Substance as a Passing Event

Stability and interruption on an ever expanding and contracting art process

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SUMMARY. This work contains a array of approaches regarding the art making process, the interpretation of a finished work and the construction of an artist's history. An attempt is made by the author to explain and reflect on his art process by evaluating and comparing on his own personal works developed within the two years of the C:Art:Media masters programme. Different lines of thought and philosophies have been applied and questioned in order to better understand the concept of *process* in art. The document is structured using the analogy of a straight line and combined with a set of interruptions that occur periodically throughout the text. Concepts regarding linearity, order, completeness and fragmentation in the art process are evaluated and challenged using examples of displayed artwork, unrealized ideas and the structure of the document itself.

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Supporting and Breaking the Axis

>'A straight line from A to B is still not enough, therefore I am fragmenting'[1]

This is one of my personal statements that I am slowly acknowledging when confronted with the process of making art. It seems that the elements that constitute the development of an artwork belong more to a complex pattern of juxtapositions, intersections and interruptions than a simplified line of consequential events which end in an *ideal* work of art. The concept of a completed idea or object such as the works displayed in institutions, galleries or museums has traditionally been considered the strongest point of the artist. This in turn is emphasized through promotional articles and artists books that construct *the ideal artist story–* the artist's past works, concepts and decisions seem carefully orchestrated and designed to avoid contradictions, detours or errors. This emphasis on completeness and the final work of art can overshadow the value of the secret process of making art with all its contradictions and unfulfilled ideas that amount to a fragmented story of the artist.

Therefore, my approach on developing a project that revolves around the relationship between my artworks and its documentation has been fragmented and discontinuous in order to show the internal machinery of the art making process and expose the blurring borders that define the parameters of a *complete work of art.* By this I mean that the work will be in constant flux – where starting, connecting and ending points of the themes could appear, disappear or reappear throughout the investigation. With this idea in mind I will try to work with a constellation of different interests, issues and experiences that will appear throughout the document as image[2] or text.

The works that I have developed during the two years of my masters program will be exposed and evaluated in the following chapters of this document. The examples that I will put forward will include exhibited projects as well as ideas, sketches and unrealized works. Many of these examples will be compared and examined through different lines of thought or *lenses* with the possibility of finding traces that could unveil my art process.

The structure of this document consists of a central path that will function as the backbone of the document. This is planned to be linear and constant. The central

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[1] This opening statement was written by the author as an initial intention to be evaluated further on in the document.

[2] All images are assumed copyrighted by their respective owners. With the exception of my own work, the images shown in this document were obtained via Google Images and are reproduced in the spirit of fair use and within the context of an academic and non-commercial project.

axis in the written project will show a coherence of the evolution of the work. On the other hand, the excluded elements, odd results or detours will also be shown in the document as *interruptions*. The *interruptions* break the linearity of the main axis in order to create, firstly: an alternative space of personal expression and interpretation; secondly: an action of resistance against self-propaganda or an idealized narrative; and thirdly: a different way the reader can experience and interpret the project.

These interruptions occur randomly at any given point where it seems relevant to intervene in the overall report. In order to maintain an honest relationship with the reader these *zones* are clearly distinguishable from the rest of the text by using a heading before each intervention, for example, *Interruption #1, 2, 3...* etc. Text or images are the main medium in this area. One part of the process is to keep a series of periodical notes that relate directly or indirectly to the results, events, or actions that take place in the documents. This could, for instance, be descriptions of material observations, thoughts about the art process, or future ideas to develop. This idea of informal notes would be applied to the thesis report as part of the research.
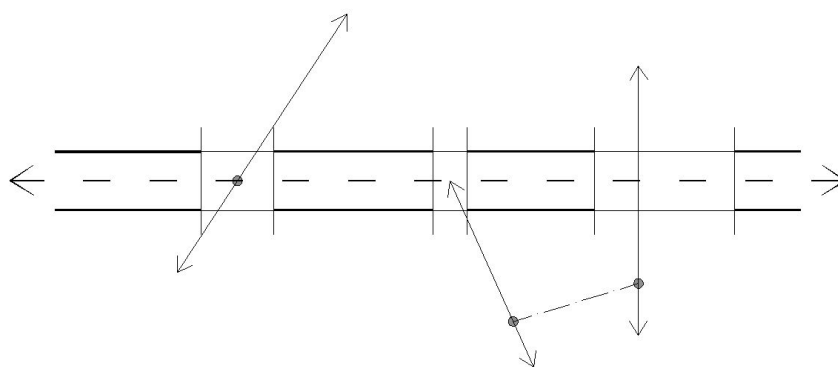
FIGURE 0.1. Preliminary diagram of the structure of the document with a central axis, connection points and interruptions.

My art process has been oscillating between two areas or activities that take place: the physical or practice space and the reflection or theory space. The former deals with the physicality of art making and the latter focuses on the concepts, theories or ideas that appear throughout the art process. Athough I am aware that these two categories do not necessarily work seperately in some art processes, this dualism will be challenged as the information in the document develops. These two categories as described in the next paragraphs will be a point of departure.

The physical space is where all material things come into play. This includes working and experimenting with tangible materials[3] , discovering their natural properties (gravity, equilibrium, elasticity, time and space) and evaluating their artistic potential. It could also be a space to involve technology through the use of motors that can help trigger natural or mechanical transformations between materials. Hard to soft, synthetic to natural, massive to light are some possible interactions with the help of technology.

This is an important activity in my research due to its connections with the physical process. My interest is based on the implementation of physicality[4] in the artwork. Limits of the body and materials, heightened perceptions, time based events, natural phenomena, direct expression of moving matter, historical traces, etc. are all elements that could be generated by physical processes.

The theory space would be the other area. This involves a space of reflection towards the work in progress. This would include the searching and pondering of concepts that have interested me throughout the master program such as the aura and enigma in objects, interactive art, the spectacle, and process art among others.

A potential transfer of information from one area to the other could occur at any given time, so one or many of these concepts could eventually overlap and influence each other. The main target would be to promote a process of osmosis. Part of the concept in this written work is to make the reader a witness of my self-evaluation and transformation of viewpoints. The text's starting point is based on divided concepts like practice/ theory, finished/ incomplete, correct/ incorrect, etc. Some of these concepts will remain separate and other might fuse into something else. As I establish, return, or move foward to new parameters of my work, I plan that the reader will also follow me through this journey.

This document is intended to reflect the way I think and work. The manner in which it has been written and composed is meant to mirror a personal process. Therefore, the style of writing and the time invested on certain topics will vary. The introduction, development and interconnections of concepts and themes will sometimes jump quickly from one point to the other, but in other situations the description of the topics will slowly be introduced, described, or evaluated. Therefore, the speed and rhythm in which the events unfold in this document will appear quick or efficient in some parts and slow and detailed in other cases.

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[3]Text can also be considered in this group as a material that is immaterial, since it operates in the realm of the idea or abstract.

[4]Merriam Webster OnLine dictionary defines physicality as: 1: intensely physical orientation: predominance of the physical usually at the expense of the mental, spiritual, or social. 2: a physical aspect or quality. Ref.: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/physicality (05/11/2009)

Plunging into the Question of the Stable Object

To finally see my work displayed in public brings a satisfying feeling. The immersive and long hours in the studio finally come to its fruition through the artwork. The fact that I have slowly and carefully developed an idea into something concrete has a sense of fulfillment that is close to magical. To see it in display, it suddenly develops this strength, assertiveness and cohesion that many displayed objects adopt when shown in galleries or museums. All of a sudden the work is possessed with auratic qualities when it leaves the chaos of the studio and enters the realm of the gallery or museum. I can not deny the positive mind-set that come with this culminating action where everything that I am and stand for has the potential to be expressed in the work I display. Or does it?

It seems as if everything could fall into place the moment the artwork is shown. The space could look just right, the light hits the surface just enough, the artwork complements the space perfectly! It is as if the mind tends to unite and order all the elements into a *total work of art*. At the same time my project I see displayed before me feels less mine everytime. The art object looses its original context, i.e. the studio, in order to adopt the new context of the gallery. This is when the interpretation of the art object becomes something more where the gallery and the museum invest for the audience to 'focus ...on objects of art in isolation: the 'white cube' removes the art work from the world at large and permits the work's aura to be witnessed in a quiet contemplative serenity'.[5] This could be the case, but does this happen all the time or should it happen at all?

When I see my work exhibited I can see many elements come together, but also in the back of my mind I know there are things that could be fixed, tweaked, changed or improved. The piece could look bigger, smaller, smarter or simpler. It seems as if the artwork is in a constant transformation in my mind, but it stays in a frozen state when displayed.

It is said that the work of the artist is never finished and that an exhibition is only one small step from the all encompassing personal life work which is infinitely evolving. If this idea holds true, then all the social and marketing mechanism that

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[5]Tom Sherman, *The Finished Work of Art is a Thing of the Past*, 1995, p.2

promotes *finished* artworks in exhibition spaces could be questioned. At least it seems clear for me that what I present as art in an exhibition space does not always reflect all the thoughts, decisions, failures and coincidences that my memory retains when I see it. Much of the artist's information is lost along the way. Sometimes the pictures that I have documented of the work in progress say more about me and my working methods than the *finished* product.

Interruption # 1

Even though I want to demystify the aura, it still comes back stronger.
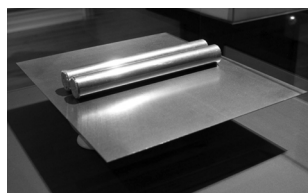
My dichotomy of the completed artwork has given me the chance to better understand the process of making art and the results that come with it. Even though the conventional methods of creating art, i.e. beginning with an idea and ending with a *finished* object in display are still practiced, new perspectives in other areas of knowledge has given way to other interpretations. The idea, the process or the result can be seen as artworks also. The border of what is complete or incomplete, tangible or intangible, mental or physical are disputable. This means that a space has opened to question traditional methods of making art. How, where and what kind of art I show to the public could challenge the meaning of a *finished* object. For example, the context of the gallery is meant for the public to assume all artworks are *finished* ideas of the artist, even though the artist might still be pondering if the work shown is really completed. On the other hand, the artist might have completed a piece in his/her studio, but the public might not be able to diferentiate or value it as a *finished* artwork under that context. The interpretation of the object in display in different contexts will mean different things to the creator of the work and the public.

A Model of the Creative Process

In this section I touch on the subject of the art process under the C:Art:Media context. I use some of my projects to illustrate the issues that can come about

during the decision making stage before and after a project is displayed to the public. I will also bring up some questions regarding the importance of the art-making process in my art practice. In the following section I begin introducing a scientific research article about the creative process. The article tries to elaborate a diagramatic outline based on the researcher's gathered information of what a potential model of the creative process.

It is always interesting for me to see how different areas of knowledge or disciplines try to describe and explain the actions that occur in the artist work after an idea is conceived and before a result is produced. I recently stumbled upon a small scientific research article which attempted to describe this issue. A recent study with the title *Modeling the Creative Process: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Creativity in the Domain of Art Making* tried to develop a model of the art making process. Their research approached the problem of art making in a different way compared to other previously done research since other studies have attempted to 'model the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and contextual factors associated with the making of a work of art'.[6] This research tried to focus on understanding and describing what artists do under their normal context. They also used grounded theory for their investigation which has a 'set of systematic procedures that seek to inductively derive a theory about a particular phenomenon'.[7]

Artists describe their process through transcripts; these are put into categories that lead to more descriptions called *meaning units*. Then all descriptions are compared and put into broader categories, but 'if provisional categories fail to accommodate the new data, new categories are formulated and the process continues'.[8] It is based on the gathering of information from data accounts rather than using questionnaires that could have preconceived ideas.

They try to find emerging patterns in empirical data. Sixteen professional visual artists were interviewed, and described through transcripts their own working process which was then analyzed in order to make a model. Finally, nine other artists were used to prove the validity of the model. The model is based on 4 phases: artwork conception, ideal development, making the artwork, finishing the artwork and resolution. In each phase there are groups of factors or decision making processes that have been subcategorized and linked to other subgroups.

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[6]Mace, Mary-Anne and Ward, Tony, *Modeling the Creative Process: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Creativity in the Domain of Art Making*, Creativity Research Journal, 14: 2, 2002, p.179.
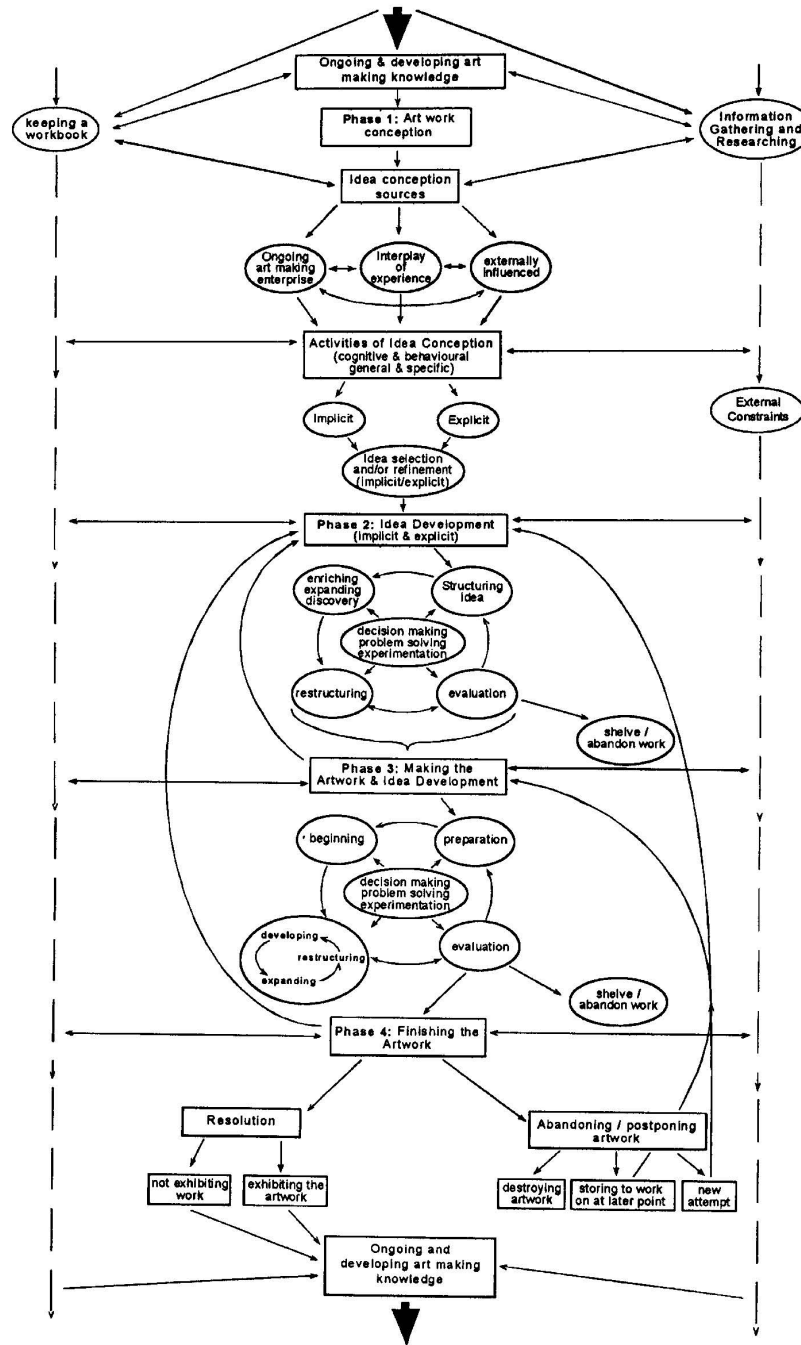[7]Ibid, p.181.
[8]Ibidem

FIGURE 0.2. Diagram of the art-making process showing the four main phases, feedback loops, and moderating variables.

In general the model was a linear structure diagram of consecutive events or marked phases, one followed by the next, with an increase of knowledge through time. But at the same time a slightly misaligned set of links and arrows desperately seemed to be connecting points with each other in constant feedback loops and moderating variables like decision-making, problem solving, and experimentation processes.

Although the scientific approach towards developing an action pattern among artists of how art could be done still seems to me to be too categorized and general; the study seems to address common variables to what could eventually be a model of art-making[9]. For example, the trial and error factor that is implicit in the model is something that I have used in experimental projects before moving on to a new phase in the process. Also, decision factors like ongoing art making enterprise, interplay of experience and external influences have affected my process, even though these conditions are not always crucial or a constant in my decisions or results.

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[9]The grounded theory method manages gathered information by groups and categories. It tends to atomize this information as independent parts. This document presents other methods and theories that try to intregrate rather than separate data and information. Although my interest is on the result of a diagram showing a possible art process based on scientific research, I am aware that the methods used to attain these results might contrasts to other theories presented further in this document.

Accumulating, Progressing and Going Forward

For an analogy to describe the development of my artwork I could use the simple observation that a straight line 'provides the shortest path between any two of its points'[10], I could use this analogy to describe the development of my artwork. For example, my first project would be the initial point of departure where I gained knowledge and skill in order to apply and make the next project a better version of the first one and so on. This would eventually progress forward to the final project where I manifest my *truest* work: the highest level of artistic and technical knowledge. My evolution as an artist would be accumulative and progressive- all knowledge building up to create a cohesive and indisputable work of art. This idea of building up knowledge and thrusting forward towards ultimate perfection brings me to my first point concerning the paradigm of progress and modernization.

Interruption # 2

Except in mathematics, the shortest distance between point A and point B is seldom a straight line.

Anonymous

The concept of progress initially derived from the forward movement or locomotion. Progress can be measured by the relative position on the road or path, although the route and its management are terms defined by criteria and values of an individual or society. In science it is seen as '...an accumulation of knowledge, and technology as a major power to make things more compact, both also reflect the quest of humanity toward greater control. Progress in society is associated with an increase in material wealth, physical and mental health, and personal happiness'. [11]

The idea of progress in humanity is that humanity has progressed from an initial situation of primitivism where progress continues and will continue in the future.

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[10]http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Line_(geometry) 25/5/2010
[11]Paul Alan Johnson, *The Theory of Architecture. Concepts, Themes & Practices*, 1994, p.277.

Seen in this way, the progress of humanity is constantly advancing linearly through time and is cumulative.

The notion of progress gives insight into the evolution of societies, which consequently gives the idea that progress and social development could be achieved through voluntary effort, intentional and planned. Modernization is born in this so-called conception.[12]
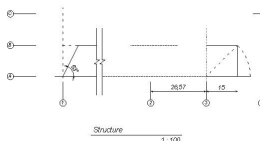
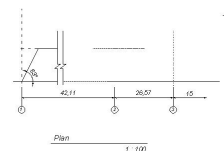Interruption # 3

Only the chosen
ones go through.
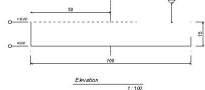
We have the
strongest tools,
now we must
form the ideal
shape.

Compression is
our game.

We ignore the
rest.

It is just a matter
of time.

According to this description of progress and modernization, we can see how the concept of progress is connected with the concept of modernization where the will of a society to develop can be represented in concrete with quantitative progress in the economic, technological and cultural fields. This evolved into an entire paradigm that underlies ideas and values of the perfection of society through science and technology, the insatiable acquisition of material goods such as power, competition as a means of survival, and so on.

The physicist and system theorist Fritjof Capra, has written about the paradigm shifts that the so called *Western culture* have gone through in the last centuries especially in the scientific community. Not only does he point out the new discoveries of how the natural world behaves, but he also describes the reluctance of some groups in the scientific community to change their old methods and paradigms. Capra has tried to capture and describe the traditional scientific values and methods and link them to the old cultural paradigms of the *West*. He describes in his book *The Web of Life* (1998) the old paradigm that has dominated *Western culture* for several hundred of years as follows:

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[12]Cristian Fernandez Cox, *Modernidad y Postmodernidad en America Latina*. 1991.

> 'This paradigm consists of a number of entrenched ideas and values,
> among which we mention the view of the universe as a mechanical
> system composed of parts, the human body as a machine, that of
> life in society as a competitive struggle for existence, the belief in
> unlimited material progress through economic and technological
> growth, not least, the belief that a society in which women are
> subjected to men everywhere, can not but follow the natural laws'.

Capra's description of a world of mechanical parts and human machines that compete to survive and progress reminds me of the mechanical works of the kinetic artist Jean Tinguely. In many of his moving sculptures the artist manifests his discontent with modern industrial society by creating events using complex machine-like sculptures that move, make sounds and self destroy as a public performance. His self destroying sculpture titled *Homage to New York* (1960) was placed in the New York's Museum of Modern Art sculpture garden and was constructed to be destroyed in 27 minutes by its own mechanism. Tinguely comments that 'it was not the idea of a machine committing suicide that fascinated me primarily; it was the freedom that belonged to its ephemeral aspect – ephemeral like life, you understand. It was the opposite of the cathedrals, the opposite of the skyscrapers around us, the opposite of the museum idea, the opposite of the petrification in a fixed work of art'.[13]

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[13]https://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue17/landy.htm 05/26/2010

FIGURE 0.3. Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York* ,1960.

The *petrification of a fixed work of art* under a universe functioning as a mechanical system compels me to jump to the idea where the art process can behave as a machine. The raw and disordered matter which is the first idea or the first art work, for example, is progressively improved, edited, rationalized and tested like a machine to become this fine tuned mechanism that has been stripped away of any incongruencies or contradictions. I imagine the final version standing in complete control, permanent and fixed waiting to be petrified in a museum or gallery.

This is where I would like to gather up the key ideas I have presented so far. First of all, I would like to underline the notion of continuity, progress and linearity as a characteristic of industrialized society which to a certain extent conditions our methods of production and material value. This also affects the creation, reaction and interpretation of art in society. I would complement this idea with Theordor Adorn's writings regarding the connections between art and society- a critical relationship between aesthetics and the sociology of art. Adorno establishes that the way art is judged and produced is partly based on societies' past and present context. Even if works of art might contain certain elements that are autonomous to society, the social situation in a specific time and place are factors that affect the results of artistic production.[14]

Secondly, I want to emphasize Capra's description of the old western paradigm made up of 'a universe as a mechanical system composed of parts, and the human body as a machine', where Tinguely contributes to this idea by celebrating the complex relationship we have with machines and capitalist industrial society. At the same time he hints at *the petrification in a fixed work of art.* This idea of life functioning as a universal mechanical system where every part is somehow connected with each other which suddenly collapses by its own fixed system brings to mind my concern with the *finished* work of art. I associate this phenomenon with the way I have approached the value of my art practice where the final artwork will be of greater value than the first one– based on the scientific model of progress and accumulation of knowledge.

If I apply these notions of finished/ unfinished works, linear processes that follow a higher mechanical system of parts, and the progressive accumulation of knowledge to my own art process and line of work I could see clear connections and similarities. On the first year of my masters programme I developed three consecutive projects that after a certain point in their development were shown to the public. The

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[14]Andrew Edgar. *An Introduction to Adorno's Aesthetics.* pg.46

following section will describe the evolution of these projects using a linear line of thought and the *finished* object.

3 Projects Interpreted as a Straight Line

My first work was a group project for a Computer Mediated Installation course. This project consisted in exploring different ways microcontrollers could be incorporated into an artwork. The main idea was to experiment with the Arduino, motion sensors, LEDs and piezos in a way that could contribute new elements or perceptions to the art project.

My group partner and I wanted to work with the concept of microcosms as a starting theme, where small moving mechanisms, forms and sounds could create an organic-like atmosphere. We also wanted to make the project interactive in a way that the public's presence would trigger elements to move or react.
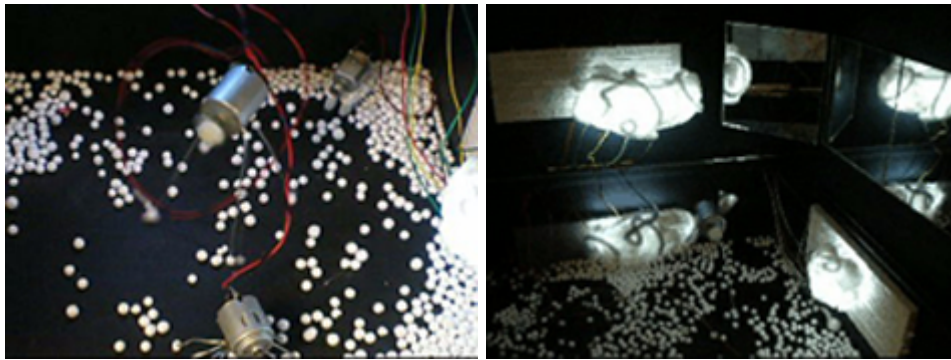
FIGURE 0.4. Xavier Villafranca and Carolina Parra, *Microcosmos*, 2008.

The project had several elements working at the same time. On the side and front walls we used several LEDs that emitted a fade in/out effect. These diodes had a semi-transparent covering which diffused the emitting light and insinuated the appearance of a living organism. In order to multiply the effect, we added mirrors on the walls and a reflecting glass on the bottom. A piezo was also connected to the LED circuit which transferred the fade in/out into sound.

Below the reflecting glass we constructed a black box. We filled the box with foam particles and incorporated three DC motor mechanisms. Each motor had an off center weight attached to its rotating pin which caused the motor to vibrate. The motors also had wires soldered on the base that alluded to insect legs and also helped the mechanism move or jump when activated. We also added toothbrush heads on the base of one motor to make it move forward. The motors were triggered

by a PIR sensor through the Arduino and a transistor (MOSFET) circuit was used for the motors with the help of an external power supply.

My main interest in this experimental project was the interactivity that could be created between the public and the objects in display through the use of technology. The abrupt movements and chaotic reactions of the motors in the presence of the viewers created an illusion that moving mechanical devices had some sort of life and consciousness. This idea of the live objects was a theme that I would use frequently in several projects along with the action/reaction behavior of the artwork and the public.

My later projects used many of the elements originated in *Microcosmos* such as public interaction, kinetic art, and random processes expressed through the artwork, but eventually progressed into a larger installation composed of several interactive and new visual components. The accumulated knowledge from the *Microcosmos* experiment helped me fine tune aesthetic and technical aspects that would reappear in several projects to follow, especially on my next project that I describe below.

Close distance was a semester project that was exhibited as a *finished* work for the C:Art:Media first year show in 2008. The project is composed of multiple screens that vibrated when a sensor detected movement. A video was projected onto them. Behind, you would see a wooden structure that holds the screens together. A projector under this grid structure projected an animated video on the back wall. The moment the public got close to the project the screens vibrated and the motors created a humming sound.

FIGURE 0.5. Xavier Villafranca, *Close distance*, 2008.

The work was based on Walter Benjamin's and Adorno's the concept of aura and its relation to distance. Aura, as a philosophical aesthetic concept, could be defined 'as an appearance of distance' or a barrier between the viewer and the artwork, 'a capacity to point beyond a work of art's givenness', to 'induce proximity through

distance or a quality' to 'look back' or 'speak' to the viewer.[15] My intention was that the viewer would perceive the scale, movement and interaction of the piece and eventually start a *push and pull* corporeal dialogue with the work. I also tried to use the concept of enigma as the 'capacity simultaneously to 'communicate' and to 'conceal' something from the observer'.[16] In this way I tried to give and conceal fragments of information for the viewers to assemble in their minds.

I could interpret the development of this project as a *progressive evolution* from the previous project shown before. The interaction, kinetic motion, and random movement of the elements of the *Microcosmos* project reappear in this work, but instead of just copying the same technique or system. I tried to correct and improve technical issues, amplify the scale of the elements, and enhance the artistic level of the piece. The work was presented in an adequate gallery and the conditions of the light in the space underlined the idea of a *finished* displayed art object instead of an informal experiment.

The third and last piece I will evaluate in this ordered sequence of events is a medium size sculpture I showed for a spring exhibition at Valand School of Fine Arts in 2009. *Unraveling Forces* is a project that interacts within itself. It can be seen as a world on its own where the main characters of the work create an event that alludes to social struggles within a structured system.

The project is based on a set of structured threads that interact with a group of small motors. The motors have been programmed to move mechanically and randomly throughout the fabric, therefore creating a play of push and pull between the motors and the fabric. The motors behave like small resistant forces that slowly try to disentangle from the woven structure, creating a trace throughout the ruptured layers of thread.
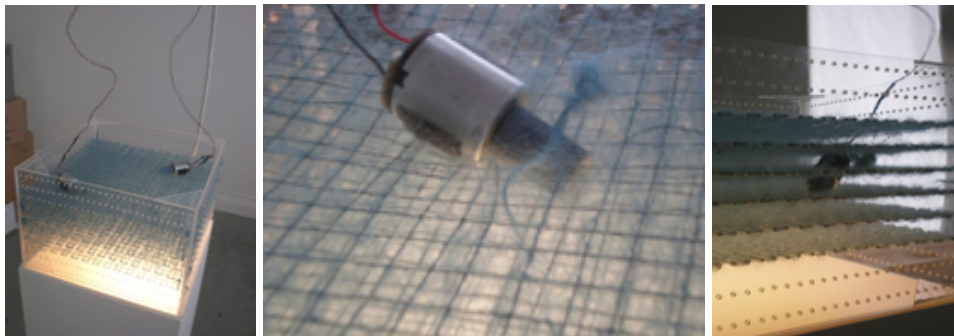

FIGURE 0.6. Xavier Villafranca, *Unraveling Forces*, 2009.

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[15]Yvonne Sherratt, *Adorno's aesthetic concept of aura*, Philosophy Social Criticism 2007, p.156.
[16]Ibid, p.164.

The evolution that *Microcomos* had with *Close distance* is similar with *Unraveling forces.* This last project had a higher technological level where the code programming and the motor interaction were more advanced. This time the motors had several conditioned behaviors, but purposefully reacted unpredictably due to the string structure that altered their route.

Even though the physical space of the project is smaller than the previous one, the connection of the public towards the project is much stronger since it is intended to let people be immersed in it due to its size, format and interaction. The project is meant to slow down the viewer's state of emotion in order to be receptive to the components and actions expressed through the project. This, I believe, is a step up from the previous installation, *Close distance*, where the public was overwhelmed with the multiple codes and data that needed to be deciphered in the installation. On the contrary, *Unraveling forces*, is easily approachable, simple and quiet, but its content maintained a critical comment on social structures.

It is interesting to see how my view of technology has changed during these two years of the master programme. I used to see the use of technology in art as a limited and rigid alternative for artistic expression. Although the use of sensors, microcontrollers and digital technology has a steep learning curve in order to apply them artistically, I can not deny the fact that technology has opened new possibilities in art. Whenever I plan to apply digital media to my projects, I am aware of the adjustments I must make in my art process. The technical and aesthetic demands of technology in art are factors that I consider before the realization of any project. Not only must I make sure the device I am using functions correctly, but I also have to decide the aesthetic implications of technology in my projects. The spectacle of technology can override other artistic intentions.. Therefore, I try to make a careful balance between the practical, symbolic and technical use of this media.

So far I have tried to underline one way I could approach and interpret my work and process. I can continue analyzing my projects using the a values of progress, evolution, universal mechanization and the *finished* product in a never ending search for the missing parts that match the whole. But one of my intentions in this document is to also show that a straight line can have its strange turns and twists, and that the idea of a line advancing in a single and unambiguous direction could become an oversimplified version of today's complex life.

Interruption # 4

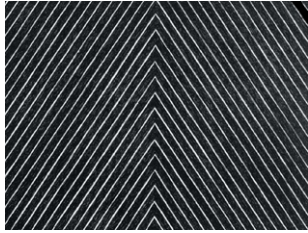In art, straight lines can be more interesting than curves.

FIGURE 0.7. Frank Stella, from *Black Series II,* 1967.

Pieces of Different Puzzles

In this chapter I apply a different approach to talk about my art making process. I introduce the general concept of entropy in relation to our complex modern life and use the view of different postmodern authors to create a framework that approach our modern values in a different way.

> 'Identity is contradictory and fractured. Identity in postmodern thought is not a thing; the self is necessarily incomplete, unfinished − 'it is the subject in process''.
>
> Madan Sarup [17]

I wanted to start this section using a quote by the social scientist Madan Sarup to begin emphasizing key aspects of which I will apply later on. The general postmodern idea defines that modern society is composed of different parts or fragments that do not necessarily fit nicely together, but on the contrary originate from different perspectives that develop in all kinds of directions without any major universal direction or truth.[18] Instead of endlessly searching for an integrated global view or grand narrative that can paint a true picture of the world, the postmodernists describe culture as naturally contradictory, fractured and incomplete. Things and ideas do not necessarily have to connect, actually they tend to be disconnected more than connected. In modernist literature, for example, this fragmentation would be described as a crisis, but in postmodern literature this phenomenon is just seen simply as a matter of fact. In postmodern thought theories appear and disappear under a complex map of perspectives and values.

This concept of disconnection, chaos and fragmentation is in many ways challenging the idea of order in nature. Although the human mind tends to understand and function better with order than disorder - 'the First Law of Thermodynamics states that energy may be changed from one form to another but is neither created nor destroyed'[19]-, there are forces in nature that suggest different impulses - 'the Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the entropy of the world strives towards a

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[17]Madan Sarup, *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*, p.47.
[18]F. Heylighen, *Post-Modern Fragmentation*, 1999.
[19]Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art, an essay on disorder and order*, p.5

maximum, which amounted to saying that the energy in the universe, although constant in amount, was subject to more and more dissipation and degradation'[20]-. The German born author and theorist Rudolf Arnheim describes in his essay *Entropy and Art: an Essay on Disorder and Order* how we tend to look for order in all things as a functional and survival behavior, even though the material world moves from stable geometrical order to an ever-increasing mechanical disorder. Arnheim uses the definition of entropy 'as the quantitive measure of the degree of disorder in a system'.[21] The higher the entropy the more energy it takes to transform disorder into order.

If I approach my artwork process using the concepts of fragmentation, discontinuity and high entropy, I could describe my art process differently than before. Many of the projects that would not fit under the logic or progressive pattern under the ideology of *modernity* can be explained under the laws of *postmodernity*. Some of my art projects that would normally fall into a category of undefined, awkward or irrelevant could become an interesting turn to explain the development of my art practice. The postmodern condition discards the idea of an integrated world view and grand narratives, and instead see 'knowledge as a set of perspectives, where different people have different views, without anyone being 'right' or 'wrong''.[22] If a universal truth is considered idealistic, and wrong or right are undefined, then this opens the possibility for me to reconsider the value in off-course and sidetrack projects as fragments in my art process that have affected in someway the future decisions. Therefore these types of projects not only play an important role in the process, but also must be valued and mentioned in the methodology.

3 + 1 Projects Interpreted as Not a Straight Line

The projects that I present in this section were made during my master programme. Some of the projects were developed under the courses of the programme, but others were created either in complementary courses or as personal experiments. It is inevitable to try to connect or *order* the projects under some kind of common denominator or characteristic as the law of entropy suggests. But the intention behind this comparison is to think and value my art practice and process with a different viewpoint.

To analyze and compare several projects simultaneously I will first briefly describe one project that was made during the 2nd year of my masters programme, but *interrupts* in some aspects the line of work I had been evolving. Consequently I

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[20]Ibidem

[21]Ibid, p.4

[22]F. Heylighen, op. cit, p.2

will interpret their relationship with my art process using the concepts that have introduced in this chapter.

FIGURE   0.8. Xavier   Villafranca,   *Politics   of   Appearance,*Trust/Mistake City Museum Project, 2010.

My work for the Trust /Mistake project at the City Museum could be describe as a series of fragments that I combine, connect and disconnect to an ever changing puzzle. I see it as an organic process, a live system. In other words, I have tried to find, create, hide and exposed pieces of information and experiences that create connections with me, us or the immediate context.

I eventually developed an interest in grasping the *lifespan* of the museum object from its origin, to its display, to its reproduction. I started to look for relationships, tensions, combinations using materials, forms and meanings that had some relevance to this theme. I wanted to take my perception of the museum, its objects and its context and translate it into an art work.

Understanding how *the politics of appearance* can affect the representation of objects in a museum framework, a sequence of elements is displayed in different combinations. The order of how things are arranged could contest our notion of what should be hidden, shown or desired. Issues of context, choice and image come to surface when historical objects are measured under the museum value system.

If I were to take this work plus the three other projects mentioned before and compare them, in a general way using the paradigms of progress, linearity and order, I could find characteristics in each of them that are common.
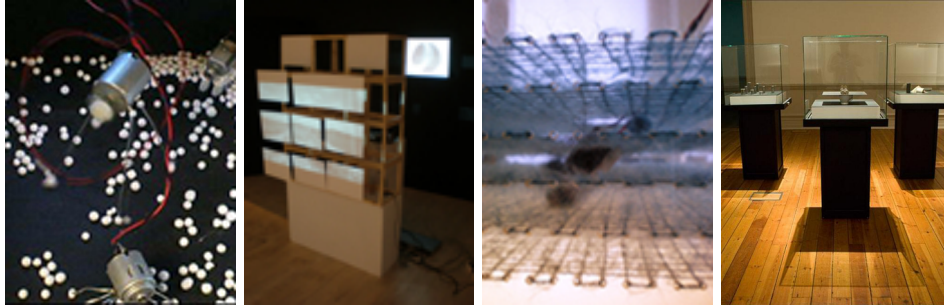

FIGURE 0.9. Detail images of four projects realized during 2008-2010.

For example, all are three dimensional objects, have a purpose or intention, monochromatic or grayish, they tend to use some kind of systematic or serial composition and they maintain an abstract aesthetic. But the last project begins to appear somehow problematic, since it is presented as a traditional set of sculptures in a museum; there is no use of interactive technologies or kinetic movement, it does not purposely change with time which makes it look like a finished piece, plus my decision to return to traditional sculpture created a contradiction with the linear and progressive evolution of my art process.

Following Capra's definition of the *old western paradigm* as a mechanical system composed of parts, I should ideally be able to find the missing link to complete the grand puzzle. But what if the puzzle is really made up of pieces that don't fit or belong to other puzzles? I would definitely run into difficulties trying to integrate them with a rational explanation. I would probably have to discard the last project as an error or failure, and limit my comparative scope to only the projects that are easily explainable. I would need to organize my projects into correct and incorrect groups. This is the point where I believe that the analytical instruments I use to compare these works have a limited capacity or only work in certain occasions. That the tendency to order things according to one ideology or value systems is limited to a specific framework and that other perspectives outside this framework are lost or discarded.

Moments of Expansion and Contraction

> 'Strongly opposed to sharp divisions and dichotomies of all kinds, Whitehead condemned 'the bifurcation of nature'. For him, the world is an organic whole that exhibits a unified fabric in which all threads are linked together'.[23]

As has been described in the previous chapters, my difficulty in finding an adequate tool to explain my artistic methods and artworks- either by a linear consecutive chain of accumulative events that has an beginning and an end or through complete disassociation where disparate fragments take multiple directions with little interconnectivity or common denominator - has brought me to find other methods that could integrate different ways of thought without creating dichotomies. This has brought me back to look for other possibilities that can come closer in explaining my work and methods.

On the following section I will introduce the theme of *process* in relationship to my artwork. I will try to explain what I consider to be a new way to see my art process, but also my interest in Process Art. Therefore, themes concerning nature as a process, the event, change, passage, novelty, etc. will be used to explain my art methods as well as the results from working with this approach.

Processual Units

> 'Everything flows, nothing stands still'.
>   Heraclitus

When I see a finished piece exhibited in a gallery space I used to believe that the work had finished and that the exhibition was a symbolic manifestation of that conclusion. Evermore than before, my idea of the finished artwork has changed. I have realized that objects of art, for example, could be more actions than things that are in constant movement from one situation or state to another. Everything is more organic that what it seems. Ideas and things flow, expand and contract. All things are connected and affect each other into an ever changing organic evolution.

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[23]Nicholas Rescher, *Process metaphysics: an introduction to process philosophy*, p.22.

Interruption # 5

Serendipity: the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for; also: an instance of this.[24]
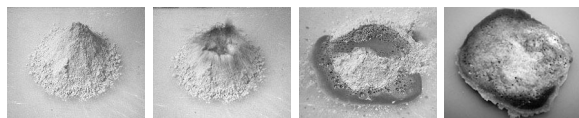
The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead has written extensively on the concept of process. He describes that the building blocks of reality are not substances but more a term he describes as *actual occasions* or *occasion of experience*. According to Whitehead, concrete objects are not so much *things*, but processual units perceived through experience. All events in nature could be considered actions of processes that humans record as experience. Whitehead also points out that all *occasions of experience* have been affected by other experiences and will affect future experiences. 'In Whitehead... there is a dialectical tension between individual and world. Each item of existence in nature touches the others and without them would not be what it is'.[25]

This idea of concrete objects actually being fluctuating units more than fixed objects, of the influencing factor in nature and the idea of reality as a flow of experiences reminds me of occasions in art where these notions were expressed artistically. Such is the case, I would say, in many of the ideas of Conceptual Art, and specifically Process Art.

Conceptual Art began to question the mechanism of the art world where they challenged the notion of *realization* of an artwork. One of their intentions was to take a couple of steps back and focus on the idea of an artwork instead of the finished product. They discovered that the work process before the final piece had an artistic value that had not been considered before. In many of the artist's sketches, failed attempts, experiments, etc. it unveiled different kinds of *information* and artistic qualities which challenged the notion of conventional art. 'As a result, it is the 'intervening steps'—that 'mess of drawings, figurings, and other ideas' – expanded now into 'scribbles, sketches, drawing, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations', that come to the fore, as being 'sometimes more interesting than the final product".[26]

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[24]http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/serendipity 26/05/2010
[25]Rescher, op. cit, p.21.
[26]Peter Osborne ed., *Conceptual art, Themes and Movements*, p.25

Many artists that have followed these ideas have changed the way art is presented and created. Not only have they worked with process as art but also concepts like chance, flux, and ephemera. One example is the work by artist Bruce Nauman, *Flour Arrangements* (1967). In this work, Nauman is pushing big piles of flour around the floor creating and transforming different sculptural forms. Like in many of his other works he uses his body as part of the action and as sculpture material. He had been making ephemeral flour sculpture everyday for over a month.

FIGURE 0.10. Bruce Nauman, *Flour Arrangements* (still images), 1967.

This work and several others that explore the process of making art have helped me understand my own art process. Considering the questions I have had about the *finished* art work and the potential information and artistic value held in odd experiments, sketches and random notes, the concepts in Process Art like random occurrences, improvisation, ephemera, transitions, etc. have given me new ideas on approaching the act of making art.

For example, in 2010 I created an installation piece called *Rate of Dissolution*. I wanted to explore the properties of raw materials which could naturally react, transform and affect each other without my intervention. My intention was to move away from the traditional art methods, i.e. coming up with an idea, sketching it and displaying it as something finished. Instead I wanted to do a work that would be alive when displayed, and where I had little control of the results of the artwork. I started exploring perishable materials that could change over time and could perform a live organic process. I started combining materials like water, plaster and textile, and contrasted them with synthetic materials like plastic and powdered color dye.[27]

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[27]I had the suspicion that my previous work had become too synthetic. That is when I shifted to more organic solutions. Later on I would retake point A again.
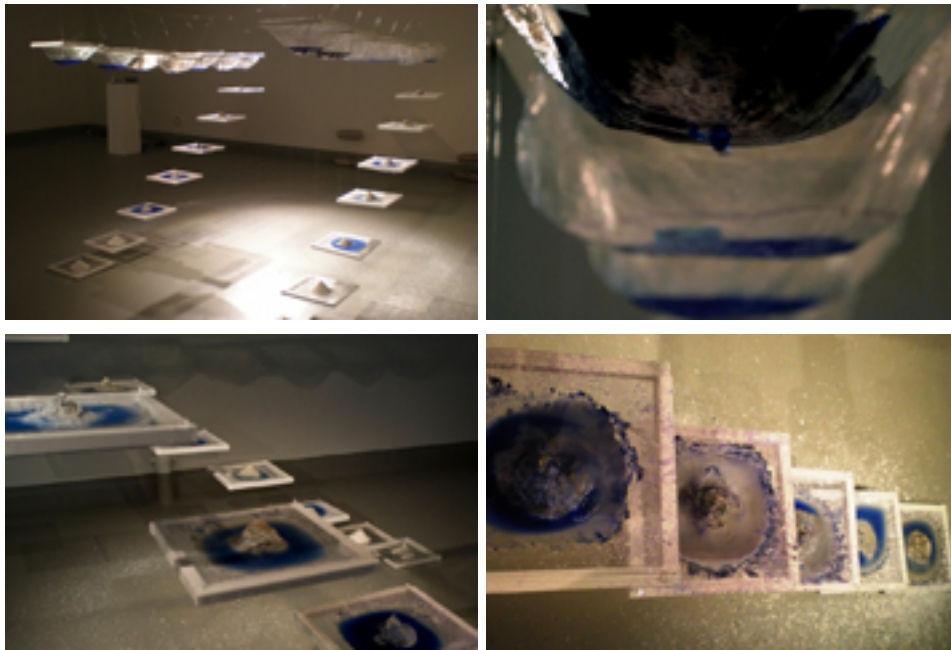
Figure 0.11. Xavier Villafranca, *Rate of dissolution*, 2010.

The idea was to align a series of suspended plastic bags filled with blue colored water. Every day I would punch a small hole to the bag so that the colored water could fall slowly as drops. The drops fell on top of a pile of plaster that was under each water bag. A slow transition occurred when the water chemically reacted with the plaster and began to harden the material. This action was repeated twice every day for seven days. As the plaster started to harden the color of the water in the plaster also changed with time. After the work was shown I was very interested to see how the project was still transforming itself with time. I was glad that I was able shift away from the fixed object in display to something that was more an *occurrence of experience* than a substance. This project was one of several experiments I continued to explore through the second year of my masters programme.

I should also add that other art movements and artists have contributed to my development and have helped me see other ways of making art. As Conceptual Art guided me to discover the value in the art process, artists like Giovanni Anselmo and Gilberto Zorio from the Art Povera movement have shown works that deal with poetic interpretations of natural phenomena like gravity, elasticity, equilibrium and materiality.

Interruption # 6
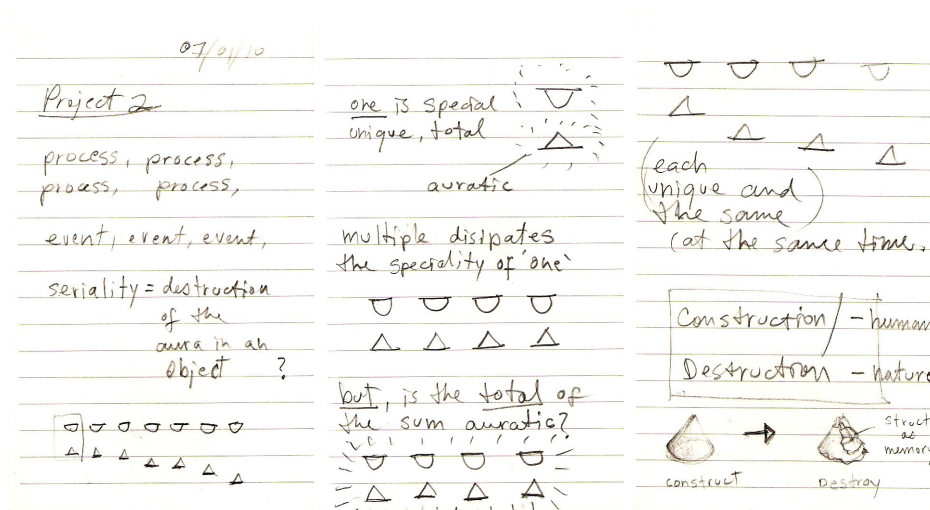
One fine example of a work that has combined the expression of raw materials, art processes and performance are the works of the Spanish artist Miquel Barceló. In his group project with Josef Nadj, *Paso Doble*, both artists perform the making of an art piece. A wall and floor were covered with clay where both artists began to transform the material using basic tools like sticks, hammers and their own bodies. The artists scrapped, shoveled and perforated the layers of clay on the wall and floor for several hours. After a long process of working against and with the material, both artists seemed immersed in their own work after being completely covered in clay. The information retained in the floor and walls, through marks, perforations and textures were all the actions and human gestures that occurred during the performance. It was like recorded evidence, through material, of the work in process.

FIGURE 0.12. Miquel Barceló and Josef Nadj, *Paso Doble*, 2007.

Holding the Line by the Middle

'Being is becoming'.
　　　Nietzsche.

The above statement is one of my final points which cover my journey towards a better understanding of what my art process could be about. As I have mentioned before, my experience of art making has transcended from a breakdown of the progressive and linear methodology, like Tinguely's *Homage to New York,* to a possible

personal breakthrough towards a ''philosophy of organism' in that everything that exists not only forms part of the organic organization of nature-as-a-whole but also will itself constitute an organism of sorts—an integrated whole with an organic constitution of its own'.[28]

This is where I would like to include the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea of the ontology of becoming. They establish that the real is in a state of flux, where life is virtual and is made of events and singularities. Reality is always in a process of becoming, where a line, for example, does not have a beginning or an end but enjoys infinite movement and is 'an absolute that is one with becoming itself, with process'.[29] To continue with the analogy of the line, we should avoid looking for the extremities of the line– since it's always in suspension and without coordinates– but instead we should 'only hold it by the middle'.[30] The salient features of the environment are expanding in all directions and therefore are never fixed or limited to a start or end, but always becoming new, old, different, similar, etc.

This idea of the process of becoming opened up a new approach of how I could see my art process. I no longer needed to select, correct, edit or discard my projects that did not fit together with my main line of work. I no longer needed to explain my projects as only colliding fragments or independent bifurcations that did not affect each other. Instead I had the facility to create a map of organic relationships between each work, idea or experiment, where I could view my art process as a constellation of momentary actions or expressions in time rather than fixed objects or a collage of disassociated parts. Artist and writer Tom Sherman adds to this issue by saying that 'when an artist dies, his or her body of work is complete. Each object is then a fixed component of a body of work, complete in and of itself. The living artist's body of work is an open-ended, expanding work-in-progress and therefore each single, discrete object of art is part of the body of the unfinished work-in-progress'.[31]

This encouraged me to try to begin incorporating process as an artistic tool of expression. I had made small insinuations of this concept in some of my projects. For example, in *Unraveling Forces*, *Rate of Dissolution* and in *Politics of Appearance*, I hinted on the idea of something that was still in process, that it was not finished or was soon to become, but not yet. I believe I intuitively wanted to address the infinite movement of life or constant state of flux and our impossibility to transform the occasions of experience into concrete things.

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[28]Rescher, op. cit, p.21

[29]Stephen Zepke, *Art as abstract machine*, pg. 139.

[30]Ibidem

[31]Sherman, op. cit, p.3

Another project that I tried to use the concept of process combined with the expression of materials and kinetic art was the sculpture called *Gatekeeper's Matter*. The piece was composed of a white horizontal box that carried a mass of raw material - plasticine. A moving mechanism was constructed inside the box that moved a set of rollers on the top. The rollers would slowly go back and forth endlessly while pressuring and polishing the material through time trying to create the intended shape. On the base of the piece one closed drawer and another semi opened revealed the drawing plans and text.

FIGURE 0.13. Xavier Villafranca, *Gatekeeper's matter*, 2010.

I wanted to work with the idea of transformation, process and profiling using mechanical elements that would interact with raw material. I created a transitional event from one raw state of material to another. The initial stage (pre-event) would be the raw material as it was. The next stage would be the transformation of the material into something else. The intention is that the change of shape of the material would slowly reveal itself though time. A mechanical device would smooth and compress the raw material until it slowly gave in to a form. A set of sketches of the final *ideal* figure would be slightly seen inside one semi open drawer together with text statements of the makers.

The manifestation of technology in this project was discreet. The mechanical device hidden inside the white box is what made the system become *alive*, but at the same time the mechanical components were concealed and operated secretly. I wanted the occurrence of technology to be hovering in the periphery of the viewer as a constant reminder of our dependency to it, but I wanted to keep it contained to let other artistic events be expressed. It is always difficult to find a right balance and not let *me* let technology make a spectacle out of the project, but that is what the involvement of technology in my art process is about. I try to think about machines and digital media consciously during my process. I have learned with past projects that a display of technological knowledge or a *high-tech* machine aesthetic is not always what I am after.

I also wanted to include in this section some of my unrealized projects since they also are a vital part of my art process. In the sketches and diagrams of unfulfilled works I am able to look back and see potential information, opened doors for new possibilities and forgotten intentions that I have left behind along the way. Even if they might appear challenging for the public to decipher all the potentiality I find in my sketches, I hope these forgotten ideas can communicate some of the raw intentions, audacity and optimism that was defining my art process at that moment.

These drawings are part of the *Unraveling Forces* project that was previously presented. The idea was to create an interactive sculpture that would change configuration or shape with time. There were three situations that were related to my main theme: social norms, tension structures, and resistant actions. I wanted to create an environemt where these social factors were interconnected, transfromed and affected. Three main components were formed: the *generators of social norms* which was made of four drums or tubes that were constantly moving a set of strings, the *flexible fabric structure* which was the center piece and was made up of a flexible grid of strings, and finally *the resistance activators* that would be three motors on the periphery of the project that would pull and stretch the elastic fabrics of the main grid until they broke while interrupting the regular course of the *generators of social norm*.
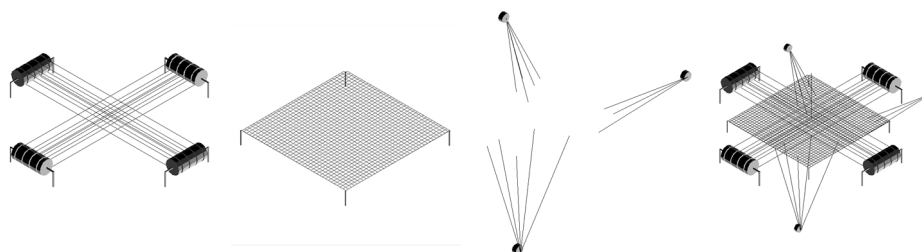

Figure 0.14. Sketch drawings before *Unraveling Forces.* From left to right: *Generator of social norm, Flexible fabric structure, Resistance activators,* and an integrated view.2009.

The project was not completed because of technical limitations and time constraints. But the will to realize this project is still in my mind. One of the interesting factors of including sketches as part of the process is that even if I have not realized this project, the idea and the intention behind it were created at least in my mind. This conceptual construction of an idea of a project possibly affected

other decision I took along the way, therefore making potential projects like this one a valuable source in the decisions made during the art process.

The Other Side of the Story

In this document, so far, I have put forward a sum of information interpreted as either a linear sequence of progressive events, an accumulation of dispersed fragments, or an organic group of occasion of experiences or becomings, which pile up together to a possible narration of *my story*. The information, comprehensible or incomprehensible, written in this document adds up to tell something about me and my history. All the elements that I have included and not included form part of the whole projection or meta-narrative of *my story* that I reflect back to myself and others.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, my concern with how the artist's story is constructed in the art world, i.e. through promotional articles, press releases, art history or artists books, makes me aware of how I present the story of my work. Searching through bookstores or the Internet you sense a saturation of marketing strategies designed to pay attention to new artists and also not to forget established ones. It seems that the writers, who help promote these ideas, construct texts where the artists promoted can appear as assertive, expert, wise, daring, perfect, artistic, etc. They rarely mention any doubts or *mistakes* in their history or working methods.

My idea was to avoid a self- promotional orchestrated text that would show only the best side of things. I wanted include doubts, contradictions, odd results, detours, etc. that could reflect the elements that constitute my art practice and methods. Artist and writer, Magnus Bärtås underlines this issue in his article, *Talk Talk-On Method and the Story of the Work*:

> 'A story of my art has a lot in common with what narratologists would call a meta-narrative of the life history, i.e. the story that you tell about your life. Both stories share the same propagandistic and idealizing features. Disturbing and inconvenient elements are excluded: sidetrack, 'unproductive' details, slips, episodes that are too odd, and the elements and events threatening one's investments in an ideology or one's principal identity'.

Bärtås continues describing how the story of the artist struggles to 'keep the self together and make it meaningful'.[32] On the other hand, Bärtås cites the example of a sixteenth century author, Michel de Montaigne, where he proposes a different narrative of the artist's life by adding events, 'digressions and even inconveniences to become more true and honest'.[33] Bärtås also mentions the artist Allan Kaprow in his audacious and self amusing approach to writing and storytelling. Kaprow stated that writing should be fun, creative, unserious and adventurous, since '...it is just at that moment when the words become most perfectly soliloquized that they take on something of the air of authenticity'.[34] This idea of turning the straightness of the text into curves through self- evaluation and transparency was something I was trying to achieve. I tried to question my own approaches without having any straight answers and I used the *Interruptions* as breaking points or dislocations. I intended to show my story as I see and experience it which meant that parallel thought processes had the potential to meet at some points and diverge in other moments.

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[32]Magnus Bärtås, *Talk Talk- On Method and the Story of the Work*, p. 12.

[33]Ibidem.

[34]Ibid, p16.

Finishing, But Still Moving

I find this last section quite challenging to work with. I can not decide how to close or confront some of the issues I have constructed in this document, i.e. the idea of a *finished* work in relation to an open-ended process. Regardless of the complexity of the topics and thought processes explained in this document, I created a linear structure (introduction, development, closing statements) as a common working area or, as I would like to say, a standard canvas with the three primary colors where I can experiment and apply a series of *interruptions* and themes to reflect the nature of my art process. I feel that the function these *interruptions* gave me a space to communicate with the reader in other ways. If I felt the need to express a concern, doubt, detour, contradiction, etc. this was the place to share it. These *free* spaces were an interesting counterbalance to the dominating structure which reflected with my art making process.

But at this point where the main structure of this document is pressuring me to end or finish with a *conclusion* which would again challenge the open-ended organic nature of natural systems, brings me to a difficult meeting point. I don't think I should simplify matters by saying that I should completely erase a line of thought and exchange it for a new one (*tabula rasa*). Instead I am trying to come to terms, balance it out and avoid fast conclusions or closures.

On the one hand, I can see how the development of my artwork is complex, juxtaposed, intersected and interrupted. At the same time, as Rudolph Arnheim suggests, the human mind tends to arrange things so they have some kind of order, so we can recognize it, understand it, work with it. In a way, culture imposes order for us to get along, even though nature might function in other ways. So even if my methods of working with art sometimes are fragmented, discontinuous, unfinished, in process, etc., I should not escape the fact that the *finished* work, the displayed object, the linear narration or the ideal artist are still ideas that I am still in the process of acknowledging. They are becoming.

I am part of a social structure, not an alienated entity. It is important to make art that challenges the status quo, transcends or goes to other places, but I also want my work to connect with society. It is significant for me to include socially

recognizable elements in my work, in order to bring the spectator/reader inside and challenge him/her with new perspectives. Therefore, this document follows some kind of recognizable structure in order to reach a wider audience which I hope will trigger new questions about our methods and practice.

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