On tangibility, contemporary reliefs, and continuous dimensions

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer - The Slade School of Fine Art – UCL – PhD 2019
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

I, Sophie Marie Isabelle Bouvier Ausländer, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
ABSTRACT

I am a relief maker, who proposes "worldmaking" as a paradigm for works of art. The relief, whether it is an art category or a geological section, is a space that extends from the surface to the volume. Such a space is as tangible as it is visible. The notion of tangibility is paramount for making and receiving artworks commonly known as relief sculptures.

My thesis examines my practice by establishing the territories of my artworks. Triggered by personal encounters and perceptions, each of these is a case study forming a section in my analysis. My purpose is to contextualise and underscore my practice, in a pragmatic rather than theoretical investigation. The public art commission *Ways of Worldmaking* raises my main questions. These relate to the topographical interconnectivity across the surface of the earth. The use of the books as a collection and an archive is another layer developed further in my concluding artwork *Ways of Worldmaking / Self-portrait*, that is, my thesis bibliography turned into a sculpture.

My making of reliefs responds to sculptural and material dimensions of site specificity while examining its social and political features. Relief is an overlooked category of practice. It is a metaphor for observation, with qualities of elevation and depth and a variety of thickness that highlights notions of discovery and emergence of meaning.

The history of Western relief sculpture informs my study of contemporary pieces. These articulate several sets of dimensions continuously from recessed parts to more protuberant ones. There is a tension between the desire to touch and the frustration of that same desire expressed particularly clearly in relief. I observe that dialectic through the senses of tactile touch and optical touch.

Artists are constantly creating and exhibiting reliefs, but they rarely make
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full use of the physical complexity and the epistemological potential of this form of art. Relief making seems to me an interesting way of expressing our distance from or our relationship with the landforms, either theoretically or practically.

Although the idea of category remains questionable in itself, I make textured world-versions, promote the relief as a rich space, readdress and redress its position among sculpture and painting.
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Impact Statement

My work has helped to shape recent public art policies in Canton de Vaud, Switzerland. It has facilitated an understanding of how public art can be simultaneously functional, permanent, innovative, and inspirational.

My practical research had received a good response amongst my peers in terms of meta-methodology. Practice-led PhD research in art still does not exist in Switzerland. My years of commuting, combining theoretical and practical research, collaborations, residencies, and commercial-based works have demonstrated the value of PhD research in art and its positive outcomes.

Summary of outcomes

Public Art
Ways of Worldmaking was developed in the public realm.\(^1\) It was designed to engage its users, and this artwork reached its target. Students freely borrow art books and develop works from it. Teachers in art, French literature and philosophy have reported about the benefits for the students’ progression and more broadly for the institution.

Architects networks were impressed. I gave talks to FAS and SIA\(^2\), introduced the library to the students and their families, to officials and local politicians. Spoken words testified about the benefits of the project for the various users.

The Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaire asked me to give a one hour lecture about the library in 2018. Phaidon Press spotted Ways of Worldmaking and included it in Destination Art.\(^3\) It will therefore radiate back to the local government, establishing a standard for its vision and art strategy.

Communications
I gave three workshops in relation to different artworks (2015, 2016, and 2017). These workshops had a positive impact on participants who have spontaneously written enthusiastic feedback which can be found in Section 6.6.

Roundtables (2014-2015-2016-2017-2018), live interviews for Radio Television Suisse and written press reports have probably influenced listeners and readers but in a way that is

\(^1\) See chapter 4.
\(^2\) Federation of Architects Switzerland, Society of Engineers and Architects Vaud.
\(^3\) This worldwide publication is an art travel guide on permanent and site-specific art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, published in October 2018.
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difficult to establish.

**Fairs**
I have shown my works every year in contemporary international art fairs during my research.\(^4\) Twice I had a solo booth at Art Genève and was the booth focus at Drawing Now. The effect on the public was tremendously positive. My galleries reported back a lot of positive interest.

**Exhibitions**
Exhibitions have contributed crucially to disseminate my research and therefore have maximised the possibility of its impact on the public. I have had one personal retrospective museum exhibition as well as shows in my galleries every year since I started the doctoral research.\(^5\) I participated in 15 group shows between 2013 and 2019.

**Collections**
All the collections listed below have contributed to disseminate my research and therefore increased its potential effect on a broad range of people and other practices. However, this is hard to quantify. Caldic Collectie NL bought “The World” for its new Voorlinden museum in Wassenaar. Foundation Lélo Fiaux bought four “Nightshift” and donated them to Musée Jenisch,

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PREFACE

Three different events that occurred simultaneously in 2013 motivated my research. They were linked to a friendship, a personal financial crisis, and a reflection about my surnames.

The first event happened while I was meeting with an artist friend who had just turned fifty. I realised he had become bitter and desperate about reaching this age without the prestige of an international career. His practice had been incredibly rich and playful, but finally, the art market was ignoring him. Witnessing such a sad change, I questioned my own art practice and my reasons for being an artist. I thought that the most important thing for me was making art in order to understand my human condition; the research process pleased me more than the outcome.

The second was frightening. Abruptly, our family faced a financial tragedy, being left with a huge debt. My reaction has been to look towards a long-term future and to express a firm will to improve confidence in my work. Instead of immediately taking any bread-and-butter job to reimburse slowly what we owed, I decided to do something that would give me more confidence as an artist, and, though it might increase the debt, to invest in proper doctoral research.

The third, intertwined with the two others, took the shape of a question mark about who I had become and where I was going. These interrogations were summed up by my surnames. My maiden name is Bouvier, meaning cattle keeper, the symbol of the gatherer. Also, there is a star named after him: l'étoile du bouvier, a guide in the sky for a guide on Earth. My married name is Ausländer, which means ‘foreigner’ in German. It is the name given to my Jewish in-laws, probably during the Sixteenth or Seventeenth Century. They must have been fleeing from Spain or from some pogrom and must have arrived at a safe town in Central Europe. They probably did not have any
defined profession or place of origin, so the local authorities simply registered them as foreigners, and this tag has become their family name. That is, anyway, how my father-in-law used to tell the story. The notions of the individual among a group, of trajectory and itinerancy, of settlement and hope are ingrained in my names. Put together, they create a strong ambivalence. On the one hand live the centripetal dynamics of the gatherer bouvier,\(^6\) confined in his closed landscape of Swiss mountains, and on the other hand, the centrifugal dynamics blow the Jewish diaspora from one part of Europe to the other.

In short, I applied to the PhD program of the Slade School of Fine Art on ontological, existentialist and epistemological grounds, with the same confidence in art as Robert Filliou, who believed that “art is what makes life more interesting than art.”\(^7\)

My research developed over six years with an overarching metaphor to my pragmatical investigations: the construct of worldmaking as a paradigm for a work of art. It has woven art conceptions with a scrutiny of materials, of making processes, and of the reception of these artworks defined as reliefs made in relationship to the geological relief.

Attention to hand making, the sense of touch and, more broadly, tangibility comes from my countryside childhood where we were used to make things with what was to hand. We were absorbed by looking after farmyard animals, growing vegetables or squeezing cider apples, making pots, painting shutters, cutting wood, shooting with a Winchester, burying dead mice and birds, cooking slug jam, sporting fancy dresses, building huts in trees, watching frogspawn in the ponds, and worrying about rabid foxes. We were called in for dinner with walkie-talkies, throwing eucalyptus butts into

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\(^6\) ‘Bouvier’ in French is a masculine noun that literally means “cow-boy”, cattle keeper and driver.

chestnut stumps. The seasons had an impact on us, and the distance to the main town seemed astronomic. There was a strong sense of community; three generations lived under the same roof with different experiences and skills. My father was a historian and a teacher and my mother a potter while my grandmother was a hairdresser, my grandfather was a graphic designer who owned a creative agency and worked with my uncle, who was a jurist and a fan of pataphysics, and my aunt was a journalist. There were four of us children: my cousin, my sister, my brother, and me. A workshop for wood and another for clay allowed us direct access to many experiments with these materials. We also had plenty of space to draw and make bricolages. We made our presents. We shared a hall to host parties, with a player piano diffusing punch-holed music. This farm has kept most of its original features. My three children, who are now adults, have spent a lot of time there, too. One is an artist working with clay and film, one is a professional cellist, and one studies linguistics and film history. I constantly converse with all of them, and they have a strong impact on my practice. My upbringing by my whole family has been so important in the constitution of my being that I consider it as standing for my sole country, my homeland, tiny but infinite, eighteen years in a lifetime but also an eternity. It equipped me with a sense of space, scale and distance.

These latter became tangible with my repeated commuting over the years. Based in Lausanne, I travelled every other week to UCL, carrying artworks in my suitcase, making them according to its size. Flying over the Channel made me think about the various perspectives from frontal to aerial and about the shift of identities between a continent and an island. These flights made me aware of the brutal mountain relief in contrast to the fine texture expressed in the folds of the water waves. Thanks to this distance to the ground, I realised that reliefs were part of me, from my mental self to my future projections on Earth; therefore, I thought I should examine them more carefully and feel deeply what they are.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 State of the issue

1.1.1 Tangibility

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Wallmapper*, detail, 2012, wall installation, road maps, 400 x 1440 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds, CH.

I handle materials to make my works, I grab the tools, I shake the hands of people who collaborate with me, and I install my pieces alone or with the help of other hands, but five minutes before the opening, the artwork is declared untouchable.

In recent decades, the visual arts have engaged more deeply with haptic senses. Awareness of the importance of the sense of touch in making and

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8 “Nowadays, the secondary senses enter art in two ways that, oddly, run parallel: either as synaesthetic art experiments or as phenomena of lifestyle.” Diaconu, Mădălina *Reflections on an Aesthetics of Touch, Smell and Taste*, Volume 4, 2006. [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0004.008](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0004.008)
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in receiving artworks has increased. However, for conservation reasons, actual immediate access to collections is rare in museums and galleries. The tactile relationship that an artist experiences while creating is broken once the finished work steps out of the studio, that is, once its public presentation is near.\(^9\) Also the observation of the sense of touch is put into words and examined in the post-making phase rather than in the making itself.

This practice-based research examines my personal artworks in relief through the prism of tangibility and from the creation processes to the public reception.

I am using tangibility and not tactility as an overarching concept. Tactility concerns solely actual touch with fingers, hands and limbs covered by skin. Eyes seem to be different and provoke another type of touch, which Gilles Deleuze has called after Alois Riegl “haptic vision” or “optical touch”.\(^{10}\) Indeed, eyes acknowledge touch, too, but with a different sensory path in relation to the mind. Consequently, tangibility is the main term I will use in this qualitative study to describe all senses of touch. Also, this word associates tactility with a degree of spatio-temporal proximity. It evokes the elastic distance between the self and the object. I will postulate that my reliefs are metonymies for the Earth's crust, for how removed or close to it I feel. The notion of tangibility will bridge three items: the space of my mental self, its expression into an artwork in relief and the presentation of this artwork on the geological relief itself. The research is framed by my own practice and compares it to other similar historical and contemporary

\(^9\) This research studies mostly the category of what we traditionally call relief sculpture. It does not expand to virtual environments or augmented reality for instance.


practices but does not expand to all types of artworks like performances or media based artworks.

1.1.2 Reliefs
I believe an artist is an unsatisfied world-maker who constructs world-versions in the hope of finding the right one, the one that best translates her sense of distance to the version of the world she lives in; it is the expression of her human condition that she is seeking. That perfect version can never be achieved; similar to the horizon, it is each time anew. Relief plays a central role in that quest, as I will show through my practice in the following pages of that report. I define myself as a relief maker.

In order to establish our topic, I will start with three definitions of relief.11 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a relief is a “1a) Moulding, carving, stamping, etc., in which the design stands out from a plane surface so as to have a natural and solid appearance. Also: work done in this way; the part which so projects; 1b) A composition, design, or work of art executed in this manner. 3b) Physical Geography. The manner or degree of variation in elevation of a part of the surface of the earth (or other planetary body).”12

The current making and reception of relief sculptures is barely noticed even if many living artists create in relief and make artworks with a whole dimensional spectrum in the same object. No recent survey has been conducted; there have been no exhibitions made on that contemporary item since 1981.13

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11 See Introduction 1.2 (Previous research, relief) and Literature Review for more developments on the art category of relief sculpture.
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The visual arts literature describes relief as an in-between, an epistemologically not-well-defined field.

I am not interested in ambiguities. I believe that often we wrongly label persons or things as being ambiguous whereas, in fact, they are ambivalent. Once something belongs to the in-between, it becomes blurred in my mind, and I do not think about it accurately anymore; it enters the intangible. To me, reliefs are everything but intangible. On the contrary, they are embodiments of tangibility.

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Remake, detail, 2012 – 2014, wall installation, ink on paper, 247 x 1700 cm, Musée d'Art de Pully, CH.

On the one hand, it seems that the category of relief is overlooked, and is

The excellent exhibition Drawing: Sculpture at The Drawing Room London was somehow covering the same subject but never mentioning it as such neither in the exhibition space nor in the catalogue published at this occasion. 

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underrepresented in critical texts and art literature. On the other, there is a risk of categorising all that is not totally flat nor totally in the round as relief; it would comprehend almost all artefacts. In addition, since the Nineteenth Century, art categories have blurred, and hierarchies between them seem to have disappeared. Consequently, it might sound counter-productive to categorise reliefs and identify firmly such a fluctuant category. My research, though, tries to name, identify and decipher what the materiality of artefacts, which varied in terms of sets of dimensions, entails historically, symbolically and artistically. By examining the core of the poly-dimensional gradience that gives rise to complexity in relief artefacts, and by making reliefs myself, I will drive attention to this category and contribute to establish it at best as a major art category or at least as worthy of more attention.

14 As discussed in the Methodology and Conclusion, a quantitative survey would be useful in identifying the exact proportion of relief, sculpture and painting in exhibitions and critical texts.
1.1.3 Continuous dimensions

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Folds / Cauchemar*, wall installation detail, 2014
inkjet prints, collage, 2600 x 5500 cm.

The understanding of reliefs as an ambiguous category of the *in-betweens* is problematic, as it considers relief as a blended mixture of only two
physically opposed sets of dimensions. However, it makes identification and naming easy. Everybody recognises a sculpture and a painting. To say that a relief comes half-way between these two major categories is a practical means to be understood by everyone, but it does not actually say enough. My aim is to approach nuances in my examination of reliefs.

Nuances are the salt of life - a whole spectrum of variations and forces relating to feelings, materiality, movement and permanence translated throughout my practice. This uninterrupted range expresses emotions, experiences, gravity and an inclination to die. These sets of dimensions pass by degrees in a continuous way. Volume and surface are only their mere degenerated extremities; this will not be examined in either the practice nor in the theoretical study.

That physical continuum is not only the richness that can be observed but also the difficulty in apprehending reliefs. There is indeed an epistemological contradiction in discerning each set of dimensions and therefore in fracturing the continuity in the physical articulation. The gradience is nonetheless made of an infinite number of fractional dimensions, all differing in elevation or depth, in the number of facets and number of folds.

Time seems to be key in reading reliefs. The synthetic primal look at a relief may consider it ambiguous, but as soon as the eye and hand take more time in observing the bed, the parts and the context of the relief become

15 “Il s'agit enfin de mesurer l'ampleur des ambiguïtés intrinsèques aux reliefs que nous étudions, leurs limites, leurs conséquences et leur fécondités, selon trois axes essentiels qui structurent notre propos: l'ambiguïté entre architecture et sculpture, entre peinture et sculpture, enfin entre écriture et sculpture dans laquelle ils se déploient.”

“Finally, it is a matter of measuring the extent of ambiguities intrinsic to the reliefs we study, their limits, their consequences and their fertility, according to three essential axes that structure our subject: the ambiguity between architecture and sculpture, between painting and sculpture, finally, between writing and sculpture in which they unfold.” My translation.

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more than a blend of volume and planes.

 Somehow, this analytical prism resorts to a measurement system which I do not examine scientifically. Such a method would look at graphene as the lowest elevated surface from the ground, and from there on, at a physical nano-metrical increment, augmenting parts of the relief’s bed, step-by-step. A sub-micron observation would require a laboratory equipment or residency to which I could introduce my research later.

The continuity in relief is produced by the permanent holding of various sets of dimensions in the same ground. It is a physical and temporal continuity.

The potential of the subtle physical gamut of the relief makes it an ideal object for practical research.

1.2 Previous research

Most of my survey on previous theoretical research is focused on relief artworks, as they are concrete expressions of my theory.

Other studies, texts or theories on continuous dimensions and tangibility will be addressed only briefly here. Indeed, I use these notions in a specific way with a personal understanding borrowed from other disciplines and translated into my practice. I will return to consider these concepts more thoroughly in chapters 4 and 5, as I want to approach them primarily from my own practice.

My current theoretical landscape emerged from four main thinkers, who are reviewed in chapter 3, namely, Gilles Deleuze, Nelson Goodman, Rosalind Krauss and Leonard R. Rogers. Deleuze is a fantastic creator of concepts which prompt various types of images that are ready to use in my creations. In addition to being inspirational, Deleuze is a good decipherer to navigate with. I discovered new aspects in my works thanks to him. Though this is not mentioned in the Literature Review, I also immensely enjoyed watching
his *Abécédaire*, which exude humour and humanity, allowing me to get closer to this monument of French culture.\(^{16}\) Goodman brings logic and structure to my thinking. His writings – not only books but also chapters - have great titles that encouraged the reader in me as much as the maker. I have been faithful to Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking* since I wrote my PhD proposal, examining it in depth, referring to it and giving its title to my last PhD artwork. Krauss beneficially brought new perspectives to the historical approach of my field. Her writings have been the starting point of a rhizomatic investigation of artists and thinkers, making me more aware of the non-continental art world, practices and art theories. Finally, Leonard R. Rogers’s *Relief Sculpture* revealed itself an important reading. It is a non-chronological survey of reliefs written by an artist who is a sculptor, a writer and a teacher. I used it as a manual both to write and to conduct my research. Though coming from these backgrounds, Rogers is neither a major artist nor an art historian, which meant his book remained quite inconspicuous. However, I found it succinct and relevant, giving the feeling of someone observing artworks in the flesh as opposed to gazing at them from a distance, as is often the case with art history texts.

As mentioned briefly in the Literature Review, other major texts deserve a review, as they comprise my mental toolbox. They are mentioned in the Appendix.

Artists’ practices and writings helped me a lot. First, they inspired and sustained my desire for the research. Second, they were concrete examples of what and how an artist can write alongside her practical investigations. Among the many important references, Ad Reinhardt and Robert Morris are the two to single out. Ad Reinhardt’s multifarious approach to art allows him

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to save a part of his practice for “Art-as-Art”.\textsuperscript{17} His paintings eschew all references to the external world and question the existence of the Absolute. They do not claim the end of Painting as a category but operate to narrowly escape the extreme limit after which the artwork does not exist anymore. I was particularly interested by what Eleanor Ray’s description of Reinhardt’s approach to art as “a modernist's affinity for polarities, and a gift for playing two sides against each other, making a viewer or reader hold them both in mind at once.”\textsuperscript{18}

Moreover, Reinhardt's humorous definition of sculpture as “something you bumped into when you back up to look at a painting” sums up many of my questions about relief.\textsuperscript{19} Brilliantly offered to us as a pun, it actually and earnestly questions the politics of arts, their social implications as well as the realities of the practice itself. Concise and sharp Reinhardt is generously challenging. He remained my lighthouse over the years.

Robert Morris' impact on my work has been quite the opposite being intimidating, and thus ruining my self-confidence. Morris' work is versatile, too. The common thread between his pieces is conceptual, which I completely relate to. I was very much interested in “Anti-Form”, in works driven by his background in philosophy and his phenomenological approach to sculpture, like the one developed in \textit{Aligned with Nazca}, which considers questions regarding the notion of scale and sets of dimensions in relation to the ground.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, I like how Morris addresses in his writings the

\textsuperscript{17} Rose, Barbara, Ed. \textit{Art as Art, The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt}, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, first paperback edition, University of California Press, 1991.


\textsuperscript{19} Lippard, L. R., \textit{Changing, Essays in Art Criticism}, New-York: E:P: Dutton, 1971, p.120.

\textsuperscript{20} Morris's works from 1967 are representative of the Anti-form, which is “a term associated with a group of artists working in the United States in the late 1960s who embraced chance and other organic processes in the creation of their minimal sculptures”. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/anti-form Accessed 7 July 2019.
property of the material and the notion of chance. His felt works are reliefs, which allowed me to consider the continuity in dimensions. They also inspired some aspects of my Archisculpture series. His description of the tipping point between the aerial and the frontal perspective in Nazca was wonderful to read while I was making my Avalanche and Radar series. These pushed me to read more from him, but he writes so well that when it was my time to explore and describe my practice in linguistic terms, I felt unskilled, inapt to the task. Finally, I left his writings and instead focused on the artworks even if there is no such clear distinction in Morris' practice.

1.2.1 Writings on relief

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Skin, detail, 2014, wall installation, ink on tracing paper, 235 x 1130 cm, Musée d'Art de Pully, CH.

A library search with the key words “relief sculpture” identified 65,535 books, texts and images on reliefs, but not all were relevant to a study of

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contemporary reliefs apprehended with the sense of touch in order to unveil continuous dimensions.\textsuperscript{22}

Only 11\% of the physical books on relief sculpture were located in Art, with the others being mainly in Archaeology or Egyptology. Amongst those, only three titles had been written after 1994.

A search with the key words “contemporary relief” gave 414,116 entries with most results in Human Rights, Economics or Law, with relief being taken to mean alleviation. However, one title matched my research; it was written from the perspective of graphic design field.\textsuperscript{23} Other books on the category offer perspectives on pre-history, antiquity, the Middle-Ages and Nineteenth Century reliefs.

The most significant text that guided my observations was Leonard Robert Rogers’s \textit{Relief Sculpture}.\textsuperscript{24} Referenced by Claire Barbillon in \textit{Le Relief}, it is a historical survey on the practice of relief making and on artworks in relief from an artist’s viewpoint.\textsuperscript{25} Rogers introduces the term ‘2.5 dimensions’ at the very beginning of the book to describe the specificity of relief. I discovered later that this term was borrowed from Nancy K. Sandars.\textsuperscript{26} Shortly before this reading, I had come up with the concept of fractional dimensions, which was later changed into continuous dimensions. My confidence was boosted when I discovered that Rogers had examined relief with a similar approach to mine.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, Rosalind Krauss’ \textit{Sculpture in...
the Expanded Field helped me to locate the shift in categorisation and appreciation of relief from a contemporary viewpoint.\textsuperscript{28}

1.2.2 Writings on tangibility

The senses of touch are being used increasingly to engage with artworks. I was interested in the writings and methods developed by Professor Helen Chatterjee about the impact of tactile relationships with art collections in the health sector and in museum contexts.\textsuperscript{29} I was also struck by museum strategies across the UK that encourage the reception of art by active touch.

Hidlebrand, Adolph, Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst, original edition 1893.
Leader, Scott, Ghiberti and Donatello with Other Early Italian Sculptors, London: Forgotten Books, 2013 original work 1882.
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Richard Sennett’s book on craftsmanship and hand skills has been inspirational as have contemporary anthropological studies about the specificities of the hand and the phenomenology of perception.\textsuperscript{30} My participation in public art commissions in Switzerland, with their requirement of interactions between the users and the artwork, have fostered personal reflections and practical developments with a specific care regarding focus on the tactile dimension.

1.2.3 Writings on continuous dimensions

There are many possible approaches to the concept of continuous dimensions. One is Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity.\textsuperscript{31} Bauman opposes the lifestyle of modernist times compared to a postmodernist area defined by splits. According to Bauman, postmodernism is characterised by individuals who continuously shift on many levels (social, political, civil, gender or geographical level). The continuous shift from one position to the other is opposed to an early modernist life when individuals were fixed, being firmly established in communities and recognised by them.

Another approach to continuous dimensions is found in mathematics and philosophy. The principle of continuity originates in pre-Socratic philosophy and in Leibniz's 1687 \textit{Opera Philosophica}, and is defined as being

\begin{center}
    laid down as a general principle, that where there is continuity between data, such that one case continually approaches and at length loses itself in another, there will be a corresponding continuity
\end{center}

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My practice borrows intuitively from not only the sociological but also from the philosophic and scientific descriptions of continuity. Gilles Deleuze’s *The Fold, Leibnitz and the Baroque* has helped to hold these together.33

1.3 Flatness, relief, volume

After my painting undergraduate degree in La Cambre, Brussels, I took a PgDip in textile design at Central Saint Martins, London. Six years passed between these studies. Reflecting now on that temporal gap, I remember both my growing dissatisfaction with painting and my growing obsession with textiles. My shift in interest from painting to textiles meant an expansion in dimensions. At that time, nobody in France or Switzerland dared to claim to be a painter; painting was under a kind of embargo, having been declared dead. However, my discomfort was of a different kind, coming not from a doxa. It had been triggered by *Océanie: la Mer* and *Polynésie: le Ciel* by Matisse, which were installed in the same room at Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique. I remember looking at them in 1992 and being uncontrollably moved. The depiction of fabrics and textile patterns in Matisse had attracted me much already, but these works were so special. I could not look away from the very large silkscreens on linen. They were flat patterns resulting from cut outs; his first attempts, they were beautiful premises of a radical change to come. They were allusions not only to printed textiles and craft but also to natural worlds, the world of the seas and the oceans, the world of the sky and the air. *Océanie* and *Polynésie* painted


Definition 2b. law or principle of continuity: the principle that all change, sequence, or series in nature is continuous, and that nothing passes from one state to another per saltum.
Accessed 2 April 2018.

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continents large enough to surround my body and absorb me because of their size and their all over composition, giving a feel of infinity. Cut outs are collages, in other words, relief artworks. These were silkscreened, thus flattened down again, but their surface contained the history of the thickness and showing the process of how these layers were merged into a plane surface in the same way linen or any fabric weaves a thread in all dimensions.

Over the past centuries, art practices have experimented extensively with flatness and volume in painting and sculpture. From a linear perspective in the Renaissance to objects in Minimal art, the tyranny of the surface and the object- hood of sculpture have been and are still being played with. Relief in pre-history, antiquity, the Middle-ages, the Nineteenth Century, and the mid-Twentieth Century have flourished in various modes (communication with the gods, epic narrations, transcriptions of the divine, propaganda or formal propositions, etc.). Since the 1960s, artists like Robert Morris have developed interesting reliefs they do not necessarily categorise as such. Land art works had notched topographies and produced relief artworks on the geological relief and on the terrestrial topography. Art movements like Support-Surface in France and groups of artists in Italy and Netherlands carried on the research further. However, a comprehensive survey of the field or a critical analysis is yet to be written.
1.4 Research questions


This research aims to provide an understanding of contemporary reliefs through the prism of tangibility. Sight predominates in art history. However,

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34 “Civilization has proclaimed man's autonomy and independence from nature as an ideal. The liberation from instincts implies the metaphorical equation, ‘sight is power’: the higher the position one conquers, the better one is able to see and control the world that lies, ordered and classified, at one's feet. If vision empowers knowledge, it also impoverishes sensory diversity and makes reality feel less real: the visual "sujet de survol"- Merleau-Ponty's expression (Merleau-Ponty, M., *Le Visible et l’Invisible*, Paris: Gallimard, 1993, p. 179) - loses contact with the environment, the world threatens to become an abstraction and, along with it, one's own body. The place from which the world opens itself to the domineering gaze lies outside the world. Correspondingly, distance and contemplation characterise the Kantian aesthetic subject. Conversely, a defenestration of the subject occurs by rehabilitating touch, smell and taste; humans descend again into the middle of the world and its whirl.”
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my research will focus on the sense of touch.

How useful is the notion of tangibility in the production and reception of reliefs? If the viewer completes the artwork’s meaning, the toucher might provide an additional sense. I will explore touchers such as artists and gallery visitors, as well as transient touchers, such as restorers or museum technicians.35

The artist who hand-makes her work touches it until it leaves the site of its making. Once out of this space, the work is no longer handled in the same way. Gloves are put on, crates provide protection from brutal direct manipulations, and if it happens to be touched by a member of the public with their bare hands this happens secretly, on the fly.

Buyers can touch their own collection, but visitors who do not purchase art cannot. Thus, financial power endows the right to touch. Yet, if collectors buy tactile access, how big is the loss for people who cannot afford artworks? I will examine what this break in tactility entails in terms of art meaning and if something has been lost on the way or whether instead something has emerged.

What actually is a contemporary relief? Is it an art category? I researched the specificity of works gathered under the term contemporary reliefs in order to find out if reliefs are a major category, a minor category or an attribute.36 Relief is a substantial space rather than being in between sculpture and painting. How can my practice express this specific spatiality? The back of a relief remains invisible (as opposed to round sculpture), and its viewpoint is limited. I will explore how such constraints become creative

Diaconu, Mădălina, op. cit.

35 See chapter 4 Ways of Worldmaking and chapter 9 Conclusion, UCL Art museum residency Redress, workshop The Big Draw in Harnessing the Wind, in Appendix, chapter 4.
36 See Practice Research, chapters 4-8 for the study of these variations depending on the series.
triggers for the artist and the viewer.\textsuperscript{37}

1.5 My hypothesis

The notion of tangibility is useful to apprehend artworks not only in their making but also in their reading. Active tactile reception enables us to decipher more dimensions in the artwork, to understand its materiality and the techniques used in the process, to reconnect to memories, and to envision future developments. The manipulation of my work by others informs my personal understanding of what I have made, too. I become an observer of how people encounter my work tactiley.

Touching reliefs is particularly relevant to understanding them, as they contain many textures and other haptic temptations. Relief artworks call for touch, as they protrude from the wall; the depth of their field is an invitation to the hand. Relief is as major as sculpture or painting. However, the reason this category is overlooked might be the words used in its description, a poor vocabulary we are accustomed to and that we do not question anymore.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, there is a need to stop comparing relief to sculpture or to painting and to free it from its sister categories. The observation must be done from and for a relief viewpoint.

The understanding of relief would greatly improve if terms such as in-

\textsuperscript{37} See chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Specialists of the art category of relief use the same inaccurate vocabulary in their description and analysis. See following paragraph for these words.

Vocabulary to describe the sense of touch is poor in comparison to the one of sight. The paucity of the terms to describe reliefs may come from the paucity of the terms to describe the sense of touch.

"As for discourse on touch, smell and taste, their underdeveloped terminology and the tendency to compensate for this by resorting to a metaphorical language are indeed real difficulties for any aesthetic theory of these three senses. However, the solution here is not to try to avoid any metaphors and catachreses (i.e., forced or dead metaphors) when describing sensory experience, but to become aware of them and use them consciously. The aesthetics of the senses requires a meta-aesthetics, a reflection on its own language."

Diaconu, Mădălina, op.cit.
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*between, ambiguous, half-half, fixed viewpoint or relief-sculpture* were replaced by expressions such as *substantial specific space, ambivalent, gradience, 180-degree viewpoint* and *continuous dimensions*. This vocabulary would induce a shift and offer a new understanding of reliefs. It would contribute on the one hand, to their analysis, and on the other to their making.

The viewpoint being limited to 180° in relief is a constraint that can be used as a creative trigger in both the development process and the reception of the artwork. Rosalind Krauss proposes seeing reliefs as meeting points of movement and stillness. The relief both narrates and arrests the viewpoint.

The non-visible back arouses desire and frustration; these poles create a continuous and fluid relation between the observer and the artwork, and the tension unveils a space that is profitable for creation. Values like static and dynamic, depressed and elevated echo frustration and desire.

### 1.6 Aims

By looking at some relief artworks as metonymical objects for the Earth's crust, I wish to find an appropriate distance between myself and the geological relief in order to consider my relation to the world. In doing so, I also aim to provide readers and artists with a toolbox to understand reliefs. Thus, I hope to bring a different light and status to the category of relief in contemporary art.

I want to highlight our contribution to the constant transformation of the geological relief. Distancing us from Earth's crust and seeing ourselves as artists creating this giant sculpture has always been difficult because on the one hand, the transformation never stops and, on the other, because the planet is rarely thought of as being an artwork. Relief artworks are ideal objects to raise awareness of and to shorten this confusing distance. Indeed, they possess many characteristics of the geological relief; they
show analogies at a smaller scale like their invisible back.

1.7 Research field

This research deals with artworks made of multiple physical sets of dimensions. It limits itself to all sets of dimensions that are not plain volumes nor completely flat surfaces. Reliefs embody such a range.

For epistemological purposes, I will define in further chapters what I mean by surface and volume and with what scale I start my research. Indeed, I propose to include in my field art pieces that have a layering of different materials, such as in my series *Avalanche*, and collages. I do not include drawings with pen or pencil on paper but do include drawings in relief with folded or creased sheets of paper.


Luis Camnitzer’s *The Photograph* helps explain the delineation of my field. Four squares of paper represent the categories of drawing, painting, sculpture and finally photography. Painting and sculpture are not part of my research, whereas drawing can be. My research considers what Camnitzer calls drawing and sculpture as being reliefs because they belong to a ground. If the fold of his drawing were a mere trace on a flattened sheet, it
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would be a drawing, but if the creased paper were a ball like Martin Creed's, it would be a sculpture. My relief artworks are in constant dialogue with the geological relief. This conversation between the small created relief and the skin of the giant sculpture belongs to the field of the research, too. At one extreme, it has been evoked by Manzoni's Plinth of the World and on the other by the reliefs of the Boyle Family.

In terms of art historical period, I will concentrate on living artists.

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1.8 Scope of the research project

My practice spans from small studio-based developments to large public commissions. It is presented in art galleries, fairs, and museums and in other public realms. Art specialists and non-specialists encounter my research, and the communication about it is adapted accordingly. Supported by verbal and written explanations in art premises, the work is left mute in the context of public art. This wide range of projects is part of my agenda, as I aim at promoting the richness of reliefs.

1.9 Personal contribution to knowledge

My practical and theoretical research fosters a new understanding of contemporary reliefs. Thus, the richness of the category is unveiled and exemplified by my artworks of the last six years. The thesis hopes to change the gaze laid on these objects; tactile sensory inputs improve the
awareness, the appreciation and the importance of reliefs. Indeed, the notion of tangibility reveals itself to be a precious method for and means of apprehending them.

More specifically, this research uses concepts of relief and tangibility in a new way. These have proved to be important epistemological vehicles in public art to trigger meaningful interactions with the users, such interactions being increasingly required in Swiss cultural percent programs.

A new angle to reliefs is to consider the invisible back as a positive creative feature. Desire alternating with frustration provokes a call for touch that, if allowed, fosters a better link to and therefore a better understanding of the artwork. When actual touch is not allowed, it reinforces the desire and the imaginative and imaginary touches. It favours a thorough thinking about the link between the artwork and the world it is anchored in, but from which it departs and distances itself.

Finally, this research on relief artworks developed as metonymical objects for the Earth's crust enables us to ponder the distance between the artist and the world. It is a radical new perspective on the perception of reliefs considered so far as minor in-betweens. Instead, it proposes that reliefs are made of rich and complex spaces, continuous in terms of sets of dimensions both physically and symbolically.
2 METHODOLOGY

This is a practice-led research; hence, my methodology has been primarily driven by my practice. In brief, I have been understanding through making. Such a closed, intertwined loop between practice and theory makes it difficult to classify my methods along the practical / theoretical axis. On the other hand, my methods are mainly qualitative in nature, with only marginal use of data analysis. Thus, presenting them along the qualitative / quantitative axis would be cumbersome as well.

I found it more productive to present my methodology inside a creation and reception framework. Creation methods apply to the “core functions” of my practice whereas reception methods apply to the “support functions”, were I to borrow these terms from the organisational and corporate vocabulary. There is no hierarchy in my mind among these categories. Support practices related to art history, teaching, or archiving, are constantly looping into my creative process.

A brief narrative of my methodology is as follows: once I had framed my field, a succinct historical study became necessary to ground my exploration, to establish its boundaries, and to appreciate the current views on my subject. My methods, which have strong pragmatic and qualitative flavours, have helped to dissect my whys and hows, to sketch the hypotheses, and to state my contribution to knowledge.

I have developed an intricate body of methods to explore various approaches to creation. I will describe the variety of my methodology in the next paragraphs. As my practice is protean and always deals with “different pans on the fire”, there is no chronological order in how the paragraphs appear below.
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### 2.1 Creation (core practices)

#### 2.1.1 Mimeticism

In the series *Avalanche*, my practice is *mimetic* as opposed to *metaphorical*. My actions imitate the usual actions made in the context of an actual avalanche. I understand this method as mimetic because I make gestures borrowed from other contexts. Miming has become the starting means by which I develop this series in my studio. Confined in my own space, I mirror practices that are foreign to art but that, nonetheless, exist elsewhere. I do not represent concepts nor mental images. The gestural translation from one situation to another helps innovation in art making.

However, one can argue that the action itself is symbolical, as it is translated into a new context. I believe that it is true, but in *Avalanche*, the translation symbolises only my status of artist. Yet the action itself in the development of my artwork implies a mimetic practice.

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39 *Avalanche* series, chapter 5.
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Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Avalanche*, 2016, gouache on waxed road maps, 125 x 99 cm.

Note in passing that later on, metaphors can appear to the viewer/toucher when s/he perceives the artwork.

2.1.2 Design (conception) - making – fabrication – production

I create my works in a variety of different ways of carrying them out from conception to practice: by conceiving, by making, by fabricating or by producing. My personal definitions of these terms are the following.

When I conceive a project, I start by thinking about it, going to the library, visiting related exhibitions, noting ideas, and talking to people who have
expertise in the field. Then come the other steps, which engage more with materials. However, I come back often to my primary inspirational notes and correct them or expand them in a new direction.

When I make things, the action mostly happens in my studio; it does not follow any particular protocol, and the outcome is not anticipated. The set of actions is closely related to play and sketch. I use materials with tools in personal ways, in a certain direction, during an indefinite amount of time. I examine the material and how it responds to my actions; I pay attention to accidents and use them. The working frame is loose. To me, to make something means to spend some time in the studio in Switzerland, in the UK or on the move. I draw, manipulate materials, take notes, or do something with my hands.

When I fabricate a piece, the action may happen either in my studio or elsewhere like in a workshop, an art centre, or a residency. I more or less follow an agenda with a given time frame, tools and machine guidelines, and available materials and structures. The action here means invention coupled with the observance of practical issues. I have an aim, a quite precise idea of what I would like to obtain at the end of the working session. The hand-making is perceptible in my fabrications, as are care and time.

When I produce something, it is either in my studio or in an external context that I commission for its expertise. In addition, production is often quantity related. When I produce alone in my studio, I actually reproduce a sample in a certain number of exemplars to create a modular manufactured piece that later on will be installed in the exhibition context. When I produce outside the studio, I give instructions to the factory or workshop. As I have neither the expertise nor the tools, I either collaborate and try to train myself, or I supervise the work in progress. Production also includes paperwork like

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40 See, for instance, Scintillation, 2014 in Appendix, chapter 2.8.
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financing, public relations, or accounting.

Also, the making, the fabrication, and the production can all be supported by the help of assistants. Frequently, a project, especially in public commission contexts, combines the three approaches in any order; the conception is revised along the way. I consider a series like Avalanche as a making and not a production even if the paintings are many and similar, because I never know where and how I will end the work. I might change my mind about the order of the gestures, the technique, the priorities. For instance, Ways of Worldmaking has a produced part (the concrete element, the books, the map), a fabricated part (the wall of books) and a made part (the preparatory book, the drawings and composition).41

2.1.3 Collaboration

Practices of collaboration have sustained this research. The word “collaboration” originates in the Latin cum labore which means “with labour”. A collaboration is a united labour, a co-operation.42 Only rarely does a work emerge solely from my own person even if I am often working alone in my studio. Most of the time, it comes out of a task performed with others as the result of a tight or loose dialogue with close or distant interlocutors - an interpretation of external views and advice. So far I have worked with users of the site, assistants, workers, technicians, supervisors, artists, architects, framers, gallerists, curators, shippers, art historians and directors, as well as with the site, which is an important partner and co-operator to consider in the context of art making. The site is very helpful, as it contributes to the conversation and to the work in progress by its historical, sociological and political inputs.

Often, I need to isolate myself and process all the information I have

41 Ways of Worldmaking, cultural percent, public art commission, chapter 4.
gathered. Alone in my studio, I make objects and take notes. The daily routine of the studio is a kind of hygiene that restores a distance between me and the world, that enables me to analyse my perceptions and my relations to it, and to understand the nature and the size of this distance, which vary according to projects, events and contexts.

Collaboration is not necessarily always engineered as a research tool but also results from chance encounters, fortuitous conversations or the sudden occurrence of a specific feature in a given context.

2.1.4 Series
Series allow me to compare artworks and to estimate their qualitative differences in the repetition. Variation allows innovation in the series itself. The final number of pieces is not known in advance; it increases over time as needed. Comparing artworks becomes more difficult over time as the studio space is overloaded. Exhibitions are opportunities to look at the whole range of variations within the series.

2.1.5 Time-distancing
Unearthing old pieces and re-organising the studio is an annual routine which I am keen on keeping, as it helps in understanding my own practice. Studio visits often prompt the rediscovery of work from previous years. The time distance between the making and the newly perceived artefact enables me to appreciate in a fresh light not only the older work but also the current practice.

2.2 Reception (support practices)

2.2.1 Historical background
The current overlooking of the category of relief can be explained through a historical analysis. This hypothesis could be verified by quantitative methods, but I believe I am entitled to leave this task with art historians.
On the one hand, categories in art have merged and relief does not appear as a categorial object in contemporary art studies. On the other hand, this once mighty category of artworks seems now overlooked. Consequently, a historical examination of relief is necessary to verify if it is still considered minor, and if this is proved to be the case, to understand how such an oversight has emerged. Some historical relief artworks seem more invisible than others. Is it due to their artistic quality? To their location? Or to other factors? Some reliefs are famous but are not considered as reliefs. The historical study of relief has to be made in conjunction with two major art categories: sculpture and painting.

In this report and its Appendix, I examine other techniques or practices related to reliefs like collages, installations, textile pieces and land art. The historical approach does not structure the whole research but is used at its beginning to establish my argument. In the analysis of personal projects, I go back to a historical perspective to ground the work and foresee potential developments.

2.2.2 Dialogue
The report is mostly composed of qualitative studies and documentation. Different pieces of writing are organised in chapters with each corresponding to a specific artwork. These approaches to my practice

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43 "Any attempt to discuss present-day reliefs immediately raises problems of definition in their most acute form. Which of the artworks of the last few decades should we include under the term "relief"... Relief is one of the fundamental spatial modes of art and that much of what is being produced today may without any undue stretching of the term, be regarded as relief". Rogers, L. R., Relief Sculpture, The Appreciation of the Arts / 8, London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

44 The history of relief is apprehended in this research with Claire Barillon's Le Relief, au croisement des arts du XIXème siècle, Bernard Griffoul-Dorval's Essai sur la Sculpture en Bas-relief, ou Règles Particulières à Observer dans la Pratique de cet Art; Ernst-Gerhard Güse's Reliefs, Formsprobleme zwischen Malerei und Skulptur im 20.Jahrhundert; Adolph Hidlebrand's Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst; Scott Leader's Ghiberti and Donatello with Other Early Italian Sculptors; Rogers Leonard Robert's Relief Sculpture, The Appreciation of the Arts / 8, London: Oxford University Press, 1974; Nancy K. Sanders' Prehistoric Art in Europe; Adrian Stokes' The Stones of Rimini; and Rosalind Krauss' Sculpture in the Expanded Field. See Bibliography.
describe my way of making reliefs in dialogue with existing reliefs, either contemporary or from other time periods. It also borrows freely from philosophy, literature, history of art, sociology, and importantly, from art and artists' writings.

I have defined certain terms like fractional or continuous dimensions, transposing them from mathematics and philosophy into art, as they have become specific to my own practice.

The report is also informed by discussions with artists and experts from the art field, personal exhibitions, and experiences of public commissions.

2.2.3 Anticipation and planning
As I have different types of projects going on simultaneously, I need to plan and anticipate my projects in detail. There is a time for conceiving and for making and another for exhibiting and documenting. However, these depend not only on me, as I need to coordinate and adapt to the various processes, and thus, adaptation to schedule changes, versatile reactions, and creativity are necessary. A project rarely runs from A to Z as planned, but most difficulties can be anticipated.

For museum exhibitions and for fairs, I design architectural models of the space (or at least technical sketches of the booth). Public art needs more detailed organisation and working time partitions. Within public art contexts, I am frequently confronted by unfamiliar techniques and agendas. Therefore, the strategical anticipation is designed to avoid supplementary costs, frustration and arguments. However, there are also types of projects where no planning is needed. I develop these without any aim other than carrying out my art research in a free temporal and spatial frame.

2.2.4 Documentation and archive
Documentation is important to remember the building processes and the reception of the artwork. It enables me to understand my primary intents, to
make replicas or repeat preliminary processes, and to archive the series and the sales. The archive of all my works is mostly digital, that is, on disks and on the cloud while some of it has been printed out for different purposes, and a part of the archive is in notebooks (two or three notebooks per year). Exhibitions have taught me how to document my work.

Documentary methodology infuses most of the present report as the report itself has documentary objectives. For example, I write texts for presentations and exhibitions. After sharing my outcomes, I note reflections that become part of the archive.

Exhibitions are both documented and can have a documentary side to them, too. When they are retrospective exhibitions, they are photographed, and sometimes a catalogue is published. Monographic retrospectives record my artistic journey. Temporary or permanent public art commissions have to be documented all the way through, as when the artwork is temporary, its documentation is the only trace left, and this may, in turn, become the artwork itself. Prior site investigations, first ideas and intents, enquiries addressed to local authorities or to people in charge of the project, development of the artwork, and finally, interactions with the public are recorded. These various reports are sometimes gathered in a single file, a part of which is exhibited again or reused in another project being further developed in a new way.
2.2.5 Collaboration

I have developed formal and informal collaborations with artist Naomi
Siderfin as our doctoral research converges in some aspects. We collaborated partially in the elaboration, documentation and report of *Harnessing the Wind*, a group exhibition that Siderfin curated in 2015 at Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall. We also wrote collaboratively a proposal for a residency in UCL Art Museum (March-June 2018), which helped to develop mutually each practice and to formulate and define new conceptual paths in our writing. In my own case, issues of degrees of tangibility, preservation and distance became defined more clearly. During another project framed by UCL Art Museum, I collaborated with the Institute of Making and learnt how to scan two medallions in relief by Henry de Triqueti and how to make 3D prints and CNC from these scans.

In 2014, I met Swiss philosopher Raphael Brunner, professor of aesthetics at the Valais School for Visual Arts (EDEHA). I asked him to write a text for my future monograph. Brunner came to my studio and later to some of my exhibition openings. We discussed notions of ambivalence and metaphor in relation to my practice regarding the opposition between analytical and continental philosophy, its consequences in teaching art and in art practices.

After having read one of his essays, I contacted Terry Rosenberg, senior lecturer in design at Goldsmith University.¹⁴⁵ Rosenberg came to Slade Woburn Research Centre during the research week of 2014 together with artist and curator Andrew Bick. He, too, became an interlocutor for my practice and contributed to my monograph.

When I made my catalogue *Hotel Ausland* in 2014, I met Michele Robecchi, editor in contemporary art at Phaidon Press. He wrote about *Ways of

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Rosenberg’s research is located in “ideational strategies; design methods and processes; drawing; spaces of design thinking; critical practice; mapping and technologies of visioning, cultures of design and designing as cultural production.”
https://www.gold.ac.uk/design/staff/rosenberg/
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*Worldmaking*, which was only a project then. Once it had been completed, Robecchi pointed it to Phaidon Press, which included it in *Destination Art* in 2018.46

Exhibition opportunities require new writings on recent practical developments and sometimes on former works with a fresh theoretical angle. These texts have to be concise and explanatory but nonetheless compelling. They are often put together by an exhibition team that approaches my work from different perspectives, which is useful for my research.

2.2.6 Methods related to context

**Academic context**

My PhD research is specific to its academic context. It took me many years to only partially understand Slade, UCL, London, and UK culture. My position will always be slightly uncomfortable. Indeed, I have given up the complete immersion strategy, as it means an entire life dedicated to it.

Understanding fine nuances like, for instance, subtleties that pervade oral intonations, never seems to be fully achieved by someone coming from a different country. One of my tactics has been to soak up as much as possible the English language, which has meant visiting the UK, and reading, listening, viewing, and talking in English whenever possible. In addition, conducting this research at the Slade was a stimulus to know more about the history of art and the contemporary art scene of the UK. Thus, I had to acquire the lexicon of the UK art language as well.

**Project-related context**

From the start of a new project, I talk to the many different people involved and ask them questions about their own professional area. I visit the site

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46 This global publication is an art travel guide on permanent and site-specific art of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries, published in October 2018.
and inform myself about its history, architecture, and users. In addition, I try to draw potential meanings and establish priorities. New questions emerge throughout the enquiry.

This method allows me to anticipate problems and reveal undisclosed aspects, and it also aims at finding ideas. Though we can never be sure where a new work will take us, the method helps in obtaining a clearer image of its context and conditions of emergence. The conversations I have and the questions I ask are part of spontaneous conversations; they are never formal questionnaires.

2.2.7 Communication
To disseminate the ongoing research contributes crucially to its development and elaboration providing the communication is not a monologue. Since the beginning of this PhD, I have given talks about *Ways of Worldmaking*, in Xian China during a residency; speeches, lectures and workshops in the institutional context of cultural percent at Gymnase de Renens, Switzerland; and lectures at the Slade as part of the students’ forums. Journalists have come to my studio, and I have been interviewed several times on Swiss radio about my general practice, a solo museum exhibition, a public commission and, finally, about the *Grand Prix* awarded to me in 2017. In addition, I conducted workshops during the residency in Xian and for the London Slade Summer residency. Studio visits are opportunities to talk about various aspects of art making. Beaconsfield Gallery organised talks and round tables about the *Harnessing the Wind* exhibition and related themes in 2015, as did Musée des Beaux-Arts du Locle (CH) in 2016 and UCL Art Museum in 2018 about the status of women in art. For the launch of my 2014 monograph *Hotel Ausland*, I was invited to

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talk about my art in a museum and then in a bookstore.

All these events are opportunities to convey my message and to reflect back onto the practice. The variety of the talks, papers and other workshops implies an adaptation of the format for each delivery. Communication changes according to the audience and teaches me how to be efficient, how to spread the message about my passion, and how to monitor my speaking time. I have also taken courses on the UCL Skill Development Program to improve these skills and overcome stress.

The communications I made have also helped to deepen certain aspects of my research. I realised that parts were still unclear and needed to be shortened or expanded. Interlocutors introduced texts, artists, or exhibitions I was not aware of while the language used by others to describe my practice has also revealed weaknesses not only in my communication but also in the work itself. The awareness of how people perceive my work is sometimes painful but nonetheless instructive.

2.2.8 Evaluation and learning

To evaluate contemporary art practices is another way to conduct my research, as it helps to articulate my own thinking in confronting diverging viewpoints, in affirming myself, and in learning from others. For example, I participate in juries as a guest artist for public art competitions, in grant attributions and in art school final examinations. I occasionally have one-to-one sessions with art students in my studio and learn through informal discussions with artists, museum directors, gallerists and collectors. I attend lectures and symposiums, as they are times of intense learning. I pay attention as much to the content as to the delivery itself in order to improve my skills. Visits to exhibitions, biennale, and fairs are learning opportunities too. I have written a review on some of these, which is in the Appendix.\(^{48}\)

\(^{48}\) See Appendix chapter 1 Art Review.
I encounter other disciplines and sectors through my projects. These are architecture, retail, building, edition, graphic design, education, health, administration, organisation and planning, information sciences, librarianship, music and theatre. They offer multiple creative possibilities and extend the type of knowledge I can acquire in the art and academic context.

2.2.9 Technical skills

I have learned unfamiliar techniques during my research and have improved my skills whenever a project’s specific needs have required it. For instance, in the project *Ways of Worldmaking*, I improved my skills in CAD software, learned about industrial moulding of concrete, and examined librarianship skills. Also, as I had to temporarily employ assistants, I improved my administrative skills related to insurance and taxes. I also learned about authority and how to impose myself in meetings where I was often the only female.
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Meanwhile, fairs have taught me practical skills while issues with gallerists have taught me my rights and my obligations. I have learned how to use social media, and I have also improved my skills in installing my own museum exhibition, as I was left with no curator due to a crisis in the museum.

Added to these, I have discovered many new techniques in the making of my own work; these are personal ways of using materials and tools. In each project, a technique is adapted to my own need to suit my agenda even if it differs from the prescribed way. I often encounter issues of permanence or security, and I have to make many attempts before finding the “good way”.

2.2.10 A word about quantitative methodologies

Although my research is qualitative in nature, quantitative methods could prove useful to my future methodology and may be useful as a means to further develop this work.

The occurrence of relief pieces in exhibitions and in the history of art or in critical texts could be used to compare the visibility and awareness of the art category of relief with painting, sculpture, or installation art, for example. From the perceptual aspect, one could design a simple questionnaire with items such as “Is this a painting, a relief, or a sculpture?”, or “What kind of space is this?”, to be submitted to a statistically representative panel of persons being shown a statistically representative set of artworks of different rises, number of facets, folds and contrasts, and subsequently correlate people’s perceptions to their social backgrounds and artwork metrics.

Also, the set routine of work could be observed. In this part-time PhD, three days a week are kept for the research, the rest being for professional activities not related to the research. To collect quantitative data on my own practice and research, like how much time I spend per day, week, or month on making, reading, or communicating my practice and PhD research and
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at what frequency, would produce a catalogue of daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly activities, or “methods”. Assigning each method to PhD research, general art practice, or general life and then analysing which methods are common to two or three categories and which are specific to the PhD research would certainly be profitable for the research itself.
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3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This Literature Review is placed before the section on my practice research where my main argument is developed. It aims to inscribe my work within a specific theoretical frame, which I have nonetheless freely interpreted and borrowed from to make art.

3.1 Gilles Deleuze

I have selected three texts by Deleuze that I referred to regularly in my analysis and practice. I read them in French.

3.1.1 Francis Bacon, Logic of Sensation

Gilles Deleuze explores the complex paintings and mark making of Francis Bacon in Logic of Sensation, the relationships between figure and ground, the colour hues and flatness, and the movement of the paint on the surface.

Logic of Sensation is important for my work, as it looks at notions of hand, relief, touch, optics, haptic sight, and figure and contour. Deleuze investigates the dialectics of touch and vision. Following Riegl, he develops the concept of contour and figure in relation to the haptic and the optic touch, the contour being both a dynamical limit and a limiting one.\textsuperscript{49} The French philosopher also explores the concept of haptic sight in regard to Egyptian reliefs. Egyptian reliefs are more haptic than optic, as space shrinks when ground and figure are on the same plane and because the engraved line calls for touch. Discussions on haptic sight are key to my research on tangibility and gradience in dimensions.

3.1.2 **Le Pli, Leibniz et le Baroque**


In *Le Pli, Leibniz et le Baroque (Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque)*, Deleuze blends philosophy and art in his analysis of the Baroque art period and applies the notion of *fold* and *folding* to the practice of philosophy and art.

For Deleuze, the fold is a relationship of difference with itself. In this reading of Leibniz, both the fold and the folding action refer to the origins of life. He suggests that the relation of the body with the soul appears in the process of folding. Taking examples of artworks with folds, he explains at length Simon Hantaï's paintings. He concludes that our subjectivity is Leibnizian in “always folding, unfolding, refolding” (p.189), a new formulation of *Ways of Worldmaking* by Nelson Goodman, who believed that “worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand: the making is a re-making.”

My own understanding would lead me to say that the making is a “folding, unfolding, or refolding.” The continuous process of folding established by Deleuze's text suggests an awareness of possibilities, the condition of possibility itself that opens up towards new possibilities again and again.

Interestingly for my practice, the book starts with an architectural description: Leibniz's monad is like a closed room, the inner space of a baroque chapel, the light source of which cannot be perceived, which is composed of two intricate – folded and unfolded – floors (the first floor for the folds of matter, and the second floor for the folds of the soul). I have used this image to develop my series *Archisculpture* and the *Cauchemar* installation.

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51 See chapter 9 and Appendix chapter 2.9; 2.12 for details of these artworks.
The points I want to clarify through my research seem easier to demonstrate in artworks with folds, as they condense the physical properties of reliefs. My wallpaper relief *Folds* (also titled *Cauchemar*) consisted of 100 A4 inkjet prints of scanned tissue papers. First, I creased tissue papers and scanned them one by one. Then, I creased the printed images on the paper of the creased and scanned tissues. Finally, I made a collage installation on the wall with them, trying to join parts, as much the printed folds as the actual folds. The paper prints play with the notion of 3D, both by being actual 3D - once creased and stuck to the wall in volumes - and by showing simultaneously a surface, a 2D reproduction of what actually has 3D, that is, an image of an original creased paper. Each A4 sheet is unique and is combined with others to create a shape, a drape, in a *trompe-l'oeil* effect.

The examination of the fold in reliefs is a means to understand the sense of touch contained in the visual quality of relief.
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*Cauchemar*, detail, 2013-2014, wall installation made of inkjet prints on paper, each 29.7 x 21 cm, collage. Musée d’Art de Pully, Switzerland.
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*Cauchemar*, detail, 2013-2014, wall installation made of inkjet prints on paper, each 29.7 x 21 cm, collage. Musée d'Art de Pully, Switzerland.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

*Cauchemar*, detail, 2013-2014, wall installation made of inkjet prints on paper, each 29.7 x 21 cm, collage. Musée d'Art de Pully, Switzerland.
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*Cauchemar*, detail, 2013-2014, wall installation made of inkjet prints on paper, each 29.7 x 21 cm, collage. Musée d'Art de Pully, Switzerland.

Deleuze specifies that to unfold is to increase, to grow, and that to fold is to
diminish, to reduce, “to enter the sinking of a world” (p.13). The fold has a tripartite quality: one that explains, one that implies, and, finally, one that complicates (p.33). Deleuze reads Leibniz through Heidegger: he understands the monad, the indivisible unit of being, as folding both inward and outward: “It is the torsion that constitutes the fold of the world and of the soul” (pp.36; 40-42). This torsion, in turn, is well explained in Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies*.\(^{52}\)

Deleuze states in six points what the baroque fold brings to art and philosophy:

1. It makes the form appear, the fold becomes an expressive means.
2. The infinite fold separates, passes through matter and soul, façade and closed room, exterior and interior.
3. It is a tension that distributes the lower and upper floors of a same world. As the matter reveals its texture and becomes material, the shape reveals its folds and becomes strength.
4. The unfolding is not the contrary of the folding, nor its erasure but its continuation, its extension, its condition of manifestation.
5. The way matter folds constitutes its texture. Texture depends on stratum and light, on the way the fold catches light. The way matter folds determines depth and superimposed depth.
6. Paper and textile folds are paradigms. (pp 48-54)

I have used all these ideas in one way or another. The fold is a recurrent element in my practice that is more or less visible depending on the artwork but which helps in understanding the notion of continuity between sets of

\(^{52}\) See my complementary literature review in the Appendix.
dimensions.

The way Deleuze writes his books is not straightforward for me whose background is not in philosophy but in art. I have, therefore, been mostly attentive in the texts to examples and images taken from art. My approach to Deleuze is similar to poetry: it is a creative reading that unfolds ideas and metaphors for my practice.

3.1.3 Différence et Répétition


For Deleuze, the characteristic of art is to emphasise the manner in which repetition proceeds. Art is a *mise en relief*, a highlight of repetition. The French philosopher develops a new concept of repetition which, instead of being a search for the eternal, becomes a transformative process, a power of consolidation, or a set of habits. Deleuze sees repetition as containing a power of metamorphosis. With a transformation of the habits that structure us, we can also change the world. If we posit ourselves in a dynamic of becoming, of time without God, then to repeat oneself is also to take identity:

The repetition is turned towards the future, the repetition of what is not yet. Repetition essentially implies an analogy of being. However, the only realised ontology - in other words, the univocity of being - is repetition.53

3.2 Nelson Goodman

3.2.1 Ways of Worldmaking


Over the past six years, I have often read *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indeed, it helped me to draw up my proposal for the PhD program. In that application,

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I offered to combine continental and analytical philosophy in and through the practice. A few months after the proposal was accepted, it inspired a proper paradigm for my research, with art being understood as a way of making a world from existing ones, or rather from world-versions. This paradigm covers my whole art practice and theoretical thinking. I read his previous text *Languages of Art* in parallel to *Ways of Worldmaking* as a necessary complement to understand the philosopher's area. I have thought about the distinction between autographic and allographic arts, as I engage with both types depending on the projects. Goodman's epistemological position is that understanding is more important than knowing. His relativism and radical pluralism, departing from Cassirer's, interest me in his way of insisting on reconstruction rather than on deconstruction. Flattening the hierarchy in the system of symbolic forms (descriptive theories, perceptions, novels, paintings, musical scores, etc.), he talks about versions and visions as being almost the same thing (see 2. *Versions and Visions* in chapter I, *Words, works, worlds, Ways of worldmaking*). The philosopher fully acknowledges the “cognitive function of the arts” as we would normally do about the sciences. On page 102, he says:

a major thesis of this book is that the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of understanding, and thus that the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology.

55 Goodman, N., *Languages of Art*, op. cit. pp.113-123
Paul Ricoeur extracts three main theses out of *Ways of Worldmaking*:57

1. We “make” the world by construing symbolic systems which are numerous and equally legitimate.

2. Each of these ways of world making is a world-version rather than a version of the world, in the sense that there is no world in itself before or beneath these versions. Goodman says that “the many stuffs – matter, energy, waves, phenomena – that worlds are made of are made along with the worlds. But made from what? Not from nothing after all, but from other worlds.”58 Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking...My interest here is rather with the processes involved in building a world out of others.” pp.6-7.

3. World versions other than the scientific one are neither true nor false. And yet some may be said to be right and others wrong. There must be therefore criteria to assign or to deny rightness to non-descriptive versions.59

When I make art, I am looking for metaphors to build new world-versions. I am interested in examining and discovering how the world can be reorganised “in terms of works and works in terms of the world.”60 Goodman had already explained the referential function of symbolic systems in *Languages of Art*, which is crucial to make art.61 Worlds and versions of worlds are inextricably melted into each other, but art practices are ways of

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58 Italics in the text.
59 Ricoeur, P., op. cit.
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unravelling them to mix them again together.\(^62\)

In the same way that Goodman often gives us direct and concrete examples, I have translated some of what I understood from his writings into my practice in a way I considered the most straightforward. For instance, my installation *Bleen* was directly inspired by *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* where predicate blue is combined with predicate green to illustrate "a new riddle of induction".\(^63\) Goodman takes the example of an emerald, which would possibly change over time from green to blue becoming, therefore, *grue or bleen*. By using Goodman's term, my artwork indicates issues of categorial fixity, which interest me regarding the category of relief.

When I made *Bleen*, I creased paper maps and pigmented them with a turquoise mixture. These wrinkled papers became moulds to pour liquid plaster into. Once they were dry, I turned back the map and peeled the paper away, which left its green and blue pigments encapsulated in the plaster folds. The entity was fragile and broke into shapes reminding me of continents and national partitions. however, these fragments were ambivalent as, on the one hand, their colour was similar to the one used to express water in cartography, and on the other hand, their materiality alluded to earth sediments rather than to oceans. Departing from a 3D reality, translated into its 2D representation, the map was finally returning to a more physical identity. These plaster fragments were pinned on the wall, preserving large white spaces in between them in order to express a new cartography where territories shift and blur.\(^64\)

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\(^{64}\) See Appendix chapter 3.9 for more images of the installation.
The public artwork *Ways of Worldmaking* completed in 2016 (see chapter 4) and its second 2019 version *Ways of Worldmaking / Self-portrait* (see conclusion) were directly borrowed from Goodman and serve as a homage to the thinker.

### 3.3 Rosalind Krauss

#### 3.3.1 *Passages in Modern Sculpture*


This book gave me a general overview of sculpture from Rodin to the conceptual sculpture of the 1970s. In a formal approach divided into case studies rather than a chronological and historical analysis, Krauss focuses on the spatial questions, strategies and narratives of sculpture that Rodin rejected, and the syntax he invented, which would be developed later by futurism, constructivism, and ready-mades, and which would also become
visible in individual European practices such as those of Constantin Brancusi, David Smith, Francis Picabia and Alexander Calder. Krauss pursues her analysis with a younger generation who dramatically challenged sculpture's boundaries, like Carl André, Mel Bochner, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Richard Serra and Sol Lewitt. Krauss demonstrates how the Twentieth Century drew a separation between a sculpture of reason and a sculpture of situation.

Preceding Sculpture in the Expanded Field, this text describes how traditional sculpture dissolved into modern practices, which were more concerned with process. In Krauss, sculpture is a conversation between art and knowledge.65

She produces key ideas for my research, such as the difficulty in defining contemporary sculpture. She refers back to Gotthold Lessing's division of arts and to Carola Giedion-Welcker's idea of a sculptural extension through space rather than time and proposes viewing reliefs as meeting points of static and dynamic features. The relief develops as a narrative, but the relief also fixes the point of view.

By examining François Rude's La Marseillaise, as Barbillon did after her, Krauss unfolds the narrative dimension of relief.66 According to her, the relief makes possible the reading of narrative. The viewpoint within relief is set, fixed, and controlled. One argument of my thesis is that instead of being fixed, relief has just a limited view, as it spans over 180 degrees. For Krauss, the ground of the relief is like the illusionistic background of a painting; it opens up a virtual space through which the figures can appear to move. Into this movement – this apparent emergence from background to foreground – the sculptor can project the temporal values of the narrative. Most

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66 François Rude (1784-1855), La Marseillaise, 1833-36, stone (Arch of Triumph, Paris). See Appendix, chapter 1.
importantly, the medium of relief links together "the visibility of the sculpture with the comprehension of its meaning; because from the single viewing point, in front of the work, all the implications of gesture, all the significance of form, must naturally devolve". Nineteenth Century relief explored this narrative dimension, except for Rodin, who tried to erase any visible logical narration in his relief La Porte de l'Enfer (Gates of Hell). As in his sculpture, he doubled some figures to establish a break in the narrative flow. Also, there is a sense of opacity in Rodin's works that comes from the way he never creates a clear contour when he sculpts the material. Clarity, contour, and repetition are notions crucial to my understanding of continuity in reliefs.

Krauss shows the reciprocal simultaneous qualities of relief as “both the development of the masses and their capacity to signify” (p.12). Such physical and meaningful simultaneity allows me to think about the notion of ambivalence.

The absence of visible verso can be treated in two ways, that is, either by providing the viewer with illusionistic expanding information about what is at the back of the relief, or by fragmenting and chopping, leaving the figures on the ground literally truncated and hence making the understanding of relief like an enigma. Such a space is then perceived to be arrested. Reliefs can be placed in a context in such a way that they blend with it so that the relief, the exhibition's context, and the space of the world become continuously articulated. Some artists like David Smith reject “the quality of formal continuity, substituting for it a sensation of schismatic break between one facet and the next, depending on the principle of radical discontinuity” (p.158). Sculpture in the Expanded Field is part of The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths. The notion of expansion developed by Krauss in association with sculpture facilitates the reading of

sculpture as a physical and mental continuity with its surroundings; it provides an awareness of this specific continuity found in the artwork's context.

Krauss also explains the shifts and differences of ontologies regarding modernist and postmodernist sculpture. She describes the passage from modernist sculpture as a monument, one that does not belong to a specific site or to a postmodernist expanded sculpture, by examining its architectural context and the process of individual practices “not defined in relation to a specific medium – sculpture - but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium – photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculptures itself – might be used” (p.288).

The medium no longer dictates the organisation of the work. Rather, the spatial context the sculpture is made in dictates different media the artist might resort to. Postmodernist sculpture or sculpture in the expanded field marks a break in the epistemology and history of form from the perspective of logical structure.

Such a structural analysis is interesting to develop my notion of continuous dimensions regarding relief, to understand the recent history of art categories and their impact/non-impact on the emergence of new practices, and finally in making and exploring my own reliefs. For me, the key points analysed in Passages in Modern Sculpture are the simultaneity in relief, the absence of a visible back, the tactile experience in relief and its continuity with the context.

### 3.4 Leonard Robert Rogers

#### 3.4.1 Relief Sculpture


*Relief Sculpture*, a survey on reliefs written by Leonard Richard Rogers, is
the only text I have found that is both solely dedicated to these specific artefacts and that spans from antiquity to the Twentieth Century (with the exception of the Nineteenth Century, which is absent from the study). Despite being more than 40 years old, this book is important to understand what constitutes a relief and how it differs from sculpture, painting or drawing.

The author studies the plastic constants of relief, examining a wide range, varying in size, technique and support. He takes examples from Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Mayan, and Indian civilisations and uses a non-chronological approach to the history of relief. He explores at length reliefs of north-western culture from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. His survey ends, too briefly in my opinion, with six Twentieth Century examples. Claire Barbillon drew my attention to Roger's book. As mentioned earlier, in *Le Relief*, she writes that Rogers has coined the term *2.5 dimensions*. As I came to this concept intuitively through my practice, I was intrigued.

Rogers speaks about 2.5 dimensions only once in the first page of his introduction. Indeed, it is not his own invention but is a term that appears in a quotation from Nancy K. Sandars:

> In his tools and manner of working the artist may be closer to a sculptor in the round, but he must also have resolved the intellectual of drawing. A two-dimensional pattern lies embedded in two and a half dimensions of the relief...

Rogers speaks about relief as an art that falls between two and three dimensions rather than about precisely 2.5 dimensions. He describes its

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69 I have selected Claire Barbillon's book (2014 op. cit.) which, in a complementary way, looks only at relief from 19th century.
70 Ibid.
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fluid boundaries. Like Barbillon, his main argument is that relief is a category of its own, albeit an underestimated one. Relief is an example of an item that does not always mean the same thing: sculptors may understand relief as a sub-category of sculpture, painters as possible tests for preparing a painting, and architects as ornament.

Rogers, an artist himself, demonstrates that to create a relief requires specific artistic skills, both conceptual and technical, as well as an acute awareness of the varying contexts of its presentation. He describes the visual issues a sculptor and a painter would encounter in their practice and extends and combines them into relief. These questions of space, form, line, light, and composition are taught in art schools. In its last part, the book examines coins and medals, exploring relief as decoration and relief in Twentieth Century art. A few lines are written about the sense of touch and the visual tactility of relief, but he does not expand much on that aspect and does not mention Alois Riegl's fundamental text on relief and tactility. His study remains a visual analysis on artworks that express touch but whose tactile nature is encountered mentally.

While Barbillon frequently uses “ambiguous” to describe relief, Rogers very rarely does. Maybe this is due to the different periods the two books respectively observe as well as the different natures of their study. Barbillon's is a detailed examination of relief located mainly in Nineteenth Century France whereas Rogers' is an attempt to define broadly what relief is as a category.

3.5 Other important texts

Other important texts for the research deserve more than a single line in the bibliography. Some are by art historians (Barbillon, Riegl), other by artists

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(Deacon, Morris, Smithson). Some are compilations of essays on specific subjects like material culture, touch or maps, while some include philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, Sennett) or sociology (Bauman, Grosz). A complementary account to this literature review is given in the Appendix. However, I will list them now quickly to provide the reader with an overall feel of my theoretical landscape.


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4 WAYS OF WORLDMAKING

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Manières de Faire des Mondes (Ways of Worldmaking), 2016
Gymnase Cantonal de Renens, image Catherine Leutenegger.

Ways of Worldmaking is an interactive public art commission for Gymnase Cantonal de Renens (GYRE), a school in Renens, suburb of Lausanne, Switzerland. The students are 15 to 20 years old.

This sculptural library was developed from Spring 2013 to February 2017 in collaboration with architects.\textsuperscript{73} The artwork in concrete lodges 1,200 different art books, each of them placed in its dedicated rectangular cavity. All books project irregularly from the wall, making them easy to take hold of and read. Architecture often builds text and language analogies, and librarians talk about collections with architectural metaphors such as bridges or gateways. Each discipline enriches its vocabulary (formal and semantic)

\textsuperscript{73} Dettling Péléraux, Lausanne, Switzerland.
by contact with the other. In the same way, art is sensitive to the contexts it confronts. *Ways of Worldmaking* has three simultaneous identities: it is an actual architectural feature, a free-access library, and a permanent relief artwork. As this project started with my doctoral research, it embodies most points of my thesis and has helped to elaborate many of its theoretical aspects. This chapter will show how such work encapsulates notions crucial to relief, namely, the notions of tangibility and continuous dimensions.

I will cover notions of tangibility in sub-chapters 4.4 and 4.5: the hand and the sense of touch while in sub-chapter 4.7, I will address in more detail what I mean by "continuous dimensions".

As mentioned previously, the artwork was inspired by Nelson Goodman's text *Ways of Worldmaking*, which is lodged in the centre of the wall. In this book, the author says, "Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking". We will see how this specific public art project emerged from various worlds, and how in turn,

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hopefully, it will ignite the making of new worlds.

My project targeted a specific type of reading: the reading of printed words. Reading on screens is not the focus here, as the users of *Ways of Worldmaking* already mostly read on screen anyway. According to the school's director, when the students read a printed text, such as a printed book or a photocopy, it is usually as part of their homework; they rarely buy printed books for themselves. The project aimed to offer them an alternative type of reading provided by printed books. Books on art exemplify the printed book item. Their appearance, materiality, and user-friendliness have been crafted, thoroughly thought out and cared for.

4.1 Public art


Over the past five years, Canton de Vaud has systemised its calls for
cultural commissions that integrate art in architecture. For each new public building, one percent of the total amount of the budget goes towards the realisation of a permanent artwork on site. As it is public money, the artist must submit her project in open competitions or as an invited artist. Once selected, the work is supervised by a team of experts who represent the departments and disciplines engaged in the project (for this specific building, the team comprised the users; the commissioner; the ministries of culture, of education, of construction and architecture; the association of artists; the architects; and the chief engineers).

4.1.1 Competition

One of the four A2 pages submitted to the jury for the competition, designed in 2013.

This competition was an invitation with twelve other fellow artists. For the

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75 Canton de Vaud is one of the 26 states of Switzerland.
See some reports on such commissions at https://www.vd.ch/themes/territoire/construction/batiments-publics/realisations
Accessed 8 March 2017
first round, I submitted my proposal *Ways of Worldmaking* with texts, budget, architectural plans, and visuals in four A2 printed boards, with a sketch already very close to its future realisation.\textsuperscript{76} I had in mind a clear image of what I wanted. The second round was cancelled, as *Ways of Worldmaking* was selected unanimously after the first round. The entire board were supportive and mostly helpful in all stages.

\textsuperscript{76} See these competition boards in the Appendix chapter 2.2.
4.1.2 The users

The main users the artwork was designed for are the 1,200 students of the school. As full-time students, they pass by the wall of books daily. I selected the titles according to my personal criteria but always bearing in mind these users. The idea to focus on art books emerged through thinking about the students who do not encounter such subjects often. Teachers, cleaners, concierges, and other people responsible for the building are other users of *Ways of Worldmaking*. Since Autumn 2017, gymnastic societies have been
coming in the evening to the sports hall as well as different associations which gather in the amphitheatre. These people are external to the routine of the building but nonetheless pass by the artwork and show interest and, so far, have cared for it.

4.1.3 Context (geographical, architectural and social ground)

The college is made of two buildings in the shape of two Ls facing each other. A courtyard lies in between with benches and trees. The artwork sits on the lower ground floor, on a mezzanine on the way to the teachers’ room and to the antenna of the Public Library of the University of Lausanne. The latter is a standard library, with a borrowing desk and alarms. Ways of Worldmaking dominates an open amphitheatre used as a lunchroom, meeting room, or reading room. Behind the amphitheatre's windows, the sports hall is visible.

The school was built in the French-speaking part of Switzerland near Lake Geneva. The relief of the mountains surrounding the lake is part of the landscape and has influenced the design of the library. Indeed, I decided to project the book spines more obviously than in the primal sketch in response to this local landscape. I firmly believe that relief sculpture echoes geological relief and therefore alludes to our belonging in the world.

Sociologically speaking, the college is mixed, as an important part of the town's population comprises first to third generation immigrants. Like other suburbs, Renens is becoming gentrified. For ten years, it has hosted the School of Art of Lausanne (ECAL) and has seen the emergence of studios, art centres and cultural venues.

As Canton de Vaud fully financed and hosted the artwork, I wanted to include the local art context in some way. Therefore, I invited all the listed

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77 Similar to the shape of the two opened books of Dominique Perrault, BNF in Paris but more horizontally deployed. See Appendix for images of the building.

78 See chapter 4.6.3 for the political significance of handling art books in this context.
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artists of Vaud to participate with their books as a complementary addition to my personal selection. The only valid criterion was being part of this local geographical context. Local artists responded differently to my call for their monograph. I included in the wall those I received in time.

4.2 The art category of relief

This research considers Ways of Worldmaking as a relief artwork made of two main components. The first component is a poured concrete wall, measuring 17 meters long by 2.5 meters high and 40 centimetres deep where 1,200 different sized rectangular slots have been hollowed out. Each of these voids corresponds to a specific book. This component is in itself a sunken relief. The second component is the book collection, that is, 1,200 different books placed in their own dedicated concrete case. When all the books are in the wall, the artwork becomes a high relief.

Concrete is permanent and paper more inclined to wear. With regard to a standard definition of relief sculpture, the concrete plane surface here is “carved”, hollowed in many places but filled with books, their spines projecting irregularly. Because each book is removable, it expands the size and dimensions of the artwork. If the wall is deprived of all its books, it remains a relief artwork because it has been designed as a carved sunken relief. However, one of its functions, the library, disappears or exists at best as a ghostly trace.

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79 See Introduction and Literature Review for more developments on the art category of relief sculpture.
80 Polystyrene reservations were fixed in the mould before pouring the concrete. The ultimate voids in the concrete do not result from an actual carving. However, in some places, the reservations did not come out easily, and proper carving with a drill removed the remains. See chapter 4.1 for more technical details and Appendix chapter 2 (Ways of Worldmaking) for illustrations.
81 I will describe in chapter 4.7 the expansion, flexibility, unpredictability and the articulation of various sets of dimensions in this specific project.
82 See chapter 4.3 for more development on function as a condition of the artistic dimension.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

Definition of the space of relief in *Ways of Worldmaking* postulates and exemplifies the space of relief sculpture as a rich and complex space. This artwork in relief continuously articulates various sets of physical and mental dimensions. Plane and volume are merely extremities of such a space.

In *Ways of Worldmaking*, the multiple sets of dimensions are revealed to the viewer/toucher. The sunken cases vary in depth, and there is a variety of grounds and quality of planes, and different degrees of projections. Physical and mental dimensions are created by the books themselves and their contents and also by the users and their manipulations, by their reading, and by their movements in the college space.

The handling of the artwork is paramount. My intent is to re-establish a physical dialogue in art contexts between the viewer/toucher and the...
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions artwork and to explore the role of touch in artistic knowledge transfer. Relief sculpture is often described as being in between sculpture and painting, or as an ambiguous minor art category. To define Ways of Worldmaking as such does not facilitate any global or detailed understanding of its artistic qualities, as it overlooks and ignores the specificity, polyvalence and potential of this relief. We will turn now to these specific characteristics.

4.2.1 Ground

83 As Fiona Candlin has noted, the accessibility to museum's collection has been prevented since the early mid-Nineteenth Century which witnessed the loss of touch as a valid means of engaging with the collections.


84 See chapter 4.7, Introduction 1.1 and Literature Review 3.1 and 3.2.

Summer 2015, lower-ground floor, amphitheatre, and mezzanine construction.
When I am commissioned to make a new public artwork, the first thing I take into account is the context. The context is the ground of the project, that is, the socio-cultural context into which the artwork will be added.

According to a standard definition of relief sculpture, the material ground of *Ways of Worldmaking* is the long concrete wall joining and standing perpendicular between the floor and the ceiling of the mezzanine.\(^{85}\)

This ground in concrete was prefabricated in a factory. It consists of five modules prepared and poured horizontally in a warehouse and then transported onto the school's site to be erected as a single wall. I designed it with computer aided design software (Adobe Illustrator and Archicad). This wall has an architectural function, as it supports a part of the floor above and divides the space. As it sits on the lower ground floor, it had to be put in place at the very beginning of the construction stage. Note that the production's rhythm during the whole project was irregular. All book titles had to be selected beforehand (and budget consequently secured) to measure their dimensions and draw the architectural plan. I then supervised the realisation of the moulds, the pouring of the concrete and the placement of the modules at the site. I was able to place all books in their cases in 2016, and in 2017, finally completed the project. See images, video and timetable in the Appendix chapter 2.2.2 for more details on the realisation process.

Furthermore, other types of ground appear in the project: the soil into which foundations were dug and on which the library stands. There are also the sociological, historical and urban grounds, as well as the abstract background, evoked by the books’ titles.

Both the books' physicality and their content directed my selection. Once in

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\(^{85}\) The literal material ground we have defined in chapter 1.3 for reliefs is the plane from which elements depart from or sink into.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

my hands, the books’ colours and materiality helped to make a composition, a visual organisation. Art practices and reflections on the world by artists have grounded the design of the final outcome. Furthermore, material grounds in public art are also the committees and the politics – all of which have to be moulded and worked with up to the specific tolerances.

4.2.2 Surfaces and textures
Textures differentiate the many types of surface in Ways of Worldmaking. On close inspection of the wall, one notices that the superficial layer of the concrete differs from one plane to another: the front of the wall is irregular but the sides of the slots where books are lodged are smooth.

Reservations wrapped in plastic foil maintained in the wooden mould before concrete was poured. Ultimately, the concrete retained the wood and plastic print of the mould.

Textures and colours of various qualities project out of the bookcases. Most of them are paper dustjackets. There is also the variety of each page of the open books, feeling softer or more rugged depending on the paper, with

86 See chapter 5 for more development on the notion of surface and related notions.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

hues and graphic compositions perceived as quiet or loud. All these surfaces fuse when we view the library from a certain distance. The visual synthesis we make when we have already come closer and used the library differs from a first glance, which merely guesses the object it observes.

4.2.3 Planes / volumes

Books are flat surfaces but also have and are volumes. The construction of this library has used planes and volumes in both literal and metaphorical ways. Rather than being a series of shelves that contain books, it incorporates the books in its actual material body. Books become integrated into the “masonry” of the building itself. Here the metaphor, in the broader sense of the function of this building, is that the books themselves are actual building materials, holding both the building and the institution together and up.

The predominant plane in this artwork is the concrete wall that contains the volumes, that is, the books. Each book is a concentration of planes, the pages, organised in such a way that they lie parallel in the cases. As in all libraries, the books are shelved vertically with spines parallel to the wall. The book spines just out irregularly, thus offering a variety of plane projections. If we were referring to a fractional measuring system, as Leonard Rogers has done with his 2.5 dimensions in regard to relief sculpture, we would say that the planes of the spines, the way they rise, and their various projections articulate multiple fractional dimensions between 2 and 3.87 However, if we consider the larger picture, the wall itself becomes three-dimensional, articulating a portion of the building, and the school becomes a sculptural object part of the geological relief.88 A profile view

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87 Rogers, L. R., Relief Sculpture, 1974, op. cit. and Literature Review
88 I am paraphrasing The Powers of Ten, a short film by the office of Ray and Charles Eames for IBM in 1977. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KBhvDjuy0
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions provides us with a different understanding of what a plane can be in relief sculpture. Here the relief is the whole wall; it constitutes it and is not attached to a pre-existing wall. The side view is facilitated, not restricted by the plane of the wall it is usually part of. All the books present portions of their flat cover showing a succession of planes taken in the thickness of the concrete mass. In this view, the space between the books is compressed and therefore inverts the visual order ground/front plane and plane/volume.

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Manières de Faire des Mondes (Ways of Worldmaking)*, 2016, detail, Gymnase Cantonal de Renens, CH, image Catherine Leutenegger.

4.2.4 Colour and light

Light, especially side light, increases the perception of a relief, particularly if it is monochrome. Polychromy diminishes this perception, as it drives the attention to colour contrasts rather than to contrasts in elevation and depression, and thus, shadows become less perceptible.

This library is polychrome. As such, it attenuates the perception of the spines' spatial projections, even if the books’ identities and materialities radically differ from the concrete. When the artwork is seen from the side,
this feeling is even stronger, as larger areas of each cover are visible and get blurred with other covers behind, merging into one single multi-patterned item.

As with all exhibited artworks, the lighting has been carefully considered. The architects had planned ceiling lights in the mezzanine where the artwork is. I chose not to add spotlights to illuminate the wall in order to affirm the architectural and library functions of the art piece instead of creating dramatical or theatrical effects.

4.2.5 Limited sight
Following Duchamp, we say the spectator completes the artwork. Viewing a relief is restricted in comparison to round sculpture, as its point of view is limited to 180 degrees. In Ways of Worldmaking, points of view are multiple: there is a fixed view from which to contemplate the whole wall from a certain distance. Such distance is necessary because the wall is large. A closer look makes it possible to examine portions of the library by glancing from the side and appreciating the rhythm of the spines.

However, there is a more haptic inspection that resorts to both sight and touch when one grasps a book, takes it to a chair and reads it in comfort. In this case, a portion of the artwork is comparable to a sculpture that can be apprehended from all sides. This allows me to postulate that not only the viewer but also the toucher completes the artwork. This completion is made of passive touch (while leaning on the wall, for instance) and of active touch. Touch in itself is multi-sensory. Active touch, induced by movement, is proprioceptive: the contact with the body and with the object is activated by sensory receptors found in the skin, muscles and joints. Touch is also emotional: "People experience objects emotionally .... People frequently talk about how they feel as opposed to what they think, and the role of touch

89 Charbonnier, G., Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp [réalisés en 1960], Marseille, éditions André Dimanche, 1994, pp. 11-12; 81-82; 88-89.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

and taking hold so as to viscerally experience the emotional object appears to be of prime importance. ... When a person has the opportunity to handle an object, they can have the feeling that the object is a part of themselves or, conversely, that they are part of the object – an experience of intimacy that would likely be denied were the object placed behind glass out of reach.90 Touching the books induces discoveries but also memories. Active touch helps to identify micro-geometrical properties like smoothness or roughness, temperature, sharpness, and size as well as the amount of exertion needed to explore it.91

4.3 Function as artistic dimension

There is a tendency for public art commissioners to ask for a straightforward interaction between the user and the artwork. I find this requirement often rather superficial. Compelled to employ interaction, I wanted a type of connection with the users that would make sense not only to them but also to me and ultimately to the artwork.

4.3.1 Difference between function and usage

The type of interaction that occurs in Ways of Worldmaking is closely related to notions of function and usage. A function is “an activity or mode of operation that is proper or natural to a person or thing; the purpose or intended role of a thing.”92 Meanwhile, a usage is “an established or recognised mode of procedure, action, or conduct; a custom or practice;


spec. one which has force of law.\textsuperscript{93}

The intended role of my artwork is to create a mental and physical encounter for the students with multiple representations of the world by artists. Here the complete contextual function of my artwork is tripartite: that of a piece of art, that of a piece of architecture and that of a library, that is, borrowing and discovering books. The ways in which the users actually interact with and manipulate my artwork is the usage. Note that the users have been given introductions and workshops so help them distinguish between the two terms and establish my intentions.

\textsuperscript{93} "usage, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.  
http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/220629rskey=mR5zU1&result=1&isAdvanced=false  
4.3.2 Function and permanence

Permanence is an obligation for state-financed public art in Switzerland.\(^94\) The artwork has to last 25 years at least. Therefore, the durability of *Ways of Worldmaking* was debated throughout the project, mainly during the competition stage and at the beginning of its realisation. The permanence has been questioned regarding its function and potential misuse.

![Prototype testing cases in acrylic, wood, stainless steel, plastic and bare concrete.](image)

The first worry concerned the material of the wall, which I wanted to be bare concrete. However, the supervisory board feared that the acidity of the concrete would eat the paper of the books. They also worried that the

\(^94\) At least for all public art projects I have worked for.
repeated borrowing and placing back of the books would ultimately wear their sides and spines.

My vision was that the books were literally edifying the wall, as bricks are in brick walls. The margins around each book in its case had to be 2 mm. Alternative protective wood, plastic and acrylic cases were submitted but none were good enough aesthetically, financially or conceptually.

The free access to the library was also problematic, as integrity of the artwork threatened by potential theft or hypothetical failure to return books to their cases. However, I was more worried that the library would not be used and would stay immobile, distant to the users, and absent to its own function. The possible disappearance of the books would raise interest for them, an actual successful interaction required in the program. Indeed, I thought that an untouched wall of books would miss its target. Because of the plausible disappearance of the books over the years, great care was taken over the design and composition of the wall itself and of its 1,200 cases.

Also, I have allowed the institution to replace missing books with new titles, on the condition that they are art books, or books on art or architecture. I designed a specific stamp as a record of new acquisitions, thus marking the difference of these from my primary selections.95

4.3.3 Function and knowledge

The general mission of a library is to gather, preserve and make knowledge available to readers. *Ways of Worldmaking* functions in the same way. We are faced with various types of knowledge within this artwork. The worlds of art and the world representations in art are innumerable; they embody a specific cultural and material knowledge. Knowledge is rhizomatic; it connects, deepens and projects thinking into new dimensions. *Ways of

95 See Appendix chapter 2.2. for image of the two stamps.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

*Worldmaking* symbolises this dynamic within relief physical dimensions. Palimpsest and mise en abyme are modes of knowledge acquisition. This wall of books is like a page of a book with plenty of signs that signify our belonging to the world. Each book, in turn, is full of signs and visuals that connect to diverse worlds and dimensions. Visual knowledge is a way of understanding, memorising and learning. Touch can be as important as sight and hearing to perceive an artwork. The manipulation of the books is key to the understanding of what the library offers and the discovery of what it contains: “There is no mutually exclusive divide between the real and virtual worlds, the material and the immaterial; rather these worlds are intertwined in complex ways.” By taking a book, the user expands the dimensions of this work on a symbolic, physical, emotional and mental scale.

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97 Touch is an embodied sense and, as such, a source of “proximal knowledge”, *McGlone, F.*, “The Two Sides of Touch: Sensing and Feeling” in Chatterjee, H. Op. cit., p.56.

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4.3.4 Social function

Marianne Huguenin, ex-mayor of Renens, POP (Parti Ouvrier Populaire, far-left party) with Pascal Broulis, minister of Finance, PLR (Parti Libéral-Radical, centre right party).

Ways of Worldmaking has a social function.98 Recent architectural research has shown that new trends and social needs emerge in public libraries.99 Thus, as more and more communal spaces disappear through privatisation of what used to be urban public areas, public libraries become meeting points where socialisation is favoured; spaces for families with cafés and piazza are created; and debates, evenings and conferences are organised. In the same way, Ways of Worldmaking allows users to learn and encounter

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98 See also chapter 4.6.6 for complementary developments.
99 Tracés 09, 5 May 2017; Espazium, Zürich: 2017, p.5.
new knowledge by interacting with others, meeting informally in front of books and eventually but not necessarily discussing titles, experiences and views on the world.

4.3.5 Function and appropriation

Ways of Worldmaking has been designed to be used. In contrast to many other artworks resorting to books, the book entity here longs to be taken hold of and read. ¹⁰⁰

There are 1,200 different titles that symbolically correspond to the 1,200 students, that is, one book per student. Students are expected to take ownership of these books and to appropriate them as windows to new perspectives. Appropriation is a key term in art; it describes a practice where artists re-use artworks of others and re-stage them as their own, either as such or as made in other materials or sizes. ¹⁰¹

There is another type of appropriation proposed in this project, specifically, an appropriation that relates to spatial experience, political notions of inhabitance and belonging. There is a physical appropriation introduced by proprioceptive senses. In an art context, this appropriation has a political frame. Fiona Candlin noted that “there is a class associated with touch in public galleries since early mid-nineteenth century: the upper classes always had licence to touch and their touch was deemed rational and non-damaging. The question remains: is a similar dynamic still in place today? Is an elite touch still considered rational? Is the touch of the mass still filthy?”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, works Door to the Library, 1977 by Hubertus Gojowczyk, Luis Camnitzer’s Window, 2001-2010, Guy Laramée’s Adieu, 2012-2013, John Latham’s many ways of using books in his work or Peter Wüthrich’s books as medium.


Local librarians perceive the nature of this library as alien. I had conversations with some of them during the conceptualisation stage of the project. The library I was designing was in many points unorthodox to their practice because of its free access or its organisation by visual order among other foreign aspects. Now it is completed, they do not consider it as a proper library but more as an artwork.

The wall of books symbolises the community, the students themselves and the ground they share. The books were imposed by the curriculum, and though the books were preselected by me, a feeling of freedom, availability and plenty is diffused. The aesthetics of *Ways of Worldmaking* attracts and invites appropriation of the artwork.

However, I am aware that *Ways of Worldmaking* can also be perceived as an intimidating “wall of culture”. Observations on its usage are currently being made. I am negotiating with the head of the school for an improvement in the mezzanine's comfort such as the purchase of soft chairs and cushions for the floor to invite students to spend more time idly in the company of these art books.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

Luis Camnitzer, *Window*, 2001 – 2010, books and concrete, 70 cm x 60 cm. Daros Latin America Collection, Zurich.

John Latham, *Film Star*, 1960, books, plaster and metal on canvas, Tate Modern.
4.3.6 Function and touch

The function of any physical library is activated by desire. Here, the act of taking hold of a book convenes the artistic dimension of the work; the users take hold of *Ways of Worldmaking*. Through approaching the wall of books, selecting a title and pulling the book out of its case, the user becomes the temporary owner of the library. By putting the book back in place, she acknowledges the artwork as common ground. Thus, haptic touch is a tactile activity that allows us to connect with the artwork in both macro and micro geometrical dimensions. As Gallace and Spence note,

> There is a difference between the memory for the micro-geometric properties of an object (i.e. the smaller characteristics of surface/textures) and the memory for object qualities (i.e. for the macro-geometric properties of the stimuli)... the difference between people's memory for objects themselves and their memory for the spatial positions in which those objects/stimuli occurred. Indeed, it is important to note that touch not only provides information regarding objects that we actively manipulate but also regarding the positions of the stimuli that happen to touch our body surface.\(^\text{103}\)

Haptic touch also makes it possible to feel the various material and spatial characteristics of the books, like their location, weight, shape, roughness, smoothness, suppleness or sharpness and to perceive their content by flipping through and reading the pages.\(^\text{104}\) Optical touch is important, too, in the appreciation of *Ways of Worldmaking*.\(^\text{105}\) The wall is first encountered through sight, which acknowledges the texture of the relief and associates

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\(^{104}\) Weight is an important notion for haptics. Gravity defines our relationship to the world. I have not included a chapter about weight, but it implicitly pervades my practice. See, for instance, my series *Plastein* in the Appendix.

\(^{105}\) See the Literature Review for more developments on optical and haptic touch (Gilles Deleuze; Rosalind Krauss).
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

it immediately with tactility. The user ultimately takes hold of the book to confirm what she has seen or imagined or to check what she will perceive through her fingers.

Candlin describes the passage from touch to vision in the reception of collections over the centuries: "In 1702, touch was considered to provide an entirely legitimate way of learning about and enjoying the museum collections but by the mid-nineteenth century, the acceptance of the tactile experience has disappeared. This sensory shift was due to the development of industrial capitalism which emphasised the appearance of commodities, surveillance (particularly within the context of social institutions), and to the growing use of visualising techniques in science."\(^{106}\)

4.3.7 Function and expansion of dimensions\(^{107}\)

By using the library according to its function, the user expands the set of its dimensions. Once a book/books is /are taken from the amphitheatre to, for example, the other floors or to the teachers’ room, the size of the art piece increases, its dimensions are diversified. The continuity in the sets of dimensions is provided by the user who relates the item she holds in her hands to the concrete wall it comes from and to the worlds the book reveals. From a two dimensional concrete block to the irregularly projecting arrangement of the spines from the wall, to the book which is in itself already a compilation of various and transformable sets of dimensions, to the mental images and abstractions an art book creates, a continuous thread connects all sets of dimensions uninterruptedly.

4.4 Tangibility

Tangibility describes the potential tactile relation with an object. It exists also


\(^{107}\) See also chapter 4.6.4 for continuity in dimensions, mise en abyme.
in the awareness of this object. Relief artworks are specifically tangible. As Alois Riegl has shown, reliefs emphasise the tactile connection of their parts, but paradoxically, reliefs have often been overlooked, as if they were not worthy of attention or difficult to grasp conceptually. Presumably, a closer inspection of the notion of tangibility will help me to understand contemporary reliefs better.

4.4.1 The status of the hand
What is the status of the hand in *Ways of Worldmaking*? The hand has had a creative role from the conception to the reception of the artwork. Indeed, many and various pairs of hands created the artwork.

**Manual conception**
I started this project by sketching and prototyping manually. The proposal was mainly done by hand with sketches, texts and collages. All images of my proposal were compiled into an art book that I made myself. Presented in the competition, it is now part of the wall along with the other titles. I started sketching by hand, and then the architects and I designed the plans with CAD software.

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108 Tangibility is a. The state or quality of being tangible; perceptibility to the touch; tangibleness. b. With a and pl.: A tangible thing or matter.
Tangible is 3. fig. That can be laid hold of or grasped by the mind, or dealt with as a fact; that can be realised or shown to have substance; palpable.
Accessed 8 February 2018.

Hand making

Adèle Moret, architect, checks the reservations in the mould at MFP factory, Marin, CH, 2015.

This project has been an innovation in concrete techniques. Several prototypes were made, and hand making was necessary to test the processes step by step, calculate risks and avoid problems. In the factory, workers made the five modules by hand, pouring concrete onto the polystyrene reservations they had cut and placed into the horizontal moulds, which they removed once the concrete was dry. The five modules were incorporated into the foundations with a crane. All the books were hand signed and were indexed by a handwritten book number, a module number and a geographical position. They were put in their dedicated case by hand.
with the help of three assistants.

Reception

The hand has had a creative role from the conception to the reception of the artwork.

The hand of the user completes the artwork by enlivening it. Thus, the human hand triggers the function of the library in this piece. Not only does the viewer complete the artwork, but the toucher contributes above all to this completion. The fine details, the depth of dimensions, the meaning and
non-obvious aspects of *Ways of Worldmaking* are discovered and revealed by the hand of the user.

**Hand and transmission**

Ultimately, from my personal selections in libraries and bookstores where I discovered these books, checked and flipped through them, to the hands of the shippers to those of my assistants, and from the hands of the first generation of students to those of the next, these books are passed from hand to hand. This is an act of manifest transmission in an institutional context where transmission is paramount.

**4.4.2 Haptic touch and haptic sight**

The terms ‘haptic touch’ and ‘haptic sight’ emerged from history of art with Alois Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901) and, after him, in philosophy with Gilles Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981). There are many ways to perceive and apprehend an artwork: the ways implying a distance between the work and the spectator and the ways by which direct physical contact with the work is made. One of the aims of this research is to find methods to reduce the distance between the artwork and the spectator, even when her body is not in direct tactile contact with the artwork. Consequently, haptic touch and haptic sight are the two main perceptive senses I am focusing on. Haptic touch is the active sense of touch, which provides a direct physical contact, usually with the hand, and which is dynamic, interrogative or curious, as opposed to passive touch, that is, being touched. Haptic sight is a visual perceptive sense augmented by an awareness and analysis of the tactile dimension. In that case, sight strongly convenes touch in the reception of the object though it does not literally touch it. Haptic sight equips the eye with a haptic function. Note that I am not referring in this research to *optical touch screen technologies* that continuously monitor the field of view on a screen.

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110 See Literature Review too for more developments on haptic touch.
The toucher completes the artwork
The process of making a physical artwork always involves touch, whether by the hands of the artist or by those assisting (studio, factory, industry, computer keyboard etc.). As soon as it exits the studio or the site of its production and enters the temples of the art world, it ceases to be freely touched: people wear gloves, warning texts forbid any tactile contact, and alarmed security cordons circumscribe the artworks and distance the work from the viewer. As Marcus Weisen notes:

We want to learn about ourselves and the world in the way that is most natural to us but we are frustrated in the museum, prevented from picking up, taking hold of the desired object. To learn we must take the object into our hands and it is this transgressive act that crosses the boundaries into emotion.111


What happens between the context of emergence of the artwork and its final destination? The artwork has reached a status and achieved a value; it has appeared on the market.112 In the various exhibition places like galleries, museums, art fairs, or collections, guards of all sorts assume that its value is endangered by touch, especially in public funded spaces, which may well

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See also *Principes de Précaution* (2014-2015) by Matthieu Martin in Appendix chapter 5.4.

112 See chapter 4.6.
be the case.\textsuperscript{113} However, touch also increases value though a value of another type, as touch provides a more complete understanding of the artwork. In the sense of touch, there is the action but also the feeling of touching. The toucher is as much touched by the object that she touches as the object is touched by her. Touching an artwork connects the toucher with its specific materiality and texture, and hence with techniques used in the making process. Light objects can reveal themselves as surprisingly heavy, the fragile becomes robust and hidden details are discovered. Depth is perceptible, the history of the making emerges, and narratives and new imagined scenarios surface. All these contained dimensions cannot be foreseen without touch. An object born from human hands has a better chance to be understood and developed through haptic perception than from a distanced gaze.

Furthermore, and as McGlone underlines, “There is now emerging evidence that there is an emotional aspect to touch – called affective touch - as well as a discriminative one. But very little is known about how tactile experiences such as those sensed from the hand, such as when handling objects in a heritage context, contrast with the touch we experience from the rest of our body surface where research is discovering, we are more sensitive to the emotional rather than the discriminative aspects of touch.”\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{The many hands}

The status of the hand in an artwork's analysis and reception must be examined from a broad perspective. Many different handlers intervene in its history. If the artwork is born from many different hands, it is also received by a whole variety of people with different behaviours towards handling.


Ways of Worldmaking encourages grasping, moving into space, and manipulation. The call for touch is loud. It is even part of the artwork's DNA and agenda. Therefore, additional to the many hands of its creation, the 1,200 pairs of students’ hands are called to ignite the artistic dimension of the library and increase and transform the sets of dimensions of the wall.

Several language expressions resort to the word “hand” (“to have the upper hand, to give someone a hand, to be in safe hands, hands off!”, etc.); the title of the artwork Ways of Worldmaking emphasises making as opposed to producing. It offers a direct opportunity to handle the art components, specifically, the books, and therefore to alter the artwork in an unpredictable way. Ways of Worldmaking implicitly engages hands on. However, as Spence and Gallace rightly note,

the paucity of terms that we currently have (or at least we use regularly) to describe the nuances of our tactile experience with objects is brought into sharp relief by contrasting them with the widely accepted lexicon of terms we use to describe visual and auditory stimuli such as colour and pitch.\footnote{Spence, Ch. And Gallace, A., 2008, p.30. Op. cit.}

4.5 Books

Ways of Worldmaking is composed of a rigid structure that encases removable books. These are not modules and neither is the artwork a combinatory piece. All books are assigned to a unique and fixed slot though being mobile elements, displaced to be read.

4.5.1 What are books?
Books are volumes. Indeed, we speak about the number of volumes of an encyclopaedia. These volumes are recognisable by their flat cover and spine (though some spines are slightly curved). Closed, books are 3D boxes
formed by a mass of flat rectangular planes, namely, the pages. Opened books double their surface area and decrease their thickness while the mass of their pages shapes a slightly curved plane and printed pages are textured. Even if the texture is almost imperceptible, the printed ink on the paper adds a relief on the surface of the page. Irregularity in the weight of the paper creates a consequent irregularity in the thickness of the book.

This artwork has focused solely on printed art books as an alternative to screen-based readings. I wanted to propose to the students a different sort of reading, that is, an opportunity to encounter printed books with art books being qualitative versions of printed paper books.\footnote{Reading on screen is radically different from reading a printed text but "the evolution of the library is not only due to that of reading materials and supports but, above all, to the evolution of its role as a public space and to the way in which the new relationships to knowledge are inscribed." Failla, L., “La Bibliothèque Comme Espace Public”, in Tracés 09, 5 Mai 2017; Espazium, Zürich: 2017, p.8, my translation.}

4.5.2 Selection

*Ways of Worldmaking* represents the ideal library I had in mind in 2013. All these books are new or vintage, on art, architecture, art theory or art history and either monographs or compilations. I had to find and buy the titles before the design stage, as I needed their exact sizes in millimetres. Therefore, I scoured libraries, bookstores, galleries and museums in search for inspiring and complementary titles. In addition, local artists and art institutions were invited to donate personal monographs or books of their collection, as I wanted to inscribe the local context in that contextual piece.

4.5.3 Isolation

Each book is lodged in its dedicated cavity designed to its exact dimensions. First, a rectangle block in polystyrene has been cut with a heating thread and placed deep in the case for the book to emerge from the wall. Each book projects differently, a whole spectrum of spatial variations. The shortest projection is 0.5 cm, and the longest is 20 cm. These variations
create a dynamic in the wall, providing a lively colourful relief. From the front, we view the spines coming towards us while from a side view, the covers are seen partially as an invitation to discover more.

The isolation of each book makes it precious; books become gems placed in their jewel case. However, all these units belong to a community, to a selection of art books. Each looks equally important; if one goes missing, the darkness of its empty case is tangible.

Libraries are often compared to text. Similarly, in *Ways of Worldmaking*, text is present twice. First, books contain actual texts, and second, the isolated book is like a sign. Its place, orientation and resonance with other such signs compose a visual language that seems to be organised in a text, a kind of text in Braille with spines protruding from the surface of the wall. The stamp signature in relief also marks the first page of each book and has been designed in reference to relief textual notion and perception.

According to Failla,

> The metaphor of the library as a text, or better, as a hypertext, facilitates the understanding of this logic of urbanisation from within: the user, by reading the space, attributes to it a signified that provides meanings to the different hermeneutic courses designed by the architect

or, here, the artist (my note).\footnote{Failla, L., 2017, p.10, op. cit. My translation.} *Ways of Worldmaking* borrows something from the musical score, too. The vertical spines relate to each other as higher or lower pitches while the long horizontal wall implies a notion of reading and duration. These latter are more related to textuality and narration than to image or to the immediate visual capture of a picture.\footnote{See chapter 4.9. for more development on relief seen through a photographic image and its loss of dimensionality.}
4.5.4 Disappearance and presence, voids and physicality
There are many nuances of the books' physical presence in this artwork. For example, the library might be empty, deprived from all its titles, yet the presence of the books will still be strong, existing as a ghostly trace; the record of all titles will be found in the map's index. The library might be used intensively, in which case, only a few books would remain visible in the concrete and available for consultation. The empty cases stand as enigmas, drawing attention to themselves and to the imagined or potential book each nests. There is also the possibility that only a few books are read at the same time. The dark holes left in the concrete ground are easy to spot but the book entity still predominates in the artwork. That type of presence has been observed so far in *Ways of Worldmaking*.

The books' presence or disappearance is flexible; it felt as temporary, as never arrested in time. Voids are there to recall their hosting function, and the rhythm of empty and filled cases locates each nest and visually helps return the titles back in place.

The solid grey wall evokes the first clay tablets while the colourful covers echo our contemporary visual culture. These two historical polarities clash in a single item.

4.5.5 List and index
Art practices compiled in books are indices of ways of worldmaking, while monographs of artists are indices of artworks. Similarly, the library map is an index. Acquired books have been listed and numbers, positions and titles have been inscribed and, typed to become part of the artwork. This indexical practice reveals my identity; it is a portrait of me in 2013 when I had to quickly select the books. The list that shapes *Ways of Worldmaking* is exhaustive because a case corresponds exclusively to a single book. Thus, the titles offer a finite index of ways of making and seeing the world, and this index reflects my personal vision.
However, there might be more latitude in this index, as there are infinite ways of worldmaking. The readers/users of this library are called to expand its index into infinity. Also, if a book goes missing, it can be replaced by a new title as long as it fits the case.

4.5.6 Composition, classification, and map

*Ways of Worldmaking* is composed visually and trains the visual memory. The library has not been organised by themes, alphabetical order, or usage as happens to be in some libraries but only according to visual order.\(^\text{119}\)

The polychrome composition enables us to locate a specific title as we

\(^{119}\) “The Sitterwerk library in St. Gallen has made serendipity its principle. Rather than trying to classify books by period, time or technique, a spontaneous and dynamic scheduling has been preferred, generated by readers handing out the books wherever they wish ... It seems a little absurd, but this ranking by subjective affinities is fascinating when you do not know exactly what you are looking for - which is usually the case for curious artists and readers who use the library.”

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remember its place in between two other coloured spines. The function is not to provide a way to the search for a specific author, artist or theme but favours serendipity, the fruitful opportunity that a library offers.

Authors, artists and monographs can be found through the provided map index. Its function is to provide help in returning the books and not to check their availability.

4.5.7 Words in relief

Nineteenth Century propaganda in relief comprised mostly engraved texts, mottos or memorial sentences. Similar mottos are visible in Ways of Worldmaking in some of the books’ titles. These are not engraved but protrude from the concrete wall. The titles form a disordered text which belongs more to poetics than to propaganda.

4.6 Continuity in dimensions

One of my hypotheses is that a maker of a relief unconsciously creates a representation of the Earth’s crust, echoing in her art practice her terrestrial position and her personal way of altering the geological relief. By creating a relief, the artist obliterates her distance to the geological relief through tactile contact with the object she makes. The continuity between the mental self and the material is restored, and the two worlds (the art-piece and the planet) collide in a tangible relationship.

The haptic senses play an important role in maintaining a continuous link from the self to the world and vice versa. As Jean-François Lyotard observed, “Instead of the distance between subject and object congenial to sight, touch restores the proximity of self and other... it entails a more intimate relation with the world.” The continuity in dimensions happens in

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120 For instance: The Abolition of War, No Tomorrow.
relief artworks on many different registers.

4.6.1 Physical register
A relief sculpture gradually differs in its physicality from one extremity: the volume, to the other: the surface. Thus, what really matters in relief artworks is the dimensional spectrum from one to the other. As it contains the whole gradience in sets of dimensions, relief is ambivalent (or polyvalent) and not ambiguous.122 Its material identity does not shift from one set of dimensions to the other but maintains the two (or the many) simultaneously.

Depending on each case, all visible sets of dimensions from 2D to 3D are present variously and subtly in relief artworks. This range is articulated in the material of the relief itself and can be fractioned down to units for observation and description purposes; however, the idea is not to lose sight of it as a continuum or continuous articulation from various projections to sunken parts. These physical sets of dimensions are, in turn, linked to emotional, mental, digital or virtual dimensions.123

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122 See also chapter 4.7. for polyvalence.
123 The art historians Alois Riegl, John Ruskin and Adrian Stokes have looked at the expression of the sense of touch to analyse artworks, both the touch introduced by the artist and the one perceived by the viewer-toucher.
4.6.2 Symbolical register

Symbols are joints that connect reality with abstraction. Indeed, there could
be no continuity in our relationship with the world without symbols. *Ways of Worldmaking* resorts to these joints on many levels, providing a meta-continuous articulation. The title is symbolic and refers to Nelson Goodman's book, which is lodged symbolically too, right in the centre of the wall. This library is an architectural symbol in the school for books as building blocks for society. The relief quality of the library works on a symbolical level too because what projects is seizable, palpable, and tangible; what is sunken is implicitly deep and has a history and thus has memories attached to it. The selected art books are symbols of all the world's books and all the world's art practices. The drawing of the library, its design, is diagrammatic; it allows symbolic links between practices and world views. There is a subtle symbolic hierarchy in this diagram, placing the beloved books at the heart of the space and confining the less cherished to the wall's boundaries. Many of the book titles allude to my way of seeing and relating to the world. There is also a metaphor in the haptic usage of this artwork. To take hold of a title in order to discover an art world is on a symbolic level like taking hold on the world.

### 4.6.3 Political register

*Polis* means ‘the city’. *Ways of Worldmaking* bridges the political dimension of an open access public library and the politics of its urban location. Renens (21,000 inhabitants) is a small suburb of Lausanne. It was bombarded during WW2 by mistake and was repopulated from the 1950s by Italian immigrants. Today, more than half of its population is of foreign origin, with more than a hundred different nationalities. The working class is still predominant. Direct access to culture is the agenda of *Ways of Worldmaking*. In this continuous urban fabric that shows a gradience in classes from the main city to its suburbs, serendipity, the opportunity to encounter by chance an artwork that offers, without constraint in exchange, an overview of many different art practices, is politically orientated and socially driven. It is also an allusion to policies regarding touch in art contexts, that
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is, who is allowed and who is forbidden to touch. Touch means class in exhibition contexts.  

4.6.4 Mise en abyme / Perec

Ways of Worldmaking embodies a continuity in dimensions that Georges Perec has written about in Un Cabinet d'Amateur, namely, a continuity in style. Indeed, this artwork has many characteristics of a curiosity cabinet. It is a collection of art books displayed in a specific way which is as much visual as personal. As in Perec's book, Ways of Worldmaking is a mise en abyme. It displays a surface that looks like an open book - a horizontal surface with vertical signs. These signs are actual books which, when opened, give a view to other worlds and a connection to other dimensions. One is the preparatory book that I presented to the jury for the competition. It is a book that gathers inspiration and information about walls, books, architecture and art. It is one of the main mise en abyme masterpiece of this wall of books, linking its genesis to its completion, the other being Goodman’s Ways of Worldmaking.

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124 See Literature Review, chapter 3.7, Helen Chatterjee, Touch in Museum and Appendix chapter 4.1 Redress, UCL Art Museum Residency.

The completed artwork, in turn, generates new projects, such as the watercolours the students made in relation to *Ways of Worldmaking* in 2017. An art teacher asked the students to observe and make paintings of the wall of books, thus reconnecting the signifying and the signified with art subjects becoming in turn artworks. Looking at the photographs the teachers took of these paintings and gave to me (see image above), I noticed that the watercolour paper given to the students had been cut into long rectangles similar to the spines. A view of all the painted works reproduced somehow the perspective we have near the wall: a long horizontal shape with colourful rectangular rhythms. Each painting, laid down next to each other, slightly emerged from the plane because of the curve of the painted paper. It not only depicted the public artwork but

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126 See Appendix chapter 2.2.
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physically reproduced its relief quality.

The last mise en abyme is the inclusion of the artwork in *Destination Art* published by Phaidon Press. Having indexed various art practices through a collection of books, *Ways of Worldmaking* is, in turn, indexed as an artwork in a book about art. *Destination Art* identifies 500 public art works around the globe worth visiting.\(^\text{127}\)

### 4.6.5 Imagination / Roussel

*Ways of Worldmaking*, like Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus*, is a statement for the power of imagination. *Locus Solus* is an incredibly rich text that explores the core issues that an artist may encounter in her practice and life, for example, the relation between man and language, the personal conception of originality, the ecstasy in creation, the mechanisms of signification in language, the notion of style, the reception of artworks, and the fluctuating border between arts. All these points are also highlighted by and in *Ways of Worldmaking*. Another question raised by Roussel's text, and important for my project, is the future of the book.

The singularity of the universes described in *Locus Solus* is quite extraordinary. It transforms reality in a palimpsestic way: reality transformed by imagination opens up to imagination again. *Locus solus* in Latin means “the unique place”. *Ways of Worldmaking* is also unique in the sense it is my personal selection of published art books in a restricted time. This personal imagined proposition realised in Renens may, in turn, inspire other individual imaginations that will radiate back onto reality, thus providing continuity in all directions and dimensions.

\(^{127}\) “A global guide to the 500 works of permanently installed modern and contemporary art worth traveling to experience.” [https://uk.phaidon.com/store/art/destination-art-9780714876467/](https://uk.phaidon.com/store/art/destination-art-9780714876467/)

4.6.6 The library as public space

A library bridges personal space and public space, but, in addition, contemporary libraries are urban paradigms. As the architect, engineer and researcher Luigi Failla has written, “The socio-political instability that characterises most contemporary cities, as well as the gradual privatisation of public spaces, have de facto accentuated the demand for places based on a true democracy of use.” The library becomes a learning centre, a life place, a third place. Indeed, contemporary society needs more spaces dedicated to collective activities and protected as such. The library is not necessarily used anymore according to its typological rules. Now, its traditional function moves more towards a social objective rather than to a cultural one. Contemporary public libraries are paradoxical sociological items. We observe

- the scarcity of major readers and the crisis of public reading, but an increase in library attendance, especially in terms of users who benefit first from spaces and only then from cultural contents;
- enrichment of content but fragmentation of knowledge and distribution of knowledge in virtual spaces; inability of contemporary man to grasp a dematerialised knowledge, which is primarily a problem of design of the objects of culture and information transmission, not yet stabilised in form and use.\(^{128}\)

*Ways of Worldmaking* is not in the strict sense a public library. Though part of a public building and of free access, it is seen primarily as part of a school. However, this reading restrains its potential identity as third place. Also, there is another perceptive aspect on which I still need to work on: the lack of comfort and ease to read the books nearby. In addition to the college users, the architects intended to open the school to the local public. Comfortable chairs, sofas or large cushions are still missing in that place as

obvious invitations to read and spend time in the mezzanine.

4.6.7 Memory and serendipity / Eco

The Italian semiotician, linguist and novelist Umberto Eco was a bibliophile who thought thoroughly about the library entity.\(^{129}\) According to him, a library “is the symbol, the continuity and the reality of our common memory.” In a similar vein, Dante describes God as “a single volume where lies everything that is scattered through the universe”, or in other words, “as the library of all libraries.”\(^{130}\) *Ways of Worldmaking*, though a small collection of books, provides us with “semantic memory (what we know from the universe) and incidental memory (what we learn from personal experience).” It contains knowledge about artists and art practices and provides an incidental encounter with art manifestations which may strike the reader. Such serendipity is facilitated by the artwork's design.

If the library enables us to actively preserve our memory and culture continuum it is also a place equipped with architectural features that condition a nonchalant presence in the company of books. The mezzanine, onto which *Ways of Worldmaking* is built, is wide enough to seat people next to the books and to spend hours idly. Or as Eco himself says in *De Bibliotheca* (the speech he gave in May 1981 for the 25th anniversary of the communal library of Milan):

> If the library is, as Borges wants, a model of the Universe, try to transform it into a universe to the measure of the man which means also, I remind you, a gay universe, with the possibility of a coffee-cream, and why not, for our two students, to sit one afternoon on a

\(^{129}\) See this short video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQYnz7Oqr20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQYnz7Oqr20)

\(^{130}\) I paraphrase in these lines and in the following paragraph Umberto Eco in Davide Ferrario’s film *Umberto Eco, Sulla Memoria. Una conversazione in Tre Parti*, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq66X9f-zgc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq66X9f-zgc)
couch and I do not say to indulge in indecent embraces, but to live a little flirting in the library while they take and put back on the shelves some books of scientific interest; in other words, a library where you want to go and which gradually turns into a great machine for free time, like the Museum of Modern Art in New York where you can go to the movies, walk in the garden, watch the statues and eat a real meal.\textsuperscript{131}

Gallace and Spence have shown the importance of free time and of long lasting tactile explorations, claiming there is a value afforded to tactile experience which is not time-limited: “Longer exploration times are needed when people have to remember details concerning the tactile stimuli that they have manipulated. Haptic exploration typically results in significantly better memory than passive stimulation of the body surface.”\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{4.6.8 The library as collection}

“The common element of all university libraries is the representation of collections. Documentary tools, such as classification, make it possible to create a link between a collection and its spatialisation; it is the representation of collections in space.”\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{131} My translation.
\textsuperscript{132} Gallace, A., Spence, Ch., 2008, op. cit, pp.177-178.
A library gathers, preserves, organises, and renders tangible and accessible collected books, either in print or digitalised format. Such collections usually increase over time but always try to reflect the institution’s original mission. Consequently, the volume and spatial display of a collection, or its digital management, continuously increase over time. However, this is not the case of *Ways of Worldmaking*. Its concrete container is fixed and is not supposed to expand. It might, however, expand in the number of replacement copies kept in reserve for each title should one disappear.

The collection of the library draws a portrait of its collector, who has selected only some books from the many available. This sampling is comparable to a demographical sample designed with intent. In the public realm, the collection becomes available to the collectivity. A collection in general highlights specificities of certain items part of a group. Once collected, their status changes: they are put forward, and they become tangible while

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See chapter 4.6.4 on Georges Perec’s *Un Cabinet d’Amateur.*
continuously reflecting back to their group. In all libraries, the common denominator is the book entity, be it print or digital while in the art section of any library, the common denominator becomes “art book”. The common denominator of the book element of *Ways of Worldmaking* is my personal understanding of art and of how art intertwines with life. *Ways of Worldmaking* reflects my condition and identity as an artist. It is my personal ideal library.

### 4.7 Ambivalence

Reliefs are ambivalent in their physical sets of dimensions, as they offer a gamut of dimensional possibilities defined between the flat plane and the plain volume. They are also ambivalent in the way we are not allowed to touch them though they call for touch. Ambivalence may be understood according to various conceptions. However, I have not found any explorations of ambivalence in philosophy though the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has examined ambivalence with regard to understanding modernity and postmodernity.\(^\text{135}\) Thus, I will displace the understanding of ambivalence as it is applied normally to subjects and focus on objects, shifting it from the domain of the analysis of feelings to a more formal, structural physical study. Ambivalence is theoretically rich and has a large potential to analyse artistic forms and makings. The term, which comes from “simultaneous conflicting feelings”, from the German *Ambivalenz*, was coined in 1910 by Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) on the model of German *Equivalenz* “equivalence”, etc., from the Latin ambi- “both” + valentia “strength”, which is from the present participle of valere “be

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strong”.136

Bauman explains how Freud developed Bleuler's concept further in psychoanalysis and revealed ambivalence by locating concepts on and between the boundaries so that they defy the distinction between psychic and somatic, inside and outside, meaning and nonsense.137

Bauman shows how ambivalence has taken in our society a negative connotation, how it has become a social construction that prohibits all sorts of indetermination. To me, ambivalence is a strength; it is the ability to preserve in the same body two oppositions that provoke a creative tension.

In relief artworks, the dialectic, that is, the articulations between the different physical entities have to be studied, as they enable spatial cohesiveness. Derived from ambivalence, there is a continuity in relief which comes from its temporal reading and from its spatial organisation. For instance, the Parthenon friezes, which are amongst the most influential and admired reliefs, are marble narratives which were attached to the top of the edifice. Their lines, volumes and painted colours (archaeology has shown that the friezes were painted in colours in order to be more visible and easier to read) allowed people to read them. They were not half paintings and half sculptures but were all painting and all sculpture at the same time. Therefore, they might be described already as ambivalent. The story they tell unfolds diachronically. Ways of Worldmaking is both ambivalent and amenable, accessible to its users and adaptable to their internal views.138

Accessed 8 September 2015.
138 In 1991, Jeanne Randolph coined the term the amenable object after D.W. Winnicott's theory of the transitional object: "...the amenable object is accessible for the viewer's need and interpretation, offering an adaptive relationship. Thus museum objects are amenable".

Continuity in the artwork is provided, among others, by books that become amenable objects.

4.7.1 Ambivalence versus ambiguity
Reliefs interest me for their ambivalence rather than for their supposed ambiguity. I understand ambivalence as the positive conscious choice to live simultaneously in two worlds. It is not the inability to choose between multiple choices, but a positive selected mode of being. This is in contrast to ambiguous items, which see their identity shift, unable to be located, and constantly hesitating.\(^\text{139}\)

My current understanding of ambivalence is dialectical; it is the faculty of preserving in the same entity noticeable differences and oppositions. It brings tension to its subject, as the two realities it articulates, which are opposed in meaning, in nature or in social construction, seem to struggle but nonetheless coexist simultaneously.

4.7.2 Polarity and multipolarity
Ambivalence describes the cohabitation of two different states; in relief, these are sets of multiple dimensions. To date, the reading of relief has predominantly been one of in-between, in between the pole of sculpture and that of painting. However, this polarity must be revised. The two poles are mere extremities that define the boundaries of the relief, which is certainly ambivalent but also polyvalent, as it develops many various sets of dimensions in its physical space. Therefore, the problem of the artist is to maintain the tension that a mere polarity creates but that polyvalence risks attenuating or diluting. For that reason, I insist on the term “ambivalence” rather than “polyvalence”.

4.7.3 Ambivalence of tangibility
The ambivalence of tangibility has never been more obvious than today.

\(^{139}\) See chapter 4.7.
The dichotomy is strong between a reality which is apprehended and encountered physically and one which is not. On one hand, the intelligence of the hand is dissected and crafts are explored, and on the other hand, we are overwhelmed by digital virtual realities, with remotely activated drones that kill people.\textsuperscript{140} Dematerialisation results in important material outcomes. To me, this dichotomy is the other face of an unassumed ambivalence at great costs. Human experience is becoming less tangible, but its effects are nevertheless increasingly real.

Focusing on tangibility is a way to be aware of that conflicting dichotomy. Drawing in relief is one of the artistic transcriptions of ambivalence. It also directs my attention to the distance between the Earth's crust and my own life on Earth, and how I participate in the shape of the planetary relief. When I am making relief artworks, I am strongly aware of transcribing with my hands some aspects of the geological relief.

4.8 Absence of a visible back

The limited view and the absence of a visible back are perceived as problems in the category of relief.\textsuperscript{141} However, painting also has a fixed view and an invisible back without this being considered a hindrance. Why should this be? What is the potential and meaning of this invisible verso?

\textsuperscript{140} Juhani Pallasmaa, Richard Sennett, Michel Serres are amongst the contemporary thinkers of the specificity of the hand.

\textsuperscript{141} “When we look at an object or witness an event in real life we usually move in relation to it and thus see it from a number of different points of view. Our ability to understand what things are and what is happening in the world depends to a great extent on this shifting viewpoint, since objects and events are seldom revealed with complete clarity in any one view. It is the nature of pictures and reliefs, however, that they can present us with only one view of their subject. ...it gives rise to one of the relief sculptor's main problems, namely that of arranging the parts of his subject in such a way that the content of the relief and its significance may be apprehended in one view.”

4.8.1 Frustration and desire

The frustration generated by the impossibility of turning around a relief and its limited view to 180 degrees affects negatively the perception of relief artworks. I propose to use the tension of frustration /desire in the art process as a creative trigger.

The possibility of turning around artworks affects their status. We do not search for the back of paintings; their frontal planarity defines them as such. Indeed, the creative latitude in a painting sits in the plane, in its acceptation or as a point of departure for depth simulation. Meanwhile, in round sculpture, the work is made to be apprehended from all sides. However, in relief, the projection of elements from the plane makes it an ambivalent object that is simultaneously planar and in volume, and most of the time, is attached to a wall. From a painter's perspective, it is rather an eccentric painting, while from a sculptor's perspective, it is rather a shy sculpture. The Paragone debates from the Renaissance started this fruitless argument, with each discipline claiming its superiority in depicting the world. However, the hierarchy in these disciplines and the idea of art categories are irrelevant today.

My proposition is to examine relief as a special space, to consider it for its specificities without making a comparison with painting or sculpture, and to apprehend reliefs without the gaze of the sculptor or the painter but with the hands and eyes of a relief maker.

In the same time Ways of Worldmaking became an architectural feature supporting the floor above, the wall became also a wall of the teachers' cafeteria and simultaneously the invisible back, or rather, the unthinkable back of the artwork.

In front of Ways of Worldmaking, the frustration is replaced by a strong call for touch, the need to understand what projects into space. Users know that books are graspable and are there to be grasped. The invitation is clearly
outspoken. Thus, it changes the usual intuition of the viewer of mistaking a relief for a sculpture.

Reading Pliny's description of the birth of relief in *The Natural History*, I believe that relief actually belongs more to drawing:

The potter Butadès of Sicyone discovered the art of modelling portraits with clay; this was happening at Corinth, and his invention was inspired by his daughter, who was in love with a young man; as her lover was going abroad, she drew a line around the shadow of his face projected on the wall by the light of a lantern; his father made a relief with clay and hardened it with the rest of his earthen objects.\(^\text{142}\)

This story brings together notions of desire, frustration, the ephemeral and the perennial, together with light, substance, tangibility and memory. The frustration noted by Pliny generated innovation and creation. Frustration in relief comes from the ambivalent reality of the artwork.\(^\text{143}\) It gives itself to the viewer but not completely; its texture and material call for touch but these are prevented in exhibition contexts. The call for touch comes from a need to understand, as the verb “to seize” expresses well, that is, to understand not only the materiality but also the making and to connect emotionally with the material. As it protrudes from the wall, it looks unfinished or emerging. In either case, the narrative seems incomplete. Some frontal projections are synchronic as opposed to friezes which are read diachronically and where the invisible back is less problematic. Relief projecting frontally out of the wall or digging into it leaves us with a narrative we wish to complete.

\(^{142}\) Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, Book XXXV, § 151 and 152. “Fingere ex argilla similitudines Butades Sicyonius figulus primus invenit Corinthi filiae opera, quae capta amore iuvenis, abeunte illo peregre, umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscripsit, quibus pater eius impressa argilla typum fecit et cum ceteris fictilibus induratum igni proposuit.” My translation.

\(^{143}\) See chapter 4.7.
However, *Ways of Worldmaking* follows another strategy. The frustration is forgotten as we can look “inside” the wall and “inside” the books. Thus, viewers become touchers, and the act of seizing, grabbing, manipulating, flipping through the pages, displacing the books in space and being absorbed by the signified of the pages diverts the frustration and even transforms it into desire, specifically, a desire to relate to the world, to make propositions and actual marks. Desire and frustration are sensual/sexual notions that can elude the presupposed imperfection of relief. Before frustration occurs, comes desire.常144 Often, curiosity pushes us to look for something at the back, as this intuitive movement means we take reliefs for sculptures. If the viewer's attention is diverted to active touch, the frustration disappears. However, in this particular example, the frustration is compensated for by the possibility of freeing the books from the cases, to look inside the holes, inside the wall and inside the books. The work is ungraspable from its back but can be penetrated and viewed from the front.

### 4.8.2 The back of *Ways of Worldmaking*

One side *Ways of Worldmaking* presents a library, while on the other, it offers coffee and tea to teachers, who are behind the wall. They represent the authority in knowledge. However, this was not my choice. I did not know until late in the project that the room behind the artwork would be the teachers’. The teachers themselves do not consider their wall as being the back of my artwork, and nor do the students, who sometimes visit the cafeteria. The architects are aware of it, but I am the only one who perceives it as its back. I chose to locate my project there, as it was on a passageway, an open space, and long enough to give a sense of plenty. Also, it is visible from many different perspectives in the building.

The other side of the wall is visible to anyone who looks for it, but there are

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144 Some might also say it is the other way around. Longing for and not be able to reach is what might produce desire. As soon as something is obtainable desire evaporates.
other backs to look for in this piece. Here “back” might mean “inside”: the polystyrene blocks behind the books lodged in the depth of their case that adapt to the rise of the spines; the back of the polystyrene blocks which is the very end surface of the concrete voids; or the rear of each book.

The books' verso is visible once they are removed from the wall. The book spine is actually what lies on the table when the book is being read. Consequently, this relief provides a view of the backs of its components in a standard bookshelf presentation but in a counter-intuitive mode for a relief piece, as if all the elements protruding from the ground were facing the bed of the relief. There is a beautiful detail at the bottom left of Mantegazza's relief, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* which illustrates this point.145

**4.8.3 Relationship with the artwork**

In reliefs, the invisibility of their back may frustrate the viewer but also may induce interests in it, like an unfinished TV series would leave a taste of incompletion; there is a desire to know more about, to understand better and to check personal assumptions. Similarly, the inaccessibility of its other side establishes a relationship between the viewer and the artwork. The complete artwork is tangible, supposed and imagined, but the reception is aborted.

In *Ways of Worldmaking*, the link between the viewer and the artwork fuses and triggers the three identities of the artwork (architectural, library and artistic) and therefore is necessary to its existence. There is an appropriative dimension by the users in this relationship., as we can say that usage determines the physical dimensions. Usage here implies sight but, more essentially, touch and manipulation.

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145 *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* circa 1478, cast at Victoria and Albert Museum, London. See image in chapter 5.4.
4.9 The surface

The surface is what is first encountered in *Ways of Worldmaking*. The very first layer touched by eye or hand is heterogeneous: the surface of the grey concrete, and the surface of polychrome paper, fabric, plastic and board book covers. I will now list, more specifically than in chapter 4.1, these different types of surfaces, how they interfere with each other, their various tactile feelings, and their symbolic depth and interplay.

4.9.1 The wall

The surface of the concrete wall looks like all other walls in the building, even if it has been prefabricated in a different location and installed afterwards. The wood formwork used for the wall of books is of the same type as the one used for the other walls and stairs. The wall’s surface has been kept raw and unpainted and is slightly textured bearing the imprint of the wood boards.

In contrast, in the empty cases that are sunken into the concrete, the surface is smooth and even, as the formwork reservations were covered with smooth plastic sheets. Nonetheless, however smooth the cases' surface is, it is very acid and eats the paper. Also, the taking and placing back of each book grates the bottom of the book time after time.

4.9.2 The spine

The books' spines are distinct from the wall. Shiny or matt, most are colourful, contrasting with the concrete. Some bear titles and words, but some remain mute. The surface of the spine communicates the material identity of the book and the printed title an idea of its content. They surface irregularly from the concrete. Magnetically, they capture the attention with a haptic feel. Many different types of treatments and surfaces are visible in the spines; indeed, the only common denominator of the spine surfaces is their rise from the concrete while remaining part of the whole artwork's
surface. It is a sort of pattern or colourful sprawl in the solid grey mass. However, once the book is taken, the surface of the cover and the spine becomes the shell of the book's content. The physicality of the book is mediated by the surface of the cover and the spine.

4.9.3 The page

The surface of the pages vary from one book to the other with 1,200 types of printed surfaces. Sometimes, change occurs within the same book, too. This variation depends on design, paper quality and weight, binding, graphic rhythm, mate or shiny aspects, planarity or folds, and on the vicinity of the mirrored page. The wall’s rhythm can be seen as the metaphor for the surface of a book's page as well. Each book has an embossed signature on its first page that identifies it by touch as part of the artwork.

4.9.4 The map

Manières de Faire des Mondes (Ways of Worldmaking), 2016, map, recto and verso.

For Ways of Worldmaking, I have designed a map like a city map. Offset printed on a Tyvek® paper (tear-resistant), it helps the reader to place back a book if he does not remember its dedicated case. There is a dimensional shift that happens through this design. In the map, the actual complexity of the relief's surface is flattened and compressed to a 2D plane.

See Appendix chapter 2.2. for more images.
4.9.5 The loss of dimensionality
In the flat photographic reproductions as well, the surface of the printed paper reduces all spines to the same level and plane. It unifies all the textures into a single one, even confusing the viewer, as the photographed books seem frozen, incorporated into the concrete with no possibility of taking hold of a book or look at it.

4.10 Conclusion

Ways of Worldmaking was made in a specific context, namely, the Swiss context of public art competitions. Not only did this influence the conception and the making but it also gathered the necessary conditions for its realisation, providing political, strategical and financial support. In addition, Ways of Worldmaking benefited from the context of Slade School of Fine Art's doctoral research, providing mentoring support and advice disconnected from financial and local political issues.

In French, we say “Who pays governs”. I knew and was quite reluctant to being supervised for four years. I, as the commissioned artist, had to report to my commissioner on a regular basis. If this relationship between me and the Swiss supervisory board was often stressful, it also provided me with a secure frame of advice. I am unsure if I could have successfully managed such a budget without reporting regularly. The board comprised 8 to 10 persons who represented all the different institutions, expertise, and professions involved in the project.

As the project was completed before the deadline and without exceeding the budget, Ways of Worldmaking is considered successful by the commissioner. Also, it met various political agendas and has been used as a vehicle to demonstrate the fruitful role of the state.

It has been noticed by professional architectural and librarian associations, by institutional art commissions, as well as by journalists. Recently, Phaidon
Press incorporated *Ways of Worldmaking* in the travel guide *Destination Art* which gathers a selection of permanent artworks around the world.¹⁴⁷

Regarding the personal contribution to knowledge, *Ways of Worldmaking* is singular in many aspects of relief sculpture if we agree with the definition of the Oxford English Dictionary: *Moulding, carving, stamping, etc., in which the design stands out from a plane surface so as to have a natural and solid appearance.*

Standard relief holds continuous dimensions in its physicality. However varied and multiple these dimensions are, they remain fixed and contained in the artwork. *Ways of Worldmaking* expands its dimensions in space as the books that project from the plane can be taken out from the ground and moved to its peripheral space. Relief has a limited view. *Ways of Worldmaking* is both a flat image seen from afar in a single point of view but also a volume that can be manipulated and turned around. This shift in spatial identity and viewing enables us to rethink the possibilities for the making of relief, the art category of relief and its status. Relief may be frustrating, as its back is inaccessible to touch or vision. However, *Ways of Worldmaking*, while still being a relief, changes this paradigm and even substitutes frustration with desire. The non-immediate accessibility of its verso is exchanged by the possibility of touching and having an impact on the artwork as well as of mentally and physically penetrating the inside of the piece. It has enabled me to test the notion of tangibility as a powerful creative and analytical tool for art objects in their fabrication and in their reception.

Some reliefs in public space, especially those attached to building facades, are immutable and permanent. Once they are put physically in place, their

artistic dimension is not questioned. This status sometimes makes the work invisible, as habit replaces wonder. *Ways of Worldmaking* does not exist as an artwork if it is not handled by the users, with books opened and read, and displaced in the space (physical and mental). It does not exist as an artwork if it stops supporting the floor above or no longer partitions the space. The tripartite architectural, librarian, and artistic identity contributes in this relief to its public art status. Function is crucial; usage generates art.

The sense of touch is increasingly favoured in museums in the UK. However, this is far from being the case in Switzerland and France where tangibility in exhibition contexts is predominantly restricted to haptic sight. *Ways of Worldmaking* militates for the haptic touch and explicitly combines the two senses of touch. In so doing, it fosters a continuity from the self to the world, from abstraction to reality and back to imagination. Tangibility has presided over the conception and the making of it. It has furthered my understanding of what a relief in the broadest sense entails.

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148 The first to initiate the tactile approach in the Twentieth Century was the Horniman Museum's handling collection, established in 1969.
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5 AVALANCHE

Avalanche is a series developed to look at how paper road maps, used as art medium, articulate different dimensions: history, politics and art.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

Most of this chapter comes from notes taken during my summer research residency at the Slade. The size of the room inspired me to experiment with larger formats, and the circularity and roundness of the studio have shaped new lines in my work.

Geographical maps are political items. The Avalanche series aims at both pointing to its own medium, the paper map, as a subjective fixed world-view and at re-presenting the artwork and the art process as transformative expressions of a world in constant fabrication. The notions of representation and re-presentation are inherent in my thesis. This series was made by taking existing representations, coded transcriptions of the Earth's crust, and by presenting them again. In between these representations and my re-presentations, the object has been transformed as well as its usage, and hence its perception. I will draw an analogy between the art piece using a map as a support and what it signifies, the Earth's crust, and try to avoid as possible the gap in the symbolic translation. It is, of course, impossible to avoid completely a gap in the translation from reality to symbol. However, I aim to minimise this loss by resorting to metonymy rather than to metaphor. The relief artwork is in my general art practice a metonymical object for the

149 "Les choix alors opérés par les cartographes pour traduire le monde en cartes se font médiateurs silencieux du pouvoir. Loin de n'être que des réductions littérales du monde en images, des relevés inertes et objectifs, les cartes “scientifiques” seraient davantage, comme a pu le montrer le cartographe Brian Harley, à envisager comme des formes de savoir construites, des fictions esthétiques disciplinant l'espace."
"The choices then made by cartographers to translate the world into maps are silent mediators of power. Far from being only literal reductions of the world in images, inert and objective records, the "scientific" maps would be more, as the cartographer Brian Harley has shown, to be considered as forms of knowledge constructed, aesthetic fictions disciplining the space”. My translation.

150 I refer here to Gerhardus Mercator’s first Atlas published in 1595 Atlas Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura, or Atlas or Cosmographical Meditations upon the Fabric of the World and the Figure of the Fabricated. My translation.
Geographical Information Systems (GIS) show now in real time this fabrication of the world. However, this study is narrowed to paper road maps and topographical maps.
geological relief, that is, a reduction, a concentration of some of the Earth’s crust features, physically organised, and combined in the same way. My ultimate goal is to restore some continuity in dimensions. An actual, exact continuous translation of a geological relief into a relief artwork would pertain to hyper-reality like Jose-Luis Borges’ map on the same scale as the empire it depicts.\footnote{Borges, Jose Luis, \textit{Del rigor en la ciencia}, Los Anales de Buenos Aires v. 1, no. 3. March 1946. Other relevant propositions could be the \textit{Earth Pieces} (1963 to Present) by the Boyle family, or a visit to \textit{Five Sisters} (1976) in Scotland, a proposition of John Latham to preserve the Bings as monuments.}

The type of relief we are going to observe is a carved, counter and sunken relief.\footnote{See Introduction 1.1 and chapter 4.10.2 for more definitions.}

I will constantly alternate observations on map-making and making art with maps. I will start with a brief technical description of the work and then move on to cartography in art, as well as surfaces and grids.

### 5.1 Technical description

Since 2010, I have explored maps through my practice. This trend continues with \textit{Avalanche}, where maps are the grounding start of each work. Maps can describe any space, physical or imaginary, and they are used and produced in many ways by different disciplines. My research deals with paper-based geographical maps, road maps and atlases that I use as a medium. I have narrowed my field to maps printed on paper in order to focus on the sense of touch. Thus, I have avoided digital maps and geographical information systems (GIS), even though digital practices are seen as tactile in other ways. For example, in GIS, the territory is mediated by touched screens; these tools facilitate interactive searches, analysis and edition. This field is extremely rich but would need a new thesis to be thoroughly explored.
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The type of item I am dealing with in this research, maps printed on paper, is becoming obsolete. In the available range of physical maps, which itself tends to be replaced by digital versions, plastic or plasticised maps replace standard paper ones.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Avalanche*, detail, wax and gouache on road atlas collage, 235 x 193 cm, 2017.

5.1.1 Layers
Three physical layers are laid upon each other: map, wax and gouache. My work begins with second-hand road-maps. Sometimes they bear visible itineraries traced in colour by previous users; these handmade lines change the status of the paper map: it is already a drawing which I develop further.

After looking at the given map, I spread a layer of melted bees-wax over it, which penetrates the fibres of the paper. Once it is cold, I add a layer of monochrome gouache paint (white, black, ultramarine, dark blue, dark green or flesh pink) on top. The colour palette is literal and symbolic: white for snow, blue for water, dark blue for under the water, black for under the avalanche, green for woods, and flesh for me.
5.1.2 Folds
The large paper sheets come to me as folded rectangles or book atlases. I dismantle them and patch them together again. Original folds are preserved in both cases. They help to identify my medium and to think about the status of cartography in art. Also folds facilitate the packing of the final artwork for my future commuting.\textsuperscript{153}

5.1.3 Weft, grid and scribble
Once the third layer, the gouache is dry, I draw a weft of horizontal and vertical lines with a ruler. Each line is not a new strata of material; on the contrary, it is dug through the surface of the gouache to the printed paper with a thin metal chisel. The section of the chisel is circular; it looks like a thick pin with a handle. Sometimes, once the surface is fully patterned with horizontal lines or square grids and lets us guess what the colours are underneath, I scratch more of it, exhuming the colour from the depth of the gouache and wax.\textsuperscript{154} I imitate the gestures of the "secours de montagne".

\textsuperscript{153} See chapter 3.1 in Literature Review about Gilles Deleuze and chapter 5.2 below for more development on the notion of fold.

\textsuperscript{154} I will develop the idea of punctum in point 5.4.
5.1.4 Texture and relief

A new texture results from the three processes: the material layering, the folding and the digging. Not yet installed, the series is more texture than relief; the thickness is slight compared to the size. Thus, the relief is low and is perceived as such especially when presented in a glass frame. However,
it can become higher depending on the final installation of the artwork. By consciously not flattening the unframed piece on the wall and playing with the folds, I often increase its third dimension and use light to achieve more contrast in the relief. Texture and relief interplay: textures of gouache cover the graphic representation of the crust, and the material lies over the conceptual. The gouache somehow silences the noisy coded inscriptions and creates a new blank page ready for new scriptures and interpretations. In this sense, it is topographical and archaeological.

5.1.5 Collage
Most of the time, the paper ground consists of more than a single sheet. I prefer to compose with different territories in order to confuse the representation. The resulting disorientation is conceptual and political, as it is a patchwork of country sections that avoid national feelings. My medium, while still a road map, moves from a homogenous to a heterogenous state, combining patches of symbols in various languages and using different graphic and design conventions. Thus, it becomes a collage. The collage process in this series is topological; it transforms the size of the area and the topology of the surface.

5.1.6 Windows
When I scratch the surface of the gouache, the original printed paper appears preserved by the wax. Tiny windows, cropped frames on lands' and villages' names are visible. However, the viewer needs to come closer to read the small type fonts surrounded by colour. Looking at the artwork is centripetal; the discretion of the small signs creates a magnetic appeal and an emphasis on them. They appear as a discovery, fresh to our view. However, these cropped frames are made by chance. They do not intentionally replace the cropped frame of reality that the map has produced, and they only allow a change in the hierarchy of the given frame. Therefore,
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the status of the places has changed.\textsuperscript{155} I am aware of the importance a hidden, concealed and therefore cancelled name on the map suggests; this cancellation primarily aims at blanking the surface out again.

5.2 Folds

Physical folds appear regularly in my practice. They are of different types: creased in the series \textit{Lost}, moulded in \textit{Bleen}, articulated and flexible in \textit{Archisculptures}, and bound in \textit{Ways of Worldmaking}.\textsuperscript{156} The fold in the \textit{Avalanche} series is straight and orthogonal. It inscribes a grid in the final outcome.

A folded Michelin road map is easily identifiable. Other brands sell folded maps, but my favourite is the Michelin for the proportion of its folded rectangles. There is no other justification for such a preference other than it fits a certain ideal visual balance and eases manipulation. I am keen on keeping these folds as visible as possible, as they point directly to \textit{this is a map}.

There is a specific way of folding a paper map. First, the paper is folded horizontally in two. Then, it is folded vertically in accordion and horizontally once again. My final artwork preserves only traces of the original folds; they have been flattened by the wax and the iron, by the weight of the paint and by my pressure on the ruler when I scratch the paint with my chisel. Old folds reappear, and new ones appear when I prepare the work for my tiny suitcase. Sometimes the work is small enough to travel without it being folded again.

When I travel with my paintings, I fold, unfold and re-fold them. These actions add the final lines to the painted surface; they change and foster a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{155}See chapter 7.2 for more development on the cartographical notion of selection and isolation as contradicted by Umberto Eco and Jorge Luis Borges.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{156}See Appendix chapters 2.11; 2.5; 2.12; 2.2 for images of these series.}

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re-discovery of the artwork each time. As Gilles Deleuze notes, to unfold is to increase (the surface, the meaning), to grow whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, “to enter the sinking of a world”.157 A fold can explain, can imply or complicate.158 In Avalanche, the explanation happens in the primary unfolding of the map (the unfolding helps to read the road network and to go from A to B) and in the unfolding of the painting as well. The form appears in the unfolding, as the folding and unfolding become expressive means (the view of the artwork becomes complete). The grid that the folds draw into the final painting complicates the surface but also makes it more stable and quiet. The folds also superimpose orthogonal graphic 3D lines onto the scratched lines and other surfaces.

The repeated folding and unfolding damages or at least transforms my painting. The gouache falls off the wax into flakes, especially in the fold itself, so each manipulation leaves the artwork's ground barer or fleshless. Sometimes, the operation has been reproduced too many times; the folds become vulnerable, and the paper threatens to tear itself apart.159 In contrast, when the painting is still fresh, the folds are straighter and sharper. Patched pages are folded along their bond, connecting clearly the different parts. Folds creep backward or project outward into space, as depressions or elevations. As such, they express different dynamics, energies and concepts. The way matter folds constitutes its texture as Deleuze has remarked.160 Light is crucial in their reading as they become joints or cuts. The final texture of the painting depends on stratum and light and on the

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158 Ibid., p.33.
159 The British artist Katherine Murphy folds a coloured sheet of paper hundreds of times in the same way until it becomes a sensuous object in which the act of folding has transformed the paper surface into low-relief giving a discrete trace of her manual labour. She explores labour conditions and routines in factories through her practice by appropriation of boring gestures to give them meaning and value.
160 Deleuze, G., 1988, p.51., op. cit.
way the folds catch the light.

5.3 Cartography in my practice

My practice tests the potential of the paper / print / fold tripartition. Having explained the importance of the fold in this series, I will now look closer at the map as printed paper.

5.3.1 Carte blanche

Obviously, the printed map is no longer a white, blank page. This printed system of signs influences both the creative process and the reception of the final outcome. As these given graphic elements are the transcriptions of subjective selections and political intents, they affect the meaning and form of the work to come.

Geographical maps combine various dimensions, both in general and in the artwork. They are 2D representations of multi-dimensional spaces. When we look at their coded inscriptions, however, what we travel through is a private, imaginary world, even though it is framed by the strategies of the geographer or the institutions the map-maker represents.
In French we say “donner carte blanche”, which also exists in English with the meaning of “blank paper, a blank cheque or “full discretionary power granted”. A literal translation would be “to give a white map”. The origin of this idiom is *blanc seing*, a kind of business card where a blank space was left to be filled in as wished by its holder. The card was pre-signed by someone important and helped in introducing the holder of the card. *Carte blanche* is also the title of a 2010 installation of 40 map drawings in which I concealed under white gouache everything which was not roads. The concept of the work and its title were inspired by the curator, who

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161 This map shows the borders of 10.05.1871 Frankfurt Treatise. The newspaper readers are proposed a game: they are asked to guess the outcomes of the WW1 and to draw the borders accordingly.
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 inadvertently told me “tu as carte blanche”.

“Avoir carte blanche” of course never happens. No blank paper exists. There are always elements to compose with, paths we have to follow, decisions imposed on us. Hence, when I paint on the paper, I am aware of the supporting ground being biased. The map is not a neutral text; it always follows a political agenda. Its author constrains the navigation as much as I do as a map-maker or rather, as a counter-geographer.

5.3.2 Orientation

Cartography is the study and the practice of map-making. As such, it implies a goal, a selection, a scripture and a function. A geographical map is always a social construction of a reality. It aims to bring about change. This system of signs forms a picture of the Earth’s surface by cataloguing the “important” and ignoring the “unimportant” features of this surface and of the social world.

Working in my studio, I do not pay attention to the names of territories or other national inscriptions. Mostly, I am given paper maps, and they thrill me as objects even if they have become obsolete today. We pick up a map with our hands, fold it in our pocket and unfold it on a table. It turns with us as we orientate ourselves.

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162 Though the artist Simon Faithfull while in residency in Antarctica experienced the reality of a white map, the loss of topography, of meaning and of orientation: “...Someone just decided – took out an empty white map and drew a cross...”

http://www.simonfaithfull.org/works/antarctica-diaries/28th-december-halley-research-station/


163 There are many examples in cartography where maps aim at changing the world. See, for instance, Changing the Map of Europe, The Financial Times competition. Europe after the war, London 1914. The British Library collection.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *orientation* as

the action or process of ascertaining one's position relative to the points of the compass, or other specified points; the faculty of doing this; awareness of one's bearings or relative position. Also: the action of taking up a particular position or bearing; (Zool.) the faculty by which birds and other animals find their way back to a place after going or being taken to a place distant from it (as in homing pigeons and migratory birds).\(^\text{165}\)

There is a difference between navigation and orientation which relates to determination and quest. The first is an assertion of oneself upon a landscape and movement prompted by motivation while the second has more to do with a search, a feeling and a question of where and who the subject is.

There is also the political orientation inherent in all maps. This is explicit in propaganda maps, but more implicit in geopolitical and road maps. Using them as a medium, the political orientation is part of the work; it is subtle and transformed or outspoken.

My practice points to these definitions of the term “orientation”. I question the directional sense of the support, and I lose the cardinal positions while altering the map. Progressively, names are concealed, and territorial identities forgotten. I sign the artwork and propose an orientation but leave it with the final viewer. In my series *Avalanche*, though I sign the work, I consider it unnecessary to fix its orientation; the signature suggests only my preference.

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5.3.3 History

Only lately have I realised that I do not know what a map actually is. Maps are the type of items I came often across, without necessarily questioning them. Yet maps have existed since the Palaeolithic era (16,500 BCE), when the earliest representations of the heavens were drawn. Maps of the Middle Ages depicted places evoked in the Bible. From the Thirteenth Century on, portolan charts drawn on sheepskin vellum helped navigate closed seas, detailing coasts and harbours. In Europe, the discovery of printmaking massively accelerated the production of geographical maps. Also, while maps from other cultures, such as Marshall Islands stick charts, a system of mapping ocean swells that was memorised before navigation, are fascinating, they are not included in this study. However, such different ways of mapping and map-making inspire new practical developments in the studio. The word “map” comes from the Latin mappa-mundi; mappa means napkin or table-cloth and mundi means world. Serving imperialistic purposes, maps have indeed been unfolded like napkins in war rooms and explorer tents.

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166 In the same way books can be read literally without noticing the critical voice of the author or the historical context from which the writing emanates.
5.3.4 Fabrica Mundi

This historical reference to textiles is crucial to my research for three reasons. Textiles were handmade and, therefore, point to the maker, the craftsman. They are highly sensual and call for touch (the haptic touch or the haptic sight). The word “fabric” means woven stuff or textile product. This meaning emerged in the mid-Eighteenth century. Before that, it meant “any manufactured” or “fabricated material.” The title of the first atlas by Mercator was Fabrica Mundi (1632), expressing the constant fabrication of the world. A textile is made of one-dimensional threads. Once woven they result in a flat surface, which when folded or creased becomes a volume. Consequently, textiles embody the notion of continuity in dimensions at the heart of my thesis.

The map as a tablecloth interests me for its surface and invisible verso, both
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paradigmatic features of relief sculpture. The tablecloth protects the table, covering it like the Earth’s crust swathes the globe. Thus, the textile character of the map associates map-making with representations of the texture of the world and with the notion of text as well.

The word “geography” comes from the Greek geo (the Earth) and graphein, meaning to trace, to write. The map is to be read as much as it is to be seen. Indeed, we usually read a map and look at a picture, which leads us to believe the map is more text than image.

5.4 Surface

In the Avalanche series, surface is paramount, both in relation to the history of art and to the geological fabric of the Earth. The first element of the encounter with the artwork, the surface suggests a hidden side, an underneath or an interior. The surface and other features correlate: the ground, the layer, the thickness, the side, the membrane. A relief is made of a ground that varies in elevation and thickness. Attached to a wall or any supporting base, its back is beyond sight and beyond touch, although we are aware of it. This inaccessibility is frustrating to the viewer. A layer is a thickness of matter spread over a surface. The surface of a layer is visible if not covered up by another layer that increases the work's thickness. A layer has an outer and an inner side. With relief, there is always an outer visible side: the front, the ground, the surface; and an invisible side: the back and the inside face of each layer in the multi-layered thickness. There is also the left-hand and right-hand side of a relief accessible by getting closer to the wall near the relief's margins. These sides enable us to appreciate the materiality, thickness, techniques and processes of the artwork. In carved relief sculpture, we assume that the depth (low or high relief)


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depends on its thickness. For instance, the thicker the stone, the deeper the carving. Cast and form shadows are strongly contrasted. However, in a Donatello stiacciato relief, for instance, the marble is barely engraved, the relief is almost flat, and the thickness from front plane to ground plane is slight. The relief artwork there looks more like a textured drawing. Therefore, the thickness of the bed, material or ground, is not always related to the thickness of the artwork in relief. A relief can be low in a thick or even in an entire volume; it does not necessarily profit from the entire thickness of its supporting ground. A membrane is a sheet, a surface or a layer. Permeable or impermeable, it is always thin. Covering an entity or a part, it separates and connects. A membrane mediates two milieus. The skin is the type of membrane that interests me. Maps were drawn on sheepskin. However, my Caucasian human skin is translucent. It shows a network of veins that echo roads and paths on the surface of the Earth.

In the word “surface”, the prefix sur comes from middle French and means over or above. I question what is under the surface and what are the effects of the surface on the production and the reception of the artwork.

I live by a lake surrounded by mountains, the epitome of relief landscape. The quiet surface of the water contrasts with the dramatic angularity that tears the sky. Life moves inside the depth of the lake: “A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.”

The surface reflects the inner expressions, body and identity of the viewer. Likewise, Elisabeth Grosz noting that a Moebius strip, which looks like the figure 8 inverting its inside and outside, develops the concept of Jacques Lacan's topologies of the psyche towards a feminist insight.

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169 Lacan departs from Saussurian linguistics to examine the relation between signifying and signified. He invents the notion of subject (sub-ject) and questions its position in
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An artwork manifests its surface, if it is preserved; but the rest is concealed. The surface is a sealed envelope, a façade that hides behind it something else that can be grasped neither by the hand nor by the eye. It erases from our senses that which it mysteriously covers. Only the surface of the envelope is perceived where the address is written and the stamp apposed. The content is only presupposed, guessed or expected but is not yet comprehensible.

In relief artworks, the visible surface protrudes to the front and varies locally in depression and elevation. Light is crucial to the texture and expression of a relief. It enlivens its surface and its ground and improves the contrast of its dimensions. Shadows contribute to the understanding of its dimensions. Yet, the hidden surface of the back remains in the dark, stuck to the wall, invisible though present.

relation to signifying and signified. Lacan examines this relation from a topological angle. According to Lacan, signifying and signified are not part of the same plane and nor do they share a common axis as De Saussure states. They are not the two faces of a paper cylinder's band. Indeed, De Saussure believes language is like a paper sheet. The thought in language would be the recto of the paper, and the sound would be the verso; the thought would be the upper face, and the sound the bottom one. De Saussure refers to a geometrical thought of language but Lacan to a topological one by taking the image of the Moebius strip and inverting the positions: signifying is on the upper face and the signified is on the inner face.

In round sculpture, all surface parts are visible with the movement of the viewer. The hidden part is the interior of the volume wrapped up by the surface.

In some paintings, the flat surface of the front plane simulates a window on imaginary worlds. It is a ploy to create an illusion of depth. There are exceptions, though, where the actual materiality of the support is made explicit, thus countering any illusory plane. My research looks at continuous dimensions in reliefs excluding the linear perspective or trompe-l'œil techniques and effects. My field is restricted to actual changes in elevation and depression of the artwork's ground.

The relief of my Avalanche paintings echoes the relief of an actual avalanche. An avalanche is the cataclysmic crushing and covering of a geographical relief by a layer of snow that obliterates the original surface, though the previous landscape is still there, compressed and hidden.
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underneath. The slope of the mountain becomes a white monochrome painting, wiping out any sense of orientation.

The breakdown in a sudden traumatic event and the instability of the surface are often paramount in my process and work. Thus, an avalanche can also be the metaphor for a fragile psychological state that collapses like the unpredictable plane of snow.\(^{170}\)

With the same systematic grid we use to find people buried under an avalanche, punching the surface and the white thickness step by step, I grid the monochrome surface of dry gouache and discover the concealed polychrome print of the map with my metal point.

There is a *punctum*. The metal pole drills through the white Earth's surface as well as through my painting. Like punctuation in language, which is both spatial and temporal, written and read, the point of contact made with my chisel punctuates the surface and points to the temporal layering. The rhythm of these points can be read as a score. Space and time are manifest in the relief. The above-snow and the under-snow of in the artwork *Avalanche* – both in the weather phenomenon and in the artwork – become archaeological features of changing topologies and topographies. Rosalind Krauss has shown how the grid in Modernism is both spatial and temporal, relating to both matter and spirit. This relation is important both in the series and in an actual avalanche.\(^{171}\)

The instability of the snow coat starts the avalanche. Once the mass has descended and settled, rescue teams dig into the thickness of the powder in direction to the earthly ground. Meanwhile, in the painting, the gouache flakes etched out of the waxed surface disclose the printed inscriptions of the underlying map and hence locate the places symbolised by the signs.

\(^{170}\) Like in the film *Force Majeure* by Ruben Ostlund where an avalanche reveals the fragility of the cohesiveness of a family.

\(^{171}\) See chapter 5.6.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

These holes in the surface also create a new texture, that is, an actual relief and not a mere representation of it.

There are large differences in scale, risk and consequences between my practice and the actual occurrence of an avalanche. However, the language and grammar used in my work derive directly from the meteorological process and the rescue operations that ensue. My gestures in the studio imitate the gestures of the rescuers in an analytic and logic method that applies the same chronological order; they progress in homology, and translate as closely as possible the actions and gestures from one field to the other. Deprived of metaphors, my homologous method borrows more from *analytical* than from *continental* philosophy. It takes discrete elements from a given context, analyses them and comes to a result. It is less *continental*, as it does not operate any synthesis or resort to symbols except for colours. Only when finished does the artwork suggest metaphorical interpretations. The language deployed in the *Avalanche* series is articulated in a language that runs parallel to but not estranged from the meteorological phenomenon.

Let us observe now in more detail the relation between the surface of the paint and that of the Earth, that is, the altered printed map as a compressed transcription of the Earth's crust, as the medium of my artwork is a printed map. As such, it is far from neutral. Instead, it comes laden with signs and intentions.

The print embodies material and historical layers added to a blank sheet before it comes to my attention. The primary coating is foreign to me even though I later appropriate it for further developments. The signs on the map come in multiple strata, sometimes manually amended by previous users. Already given as such, they are repeated over time becoming subjective selections of multi-faceted realities. The primary selection, the first map of a given territory, is restated as such in the following versions of it, possibly
repeating omissions and errors. Consequently and because the printed map is their ground, my works point to multiple previously layered views like intentional omissions, political change of city names, frontiers, etc. These views are compressed as much as the geological layers of the Earth’s crust are a compressed relief due to its mass dynamics, tectonics, and epochs that have shaped mountains, glaciers and oceans. The map is a 2D graphic compression of all sets of dimensions.

Military maps were waxed to resist weather exposure. Using the same method, I apply a membrane of wax between the print and the gouache to prevent the paper fibres from absorbing the gouache pigments and to allow the printed coloured inscriptions to appear when the gouache is scratched away. The names are disclosed, revealed anew, read with a different lens. This process brings awareness to the consultation as the relation between visible elements is changed and becomes a new spatial proposition.

A waxed paper road map becomes translucent. It transforms into parchment, with the look and feel of a skin. The road network changes into blood vessels, a skin with red and blue veins. The human body collides with the scale of the territory on the surface of the map, and the compression in my painting happens here, in this collision.

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172 With “Un Livre Blanc”, the French writer Philippe Vasset has directed the attention to non-mapped territories, the “white” in the map. He “travelled for one year fifty white areas of the map of Paris No. 2314 OT IGN to discover what lies behind these ‘empty’ spaces (uninhabited or uncultivated, peripheral and marginal in the eyes of the official power), that is to say, what escapes the representation because it is often considered as not presentable. In fact, with the help of a writing which he himself defines as "spatial", Vasset tries to fill gaps in knowledge to make literally non-places exist. Thus, particularly in Un Livre Blanc (Fayard, 2007), cartography and novel intertwine continually to compose a "fictionalised documentary" or a truly original "text-performance": the objective and subjective account of an investigation sociological and literary in the outposts of urban change.”

See images of white maps in the Appendix last page of chapter 1.

173 As already mentioned above, this pointer is general. I do not choose specific territories to provide a discourse on specific politics and precise subjective intentions.
5.5 Distance

One of the main functions of a road map is to estimate distances, that is, spatial and hence temporal distance from one place to another, from where I am to the place I want to reach. This is a topographical distance, the main type of distance the paper map describes. However, *Avalanche* tackles a different kind of distance: the distance from me to the Earth, and then from the Earth to the cosmos, the dialogue between the self and the physical world. Sometimes, I question the *raison d’être* of my practice. My main quest is probably to find an appropriate distance between me and the world. I constantly shift my cursor from the perception of our world as volume to its perception as a curved plane, with folds and creases providing continuity. Some days, I feel more like a sculptor who needs to touch and, the next morning, more like a painter who needs to see. One day, the distance to the world is such that it appears unreachable, a pure symbol. Whereas the next day, I am one with the world, keeping to it and in no need of translation. The position of relief maker allows me to remain ambivalent and to combine these two identities, playing with volumes and surfaces and continuously articulating their dimensions.\textsuperscript{174}

Hence the continuity in dimensions in the Avalanche series is

1. physically transcribed (the simultaneous physical dimensions are articulated and protrude from the ground),

2. perceptive (from the self to the material world),

3. stylised (the relief artwork stands for the geological relief).

\textsuperscript{174} See chapter 4.7 for more development on ambivalence.
The format of the series is vertical, transcribing the vertical flow of an avalanche down a slope. However, a geographical map is also a landscape, specifically, an aerial view of a landscape. I therefore question the genre of these paintings: Are they portraits or landscapes? I propose they are portraits of landscapes.

What happens when the position and the gaze changes from being aerial and horizontal to looking at the frontal and vertical wall? This change corresponds to my way of working on a table and hanging the artwork on the wall. In the final painting, I try to combine both views: the frontal and the aerial. In some of them, the grid gives the illusion of looking from above,
while in others, the verticality reinforces the depth in the image.\textsuperscript{175}

The portrait and the landscape are temporary: the \textit{Avalanche} flakes out; it fragments and transforms with heat. But this series is not about deconstruction nor ambiguity. The scratches are made, the different layers chip. Plane and volume appear simultaneously. All these apparent disconnections are hold well together; they create the tension in the artwork. Also, they portray the unity of the perceived, conceived and lived spaces that Henri Lefebvre has talked about. The perceived space is the space that appears when someone looks at the painted map in relation to its context of presentation and the experienced or non-experienced territory the map depicts. The conceived space, however, is both the spatial strategy behind the map and the space that emerges from the artwork into the mind of the viewer. Finally, the lived space is the experience of spatial reality translated into the artwork. That lived space results in a combination of multiple historical, social and political realities. In \textit{La production de l'espace}, Lefebvre differentiates between these three spaces. According to him, they result from modes of production which ultimately unify their spatial differences. Though being perverse, this process of unification helps me to

\textsuperscript{175} Robert Morris in \textit{Aligned with Nazca} gives an enlightening account of the phenomenological encounter of the blurred dichotomy of surface and the three-dimensional format. This dichotomy is clearly distinct in our culture and is reinforced by the spatial context of the orthogonal room in which works are conceived, made and mostly exhibited. In comparison, the Nazca landscape of 200 BCE was directly carved and incised in the ground with lines that confuse and invert distinctions between surface and depth and where “… the ground plane does not remain merely horizontal, for it extends up into one’s vision to the height of one’s eyes at the distant horizon. The opposition of street and building, floor and wall, of close-up urban seeing, is nonexistent. One sees instead always at a distance, the known flatness of the ground also becomes visible ‘elevation’ at the horizon. The lines inscribed on the plain become visible only by virtue of the extension of that plain - literally from under one’s feet up to the level of one’s eyesight. The horizontal becomes vertical through extension. The lines become visible by the ‘tilt’ of the ground plane and subsequent compression of foreshortening. The further down the line one looks the greater its definition. Yet the greater the distance the less definition of detail. The lines are both more general and more distinct as lines in direct proportion to the distance focused by the eye. The gestalt becomes stronger as the detail becomes weaker.”

think of the continuous dimensions in relief and the dialectics from the self to the world.\textsuperscript{176}

When I scratch the surface of the gouache in search for the colour of the map, some accidents occur. Flakes of various sizes come off. Depending on the viewer, the missing parts appear as voids, as windows or as recovery of the territory. I find these holes in the monochrome gouache surface too big when they permit too much knowledge about the map. Therefore, I need to conceal these pockets of visible territory as if the disclosed elements do not fit my purpose, the results of the enquiry are inappropriate or, finally, as if the mystery needs to remain preserved. We have already come across the notions of disclosure, enquiry and mystery that relate to relief sculpture in comparison to painting and sculpture in-the-round. The frustration coming from the inaccessibility of the relief's verso creates a strength in the artwork - a desire and a tension. In \textit{Avalanche} the tension needs to be balanced in order to preserve the desire, the curiosity and the frustration.

When the artwork is finished, areas vary in colour saturation. They look like organic shapes, lands or gestural traces. Where the wax under the gouache is too thin, the paint cannot be scratched, and so the colour seems more saturated because it is preserved. Hence, the relief transforms the perception of the colour, which looks fragmented though uniformly applied. Conversely, the perception of depressions and elevations diminishes when the surface shows more than one colour. Therefore, I always apply a monochrome surface of gouache on purpose.

The methodology of the \textit{Avalanche} series focuses on questions of physical dimension. It is primarily driven by expressing relief and secondarily by examining the colours' interplay.

\textsuperscript{176} Lefebvre, Henri, \textit{La production de l'espace}, Paris: Anthropos, 4ème édition, 2000
5.6 Grids

I came to grid the surface of the paint while remembering a rescue of people under an avalanche and its formal organisation and by looking at the gridded maps I was given. Hence, in my practice, the grid has emerged as a transcription of movements on the Earth’s surface and as a replica of a measuring system into a plastic component. Usually orthogonal, it happens, though, that some of my grids are wefts of circular segments. New techniques of rescuing people under avalanches use radial methods and have inspired these circles.

In her 1979 seminal essay ‘Grids’, Rosalind Krauss talks about the spatiality and temporality of the grid in painting.\textsuperscript{177} She says,

> the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricised, ordered it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal...\textsuperscript{178}

Unlike perspective, the grid does not map the space of a room, or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting. Indeed, if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself.\textsuperscript{179}

She then goes on to say, “Because maps are the products of scientific research it is easy to forget that they are essentially pictures: diagrammatic images that approximate the physical world.”\textsuperscript{180} The cartographic grid is for me as much pictorial as scientific. I am interested in the map as a gap in scientific knowledge as all symbolical coded transcriptions are. Its scientific

\textsuperscript{177} See Literature Review (3.3), for a more detailed account on this text.
\textsuperscript{179} Krauss, Rosalind E., 1986, op. cit. p.10.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

identity covers political and social agendas; therefore, the grid in maps is both political and pictorial.

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Avalanche, wax and gouache on map, 39.5 x 49.5 cm, 2016.

It is important to note that three related items appear in my practice: the index, the grid and the diagram.

The map both is and has an index. It is a system of references that accounts for selected and registered features of a given space, and it has an index
that classifies by alphabetical order the list of names it shows and their spatial position. *Avalanche* is not an index, nor was it made as an indexical practice.

Both the map and my paintings have grids. A cartographic grid is the graphic representation of parallels and meridians that locate a place whereas the grid in my painting refers in the outcome and in its production to the search for bodies in an avalanche; it divides the space of the painted surface while revealing its layers. Also, the grid in the painting gives a sense of scale. In addition, maps are examples of diagrams.\(^{181}\) Indeed, my paintings are diagrams when they show relations between parts and elements. Also, they contain the diagrams the map embeds.

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\(^{181}\) "diagram, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2017.

“1. Geom. A figure composed of lines, serving to illustrate a definition or statement, or to aid in the proof of a proposition. 2. An illustrative figure which, without representing the exact appearance of an object, gives an outline or general scheme of it, so as to exhibit the shape and relations of its various parts. 3b. A delineation used to symbolise related abstract propositions or mental processes.” [www.oed.com/view/Entry/51854](www.oed.com/view/Entry/51854)

According to Krauss, the grid in Modernism is an ambivalent object. This notion is important for my thesis, as I understand the relief as a spatially ambivalent object, composed simultaneously of flat planes and volumes. Some of my reliefs, as in this series *Avalanche*, have grids.¹⁸² I am interested in the grid as it connects the viewer to both matter on the one hand and spirit on the other.

¹⁸² see chapter 4.7.
In the same vein, Krauss continues:

Now it is in its ambivalence about the import of the grid, an indecision about its connection to matter on the one hand or spirit on the other, that its earliest employers can be seen to be participating in a drama that extended well beyond the domain of art.\(^{183}\)

Reading a grid opposes two dynamics. The first is centrifugal which I believe my work belongs to:

Logically speaking, the grid extends in all directions, to infinity...By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric.\(^{184}\)

The second is centripetal, it corresponds to the grid in map-making:

The grid is, in relation to this reading, a re-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects...It is a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself.\(^{185}\)

Centrifugal and centripetal grids appear in my atlas pages, in my paper folds and in the tight grids I draw through gouache and wax:

Because the centrifugal argument posits the theoretical continuity of the work of art with the world, it can support many different ways of using the grid ranging from purely abstract statements of this continuity to project which order aspects of “reality”, that reality itself conceived more or less abstractly... And of course, for the centripetal practice the opposite is true. Concentrating on the surface of the work

as something complete and internally organised, the centripetal branch of practice tends not to dematerialise that surface but to make it itself that object of vision.\textsuperscript{186}

When the grid is quite loose and does not lie over the entire surface, it tends to be centripetal, and when it covers the entire page or when the collage of the paper sheets itself shapes the grid, it appears more centrifugal. However, these two tendencies should be observed case by case, as slight differences in the width of the line, in the sharpness and contrast of the fold and little incidents can dramatically change the dynamic from one into the other.

My practice has already examined the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics in the \textit{Skin} installations, in 2014 at Slade Woburn Research Centre and at Musée d'Art de Pully on the occasion of my personal exhibition \textit{Hotel Ausland}.\textsuperscript{187} In the two different versions of the installation, I have used two opposite walls in a complementary way, each presenting an opposite dynamic.

5.7 Conclusion

“Between visible and readable, duplication and deformation, real and imaginary, maps are complex and equivocal images.”\textsuperscript{188} I use maps as a medium to explore the expansion of art boundaries, connecting art with social, historical and political spaces. Combining given image and text, monochrome and polychrome surfaces, flatness and volume, the

\textsuperscript{186} Krauss, Rosalind. “\textit{Grids}.” October, vol. 9, 1979, pp. 51–64. 
https://www.jstor.org/stable/778321?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

\textsuperscript{187} See Appendix chapter 2.4

Avalanche artworks, both as painting and cropped frames of reality, escape categorisation. By indexing a territory, the map is not a mimetic but an abstract representation. As an artefact that reflects a mental view, it is a valuable resource to renew the understanding of abstraction in art.\textsuperscript{189} In this regard, Robert Smithson writes,

Abstraction is a representation of nature devoid from realism based on mental or conceptual reduction. There is no escaping nature through abstract representation; abstraction brings one closer to physical structures within nature itself... Abstraction can only be valid if it accepts nature's dialectic.\textsuperscript{190}

Developed into a further artwork, the scriptures of the map and its materiality already embed such a dialectical abstraction. The many graphic lines and surfaces of the map ingrain shared histories and subjectivities. Folded and unfolded, embodiments of Möbius continuum, and organised in layers, painting using maps as a supporting medium represents a unity of various spatial productions and articulate within the artwork, social, political and art dimensions. From their title to their medium, my Avalanches express and embody these many articulated frames in a continuous way.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions
6 PAINTING / MARE VOSTRUM

Painting/Mare Vostrum was commissioned by Beaconsfield Gallery for the October 2015 exhibition Harnessing the Wind (curator Naomi Siderfin). The installation, made of 4 km of barbed wire, collected dust, graphite, pigments and PVA, looked like a hybrid tumbleweed with skin scraps torn by a roll of metal spines. It had been inspired by Trois Femmes Puissantes (Three Strong Women), the fictional journey of Khady Demba, a Senegalese woman who tries to reach Europe.\footnote{Marie Ndaye, Trois Femmes Puissantes, 2008, Paris: Gallimard.}

Capture, confrontation, entanglement and tangibility are notions at stake in this installation. It is a contemplation of the destructive force of wind, thinking of societies being swept away in a wind of change, which becomes an untameable storm.
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Two titles underline the final piece: First, *Painting* as it contains the word "pain", and second, *Mare Vostrum* ("your sea" in Latin), as a reference to *Mare Nostrum* (our sea), an operation Italy set up from October 2013 to November 2014. Following tragic shipwrecks near Lampedusa, Italy aimed to rescue immigrants at sea: "Once a country known for hard attitudes to migrants, Italy offered medical treatment, shelter and food. Migrants were even offered legal aid that could have helped them gain asylum." Its aim was to rescue people and not to control borders. In terms of figures, it was a successful operation. More than 130,000 migrants were rescued in a year at a financial cost of more than 10 million euros a month resulting in hundreds of thousands of migrants on Italian soil. After a year, Italy asked Europe for help. However, the European states not only refused to help Italy but accused it of encouraging "refugee traffic" by

195 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303480756_The_Mare_Nostrum_Operation_and_the_SAR_approach_the_Italian_response_to_address_the_Mediterranean_migration_crisis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303480756_The_Mare_Nostrum_Operation_and_the_SAR_approach_the_Italian_response_to_address_the_Mediterranean_migration_crisis) Incipit and page 7. Accessed 10 November 2019.
allowing rescue and welcoming migrants.\textsuperscript{198} Finally, Italy had to shut down the operation in 2014.\textsuperscript{199} The then European Union set up Triton.\textsuperscript{200} However, the primary focus of Triton was no longer to rescue migrants but to control borders,\textsuperscript{201} in other words, to prevent migrants from landing on European soil.\textsuperscript{202}

I wish the Mediterranean Sea was a \textit{Mare Nostrum}, a sea bordered not only by states ready to welcome endangered people but also supported by a whole continent of states following the example of Italy, Malta and Greece.\textsuperscript{203} The UK, France, Germany and other European countries have called upon Italy to stop helping endangered people,\textsuperscript{204} as if telling Italy and the migrants that ‘the Mediterranean Sea is not our sea, it is your sea, you can bloody sort it out yourself.’ Hence my title \textit{Mare Vostrum}. In the meantime, these powerful European countries were bombing Libya, Syria and Iraq.\textsuperscript{205}

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\textsuperscript{200} \url{http://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/operations/Pagine/MareNostrum.aspx}
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\textsuperscript{201} \url{http://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/operations/Pagine/MareNostrum.aspx}\hfill \url{https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303480756_The_Mare_Nostrum_Operation_and_the_SAR_approach_the_Italian_response_to_address_the_Mediterranean_migration_crisis}
p.16.
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\textsuperscript{202} \url{https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-leaders-killing-migrants-by-neglect-after-cutting-mediterranean-rescue-missions-a6988326.html}
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On tangibility, contemporary reliefs and continuous dimensions

The sculpture borrows from drawing; it looks like an obsessive scribble which has absorbed its support. however, it also relates to painting. The medium, PVA, is the usual binder of acrylic paint. Pigment has been mixed with dust collected by friends and volunteers. The piece is confrontational, almost blocking the entrance of the exhibition room. It seems to have rolled down the steps and the slope. It should be noted that Beaconsfield's upper room has a special floor with two steps and a slope.

The structure is tight and dense and is full at its heart. Having started with a diameter of 20 cm, the rolled barbed-wire, gripping and catching scraps of dried PVA skins, grew to an awkward 250 cm sphere.

6.1 Tangibility

The hand is present in this artwork, from the primary inspiration, to the concept, process and final outcome. It includes many aspects: a hand that grabs a barbed-wire fence, pushes to climb it, is skinned by it and dies there unable to reach the destination; but also a hand that draws a project; a hand that seizes a vicious material and persistently builds with it in order to dissolve itself into mass and space.

A hand draws, sculpts, caresses and grasps. A hand is personal; it belongs to someone. It also connects the individual with the community. A hand is an active bridge, a semi-colon from idea to practice, from material to concept. A hand is a dynamic and structured landscape made of bones, muscles, nerves, and some flesh. A hand is covered by skin, the porous

https://inews.co.uk/news/world/countries-bombed-syria-civil-war-302800
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barrier between us and the world we live in.206

The complexity of the hand has enabled humanity to be built. As Colin McGinn remarked,

Hand pride would emerge, and hand admiration, and hand hierarchy. Social bonds would revolve around tool use and hand skills.... Clearly, having powerful, clever, agile, sensitive hands would have social value, as well as individual value. It became the “survival of the handiest.”207

The hand is an anthropological object that has accompanied our evolution. Many of its original features have been preserved, but it has also adapted to contemporary life. The hand co-evolved both with tools and with the brain. According to Martin Heidegger, it has had a critical role in the appearance of language. Heidegger plays on the nearness of the words zeigt, zeigend, zeichnet, zeichnend, die zeigenden Zeichnen and unravels a thread which links the hand, the word (Wort), the being and the thing (Ding): "The hand reveals what has been hidden as far as it shows and draws while showing, and when drawing, it builds signs which show accomplished shapes" (my translation). The word is located in this gesture of pointing by the hand; the hand shows the word, and draws it, and so this gesture becomes a sign and culminates in shapes.208 Therefore, the hand has opened up the possibility of culture. Indeed, McGinn thinks that "culture was made possible by the bipedal gait, because free hands were the engine of the entire cultural process".209 For Heidegger, the hand is inseparable from the thinking

206 I will expand on the notion of skin in chapter 6.2.
209 McGinn, C., 2015, op. cit, p. 117.
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abilities. It plays a role in the thinking processes and mechanisms.²¹⁰

All the hands the artwork passes into and through are interesting and express our relation to the world. They have political meanings which arise from their context. More recently, Juhani Pallasmaa and Richard Sennett have theorised the craft hand, examining the whole span of its skills.²¹¹ The hand embeds notions of dexterity and precision. The common view is that a craft hand is trained to work in a workshop – a word which denotes a commercial activity - whereas the art hand creates in a studio – a word which is rooted in studium (study in Latin). Idealised as such, an art hand is limited to the conceptual, theorising realm. My manual work encompasses all: concept, practice and skills. In addition, the hand penetrates language. What does it mean to have the upper hand? To give someone a hand? To be in safe hands? To keep your hands clean? Artists have regularly transcribed these expressions. For instance, Mani Pulite (clean hands operation) by Swiss artist Gianni Motti made in 2005 is a work consisting of a little piece of white soap. Emmanuel Perrotin, his gallerist explains:

The piece, a little soap, was created out of the fat from a liposuction performed on the prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in a Swiss clinic. The title ‘Mani Pulite’, refers explicitly to the gigantic anti-corruption operation of the same name which had failed in the 90s, aimed at the relations between organised crime and the political world, and during which Berlusconi was called to question on several occasions. This

Accessed 10 October 2015.
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piece expresses the politic of the body and Berlusconi’s ‘bio-political’ communication, since his body is exhibited as if it had an extraordinary longevity. The clan of Berlusconi and his enthusiasts denied the origin of the material. The polemic stopped when Gianni Motti suggested making a sample of the soap available in order to proceed to a DNA test.212

*Mani Pulite* interests me doubly. First, the word “hand” (*mani* in Italian) appears in the title of the work, and second, it offers a circular interpretation. We can wash our hands with and thanks to the fat of a corrupted politician. We actually wash our hands but get them dirty at the same time. Likewise, to what extent are we entangled with the tumbleweed of the extra-European immigrants crisis? Do we have a hand in their destiny? What is the proximity between this immigration and our hands-on politics? War and instability always benefits someone. The ball carries on rolling by itself; the Northern desert remains blind and mute.

6.2 The skin213

In *Painting / Mare Vostrum*, two components predominate: a metallic spiny thread, which is the support, and a skin of paint, which is the torn surface. However, a living skin is more than a surface that defines what it wraps and covers. Rather, it is an interface that mediates two milieus, a membrane that is both porous and holds a mix of different separated elements, that is, an integument.

The skin, the largest human organ, is already itself a material composed of different layers (hypoderm - derm - epiderm) each changing in nature the more inward or outward to the body or to the world that it is located. Its

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213 See chapter 7 for my artwork developed in relation to the item of skin.
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structure and function are comparable to the Earth's crust, enabling a dialogue to occur between the self and the geological relief that humans exploit to ground their life. The skin is one of the bridges that connect phenomenologically the world to the individual and the material context to one's mind.


Skin and fold are closely linked: skin both folds and contains folds. Indeed, life begins with the ectoderm (outer-skin), a membrane that is folded around itself; it is the starting centre of an organic body that continuously grows,
wrinkles or alters. Facilitating an understanding of texture and clarifying the notion of continuous dimensions, skin can be seen as an infinite spatio-temporal fold as suggested by Gilles Deleuze:

Aussi le labyrinthe du continu n'est pas une ligne qui se dissoudrait en points indépendants, comme le sable fluide en grains, mais comme une étoffe ou une feuille de papier qui se divise en plis à l'infini ou se décompose en mouvements courbes, chacun déterminé par l'entourage consistant ou conspirant.

Human skin shows differences in colour and texture in relation to geographical origins. Though colour differentiation does not necessarily mean racism, blindness to the colour of the skin does not exist. Zach Stafford writes, "Race is such an ingrained social construct that even blind people can 'see' it. To pretend it doesn't exist to you erases the experiences of black people." Thus, skin is political. The economic gaps between the Northern and Southern hemispheres and violent socio-political contexts are the background to Marie Ndaye's *Trois Femmes Puissantes*. In this novel, the black, white and red membranes of three vocal folds vibrate between France, Senegal and pain. Ndaye shows the skin to be both vulnerable and resilient. It gets torn and gashed. It regrows allowing grafts. A skin can be transformed into sculpture, painting or relief: tanned and turned into lampshades, tattooed or scarified. The epidermis bears the history and memory of the body. In the novel, Khady Demba’s skin is lacerated.

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215 “The division of the continuous must not be taken as of sand dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points or minima.” Deleuze, G., *The Fold, Leibnitz and the Baroque*, p. 6., op. cit.


reaching the opposite continent, she dies facing the sky.

### 6.3 Context in the artwork

Dust and small particles of the building have become part of the artwork itself. A symbolical tumbleweed shape emerges, un-retouched, from its own making process and analogous to the life of Khady Demba. The embedding becomes both subject and result: the precarious material conditions that emigrants find themselves entangled with quickly become vicious circles. Thus, the creation of the artwork incorporated contextual elements in a process similar to desert tumbleweeds. The ecological purpose of this organic shape is to spread weeds and to disseminate biodiversity, with the wind helping the round mass to tumble. On the human side, winds of change turn into dangerous storms, threaten choice-less emigrants, and erect closed gates. *Painting / Mare Vostrum* is made of dust collected in the site itself but also brought by people working at Beaconsfield and its area. Walking to the gallery, I noticed that Graphite Square is further down this road, like a suggestion to use graphite as well. To make the artwork, liquid PVA was poured onto plastic sheets, then dirt, dust and graphite sprinkled on it. Once it had dried, I peeled the combined materials like dead skin after sunburn and stretched them on the barbed-wire.

### 6.4 Categories and the reading of relief

*Painting / Mare Vostrum*’s elements are idiosyncratic to art categories: the one dimensional barbed wire is a line that stands for drawing, the 2D torn paint for painting, and the 3D structure for sculpture. However, the way these elements interact with each other in the final installation shifts their identity within these categories. The wire is so long that it participates in the definition of the surface more than in the one of the contour. It creates the volume and the shape, being a scribble so obsessive and thick that it becomes a sculpture. The spines contribute to the meaningful texture. The
scraps of paint, once stretched on the wire barbs, become folded; they do not remain flat but become twisted and tensed in space. The ball is a compressed whole that reads more like an accumulation of parts than a solid material; the temporal process of its fabrication takes on the perception of the volume.

If all these elements shift continuously from one category to the other, can we speak about Painting / Mare Vostrum as relief? Here I suppose the relief appears in the metaphor rather than in the physical dimensions. The relief is the dark shadow on the floor when the body is delivered from the accumulated pain symbolised in the artwork. It is the alleviation that lifts from the burden of the barbed-wire once the artwork settles. The relief is to come but is has not arrived yet.

6.5 From dust to flat surface, to volume, to dust again

Dust is usually the end result rather than the start of a process. To begin with, it implicitly points to a temporal cycle. The tumbleweed shape also evokes dust and the dry plains. Though carrying potential germinations, it rolls on arid surfaces hostile to human life.

Graphite was mixed with the dust. I added this carbon derivative to darken the colour of paint and to better match my narrative. Also, it epitomises the category of drawing. Then, while the components of the skin-like paint were drying, I rolled the barbed-wire around itself. Next, I tore dark peelings of PVA from one barb to another. They were stretched like a canvas on a frame or hung like dried fish under the sun with the fragments swinging unstretched in a deadly expression.

The sphere became larger and heavier. To carry on with the installation alone became difficult; it had become a tumbleweed victim of its own nature. Although I was wearing body protection, the wire hurt me, making me aware of its vicious nature. The structure was crumbling under its own weight,
crushing the fragments of paint, grinding them back to dust.

Later on, during the exhibition period, we set up a workshop in Beaconsfield. It was part of *The Big Draw.*\(^{217}\) There, the art piece became the end of a pencil, used to draw on a roll of paper. All the participants pushed and pulled the barbed-wire mass on the paper, inverting the scale of tools and hands, and drawing laboriously with this metal point, reminding me of Lilliputians and Gulliver.

The continuity between the novel, the art context and the making has been uninterrupted. Process and scale were helping factors. The materials were the driving parameters. Likewise, human actions and will are constrained by the ratio of body to territory.

### 6.6 Myths, process and labour

*Painting / Mare Vostrum* pertains to the myths of Penelope and Sisyphus. Penelope weaves a piece of cloth during the day and un-weaves it during the night as a trick to turn down pretenders in the hope of seeing Ulysses return. Having a goal in mind, she incarnates the notion of process. Since *Painting/Mare Vostrum*’s first creation, I looked at this myth again during a 2017 residency at UCL Art Museum. Henry de Triqueti’s *Marmor Homericum* was my starting point. Two medallions in relief depict Penelope at her loom.\(^{218}\)

In another myth, Sisyphus struggles against absurdity and the absence of meaning in human life. Condemned to fruitless effort for having cheated death, he perpetually rolls uphill a giant stone, which runs down again at the end of the day. He embodies the notion of labour, the goal of which is

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\(^{218}\) See Appendix chapter 4, *Redress,* for a thorough description of my residency.
everlastingly postponed.

Historical differences and economical gaps between North and South remain absurdly unsolved. Ulysses finally reaches his destination, but the happy end of Penelope’s myth is not likely to happen soon, as *Mare Nostrum* has been abandoned. Despite their strength and evading strategies, desperate populations are bound to forever re-enact the myth of Sisyphus.

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Mare Vostrum*, detail, 2019, floor 1200 x 1200 cm, sphere 300 cm diameter, Musée des beaux-arts du Locle, CH.219

Idioms with *hand* should somehow express the importance of the sense of touch in our life. What does it mean to be *in good hands*? When does this happen and under what conditions? To be a *good hand* at something means to have an ability to do something well.

In November 2015, I instigated a drawing workshop open to a large

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219 This is the 2019 version of the installation retitled *Mare Vostrum.*
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All the participants rolled the artwork together. We moved the barbed wire ball across a length of paper, puncturing it and thereby creating a drawing. The ball was pulled and pushed by the hands of all the people in the room, gathering individual strength in the same direction in a positive Sisyphean image. Its 400 kilos and dangerous materiality rendered the piece emphatically tangible. At the end of the workshop, the shape of the ball had been altered, and it was difficult to put it back in place. However, its look contained a trace of the process, which enlivened and enriched its meaning. This altered its meaning in general but also specifically for the people who participated in the workshop and for me, who could see them relate to the reality of the sculpture’s materiality. Haptic sight and haptic touch were perceived both by the makers and the viewers as they became synchronised and combined.

Two days later, a participant wrote to Siderfin. In his email, he described what I call an active tangibility:

Imagine my surprise when I came and witnessed and took part on [sic] a performance piece created by Sophie Auslander, pushed by two aliens clothed in overalls and protective helmets and pulled by eager participants (of which I was one) across a roll of paper pierced by the barbed wire that surrounded the blob. And then, to hear pages from a book, which bled the blood of three strong women before armed [sic] with canes at the ends of which charcoal was strapped, in memory of Matisse, like aides to arthritic hands we drew our communal drawing sliced by red lines drawn in light emanating from your work. The red cross, fragile, wet through either repair or the fresh pain of paper scored by barbed wire, I'm not sure which, lay cut by the angled floor to ceiling, lonely, frightened in a corner. The hour

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220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
the performance lasted was the experience contemporary art has the power to give and left me walking home trying to process all the emotions aroused by the sensory bombardment I had suffered.\footnote{Email from a participant, addressed to Naomi Siderfin on 02.11.2015.}

Active tangibility, that is, an awareness of the tangible becoming a continuous dynamic within the act of making and receiving art, is something I am seeking throughout my practice.

The hand fosters intuitive explorations of limits, border, surface, contour, texture, thickness, porosity, connectedness and adjacent space. Its role in art is examined in parallel to the whole body, which is often the main scale by which to measure the world, though interestingly, it is a non-accurate measure. The skin is an interface, a membrane that is both the limit between the body and the world and a part of the body's entity. Through perceptive nerves and pores, the skin informs our understanding of the world. The hand, the epidermal part of the body, is also located at a limit point. Analogous to Land's End, it defines somehow the geographical end of our anatomy.
The political context in which we committed our hands, arms, and muscles to the act of making an art piece at Beaconsfield was trivial and not to be compared with the reality endured by migrants. Indeed, although the project had started long before the immigration crisis, it became problematic for me to continue with it, knowing that the exhibition was going to happen simultaneously to shipwrecks and people drowning; I felt I was being opportunistic. Also, the degree of tangibility of these tragic events contrasted sharply with the feeling of helplessness of people who were trying to save their lives.
7 SKIN

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Skin, 2014, Slade Research Centre, Woburn Place, London.

The artwork Skin emerged from a series of installations made of tracing paper, which changed over their different exhibition contexts. The first of this series is Blue Skin, which was shown in a multi-piece installation Studio Studioso.\(^{223}\)

Skin was installed at Woburn Slade Research Centre, London and was part of the exhibition IMMATERIAL, MPhil / PhD Research week, February 2014. Two pieces on two opposite walls comprised the installation. The two parts were each made of multiple parts, with one installed vertically on the wall as a dark second layer and the other piled horizontally in a white stack on a small shelf.

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\(^{223}\) See Appendix, chapters 2.6 and 3.9; Hotel Ausland, Musée d'Art de Pully, 2014, Gollion, Genève: Infolio, L'Apaye, pp.44-47.
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7.1 Materials

The material is aged tracing paper; this presents similar qualities to the wall's plaster layers, which are visible in the derelict staircase at Woburn Square. It refers to both architecture and to cartography. By covering the paper either with white gouache or with dark ink, I interfered with its translucency and increased its tendency to crack.

The first version (*Studio Studioso*) followed a specific protocol while for the new one, I wanted to carry on my investigations with tracing paper with a different approach to its materiality, which would drive the work. Richard Sennett has studied what constitutes material consciousness and material awareness and has written about skills and implicit and explicit knowledge.\(^{224}\) Reading his works, I observed how tracing paper cracks, and because it cracks spontaneously, I decided to make it crack intentionally.

However, if one aspect of the tracing paper was respected, the other, its translucency, was thwarted. In this way, I tried to get a tension in the artwork from its elements to their overall composition.

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I covered the translucent paper with dark grey ink on both sides and tore it into pieces. The borders of these fragments appeared white, revealing the paper’s original colour and identity. Installing the parts on the wall, I played with their thin, white edges, thus creating a drawing. The superimposed layers looked darker while in some places, the ink reflected the light and confused the reading. As I played with volumes, thickness and strata, the drawing became more sculptural.

### 7.2 Site specificity

During that week, I focused on the notion of research. Research is an attempt to penetrate the unknown, the obscure. *Skin* was an experiment to transcribe this quest while also creating worlds. Artists react to the world’s questions with artworks or, as Nelson Goodman would say, with “world-versions”. In that respect, this site had a lot of potential, as it inspired strong replies. I was struck by the dark derelict staircase with stained white walls and their peeled plaster skin.
I selected two colours echoing them. A white gouache with matte aspect and softness was reminiscent of plaster while a purple grey ink from Sennelier was dark enough to refer to the penumbra of a cave. Also, it contains shellac and therefore shines when kept concentrated. Matte and shiny are predicates that symbolise notions of absorption and reflection, which are the dialectics contained in learning, understanding and transmitting.

Hundreds of pieces of paper were torn apart into sizes to fit my suitcase, which is important, as I live and work abroad. On one of the walls, the white pieces were condensed in a pile, similar to my flight boarding passes, and stacked on my desk. In this part of the installation, the painted paper was no longer a flat surface; accumulated in a heap, it became a volume, thus giving me the image of a time thread reduced to a condensation of events.

On the opposite wall, the surface was fully invested, manifested, and displayed. The white edges of the torn dark papers showed lines and layers; they added to the duality of the work as both a drawing and a sculpture. Aspects borrowed from painting, like brush strokes, were also visible. However, the final outcome of the frontal dark wall did not evoke the original plaster cracks in the staircase; instead, materiality, gestures, time, and financial constraints drove the primal vision into a new work.
7.3 Persistence

This installation was made with persistence. Indeed, some people described it as obsessive, but I am not convinced by this word. I understand obsession as a kind of anxiety or mental illness whereas persistence relates more to an attempt to reach a goal and to be aware of the journey's parameters. I am keen to pay attention to these differences of meaning. One of the general tendencies I watch in my practice relates to the dialectics of control and letting things go and the usefulness of accidents and serendipity. Repetition is the method I use, which is associated with a sense of rehearsal. I repeat and I rehearse. I re-affirm and I secure. Control, tightness, closure, technique and repetition can be negative in the perspective of art's freedom. Probably these words come to mind because I use innumerable small parts in my constructions. The work is made all the way through in the same mode, and these parts have a strong relevance as they show multiple processes in their making and have multiple facets. For example, they might express individuality within a community. The problem is to avoid laborious expression. In other artworks made of elements, obsession does not come to mind so easily; nobody questions the innumerable brush marks in a Lucian Freud portrait, the bits of writing and cut outs in Roni Horn's drawings, or the bolts in Richard Deacon's sculptures.
7.4 Parts and whole

_Skin_ is outspokenly theatrical. It is made of things; it has been built up and shows off - it manifests both its artificiality and its making processes. The plentiful parts are gathered into a whole. Indeed, the notion of wholeness is crucial to examine the continuity or the constitution of a world made of continuous dimensions.

Another question emerged in the research week: What is the proper generic word for each element of _Skin_? Fragment? Unit? Module? Bit? Piece? Fractal? They all look alike but are not identical. All are permutable but not totally. “Unit” is too scientific, “module” is too architectural, and “fragment” is too literary, too archaeological, or too forensic. Thus, I prefer “part”. A part is an entity; it is associated with the notion of selfness while relating to a bigger whole, and while the whole is not complete without this part, the part can be read for itself. I am particularly interested in wholes composed of
many similar parts; similar parts are not necessarily the same or identical.

A part represents the notion of possibility or possible worlds. Part is part of de-part-ures. The layout, the organisation, the placement, the composition, and the combination of a part in relation to others are infinite. I choose to gather them in certain ways and not in others. The final construction is a kind of fixation, an apparition, and a representation, but it is also a temporary situation. In the meantime, it allows for a different reading that focuses on materiality and technique. It expresses the processes involved in the making as well as hypotheses and other combinations not yet exploited. It might express Deleuze's (after Spinoza) *potentia* and *potestas*, both in the same work. Potentia and potestas express different sorts of power, with one relating more to possibility and the other to strength and authority.

A part being multiplied gives a pattern. I find it intriguing, as it speaks about boundaries. A part is contained by the whole, but it is also a container. It has a shape. Accumulated, it contributes to shape a whole, whether a flat surface or a volume. In addition, a part is a clarification of what the work is made of. It is also an opening when it sits at the fringe of the work like a pattern. Patterns can also result from texture. Boundaries made of patterns are fluid and special, like in Escher drawings. They allow an imperceptible gradation from one situation to another.

### 7.5 Developments

Following the installation at Woburn Square, I continued my paper research in a museum exhibition. The allocated room was very low; therefore, instead of covering the wall, which would have drawn attention to the lighting appliances, exit signs, and other visual parasites, I decided to install the...
dark paper in a ribbon shape of 235 x 1130 cm, running on two adjacent walls and increasing the volume of the relief into the corner. Opposite the largest wall, I installed the piece in the same way, sticking the first layer to the wall with starch glue. Once the second installation was finished, I tore away all that I could. The torn papers were piled into two cardboard boxes I had designed according to the size of my usual luggage. Thus, the room had two strong dynamics: the first wall was centripetal and the opposite was centrifugal. The boxes in the middle were containers of two possible departures for the work.
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Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Skin*, 2014, Musée d'Art de Pully.
Image: Claude Cortinovis.
8 SAME OLD STORY

In *Same Old Story*, I shredded and wove papers into a map for a floor, a mat of words, the sense of which disintegrates with time. This rug was made for the little space at Roaming Room. Before being cut, a text and a wallpaper pattern were multi-photocopied on red and on white paper.

The text is a paragraph by Karl Kraus published in 1931 in *Die Fackel* while the floral pattern was found in the corridor of Roaming Room. The reconstructed text is visible in the weaving at the top left corner and the flower at the bottom right. It warns about the power of words and the danger of their misuse and hence their impact on our lives. The decorative pattern evokes a standard interior, the everyday life, the passing of the days.

I found the *Die Fackel* quotation in the contemporary French press. Having heard it twelve years before on a *France Culture* radio program, the sentence had remained in my mind ever since.

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226 This is an in situ work made for the 2017 PhD group exhibition *The Intercontinental* at Roaming Room, London.
227 *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*) was an Austrian satirical review published between 1899 and 1936, edited and written by the writer, journalist, poet, and satirist Karl Kraus. Born in Jičín, Czech Republic in 1874, Kraus died in Vienna, Austria in 1936.
228 See below for the original text.
229 *Ne tuez pas la parole!* Le Nouvel Observateur, 18.11.2014
http://teleobs.nouvelobs.com/polemique/20141118.OBS5320/ne-tuez-pas-la-parole.html
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My translation on cards displayed on the floor of Roaming room.

“When ideas are not right, words are wrong; when words are wrong, works do not take place; when works do not take place, morality and art do not thrive; when justice goes awry, the nation does not know where to lay foot nor hand. Thus do not allow anything to be wrong with words. They are the key to everything.” Karl Kraus, Die Fackel, Nr 852-856, Vienna: Verlag Die Fackel, 1931, p.60.
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Originally written by Confucius, it is cited by the philosopher Erich Heller.\(^{230}\) Indeed, Kraus mentions Heller's quotation in the 1931 mid-May edition of *Die Fackel*.\(^{231}\)

In 1931, Heller was a student. *Die Fackel* had a great influence on Ludwig Wittgenstein, Adolf Loos, and Arnold Schönberg and on the rest of the early Twentieth Century Viennese intelligentsia.\(^{232}\) Heller cited these words to Kraus to express his consideration of *Die Fackel*. Today, Kraus is

\(^{230}\) Ibid.

\(^{231}\) Kraus, K., *Die Fackel*, Nr 852-856, Vienna, 1931.

acknowledged to have been one of the rare examples in the Austrian press to fiercely and consistently oppose the rise of Nazism.

This artwork is both a text and a texture. Context, construction, and destruction, all shape it. It is made to be stepped on.

8.1 Text, textile, and texture

Kraus's citation has a universal echo that I wanted my work to address. One of the purposes of Same Old Story was to explore the continuous dimensions expressed by the nature of the textile itself.\(^{233}\) I intended to weave symbols, materiality and meaning together to create a historical dialogue across periods, to bridge the mental self to the architectural context, and to let emerge a work from the words of the text in a shape that underlines their specific meaning.

I wanted to make my own fabric in order to weave my concepts into a physical piece as opposed to starting with an existing cloth. Having a background in textile design and specialising in printing and finishing, I could foresee the difference that my own creation would make.\(^{234}\)

There is a link between cartography and textile that can be traced through the history of cartography. World maps with coordinate systems were invented in the Second Century with Ptolemy's Geography.\(^{235}\) They are similar to the mesh of fishermen's nets. In the Renaissance, Alberti invented practical geometry and land surveying.\(^{236}\) Then, in the Fifteenth Century,

\(^{233}\) See chapter 7.2.
\(^{235}\) Map: exploring the world, London: Phaidon Press, 2015, pp.7;139.
the same trigonometrical components were developed in Vienna using a piece of string as a drawing and measurement tool.\textsuperscript{237} The CAD (computer aided design) mesh to print maps in relief reminds me of a textile warp and weft.\textsuperscript{238} Also, given the recent availability of the whole planet’s surface provided by Google Earth in a few clicks, it seems relevant to remember that digital technologies originated in the Jacquard loom invention of punched cards. Indeed, one of the earliest implementations of a digital system is attributed to Joseph-Marie Jacquard of France in 1801, the Jacquard Loom. He used a punched card to control the weaving actions of a loom, which introduced much more intricate patterns in woven cloth. Jacquard’s approach was a variation on the original punched-card design of Jacques de Vaucanson in 1745.\textsuperscript{239} Jacquard textiles are known for their patterns created in reliefs as opposed to printed on the surface of the fabric. They are often reversible. Dots, data, grids, warps and wefts organise the understanding of our world imprinting a textile structure to it.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{CAD-software-Rhino.png}
\caption{CAD software \textit{Rhino}, see footnote 239.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{238} See, for instance, \textit{Rhino - Using Patch to Map a Terrain With a Point Cloud}, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTubIMSMiOw Accessed 18 June 2018
The projections of the Flemish geographer Gerardus Mercator depicted the fabric of the world. He inscribed in the title of his first atlas the terms fabrica mundi (the fabrication of the world in Latin). Medrazza and Neilson note that the concept of fabrica mundi resonates with the celebrated image of the homo faber fortunae suae (“man as master and creator of his own destiny”), employed by these thinkers to designate the liberation of “man” from the subjugation to natural and transcendent forces. It is salutary to keep in mind that Gerardus Mercator, the first “scientific” cartographer, also mobilised this concept in the title of his Atlas Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura.

Both fabric and fabrication derive from faber meaning worker.

As I have always been fascinated by the image of us as the co-workers or the co-fabricators of the Earth, my practice strives to express the craftsmanship of this planetary work as much as its artistic dimension. We alter the relief with dexterity and skills, but also, we construct it with a vision. Maps are a testimony to the fact that geography invents the world. They are designed for actions on the Earth’s crust. Fabrication has this double meaning I am interested in. Fabrication is crucial in cartography, a discipline used as much to depict as to create. In addition, maps are political items. The lines, names, and words on the map unravel historical threads. Kraus' words expressed his anxiety of seeing the tongue of the Third Reich invading the German language as it was annexing territories. Likewise, “a language is a dialect with an army and a marine”, noted marshal Hubert Mezzadra, S., Neilson, B., “Fabrica mundi: producing the world by drawing borders”, in Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, p. 27.

Mercator, G., Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes de fabrica mundi et fabricati figura, Duisburg:1595.
8.2 Continuous dimensions

The earliest maps were probably drawn into the dirt of the Earth itself. These maps were scratched onto the surface of what they were mapping, drawing a relief on the geological relief they were referring to. Soon, Egyptian and Greek goddesses and Christian saints participated in the history of the world's creation via textile symbols. Neith, Athena, Penelope, Ariadne, and Veronique - all express the continuity in life, notions of process, orientation or tangibility resorting to the thread, the strand, the woven fabric, the wool ball or the veil. Fabric is a tight grid that maps the territory. Mappa mundi means the tablecloth of the world.\textsuperscript{242} It is the literal image of a fabric that covers the topographies and protects them. In his 1893 text \textit{Sylvie and Bruno Concluded}, Lewis Carroll wrote about the paradox of the complete map, a concept that will inspire Umberto Eco and Luis Borges a century later:

"That's another thing we've learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we've carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"

"About six inches to the mile."

"Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"

"Have you used it much?" I enquired.

\textsuperscript{241} Laponce, Jean, \textit{Loi de Babel et autres régularités des rapports entre langue et politique}, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006.

\textsuperscript{242} The word map derives from Latin mappa meaning tablecloth.
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“It has never been spread out, yet,” said Mein Herr: “the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.”

Since humans settled and cloth was woven, maps have been unfolded on tables to plan fortifications and wars. From a fabric that wraps the world and registers it to a fabrication of the world that a map induces, textile and geography have worked hand in hand to understand, possess, protect, and act upon topographies. However, textile is mathematical and physical while maps are mathematical and political.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude have literally wrapped portions of land with textile, thus creating powerful images of mappa mundi wraps, somehow claiming back the virginity of the Earth's crust and depriving it of human signage, colours, or recognition. In this way, the relief becomes predominant, underlined by ropes and strings, with folds reinforcing structural lines and shadows. In the artwork of Christo and Jeanne Claude, it is the blanket which triggers the artistic dimension by colliding two images into a single piece. A damp fabric covers a small clay sculpture, which is being shaped during the day on a stool; this protective textile preserves humidity before the completion of the artwork. The other blanket is the one that wraps the planet to measure and master it; it is the tablecloth of the geographer, his mappa mundi. It also reminds us of the degree to which maps are subjective constructions, obliterating details and selecting some facts to the detriment of others.

Google Earth has changed the paradigm of mappa mundi but not the one of fabrica mundi. The Earth's crust is left bare and observable in its tiniest

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See also Appendix, chapter 4, *Redress, Mappa, for image*. 206
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details. This would satisfy Eco’s frustration with the map. The Italian writer
describes how the unpredictable changing nature of a territory, like its
physical or demographical expansion, for instance, makes it impossible for
it to be faithfully transcribed onto paper.244 Before him, José Luis Borges, in
his short-story *On the Exactitude of Science*, part of *A Universal Story of
Infamy* wrote about the relation between map and territory.245 In the style of
a forgery, Borges imagines a geographer of the Seventeenth Century,
Suárez Miranda, and his scientific essay “Viajes de varones prudentes”,
purportedly from *Travels of Prudent Men*, Book Four, Ch. XLV, Lérida, 1658:

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that
the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the
map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those
Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers
 Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire,
and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations,
who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears
had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some
Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of
Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are
Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all
the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Though all is mapped already and territories fully observable, we still need
guidance and awareness to navigate the ocean of visual information. The
fascinating satellite cameras enable us to zoom in, penetrate the superficial
view and unfold the relief, but satellites themselves are the eyes and hands
of great political powers. These contemporary panopticons can be taken for

244 Eco, U, *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 1995
pp. 95–106.
245 Borges, J.L, *A Universal History of Infamy* (translated by Norman Thomas de
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research-empowering tools but also for mute and unpredictable threats. Satellites habilitate new types of weapons, reaching distant supposed targets with drones. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of UCL, designed the panopticon based on an idea by his brother Samuel. This online article of the Guardian explains:


Bentham was regarded as the founder of utilitarianism and a leading advocate of the separation of church and state, freedom of expression and individual legal rights. And now, from beyond the grave, his cadaver contains a webcam that records the movements of its spectators and broadcasts them live online, part of UCL’s PanoptiCam project which tests, amongst other things, surveillance algorithms.

Nonetheless, gaining the totality of visual information about the Earth’s relief has not solved the question of interpretation and manipulation. Human beings first discover the world by touch; visual exploration comes later in the development. Words and language appear later still. Though taken for granted, data still need to be processed and analysed. Otherwise, as Kraus noted in 1931, “The nation does not know where to lay foot nor hand”.

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246 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon
“The controversial U.S. drone strike program in the Middle East aims to pinpoint and kill terrorist leaders, but new documents indicate that a staggering number of these “targeted killings” affect far more people than just their targets.”
The loom's weft and warp create fabrics with varying degree of texture. These are never completely smooth; even non-woven textiles that aggregate fibres in all directions show a perceptible texture which appeals to haptic senses.

Viktor Lowenfeld's art and education research postulated that “seeing may...become an inhibitory factor when forced upon an individual who does not use his visual experiences for creative work.”249 Both haptic and optic touch are important in my creations. In their making I use both senses of touch as well as words that become part of their DNA. As a thread is spun and woven, the process follows a continuous cycle. It blends touch, words, and ideas. Like felt fibres, art language and textual language are interlaced.

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Same Old Story, detail, 2017, inkjet on paper, collage, 160 x 200 cm.


“Victor Lowenfeld has claimed that the nature of our responses to the plastic arts depends largely on whether we are haptic or visual types.” Rogers, L.R, Relief Sculpture, The Appreciation of the Arts, 8, London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 7.
If, as Kraus says, “The words are the keys to everything” and because words command ideas as maps to construct the reality of the world, I am examining how my own ideas emerge and what the texture of these words is. It seems to me that often in my practice, haptic touch makes new words appear and then the words become thinking. Physical intuitions drive my creation. Later, I analyse the outcome, put it into words, and carry on working according to my temporary conclusions, but the order may well change. I hear striking radio programs; I read books and talk to friends. All have an impact on my work. My material relationship to the world, which my works articulate both textually and in texture, is paramount to my being.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word text comes from the Latin textus (u-stem) (for) style. It is a tissue of a literary work (Quintilian Language). Text, texture and textile share the same Latin root. however, through history, the meaning of words slowly shifts in ways that are traceable but that change dangerously. In particular, the manipulation of words by political agendas imprint new senses on words. The fabric of the words sounds renewed, and the text they create seems promising though it is always re-enacting the same old story of the world.

### 8.3 The impact of words

Two different texts are ingrained within this report. The first is the text which you are reading: the English fibre and texture that I am attempting to weave. The second is the under-text, the French, which is more the weft and warp, the matrix of the report, my cultural background. Nevertheless, all has been written directly in English.

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251 Georges Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty Four and his “newspeak” is probably the best description of the manipulation of words and meaning. Orwell, Georges, Nineteen Eighty Four, London: Secker and Warburg Publisher, 1949.
Being foreign to English makes me often feel awkward, but also it drives me to question most of the words I use. The linguistic material is weighted, compared, and addressed. My mother tongue would not produce the same research on either the theoretical or the practical side. I became a proper Ausländer in my own creation, an outcome which I anticipated when applying to the program in the UK but to an extent that I was not fully aware of.252

Kraus says that words are the “key to everything”, which I agree with. However, I would rather say that the texture of the words is decisive. Their relief is what is understood and remembered. Words are labels stuck onto things and affects. I have been given attributes over the years that I still question and argue with. Words mean actions and consequences. Innocent words are pronounced in contexts that displace their meaning. Words become political with usage. Words are materials that affect the making of an artwork. However, over-repeated words and over-printed sentences no longer have meaning. They become a decorative pattern like part of a rug we step on, making it flatter and flatter, torn back to pieces.

252 Foreigner in German, my surname.
8.4 Permanence and transformation

_Same Old Story_ is fragile; it is analogous to what we learn from history, for example, that Nazism has been defeated. However, what we have learnt from darker times is never incised in marble. Generations pass, and memory alters. Words are repeated though their relief fades; contrast disappears rubbed day after day by new traumas though it might be argued that new reliefs and contrasts replace others. In the same way, the
transformative process of the artwork is paramount. Both the fabrication and becoming of the woven paper are obvious. This textile piece is handmade; it will disintegrate. Its value resides elsewhere: in the words themselves; in the effort of reading them and making sense out of them; in the stepping action that signifies the indifference; and in the colour, which is the element that will fade but will still be remembered.
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9 ARCHISCULPTURES

Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, Archisculpture, 2015, ink on paper, various size.

This series is the expression of my ideal studio. After trials in stiffer materials, I developed a matrix in paper. Though the cut shape is the same, each exemplar installed on the wall is different from the others.

My art studio is a playful space. It transforms in the same time as new pieces emerge in it. This playfulness shows in the artwork itself. The evolving container in turn influences the art it hosts. However, my workplace is sometimes overwhelmed by the creations it holds, and thus I had to create new ideal studios.
9.1 Art as reaction

I make works that have an architectural aspect but that also can be incorporated into architecture as public art. Constructions and their correlated regulations strictly frame the commissions of art in architecture. *Kunst am Bau* is the name of Art in Architecture programs in Switzerland. It is a specific understanding of art in relation to architecture. Blending with the context, interactive in one way or another, it has a social function in opposition to a sole decorative dimension. It is supposed to be closer to the idea of construction than to only of statuary. Sometimes, I am invited as a juror for these commissions, which is helpful in giving a better understanding of the impositions on art practices. In such contexts, artists are given programs to follow as well as maquettes supplied by the architects.

Even if some of my experiences have been happy, the situation is sometimes conflicting. The artist must claim her place while pleasing both the state’s demand and the architects’ ego. The handed-out maquettes are rarely inspiring. Indeed, architects often consider *Kunst am Bau* a nuisance and so rarely encourage artists to fully invest in their project. Rather, they drive the art away from their own program to ensure it remains as unobtrusive as possible or even disconnected from the architecture.

These considerations pushed me to imagine my own maquettes. Architectural models are maps; the measures and figures of my Swiss studio were transcribed onto paper and changed into imaginary buildings not to be erected on the ground. The series started with clay and then moved on to lighter materials.

A studio emerges from scratch through gestures. Drawn, cut, and pasted lines stand for *a room of one’s own*, for a container that provides content and infinite possibilities of existence. These maquettes are my self-portraits. As self-definitions, they aim at opening up rather than confining and
controlling. In front of these, I realised that the predominant stiffness of the building I had in my mind had faded in favour of a questioning about space, weight, matter, time, and light. A dialogue between a set of rectangles and different combinations thereof appears. Difference, repetition, and shift of dimensions are explored in a playful way.

9.2 Flexibility and play

The Archisculptures series is constructed in Tervakoski, a very thin material used as tracing paper by architects. Its quality is close to white tissue paper. The contours are inked in either dark blue ink or Indian red, and I folded the walls. As the paper is too thin for the size of its cut surface, nothing stands; the maquette appears flabby, and its translucency lets the coloured contours show through. Lines and surfaces blend in as do volumes and surfaces. In the last pieces of the series, I have avoided folding the lines, using the area of the paper as the start and end point; gravity makes it fold instead.

Archisculpture solves practical issues: questions of storage, transport, and shipment. Easily piled in drawers, transported within a folder or shipped in envelopes, the series is light, resistant and mobile. Flexibility appears in the installation itself, too. A single architectural plan generates many different shapes. These maquettes are either directly pinned or stuck with starch glue directly onto the wall and various elevations and rises on the wall change with people passing by, as a gentle breeze temporarily lifts the paper.

Paper Archisculpture expresses the transition from an ideal impossible to grasp to the realisation of an artwork, that is, an intangible goal actualised into self-expression. Not only does my ideal studio always transform in my mind, making it impossible to arrest a final shape, but even when fixed into a final plan, financial issues, strength and skills stand as the next barrier to its actual construction. The container cannot shelter anything anymore but
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itself becomes the artwork. It is the metaphor for the artist's ambition that invades her space and for her imagination that crosses the walls for a better becoming. The series is a type of collision, an absorption of one by the other, a contraction of the contained and the containing, and of the signified and the signifying in a thin, small and spatial drawing.

9.3 Shifts in categories

Contrary to sculpture in the round, reliefs may frustrate the viewer as their backs are inaccessible. The urge to turn a relief around comes from the reflex of a sculptor who does not have the same impulse in front of a painting. Contrary to what the history of art postulates, reliefs are not sub-sculptures nor loud paintings; instead, they have their own categorial characteristics. The term relief sculpture used to define the category is in that respect quite evocative. For instance, L.R. Rogers, right from the first paragraph of his book Relief Sculpture, says:

Most sculptures may be readily classified as either in relief or in the round. These two traditional main branches of the art of sculpture were being practised side by side 20,000 years ago but they do not appear to have originated at the same time. The evidence that has been discovered so far points to the conclusion that relief did not, and perhaps could not, emerge until the arts of sculpture in the round and drawing were both well established.²⁵³

Relief appeared once sculpture in the round and drawing had settled, and both contribute crucially to relief. However, this does not explain why we should see relief as a sub-category of sculpture. Painting is accepted as a first-order category even if it requires drawing and spatial skills too.

Therefore, I propose to divert the dissatisfaction by making artworks that

²⁵³ Rogers, L. R., op. cit.

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exchange this frustration with puzzlement, by rendering explicit the tension between what is visible and hidden and by confusing categorial assumptions. The concept of tangibility - optical touch and haptic touch - can help in that diversion.

In addition to drawing a plan and sculpting an imaginary life, the series Paper Archisculpture introduces a third historical category: architecture. This art category was considered part of the arte del disegno in the Renaissance with sculpture (arts of volume) in opposition to drawing, painting, and print (arts of surface).254 Then, in the Eighteenth Century, Kant associated architecture (Plastik) with the two other bildenden Künste: Skulptur and Malerei (painting). In the Nineteenth Century, Hegel identified five different types of art that he classified according to the power of expression and materiality on a double-scale organisation going from the least expressive but most material art to the most expressive but least material art. Architecture came first.255 Today, there are ten different arts that are recognised as such. Architecture still sits in the first position on the scale of Twentieth Century arts, coming before sculpture and the visual arts (painting and drawing).256 However, it is important to note that these categories have become obsolete. In practice, they blend together without boundaries and borrow from each other. Their market value, though, still reflects historical categories.

While drawings are usually displayed vertically, similar to sculptures, architectural maquettes are usually horizontally installed on plinths, with

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https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classification_des_arts#cite_ref-
Accessed 24 June 2018
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
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side documentation and explanatory drawings on the walls. Viewed from above, and displayed at waist height, they lead us to bend to see the elevations. *Archisculpture* merges the architectural presentation with the vertical hanging used for drawings. By understanding the series as relief and therefore attaching it to the wall, the reading code of the volume becomes pictorial. Thus, architecture becomes relief in an inverted reflection of reliefs attached to facades.

This observation made me question the series title itself, should not it be *Archidrawing* instead? Also, suddenly, I wondered if my research on degrees of tangibility might actually not be embodied in architecture, but in the category of actual projections of the architect’s mental constructions onto the surface of the Earth?

### 9.4 Lightness and light

In that series, gravity sculpts the shape and draws the shadows. The overall arrangement is never fully mastered, as the paper was not meant to be used in this way. Pinned to the vertical plane, the material's translucency lets us guess what the back of the artwork looks like. The frailty does not match the signified, which is supposed to be built for real and to last. The plastic conversation between what recedes and what projects energises the dimensional dialogue. Lines inked on the edges of the plane stick to the wall as much as they fly in the space. They affirm both the consistent surface of the paper shape against the vertical solid plane of the room and the many subtle varying sets of physical dimensions, such as the lifted parts and curved inclinations. The dark blue lines become crucial in the articulation of physical continuity amongst parts, which then acts as a unifying force of the artwork and of the room.

The orthogonal and rigid drawing of the primary architectural plan, once

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257 See chapter 8.8 for additional development about light and shadow.
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apposed to the wall, looks all at once more vulnerable and adaptive. Depending on light, the white of the paper blurs with the white wall, but the shadows make the relief exist as such. Fine observation reveals where the work starts and where it takes off from the wall. For this reason, Paper Archisculpture is best seen in daylight, as it is transformed by it, with the light expanding or shrinking its dimensions.

9.5 Considerations about travel

All of my artworks have to be easily transportable due to the repeated commuting from London to Switzerland. Indeed, not only the artworks but also my workplace regularly travels with me across the Channel. Though my Swiss studio differs to the one in the UK, an important part remains contained in my brain, my computer, and the Cloud. In this format, my workplace stays with me continuously even when I fly and return. Because of this, the pendulum's motion is as crucial a factor in this series as it is in my life. The balance emerges in a united symbol: a Paper Archisculpture.

In that sense, each piece of this series is similar to musical scores or to allographic arts, or as Bruno Latour says, to “objects which have the properties of being mobile but also immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another.”

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Historical reliefs are often attached to monuments and are often carved in stone or marble. They are detailed, heavy, and massive. Designed in their time to be perceived from afar and from ground level, the contour guaranteed the permanence of the reading and helped in restoring faded colours. *Paper Archisculptures* are the opposite. The artworks do not belong to the wall; they just lean on it. With all details washed away, a solitary outline is inscribed. The contour displays variations in space. The thin lightness of the ground cannot be carved; it only folds and curls to become a relief, like a washing line between two houses.

When I started the series, I was tired of monumentality. I had almost completed a public art commission which had taken me four years and which was massive in all respects.²⁵⁹ Also after visiting many exhibitions,

²⁵⁹ *Ways of Worldmaking*, see chapter 4.
the image of the dormant stocks of museums suddenly frightened me. Artists are supposed to be visionary and propose viable futures to society. Instead, we contribute to the material congestion of the planet. Therefore, in response, I wanted to explore compact and lightweight propositions. Since this time, my design has favoured modular designs, foldable pieces or recycling strategies.

In my undergraduate studies, a painting would begin small in size. The difficulty lay in increasing its dimensions without losing impact and quality. Wandering through art exhibitions, I often question the sizes of artworks. How would this painting or that sculpture look if it were shrunk to a twentieth of its size? What would be the strength? Teachers know how to speak quietly in a noisy classroom to re-capture their pupils’ attention. Similarly, quietness and humble sizes seem necessary in the current art context.

9.7 Inspirational works

Architecture sometimes borrows from art practices, and artists may construct their art with an architectural accent, but the incorporation and the full understanding of one into the other seems rare. The misunderstanding of the working methods of each contributor to a public art project fosters tensions. However, the communication between artists and architects improves collaboration. Should we therefore invent a common term for "art and/in architecture"? Would it be conceivable to create competitions where an artist would be involved in the same way as a landscape artist?260

Archisculptures relate in some points to the Endless House 1958-59 project of Frederick J. Kiesler. Kiesler was an architect, theoretician, theatre designer, artist, and sculptor. The merging of these identities is clear in his

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260 My translation. This reflection comes from notes taken at a seminar attended in 2012 at Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais, CH. See also: https://www.letemps.ch/lifestyle/lart-habite-lespace-public Accessed 24 June 2018
work; as he said, “Life is short, art is long, architecture endless.” Kiesler coined the term *city in space*, which is inspirational for an artist who commutes between cities, bearing in mind all the places in these spatial shifts.

After coming to the concept of *endless theatre*, Kiesler invented *correalism* and the *endless house*. Kiesler asserted: “We live through correalism. Science, art and philosophy try to make us understand this fact, more and more, richer and richer. All our being is conditioned by a consciousness of correalism.”

Regarding this, Monika Pessler, director the Freud Museum in Vienna and former director of the Frederick Kiesler Foundation, says

> Correalism, the theory, implies that there are energetic forces which influence our actions and even our feelings and that the mobile form, the biomorphic form of the object bears the essential aspects of his (Kiesler) theory, or exemplifies them, namely change and adaptation. This endlessness also implies something like an open-ended artwork.

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261 Frederick Kiesler - “Life is short, Art is long, Architecture endless”, https://vimeo.com/122899505

262 Ibid.

263 Ibid.
The open-endedness of the artwork is at stake in *Paper Archisculpture*. The representation of the studio evolves with my being, my mental state, my body’s ageing, and my spatial shifts. The imaginary space I am designing transforms every day. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to build it in paper than in full scale and concrete. As Kiesler noticed, these architectures are submitted to other forces that imprint new temporal shapes on them: one wall falls, another curls. Thus, natural forces wring the artwork, which in turn makes them tangible.

Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau* is another important reference to this series. Schwitters always had this tension between an ideal created “studio” or workspace/home that was an expression of his creativity, but he was always frustrated by the fact that he had to flee. Whatever situation he found himself in, he seems to have remade himself a *Merzbau* – even if it meant using porridge to sculpt with whilst in an internment camp on the Isle of Man. *Archisculpture* could be taken as a *Merzbau of the mind*. 
I am interested in creating and observing sculptural lines and drawn volumes. Indeed, architecture is by essence the art of drawing volumes. Erected buildings project lines from the ground to the sky, and the shadows they cast onto us give a sense of scale. They produce sensorial inputs like coolness; in the midst of summer, they give shelter and rest. They confuse visual details but also style cities. The angular shadows are cast in different ways in New York, Amsterdam, Helsinki, or Algiers, in winter or in summer.
Not only the trajectory of the sun in the sky but also humidity, size, shape, and colour of the buildings and pavements alter the nature of the penumbra. Monumental installations have played with such parameters: a Richard Serra or a Daniel Buren does not draw the same type of trace on the concrete streets.

The interception of light differs during daytime or night. At night, the artificial lights of cities create shadows too but these are more readily annihilated by other lights that come from counter directions. Their nightly colour and intensity change the perception of the relief. They also confuse birds in their migration. Disorientation is the consequence of flattening the contrast while flashes capture the attention.

The inverse is the quietly and smoothly lit relief illuminated by the moon or stars. The geological elevations are perceptible in the dark. Spending the night in the mountains and in the countryside made me realise how the noise of artificial lights turns the earthly landscape into a flat graphic design.

Darkness can structure but likewise destabilise spatial organisation and social relations. Obscurity and its corollary lighting condition our behaviour in urban environments. Recreations, nightclubbing, and parties flourish in obscurity, as do illicit practices. In addition to sensory perspectives and experiences, lighting at night brings into play commerce, moral values and political domination. Light defines relief, and relief is light as the French expression mettre en relief (to emphasise) suggests. Side-light increases the perception of relief. Various lengths of waves create different hues though texture, and reliefs are better perceived when the

264 «Villes dans le noir», CESSMA, Axe «Production, politiques et pratiques de la ville», URMIS, groupe Villes en constitution, Université Paris Diderot, 12 October 2016. 

265 Ibid.
artwork is monochrome.

When we encounter Romanesque reliefs today, they are monochromatic, but they were painted in bright colours in a longing for pictoriality. Relief in stone preserved the shapes and contours of coloured areas exposed to weather elements. The art of relief reinforced the lines in incisions, thus improving the projection of other parts.

Recurrently, the illusory plane of painting merges with the actuality of sculpture in a relief artwork. The lines, incisions, and projections of a relief are both virtual and real; they signify and are signified. That collusion bridges mind and expression: the human inscription is witnessed and acted upon the crust.

Recently, I have changed the inked outline into a dark surfacing, and the dialectical flux is inscribed on the wall. Graphite covers the paper, but it overflows. There are two shadows overlapping: the shadow cast on the wall and the shadow drawn onto it. The structures of my ideal studio caress the room, projecting their dark traces on the vertical plane. Hence, they prove their existence, be it present or future.

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10 CONCLUSION

10.1 Process

Puzzled by how touch falls apart once an artwork is exhibited, I came to examine how the notion of tangibility can be used to create, analyse, and receive contemporary art in its various contexts of presentation. I have based my observations on my own experience of art-making and my reflections on art practices.

Soon, I noticed that what we usually call relief-sculpture is the category of artworks that could best provide answers to my questions, which are grounded in the history of art, philosophy, and art. As my methodology is qualitative and my research practice-based, I made pieces in relief playing with the whole dimensional gamut a relief can offer. At an early stage of my study, these material explorations pointed me to their metonymical nature and potential. My reliefs became transcriptions of geological parts and of my own position and actions on the planetary integument. Also, when my reliefs were touched, they seemed to bridge the space between the mental self and the material world. They were both themselves continuous in dimensions as well as connecting me to the geological relief through their materiality, structure and texture.

I realised that what we call relief sculpture had been overlooked over the years though it had been a major art category in previous centuries. Therefore, I tried to identify the reasons for this recent neglect through my own practice and by the study of reliefs by other artists. First, I circumscribed in my practice what the notion of category means in a contemporary art context and then set up strategies to draw new attention to relief artworks in relation to the geological relief. For instance, I thought to change the terms we use in their description.

I discovered that reliefs articulate their sets of dimensions gradually in a
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continuous way and that pure volume and plain surface are its mere degenerated extremities. Their usual inclusion in the reading of reliefs has transformed these into ambiguous items, thus contributing to their oversight. I concluded that reliefs need to be observed without the gaze of a sculptor or a painter but with the one of a maker of reliefs in order to be re-established as a major category.
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The aim of my research has been to provide readers and artists with a tactile analysis in complement to the one by sight in the apprehension of artworks. From the various art projects described in the preceding pages, I inferred that not only the viewer but also the toucher completes the artwork. Therefore, I compiled a tactile toolbox to use for the making as well as for the theoretical analysis. My tools are continuity in dimensions, tensive dialogue between frustration and desire generated by an invisible back and, finally, the notion of ambivalence.

The proposition that relief artworks are metonymical objects for the Earth's crust points to our contribution in the constant transformation of the relief. Indeed, the research process made me understand that creating reliefs is a way for me as artist to find an appropriate distance between myself and the world. Thus, the art-making needs to be revised and adapted from case to case because that distance is ever changing.

In terms of personal contribution to knowledge, I believe that my research facilitates a new understanding of what contemporary reliefs entail. The richness of the category has been unveiled in the report and demonstrated by my artworks. It has shown that the gaze laid onto this category has to change; this can be done without promoting the idea of category itself. It is a radical new perspective on the perception of reliefs, which were previously considered minor in-betweens. Instead, it proposes that reliefs are made of rich and complex spaces that are continuous in terms of sets of dimensions not only physically but also symbolically.

Also, in my public commissions, relief and the notion of tangibility have proved to be important epistemological vehicles that foster proper actual interactions with the users, such interactions being increasingly required in Swiss cultural percent programs.

Furthermore, in terms of language, I have established a distinction between tangibility and tactility and between ambivalence and ambiguity. Other
specific words have been detailed in the report; they all contribute to a re-
consideration of the richness of reliefs.

10.2 Conclusions after hypothesis

Tangibility, used in this research in turn as a notion, a tool, and a method,
has been revealed to be a fruitful way to apprehend my artworks in their
making and in their reading. In this way, I have discovered more dimensions
in my reliefs through haptic touch and prehension (materiality, techniques,
reconnection to memories, vision for future developments). Furthermore,
the manipulation of my work by others has also informed my personal
understanding of what I have made. Thus, I became an observer of how
people touch my work.

The language currently used to describe reliefs contributes to the tendency
to undervalue them. Conversely, we overlook reliefs because we are used
to this poor vocabulary in their approach. Therefore, there is a need to stop
comparing relief to sculpture or to painting and instead to free it from its
sister categories. The observation has to be done from and for a relief
viewpoint.

Words such as in-between, ambiguous, half-half or relief-sculpture can
beneficially be replaced by notions like substantial space, ambivalence,
gradience, relief and continuous dimensions. This vocabulary will induce a
shift in the understanding of reliefs; in the same way that it has proved
powerful and productive for my own practice and reflection, it will hopefully
contribute to their making and to their analysis.

In art literature, reliefs are described as having a fixed viewpoint, but this is
actually incorrect, as this viewpoint is only limited to 180° degrees. It is a
constraint that can be used as a creative trigger not only in the development
process but also in the reception of the work.
10.3 Concluding artwork:

_Ways of Worldmaking / Self Portrait_

_Ways of Worldmaking / Self portrait_ is the last piece completed during my PhD research and was meant to be its practical conclusion. Made for a disused observatory near the Slade School of Fine Art's entrance, it is a site-specific artwork. It is the mobile version and continuation of the permanent public art commission _Ways of Worldmaking_ built in Renens in 2016 described in chapter 4.

The first version had shaped my thesis and was to be the focus of my viva. However, it was impossible to move. Also, mere documentation seemed counterproductive, as my main point is tangibility. I wanted to provide a
direct access to my work in this final exhibition. Consequently, I decided to build a new library made according to the Slade's context and architecture.

*Ways of Worldmaking / Self portrait* has two components. One is MDF, and the other is my bibliography, that is, all the books which have contributed more or less directly to my research. These are books I read for this thesis; books that are part of my art DNA; books that I read in my leisure time over these past years; books that I flipped through; leaflets from shows I saw; press articles about me or my work; and books about people I like, I am inspired by, or who are part of my life. This artwork is a panorama of my research, and it can be experienced superficially or dived into. It is academic research, but also it is autobiographical; that is, it is highly personal in the same way life and art converge. It has something to do with the “Museum of Innocence” of Orhan Pamuk or Thomas Hirschhorn’s monuments to thinkers he admires. This artwork is a symbol, a talisman, and a matrix.

With this new version, my theoretical structure becomes tangible, physically present, and available in the same space and time. It allows theories to be shaped into a sculpture, thus intertwining the practice and the reflections, the readings and the outcomes, the method and the context.

The North astronomical observatory, built in 1904, has its symmetrical counterpart, which is also disused. They both frame the portico like two ocular globes protected in their eyelids. It is a perfect architecture to express the academic research and the artist acting from and on or for the transformation of established grounds.

This new version of *Ways of Worldmaking* is the index of my six years of research. It is a partial index, as books and materials have been forgotten, some texts read online have not been printed out, and some books

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borrowed from libraries were not available to be shown. An eighth part comes from UCL library. Liz Lawes, librarian at UCL Art Libraries, has helped and facilitated the loan for the exhibition. Once the books are returned to the shelves, their cases will remain empty. These voids are important, as they become an integral part of the lively fabric of the research. Furthermore, the drawing made to produce the artwork was the basis used to design the map, which is an additional indexical element of the installation.

Books are pointers to my series; some are specific to a single series and others to many of them. These pointers do not need to be explicitly mentioned, as I wish the artwork to stimulate new ideas for the visitors. However, written notes in these books are quite explicit about the work they relate to.

The artwork is obviously my archive. It contains most of my research’s bibliography and a folder that holds the preparatory material and documentation of the artwork it sits in. Also, frequently on the book's first page, I have written the date when I first read it. There are plenty of bookmarks, comments and annotations, underlined paragraphs, as well as forgotten cooking recipes, Christmas cards, photographs, to-do lists and children’s drawings. Each book is signed with an embossing stamp and a number that makes it possible to locate the book in its case thanks to the map.
The artwork, in addition to being an index, a pointer, and an archive, was also a practical means to organise my viva and its conversation. I have always found it easier to talk about my research when I am physically close to it. As I needed to invigilate my work for the whole exhibition time, it became my studio, with me studying the texts at hand. Also, the many visitors' views and questions coming from different backgrounds functioned
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as various mock vivas.

*Ways of Worldmaking / Self portrait* is not only tangible but also penetrable. In the observatory, the eight panels are hinged together in an octagonal shape in an echo of the hosting site. The eighth panel blocks the way; this induces a penetration of the installation and forces the visitor to walk backwards, to apprehend the artwork again, and to give it a second chance, in the same way that research evolves.
The observatory is small, almost like a doll’s house. When we get into this architecture, we become very aware of the threshold, of what is outdoors or indoors. The second level of penetration is of the shape of the artwork. The third level is the entering of the depth of its components: the books. By taking a book and flipping through it, the visitor penetrates the deep space of the book's author as well as my personal space. I did not expect that feeling, but I found myself very much exposed when people came, touched and spent time with my artwork. I felt vulnerable. It was not a worry for the permanence of the artwork, but it had more to do with intimacy and privacy. The usual danger and threat associated with touch in an art context shifted from the danger for the integrity of the artwork's material to the danger for the artist's identity and self-confidence reflected in the materiality of the books.

The books are almost floating in the air, as a minimum of 1.2 cm width and 10 cm deep of MDF has been preserved around each item to be held while making it possible to see and touch most of it. The surrounding void makes it possible to see other titles, other spines and backs of books. The library is on wheels, movable and adjustable, mirroring my repeated commuting over years.

The artwork questions the notion of hierarchy and composition. In its first version, the selection of books was different, and a few were rather imposed on me. My response to these had been to place the titles I felt uncomfortable with at a height difficult to reach or barely noticeable at the bottom of the wall. In the new version, hierarchy in the components has been removed. The composition is purely pragmatically; I have tried to fit all my books within this confined and given space.

Ways of Worldmaking / Self portrait may be read as an ambivalent gathering of theory and practice, of sources and outcomes, but what it actually does by holding both items in each pair relates to equivalence, as it levels them.
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This affects how the piece addresses time. As Rosalind Krauss wrote about Joseph Cornell's boxes,

> The sculpture functions in real time and in immediate response to the viewer's touch [...] Yet whatever the divergence in scale, function and level of actual presence of the things it contains, the nature of the Cornell box is that it is a magical equaliser of all these differences. That is, within the space of the box or stage, (in my case I would say within the space of the library) all these objects / images acquire the same degree of presence or density - they all seem equally "real".268

Recurrently, I have examined the specificity of the back of an artwork in my research. Crucial to relief practice, the back is not accessible. The manner in which I have installed *Ways of Worldmaking / Self portrait* gave - in terms of categories - a round sculpture, but the question of the back remains relevant. I can choose to insert all books with the spines frontward and the backs backward or the other way round, or in a mixed installation. In the future, the artwork might become a relief if leant onto the wall.

MDF and air are the materials of the second version's structure, which in this respect is quite antithetic to the first version in concrete. However, a similarity between the two artworks remains and allows me to discuss them as versions. They both refer to written language not only because of the books but within their design. Indeed, the surface of all the joined panels looks like a word of eight vertical fonts. The hinged panels look like a Leporello or a horizontal page of text or a musical score. Each book has a unique cover surface; thus, each book opened allows the surface of the pages to be seen.

Furthermore, the new work contains many mise en abyme, pointing to the

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context and its symbolical identity. My library, which is an observatory of
theories and practices, sits in an actual observatory, the North observatory,
which is contained in another observatory, namely, UCL. The artwork is an
octagon replicating on a smaller scale the hosting architectural octagon.
Also, this specific shape alludes to Jeremy Bentham's invention of the
panopticon and is examined by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et Punir*, his
study on the history of surveillance and punishment. This text is in the
artwork. The report of my research itemises some figures of *mise en abyme*
as examined by Georges Perec's text *Un Cabinet d'Amateur* and Raymond
Roussel's *Locus Solus*, which are in the cases, too. *Destination Art*, the art
travel guide that indexes the previous version, along with the documentation
of this one, are like the back ribs of the structure.

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The library is also the library of the future, of a life after the PhD. Some books are there to remind me of reading them or re-reading them. I have the irritating feeling of forgetting about their content. Worse, I always realise too late that I have already read a book. Various questions regarding knowledge are implicit in this work. What did I learn over the years? How did the research shape me? What is the dialectic of the research process? These questions will remain open similar to the air that circulates around the paper books, even if we, artists researchers, need to state our impact and our contribution to the knowledge of the world.

10.4 Final conclusion

In my research, tangibility is a notion that has proved to increase the insight into reliefs and to foster creativity both in my own art practice and in the analysis of artworks. In that sense, it might, in turn, become a form other artists resort to. Reliefs are incredibly rich in terms of material dimensions and in their potential to reconnect us with the planetary crust. The relief is what grounds our human condition, and, conversely, the way we alter it constantly affects the understanding we have of it. Therefore, the distance between the mental self and the world has to be considered, worked and played with, as artists have done since Palaeolithic times. However, I feel that this distance becomes increasingly elastic. It vibrates continuously in my life in a way that I am not always able to identify. The event of grabbing material, the duration of making the artwork, and the moment for its contemplation force me to rethink my perpetual cataclysmic severance from the world and from others. Making a relief is my way of restoring continuity between my mental self and the planetary sculpture and of focusing on my senses and the crust. By putting my hands on what is at hand, I become fully aware of our ambivalent condition and foresee potential becomings.
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Sophie Bouvier Ausländer, *Skin*, detail, 2014, 400 x 700 cm, ink on tracing paper.
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