental distinction to avoid losing oneself with Internet input.

Though radically reformulating the role and object of art, twentieth-century artistic research has always developed in an attempt to eliminate the distance between the space of life and the space of culture,[6] and to re-establish the rules of society. From the 1990s onwards, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dawn of globalization, this need to salvage direct contact with reality led artists to see in the "site-specific" approach (which, subsequently, also contained so-called "relational" and then "social" and "political" art) the possibility to manifest above all the dialogue between the work, the artist/enjoyer, and the context of manifestation. So the matter of being able and having to select a location that is specific and ideal with which to observe the world now became an excellent *fil rouge* with which to examine those great changes that took place in the enjoyment, production, and spreading of art over the past thirty years. All this is intermingled with the grand novelty of the "printed word" (and not the handwritten one) in possessing a unique presence in the everyday lives of people through text messages and the enjoyment of immaterial communication. This, at the same time, has also influenced the statute of images, which are perceived more like an informative message than the representation of reality, precisely because their existence is confirmed the moment they are shared rather than the second in which they are "made." The title *Tales of a Place,* therefore, refers to the viewing point the subject may single out to interact with the world and, as a result, to understand what to narrate through what means and for what purpose.

The choice in allowing these observations to come forth from an exhibition with artists like Mel Bochner, Mario Airò, Nedko Solakov, Christian Jankowski, Suzanne Lacy, Cuoghi Corsello, Antonis Pittas, and Maurizio Nannucci is due to the desire to observe these changes, starting with the specific cases of each work of theirs. In fact, even though these eight artists come from different generations and countries and use varying mediums, their works derive from the same confrontation with words, in so far as they evoke thoughts, and the desire to create not an image of the world, but a tool with which to measure it from both a physical and a conceptual point of view. This approach stems from the fact that they relate with reality and art history, aware they know not the truth, but instead they place themselves alongside viewers to open a debate on what role art plays and what is meant by shared reality, also from a planning point of view and not just as information. But these inclinations have been practiced by other artists, too. So why should we start with these eight in particular? Because each personal story allows us to identify and explore eight macro areas (cultural, contextual, historical) with which to reconsider how the relationship between image and text, between specific place and the world, between national and immaterial confines, between art history and "histories of the arts," has changed in the past decades. The singling-out of these macro areas, treated here in the sections dedicated to the works of each single artist, will allow us to face a meditation on the different nuances the use of words has acquired in art practice from the 1960s to today. From this point of view we can face and rewrite a history that from the work *One and Three Chairs* by Joseph Kosuth, 1965, reaches up to *Less Oil, More Courage*, 2003, by Rirkrit Tiravanija. That is, a history in which the tautological reflection shifts from the practice of dematerializing the art object to the one devoted to analyzing the dematerialization of society. It is in this perspective that we may cover the evolution of site-specific art with which the artist/spectator has highlighted the need for the "here and now."[7]

6. The spread of art from the 1990s, on a global scale, across various information channels has led the public at large to become more and more connected to new artistic investigations, and for artists to interact in a direct way, increasingly raising sensitive questions from a political, social and cultural point of view, along with salvaging hidden political crime stories that were covered up. For more information, see Roberto Pinto, *Nuove geografie artistiche: Le mostre al tempo della globalizzazione*. Milan: postmedia books, 2012; Boris Groys, *Going Public*. New York: Sternberg Press, 2010.

7. This expression was later used by Walter Benjamin in his famous collection of essays, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. New York: Belknap Press, 2008 (1939), and it lies at the base of all later research regarding art techniques and their systematization according to a linear historical trajectory, also including the one proposed by Gillo Dorfles, in *Il divenire della arti*. Milan: Bompiani, 2002.

Such a need has always been re-elaborated by artists, who here will be taken into consideration through varying possibilities of rendering relations concrete, both on the physical experience plane and on the cognitive one, between "the container" and "the content" to ask which one contains which.

Image/Text

From an anthropological and social-use point of view, the great novelty of this post-colonial, post-industrial, globalized, and dematerialized historical period, even regarding money as an object (the elusive Bitcoin), lies in the fact that images have, more and more, taken on the form of captions of thoughts to share. In fact, rather than using the word statute, it is more appropriate to talk about purpose and different use of the image with respect to previous decades. The relationship of trust and power between caption and image, as it evolved during the 1900s, was based on the certainty that the system of reference was indeed printed letters, while today we are faced with a reference system tied to the exchange of input on constantly changing digital platforms. That is why even the interpretive factors concerning the influence of images in structuring judgment on the world on behalf of the world must all be considered and measured anew. For example, re-reading today the statement by Paul Virilio, "the image is truer than the actual object,"[8] may still explain very well the fears and attractions for the shift from a local dimension to a global one, from analogue to digital, but this cannot be applied to the current situation, since it was the normalization of this situation, at the start of the 1990s, that was considered exceptional. As stated to many international media, in September 2015, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, when faced with the images of migrants and walls (not metaphorical ones but real ones) erected across Europe, clearly commented: "We live in an interregnum of change, not transition." That is why from a

significance point of view, we cannot make a comparison with the former, but only take stock of the new mechanisms we have to deal with in so far as being makers/enjoyers of images. In Virilio's case, for example, the first words quoted were readapted by himself when he commented on, in the early 1990s in various newspaper articles and at conferences, the media effect unleashed by the intrusion of TV images in the homes of people across the Western world, during the initial bombings of Baghdad in the First Gulf War in 1991. These pictures consisted of a gelatinous green light with even brighter filaments of light racing across the screen. Trust in these abstract images was provided by the TV commentator, but corresponded also to the conviction that technological prostheses could only increase and heighten the abilities of humans without infringing upon any moral, perceptive, and cognitive levels. The diffusion of digital technology, from the analysis of those images, shifted the matter to other fields, highlighting that now technology is not a tool, but instead has become part of those mechanisms of perception with which reality is codified. The equivalent of this, though set in today's perception context, can be found in the famous speech[9] General Colin Powell gave to the UN on February 2, 2003 to explain the need for a preventative attack on the Middle East thanks to recordings and above all the "proof" provided by photos. The satellite images were not really "legible" or "exhaustive" in demonstrating the presence of weapons of mass destruction, but by then the idea had spread that those digital images could not "lie," as they were self-explanatory without any need for "verbal" commentary. The different reaction to these images from 1991 with respect to those from 2003 corresponds to the gradual course with which the relationship between written captions, images, and events has changed and been redefined in new perspectives. This layering of how the communicative role of images changes, along with their semantic implications, has been influenced in part by the new use of computers, which have acquired the dimensions of portable phones and which have led users to observe them and interact with them in-

8. Cfr. Paul Virilio, *Estetica della sparizione* (1980). Naples: Liguori, 1992.

9. http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Esteri/2003/02_Febbraio/06/documento.shtml?refresh_ce-cp.

stead of just using them as mere telephones for oral communication. Thanks to text messages, this tool became a generator of textual information, and also thanks to touchscreens, it is a means with which to share images by making all these more and more connected. Writing every day on the Internet across varying "chats" has led to its change, both intimately and privately, and now is a performing tool. This condition allows us to conceive grammar mistakes unthinkable just fifteen years ago, precisely because even these bear witness to urgency and "writing while doing something else."[10] So what has changed in writing, and in conceiving reading, is the waiting time for an answer, which has expanded up to almost considering its manifestation as unnecessary. This influenced and is still influencing considerably the structure of narration, from literature to cinema up to TV series, almost as if to make the expression "the end" disappear.[11] This nonneed for "the end" or to receive a reply to an image/text message is connected to the awareness that we are dealing with social platforms that always consider messages multidirectional. But, at this point, the message is for everyone, and thus for no one, and it is precisely from this contradiction of objectives that the message "I am here" clearly corresponds to the manifestation of being in the world and not so much as establishing a dialogue with "others,"[12] thanks to sharing the image of a place. These messages aim to measure space, even though it may be virtual, and to certify the presence of the author, though partly carrying out the goal of surviving beyond death that once had archaic gestures, like graffiti in caves or mailing letters home during colonial times. This awareness of implication nuances that the message/text acquires leads to reflecting, as a group, on its statute and its possible new role within society.

During the 1990s, the reality principle broke down even further. The question: "What is real and for whom?" was perfectly embodied by the movie *Matrix,* released in 1999; it contains all the tensions of those years related to new neuroscience research, new applications of digital images, the diffusion of the philosophies of Nietzsche and Benjamin regarding the idea of "potential narrations" and "phantasmagoria." Almost as a repercussion to all this was instead, in 2013, the news that the Venice Film Festival awarded Best Film to the documentary *Sacro GRA* by Gianfranco Rosi. The documentary won for its ability to tell a story, and is the perfect synthesis of the previous decade tied not to narrating possible or exemplary stories, but "real stories about real people." In fact, as early as 2012 the XX International Conference of Philosophy, held in Bonn, brought out the need, in this discipline, to confront the theme of reality to reclaim, "as politics had attempted to do,"[13] an active role within society. Both these climaxes, "narrating the illusion of narration" and the "concreteness of narrating everyday intimacy," explain the evolution and transition from the 1990s to today. In the middle, we find the diffusion of the illusion of democratizing information, conceded to each single user by the idea of no longer having confines or limits to constant information access thanks to Internet. So each user goes from an enjoyer of information to a more and more aware maker of information, up to provoking resounding cases of "democracy from below" like the "Arab Spring," the new organic food culture, "Occupy Wall Street," blowing the whistle on sexual abuse, the public's recent refusal to take part in TV reality shows, and WikiLeaks. In this case, artists forerun these mass phenomena, and as early as the beginning of the 1990s, they responded to the post-Berlin Wall world with a "predisposition of space" that allow viewers to become extremely aware of how they perceive reality, starting with "relational" situations that could be reconsidered: confronting different cultures, different authors and enjoyers, and the role of art and the institution with which it begins to dialogue (national, family, legal, etc.). In this time period, the

10. But at the same time, a kind of resistance took place to all that verged on the quasi-comical or the grotesque. The *Wall Street Journal* openly spoke about "crimes against grammar," and citizens rising up in groups. In Italy, there is a Facebook page from 2010 with an informative name: "Scartare corteggiatori e potenziali amanti per gli errori grammaticali" ("Reject admirers and potential lovers according to grammar errors").

11. For more information, see Paolo Bertetto, *Microfilosofia del cinema*.

Venice: Marsilio, 2014, and forums related to the Scuola Holden and essays by Alessandro Baricco on this topic.

12. Cfr. Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other* (1990). New York: Verso, 2009.

13. Cfr. Michael Hardt, Toni Negri, *Commonwealth*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2009.

youngest artists began to experiment with varying mediums up to, in early 2000, the moment when the public at large accepted that each single artist may indistinctly use the techniques of painting, sculpture, or video, depending on the medium that has allowed him/her to best express their dialogue with the place of intervention. This was an important transition for the artist-world relationship, but also for the study of new media aesthetics, seeing that what had been totally surpassed was associating the choice of a specific technique in defense of an equally specific ideology. In fact, up until the early 1990s, there were not many exhibitions that related artists who used painting with those who employed video, for example, precisely because they still seemed (to the public and those in the field itself) to belong to parallel universes. Moreover, it was video and photo narration that allowed, back then, women artists to become known to the art system because they faced a relatively new medium and thus were not subject to prejudice tied to, for example, the history of painting, which was conditioned by previous examples made almost exclusively by men. The idea of a connected and hyper-mediated world opened the possibility for artists to work not on producing new forms or signs, but rather on associating those already in existence to reflect differently on ways of perceiving and practicing the notion of art and reality. That slow gaining of awareness took place right at the same time as the slow undoing of old categories of private and public space. As this confine weakened, the parameters of managing everyday life and the notion of the past were reconsidered. In fact, it was in the mid-2000s that many artists began working on archives to reactivate the reservoir of collective memory, which, though accessible to all with a "click of the mouse," had been treated only generically. Therefore, beginning from specific cases has allowed a new approach of confrontation with facts from history, beyond any ideologies. The choice of many artists to work on these themes was faced also as a reaction to the diffusion of the concept of "expanded present" that always took hold in perceiving the world on the part of society.

Tensions tied to perceiving and mediating reality from the 1990s to today are complex and must still be unraveled. Also because the definitions that have been given as time went by are many. But some of these are still relevant: for example, in the 1990s, the expression that is still pertinent is "non-place."[14] Back then, the investigations of many artists were interpreted as a reaction to that condition, which led them to want to leave those spaces canonized by the art system by including in their reflection on art a strong social-political activist connotation. At the same time, the art world which was changing in those years, created, in the early 1990s, a series of "definitions," from "Post Human"[15] to "City on the Move,"[16] from "Sensation"[17] to "Post-production"[18] and "Borderline Syndrome."[19] The first decades of the twenty-first century are complex because they are still too near to us today, but one definition that still holds even internationally and which comes forth in 2005 is surely "third landscape."[20] In art, those years shift between the idea of the "spectator's dictatorship" evoked also by the second title which Francesco Bonami gave to the Venice Biennale he curated in 2003, and the idea of "making worlds," which is also the title of the 2009 Venice event, curated by Daniel Birnbaum. Instead, artists, in those years, manifested the need to salvage some sort of contact with the art and political practices of the 1960s and 1970s (up to including veritable re-enactments of works from that time) as if to reconnect with an age of experimentation and trust in society's change, in addition to reflecting on the concept and legacy

14. The definition was by the French philosopher Marc Augé to underline how places of passage were no longer perceived as a tool of connection, but rather as the new horizon of society.

15. *Post Human*, an exhibition curated by the dealer and gallerist from New York Jeffrey Deitch in various venues including, in 1992, the Castello di Rivoli, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli; Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens; Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Hamburg; Fondation Asher Edelman, Lausanne.

16. *City on the Move*, 1997–98, was a travelling show curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru that was each time a new and site-specific exhibition for the participants, the stories, and the displays.

17. *Sensation* was the show that consolidated the birth of Young British Art, held also thanks to the businessman and collector Charles Saatchi, at the Royal Academy of Art in London in 1997.

18. "Postproduction" is the term used by Nicolas Bourriaud in interpreting a new generation of artists. Cfr.

Postproduction. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2007.

19. "Borderline Syndrome" is the title of the third edition of Manifesta, held in Ljubljana in 2000.

20. This definition by Gilles Clément (a French writer, entomologist, landscape architect, and agricultural engineer) became widespread because it evokes newfound attention to ecological and eco-sustainable policies and to accepting a stop in building in favor of old industrial reconversion. Cfr. Gilles Clément, *Manifeste pour le Tiers paysage*. Paris: Éditions Sujet/Objet, 2004.

of modernism. For now, 2010 to 2015 can be summed up with the definition "digital natives."[21] Discussing these new abilities of the latest generations has allowed us to speak more about the notion of the future and its practicality. In art, this was expressed aptly by the theme of Documenta 13 (in 2012), curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and the title (unfortunately, only that) "All the World's Futures" of the Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2015. In the art world these past few years, greater attention has been given to abstract art (also by reconsidering historic artists who used geometric abstraction in relation to their political involvement as post-fascist left wingers), maybe to satisfy the growing request on the part of society for a sign with which to create suspension and reflection with respect to the enormous outpouring of images it has to constantly control. Instead, even more recent are the works that re-use assemblages of elements from electronic applications, though without having that same feeling of restlessness of similar works from the 1990s or tied only to the "hacker" spirit, as with the interventions made online since 2000. Using new technologies in dialogue with and equal to other artistic materials confirms that they are perceived as part of everyday life and that, therefore, the future is no longer frightening. Naturally, in this list of expressions, a date that has become a definition must be mentioned: September 11. The terrorist attack and the fall of the Twin Towers shattered all parameters of the twentieth century, and maybe the definition that emerges and best describes the situation it caused is that of "multitude."[22] All the tensions described and identified in this section and in previous ones determine the choice of recognizing in the works of eight artists (Mel Bochner, Mario Airò, Nedko Solakov, Christian Jankowski, Suzanne Lacy, Cuoghi Corsello, Antonis Pittas, and Maurizio Nannucci) eight vast conceptual macro areas

with which to reflect on what we mean today for new media and the renewal of art techniques. The work of these eight artists (some active since the 1960s, others from the 1990s and 2000) shares, in our investigation, the fact they all have worked on the mechanisms of measurement regarding physical and mental space (so that they may coexist), facing at the same time the presence of the written word. Observing their work and the relationships with artistic/technological techniques means realizing that site-specific art has gone from a spatial physical dimension to a dialogue with the atmospheres or moods of a globalized context. Facing these two points of view of interpretation is like asking questions on the concept of historical distance, on belonging to a culture, on acknowledging new tools of criticism, on the non-applicable Western idea of evolution.

21. This definition was coined by Marc Prensky in his essay "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," published in 2001 in *On the Horizon*. Even though it referred to people born (in the USA) after 1985, it was recently used to highlight not only the tools but also the mindset from analogue to digital, as Paolo Ferri states, in *Nativi digitali*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2011.

22. Guattari and Deleuze chose this word to explain the new state of the subject/mass beyond the confines in disorder that were taking shape following that event.

Mel Bochner

Mel Bochner is one of the key figures in the development of conceptual art in New York during the 1960s and 1970s. His interest in painting, which began in the 1990s, culminated recently with two museum exhibitions (*If the Colour Changes* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, 2012, and *Strong Language* at The Jewish Museum in New York, 2014). While the transition from Bochner's early conceptual work to painting was a surprise for some, he has consistently explored the parameters of language in the exhibition space. The recent paintings display a rigorous aesthetic presence related to abstraction, and the history of painting, while the integration of text leads to a new modality. The artist has come to terms with a society that no longer aims to be a "spectacle"[1] (because it has extensively carried out this goal), but rather a society of "connection."[2] The series of large-format paintings from 2010 titled *Blah, Blah, Blah, Blah,* demonstrate the over simplification of language filtered through new technologies, and also, the potential of words to act as a filter for understanding and taking stock of the world. The final comma in the title evokes a dimension of constant repetition, but also suspension and the emptiness of this continuity. Attendant to the *Blah, Blah, Blah,* series are the thesaurus or synonym paintings (taken from the Roget Thesaurus[3]). *Crazy,* 2005, has a range of varying but similar definitions covering the brown-colored ground; the final line ends with "foaming at the mouth." The short-circuit between meaning and form, through the use of language, and the introduction of color is subtle and pervasive. The artist's peculiarity emerges as he contradicts and colludes with the practices of dada, monochromes, pop art, and even the work of 1980s American artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. In some paintings, the provocation and shock is amplified. In *Nothing,* 2003, the language reaches an accusatory dimension as is the case with *Liar,* 2010, where the sequence of names begins with the title and ends with "bullshitter." These works stand out in part because of the different painting "language"; there is a range in the physical application of paint: rubber-

1. Cfr. Guy E. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. London: Black&Red, 2000.
2. Cfr. Vincenzo Susca, Derrick De Kerckhove, *Transpolitica: Nuovi rapporti di potere e di sapere*. Milan: Apogeo, 2008.

3. The *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, compiled in the first-half of the nineteenth century by Peter Mark Roget, is a very important tool for his works dating to the 1970s; he would use it to compose the list of synonyms within his drawings from 1966 to 1969, with compositions of words with which he evokes portraits of artist friends like Eva Hesse and Robert Smithson, thus shifting the canons of concrete poetry on an analytical and personal level.

ish thickness in the bright colors and opaque layerings for the more gloomy hues. The choice of painting material and color is directly connected to the sensations that the words written on canvas surface or sheet of paper arouse. The relationship between significance and signifier, where visual and textual nature intertwine, allows the artist to "expand the meaning of the text, to incorporate the meaning of the process."[4] The viewer must choose between looking at the painting, or reading it as a text. Bochner experiments with the "slipperiness of language"[5] and the entropy of present-day hyper-communication. Who are these statements intended for? For everyone and no one, akin to social network "posts."

Initially, the viewer is disarmed by the impotence of language deployed in these paintings. But, as with the early works related to measuring space or the mathematical systems from the 1970s, the viewer must engage the notion or practice of understanding, *of what* and *for what*. This analytical and propositional approach has led Bochner to experiment over the decades with different media, from drawing, photography, wall painting to sculpture, all in order to analyze the parameters and possibilities of art making.

Measurement Plant, 1969–2015, is an installation of small trees in front of a wall. On the wall, horizontal lines made with black vinyl are installed to measure the height according to the Anglo-Saxon system of measurement, inches. The work draws attention through the presence of "familiar" elements, yet the unusual association provokes a feeling of disorientation, leading the spectator to understand the whole work as a measuring instrument. The main objective is not describing the size of the plants or even the architectural container in which they exist, but the time it takes for them to grow in this specific space. The viewer contemplates the time corresponding to the "life" of the work, and of the viewer in relation to the work. Through these attenuated encounters between the viewer, space, and object, Mel Bochner conveys two different systems of interpretation: one is related to teaching art, where the

4. Interview with Jared T. Miller for the exhibition *Strong Language* at The Jewish Museum, 2014, http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/171361/mel-bochner-returns-to-the-jewish-museum.
5. Ibid.

6. Mel Bochner, in *DATA* # 2, February 1972, p. 67. http://www.artslab.com/data/img/pdf/002_62-67.pdf.

7. Cfr. "Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Sandra Antelo-Suarez interview Mel Bochner", http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/notes/interview/i003_text.html.

Measurement Plant, 1969–2015. 3 plants, adhesive strips and numbers on wall. 290 x 380 x 77 cm. Variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist and Peter Freeman, Inc., New York.

spectator uses the grid drawn on the paper to copy a real object in an imitative way; and the other belongs to the everyday world of provisional measurement, i.e. marking the wall with a pencil to chart the height of a growing child.

This work (installed for the first time in 1969 at the Finch College Museum of Art in New York and later part of Robert Rauschenberg's collection) was one of the "devices" singled out by the artist to establish an active, real-time debate over the status of a work of art, unbound from the fetishization and commoditization of the object. "The problem, as I saw it, was how to have art which added nothing to the catalogue of existent objects, yet avoided performance. It seemed to me that the only resolution was something which was solely procedural, but still left some trace of its having been 'done.' Initially, this switch (from 'making art' to 'doing art') might have appeared to be only semantic, but it carried with it a very basic re-evaluation. Measurement is an operation. Its commonness of application renders it virtually invisible."[6]

This approach was elaborated by Bochner in 1968 for his project *E.A.T.* made in the Singer company labs. It involved confronting technicians and scientists on the possibilities of applying new technologies to art research and vice-versa. The final work consisted of two Xerox copies of all the notes gathered over three months of brainstorming.[7] This immersion in measurement and ubiquitous materials that one finds at a hardware or construction site led to works like *48 Inch Standard" (1#)*, 1969, a sheet of brown paper with the distance between each side written and represented on the face. By using this expedient, Bochner directly draws attention to the object and its naming via its functional purpose. In 1969, for the exhibition *Measurement Room* at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich, he applied the lines and measurements between the main architectural components: the door, ceiling, and walls through which the spectator moved. Throughout his career he has kept making interventions of this kind, and in the 1990s he was applying it to the painting

system through measured monochrome canvases. Today, displaying the work *Measurement Plant* from 1969 allows it to acquire new worth precisely in relation to the "dematerialized and digitalized reality" in which we exist and where images are perceived the moment they are shared on the web and not the moment when they are made. His words as well on the context of today, therefore, take on new implications: "What I wanted to understand was the nature of conventions. Conventions grant us the limits of experience."[8]

Mel Bochner (Pittsburgh, 1940; lives and works in New York) came of age in 1960s New York alongside artists Robert Smithson, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris, Eva Hesse. They all shared investigations on dematerializing art objects.[9] He worked to highlight and display "making art," that is, ideas rather than objects added to more objects of the present. From the outset he was using rules and strategies of language, and texts as means of expression. Joseph Kosuth[10] and Bochner both examined the language and philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."[11] But unlike Kosuth, Bochner did not offer works as quotations, observations, or applications of statements, his focus was on the analytical approach of coexistence and experience of reality. In his oeuvre, there is a subtle hint of irony and humor, restlessness and surprise that is less evident in other "conceptual" artists. For Bochner, conceptual art, in the way we know today, was limiting at times, precisely because it identified a tension between randomness and control of it, and vice-versa. In 1966, his first major work, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art*, was exhibited at the School of the Visual Arts in New York where he taught. The piece consisted of four black binders placed on four white bases of the same height that contained drawings by artists or ideas and sketches of mathematicians and other intellectuals in New York at the time. *Working Drawings* pioneered the idea of art as concept, and it anticipated a new sensibility in making and view-

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8. Cfr. Richard S. Field, "Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966–1973.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 15–16 (our translation).

9. Cfr. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. First edition, 1973. The publication of this text greatly contributed to the self-awareness of the work on the part of artists and the art community.

10. In the mid-1960s, Kosuth used the term "conceptual art" various times in his writings and statements, above all during the debates on the work *One and Three Chairs*, 1965, while finding in artists like Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry, and John Baldessari similar intents more than with other artists with similar practices.

11. Cfr. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus e Quaderni 1914-1916*. Turin: Einaudi, 2012.

ing art. These different approaches, and their simultaneous existences, was considered unthinkable at the time, but it would accompany Bochner's practice throughout his career and set him apart from his peers. His certainty that "an idea always needs support" led him to hold dear the need to measure the tool, material, and technology, which the artist uses to raise questions on what it represents and on the order of values it is a part of. *Transparent and Opaque* dates to 1968 and is a series of photos taken by a professional ad photographer. The subject is always the surface of a glass that, shot after shot, becomes something different thanks to the use of Vaseline, shaving cream, and other liquids. *Theory of Painting* is a floor installation with newspaper pages that outline four combinations of squares with respect to the squares made on them with blue spray paint. Instead, his *Misunderstandings (A Theory Of Photography),* 1967–70, is a series of cardboard boxes bearing the definitions of various artists and theorists on the technique and meaning of photography, from Duchamp to make-believe statements invented by Bochner himself. Instead, *Theory of Sculpture*, 1968–73, is a series of compositions on the floor made with rocks arranged inside and outside chalk-drawn patterns. *Theory of Boundaries* dates to 1969–70 and corresponds to four squares drawn on a wall (one with precise edging while the others are blurred) bearing inside words written with chalk referring to ideas of placement and shifting. The physical space becomes a notebook of the mind on man's actions with which he may occupy and plan that space. These works clearly display that the artist, besides reflecting on the very mechanisms of culture and "new media," has always been attracted to establishing a dialogue and reflection between perceived space and actual space, designed space and the space occupied by the artist/spectator. This almost performative idea with which to manifest a change of forms/notions and to place them in a state of dialogue vulnerability is what makes his work unforeseeable and able to ask the question: What is the different between looking and see-

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ing, between observing and knowing? Bochner uses the questions central to analytical philosophy and French structuralism to embark on a pragmatic discourse, leaning heavily on the viewer's participation. Since the 1990s, Mario Airò's work has been animated by his investigation of how ideas are manifested, shared, and allowed to grow. This is why many of his works focus on the "presence" of the written word, but above all, references to cinema, literature, philosophy, and poets/writers. These references to collective culture are always evoked by the artist to strike the correct balance between two chief world systems and the site specificity where they become manifest, precisely to solidify the question: Dialoguing for whom, with whom, and where from? That is why his works are always the unique association of everyday elements, with which to offer a shared reflection within the globalized world not only on the artist's role, but regarding the creative act in general.

L'amour fou, 2009, is a particular "bachelor machine" since the remains with which it dialogues seems to be that of 1970s sci-fi films rather than the sculptures or "assemblages" of Dada or Yves Tanguy.[12] The work consists of a white-enameled metal cylinder with small wheels; constantly rotating on itself, it flutters about the pages of five recent editions of books on the search for love: *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan; *Se résoudre aux adieux: roman* by Philippe Besson; *Cinacittà* by Tommaso Pincio; *Everything Is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, and *Eighteenth-century French Erotic Novels*. The object is intentionally awkward and ridiculous, but at the same time it is able to instill unfathomable unexpectedness of motion, also thanks to the long cable connecting it to the outlet, ultimately suggesting that it could suddenly move in any direction and thus forcing the viewer to approach with some embarrassment, curiosity, and caution to discover more on the contents of the books and its reason to exist. This "presence," the result of one of the poetical but unexpected associations between everyday objects made by Airò, asks interesting questions on

Mario Airò
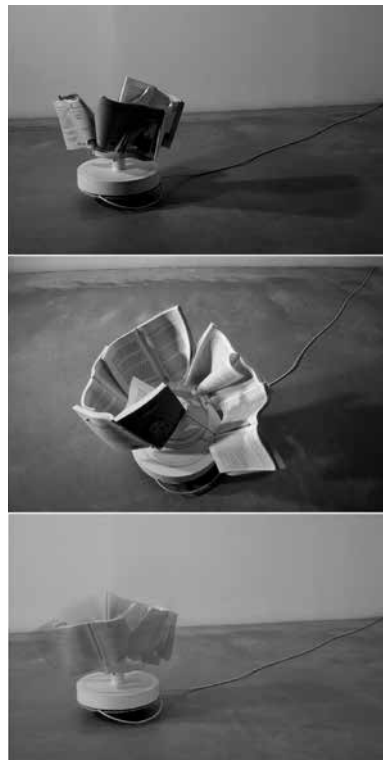
L'amour fou, 2009. Steel, iron, painted electric motor, 5 books, wheels. 48 x Ø 35 cm. Courtesy the artist and vistamare, Pescara.

12. This intuition and association was practiced by Harald Szeemann in his travelling show *Le macchine celibi*, 1975–77.

13. Cfr. Matteo Ciastellari, *Le architetture liquide: Dalle reti del pensiero al pensiero in rete*. Milan: LED, 2009.

Ierofania, 2011. Neon, pencil on paper, steel cables, stone. 200 x 35 x 50 cm.

14. "Hierophany" is the term used by the religion historian of Romanian origins Mircea Eliade with which he describes the manifestation of the sacred, which is different from the idea of apparition.

15. Cfr. "L'immagine non è la didascalia di un pensiero," interview by Gianni Romano with Mario Airò, 1996, https://www. academia.edu/931469/Intervista_Mario_ Air%C3%B2.

how the Duchampesque "ready-made" can be understood today along with the role of the monument. *L'amour fou* is "a circumstantial object"[13] that by staging "low-technology" objects and books on an imagined future (two realities that clash with the digital strategy) aims to shift attention on this society's unwillingness to plan its future in favor of a present expanded by information. Maybe the mad love, mentioned in the title, which Airò suggests we look for is that for narration as the epiphanic discovery of reality and sharing it.

Ierofania, 2011, is striking for its intangible presence: a solidified and expanding ray of light, a simple neon tube covered by colored gelatin that creates the effect of a Wood lamp, that hovers in the air with a sheet of cotton paper at one end with on top a small stone broken in two and containing inside a purple crystal formation. In this case, the perfect balance the artist establishes is between the fullness of the vertical neon and the underlying emptiness, between the surface of the sheet of paper lit up by the Wood light and the non-light from the modified neon, between the stone and the text written by hand lightly starting with the words: "When the sacred manifests itself."[14] This alludes to the works of Lucio Fontana by taking to an extreme the empathic side of the viewer; the approach is hinted at but never developed by the "artist of slits." This is part of Airò's works that are strongly related to literature, or rather, to the power of literature to "picture"[15] things and, therefore, to make them "present" and concrete at that moment and which goes beyond explaining them through symbolism or metaphor. This act is quite unlike the installations and rooms the artist created ten years earlier, such as *La stanza dove Marsilio sognava di dormire,* presented in his solo show at GAM in Turin in 2001, or the permanent work for the city of Hann. Münden in Germany titled *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,* 1999. These last two works, like many others, displayed a practice, both mental and physical, with which the spectator came into contact to reflect on the relationship between everyday space and the

possibility of imagining it. With the work *Ierofania* the space portrayed is metaphysical, and therefore it provides a perceptive mechanism that highlights what separates the visible from the invisible, lightness from heaviness.

With *Walt's overture (as of Forms)*, 2007, Mario Airò creates a unique hybrid between a light box and a monochrome painting to provide tangibility and visual effectiveness previously unknown to words: "Their genesis, all genesis. They lost, all lost – for they include all it." These last words are the reproduction of a page from the carnet that was part of *Leaves of Grass* by the famous nineteenth-century American poet, Walt Whitman. This verbal statement becomes an apparition both unreal and concrete by means of the light filtering in through the cutout letters on the large sponge-painted green wood panel, and not with a brush so as to emphasize the surface's "perceptive awareness." The intensity of the color/light from within the box, which proceeds horizontally for almost three meters along the wall, is possible thanks to a neon tube hidden from sight that amplifies the yellow shade the inner surface is colored with. On a visual level, that which is empty becomes full, and that which was in the white space without the weight of the sheet "takes space" and "takes shape" with respect to the proportion of the viewer's presence. Thus with the work, the artist's attention focuses on painting sensibility and the power of writing to create after having experimented around 2005 with the series of panels titled *Il vago* or with the sculpture/bench/frottage *Dolmen*, or with the signs of *Ling*, 2007, the zero degree of the information stimuli of the image/text. This need on the part of the artist to draw attention to the work's direct experience, and thus raise the question within the spectator of what we see and how, coincides with the time when social networks like Facebook and text messages became widespread. To all-encompassing communication "rumors" he replied with these meditative and intimate works to focus on the emptiness/fullness of waiting and on the intensification of "looking." What
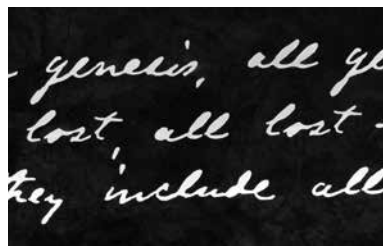
16. *Xanadu*, along with two other installations titled *Papete* and *Bahia*, was made as an environmental work for the artist's solo show at the Centro per l'arte contemporanea Palazzo Fichera in Catania in 2001.

17. The venue "via Lazzaro Palazzi" was opened in 1989 by Bernhard Rüdiger, Liliana Moro, Mario Airò, and many other artists, two months after they published their magazine *Tiracorrendo*.

emerges even further in his investigation is a constant confrontation with painting tradition, from Giotto to Rothko, though practiced beyond the formal problems of this medium's language, so as to initiate a discussion on its role and its implications.

The installation *Xanadu*,[16] 2001, is an environmental sculpture with a globe light placed at the height of the viewer and suspended by two steel tie-rods that anchor it to the ceiling and the floor, thus outlining a diagonal line across the room. With its light, a tiny model lamp draws attention to a precise spot in Asia, whereas a transparent Plexiglas plaque hanging on the ceiling bearing the silkscreened word "Xanadu" focuses it on the threshold of the nearest door. Xanadu is the name of the ancient city built by Kublai Khan after he became the emperor of a unified China in 1271. This is one of those examples where an actual place and mythology are blurred right from the start of its history, also handed down by the stories of Marco Polo and in the modern age by the poems of Coleridge. The plaque, which is a revisitation of the Exit sign always found in public spaces, evokes yet another Xanadu, that is, a star discovered in 1999, and called thusly. When Mario Airò made this work in 2001, contemporary society was in full-blown global communication, while the world suddenly appeared smaller and at arm's reach also thanks to low-cost flights. The physical and historical spot this tiny light refers to, along with the one in the cosmos alluded to by the plaque, introduces, in a soft and poetical way, a necessary relativizing in the claim to rationalize things, but at the same time it also suggests a new perspective with which to imagine and hand them down and not only describe or define them.

Mario Airò (Pavia, 1961, lives and works in Milan) began his investigations in late 1980s Milan by following the classes of Luciano Fabro at the Brera Academy and by actively participating in creating the self-run venue of "via Lazzaro Palazzi."[17] As with other artists of his generation, he had to come to terms with the invasive expressionist painting of Transavanguardia and with post-1977 political un-

rest,[18] as well as reconsider the legacy of arte povera. Airò's contribution to the aesthetic plane (with respect to emerging neo-conceptualisms, to future relational art, and to very widespread post-minimalist sculptural objects) was by creating signs that could solidify a new awareness of the encounter between a physical and a mental place, the work and the observer. This aptitude derived by taking stock of the great changes underway over the course of the 1990s tied to the post-ideological period, to the advent of new reproduction technologies, to the dematerialization of reality and both instantaneous and global communication. Thus, besides paving the way for the idea of the site-specific related to establishing a dialogue with a certain atmosphere of that "context" that could move beyond spatial relations with its physical container, Airò has aimed to eliminate the rhetorical distance between the artist's role and the enjoyer's by means of the "cross-over" between different expressive languages and between high and low culture. As with other international artists like Carsten Höller, Olafur Eliasson, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Tobias Rehberger, Airò does not display the formal representation of reality, but instead that very process that allows the work and in particular natural phenomena to appear as they "unfold" before the audience. This choice has allowed him to avoid spectacularization and analysis of the mechanisms of communication like his coeval Italian peers such as Maurizio Cattelan and Vanessa Beecroft, and instead to make the observer aware of the mechanisms of perception and sight from both an ontological and historical point of view. This itinerary is evident by considering works tied to natural phenomena, like *Fulmine*, 1992, shown at the Castello di Volpaia, or *Aurora*, 2003, part of the MAXXI collection in Rome, as well as the photo series *En plein air*, presented at the Museo di Villa Croce in Palazzo Ducale, Genoa, in 2013. Or the relationship between physical space and the one perceived as in the forest sound installation for Sonsbeek 93, or the light projection installation for a square in Turin in 2002, up to an ephemeral environment titled *Sur-*

18. Cfr. Angela Vettese, in '*Look aloft!' cried Starbuck. The corpusants! The corpusants!*, exhibition catalogue, Galleria Nazionale, Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma, March 29 – June 7, 2015.

Nedko Solakov

place made in the gardens of Sant'Alessio in Rome in 2015. Or tied to the sculptural/inhabitable object like the installation *Unité d'habitation* made in 1994 at the Galleria Massimo De Carlo in Milan, or the installation *Addio, e grazie per tutto il pesce* for the Venice Biennale in 1997, or the volume made in the Piazza Vecchia in Bergamo in 2002 called *La visione di Philip*. Even though these works use different techniques and objects to dialogue with distant spatial and historical contexts, thus allowing some of their unique aspects to emerge, the questions they raise are always the same: Today, in our post-ideological and digital world, what can be considered natural phenomena? What makes a sign the copy of another, if all the signs in the world are part of an original experience? How can we share imagining reality and thus making it even more concrete, and how can we make a constructive comparison in favor of each observer between memory and history? The handwritten (but not only) interventions of Nedko Solakov constantly accompany his work that from the late 1980s has stood out for its use of many media to reflect on the object, on the art system, and on the time of enjoyment. For him, words, in so far as "story telling," are an integral part in creating an image and vice-versa. The exuberance of writing that invades the space and the choice of allowing it to be discovered thanks to small texts scattered here and there are always supported by an explicit "fairytale" and a surreal style with which he engages the viewer by questioning the authenticity of representation systems, from politics to art, from life to memory, which he confronts. But his goal is not implosive meta-narration deconstruction. Instead, he aims to reformulate the criteria with which to discover reality and the way of narrating it. This motive of his never leads to rhetoric or losing oneself in society's rules, which he ultimately longs to short-circuit, precisely because it derives from specific everyday facts tied to his own situation made of fears, desires, questions. This gives rise to complex installations made of many fragments, techniques, and stimuli like *El Bulgaro*, 2000, where he offers the story of

an alter ego of his in competition with the seventeenth-century painter El Greco to meditate on the stereotype of nationality the moment borders are dematerialized; or even when he makes his entire exhibition *Negotiations* at the Dvir Gallery in Tel Aviv in 2003 revolve around the request to end the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis to avoid being hurt while he is there. In other cases, his self-ironic side has allowed him to prefer the work's processional story, as with the installation *Fear* made for the Biennale di Ceramica nell'Arte Contemporanea in Albissola in 2003, which was born to give shape and form to his superstitions and in particular his fear of flying. The relationship between the small "sculptural" finds, made by squeezing clay elements in his hands to overcome his stress when flying from July to September 2002 (displayed in a glass case next to his plane tickets), asks important questions on the identity of sculpture today and the interpretation of the objects found, in general, both ancient and contemporary. Over the past years, the story of the work process became more complex, intricate, and layered, as in the large installation, made in 2010, with tables, writings, videos, notes, souvenirs called *I Want Back Home (Said the Big Frog)*. What was presented as his travel log during his fourteen days on the train, from Sofia where he lives to Shanghai, to take part in a show at the Rockbund Art Museum along with his wife and a toy frog, bought in New York but made in China, is a reflection on what today we can call home and what we build our feeling as a community on. For Solakov, being self-ironic and having a fervid imagination does not mean avoiding everyday/universal problems, but facing them from a human and concrete perspective that always makes him conduct an important (group) self-analysis, at times even painful, as with the work *Top Secret* made between December 1989 and February 1990 and shown at Documenta 12 in Kassel in 2007. The work is made of small index cards and information held in a wooden file cabinet, commented on by the artist himself, where he confesses that while a student (from 1976

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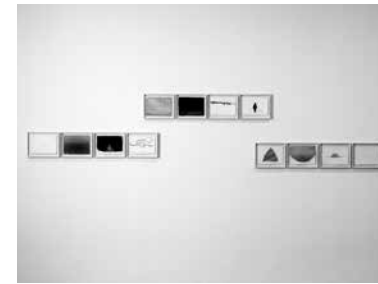
Roads, 2015. Series of 12 sepia drawings, b/w ink. 19 x 28 cm each. Courtesy Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia.
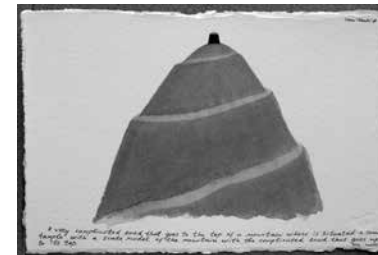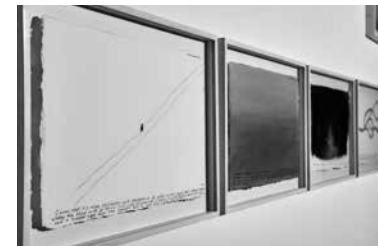
19. Cfr. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, and Jacques Derrida, "Il cinema e i fantasmi" (2001), *Aut Aut*, 309, 2002.

until he dropped out in 1983) he was a collaborator and informer for Bulgaria's secret services. It's an oneiric confession aimed at himself (that political system was already undergoing great change when he showed the work in 1990, but also because make-believe and reality are very intertwined), but it allows him to reflect on control and consensus methods that exist today. These seem to call to mind the work or the "story through visual fragments" that exist even today in the age of Internet, it's just that they are immaterial. This analytical and narrative, intimate and collective approach makes his interventions, in reality, always site-specific precisely because they are above all the means with which he establishes the encounter/dialogue between himself, the context, and the observer, to then foster and reactivate the discourse on trust in the narrator with respect to the audience and vice-versa.

Roads, 2015, is a series of twelve drawings where the artist places the two codes of "image" and "text" on the same level of meaning, thus profoundly altering the norm of the world of media that presents these two elements as one under the other. This inclination of his allows him to work not in an affirmative format (typical of advertisement), but rather in doubt and misunderstanding, to share empathically with the viewer. But in this case, unlike all his other works from the late 1980s to today, it isn't a story drawn directly in the exhibition space with the goal of stimulating the viewer to a performative reading and one of discovery of the "here and now." In this work, the display of the sheets framed and arranged along the wall underlines a closed enjoyment with a precise beginning and end, emphasized also by the successive numbering within the drawings and by the dates when they were made. This "narrative linearity" is, however, contradicted by the possibility of testing each single drawing/text even independently from the others, since they exist as "potentially parallel stories,"[19] seeing his subjects are from fairy-tales: "roads." These are used as passive tools where the hero passes and are then turned into anthropomorphizations in that they are

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free to express their feelings, memories, or existential doubts on where to go and what will happen to them. There's the road through the forest, the one that goes around the mountain, the upside-down one. Thus the artist may freely question the structure of narrative in the time of Internet, social networks, and TV series in streaming, which have provoked an expansion of narrative time with "an open ending." In fact, the sequence ends, only temporarily, with the phrase "a dead road" drawn with a continuous line at the center of the sheet as if to portray another line/road, thus raising the question: Which road? The narrative road? One of the roads listed/portrayed in the story? This meta-narrative approach that sheds light on those same tools of the work to stimulate an even greater active role on the part of the spectator is also explored in the series *Attempts*, 2013, and in *Routine*, 2014. In these works of his, the time narrated (devoted to purpose and enjoyment) coincides and collides to ask the questions of what a story is and what role it plays.

For Not Being, 2014, is an oil on canvas by Solakov characterized by a red surface portraying a face with a sardonic smile along with rows of flames, a text handwritten by the artist, and a fragment of a gilded frame that covers just one corner of the picture. These three elements clash and suggest varying interpretations. The text talks about the artist's concerns on ending up in hell after he dies, basing himself on a list which he writes by hand, like for example not having been a "nice person in general" or "some other person" or "I don't remember this one, see next." The red face is the one that the psychoanalysis scholar Lacan would define as the "representation of the unconscious antagonist." The gilded frame is considered a sort of "voice of conscience" or an omniscient observer seeing that Solakov writes on the canvas, below it: ". . . is trying to verify that what I am stating on the right is true and that I am not actually convinced that I will turn up in heaven." The contrasting statements and the melancholic/self-ironic tone that envelopes everything allows the artist to not represent fears for his future

For Not Being, 2014. Oil on canvas. 113 x 142 x 5.5 cm.
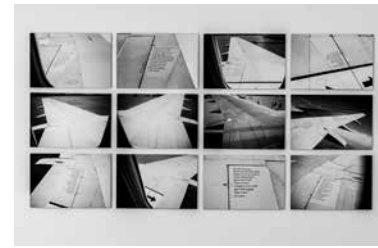
On the wing (texts on the wings of 6 Boeing 737), 2001. Series of 12 color photographs mounted in aluminum. 40 x 60 cm each; total 124 x 246 cm. Ed. 6 + 2 AP. Courtesy Galleria Continua, San Gimignano-Beijing-Les Moulins.
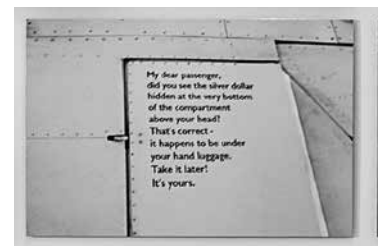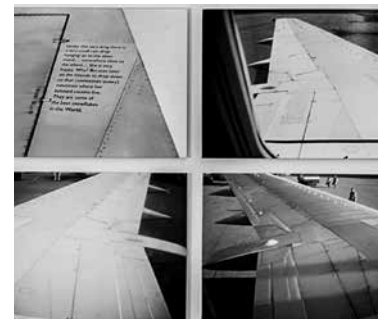
20. Cfr. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*. London: Polity, 2000 (our translation).

tied to cultural and religious traditions, but rather he "presents" them by unveiling the mechanisms of consensus and the immediate pragmatic implications. The discussion concerning the existence of hell takes second stage with respect to his questioning himself, as a middle-aged man, on his past and how to live his future, thus facing various themes from a pragmatic and seemingly personal dimension.

On the wing (texts on the wings of 6 Boeing 737), 2001, is a composition of twelve photographs where twelve printed texts found on top twelve Boing 737 wings are seen from different points of view even though always from inside the airplanes. "My dear passenger, did you see the silver dollar hidden at the very bottom of the compartment above your head? That's correct, it happens to be under your hand luggage. Take it later! It's yours." This phrase, like the others, forces the viewer to reflect on the narrative strategies of a functional kind and on the subtle misunderstanding, typical of "liquid modernity," of "interpreting public news as strictly personal and personal facts as extraneous."[20] On an aesthetic level, this work dialogues with a 1960s American photography tradition, from Ed Ruscha to Bill Owens, but takes one step further because it aims to translate in an other time the meaning of the site-specific work which he completed in 1999 when he had writings made for an exhibition at the Casino Luxembourg. This kind of intervention where the work is almost camouflaged with reality is used during the 1990s by Solakov, instead of offering an image of reality as "suspended judgment" (like many artists, from Fischli & Weiss to Thomas Demand and even the Italian Diego Perrone) to suggest that the spectator raise his attention with respect to his everyday reality and official information. Stimulating this debate on what can be considered a work of art is an approach that is different from other American conceptual artists who in the late 1960s began introducing writings and not images in art spaces, even though today we may observe them also in a constant perspective. Today, observing this work is like finding oneself on the edge between the concept of

"non-place"[21] from the 1990s codified by Marc Augé and the "expanded time" of today, between a figurative and an abstract dimension, between an intimate and a public dimension. Evoking different tensions highlights that today we live in a hybrid society between a "nomadic" one and a "sedentary" one,[22] and the site-specific work may also have implications not only with respect to the physical space where it becomes manifest, but also with respect to the time it is enjoyed.

Nedko Solakov (Tcherven Briag, Bulgaria, 1957; lives and works in Sofia) was classically trained as a fresco artist, though always filtered through irony and concepts. More than other artists from Eastern Europe, he has been able to metabolize and present in his work the contradictions of the post-ideological world, of the transformation of national borders but not in a pedagogical way. Searching for a horizontal dialogue, tied to the power of fairy-tale imagination though "pragmatic" between spectator, space, narration, and intimate story, is Solakov's personal contribution to the evolution of an inclination displayed by artists from the previous generation, like the Kabakovs. His objective is to re-propose a need for responsibility on the part of the audience so in the future they do not have to tolerate as a group "spectacularizing facts for the shapeless masses."[23] In his work, we find two seemingly different aspects: on the one hand, a reflection on the art object and on minimalist sculpture, while on the other, a direct analysis of meta-narrative mechanisms, to present the limits and potentials of painting and drawing to create not a spatial illusion, but rather a shift towards its enjoyment on an almost process-like dimension. Thus works as potential surreal re-readings of the "ready-made" object (like the public intervention called *Destroyed Public Sculpture* for Sonsbeek 9 at Arnhem in 2001 or the action of the two house painters in *A Life [Black & White]* also presented at the Venice Biennale in 2001) may coexist with the painting exhibition *Romantic Landscapes with Missing Parts* held at the Neuer Berliner Kunstv-

21. Cfr. Mark Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. New York: Verso, 1995.

22. Cfr. Bruno Accarino (ed.), *Confini in disordine: Le trasformazioni dello spazio*. Rome: manifestolibri, 2007.

23. Cfr. Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2009.

24. Cfr. Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*. Milan: Bompiani, 2000.

25. "Institutional critique" is the systematic investigation on how art institutions, like galleries and museums, work and was created in the 1960s by artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Andrea Fraser, Fred Wilson, and Hans Haacke.

erein (n.b.k.) in Berlin in 2002, and with the environmental work, thus creating friction between the real object, its image, and its explanation, also made that same year at CCA in Kitakyushu, Japan. His willingness to search for a dialogue on equal footing with the enjoyer with whom to overturn the rules, both in a social space and in the overall narration, is analyzed also within the art system. Among these we find those whose subject is an unreal "collector" in all his forms and neuroses, even mythological, or those that highlight the antagonistic roles between artist and institution, as in the exhibition *Rivals* at the Centre d'Art Santa Monica, in Barcelona in 2004; this inclination would lead him to organize his thirty-year retrospective, in 2011–12, between the Smak in Ghent, the Museum Serralvez in Porto, and Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, as if he attempts to find the rules to order all his works/memories/files in a unique "open work"[24] with respect to the viewer, museum, curators and with respect to the entire project, as in the new added show "underway" at the Galleria Civica in Trento, where Solakov displays the works "unshown" in the three previous museums. His is a particular form of "institutional critique,"[25] where he questions the contradictions of existence by entering the maze of social and political rules that regulate our lives, reminding us that they were made to improve our everyday reality and not to collectively imprison us. An example of making the roles of inhabitants and institutions dialogue with each other on their identity is also evident on the "home page" of his artist web site, where he thanks (maybe) some institutes in Bulgaria that are involved with contemporary art, but this support has evidently still not been seen, since the web site is not active. It would almost seem that Solakov, as a witness from an Eastern European country during the demise of Communist ideologies, has well in mind the idea that today the institution has given way to private ego and, therefore, "critique" must be carried out above all according to the actions of each single person, with respect to society and vice-versa.

Christian Jankowski studied in the late 1980s at the art academy of Hamburg during the same years as artists like Jonathan Meese and John Bock even though his idea of "widespread performativity" without a single and frontal protagonist with respect to a specific public has led him down different paths. In fact, the goal of his practice is to spontaneously establish a "collaborative" nature so that each viewer may take part and contribute, often unintentionally, to making the work exist. And it was precisely this approach that has allowed him, with his videos made during the 1990s (which never document an action, but display an other process), to be a critical and propositional observer of the great changes brought about by communication in perceiving reality, in conceiving subjectivity, in constructing the relationship between the perception of everyday and public space, up to the new implications of the words "spectacle" and "in real-time." The video *Telemistica* made for the 1999 Venice Biennale contains all these described tensions since it consists of a montage of TV recordings of phone calls made to varying television shows of fortune tellers by some local broadcasts, who were called to find out information on his participation in the Venice event. What Jankowski creates with his videos/happenings is a subtle humorous and estranged dimension in the strategies of "aggregation" and "communication" used by the "new mass media." But his is not mere parody; instead, it is erosion from within leading its basic mechanisms to extreme consequences. This is why the works of Jankowski may be seen also as "confessions" on the part of the contexts he faces and confronts; therefore, we can consider his operations as being site-specific as they relate to the operative and contextual dimension, and not only with respect to the physical and installation conditions of the successive product. For him, exploring these "organizations" means giving solidity to the immaterial, seeing that usually they are abstract realms verging on mythology, like cinema (*I Played This Tomorrow*, 2003; *16mm Mystery*, 2005; *Lycan Theorized*, 2006), the allure of hope shopping (*Telemis-*

26. Cfr. Pier Paolo Pasolini in *Corriere della Sera*, December 9, 1973 and in *Scritti corsari*. Milan: Garzanti, 2008.

Tableau Vivant TV, 2010. Video, color, sound. 64' 2". Ed. 5.

Tableau Vivant TV, 2010. Stills from video, color, sound. 64' 2". Ed. 5.

tica, 1999; *Talk Athens,* 2003; *Perfect Gallery*, 2010), religion (*The Holy Artwork*, 2001; *Casting Jesus*, 2011), the economic and art market (*Point of Sale*, 2002; *Kunstmarkt-TV,* 2008; *The Finest Art on Water*, Frieze Projects, 2011). The motive of these actions is surely his desire to critique and react to the passive stance of spectators from the 1960s onwards, and as Pier Paolo Pasolini[26] noted, due to TV shows that tricked him into thinking he could participate in political debates and in information in general, while in reality these were only seemingly "open" monologues, which required unconditional and anti-democratic consensus.

Tableau Vivant TV, 2010, is a video by Christian Jankowski that takes to the extreme the statement "the medium is the message" coined by Marshall McLuhan, layering in a single narration the inner and outer dynamics of temporary display, the artist's creative process, making works, his mediation with people in the field and the "public at large," up to presentation in the exhibit hall at the 17th Sydney Biennale in 2010, on opening day. This "union of various processes" is visible thanks to the collage of many TV formats where known hosts of culture shows (with their own aesthetic, type of editing, and broadcaster logos) hectically comment on what is happening or what the artist is thinking, while he is always immobile, according to the "tableau vivant" technique that became widespread during the nineteenth century. For example, we may observe an immobile Jankowski inside a tub as he is bathing with a book in hand, which is the moment, according to the journalist with him, when the artist got the idea for this work, thus creating a reflection between staging and reality itself. This work places the viewer in front of the filtered, explained, portrayed, and assimilated creative moment, noting on the one hand that advertising over the past twenty years has gone from being a face-on message to an integral part of an immaterial platform the audience nurtures first-hand also through social networks, while on the other hand, all this real-time information forms a grand archeology of current

facts, thus furthering the idea of the expanded present. So it's too simplistic to call *Tableau vivant TV*, as many of his other works, mere art video, since it results from "a widespread performative act" that engages more than one person who all become co-authors of concept, aimed at both the languages of TV new media by making them implode and at a part of the "institutional critique" intended for "the culture industry."[27]

A reflection of this work is the neon series *Visitors*, 2010, with which Jankowski explores the other side of communication, that is, the public's autonomy: the manifestation of its judgment and its self-representation. The works in this cycle consist of transforming comments (left by the audience in a guest book inside art galleries and museums) into a white neon tube. The drawing that becomes the light sculpture *Ciao!! Bravo!!*, 2011, is a fragment of a comment from the Galleria Enrico Astuni in Bologna, that is then enlarged, turning it into a monument, for an exhibition organized by this gallery.[28] In this case we see the exhausting game of opposition between the personal testimony of each visitor and his egocentric inclusion in the public space, between the intimate text written by hand in the book and its transformation into a neon drawing as if it were the sign of a big department store, between the ego of each subject and its annihilation in favor of an ego of communication in general of art in general. This series of works-in-progress draws attention to the fact that in "online" communication, on the one hand, signs are perceived more and more as if they were images, and on the other they exist regardless of the broadcaster and end user they were intended for. In this case, Jankowski's irony almost becomes sarcasm by noting that in order to make a message viral, each single subject is forced to objectify itself as much as possible, that is, be dematerialized in it.

Organize bigger show, 2015, is another installation that adopts writings taken from his "personal" and private to-do lists, represented by white neons. It is part of the work-in-progress called *Was ich noch zu erledigen habe* (What Still Needs To Be Done),

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27. Cfr. Max Horkheimer, W. Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Continuum, 1969.
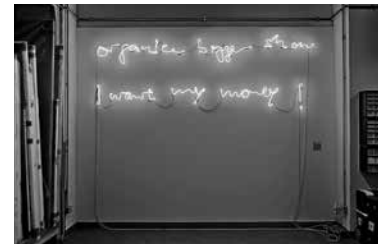

Ciao!! Bravo!!, 2011. White neon. 200 x 200 x 5 cm. Private Collection, Parma.

28. *This is my reference*, an exhibition curated by Lorenzo Bruni, during the 2011 edition of Arte Fiera, in Bologna.

Organize bigger show, 2015. White neon. 27 x 300 x 5 cm. Private Collection, Como.

Organize bigger show, 2015. White neon. 27 x 300 x 5 cm. Private Collection, Como. *I want my money !*, 2015. White neon. 36 x 282 x 5 cm. Private Collection, Padua.

29. This text, made from a neon tube, became the site-specific intervention on the façade of the Galleria Enrico Astuni for the exhibition *A chi ti stai rivolgendo/Who is your audience*, held in Bologna from September 10, 2010 to February 6, 2011, curated by Lorenzo Bruni.

begun in 2008. This series entails a "display" of the notes which the artist wrote by hand where he lists his daily "things to do." These are memos ranging from "Thank the curators for the exhibition"[29] to other matters to discuss with people tied to his work, like gallerists, students, accountants, etc., and not only. These reminders the artist keeps accumulating day after day, year after year, constitute a personal reservoir that, once placed in a public space, provokes, for its generic size and for being a fragment of practical life, a strong dose of interpretive misunderstanding. In the case of *Organize bigger show,* the writing is a shortened form of the well-known *Organize bigger museum show*, made many years ago, to remind himself to do this with his New York gallery, Maccarone. Many years after, this statement is still potentially correct, even though with different implications and value. For example, it could now refer to his role as curator of the prestigious Manifesta that will take place in Zurich in 2016. Therefore, these texts have nothing to do with the statements and the use of language carried out in the 1960s by artists like Joseph Kosuth. In fact, Jankowski employs language to meditate not so much on the work itself, but rather on the relationship that exists today between public and private dimensions to then use it, just like a sculpture, to attract new attention to places of passage where his works are found, and which range from the rooftop of a gallery to his storage area (normally an off-limits functional space), as is the case with his recent work on display at the Galleria Enrico Astuni, in 2015. With this latest work, the artist makes a successive discard, which in previous works from the series was considered but not shown, and which concerned activating a site-specific mode with respect to the time of enjoyment. In fact, *Organize bigger show* is only the first (placed above on the storage wall, leaving the bottom empty) of four neons/texts (*I want my money!*, *Get blood*, and *Organize bigger museum show*), always based on his notes referring to "What Still Needs To Be Done," which were arranged, under the first, at times following the show's inaugu-

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ration, thus shifting the spectator's attention to the work's future, but also to the event's time in general and not only in regards to the architectural space.

Christian Jankowski (Göttingen, 1968; lives and works in Berlin), since the early 1990s when "images were perceived as more real than actual objects,"[30] opted not to adopt the traditional techniques of art, but instead confront the new media of globalized communication. In reality, this is the means and not the ends with which the artist wishes to give preference to a real-time action/experience that is then made "lasting" most of the time through video. In fact, if in the mid-1990s his work could be associated with that of artists such as Gillian Wearing or Pierre Huyghe, attentive to the image in relation to make-believe and reality, beginning in the mid-2000s his works are more akin to those by Tino Sehgal and Roman Ondák, due to their need to shift attention to the moment of enjoying the experience to reflect on the notion of collective identity, memory, and culture. But unlike these artists, Jankowski aims to turn this moment into a "lasting"[31] condition by highlighting all the contradictions of the case. This is why, right from the start, he began to reconsider (through the representation of potentials and limits) the technique of painting, sculpture, the ready-made, architectural intervention, and staging to open a broader debate on the role of artworks and above all on the role of the audience. So with *Mein erstes Buch* at the Portikus in Frankfurt in 1998 he explored the limits and strategies of the installation and real-time talks through the creation of a literary work, whereas with *Living Sculptures*, 2008–09, he reflects on the role of monuments through bronze sculptures/copies of street artists impersonating popular figures like Julius Cesar, Che Guevara, Salvador Dalí's *La Femme aux tiroirs*, placing them at an entrance to Central Park in New York. Or, with the work *The Finest Art on Water*, made for the 2011 edition of the Frieze Art Fair in London, he investigates the nature of the ready-made with respect to financial economic strategies and contemporary collecting, while the cycle of large paintings called

China Painters, 2007–08, which were made by some Chinese painters from a community of 10,000 copiers in the city of Dafen, meditates on the idea of original and copy, as well as the leveling of cultural codes to allow greater diffusion. His desire to make the context emerge where he intervenes allows us to understand that his wanderings into new communication media is a tool with which to activate a reflection on eliminating the distance between the space of art and the space of life. More than a confrontation with communication, he faces language, not according to the ways of conceptual artists from the 1960s tied to the chief world systems and the analytical dimension, but instead observed by resorting to everydayness with respect to social stereotypes. In some works, this idea is transformed into the need not only to analyze the shared codes of language, but to reformulate its meaning, also ontologically. This new motive is approached by reflecting on the dynamics of belonging to new temporary "communities," made today by the subject within "liquid modernity." This gave rise to famous works like *Let's get physical/digital*, 1997, or *Lycan Theorized*, 2006, but above all, among more recent ones, we find the installation *Review*, with letters in bottles, made at the Petzel Gallery in New York in 2012, the video *Silicon Valley Talks*, made for SFMOMA in its Silicon Valley headquarters in 2013–14 where he involved those working on the new Google program and other Internet language platforms, up to the photo project in 2015 for the non-profit venue Base / Progetti per l'arte in Florence called *Friends of Friends*.

Suzanne Lacy

Suzanne Lacy is an American artist and theorist active since the 1970s. She developed the practice of performance art in previously unexplored ways, regarding collaboration, political activism, the potentials for new forms of engagement with audiences before and during the digital age, and the widespread "re-enactment" archive. *Prostitution Notes* was made in 1974 as an early example of performance and research, and was subsequently exhibited in *Social Works,* curated by performance artist

30. This is the basic observation of Paul Virilio in analyzing the media images of the first Gulf War up to film images following September 11 events.

31. In the dimension intended by Peter Handke in *To Duration*. Amsterdam: The Last Books, 2013.

Nancy Buchanan at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art; it consists of a series of investigations repeated over the course of several months in gathering places in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Mexico, with the goal of understanding the world of prostitution. The visual result is a series of "diagrams" where the hand-written text and the collage of images and drawings of maps of places she went to for her research poised between anthropology and social work dialogue in a unique way and give life to a story where the visual and the written interact on equal footing. The artist's attitude in shaping the work this way reveals three important "strategies" that are central to her entire oeuvre and suggest her considerable innovation on the international art scene. The first concerns her idea of a widespread performance where she isn't present first-hand nor does she stage the problem of prostitution, as instead some other colleagues of hers had done in Europe, like Valie Export and Marina Abramović. Rather, she establishes an empathic and democratic rapport with the people and places of what was called "The Life," which is hidden right under the official surface of the city. The second has to do with Lacy's personal and idiosyncratic manner of coming into contact with these women, beginning with information provided by personal friends and then spreading out into the larger world of the issues under consideration. This type of "rhizome" approach, also seen from the point of view of the social network age, reveals all her radicalness and innovation precisely because the information she gathered is the result of slow and gradual experience in understanding that context, which inevitably led, in turn, to people getting to know her. The third strategy pertains to the generative relationship between handwriting and the collaged images that together make up the drawings with which the artist creates a new "narrative" approach based on a unique balance between the object described and the narrator, between the body of writing and the body of information, between reformulating the signifier and the meaning. Her practice bordering on
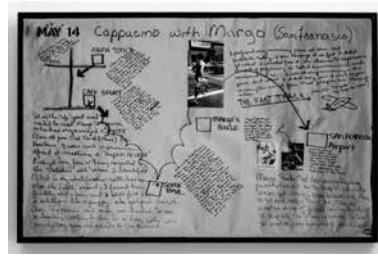
Prostitution Notes, 1974–2015. 10 color photographs, Lambda matte print, painted wooden frames. 48 x 76 cm each. Video 16:9, color. 19' 18". Ed. 3 + 2 AP. Private Collection, Ravenna.

objective documentation and intimate confession led her to move beyond the use of the word in art as it had been conceived up to that moment, from concrete poetry to Fluxus, and to totally oppose the analytical approach adopted in the mid-1960s by some conceptual artists. Therefore, ultimately, the work *Prostitution Notes* represents absolute novelty, not only for the kind of process, but because it bears an equal exchange between "the interviewed" and "the interviewer," between performer and audience, thus allowing her not to merely investigate, but to interact with the object of her investigations: prostitution, in this case, in that it is a nuance of society and not a phenomenon in its own right. This subtle point of view will return in all her subsequent works, up to creating complex projects for the time they took to make and the "characters" involved. Examples are the project *Under Construction,* 1997–98, made with the producer Barbara Clausen, where she relates to the community of young women in Vancouver, or *The Oakland Projects*, 1991–2001, where she establishes a new dialogue between high school students and the local police, school administrators, healthcare providers, and politicians. *Prostitution Notes* has newfound identity in 2010 when it was turned into a performative reading within the project *Map Marathon*, curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist for the Serpentine Gallery in London. On that occasion, the artist, with videos, recordings, and images (both archive and new) for the event, documents the steps of the project by metaphorically "redrawing" those connections and that knowledge she had already faced in 1974, thus raising two important questions in reconsidering it and narrating it live with new listeners. The first is tied to questioning the process of personal memory and how each person re-elaborates, over the years, one's own past actions. The second is connected to trying to understand how today's society reacts to still similar, though different, issues. This is the same motive that led her to recreate today the "re-enactments" of her past performances, which we consider as being new works because of their renewed dialogue established with

society. The currently relevant point of view Lacy wishes to create is well represented in the re-enactment of a work from 1977, *Three Weeks in May* (recreated in 2013 for the Getty's Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival as *Three Weeks in January*): "My question was always, 'What is the social/political context that exists around the issue of rape, and can I make a contribution?' But now I had a new problem: 'What is of interest to me, conceptually, in the rethinking of this work?'"[32] A subsequent passage of *Prostitution Notes* takes place in 2015 when the series of original drawings is "de-fetishized" and placed in the present time when they are turned into a series of ten photographs. This friction or transformation from low technology to digital reproduction is but one of the warning signs the viewer has at disposal to understand that, from a visual point of view, the focus of this work, as with others by her, unfolds across media mechanisms (by photographing the pseudo-democratic evolution from the world of journalism since the 1970s to the world of today's blogs and social networks), striving to illustrate and render concrete their rules and goals. In this way, the artist aims to alter and reformulate the media channels that normally transmit these facts to the public to thus change stereotyped ways of thinking that lead to repeated poor judgment, like for example, presenting rape, in the 1970s, as being the fault of women's behavior and not that of the rapist. Today, with new technologies that allow us to come into contact with everyone and everything and which create the illusion of rendering information democratic, a new need arose for Lacy to stimulate a critical outlook on how to mediate and access this information so as to avoid imploding in the apathy of hyper-communication. *Chickens Coming Home to Roost*, 1976, is a series of four photos, reprinted in 2015, that explore the theme of female identity beginning with her portrayal, interweaving this with a strange and surreal physical comparison between the human body, an animal's body, and its use as food. At the center of the shot we always find the nude artist in full display, while on a table (that ide-

Chickens Coming Home to Roost, 1976–2015. 4 b/w photographs, Lambda matte print on Dibond with lettering applications. 81 x 122 cm each. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Original and one-of from 1976.

32. Cfr. interview with Paul David Young, "The Suzanne Lacy network," *Art in America*, June 1, 2012. For her show at the Museo Pecci in Milan in 2014–15 she recreated a further re-enactment of a (broader) part of the project *Three Weeks in May* from 1977.

ally divides her from the viewer) we see a roast chicken in a container. Below, but always in the frame, there are words that describe and objectify the staged gestures, for example, "wing" and "arm." Both these elements, the action carried out only for the camera and in a private place like the intimacy of a kitchen, along with the non-subordinate relationship between text and image, since they are on the same formal and semantic level, go beyond the apparent purpose of the photographs in documenting a performance. In this, the artist may expand the implications and the notion of a performance not only as a new artistic discipline, but also by turning the body into language and vice-versa. A strong vein of irony informs her work and is already present in the title, as it creates short-circuits in two fields of interests for the artist and the intellectual community at that time in California, though without making them rhetorical or labeling them. The first field regards the world of media and advertising that stereotyped the image of women by creating well-determined cultural and formal expectations. The other concerns the relationship with studying the animal world and the food chain industry. Her nude body and the act of eating meat clearly emphasize the animal side to humans and provoke an explicit appeal to vegetarians. The ethical questions she raises are shifted into a broader field, not only concerning political activism through irony, also thanks to the expedient of "presenting" everything by a convivial dinner. The romantic dinner the public is invited to is only evoked, but it suffices in forcing viewers to reflect on the responsibility each single individual has in regards to "macro-corporations," to government, to industries, and so forth. It is the theme of conviviality, of sharing, of making something together, of collaborating not only physically, but also in communication and conceiving, which is central to some of Suzanne Lacy's fundamental works, like for example *International Dinner Party*, 1979, where, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, she invited over 200 organizations founded by women across the world to hold an actual dinner party and

to send, by telegram, information, topics treated, to create a final map/event instructions, and therefore a world geography based on values different from those of their own countries. This is a fundamental practice and formalization above all for the development of later artistic investigations, including relational art, during the 1990s, on the part of artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija who elaborated the role of food as a means of direct socialization, but also Félix González-Torres who reclaimed the mechanisms of political/social activation, though not in a head-on or controversial way, to invite broader reflection. *Tattooed Skeleton*, 2010, a project created over the course of one year for the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, is composed of a series of performances and city interventions, videos of interviews with the women who live in a domestic violence shelter, the screening of a film during an annual ceremony of the Spanish government that brought the audience itself into the frame of the film, a conversation among activists, journalists, and government workers, to explore new ways of narrating the public story on violence against women, a live-streaming event with young students, and even a protest in the square on November 25 (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) where the names of women murdered during that past year were read out loud. In this case, Lacy's activism not only always aims to create a direct dialogue between the space of life and that of art, but it also transforms the museum into a hotbed of ideas and meeting points. Here, her art tool, as in many other works from this past decade, is mainly conversation, used as an inclusion as well as performative strategy. The artist in her statement explains this extensive effort: "The project began with a white mask that protestors in Spain have used to symbolize how victims of domestic violence must remain hidden for fear of retribution. The project embraced the complexities of this symbol, which also provoked feelings of entrapment and helplessness for abused women. Four hundred personal narratives from women around the country were recorded by hand

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Tattooed Skeleton, 2010. 2 color photographs, Lambda matte print on Dibond. 27 x 40 cm each. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Private Collection, Verona.

Tattooed Skeleton, 2010. 2 color photographs, Lambda matte print on Dibond. 81 x 122 cm each. Ed. 5 + 2 AP.

Tattooed Skeleton, 2010. Still from video, color, sound. 7' 37''.

33. Cfr. http://www.suzannelacy.com/tattooed-skeletonnew-page/.

onto the face of the white masks that were used throughout the project . . ."[33] Naturally, the photos and videos taken of and connected to this project do not just turn it into a fetish or a testimony, but instead explore unique aspects with respect to current techniques in spreading photo images, offering food for thought for those that had not been faced with the "live" project. So the photos of the white masks (before the performance and film event) in the empty chairs of the theater in the Museo Reina Sofía evoke the violated identities as a community, precisely through their absence. Other photos in the form of diptychs find an ideal tool to highlight two implications of the same act/concept. For example, in one diptych we find the audience wearing the masks while they are seated in the (above-mentioned) theater, and in the other image we see a parade of women with masks protesting in a square. These images effectively express key concepts of the project, that is, without hearing there can be no action and vice-versa. Instead, *Tattooed Skeleton*, the video shot with the Chilean filmmaker Cecilia Barriga, offers a direct critique of the media, TV shows, and the media industry based on the pain of others and the host's pretend empathy. This critique is demonstrated by the testimonies of the women subject to violence in the absence of the mediator, the journalist. So the question is: Who are they talking to? This emptiness, which becomes evident by following the video testimonies, may be filled only by the viewer's new awareness, which echoes the victim's newfound strength and self-consciousness and, therefore, a new potential "story" or public narrative.

Suzanne Lacy (Wasco, California, 1945; lives and works in Los Angeles) studied with Judy Chicago in Los Angeles; she then collaborated with Allan Kaprow and, after her initial performances where she used animal parts in addition to direct and violent acts with respect to the audience, quickly elaborated her own personal articulation of the potent combination of performance/happening and feminist philosophy, leading to today's temporal social practice artforms. This approach allowed her

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to engage in direct debate with society concerning political, pedagogical, legal issues and with respect to activism and group fears of "others" in general. A central and constant aspect in all of Lacy's work is her desire to give a voice to people who don't have a representative public presence, but at the same time she aims to make this experience coincide to create ever-new political awareness in the person who acquires this voice, as she attempts not to cannibalize the information.[34] During the 1970s, when she extensively used her body as a tool for group actions, she also experimented with self-awareness with respect to the world and its aspects, with which she dialogues. This is evident, not only in *Prostitution Notes,* but also in all those works connected to the widespread stereotype that for women aging is something negative, ranging from *Inevitable Associations,* 1976, and *The Bag Lady,* 1977, where she self-ages, to works where she includes direct testimonies and the presence of elderly women, as in 1983–84 with *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind.* Thus it becomes clear that all of Suzanne Lacy's work is characterized by her willingness to layer her role as an artist with that of an educator and activist to broaden her desire to work on the overall notion of learning.[35] Even though most of her works do not represent the learning process in itself, they nonetheless stimulate it, making this process open-ended and continually implicated.

Since the mid-1980s, Cuoghi Corsello (Monica Cuoghi and Claudio Corsello) have been devoted to deciphering the tensions of a social kind and those tied to the artistic act in itself by adopting re-activated found objects,[36] but also by using words or tags, sound installations and concerts, oneiric videos or computer-generated animations as well as images stolen from life experiences and urban spaces, up to new "painting" works made since 2002 with computer graphic technology, today considered vintage. *Degrado 4U (degrado per te)*, 2009, is an installation where the writing "degrado" (degradation) becomes a surreal presence, thanks to the silver helium balloons arranged like an arch and held down by white

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34. The use of widespread conversation to activate a work of collective and personal consciousness (not only in *Prostitution Notes,* 1974) lies also at the heart of works such as *The Crystal Quilt,* 1985–87, where she adds her reflection on the experience of aging in women, and *Skin of Memory,* 1999, recently presented at the Tate Modern in London, made in collaboration with other artists in Colombia, a country devastated by crime, or the discussion project also for radio, from 2007 for the twentieth anniversary of *Artscene,* the magazine of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

35. Lacy centralized and framed her own learning processes, in recent writings, as well as artworks. Lacy has become more overt in exploring the relationship between public performance and public pedagogy. For more information, see her work *Kaprow project,* 2013, made at the Manchester Arts Gallery as part of *Do It* (curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist) and the project *between the door and the street,* made in New York in 2013 and which she will intervene upon in spring 2016 in northern UK, as well as read some recent theoretical texts she has written and the one by Chris Robbins, "Reclaiming the Public in Public Pedagogy" where the work is mentioned and discussed, *Oakland Projects* (text published in Randy Martin [ed.], *The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics.* New York: Routledge, 2015).

Cuoghi Corsello

36. Cuoghi Corsello began occupying large abandoned industrial sites in 1994: *Il giardino dei bucintori, Cime tempestose,* and in 2001 *Fiat.* "By occupying these factories, everyday life became one long installation. We'd assemble every thing, from rocks to furniture, in an almost exorcism-like practice with respect to the factories of hard work and alienation."

37. Cfr. Franco Berardi (Bifo), *Dell'innocenza. 1977: L'anno della premonizione.* Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997.

Degrado 4U (degrado per te), 2009. 7 foil letter-shaped balloons. Total installation 397 x 513 x 20 cm. Variable dimensions. Private Collection, Verona.

Pea Brain stazione BO, 1990. Color photograph. 10 x 15 cm. Courtesy the artists.

strings that anchor them to two amplifiers placed on their own stands. The contrast between the shiny bright letters and the amplifiers does not only act upon the aesthetic plane, but also on the functional one, seeing that from afar they evoke a "live" event, whereas from close-up they spread across the room the audio titled *Concerto di uccelli*, 2006. This is a composition of recordings of birdcalls combined with instruments and vocals sampled by the artists themselves. The result is an installation verging on a sculptural object that allows the viewer to discover the setting and measure the space from both a physical point of view or one that may engage incorporeal stimuli. In its complexity of signs, the installation eliminates from the writing its role as signifier to become the synthesis of a mood, a thought, a déjà vu . . . but which one? As the artists explain: "The need to write 'degrado' in this way (extravagant and ephemeral but at the same time modest and severe in its paradoxical composure as a triumphal arch) came to us for the invasive and ridiculous exploitation of this word on the part of politicians and journalists, making it soft, nostalgically dramatic, and romantic." Degradation always goes hand-in-hand with the defense of decorum and is always tied to non-livability in the urban space. This theme is quite beloved by Cuoghi Corsello, who from the end of the 1980s intervened with violence and obsessive reiteration through tags across the city to show social emptiness and overcome the mourning for the end of positive and collective revolutionary tensions from "'77.[37] That's why the theme of reclaiming the city and the creation, even temporary, of a new reactive and reunited community under the banner of art, of graffiti, of lovers of Pea Brain, of haters of Pea Brain, and so forth, has always enlivened their role as stimulators of dialogue in social spaces.

Pea Brain stazione BO, 1990, is a color photo (used as the image for the project *Tales of a Place* in 2015) of a sequence of stylized "ducks" that seem to run into each other, drawn with markers (and not the usual spray paint) on a wall near the train station in Bologna (in fact, so near that at the time it

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became famous among the city's writers). Observing this image today is the most effective testimony to understanding how the act of writing slowly took hold in their work (they had to remain anonymous due to problems related to laws against vandalism) and of being visual artists. In fact, the image is not the documentation of a "piece" (according to the writer), but a picture conceived down to the tiniest detail and which we may liken to the aesthetics of what back then would be called internationally "the Düsseldorf school."[38] The photographs of Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth became famous across the world precisely because they found a new way of documenting the landscapes/architecture of modernity, of industrial archeology, by opening important debates on the theme of photography and shifting that of the visual archive towards different perspectives with respect to that of Narrative Art *a la* Christian Boltanski. Cuoghi Corsello, though in synch with the practice of these photographers active in Germany, stand out precisely because they consider the image of urban spaces on equal footing as an evoking device, not only belonging to a specific cultural historical time, but also as a possible "re-activator" of "non-places" (abandoned factories, pillars, city walls, etc.) since they are portrayed with the "pieces" they made with markers or spray paint, putting these in an other dimension. As Monica Cuoghi says: "Back then writing on the walls meant visually reclaiming the city, our places, of proper sources of knowledge and gathering." The violent reaction of offended citizens was what they sought to reawaken attention and critique. At the same time another community as an alternative to the official one formed, identified in a particular war against Pea Brain since they saw it as a "protest against the stupidity of those in power and against TV," even though, as Monica states: "We've never been politicians in an academic sense, and I saw the ducks scattered across the city more as a huge embrace of it."

The installation *Piatti con paesaggi*, 1994–2015, was born by salvaging photos from 1994 and using

38. Cfr. Stefan Gronert, *The Düsseldorf School of Photography*. New York: Aperture, 2010.

Piatti con paesaggi, 1994–2015. 18 ceramic dinner plates with b/w printed photoscollages from 1994. Ø 25 x 2.5 cm each.
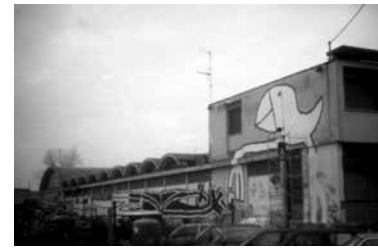
Paesaggio n. 9, 1993–94. Photograph, b/w. 18 x 23 cm. Courtesy the artists.

39. An inclination mentioned by Guido Molinari, in "Dal graffitismo al 'paesaggio fotografico,'" *Art Leader*, n. 25, 1995, and by Elvira Vannini, in "Cuoghi & Corsello," *Around Photography*, n. 8, 2006.

Suf! Azzurrina, 2014. Light box, hand-carved birch wood, white LED light, king's cape. Programmed sound for June 21 of every year. 74 x 73 x 12 cm. Variable dimensions.

them as raw material in a new work. The series from 1993–94 titled *Paesaggi* has as its subject the fronts of abandoned factories and city walls, like the one against the freeway (*Paesaggio n. 1*), or like the facade to the entrance of the social center Link (*Paesaggio n. 9*). These were always big in format and in proportion to the architecture they collided with, whereas the photos were taken strictly in black and white (which they then printed with an enlarger that made the works a soft and dreamy gray) that gave further impression the building and de-sign were born together and in symbiosis.[39] This archive of visionary archeology radically allowed a different point of view to emerge, not only on a temporal level, with respect to Luigi Ghirri's photo investigations during the 1960s in Emilia Romagna that portrayed great confidence, back then, in modernism and in industrial production on the outskirts of big cities. The images of emptied sites, though not abandoned by strange drawn presences, was an invitation to see and act in a different way regarding these lunar-like locations. *Piatti con paesaggi* stems from the desire to include once again signs taken from reality and placed back into reality and thus interfering in the everyday aesthetic experience, taking it to a whole different level. Exceptionally, the dishes became a wall installation, arranged on two levels: on the bottom row the same image is repeated, but in a warmer shade with respect to the other picture. They create an alteration of the photo double, reminding viewers that a picture exists the moment it is conceived, taken, printed, and not just when it is shared, as is the case with social networks and new tools of temporary archives like modern-day telephone machines/cameras.

Suf! Azzurrina, 2014, is a sculpture that expands its physical presence by acting as a mediator of particular energy forces, like the one of the ghost of Azzurrina in the castle of Montebello along the Apennines in Romagna, ever since she passed away in 1375. *Suf! Azzurrina* is composed of a wooden structure whose perimeter is made up of three circles; it is particularly sensitive since it was made by hand

by a carpenter/skater. On the surface are two eyes/ sky-blue circles that simulate opening and closing through an LED light intensity regulator, whose rhythm is like a kind of breathing used during meditation. Moreover, thanks to an electronic device within, it was programmed to emit, on June 21 each year, the cry of the ghost Azzurrina that was recorded by the University of Bologna. This sculpture, placed on the ground, is wrapped in a red cape that protects it and turns it into a sort of totem, reminding viewers that centuries ago sculpture was born as a functional and not aesthetic ritual object[40] that could arouse a feeling of community and belonging. Previously, it was displayed as the "main actor" in a comedy with twenty-one children for the project *Baby Bloom*, 2014.

La zampa di Pea Brain, 2015, is an installation with a neon located on the façade of the Galleria Enrico Astuni building, found near the Bologna train station, where still today a row of their ducks, made with marker, can be seen. In this case, only a part of the ducks (legs) is present, like a ghost or as an allusion to even bigger proportions the building cannot contain. The neon, thirty-two meters long, crosses two sides of the building at a corner: on the one hand, only a part of the sign is perceived, while on the other the leg is in full view. The neon starts at the center of another work located on the front of the gallery, *Cartina tornasole*, 2015, a green grid bearing tags and throw-ups made with spray paint by the new generation of writers from Bologna, over the past decade. The grid was found on the wall of the Istituto religioso delle Suore missionarie del lavoro on Via Clotilde Tambroni in Bologna, placed there over ten years ago to protect the wall from writers. The provenance is symbolic for Cuoghi Corsello since it is the wall that also hosted their tags when they lived on that street, during the glory days of Pea Brain and Cane Cotto. Placing this grid on a new façade is like giving different meaning to the tags, referring them to poster writings in shops from the 1970s and graffiti in pre-historic caves. This work evokes the power of narration and the desire

40. Cfr. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," mentioned in Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982.

La zampa di Pea Brain, 2015. White neon. 2.70 x 32 m.

Cartina tornasole, 2015. Green mesh painted with decades-old layers of spray-colored tags (signatures). 200 x 600 cm.

6 giugno, 2011–15. Digital drawing on ceramic. 24 x 23 cm.

41. During those years they actively worked to single out an identity for a new generation of artists, collaborating with the gallery neon, directed by Gino Gianuizzi, but also with critics like Renato Barilli, Roberto Daolio, and Guido Molinari, subsequently hosting in their homes/workshop (occupied factories) artists such as Eva Marisaldi, Campanini, and others as well as musicians, graffiti artists, and curators from later generations.
42. Cfr. Teresa Macrì, "Cuoghi Corsello," *Next*, n. 29, 1993.

to know more, because it seems incomplete, there could be other signs to discover inside, and since it is associated with Pea Brain's legs it raises other unanswered questions on a social and cultural level from the 1980s to today. In fact, for the artists *Cartina tornasole* is "indicative of civilization."

6 giugno, 2011–15 (in this case, the date refers to the inauguration of the event hosting it), is a ceramic tile, bearing the date and a nude woman painted in lifeless colors; placed in this space, it raises the question of what took place precisely that day and above all what is the year it refers to. This work arises from a new need, which Monica Cuoghi explains: "Since 2001 I've been making one drawing each day for my desktop. In 2009, I wanted to learn how to improve drawing nude bodies so I decided to draw a nude woman every day. At that same time I became part of the Facebook social network, and so I began putting these drawings online every day until they were blocked due to 'improper' content. Three years of women, one of flowers, one of animals, and then one with more abstract drawings, while this year, 2015, saints." The series of women, as with all the works of Cuoghi Corsello, may also be considered a sort of "matrioska" of techniques (in this case, computer graphics and ceramics), but also varying references to space and time ranging from the virtual one of the Internet to the ontological one of architecture, up to the historical one tied to the 1980s aesthetics of "modest nudes."

Cuoghi Corsello (Monica Cuoghi and Claudio Corsello) are forerunners to many later practices including works not by art duos, but rather by a new organism/identity (there is no "and" between their last names), born twenty-nine years ago. They experimented and "put themselves to the test" in dialogue with the world of graffiti art, of the new generations of artists[41] in 1980s/1990s Bologna, and with respect to the practice of their legendary "occupied factories" as homes or workshops. By being the bearers of different stimuli between high and low culture, between an unbecoming[42] and naïf dimension, they have reflected on how to create a new "communication/lan-

guage" by layering[43] pre-existent signs and moving beyond the idea of art technique in favor of establishing a dreamy and concrete atmosphere where the material and the spiritual share common ground. For example, in 1991 at the GAM in Bologna during *Nuova Officina Bolognese*, they presented *Bello* and *Nel mare della benevolenza*, three sculptures/totems made with TVs,[44] one of which displayed altered videos in colored kaleidoscopes taken from porno films; or when, for the 1999 Tuscia Electa edition, they flooded the foundations of the medieval palace in Radda in Chianti where, by crossing the catwalks, visitors could discover the video *Lo spirito delle ragazze*; there was also *Il bosco che respira,* 2001, made at the Officine del gas, at Bovisa in Milan, with lights that turned on and off in a very slow loop amidst a group of trees outside the building; or the permanent installation *Cadaveri squisiti*, 2009, presented at MACRO in Rome with varying signs/stories, including *Bello* (a stylized face that would accompany them throughout their oeuvre) made in neon with a trembling light, visible while taking the elevator. What unites all their works is the idea of re-establishing a place with rituals that should be sought and perpetrated on a collective dimension. It is an art that aims to "fix things" instead of adding to them. Antonis Pittas is one of those artists active since the second-half of this past decade who had to come to terms with the fact that the world is dematerialized in an expanded and digital present. This is why for him site-specific works correspond not only to dialogue with the physical/mental context in which the work appears, but also to a rapport with the globalized world of information enveloping the viewer. His own personal contribution to this debate is to salvage traditional techniques,[45] like sculpture and writing, to question what today can be considered the aesthetics of new media also in relation to the codes of modernism and the effect of déjà-vu of online images/information if they are not analyzed every day by the "user." His works are always platforms with which to arouse in the viewer a needed reaction with respect to the message for an indis-

43. Cfr. Roberto Daolio, "Oltre i generi," in *Figure del 900 2*. Carpi (MO): Lalit, 2001.

44. Renato Barilli, *Prima e dopo il 2000*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006, p. 141.

Antonis Pittas

45. According to Nicolas Borriaud (cfr. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998), the freedom of artists to use any technique, from painting to installation, sculpture to video, even though creating a direct rapport between the public and the context, was a true fissure, in the 2000s, with respect to the previous generations of artists. Therefore, choosing a technique (and only one) represented a fundamental ideological expressive choice. Today, Antonis Pittas questions, against the mainstream, the specifics of single techniques that for him are not interchangeable.

Marginal costs, 2014. Polished brass. 148 x 170 x 6 cm. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

Aggregate demand, aggregate supply, 2014. Stainless steel, steel. 142 x 185 x 3 cm. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

46. See Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive*. London-Cambridge (MA): Whitechapel-MIT Press, 2006.
47. Contrary to the point of view of Boris Groys, "Art and Money," *e-flux Journal*, no. 24, 04/2011 and *Art Power*. Milan: postmedia books, 2012.
48. Cfr. Yasmil Raymond, *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958–2010*, exhibition catalogue, Dia Beacon, New York, May 5, 2014 – March 9, 2015.
49. The phrase was stated for the first time by Frank Stella in 1966; it then became the unofficial slogan of minimal art, with which they took a stance with respect to the psychologizing around the artistic act so as to focus attention on pure perception.

tinct audience and a typical condition of globalized information and social networks. Naturally, this reaction calls into play new awareness of the criteria to rebuild as a group the idea of archive[46] as a tool of knowledge and the notion of personal/national identity. *Marginal costs*, *Labour costs tepid*, and *Aggregate demand, aggregate supply* are three sculptures/diagrams in brass and steel from 2014 that, as the titles suggest, display specific information with which to interpret the trends of world economy. These abstract, fleeting, and changing facts are turned into fixed forms by adopting a craft and "handmade" process, thus making them concrete objects in a physical world. But the approach is not controversial or desecrating[47]; instead, the metallic compositions are striking because they seem "harmless," beautiful," and "familiar," thereby highlighting that the codes of renewing sculpture, ranging from Brancusi to Carl André, with which the pedestal has been engulfed in composing the work until it becomes a "platform of experience,"[48] are treated like living elements from our shared heritage. This willingness to put the public at ease by enshrouding his works in an inviting atmosphere may be seen as the soft and relational evolution of the intentions expressed in the famous statement of Frank Stella: "What you see is what you see."[49] *Montage*, 2014, is an installation where the there metal sculptures, which in some way display the shifting trends of the economy, are transformed from autonomous elements into a space/stage "where the past may be reactivated and the present may be faced," as Antoni Pittas sustains. In this case, the present is a reference to the new importance of finance in international politics and the ensuing manifestations and revolts of civil protest. The past emerges once again, not only in the form of subconscious suggestions due to the display of "modernist" codes by means of the aesthetics of the three sculptures, but in so far as the design of a unique and broader experience. In fact, the base with the three shades of gray and the wall painted yellow, red, and orange re-propose the architecture of a movie theater conceived in 1924 by

the Austrian artist and designer Herbert Bayer, who was an important figure in the Bauhaus movement, where space, modified by the three colors in succession that marked and altered the environment, served to amplify the emotional impact of the experience of the "moving images." Bayer's project is an example of applying the "fourth dimension" in a purposeful way, that is, attention is paid to the presence of the "time" factor in enjoying the three dimensions of the sculpture/object, just as it had been conceived by the Dutch group "De Stijl."[50] In Pittas's work, the movie screen is set aside so as to draw "attention" to what is taking place between the base, the surroundings, and the potential of the viewer in crossing the threshold and occupying the same space as the sculptures, in order to place at the center of the work the temporality of enjoyment, both physical and mnemonic. This work was born from his solo show at the Annet Gelink gallery in Amsterdam in 2014, but when he presented it in Bologna at the Galleria Enrico Astuni he did not offer a formal portion of it; instead, he created a new and unique physical presence. In fact, he transformed the original installation into a sculpture (which contains the three others in steel and bronze), but also into a stage that by placing itself at the center of the architecture, divides it and allows it to be crossed in a single way. This isn't the same work, even though the departure point is the same. It is important to note that for Pittas his works always entail fragments of culture, as is evident with the marble and graphite installations with which he displays information taken off the Internet, in an effort to establish a new "identity of place" so the viewer may focus on the act of his presence and movement in it, psychological enjoyment, archiving and sharing information. *We shall do as we have decided*, 2013, is a vast and complex installation where marble objects interact with graphite texts that bear information from the Internet concerning comments by the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Erdogan. In this case, the artist relates opposites, chaos and order, control and energy, the slow time in making the graphite

Labour costs tepid, 2014. Stainless steel, steel. 142 x 186 x 2.5 cm. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

Montage, 2014. Stainless steel, steel, polished brass. Wooden structure. 300 x 598 x 254 cm. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

50. Key concept in the ideals of De Stijl, cfr. Luigi P. Finizio, *Dal neoplasticismo all'arte concreta. 1917-37*. Bari: Laterza, 1993.

We shall do as we have decided, 2013. Marble, graphite. Variable dimensions. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

51. Cfr. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Critical Reflections," *Artforum International*, vol. XXXV, January 1997.

texts and the quick time in which news appears on the Internet, the English language and the people of different nations/cultures who use it to be understood on a basic level by everyone. Thus the observer, paradoxically, finds himself in the state of being site-specific with respect to that spatial context and the media information, and not vice-versa. In fact, by moving inside the work, he will find meanings by reading phrases in a certain sequence and which can hardly coincide with that of another viewer, also because as the show unfolds the spectator, by moving the elements, will always turn it into a new thing. Therefore, attention is paid to the need to side with the viewer when observing the world. This suggestion is raised on a pragmatic level, like for example by making the audience note that the word "Safe" written in graphite on a side of a marble element placed on the ground acquires another meaning if it is observed from a slightly different point of view, thus revealing that on another side the letters "Un" appear and thus turn the word into "Unsafe." But what is unsafe? The marble object? The viewer? The context? The indistinct heap of information?[51] The shape of the marble elements and their placement is established by the image of a street in Istanbul after a riot between protesters and the police. For their size and volume, the circles correspond to the car tires used as barricades, the shafts resemble improvised bars, and small cylinders are the marble equivalents of the water bottle tops used to mitigate irritations caused by tear gas, while empty cylinders represent the gas containers used to scatter the crowd. In fact, the materials on the floor, the white marble and the black graphite, contain all the tension "of the moment before and after the storm" since the overall context refers to the unrest in Istanbul, but also in Athens and in Spain, in addition to the Arab Spring, which perfectly epitomizes a general feeling of change. In observing today this installation, we cannot help but think of new news about the destruction of archeological sites on the part of ISIS. Pittas's work acts on the relationship that the texts may gradually establish with the un-

folding container of the most pertinent information at that moment, thus instilling in a subconscious way in today's society ferocious criticism of constantly living in expanded moments. The artist, who notes but does not judge, seems to tell us that today's smaller and sectorized world now requires a new level of empathy and interaction, above all if we consider the theme of searching for a collective future.[52] So the question is: Which signs, places of belonging, rituals do we want to hand down and how can we reinterpret those of the past without mummifying them or turning them into mere impotent fetishes? This feeling is even more evident when the work is shown more than once, thus bearing on the marble's skin the traces of previous writings, which will necessarily be erased once the exhibition ends. In fact, for him this has nothing to do with a relationship of forms between marble volumes and texts, but instead he tries to create a thought device. In order for it not to be outdated, this device must always bear the performative dimension of the writing "made specifically" for that place/context, with which it consequentially stimulates the way a spectator accepts that performance. Maybe it is also for this reason that his practice can be likened to that of a "sui generis archeologist"[53] who instead of interpreting the signs of another society aims to create the ideal conditions to interpret those in our current reality.

With his works, Antonis Pittas (Athens, 1973; lives and works in Amsterdam) amplifies his doubts with respect to the "expanded present" state from a "digital native"[54] point of view to highlight the public's need to reclaim critical attention to signs and their placement in collectivity. This was the reason behind the work *Untitled (this is a historic opportunity for us)* from 2010 during his art residency at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven where each week for three months he added a piece of information to the daily news, while using graphite to put it on a wall, thus creating a chorus and Dadaist kind of narration and, above all, giving life to a device that made the time of the show concrete with respect to

We shall do as we have decided, 2013. Marble, graphite. Variable dimensions. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

52. This subject was faced critically by G.C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1999.
53. Cfr. Interview by Ioanna Gerakidi, http://www.mistermotley.nl/art-every-day-life/contested-site-interview-antonis-pittas.
54. For further information, see Paolo Ferri, *Nativi digitali*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2011.

the time of international news. This same approach also led him to reproduce, for the fourth Athens Biennale in 2013, in the atrium of a building from the 1920s (the historic seat of the stock exchange), the event's press release, whose texts acquired, in rapport with the architecture, a unique perception as well as questioned the disappearance of monuments as suggested by their slow erasure due to the negative effects of so many visitors. A feeling that always accompanies his installations, in a more or less evident manner, is an aesthetization that implodes in emptiness with the goal of making the spectator take on new responsibility in sharing information, so as to offer and search for new references for a feeling of belonging and community. This is what brought him to *Reel Times*, a mimetic/minimalist intervention on the floor of the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam during the exhibition *Scenographies* in 2013; to vertically display, in the group show on young Greek art at BOZAR in Brussels in 2014, *Caa3 Country Ceiling* (the first part of the series *Country Ceilings*), a 1:100 photograph of the roof window of the Greek Parliament; up to the quasi-pop installation *throw hands,* with hands/cushions and other elements made for *Between the Pessimism of the Intellect and the Optimism of the Will*, the 2015 Thessalonica Biennale curated by Katerina Gregos.

Maurizio Nannucci

Maurizio Nannucci's work is made to provoke, through a general analysis of language and culture, with great tension between the mind and the body, which he highlights and renders concrete as well as evokes and makes us imagine. *Same words different thoughts*, 2015, is a two-meter long red neon writing placed on a wall near a corner right off the ceiling. The processes of the mind that activate the writing "Stesse parole, pensieri diversi" (Same words, different ideas) are multiple and cannot be referred only to the "contextual" conditions in which it is found, even though it allows the spectator to linger upon aspects considered "negligible": the words found in the books on the shelves facing the work, the context of the gallery hosting it, the many explanations

Same words different thoughts, 2015. Red neon. 11 x 273 x 4 cm. Private Collection, Turin.
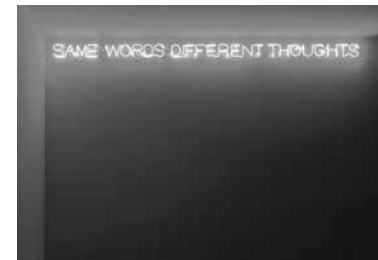
that normally accompany reading works, up to philosophical notions over the course of the twentieth century and which today constitute our shared cultural baggage. The context this statement may refer to extends even further, from a pragmatic dimension to an ontological one, since the conceptual process for Nannucci always prevails over the aesthetic one, even though the artist does not aim to escape from here, but rather deconstruct it. In fact, "analyzing beauty" is present in his work, even though it heads towards particular strategies and uncommon ground. For example, the writing *Same words, different ideas* denies the centrality of the wall by engulfing it entirely in its range of action, while the color red that raises the spectator's attention level moves beyond the architectural container, turning it into a sign/space/text equal to an atmospheric sensation and a cognitive tool. So the work is transformed into a measuring tool of the mind and physical location. But its place is not only objectified but rather refounded and challenged. This is the inclination and contribution of Nannucci, since the 1960s, to the "conceptual" debate between Europe and America[55] on dematerializing the work of art, and on the use of language and confrontation with globalized communication. That is, his art is not limited to the "analytical" dimension of language, even though he begins with this and aims to develop a constant "play" moving in various directions of knowledge and understanding. This approach of his has always led him to reconsider the chief world systems, beginning with specific cases in applying these. For example, the first neon Nannucci made in 1967 called *Alfabetofonetico* (a display of white neon letters, not how they are actually written, but instead how they are pronounced, arranged on the bottom wall near the floor) draws attention to that portion of space and to the represented/instigated act of verbalizing each letter on the part of the viewer.[56] The need to analyze the practice of language beyond the codes of writing led him in 1973 to make two photo works that derived from a performance of his not for the public but only for the camera lens, thus stimulating

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Same words different thoughts, 2015. Red neon. 11 x 273 x 4 cm. Private Collection, Turin.

55. Among the many exhibitions that bear witness to this dialogue that took place from Holland to France and Germany, an important one for Nannucci was the show in 1967 in Bregenz, curated by Peter Weiermair, where concrete poetry artists were invited along with conceptual ones, like Lawrence Weiner, Carl Andre, and Robert Barry. These were his first dealings with New York's conceptual scene, even though he maintained his own investigations, as confirmed by his inclusion in the *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* by Emmett Williams, published by Something Else Press in 1967.

56. As the artist states in "Senza avere dubbi di contraddire se stessi," interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, July 22, 2008 in *Something happened*. Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2009: "In my neon writings, the tautological reference, when it exists, is not self-referential, but environmental and contingent . . ."

57. These collaborations have led him to create permanent works in public spaces in progress and not following the building's creation, as with the Parco della musica in Rome or the library of the German Parliament in Berlin.

a broader reflection on what is meant by performance and photo work. In the thirty-two pictures that compose *Scrivere sull'acqua*, a hand is shown rippling the waters of the Arno River while displaying the creative/expressive act of the word the moment it is revealed; instead, the sequence of images in *Star / scrivere camminando* portray the artist as he chooses one street over another, to show the existence of the word "star" in the urban space of the Renaissance city and observe it from a totally new perspective. This need would also give rise to *Parole, 1976* (an audio installation with slide show) where the artist offers the first word pronounced by the people he interviewed off the street, thus giving voice to the TV audience that normally takes a passive role with regards to communication. The interaction between urban space and language, with the inclusion of neon writings, would lead him in the 1990s to collaborate with architects like Renzo Piano, Massimiliano Fuksas, Mario Botta, Nicholas Grimshaw, Stephan Braunfels.[57] This decision coincides with his constant need to raise awareness, in each human, of social space practices, which precisely from the mid-1990s was on the decline (like politics), losing its power to unite in concomitance with the first applications of Web social networks. Famous texts bear witness to this need, like *All art has been contemporary,* found on permanent display on the building of the GAM (now called MAMbo) in Bologna, 2001, and the one in Turin, 1999, but also with the temporary neons on the façade of the Altes Museum in Berlin or the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. The work (still without a neon writing) *Volterra73*, made in Volterra in 1973, bears a significant precedent. For what was one of the first public sculpture shows in Italy, the artist displayed the two main roads of the medieval town by intervening on the pre-existent public lighting and applying red gelatin to the lamp posts on one street and blue gelatin to the other. This inclusion of amazement allowed viewers and inhabitants to discover the city, crossing it, as if for the first time. *Lives Here (Keith Sonnier, Joseph Kosuth, General Idea, Dennis Oppenheim)* is

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a photo work of four color pictures, and is part of a work-in-progress that began in 1975 and which became the artist book *L.H.* (made up of a selection of forty-eight images, from among many) in 1987 for Art Metropole, in Toronto. The subjects are the fronts and doors to the homes of artists Nannucci visited and befriended through collaborations or elective affinities from the 1960s to today, thus revealing his own network which normally would remain private. The color images move beyond the idea of a voyeur-like or anecdotal stolen snapshot of the artist's everyday life, but also beyond an objective, detached, and analytical reportage dimension of the modern landscape typical of the photos/editorials of Ed Ruscha. For the project *Tales of a Place*, the work *Lives Here* acquires specific details (the choice of exhibiting only four artist friend homes and printing these in a given dimension) in reply to both the physical context, seeing that their size corresponds to the size of the four panels of the glass door present on the wall where Nannucci chose to install it (creating particular tension between outside/inside), and to the overall conceptual display since the four artists evoked with the images of their homes seen from ground level (Sonnier, Kosuth, General Idea, Oppenheim) were associated by Nannucci to reflect broadly on different and similar inclinations in art to site-specific works and to the use of words in art. Naturally, these elements art part of the work's reason to exist that is manifest in that specific case to best activate its concept. In fact, as the artist suggests with his famous statement in blue neon from 1969 (the font of which, as always, he designed): *The missing of the poem is the poem*. This is connected to a political aspect of his work regarding a need experienced on an ethical, non-rhetorical level, which has led him from the 1960s to create "art editions,"[58] publishing projects, that enliven non-profit venues like Zona non profit art space (in 1974–85), and then to co-found Base / Progetti per l'arte in 1998, also in Florence. Nannucci has always attempted to practice alternative channels to galleries/museums with which to direct art and broadly

Lives Here (Keith Sonnier, Joseph Kosuth, General Idea, Dennis Oppenheim), 1987–2015. 4 photographs on Dibond. 90 x 60 cm each; total 90 x 246 cm.

reflect on its role within society and the role of the public. *Lives Here* also allows spectators to linger upon two important aspects of his work. The first is related to the work-in-progress photo series, which is also the case for *Giardini botanici,* 1967–today, for *Stored Image*, 1969–today, and for *Bag Book Back*, 1995–today, plus others. All these photo series have also taken the form of artist books, and this has allowed him to accept and declare that the world isn't determined in a closed form, but instead his gaze as an artist changes regarding it.[59] The second aspect that *Lives Here* raises is the awareness that today humans find themselves in a digital world that allows them to be in contact with everyone and everything very easily, contrary to the conditions of Nannucci (as with all conceptual artists) since the 1960s and in which global contacts stemmed from a very strong need for content exchange, and certainly not from the need to channel them.

Wherever you are wherever you go, 2015, is a blue neon measuring five meters in length that unfolds along the entire height in the corner of a room, thus becoming a measuring device with which the viewer may "discover" the space crossed at that moment; at the same time the assertion "wherever you are wherever you go" draws attention to other places of desire and memory, of exotic journeys and everyday ones. The duality of the rational and the unknowable, of the physical and the mental is always present in the cognitive process he activates and represents with his works. This kind of intervention highlights, more than others, the necessary transition of Nannucci in his career from the 1960s to today, from the emblematic space of writing on blank pages to the space of architecture.[60] Even though for the artist there is no break between both fields, if not in the implications, it should be noted that in works like *M40*, 1967, and *Dattilogrammi*, 1964–65, each sheet of paper corresponds to a study tied to the possibility of the typewriter, used as an art tool, to create visual poetic devices and not just verbal expressions. Referring his neon works to his approach of the blank sheet allows in any case to bet-

58. For Nannucci an edition is not a work in many copies, but instead one that keeps in mind its reproducibility and the direct and daily interaction of the viewer. For more information, see Elio Grazioli, "Intervista," in *Il collezionismo, o il mondo come voluttà e simulazione*. Milan-Cremona: a+mbookstore edizioni / studio permanente, 2006; Achille Bonito Oliva, "Intervista a Maurizio Nannucci," in *Enciclopedia della parola: Dialoghi d'artista 1968/2008*. Milan: Skira, 2008; and Stefano Chiodi, "Let's talk about art. I multipli di Maurizio Nannucci," in *Where to Start From*, exhibition catalogue, MAXXI, Rome. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2015.

59. The work-in-progress is a particular strategy of Nannucci in his use of photo narration. In the case of his neon statements, the work-in-progress is present only in *Anthology*, 1967–today, where statements he writes come together, and when they take shape they are always in blue neon, keeping the artist's handwriting and thus highlighting the dimension of notes on the world and for the world.

60. For more information, see: "Conversazione di Maurizio Nannucci con Hou Hanru," in *Where to Start From*, exhibition catalogue, MAXXI, Rome. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2015.

ter understand the artist's cultural references that cannot be compared to those of conceptual art, but which instead are the result of radical interaction between his use in the 1960s of "concrete poetry" tools and methods and those tied to his interest in experimental music, which would lead him, from 1965 to 1969, to be part of the S2FM musical phonology study team at the conservatory in Florence, as he created electronic compositions related to voice elaboration and subsequently multiple sound interventions. Moreover, even after his works from the 1960s, his dealings with printed matter have always been consistent, with both art editions and publishing projects.

Maurizio Nannucci (Florence, 1939; lives and works in Florence and Südbaden, Germany) has, since the 1960s, carried forth radical investigation and reformulation of language codes and channeling "supports" of visual/verbal meaning. His contribution, characterized by a conceptual and rigorous formal approach, born within the field of "concrete poetry," has been of great impact in Italy at a time when it was bound to the debate between formal and abstract painting, immediately expanding the confines of the dialogue into a global dimension. This striving was facilitated for him by the use of English in his writings/images, in addition to his practice of mass reproduction means like editions, magazines, "educational works," thus establishing a constant network with artists, intellectuals, and musicians from other countries who all share an interest in dematerializing the "art" object. At the same time, his expansion and reformulation of so-called "new media" allowed him to follow a totally independent course (like others artists including Franco Vaccari, Maurizio Mochetti, Gianni Piacentino) with respect to what was later called arte povera, and afterwards Transavanguardia. Besides practicing the possibilities of neon texts to modify how architecture is perceived, a reflection on color, in all its manifestations, is pivotal to his work; from the pastel monochrome series such as *Faber Castell Polychromos*, 1967, to neon structural compositions like

Wherever you are wherever you go, 2015. Blue neon. 450 x 13 x 5 cm. Private Collection, Ravenna.

Editions and multiples, 1967–today.

NICE, 1991, at Villa Arson in Nice, where the letters are inscribed one inside the other in a single square, from the photographic/cataloging work *Sessanta verdi naturali*, 1973, in the Lenbachhaus Collection in Munich, to the intervention for the Venice Biennale in 1978, *Image du Ciel,* made up of an airplane that drags across the blue sky a banner bearing the words of the title (in addition to displaying in the show a palm, a chair, the image of the airplane, and a pre-existent fan). His practice is about questioning on a collective level the possible role the relationship between art/artist/world can acquire within society.

The works of the eight artists described in the previous section suggest that for them an image is not the caption of a thought, but rather its evocation to discuss collectively. Their works are all characterized by being devices that narrate a place while keeping in mind the context they are a part of and, in some cases, overturning or exploring even to extreme consequences the concept of "site-specific." This inclination is practiced through different expressive materials and techniques and animated by a translation from reality. Which experience to translate? For whom and how? These are the questions that give rise to and foster their interventions. And it is precisely for this reason that they offer conditions of everyday life, minimally altered, where the conflicting/relational process is externalized and which society has always entrusted to the relationship between word and image, caption and representation, a thing and its purpose. Mel Bochner's paintings titled *Blah, Blah, Blah*, or the installation *Measurement Plant* ask the practical question of which is the viewer's place of reference: the one of representation and of art, or rather the one of nature and the real object? Instead, Mario Airò creates contradictory spatial objects, which use books, neon tubes, and even audio that reflect on the role and genesis of the creative act, in general. Nedko Solakov's works are always meta-narrative operations upon the mediums he uses in his works, be they drawings on the theme of travel or reflections on paintings or keeping and narrating the site-specific interventions made in other contexts. Christian Jankowski strives to create an awkward and at times surreal dialogue between the world of globalized and televised communications and the everyday private dimension to establish a widespread performativity with which to make the observer reflect on his or her ability to intervene on reality even though dematerialized. For Suzanne Lacy the place where she makes her art can never be separated from social and genre conventions that distinguish those same spaces taken into consideration, and this is why she always aims to make these dynamics emerge by establishing interpretive friction through her performances, photographs, and videos. Cuoghi Corsello have always worked on overturning public and private and the cross-over between what is considered inappropriate and dignified/official art. This has led them in the 1980s to work with graffiti in cities and to interact with pop images, then to use the remains of modernity to create "compositions"

that evoke a situation that seems new and abandoned. Antonis Pittas makes layerings of texts with graphite, suggestions tied to the economy and codes of modernism to reflect on the mechanisms of the globalized and dematerialized world, which allow those inputs to coexist in the interconnected and "expanded present" by means of Internet. The neon writings of Maurizio Nannucci are not just a meditation on language, on naming things, and on tautology, but rather on creating a rapport with the physical space his works are a part of to establish a new imagined way of using that same space.

The works of these artists suggest that it is only by exploring the place from which we observe the world can we discover it with unique concreteness. That is why they all derive from a confrontation with differing notions of place and with the modes with which to narrate this two-fold encounter. However, this is only the starting point, and not the finale, with which they propose an open-ended reflection on the relationship between imagined space and experienced space, between occupying a place and communicating with it. On the one hand, their works are tools to arouse awareness in the spectator in the use of the information/images with which they come into contact on a daily basis, while on the other hand they reflect on the possible role of art, the artist, and the audience in globalized society. This is why the works are characterized by a high level of epiphany of the "here and now" with which to reactivate memory, desires, notions, turning these into new tools of measurement and not of documentation regarding the world. But the peculiarity is that this approach also contemplates problems concerning collective memory, on how to keep its narrations and how to reuse these in planning the future. A perfect balance between awareness, specific cases, and chief world systems I want to make the observer aware of is what characterizes these artists in facing a dialogue with society and with art itself.

Conclusions

In the past three decades, the idea of an ideological future has weakened, and with the diffusion of global and immaterial systems of communication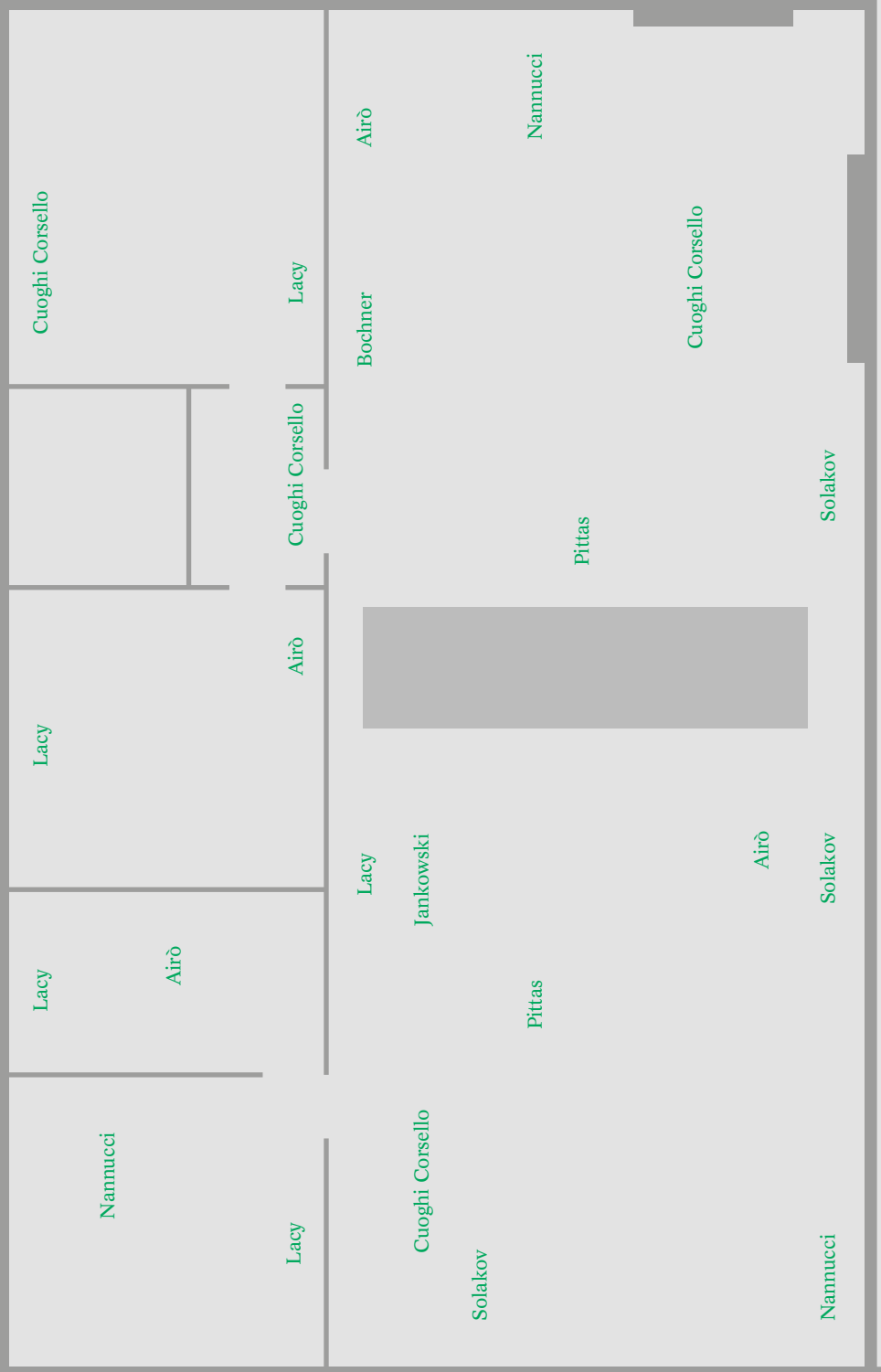 society has entered into the dimension of the "expanded present." The eclectic or "melting pot" aspect, concerning both art and society was simply the response to a world that kept growing, though closer with the click of a mouse. Today, it is evident that not only the Western model exists with which to explain phenomena and single-out social rules, and the idea of just one history of art is also on the decline. This book examines the central core of new media aesthetic studies and studies on art methodology and criticism. Which technique or process makes an object/handmade piece a work of art and why? This question was raised for these eight artists (and, as a consequence, for the relating eight geographical, historical, and contextual macro areas) though observing from two different interpretations that distinguish this "relevance of ours." The first is related to the observation that the presence of the "textual word," since it is layered in everyday Internet communication, is gaining expanded time and a unique performative dimension. This aspect leads us to reconsider art from the 1960s to today, related to object dematerialization and to language no longer as an act of provocation and break with artistic tradition, but as part of an evolution in vaster perception. The second interpretation concerns society's awareness of no longer being in a state of transition with respect to the use of new technologies and the increasingly urgent need to find a place of the mind and the body from which to observe the world so as to stay in contact with Internet information. This point of view leads to reconsidering the "site-specific" concept and how this has changed in the past decades, that is, how it has allowed us to reconsider the use of art techniques not as being ideologically opposed (as was the case for painting and video in the 1980s). The eight careers and practices treated in this publication all share the fact that these artists had no desire to add new signs to the world, but rather to reassess existing ones by giving them newfound self-awareness. Their goal has not been to create formal/technical novelty, but a new way of perceiving and discussing collectively the role of art and culture. It is the same approach, according to Rosalind Krauss,[1] that

1. Cfr. Rosalind Krauss, "La crisi della pittura da cavalletto," in *Reinventare il medium*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2005.

in the late 1950s led Jackson Pollock to use painting as a new medium, by simply shifting the mode of perception and conception rather than searching for novelty in materials and formal dimensions. Thus painting has become an active tool of discussion with respect to history, to the future, to the social landscape precisely because it identified "the way of seeing as a new medium." This critical direction lies at the base of this book in facing the limits and potentials of the medium on the part of some artists, in reconsidering current "art histories" with respect to the new awareness of the ego/society of "being in the world" (coined by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger), even when it pertains to an expanded, dematerialized, and globalized world like the one that today surrounds us.

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Jankowski

Cuoghi Corsello

Airò

Nannucci

Lacy

Bochner

Cuoghi Corsello

Cuoghi Corsello

Lacy

Airò

Pittas

Solakov

Lacy

Lacy

Airò

Lacy

Jankowski

Airò

Solakov

Nannucci

Pittas

Cuoghi Corsello

Solakov

Lacy

Nannucci

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Tales of a Place
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in Perceiving Visual Arts from
the 1990s to Today

Tales of a Place
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Antonis Pittas, *We shall do as we have
decided* (detail), 2013. Marble, graphite.
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