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# Life-stowing from a Digital Media Perspective: Past, Present and Future

Alberto Frigo



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Life-stowing from a Digital Media Perspective:  
Past, Present and Future

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## **Abstract**

While both public opinion and scholars around the world are currently pointing out the danger of increasingly popular life-logging devices, this book articulates this debate by distinguishing between automatic and manual life-logging approaches. Since new definitions of life-logging have excluded the latter approach and have been mainly focused on effortless life-logging technologies such as Google Glass and Quantified Self applications in general, the second part of this thesis theoretically frames life-stowing.

Through extensive etymological research, I have defined life-stowing as a manual and effortful practice conducted by life-stowers, individuals who devote their life to sampling reality in predefined frameworks. As part of this book, an historical overview introduces life-stowers and distinguishes between Apollonian and Dionysian varieties of these practitioners. Lastly, in order to understand the future reception of life-stowing, particularly in relation to digital media, I have disclosed my ongoing life-stowing project to a small audience.

**Keywords:** life-stowing, tebahism, effortfull, life-logging, quantified self, self-tracking, surveillance, sousveillance, archiving, syncretism, constructivist theory of perception, database aesthetics.



## Preface

And I understood that those sciences are very interesting and attractive, but that they are exact and clear in inverse proportion to their applicability to the question of life: the less this applicability to the question of life, the more exact and clear they are, while the more this try to reply to the question of life, the more obscure and unattractive they become.

Tolstoy 2005:23

I stow, therefore I am: since 2004, when I was 24 years old, I have been continuously documenting 18 aspects of reality and I have devised 18 ways to elaborate them. As of 12 October 2016, for example, I have photographed 330,000 objects my right hand has used, I have written down 14,300 dreams, I have video-recorded 20,880 public spaces where I sat, I have made 9,930 drawings of my ideas, I have recomposed 6,720 songs I have heard, I have portrayed 992 new acquaintances, I have picked 134 square meters of trash from the sidewalk. I could go on boring the reader with such a list. My point here, however, is that in the near future, lists of this kind might not be all that bizarre; as technology progresses, ordinary people are more likely to hoard more of their personal data; or better, let me put it this way: as technology progresses, technology is more likely to hoard more and more personal data from common people.

Several books have in recent years focused on personal data stored via life-logging devices and Quantified Self services (e.g. Rettberg 2014; Nafus, Nefs 2016; Lupton 2016). This book is my attempt to research a similar topic but from a different point of view. In the first place, I write from the perspective of a practitioner who has anticipated this phenomenon. Second and most importantly, I write from the vantage point of a practitioner who has been documenting his life manually, without the assistance of automated sensors or algorithms, and therefore doing the work of the technology. Thirdly, I write from the perspective of a practitioner who has crafted his practice based on his design of an architecture in which to contain 36 years of the collected data. Given these three perspective, in this book I call my manual practice “life-stowing” as opposed to technologically driven storing and in relation to older historical traditions.

While written within Media and Communication Studies, the rich content of this book is also a form of stowing the results of many years of thinking and exposing myself through my demanding media practice. Methodologically as well, as in my life-

stowing project, this book makes use of several methods to draw a comprehensive trajectory from what I believe to be the historical origins to the present and future scenarios of life-stowing media. In this respect, it proposes an alternative perspective to the field of Media and Communication that takes into account the empirical knowledge that constant exposure to a media practice inevitably brings. In keeping with this line of thinking it should be viewed as a form of autoethnography.

## Sammanfattning

Den samtida samhälls- och forskningsdebatt, där de allt mer populära teknologierna för life-logging ofta framställs som farliga, vidgas och utvecklas i denna bok genom ett särskiljande av automatiska och manuella tekniker för life-loggning. Eftersom nya definitioner av life-loggning i stor utsträckning har exkluderat manuella tekniker och fokuserat på egenmätning som inte kräver så mycket av användaren, såsom Google Glass, består avhandlingens andra del av ett teoretisk utforskande av begreppet life-stowing.

Genom omfattande etymologisk forskning definieras life-stowing i avhandlingen som en manuell och ansträngande praktik utförd av life-stowers, personer som vikt sina liv åt att samla och spara bitar av verkligheten enligt fördefinierade ramar. I den historiska översikten introduceras två typer av life-stowers, den Apollonianska och den Dionysiska. Slutligen, för att förstå det framtida mottagandet av life-stowing i relation till digitala medier, avslöjas i avhandlingen författarens egna life stowing-projekt för en mindre publik.



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I sincerely thank Myrthe Nagtzaam, who has sustained me during these years and has patiently waited for me at a distance. I also thank my son August, who has once again in his life dealt with a parent doing a Ph.D. I am grateful to my parents, who have paid for the doors and windows of the barn where the case-study was conducted. Huge thanks also to Davide di Saró, who contracted lyme disease while helping me renovating, and a word of appreciation to Aldo Maistro, who, despite his age came to the rescue in moments of physical hardship. No least, my greatest gratitude to the small mountain community of Contrada Costenieri, who have facilitated in many ways the realization of this project, giving me food, wood for the cold nights spent there, taking care of my dirty laundry and chatting with me in moments of extreme fatigue.



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# 1. Introduction

But to grow or make things by myself; for myself: what fun, what exhilaration, what liberation from any feelings of utter dependence on organizations! What is perhaps even more: What an education of the real person! To be in touch with the actual process of creation. The inborn creativity of people is no mean or accidental thing; neglect or disregard it, and it becomes an inner source of poison. It can destroy you and all your human relationships; on a mass scale, it can—nay, it inevitably will—destroy society. Contrariwise, nothing can stop the flowering of a society that manages to give free rein to the creativity of its people—all its people. This cannot be ordered or organized from the top. We cannot look to government, but only to ourselves, to bring about such state of affairs.... It is the essence of self-reliance that you start now and don't wait for something to turn up.

Schumacher 2010:7

On 22 February 2017, the keywords “how many people u” entered in the Google search bar of my Samsung Galaxy A5 smartphone immediately suggest “how many people use Facebook.” I click on the suggestion and am instantly provided with feedback: out of the world population of approximately 7.4 billion (at least according to a search for “world population” on Google), 1 billion use to some degree the most popular social media site in the world. This statistic might not seem to be particularly interesting or impressive, considering that in 1969, when the world population was less than half what it is today,<sup>1</sup> it is estimated that about the same number of people watched the television broadcast of the first landing on the moon.<sup>2</sup>

These data might be more interesting, however, if we take into account factors such as that 1.6 billion do not have access to the Internet and that countries like China, which alone has an estimated population of 1.4 billion, do not allow their citizens access to Facebook for political reasons and propose instead successful alternatives like Tecenent QQ.<sup>3</sup> We can thus estimate that there are approximately 4

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-22: [https://www.google.com/search?%7Bgoogle:accepted+Suggestion%7D%7Doq=as+of&sourceid=chrome&channel=cs&ie=UTF8&q=as+of&gws\\_rd=ssl#q=world+population](https://www.google.com/search?%7Bgoogle:accepted+Suggestion%7D%7Doq=as+of&sourceid=chrome&channel=cs&ie=UTF8&q=as+of&gws_rd=ssl#q=world+population)

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-14: [http://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/apollo/missions/apollo11.html#.VD0XZfmSyRI](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/apollo/missions/apollo11.html#.VD0XZfmSyRI)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-13: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_Internet\\_usage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Internet_usage)

billion users who could utilize Facebook, and that it would be more accurate statistically to consider the fact that one fourth of the people on Facebook use it actively every month.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, if we look at countries with the highest Internet usage,—for example Sweden, where this book has been written and where 94% of the population use the Internet,<sup>5</sup>—64% use Facebook.<sup>6</sup> This number is most interesting: in Sweden more than half of the population uses the world’s most popular social media site. The statistic is also relevant if we think in terms of the new social media economy: more than half of Swedes provide personal data to Facebook, which is in turn utilized by the company headquartered in Menlo Park, California to make a gross profit of 2.6 billion USD that is rapidly increasing as the focus shifts to mobile users.<sup>7</sup> The profit is perhaps not interesting per se, since it is roughly only 0,5% of the GDP of a sparsely populated country like Sweden.<sup>8</sup>

The danger, however, is that Web 2.0 social media companies like Facebook are getting more aggressive as they try to wring bigger profits from the “free” personal data provided by its users (Andrejevic, 2014; Van Dijk 2014). Driven by a need to socialize over the net, these users are supplying Facebook with data that the giant media company analyzes to better target them with marketing campaigns. While some users might not feel bothered by the idea, ever more sophisticated life-capturing algorithms and sensors are already being sold to consumers who can’t resist wearing them and in turn sell their personal data to the media industry (boyd, Crawford 2012). One of the aims of this book is to broaden the discussion of the implications of social media at large by introducing and analyzing the work not of communities (e.g. as outlined by Hepp 2016), but of individuals who, years before the appearance of social media, experimented with crafted ways of collecting and organizing their personal data. I therefore shift my attention to more marginal media practitioners (cf. Couldry 2002). Other researchers have already criticized the sole use of power dynamics to understand phenomena such as self-tracking (Nafus, Neff 2016; Sharon, Zandbergen 2016; Frigo, Smolicki 2016; Frigo 2016). Using ethnographic approaches, they have developed new theories that associate the work of marginal media practitioners with soft resistance (Nafus, Neff 2016) and mindfulness (Sharon, Zandbergen 2016).

Digital media self-tracking, however, is not new. As early as 2000, a few years prior to the advent of social media, there were marginal media practitioners whose activity can be classified as soft resistance and mindfulness. Art students Ellie Harrison, Iwan

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on 2016-09-16: <http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/>

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved 2014-10-13: “Percentage of Individuals using the Internet 2000–2012,” International Telecommunications Union (Geneva), June 2013

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-22: <http://www.internetstatistik.se/artiklar/facebook-fyller-tolv-vi-bjuder-pa-statistik/>

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved 2014-10-14: <http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/29/technology/facebook-earnings/>

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved on 2016-09-16: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/sweden/gdp>

Wilaga and Jonathan Keller, for example, began using the newly available digital technology to capture and organize their everyday life by designing Web 1.0 interfaces (see my book on self-tracking pioneers Frigo, Villarroel 2017). While the onset of social media has aroused the indignation of some of these practitioners and has put a partial end to their pioneering web projects (Harrison 2009), this book attempts both historically and theoretically to frame these projects from a perspective that differs from the light in which it is generally viewed (e.g. by Andrejevic 2014; boyd, Crawford 2012; Crawford et al. 2014; Van Dijk 2014). Thus here I investigate what I have come to define as life-stowing, a manual packing of life in predefined containers that is distinct from the automated storing and showing of life by social media that is often described as life-logging.

## 1.1 Introducing Life-logging

While most of us, at least in a country like Sweden, already casually capture, organize and share our lives on platforms like Facebook, companies around the world are developing wearable systems to allow individuals to capture their lives more systematically and, in this respect, provide more accurate data to marketing companies which will in turn “direct” our lives (Dodge, Kitchin 2007). Surprisingly, it is again Sweden that is at the cutting edge of this idea that, although it will refine the way in which people surrender details of their personal data to companies that provide them with capturing systems, it also has serious privacy implications (Geere 2013).

Prior to moving on to the academic discussion of the topic, I will explain what life-logging is by introducing a self-promotion documentary launched by the Swedish life-logging company Memoto in 2013.<sup>9</sup> Here we see a stereotypical Swedish girl, Amanda, as she travels around the world on a mission to find out what life-logging is. The documentary begins in the United States, and Amanda’s first question is:

We have heard about this, this thing called life-logging. Do you know what life-logging is?

A chorus of three voices answers:

A lot of people say that data is the new oil. This is the fundamental change, it is coming. It’s gonna revolutionize health care. It’s gonna revolutionize education. This will happen, and it’s happening very, very fast.

This sentence helps us understand that although the social media business has not yet penetrated so very deeply, data-collecting technologies like life-logging are not only revolutionary but also very profitable. To return to the Swedish company Memoto, which was later renamed “Narrative Clip,” we can get a better understanding of what

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-15: <http://getnarrative.com/pages/lifeloggers> my transcription

these life-logging technologies are by reading the first catch phrase on the company's website:<sup>10</sup>

A new kind of photographic memory. Narrative clip is a tiny, automatic camera and app that gives you a searchable and shareable photographic memory.

And the site continues:

Founded in Sweden in 2012, Narrative was first called Memoto. The name was supposed to allude to the sentiment of "memory + automatic," because an automatic memory was essentially what this new company was set to build. On October 23 2012, the Kickstarter campaign "Memoto life-logging Camera" set sails. The goal was to bring in \$50,000 to have the resources to move into production. 36 days later, 2,871 amazing people from San Francisco to Shanghai had pledged an astonishing total of \$550,189 and we were set to bring the Memoto life-logging Camera to reality.

As of 2014, this Swedish product was available on the market at the accessible price of 149 USD.<sup>11</sup> After an improved version came out in the summer of 2016, the company experienced financial troubles and finally went bankrupt in the fall of the same year, leaving thousands of life-loggers desperate to rescue their data from its server.<sup>12</sup> Those who have used the gadget extensively to document their lives will be left gadgetless.<sup>13</sup> Life-logging practices are based on a wearable device equipped with sensors and an interface. A life-logging user really does nothing, as capturing, arranging and retrieving images and other data are done automatically by the algorithms running the sensors and the interface. Although digital media life-logging can be traced back to the twentieth century, the idea of systematically tracking life is not all that new, and there is an unofficial history in both Western and Eastern culture of people who have attempted to craft their own tools to track their lives. Based on my etymological analysis of the word "archive," I call this practice life-stowing. Life-stowers neither store nor hoard endlessly in the manner of the frameworks provided by the social media industry; instead, they sample essential elements of their lives and stow them in containers. Whether a box or a closet or a palace, these containers are all predefined; life-stowers design their life-stowing based on the available space, and if there is an empty room they come up with something new to fill it. Far from storing, then, life-stowers define beforehand the perfect container to which they wish to commit to. Most importantly, life-stowers do not allow automated and therefore effortless technologies to store life for them; they put great effort into doing so themselves.

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-14: <http://getnarrative.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved on 2015-01-11: <http://shop.getnarrative.com/cart>

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved on 2016-10-16: <http://www.slashgear.com/narrative-shuts-down-promises-life-logging-camera-app-for-owners-27457816/>

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved on 2016-10-17: <http://www.today.com/money/man-records-every-detail-his-life-past-5-years-no-t51921>

Throughout this book I use the word “media” extensively. My conception comes close to that of Marshal McLuhan, who sees media as “anything that extends the senses or the body of man” (McLuhan 1994:7). In this respect, I argue that the practice of life-stowing is the actual media. A life-stower can in fact use a digital camera, an audio recorder, 3D software, a scanner and even a notebook or a canvas unconditionally; these are mere technologies, whether analogue or digital. However, on top of these technologies there is a scheme to which the life-stower decides to adhere consisting of a set of rules and procedures which indicate when it is time to paint, or take a photograph, or make an audio recording, or write or create a 3D model. I call the execution of this set of more or less formal rules “practice,” and I consider it to be the media, or in McLuhan’s term, the extension of man that the life-stower uses to stow.

Having said that, while I use the “media” in reference to the practice by which individuals stow life, I also use “technique” as a synonym. As defined by sociologists (Ellul 1964:14), it refers to practices of individuals who adhere to formulas and create an alternative to a future that is otherwise determined by technology. In order to emphasize this adherence to a set of rules and/or formulas, I also speak at times of “discipline” or “self-discipline,” to borrow Michel Foucault’s notion of technology of the self—technologies applied by individuals to transform themselves spiritually (Foucault 1998:1). The latter concept is confusing, however, since it includes the word “technology”, which I try to regard as only the tool that life-stowers use to perform their stowing scheme. In this respect, the most accurate concept is perhaps what the ancient Greeks called “aretè”, meaning the ability to be self-reliant and to excel in every physical as well as mental virtue (Montanelli 1972:378).

## 1.2 The Life-logging Trinity: the Official History and Definition

Before going any further into my discussion of life-stowing, let me introduce some of the buzzwords currently used by journalists and bloggers in reference to recording one’s life. “Life-blogging” has to do with the writing of online diaries, while “life-caching” has evolved into “life-streaming” and refers to the act of storing and sharing one’s life in an open and public forum.<sup>14</sup> We should not confuse the practices behind these terms with life-logging. In speaking of life-logging, both journalists and scholars (Sellen, Whittaker 2010:2) often mention the “trinity,” in allusion to the Christian doctrine. The “Father” is Vannevar Bush, the head of the U.S. Office of Scientific Research and Development during WWII, who envisioned life-logging as a tool for postwar scientists (Bush 1945). He argues that modern scientists need an augmented memory device in order to deal with knowledge overflow. His ostensibly benign motive is paradoxical, given that during the war his office mainly focused on developing weapons of mass destruction. To continue the allusion, the second figure

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<sup>14</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-09: <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2004/aug/19/onlinesupplement.blogging>

of the trinity, the “Son,” is Steve Mann, a computer scientist who has been experimenting “on his skin” with wearable computers. He has been wearing recording equipment on his head since the 1980s, and was the first to invent augmented reality glasses (Mann 2003). It was not he, however, who came up with the term life-logging. That distinction goes to the “Holy Spirit,” the senior Microsoft researcher Gordon Bell, head of the directorate that developed the Internet, who coined it in reference to his research project MyLifeBits (Bell et al. 2002).

While scholars have developed more sophisticated characterizations of life-logging, for now we will use the *Macmillan Dictionary* definition of the term:<sup>15</sup>

The activity of producing a continual record of your everyday life by carrying a portable camera and/or other digital device around with you.

Another passage from the same online dictionary helpfully elaborates on the concept:

The word life-logging has various derivatives, including the nouns lifelogger and lifelog, the latter referring to the digital record produced by the activity. Lifelog also exists as a verb, used both intransitively and transitively and commonly occurring in the passive or forming participial adjective lifelogged (e.g. lifelogged data/information). (ibid)

Kerry Maxwell, the author of this definition, also comments that

...it transpires that you don't need special equipment to have a go at life-logging, since the term is often used more broadly to refer to other kinds of self-monitoring activities ... (ibid)

In the theoretical chapter of this thesis I discuss the current scholarly definition of life-logging as an effortless way of documenting one's life, which means that no exertion is required on the part of the life-logger and that the practice merely consists in wearing a device that automatically captures, organizes and retrieves the life of the wearer (Sellen, Whittaker 2010). Or as defined in more detail by Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin (2007:1):

... a form of pervasive computing consisting of a unified digital record of the totality of an individual's experiences, captured multimodally through digital sensors and stored permanently as a personal multimedia archive. The aim of life-log developers is that they will provide a record of the past that includes every action, every event, every conversation, every material expression of an individual's life; all events will be accessible at a future date because a life-log will be a searchable and recallable archive.

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<sup>15</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-09: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/life-logging.html>

### 1.3 Life-logging: The Academic Debate

Enthusiasm over the potential of digital media to capture, organize and retrieve our lives has in the past decade given way to stark criticism. This shift dates to a colloquium under the auspices of the United Kingdom Computing Research Committee on the “Memories for Life” project, whose goal was “to understand how memory works and to develop the technologies to enhance it.”<sup>16</sup> The discussion produced one camp of enthusiasts who praised the potential of new technologies to augment human memory, while other academics from various fields pointed out the risks in a society where individuals generate and share their personal digital memory. In this section I will review both points of view and present my own contribution to the debate.

To begin, let me introduce the enthusiasts, all of whom were Human-Computer Interaction developers connected in particular with Microsoft Research, which conducted the first experiments on the Sense Cam, a device for automatically logging the life of the user (Hodges et al. 2006). While the pioneers of wearable computers in the 1990s advocated technology that would transform individuals into superhumans by amplifying their memory (Rhodes 1996), scientists at the beginning of the millennium looked instead to technologies like Sense Cam as a means to assist the autobiographical memory of the elderly and mentally disabled. Today life-logging has emerged from a long phase of academic research and is now developed by the industry as a technology that no longer targets these extreme groups but is intended for the general market.

At this point in time life-logging has become an everyday reality, and the enthusiasm that initially characterized several academic fields—especially Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), which evaluates and designs technologies allowing humans to interact with computers<sup>17</sup>— has in recent years yielded to a more critical attitude as early life-logging researchers like Gordon Bell and Cathal Gurrin, have turned their attention to privacy issues (Ye et al. 2014). While the solutions presented by these researchers and developers are still ambivalent (Gordon et al. 2007), scholars in various fields such as geography (Dodge, Kitchin 2007), law (Allen 2008), design (Sellen 2010), and information and communication technology (Michael 2013), have presented a real front against it, as have UK-funded research projects dealing with privacy (Price 2010).

Scholars have thus investigated either the benefits of life-logging or, more recently, its negative implications (Dodge, Kitchin 2007). While it has been shown to “augment” the memory of the wearer (Hodges et al. 2006), Dodge and Kitchin (2007:1) identified its negative potential early on:

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-09: <http://www.memoriesforlife.org/>

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved 2015-03-25: <http://hci2015.bcs.org/>

Such life-logs will constitute new, pervasive, sociospatial archives, because inherent in their construction will be a locational record; it will detail everywhere an individual has been.

My contribution to this debate is to examine life-logging and similar practices from a different point of view. Considering the benefits as well as the negative implications, I want to look at artistic production which creates neither a “memory aid” nor a “sociospatial archive”: what I call “life-stowing.” This practice lacks the granularity necessary to be useful to both the user and surveillance institutions. It has no pragmatic function, but is closer to the concept of techniques and magic. As I will discuss in the theory chapter in relation to Jacques Ellul (1964:14), techniques and magic are alternatives to the technology of “*homo faber*” and therefore to life-logging itself and its social consequences. What the present book ultimately attempts to do is to present life-stowing—marginal and precarious artistic practices in which personal data is manually stowed to accomplish a more transcendental objective.<sup>18</sup>

Nowadays, technology offers life-logging features that, under the new social media paradigm, potentially “complement” existing surveillance (Dodge, Kitchin 2007). This means that governments can make use of both the surveillance infrastructure permanently installed in public environments and the “sousveillance” generated by people tracking their own lives with devices that automatically link their data to a cloud designed to promptly analyze and make sense of it through smart algorithms.<sup>19</sup>

To give an example of the scale that this exploitation of the self might take, consider that the biggest media giant, Google, has been developing the Google Glass—augmented reality glasses to be worn throughout our everyday lives. This device allows us to collect our reality and give us a feeling of control over it. At the same time, it is loaded onto a Google server to be analyzed, after which a new reality is superimposed on our data to generate well-targeted commercial ads (Andrejevic, 2014; Van Dijk 2014). Although Google has suspended the sale of its Glass because of these privacy issues,<sup>20</sup> consumers may slowly learn to accept new versions of it. In any

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<sup>18</sup> The adjective “marginal” has been borrowed from Marshal McLuhan’s definition of Noah-like media artists operating outside the mainstream (McLuhan 1994). The adjective “precarious” is instead my contribution. It arises from two factors. In the first place, as the history chapter of this book shows, life-stowing artists have lived in turbulent times and/or their lives have been in turmoil. Secondly, their practice is rendered precarious by the fact that they commit to a technology that is doomed to become quickly obsolete.

<sup>19</sup> By the term “sousveillance” here I am referring literally to Steve Mann’s definition of physical surveillance apparatuses mounted not on buildings but rather on people (Mann 2003) who have been persuaded to wear a sensor in order to augment their physical or mental conditions. I am not speaking of the more voluntary form of “sousveillance” adopted by individuals as a form of political resistance to governmental surveillance.

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved on 2015-01-21: <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2475383,00.asp>

event, American companies in the commercial battlefield like Virgin Atlantic and Capriotti's Sandwich Shop have been testing the device on their new employees.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, however, in the last few years the launch of life-logging technologies like Google Glass has aroused not only scholarly interest, but also strong concerns that future life-loggers may risk not only their own privacy, but also that of others in the public space.<sup>22</sup> Developers have attempted to review their technologies based on this criticism, but their unrealistic solutions include making the recording apparatus more visible to automatically exclude people who do not wish to be recorded, and storing the data in offshore Swiss-like banks to avoid governmental control (Bell 2007). Such criticism, however, fails to understand that wearable technologies as first conceived by Steve Mann throughout the 1980s and 1990s were mainly designed not to record reality but to augment it. Recording was not added as a feature until he started becoming the target of discrimination as he walked around wearing such devices. He also noticed that the people who are most sensitive about being recorded—casino employees or jewellers, for example—have something to hide (Mann 2003). Finally, because this criticism seems to point fingers indiscriminately at all life-logging practices, it is my aim in this book to attempt to differentiate and explore the poetics and aesthetics that an effortful approach to life-stowing can generate.

#### 1.4 Bloggers, Qsers, Cyborgs and Life-stowers

The critique of life-logging gadgets has not yet distinguished sufficiently between the different ways in which reality can be systematically documented. While Jill Walker Rettberg draws a distinction based on the outcomes of self-tracking activities (Rettberg 2014), and Andreas Hepp discusses self-tracking as a community in relation to other pioneer communities (Hepp 2016), I will focus on how different kinds of life-loggers record their reality. As the sale of automatic logging devices has risen to over 90 million units a year (Nafus, Neff 2016), it is essential to also discuss manual life-logging approaches, which other authors have simply defined as belonging to the art world (Lupton 2016). I claim instead that these practices cannot simply be dismissed as art. My main point of departure, therefore, is the distinction between automatic and manual documentation, which is necessary if we are to avoid the stereotypes attaching to all sorts of systematic and digital documentation, whether in reference to privacy issues or social media marketing strategies. In addition, this contrast will serve as the basis of an investigation into both the poetic and aesthetic dimensions of manual and effortful life-stowing.

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<sup>21</sup> Retrieved on 2015-01-07: <http://www.inc.com/john-brandon/is-google-glass-ready-for-small-business.html>

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved on 2014-09-17: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304757004579334690844629788>

My contribution to this debate is thus to point out four different kinds of documenters: the casual chronicler using a social media framework, the enthusiast using purposely designed apps, the developer experimenting on his or her life to develop automatic life-logging technologies, and lastly, life-stowers, who build their own framework to stow reality and make an effortful commitment to it. This subdivision differs from the broader distinction drawn by ethnographers like Dawn Nafus and Jamie Sherman (2014) between self-trackers and “powerful” data-aggregation businesses. While they conclude that self-tracking can also provide “an important modality of resistance,” I will try to differentiate further among the various practitioners based on my own sporadic participation in the QS movement.

Both newspapers and scholarly articles (Chennuru et al. 2012) generally describe those who use digital media to systematically document their lives and surroundings as life-loggers.<sup>23</sup> This terminology will be discussed more thoroughly later in the book, but for now I will simply try to distinguish between different kinds of life-loggers by subdividing them in four different categories:

1. The blogger or casual practitioner who operates within a provided framework;
2. The qser or enthusiastic practitioner who tests a new provided framework;
3. The cyborg or scientist practitioner who designs new frameworks for the industry;
4. The life-stower or autonomous practitioner who crafts his or her own framework.

#### 1.4.1 The Blogger or Casual Practitioner

Among casual practitioners I include bloggers and social media users who post pictures on, for example, Facebook and expose themselves to their circles of acquaintances or followers. These casual life-loggers use already existing frameworks supplied by social media providers. In this respect, they are not only compelled to log what the framework suggests to them, but may also be inconsistent, logging only events they find relevant for sharing with others.

Their inconsistency also arises from the fact that they do not craft their own self-tracking frameworks: software and hardware can change, or new ones of a different brand can appear which tempt them to switch. Social media applications must continuously improve their services in order to prevent users from migrating to other platforms. These improvements can disrupt the flow of data over time, which paradoxically makes past logs increasingly less detailed and lower in resolution than more recent ones. Also, especially to gain more marketable data from casual users, social

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<sup>23</sup> Retrieved on 2014-11-25: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2252690/Say-cheese-Youre-snapped-lifelogger-.html>

media platforms can gradually be improved in a way that excludes other, more meaningful data.

The resulting clusters of disrupted syntaxes are only useful for making sense of the specific time periods in which one or another application is operated, and only through the processing of software that attempts to capture emerging patterns within the different datasets. In addition, because these datasets have been generated by sensor technology, they are unlikely to provide any readable content to anyone who is unfamiliar with the person who is sharing the data. Nonetheless, in the Facebook Timeline, for example, designers are attempting to make sense of this data inconsistently recorded by casual practitioners.

### 1.4.2 The Qser or Enthusiast Practitioner

Today, when the topic of camera-based wearable life-logging devices has become too sensitive a subject, a new form of self-tracking has arisen. The Quantified Self, or QS movement, was initiated in 2007 by editors Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly of *Wired* magazine and has quickly gained a more peaceful public reception. QS technologies enable us to track more abstract levels of our everyday life through, for example, recording the heartbeat or other biofeedback that, in fact, generates abstract visualization that cannot easily compromise the privacy of users and those around them. Examples include products like Nike's FitBits and Apple's iWatch, fashionable accessories that generate appealing charts. The issue here, however, has to do with the framework that companies apply to these life-logging services in order to increase their profits by retaining, analyzing and selling their data. For example, the FitBits bracelet monitoring the health state of a person might in the near future be utilized by Nike to sell the wearer a better kind of sneakers.

The enthusiasts I am now discussing are nicknamed "qasers," or Quantified Self users, who are attracted to new social media platforms or smartphone apps with self-tracking features such as those offered by Fitbit, Saga, MoodScope, Zeo Personal Sleep Coach, RunKeeper, Momento, DailyMile, Kout, Daytum, Nike Fuelband and Track YourHappiness. The Quantified Self movement represents a network of these qasers from different cities around the world who share their self-tracking experience with each other. The framework of these meetups is very rigid: in five minutes and with a fixed number of slides, these practitioners relate how they use a particular application to lose weight or solve their sleeping disorders. I call these qasers "enthusiasts," as they are often eager to utilize a self-tracking application for a limited amount of time to improve and/or visualize their well-being.

There are several examples of this kind of enthusiast practitioners who contribute to a framework with purposely-designed technologies. They use the Quantified Self movement as an umbrella under which to meet and discuss experiences. They thus go a step beyond the casual life-logging users of popular social media platforms to acquire specially designed hardware and/or software extensions in order to track certain invisible patterns in their lives. Some of them also share their findings within

the QS framework generally called “Show&Tell,” which is a rather strict and profit-oriented way to allow them to communicate within a very specific and highly moderated period of time lasting some 5 to 10 minutes by responding to the following questions:

1. What did you do?
2. How did you do it?
3. What did you learn?

Thus enthusiast practitioners use a purposely-designed interface to capture and retrieve their data, and it is only within this framework that they can present their experience. This has allowed individuals to share their self-learning experience, but lately the popularity of the Quantified Self movement has decreased dramatically. While gadgets like Fitbit are still among the most sold Christmas presents,<sup>24</sup> QS conferences are becoming increasingly smaller<sup>25</sup> (in 2016 there was no official conference), meetings are sometimes cancelled because of low attendance, and today there is barely any activity on the official Quantified Self website. New trends for enthusiast practitioners such as the Body Hacking movement are, however, emerging.

### 1.4.3 The Cyborg or Life-logging Developer

It is now time to introduce a third kind of practitioner who goes beyond casual forms of life-logging. These individuals are usually expert computer scientists with experience in developing self-tracking hardware and/or software. At conferences and in popular articles, they are usually defined as “geeks” or “nerds.” They distinguish themselves from other users on the basis of the technology they build and test on themselves, and are thus most commonly referred to as “cyborgs.”

These practitioners are likely to become developers of the aforementioned products. A cyborg can be someone whose invention you hear mentioned during popular science events such as Professor Steve Mann’s briefing of his experience at a TEDx talk.<sup>26</sup> Cyborgs often end up working for the industry by developing general capturing systems or frameworks to accommodate other people’s life-logging cravings, or they generate their own algorithms and automations for capturing, organizing and retrieving data—tools that in the end really excite a social media

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-22: <https://www.neowin.net/news/fitbit-may-be-the-most-popular-wearable-gift-this-christmas>

<sup>25</sup> Ironically, the audience of the last Quantified Self conference in Europe mostly consisted of academics trying to understand the phenomenon, now that, as I have observed, it is disappearing. Nonetheless, it is quite plausible that similar gadgets with a different name and a slightly different perspective will once again be hyped in the coming years.

<sup>26</sup> Retrieved on 2016-09-17: <http://www.tedxtoronto.com/talks/tedxtoronto-2013-talk-dr-steve-mann/>

industry that makes its profit on user data. The aim of these practitioners is to let technology do all the work, minimizing the user's participation. Their goal is to create tools not only for immortality but also for totality, which means they attempt to develop technologies to record everything, just in case it might be needed in the future (Bell 2007).

The pioneering initiatives of these expert practitioners are essential to technological progress. Steve Mann's work on wearable computing may in fact be the source of all neck-worn or head-mounted life-logging gadgets—not least the Google Glass—that are now being launched in the global market.

Nicholas Felton is another developer who experimented with tracking his own life and later developed frameworks for others. He was an “infographic designer” who became famous with his Personal Annual Reports: visualizations of the data he tracked over the course of a year.<sup>27</sup> In 2011 Felton joined the Facebook team to create the much-discussed Facebook Timeline, a way to summarize and make sense of all the pictures and data collected within every single account by turning the most memorable posts into a single story with a beginning, middle and an end.<sup>28</sup>

Steve Mann and Gordon Bell are two other examples that will be discussed in more depth in the theoretical overview of this book. Originating mostly in the United States, their inventions have become a lucrative market attracting speculative investment in simple and quite inexpensive applications operating on smartphones and in trendy wearable accessories released by big companies such as Nike. In a Web 2.0 era, profit is not really generated by these software and hardware black-boxes per se, but by the actual personal data they are able to produce and automatically capture and organize on the companies' servers, thus enabling the sort of very direct target marketing that clogs our lives even further as it attempts to redirect our purchases.

#### 1.4.4 The Life-stower or Autonomous Practitioner

Identifying the fourth kind of practitioner is my contribution to the debate. I call them life-stowers. Like the third category, they also make frameworks, but theirs are crafted for their own needs in bricolage fashion and do not claim to be designed to be used by others. In this respect life-stowers are autonomous. They have some skills, and instead of using “ready-made” technologies, they assemble tools and frameworks with which to conduct their own life-stowing. While cyborgs use technology to do the work of capturing, organizing and retrieving for them, life-stowers do this work on their own. Rather than relying on sensors and algorithms, they learn to perform as sensors and algorithms themselves. In other words, instead of using automation, these practitioners perform such functions like shamans with their formulas.

Since the Internet has become an available platform that people can not only use but also configure, around the year 2000 several young individuals across the world

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-14 <http://feltron.com/>

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-31 <https://www.facebook.com/about/timeline>

started to experiment with ways to track and share their lives in purposely dedicated web interfaces. In Eat22, Ellie Harrison shared a picture of everything she ate between her twenty-second and twenty-third birthdays.<sup>29</sup> Later, in 2006, with the spread of social media and Web 2.0 in general, which favors the use of ready-made interfaces, the self-crafted initiatives of these individuals became clumsy and more difficult to manage, and recording and sharing life became a far more common phenomenon. As a consequence, many manual data collectors like Ellie Harrison have stopped. Upon quitting her several internet projects on self-tracking and turning to the mainstream trend of socially and politically engaged art, she claimed (Harrison 2009:10):

Web 2.0 has spawned a whole new generation of data collectors. There is now such a ridiculous abundance of boring information about other people's lives on the internet, I felt obliged to stop adding to it.

Despite this development, Dodge and Kitchin (2007:440) were among the first to focus attention on the work of these “digital artists” who try to live in a “life-logging world” and generate “questions” concerning their “technified human experiences”. Such effortful operations have been excluded from later definitions of life-logging, which nowadays refers only to the use of fully automated digital equipment to capture, organize and retrieve data (Sellen, Whittaker 2010). It is this far less-discussed fourth kind of self-tracking practitioner that I will attempt to thoroughly address in the present book.

### 1.5 Positioning Myself as a Life-Stower and a Researcher

Here it is necessary to position myself as a practitioner of the fourth kind: a life-stower. I started my project on 24 September 2003 at the age of 24 after a summer on a Swedish farm, where I learned about agriculture and carpentry. At the time I was deeply fascinated with the possibility of recording this discovery process, and I have been capturing my life manually ever since.<sup>30</sup>

By now I have documented six aspects of myself (e.g. my activities, my dreams, the songs I recognize, etc.), six aspects of the reality around me (e.g. the public places where I sit, trash I find on the sidewalk, people I meet, etc.) and six aspects of the weather (e.g. the intensity of the wind, the temperature, the shapes I recognize in clouds, etc.). Along with these eighteen facets of reality I have developed eighteen different ways to publish them. While at a conference in England in June 2013, I found it necessary to put a selection of my project online in order to better explain to

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved on October 7 2014: <http://eat22.com>

<sup>30</sup> Gordon Bell, the main and most prominent life-logging figure, only began to consider to wear a camera in October of the same year and only officially started proactively life-logging in 2004 at the age of 69.

others what I was talking about. Ever since then I have been identified as “the most extreme example” of a “self-tracker” (Barcena et al. 2014: 6). I am regularly invited to show my work at exhibitions or participate in discussions of self-tracking: I have recently been invited to exhibit at the Aarhus Art Museum, the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg, the Trinity College Science Museum in Dublin,<sup>31</sup> the Museum of Applied Arts in Frankfurt,<sup>32</sup> and the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology has recently organized a touring exhibition of my work around India.

Although I am often asked to be involved in events such as curating presentations and exhibitions of self-tracking artists for Quantified Self conferences, I am not a member of the movement, nor do I attend any of its meetings. Instead, I keep my project rather autonomous and help when asked, as I understand that my practice goes beyond a mere trend. Most importantly, I attempt to provide an academic contribution to this object of study. My work is thus not immediately identified with promoting QS or any other such publicity. On the other hand, it has been hailed as a prime example for scholars who want to change the way they look at self-trackers from data-fetishism that inadvertently empowers commerce and surveillance (as Morozov 2013 has pointed out), to soft resistance and mindfulness (Sharon, Zandbergen 2016).

In recent years, then, I have been increasingly referred to as a quintessential life-logging and self-tracking “geek”<sup>33</sup> and my work has often served as the basis for discussing automated forms of life-logging.<sup>34</sup> In an article published by the Observer concerning the death of privacy, the novelist Alex Preston writes<sup>35</sup>:

An early proponent of life-logging was conceptual artist Alberto Frigo, who in 2003 decided to record every object he would hold with his right hand for the next 36 years. He put the pictures on his website, 2004-2040.com. Frigo’s project started with photographs but has developed into a labyrinthine mapping of his thoughts and dreams, the music he is listening to and the world around him. The website is now a wormhole, a place in which it is possible to lose yourself in the beautiful but useless ephemera of a single existence. Frigo tells me that his aim is to create for a future

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<sup>31</sup> Retrieved 2015-04-10: <https://dublin.sciencegallery.com/life-logging/lifeloggers>

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved 2015-04-17: <http://www.museumangewandtekunst.de/en/item/id/208/item/10>

<sup>33</sup> Cianan Brennan (February 12, 2015). “This man has been taking a photo of everything he touches... for the last 11 years.” Corey Charlton *The Journal* (February 27, 2015). “The most touching set of photographs you’ll ever see!” Mark Wilson, *Daily Mail*. *Fast Company* (Mar 9, 2015). “PHOTOS: Alberto Frigo photographs everything his right hand touches.” Christopher Pramstaller, *Metro World News* life-logging: 998 640 Fotos einer rechten Hand.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

<sup>34</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-14 [http://www.symantec.com/content/en/us/enterprise/media/security\\_response/whitepapers/how-safe-is-your-quantified-self.pdf](http://www.symantec.com/content/en/us/enterprise/media/security_response/whitepapers/how-safe-is-your-quantified-self.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Retrieved on 2014-10-14 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/03/internet-death-privacy-google-facebook-alex-preston>

audience "some kind of a Rosetta Stone of this time, where different aspects of a person's life, recorded with different media, can be compared and interpreted.

Other writers (Dodge, Kitchin 2007:13-14) have stated in a similar vein that my work "... in 'visual-statistics' questions humans' banal dependence on technology through a very exacting type of logging." These authors, however, perceive a peculiar yet important difference between my life-logging operation and that of other "digital artists," namely the fact that my life-log is manual and selective. It is along these lines that I wish to contribute a broader differentiation of what is commonly defined as life-logging and study the under-researched field of more artistic, manual, selective, effortful and, generally speaking, more self-crafted life-logging practices.

## 1.6 Introducing the New Old Concept of Life-stowing

I find it useful at this point to advance the new concept I have developed to describe manual life-logging operations. Given the fact that life-logging is now referred to as an effortless way of self-tracking one's life (Sellen 2010), and that the association with craftsmanship might again be underestimated, I have investigated the possibility of referring to the manual practice as a form of archiving. Given the negative connotations attaching to archiving in the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who associated it with the act of both preserving and dictating the law (Derrida 1997), I suggest the term "life-stowing," a term I will develop more thoroughly later in the book.

Rather than life-stowing, I could have added other adjectives to life-logging to define the kind of systematic documentation of life I wanted to address. I could have called it experimental life-logging, but this is in fact related to the third type of practitioners I have identified, who make use of sensors and algorithms to automate capturing, organizing and retrieving data, which therefore makes their practice more commercial, on the one hand, and on the other more fraught with privacy issues. I do see a clear continuation of the third kind of life-logging in the conceptual and performance art of the 1970s and 1980s, and could thus use the term artistic life-logging. But while this art involves the physical presence of the artist within a limited time and space (Vergine 2000), the kind of practice I want to investigate transforms life itself into an artwork. In the most comprehensive academic book on the Quantified Self movement, Deborah Lupton discusses my work along with that of pioneering artists like Andy Warhol and On Kawara, who have anticipated the emergence of this phenomenon (Lupton 2016:12). Because the word "artistic" might give rise to connotations of "not serious" or as generally referring to high art (Rosenberg 1972), I decided to use another term.

Life-stowing denotes an act of storing neatly and compactly in view of disclosing the stowage in the future. It also differs starkly from the more fashionable term "hoarding," which is a manic form of indiscriminate accumulation devoid of the ability to select that is so characteristic of life-stowing. My main interest here is to

look at how life-stowing is conducted through the use of digital media and how digital media can act as a machine that can bring meaning back to life, by, for example, allowing visitors to navigate through the digitally stowed content.

### 1.7 Life-stowing: Research Interest and Aims

In this introduction, I have so far presented the emergent phenomenon of life-logging. Following the line of thought of other scholars and public opinion, I have discussed how this compensates rather than undermines existing surveillance, and that it can in addition provide companies with a better marketing profile of each practitioner. Based on this premise, I have differentiated four types of life-loggers. It is the aim of this book to look into the fourth type, the life-stower, and both revisit and articulate the history, operation and reception of this new media activity, which because it until now has been associated with earlier practices, has not been researched sufficiently. My analysis of life-stowing examines it from three different angles in the three chapters of the book focusing on its past, present and future. The first chapter draws on several examples from the past to introduce a history of life-stowing. The second departs from the common understanding of life-logging and provides a theoretical foundation for life-stowing as an effortful kind of life-logging. The third makes use of my own practice to look at the future reception of life-stowing.

The main aim of the chapter dealing with the past is to write a history of life-stowing and broaden our understanding of it. To do so, I look beyond the official history of the phenomenon based primarily on American computer science and link it to more distant places and times by examining examples of life-stowing that used pre-digital media.

In the chapter on the present I define life-stowing and distinguish it from other contemporary self-tracking practices. While I have partly already done that in this introduction, a more in-depth theoretical discussion will present its main characteristics. As for the chapter on the future, my aim is to understand how people can make sense of a digital stowage. In order to answer this question I have carried out a case-study in which individuals have been invited to explore a purposefully constructed installation and an archive in which my project is shown and stowed, respectively.

Throughout this book I will address these aims by focusing on life-stowers as media practitioners. Here I am following Nick Couldry's (2002) concept of media studies, which shifts attention to more "marginal" users such as the outsider artists whom McLuhan (1994:94-95) describes as the radars of society. In this respect I agree with Couldry's rethinking of James Scott's idea:

We must be careful not to dismiss the 'weapons of the weak' just because they appear weak, cut off from wider structures of power, in this case the structures of media power. Because it is precisely this weakness that registers (in reverse) the vast power differentials at stake. (Couldry 2002:5)

## 1.8 Life-stowing as my Overarching Methodology

In a chapter of a book (Kubitschku, Kaun 2016) introducing innovative methods in the field of Media and Communication Studies, I have reasoned that manual life-logging practices like mine can themselves be considered a research method (Frigo 2016). I argue that life-logging was originally conceived for scientists of the digital age to help them deal with information overflow (Bush 1945). The idea originated with Vannevar Bush, who came to think of the Memex (1945) as a device that could provide such assistance. This method has mostly been applied by cyborg researcher Steve Mann, who defines it as action research (Mann 2004:1). Similarly to life-logging, life-stowing also deals with information overflow, but it differs in that it uses not automation but schemes predefined by the user that are designed to stow a complete and balanced palette of the various aspects of the life-stower's reality. As this palette is completed, new aspects also present themselves. In this respect, life-stowing can be viewed as conforming to the Baconian concept of *Novum Organum*: an instrument for the production of new knowledge consisting, like life-stowing, of predefined and perfect tables in which this knowledge is not only stowed but generated (Rossi 1983). Here as a media research method I summarize six different kinds of knowledge that life-stowing can engender (Frigo 2016):

1. Technical. Researchers craft their own life-stowing and must develop ways to deal with the rapid obsolescence of the hardware and software they adopt.
2. Empirical. Once life-stowing is in place, it provides researchers with better knowledge both of themselves and of the surrounding reality that it brings to their attention.
3. Maieutic. Via a dedicated curation of their life-stowing, researchers develop a feeling for certain threads of knowledge that might already have been developed elsewhere. But willingness to develop and/or maintain the practice will motivate them to intuitively re-investigate these threads.
4. Ethnographic. In order to nourish and disseminate the outcome of their life-stowing, researchers who have the possibility are motivated to live in different places in which to perfect their life-stowing in the face of new circumstances which they will inevitably stow and eventually reflect on;
5. Historical. Continuing to register not only the content of the life-stowing but also examples that relate to it and to its outcome will develop a sort of personal encyclopedic universe, a culture that is also shaped by what the researcher serendipitously comes into contact with.
6. Critical. Through constant confrontation with the existing cultural, political and economic establishments, the life-stowing researcher will necessarily develop an ongoing criticism of these artificial and conventional structures.

Life-stowing as a method has proved especially adequate in the more reflective parts of my project. During my thirteen years of practice, I have inevitably stumbled upon practices related to my own. Over the many years I have been in the field, I have been on the lookout for cultural artefacts that relate to my own practice. This watching for relations has been particularly necessary given the fact that my practice has not emerged directly from any tradition. I have not studied at an art academy or followed any particular movement. Lacking well-defined predecessors, I have instinctively tried to establish my own historical references.

Also, certain thoughts and notions have matured in my head while life-stowing, and I have used them to lay the foundations of the theory chapter and to map out a history of life-stowing. In the chapter dealing with the past I will discuss this relationship between life-stowing and pre-enlightenment scientific approaches, and in the introduction to each chapter I will discuss life-stowing more thoroughly in relation to other similar methods. As an overarching argument, I now want to stress the relationship between life-stowing and ethnography. Whereas the ethnographer investigates a delimited aspect of reality and makes field observations in a notebook carried along for the purpose, life-stowers investigate the world continuously, and their “notebooks” consist not of blank pages but of what Bacon defines as *tabulae perfectae*, a perfect table designed in advance to stow the knowledge to be collected in certain predefined categories, thus maintaining an overall coherence (Rossi 1983).

I continuously record eighteen aspects of reality, which make up the inputs to my life-stowing operation. As an output, however, I conduct eighteen additional projects in which I reflect upon my activity. For example, I keep a journal now consisting of 500,000 words, I have annotated over 1000 thoughts that emerged about my project, I have written a reflection for every month of production resulting from my eighteen records, I am writing a book providing the historical, conceptual and technical background of each record, I film myself while as I compile these records, etc.

These eighteen additional ways of reflecting on my project started as I began writing the present book. Through them I contemplate not only the stance I have taken in society but also its overall significance. I am attentive not only to the cultural phenomena I am shaping but also to the technological, societal and political transformations around me that impact my being. In this respect, life-stowing has some affinities with autoethnography.

Autoethnography is recognized as a qualitative research method that has come to disregard “the once dominant idea of a detached observer” (Rosaldo 1989) and instead highlights the importance of personal experiences, storytelling, aesthetics and literary practices, emotions and the body (Adams et al. 2015). While it has not yet been used to understand media practices like my own, it is closely related to life-stowing practices, particularly when dealing with scientific inquiries. As noted by Carolyn Ellis, who is among the most active researchers contributing to the framing of autoethnography as a research method (Adams et al. 2015:8-9):

If our task as researchers, as social scientists, is to study the social lives of humans, then we cannot relegate elements of human lives or experiences to the periphery, nor can we bracket out the ways our lives and experiences are intertwined with our research projects and participants.

Thus autoethnography allows researchers to circumnavigate the main epistemological issues that hinder them from fully expressing their personal insights on a research topic. It is not only a research method but also a way of life that intertwines ethnography with autobiography (Adams et al. 2015). Following Ellis, I argue that life-stowing is a way to include the complexity of life and phenomena, an abundance which I fully embrace by producing material continuously. My field notes are ongoing, as is my research; as I deal with the overflow I design moments of reflection and detachment, for example, when, for example, I write in my journal or edit video footage of me photographing the objects I used to prepare a meal, or writing the present book. As an autoethnographer, I have also favored a more conversational style of writing to remain accessible throughout to a broad audience (Goodall 2004:191).

Thus my interest lies in the act of life-stowing itself and in providing others with insights. I want to bring the stowed data back to the human world; if machines need machines to interpret the data they generate, my case-study reveals how humans interpret a humanly-generated dataset.

To investigate this question, however, life-stowing alone will not suffice, so I will make use of other methods as well. In the chapter on the past I borrow from media archaeological methodologies. In the theoretical chapter I adopt etymological research in order to investigate a possible definition of manual life-logging. In the chapter dealing with the future I refer to reception studies methodologies. Much of the historical overview has been developed through a careful literary analysis that often extends beyond academic texts and involves critical studies of cultural artefacts such as novels, films and works of art. These artefacts have been selected based on both their relation to the field of database aesthetics and their significance in explaining the different nuances with which life-stowing can be described. My criteria will be elucidated as the text unfolds, and my methods will be presented in more detail in the introduction to each chapter.

## 1.9 Structure of the Book

In the previous section I have discussed life-stowing as my overarching method. As for the layout of the book, life-stowing is presented in a historical crescendo from past to present and on to a future perspective subdivided into five sections. The first is this introduction, in which a discussion of social media has been narrowed down to the marginal media practice of life-stowing. The second section, the chapter entitled “Past,” is a thorough historical overview to contextualize life-stowing. The third chapter, “Present,” focuses on a state-of-the-art theory of the practice. In “Future,” I

## 1. INTRODUCTION

introduce a case-study to help understand what meaning lies behind the reception of a digital stowage like my own, and in the fifth and final part I present my conclusions.



Past



## 2. A History of Life-stowing

*Ivan the Terrible*, which I saw after the Second World War, was the acme of all historical pictures. He dealt with history poetically - an excellent way of dealing with it. When I realize how distorted even recent events have become, history as such only arouses my skepticism. Whereas a poetic interpretation achieves a general effect of the period. After all, there are more valid facts and details in works of art than there are in history books.

Chaplin 1966:198

The following chapter is meant to provide a history of life-stowing. It fills in the gap between two well defined and documented phenomena, namely the ancient memory techniques developed by European humanists up until the Enlightenment, and the recent official history of life-logging beginning with postwar American science. The latter discussion focuses primarily on the actual computer technology utilized by scientists to augment their memory (Bush 1945), but here I will instead concentrate on techniques utilized by less-researched individuals who stowed the reality around them.

First, as part of my history of life-stowing I will address memory techniques and how they fused with combinatorial approaches prior to the Enlightenment. Second, I will introduce examples of certain eccentric scientists, followed by writers and artists—people who have somewhat inspired my own life-stowing practice. At first glance, the selection of these examples may seem arbitrary and the resulting history eclectic, since it is based on techniques that generate different outputs (e.g. novels, architectures, films, etc.) for various purposes (logging, storytelling, divination, remembering, etc.). However, it is founded on some key criteria that are central to what I view as life-stowing.

Prior to addressing these key parameters let me also argue that because it is the nature of digital media to use all of these techniques, they expand the ability both to sample and to generate life, which due to the media themselves has become increasingly complicated. This chapter, therefore, cannot be understood without taking into account the use that life-stowing makes of digital media. The volume of what can potentially be stowed over a lifetime by a single person has increased exponentially. Life-stowing in the digital age has become perhaps less physical but certainly more intense and psychological, sometimes resembling mere *ars mnemonica* devices more than actual archival techniques. On the other hand, as my own stowage demonstrates, it can also easily utilize a physical environment like the

barn I have renovated to conduct my case-study and analyze the reception of life-stowing. Thus what I am presenting in this historical chapter is a glimpse of the different samples that life-stowing using digital media can provide.

Prior to presenting these samples, let me discuss the key criteria I have adopted to select them and dwell on the historical method I have adopted. Ever since I started my life-stowing, I have been noticing similarities between my own activity and other historical practices based on the same fundamentals. Specifically, the basic key criteria I was seeking include one or more of the following:

1. The sampling of aspects of reality is “effortful,” i.e. non-automated and conducted over a long period of time;
2. A pre-defined architecture is identified in which to stow the resulting samples;
3. The stowed samples can be recombined to generate new meanings.

Throughout the construction of this history I have acted as a life-stower. My historical method is therefore not a particularly active one. I am not a media archaeologist who digs through the various strata of history, discovering forgotten artefacts and making meaning out of them (Parikka 2012). While at first glance there are similarities between life-stowing and media archaeology, I do not identify my method with it, at least as it is described by Jussi Parikka:<sup>1</sup>

... a heterogeneous set of theories and methods that investigate media history through its alternative roots, its forgotten paths, and neglected ideas and machines that still are useful when reflecting the supposed newness of digital culture. The definitions have ranged from emphasizing the recurring nature of media cultural discourses (Huhtamo) to media archaeology as an-archaeology, or variantology (Zielinski) which in its excavation of the deep time layers of the way we sense and use our media always tries to find an alternative route to dismantle the fallacy of linear development.

By developing my life-stowing practice from scratch and with my own set of criteria, fully exploring the new digital media at hand without the support of pre-existing traditions, I have sought my own set of references. My life-stowing methods have been able to relate current life-stowing activities to similar historical practices and events and have also helped me to better understand my own current practice. While some of these historical precedents have already been noted by other scholars, particularly in studies on the art of memory, my intention has been to add to these existing scholarship marginal examples of life-stowers in order to stress a further relation to combinatorial techniques.

Although some media archaeologists like Wolfgang Ernst advocate a more hands-on approach that physically disassembles technologies in order to understand them (Ernst 2013), through my practice I am not attempting any such specific dismantling.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on 2016-08-24: <http://mediacartographies.blogspot.se/2010/10/what-is-media-archaeology-beta.html>

Today, with the advent of sensors and algorithms, I am aware that there is a far bigger technology to be unfolded, namely contemporary life at large. My practical experiment has consisted in becoming the designer and sole executor of the circuit of life. It is the experience of running my own life-stowing technology that is the source of my reflection.

This said, I should point out that the historical method I have generated through my life-stowing practice consists in a free roaming in the deep time of the media, and as such it is an “an-archeology” in Zielinski’s (2006) terms, that refuses “to identify a primary, standardized set of objects for analysis” (Natale 2012:525). Also, unlike most other media archaeological works, my historical approach is presented in chronological order. I do not regard my history as a chronology in a strict sense, but the sequential organization has facilitated remembering the various episodes that comprise it.

As in media archaeological treatises, this historical progression does not allude to a history of increasingly more complicated technologies (Natale 2012). On the contrary, my history only gives a glimpse of all possible examples of what I have defined as life-stowing. I do, however, argue that a systematic historical analysis of life-stowing can only be conducted with great difficulty; life-stowing is by nature marginal and intimate, so that adopting officially available historical material that is purposely intended for historical research will not be of much help.

## 2.1 Life-stowing as a Divination Technique

Here I approach an idea developed by media archaeologists, which is to focus on techniques—or rather, in Eric Kluitenberg’s words—on the ignored “imaginary media” techniques (Kluitenberg 2006) that precede actual technologies. The distinction between technologies and techniques is clearly presented by Jacques Ellul as follows:

It has not been sufficiently emphasized that technique has evolved along two distinct paths. There is the concrete technique of *homo faber*—man the maker—to which we are accustomed, and which poses the problems we have normally studied. There is also the technique, of a more or less spiritual order, which we call magic. (Ellul 1964:24)

Referring to the work of sociologist Marcel Mauss, Ellul continues by pointing out the affinities between magic and technique:

Magic developed along with other techniques as an expression of man’s will to obtain certain results of a spiritual order. To attain them, man made use of an aggregate of rites, formulas, and procedures which, once established, do not vary. Strict adherence to form is one of the characteristics of magic: forms and rituals, masks which never vary, the same kind of prayer wheels, the same ingredients for mystical drugs, for formulae for divination, and so on. (Ibid.)

Following Ellul, we can recover imaginary techniques that have been devised throughout the seventeenth and up to the twentieth century as part of the history of life-stowing and the related practices of knowledge and memory work. These techniques are primarily based on formulas. Throughout history, life-stowing has often been given a purpose. As we will see in the initial part of the chapter, these formulas were meant to be used by important personages to remember orations. Later they were employed to generate new knowledge.

Generally speaking, then, by life-stowing I mean methods that are developed by individuals using predefined containers to sample over a long period of time the reality around them, and that eventually allow the generation of new content out of these specimens. In the sections below, I will explore how reality has been stowed in different historical periods and how the resulting stowages are characteristic of different technological paradigms. Starting with the purely mental techniques characteristic of oral traditions such as those of ancient Rome, the chapter goes on to introduce more physical techniques such as combinatorial wheels and architectures in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and finally considers film, photography and contemporary digital media. The latter are particularly relevant, as they can be used to render most of the aspects upon which life-stowing relies—for example, architecture, writing, drawing, photography and filming. Older media, as Bolter and Grusin (1999) have argued, are remedialized into digital forms.

My aim with this chapter is to introduce historically another element of life-stowing, namely its combinatorial and to some extent generative potential. Historical examples of techniques focused on sampling are accompanied by a look at techniques that are more generative in nature, in which the interpretation of the user is needed to make sense of allegoric combinations. Following this line of thinking, as I will show with more recent examples, the resulting stowage is often released in a rather arbitrary fashion that brings the life-stower's work close to that of a shaman. In this respect, if historians (Yates 1965; Rossi 1982; Van Dijck 2005) have focused on the mnemonic, storing and archiving capabilities of techniques, throughout this chapter I intend to focus on their combinatorial and generative aspects, which thus approaches the discussion addressed by database aesthetics (Manovich 2002; Vesna 2007).

This background is only meant to summarize what past historians and contemporary scholars, in particular Francis Yates and Paolo Rossi, have already amply treated. It will later serve as a source of discussion, especially when comparing contemporary database practices with more traditional encyclopedic approaches. In addition, this history might help elucidate how the practice has shifted between science and art over the centuries, ultimately regaining academic focus in recent decades since the advent of digital media.

I therefore acknowledge that my procedure is simply one of many possible “variations” for exploring and exposing a discourse that includes what is commonly

referred to in the discussion of memory techniques: the art of memory, the combinatorial art, Baconianism, Encyclopedism, experimental literature, outsider art and cybernetics. This chapter presents an overview of these techniques. I apologize for its apparently eclectic nature, but it seems that encyclopedic practices cannot be discussed without also, like many of the philosophical works discussed below, being to some degree encyclopedic, Ciceronian, and pansophistic.

My last remark concerns the latest stage of this history. While the initial part has been thoroughly investigated by diligent scholars such as Paolo Rossi and Francis Yates, the later phases dealing mainly with the cultural revival of these traditions have been rather neglected. It is thus the challenge of the present chapter to broaden this history, particularly in light of the too limited focus on American computer science of recent decades. My intent is to do so by including the histories of politicians, writers and artists and, generally speaking, life-stowers of later centuries.

## 2.2 The Art of Memory: From Oratorical Enhancement to Freak Show

To begin my trajectory through the history of life-stowing, let me present the ancient art of memory technique: I am walking down the alley of my grandmother's family villa where I used to spend my summers as a young boy. Three men from the distant past are standing on the staircase, and a young man is sitting at their feet holding a shapely young woman and gesturing that I should go to his right. This is the first memory image I have stored in my head to help me remember the discussion I am about to develop in the following section. As ancient orators did in the past, I have created an image in a familiar place in order to remember an argument. To begin, then, I have positioned two great Roman orators, Cicero and Quintilian, next to Thomas Aquinas. The former two were among the first public speakers known to advocate the use of this mnémotechnique (Yates 1966) mostly during the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (27 BCE to 70 CE) of the Roman Empire. As they also relate, this technique came from the Greeks, and according to another great Roman orator—Mark Anthony—in a dialogue reported by Cicero in his *De Oratore*, presumably from Simonides:

There is a story that Simonides was dining at the house of a wealthy nobleman ... and chanted a lyric poem which he had composed in honor of his host.... The story runs that a little later a message was brought to Simonides to go outside ... but in the interval of his absence the roof of the hall ... fell in, crushing Scopas himself and his relations underneath the ruins and killing them; and when their friends wanted to bury them but were altogether unable to know them apart as they had been completely crushed, the story goes that Simonides was enabled by his recollection of the place in which each of them had been ... ; and that this circumstance suggested to him the discovery of the truth that the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement. (Cicero 2001:351-54)

The dialogue in *De Oratore* goes on to reveal the main method of what would later be defined as the art of memory (Yates 1966):

He [Simonides] inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves, and we shall employ the localities and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters written on it. (Ibid.)

The application of the technique as described in Cicero's oratorical manuals but also in Quintilian's *De Institutione Oratoria* and Seneca's *De Beneficis*, is clear: one ought to picture the rooms of a familiar place and mentally stow in these rooms different images representing the concepts one wishes to be reminded of. The sequence in which these images is ordered is vital for determining the path of an oration. In this respect, then, the scope of this mnemonic technique is also clear: it helps the orator to remember discussions that the "natural memory" alone cannot retain (Yates 1966). Additionally, this technique is a faculty that enables humans to fill their heads with notions according to the place in which they decide to utilize them. This place, in my case my grandmother's villa, is not unlimited. It is not, as later criticism has implied, a form of mental hoarding (Bacon 2011). On the contrary, the person using such a technique must mentally order the room of the place so as to create a visual as well as a spatial consistency; it would otherwise not be possible to trigger a memory. The rooms are not overcrowded with collections of items; the triggers or set of triggers are instead precisely located and ordered within each room of the place.

Along with Cicero and Quintilian, as mentioned above, I have created a mental image for the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas. Although the art of memory was an established oratorical technique among the Roman aristocracy, with the decline of the empire this technique waned as well. It was Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century who reintroduced and, to some degree, Christianized it (Rossi 1983). Even in the early Renaissance, however, the only purpose retained by *ars mnemonica*, as it was known at the time, was to help remember an oration such as a sermon. At Aquinas' feet I have imagined a young man sitting with a shapely woman. He represents Peter of Ravenna, who is possibly the only humanist who during the fifteenth century and throughout the Renaissance not only successfully theorized along with many others about such an art, but could also put it into practice, claiming to have at his disposal 100,000 mental places. To quote an extract from his rather self-promoting treatise *Phoenix seu artificiosa memoria*, Peter says he has

... 'placed' 20,000 legal extracts, 1,000 texts from Ovid, 200 from Cicero, 300 sayings of the philosophers, the greater part of Valerius Maximus, 7,000 texts from Scripture, and other pieces of learning on 19 letters of the Roman alphabet (Carruthers 1990:114)

Peter goes on to claim that while the art of memory in Roman times was meant only for elevated personages, it could now enable even a peasant to memorize thousands of quotes and laws in a few months. Here he also reveals his secret: to be more easily impressed upon the memory, the mental pictures are in fact accompanied by images of slender young women. Aside from suggesting that he was a womanizer (he was forced to leave a professorship in Germany because he was “unable to live without prostitutes” (Rossi 1983:51)), his example offers a slightly different approach to the art of memory. As Paolo Rossi notes, Peter of Ravenna is far more focused on the evocative power of mental images—in this case of pretty women—than on the actual construction of places. Additionally, while earlier scholars of memory such as Cicero, Quintilian and Aquinas applied the art to create and memorize an oration without the aid of writing, what is retained in Peter of Ravenna’s case is information already stored on paper and not necessarily used to give a speech. This is a common tendency among the many fifteenth-century treatises on the subject.

One way to understand the functioning of the art of memory is to think about the difference between the volatile working memory (RAM) and non-volatile stored memory used in computers. While the volatile memory disappears when the computer is turned off, non-volatile memory is stored and can be retrieved when the computer is powered back on. Analogously, the art of memory can also be defined as having a volatile and a non-volatile memory. The former consists of images that can easily be imprinted by the human brain. Unless these images are placed within a familiar architecture, however, they will be harder to remember. Thus in my history of life-stowing the relationship between images and architecture is an essential one, in that the life-stowing of meaning can only occur within a fixed space.

While Peter of Ravenna’s treatise was highly successful—the first book ever to be copyrighted (Wayne 1994), in fact—throughout the fifteenth century in Italy other popular works on mnemonics appeared that also included more specific instructions. In an anonymous treatise written in vernacular Italian and published around the same time as Ravenna’s *Phoenix*, for example, we read that the rooms where images are mentally located cannot be too dark or too crowded with these pictures, that each room should stock either five or ten of them, and so forth. Here again, however, the anonymous author does not use remembering a discourse to exemplify the application of the art, but indicates that the technique is being presented to aid in the memorization of rosary prayers (Rossi 1983).

It is difficult to say how hard it was to access printed information, but these popular philosophers promised that within the short space of a couple of weeks even a peasant could learn to master such an art and acquire an incredible memory. The discussion of mnemonics in the fifteenth century was arguably focused less on addressing concrete applications and more on attracting attention by claiming the ability to quickly enhance any human mind, however simple (Rossi 1983).

To return now to my mental image, following Peter of Ravenna’s gesture, I am directed to enter my grandmother’s family villa. In the main hall I immediately go to

the right as he indicates to me. Standing next to a piano I find an orator reciting and pointing with his right hand to a window. I look out of the window and I see a big tree that is no longer filled with persimmons but with light bulbs. I locate this tree in my mind to be reminded of a peculiarity I noticed as I tried to mentally structure my discussion in my grandmother's house. I have in fact realized that, utilizing the fixed structure of an already existing architecture, I was no longer stowing memories but was also generating new ones in order to fill all the available rooms of the mansion.

In the following, I will examine the generative power of life-stowing practices. Thus it will be clearer that these media are not simply compact ways to stow meaning within a familiar and fixed architecture, but also that life-stowing can generate new content which derives from this act of stowing.

### 2.3 The Combinatorial Art: From Idea Generation to Occult Kabbalism

I now walk out of the small room indicated to me by Peter of Ravenna and cross the main hall of my grandmother's family mansion to enter the opposite room, in which a man wearing traditional Arab clothes is seated on the floor, like some disc jockey spinning a pile of concentric vinyl records on a turntable. The moment I see him, I am immediately reminded of a distinct phenomenon in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century European academic discussion, namely Lullism. I have placed a traditionally dressed Arab man here in order to be reminded of the influence that Arab culture had on Lullism's father Ramon Lull. It is claimed that while in Spain, he had observed Arab astrologers using a combinatorial wheel called the "zairja" to generate new ideas (Urvoy 1990).

I shall now take a short but necessary detour from the discussion concerning the art of memory to present the idea characteristic of Lullism: the *ars combinatoria*, better known as combinatorial art. I am doing so to further emphasize the generative aspect of what can otherwise be conceived as merely a storing device. Initially, the combinatorial art was promoted as an instrument for reconciling the religious clashes in Spain (Rossi 1983), where it had originated, particularly between Christians and Muslims, but to some degree with the Jews as well, as it is also similar to traditional kabbalah, an esoteric method of thought originating in Judaism. By entering any question into this mechanical device consisting of concentric and rotatable wheels, any believer could find a set of combinations to answer it, which would bring them closer to a complete understanding as perfect as God's. This machinery was therefore meant to transcend the dogmatic view of each monotheistic religion by providing universal answers.

When someone sought an answer to a particular question, they would contemplate the various concepts impressed on the concentric wheels. Rotating one or several of these wheels would yield a new sequence of concepts that provided hints to a universal answer to the question. Thus these mechanisms provided a quasi-infinite

number of combinations in which to obtain many different answers to any single specific issue. Given the way it articulated different questions and allowed users to expand their knowledge on a subject by generating constantly new perspectives from which a subject can be perceived, it seemed that the instrument might in fact be the solution to clashes generated by the different dogmatic truths propounded by various religions.

When Llull presented his art with this purpose in mind to Pope Boniface VIII, the latter convinced him to abandon the concentric mechanism and adopt the simpler and non-generative structure of a tree. At this crucial moment, the combinatorial art becomes illustrative and loses the generative aspect provided by a closed but remixable system like that of the concentric wheels. I argue that from this point on it loses the ultimate aim of life-stowing, which is to contain potential fragments of meanings that can later be randomly released and recombined into new life forms.

With the *arbor scientiae* in mind, I come to the main hall of my grandmother's family villa, in the middle of which I can finally contemplate an old tree. The idea of the tree came to symbolize the fact that, while all the branches constituted specific sciences, the trunk symbolized the *Ars Magna*, the primary science from which all others emerge. Further Llullist investigations throughout the sixteenth century aimed at finding a universal science, mastery of which would automatically provide knowledge of all the others. Following this new direction, Llullists came to dismiss the generative aspect of their former mechanism, thus disregarding the combinatorial generation of quasi-infinite sets of sequences providing ever new answers.

This trend of seeking a single universal science to which all specialized minor sciences belong is accentuated in the correspondence kept by René Descartes with the theologian Marin Mersenne:

God is one, and has created nature from a few principles and elements, so that it is unified, simple and continuous, everywhere coherent and consistent with itself. From these few principles an almost infinite number of things can be generated which nonetheless are all distinct, and have a certain order and hierarchy in the three kingdoms—mineral, vegetable and animal. The understanding of these things, like the unique creator himself and his unique creation (nature), must be unique, simple, continuous, uninterrupted, based on a few principles (in fact, on a unique principle of principles), from which all things are derived, down to the individual connections, deduced according to the wisest order. Thus our contemplation of universal things and of individual things is similar to a picture or mirror which represents with absolute precision the image of the universe and its parts. (quoted in Rossi 2000:114)

However, returning in my imagination to the villa and mentally walking to the end of the big hall, past the big tree and looking out of the windowed door leading to the endless fields, I can finally observe the large wooden model of a theater. In the sixteenth century in Europe, the art of memory and the combinatorial art were increasingly united, for example, through the memory theater of Giulio Camillo (Rossi 1983), which was not only meant to contain, through emblematic images

placed on its steps, the whole of human knowledge that can be viewed at a glance by a person standing on the stage (Yates 1963), but also aimed at generating new knowledge, much like the combinatorial art of early concentric mechanisms. It is thus thanks to Camillo that Lull's ideas of recombination, censured by the church, were brought back to life. While in Lull's system it was the wheel that had to be rotated in order to provide a possible sequence and obtain the answer to a question, in Camillo's case it can be said that this is done by the inquirer, not only by standing on the stage and looking at all the potential truths at once, but also by moving around the theater and glimpsing the truth from various angles. It is not clear to me whether Camillo intended this latter possibility, but it is obviously a marriage of the art of memory and the combinatorial art.

Particularly German scholars began strongly criticizing these mergers of the two arts. Although Cicero and his later followers declared that mental images can easily be erased and replaced (Rossi 1983), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim found the techniques to be mentally obstructing (Agrippa 1600). Agrippa seized the core of this criticism:

It is necessary to warn you of one thing: this art is used more for pomp and the ostentation of knowledge than to procure knowledge: it has in itself more impudence than efficacy. (quoted in Rossi 2000:105)

In view of the fact that among the harshest critics of these arts was the Protestant reformer Philipp Melanchthon, who considered them sterile (Melanchthon 1999:79), it is also possible here to highlight the split that occurred between northern Europe and the more emblematic and iconic humanism of southern Europe. While the former, reformed tradition later became the foundation of modern science, as discussed in the next section, the latter became irrelevant, particularly after a wave of criticism coming from reformed England, where Sir Francis Bacon characterized the non-reformed southern European humanists and their art of memory and combinatorial art as "junk dealers" and "tightrope walkers" (Bacon 2011).

In addition, the reformed generation of northern European scholars also did not tolerate the kabbalistic and magical element that started to appear in these new developments of the art of memory joined to the combinatorial art as adopted by Camillo and in particular as later formulated by Giordano Bruno in his work *De Umbris Ideorum* (Rossi 1983). This intolerance undermined the further application of not only traditional mental and combinatorial systems but generally the use of images as well, which in an iconoclastic spirit were banned from texts despite their pedagogical suitability as advocated particularly by John Amos Comenius (1984). Notwithstanding this criticism, in the following sections we will see how the idea of life-stowing re-emerged in a new conception of science that later moved most definitively toward the arts.

## 2.4 Baconianism: From Perfect Tables to an Open-Ended Encyclopedia

Back in my grandmother's family mansion, as I move to the last room on the bottom floor, I see a naked Adam touching a suspended chart with his index finger. The intellectual scene in seventeenth-century England was characterized by efforts to create a pure and universal language (Rossi 1983). In my history of life-stowing, the cradle of modern science illustrates a moment of transition in which certain systematic and generative aspects of knowledge production were still being attempted but were ultimately dismissed. Baconism is one example of such endeavors. Critical of the latest developments of the combinatorial art, Sir Francis Bacon still maintained that it was necessary to apply a more traditional and non-kabbalistic art of memory, to which he allotted a very specific task. Seeking to develop a new logic, he divided the intellectual arts into four parts (Bacon 2011):

- 1) The art of inquiry or invention;
- 2) The art of examination or judgment;
- 3) The art of custody or memory;
- 4) The art of elocution or tradition.

For the first art Bacon specified that traditional dialectics was sufficient for formulating arguments, but for the creation of new sciences and arts he sees the need for a *Novum Organum*, a new instrument to generate a new body of knowledge extending beyond the old one (Rossi 1983). For this purpose he advocates the use of *tabulae perfectae*, “perfect tables” to “embrace” the whole of human knowledge while filling in the missing parts with new knowledge. It is important to understand here that these tables are not just classifications that can guide us to the discovery of new knowledge but are also the precondition for the invention of a universal language much like that written by the ancient Egyptians and Chinese, a non-nominal language accessible to everyone that, as Descartes also pointed out (Rossi 1983), can easily be learned by simple farmers.

This discussion, then, should be framed under the attempt in the sixteenth century to merge the art of memory and the combinatorial art in order to create an *ars magna*—a prime science or mother of all sciences, which were considered mere branches of the single tree as symbolized by Llull's last efforts and revisited by Bacon:

... it is necessary before we enter into the branches of the former division, to erect and constitute one universal science, to be as the mother of the rest, and to be regarded in the progress of knowledge as portion of the main and common way, before we come where the ways part and divide themselves. This science I distinguish by the name of *Philosophia Prima*, primitive or summary philosophy; or *Sapience*, which was formerly defined as the knowledge of things divine and human (Bacon 2011:337)

and more particularly by Descartes:

Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that issue from the trunk are all the other sciences” (Haldane, Ross 1997: 269)

The necessary precondition for a universal science, however, is the classification and ordering of knowledge. In this respect Descartes writes:

I added also that the enumeration ought to be methodical. This is both because we have no more serviceable remedy for the defects already instanced, than to scan all things in an orderly manner; and also because it often happens that if each single matter which concerns the quest in hand were to be investigated separately, no man’s life would be long enough for the purpose, whether because they are far too many, or because it would chance that the same things had to be repeated too often. But if all these facts are arranged in the best order, they will for the most part be reduced to determinate classes, out of which it will be sufficient to take one example for exact inspection, or some one feature in a single case, or certain things rather than others, or at least we shall never have to waste our time in traversing the same ground twice. The advantage of this course is so great that often many particulars can, owing to a well devised arrangement, be gone over in a short space of time and with little trouble, though at first view the matter looked immense. (Haldane, Ross 1997:24-25)

The above quotation demonstrates the drive towards a universal science, which finds its highest fulfillment in Comenius’ *Pansophia* (2008), a temple that in the first place must be a mirror of the world and can only then develop into an exploration of the unknown (Rossi 1983). In this respect Bacon’s perfect table is the one concrete method for realizing such a mirror; it is yet another life-stowing mechanism.

This said, however, Bacon’s followers throughout the first half of the seventeenth century demonstrated the impossibility of such an ordered classification of reality. If we look at the English clergyman John Wilkins’ “An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language” (2011), the idea of a universal language overcoming the obstacles posed by the non-nominal human language—this idea of a “stoic, “non-Ciceronian” “original” and “universal” language which conveyed the whole of human knowledge and had the power to solve all disputes—was soon criticized for the arbitrariness of its method and because it forced collaborating scientists to adapt an articulated reality to Wilkins’ scheme (Lankester 2010). How could naturalists, for example, force the innumerable species of both animals and plants to fit in Wilkins’s “perfect” yet too simplified model?

By the time Denis Diderot and Jean Le Ronde d’Alambert compiled their encyclopedia during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the pansophistic aspiration had been dismissed (Rossi 1983). While retaining a few of the connotations of the earlier art of memory—for instance through the use of illustrations—many of its aspects were absent from this further development. The Enlightenment encyclopedia is no longer a spatial system that triggers ideas in a person’s brain; it is instead a systematic documentation of human knowledge. In this respect, knowledge resides

in writings, and those who consult it take a far less active role, which is what happens, for example, when they interpret an emblematic image presented to them.

In addition, the aesthetic and to some degree mystical value of combinatorial systems, perfect tables and early forms of life-stowing in general diminishes, leaving space for an open-ended encyclopedic production without a frame and most of all, without the need of a human subject to understand it. Thus whereas early forms of life-stowing such as the already-mentioned combinatorial systems, the memory theater, and to some extent the Baconian tables, all had keys that allowed interpreters to open up new knowledge, if not the universe, and thus come closer to God, the Enlightenment encyclopedia and the subsequent science became this universe and no longer required a key to discover it. In other words, as is familiar to us today, science fully maps knowledge in its totality, leaving no space for interpretation, while life-stowing implies the generation of constantly varying and interpretable meanings. It is therefore not finished like D'Alambert's encyclopedia, but infinite, yielding, in fact, an unknown potential number of combinations depending both on the sequences generated by the life-stowing mechanism and interpretations influenced by the interpreter's personal history and psychological state.

Prior to moving on now to a new section, I find it important here to underline the classic idea of perfection as a medium for spiritual heightening, a notion conceived not only during the Renaissance by, for example, Leon Battista Alberti, but even earlier with Vitruvius in his *De Architectura*, in which the concept of pure shapes and geometry, particularly in the design of temples, is the precondition for such enrichment. Sir Francis Bacon and those other early architects of instruments for knowledge storage and generation are very important. When the search to devise a perfect machine is abandoned, the drive to advance through perfection and thus completeness is relinquished as well, also, perhaps, in view of new revolutionary discoveries during the Enlightenment that may, in fact, have affected the idea of the one perfect God or the notion of God in general. Having made this claim, it is about time for me to refrain from entering any more rooms of my grandmother's family house and simply sit under the tree in the middle of the hall, ponder over the last two centuries, and finally analyze the current status of life-stowing, which is increasingly being utilized on the margins of both scientific and artistic production.

## 2.5 Eccentric Science: From Self-Knowledge to Politics

Benjamin Franklin, known as an early American political figure, is also famous for his inventions. Here he serves as a *deus ex machina* that allows me to stitch together the increasingly formal European science of the eighteenth century and the cultural production of the nineteenth, a shift that shows how life-stowing became increasingly less concerned with generative approaches and gradually turned its attention from stowing the universe at large to the self and its surrounding reality. Franklin did not produce any actual stowage; the system he set up to morally improve himself is at the

root of how life-stowing has evolved today, proceeding first from the agent and only later expanding to outer reality. Franklin's experiment should be seen not only as a form of self-tracking similar to other stoic examples such as Seneca (Rettberg 2014), but above all as a precursor of later historical life-stowing practitioners like the eccentric American architect and inventor Buckminster Fuller, who in an experiment spanning sixty-three years begun in 1920, documented his life every fifteen minutes. The project resulted in eighty meters worth of paper now stored at Stanford University. As Fuller reflects on his *Dymaxion Chronofile*:

[What would happen] if somebody kept a very accurate record of a human being, going through the era from the Gay '90s, from a very different kind of world through the turn of the century—as far into the twentieth century as you might live. I decided to make myself a good case history of such a human being and it meant that I could not be judge of what was valid to put in or not. I must put everything in, so I started a very rigorous record. (Fuller 1962:324)

While Fuller's idea is that everything should be collected indiscriminately in order to more strictly provide future generations with a human record, Franklin's experiment can be viewed more in the light of an attempt to achieve moral perfection and virtue (Franklin 2016:35). It is also possible to consider certain life-stowing operations in keeping with this stoic approach to self-formation. By stoic I mean the determination to realize one's will through one's own conduct and in accordance with nature (Seneca 2007:279). Franklin continues to elucidate what amounts to a life-stowing method:

In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I met in my reading, I found the catalogue more or less numerous, as different writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name. Temperance, for example, was by some confined to eating and drinking, while by others it was extended to mean the moderating every other pleasure, appetite, inclination, or passion, bodily or mental, even to our avarice and ambition. I proposed to myself, for the sake of clearness, to use rather more names, with fewer ideas annexed to each, than a few names with more ideas; and I included under thirteen names of virtues all that at that time occurred to me as necessary or desirable, and annexed to each a short precept, which fully expressed the extent I gave to its meaning. (Franklin 2016:35)

Later in the text he lists exactly what virtues he is referring to: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility (Franklin 2016). The following lines are also revealing in terms of the method that Franklin used to "track" his virtue:

I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues. I ruled each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. I crossed these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column. I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found

upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day.  
(Franklin 2016:37)

Franklin's experiment can be seen as deriving from stoicism and a precursor of a contemporary trend in life-stowing, where— as I have discussed in my analysis of the art of memory and the combinatorial art—the starting point is no longer the universe but the self. In this historical account of life-stowing, then, it was Franklin who inaugurated a tradition of self-experimenting that was later followed up by Henry David Thoreau in the nineteenth century, by Buckminster Fuller in the twentieth and Seth Roberts<sup>2</sup> at the beginning of our century. As the latter's self-experiments are meant to improve sleep, mood, health and weight (Roberts 2004) and avoid offering any moral guidance as in Franklin's case, they make a smooth transition to the Quantified Self movement, and they also show the way knowledge can be produced “non-scientifically” by simply adopting self-crafted frameworks of operation.

While the advent of digital portable technologies has made the operation of annotating oneself easier, Franklin's self-experiment is interesting from the perspective of my history of life-stowing because he crafted it himself. He did not adopt any ready-made systems that he could have obtained from a religious book or institution. He went so far as to compile his own table, which in this respect much resembles Bacon's approach. Moreover, although he did not make the mistake of claiming that this table he crafted for himself was of any use to others, we can draw upon it as a source of inspiration as we perhaps also set about devising our own individual system for self-improvement.

To conclude, I would also like to point out that conducting self-experiments does not imply being selfish. This is remarkable in the case of Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, but it is also true of other politicians, including the father of modern India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi:

... [It] is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and my life consists of nothing but those experiments ... But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field.... What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization. (Gandhi 1983:1)

Interestingly, then, the self-experimentation of these political figures comes close to Ellull's already-mentioned notion of technique as magic: through their practice of self-crafted imaginative media they naturally become the shamans of their community—a role that differs considerably from that of the political activist. Leaving this discussion aside for now, in the sections below I will go back to Europe and look

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Berkeley, Seth Roberts was famous for his self-experimentation.

into examples that depart from a rather macroscopic perspective. As we move into the twentieth century, however, we will return to the United States and recover what Franklin, Roberts and Fuller have left behind. I have therefore merely touched upon the history of American self-experimentation and then only to introduce a new perspective on life-stowing that has increasingly adopted the self as its point of departure.

## 2.6 Experimental Literature: From Art of Science to Science-like Art

I will now proceed to investigate the emergence of life-stowing. What I want to stress here is not that the life-stowing methods developed by medieval humanists came to a halt, but that there was a historical shift between these methods and those employed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century experimental art. The following section explores experimental literature as the site where previously criticized and banned practices of life-stowing were rediscovered (Rossi 1983).

By experimental literature I mean writing that is focused less on the narrative outcome per se than on experimentation with ambitious methods of literary production. These methods provide the author with a broader ability to both depict and regenerate human experiences. By not claiming any scientific results, the writer can craft these methods in total freedom from increasingly regulated scholarly scrutiny. Through the examples below I argue that, while science from the Enlightenment onward has denigrated the use of the art of memory, combinatorial art methods, and life-stowing practices at large, experimental literature has more or less involuntarily recovered them.<sup>3</sup>

As I have discussed in previous sections, the shift from an interpretative instrument for hosting and generating knowledge to a more descriptive and non-interpretable scientific production took place at the dawn of modern science. During the Enlightenment, totalizing and, to some degree, mystical systems were criticized and then banished, including methods of knowledge production such as combinatorial wheels, memory theaters and the perfect tables that characterized a relevant part of the overall humanist creation of the European Renaissance and marked a significant initial stage of life-stowing. So what has become of this aspiration to create structures to host and generate new knowledge? The Lullian approach of divining knowledge from memory wheels, and the arbitrary attempt of the pre-Enlightenment

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<sup>3</sup> I think it important to mention, however, that the roots of life-stowing-related experimental literature predate nineteenth-century French literature. At least two early examples of thirteenth-century Italian works are relevant to the present discussion. On the one hand, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the afterlife can be construed as an entire architecture, represents an excellent application of the art of memory, and on the other, there is Boccaccio's *Decameron*, where the rotation of stories and narrators is a good example of applied combinatorial art.

Baconian scientist to frame all of human knowledge in perfect tables were severely criticized in the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century, which rendered life-stowing an unacceptable methodology in the realm of modern science.

As we have seen, however, Descartes, referring to the creation of a universal science as the making of a mirror or a painting to be contemplated (Descartes 1997), saw both aesthetic and moral choices as a leading factor in the use of such systems. In his view, because God is the source of all knowledge, and since He is perfect, it is only with a perfect system that universal truth can be sought. Although eighteenth-century science had rejected perfect systems of knowledge organization, it is in fact possible to recover traces of systematic and totalizing methodologies in nineteenth-century literature—ironically enough, in France, the birthplace of the Encyclopedia that epitomized Enlightenment rationalism. Beginning with Honoré de Balzac and Emile Zola, we can identify a genre of experimental literature premised on preconceived systems available to the writer to use, in this case, to depict the whole of contemporary society.

It is in the middle of the twentieth century and again in France, however, that a new generation of experimental writers started utilizing quasi-scientific methods to generate literature. I am here particularly interested in the work of George Perec. While together with Marcel Duchamp, Raymond Queneau and Italo Calvino he belongs to the literary group *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, commonly referred to as *Oulipo* (Motte 1986), Perec neatly demonstrates how the art of memory and combinatorial art methods once used in science have been adopted in the realm of experimental literature. If on one hand Perec was a something of a Moses, having been sent by his mother to Grenoble before she was taken to Auschwitz during WWII, he mainly operated as a Noah, dedicating his time not only to working as an archivist at a neurophysiological research laboratory, but also archiving data for his own novels.

The Cuban-Italian writer Italo Calvino, who died in 1985, prepared for Harvard University a series of lectures to point out the “six memos” that should be kept in mind in the cultural production of our millennium, namely lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity (the sixth one, consistency, was not written due to his sudden death). In the very last pages of his notes he refers to Perec’s work *Life: A User’s Manual* as the last important event in the history of novels and, in fact, as a revival of the great Balzacian cycle (Calvino 1993). He informs us that Perec spent nine years compiling forty-two categories in which he listed a variety of themes:

... and decided that, even if barely hinted at, one theme from each category ought to appear in each chapter, in such a way as constantly to vary the combinations according to mathematical procedures” (Calvino 1993:122)

Like the previously discussed seventeenth-century English clergyman John Wilkins, Perec acknowledged the necessity of a perfect life-stowing structure, a three-dimensional Baconian table in the shape of a bi-square building of ten by ten rooms that

allowed him not only to create interesting combinations of categories from which interesting stories could arise, but especially:

... to escape the arbitrary nature of existence ... to impose rigorous rules and regulations on himself, even if these rules are in turn arbitrary. (Calvino 1993:122)

Contrary to the critical reception of Wilkins by his contemporaries, Perec is praised by Calvino, who goes on:

But the miracle is that this system of poetics, which might seem artificial and mechanical, produces inexhaustible freedom and wealth of invention. (Calvino 1993:123)

Here references to the generative aspect of the art of memory and the combinatorial art are clearly evident. While the placing of things in a fixed architectural structure strongly echoes the art of memory, the book itself is based on the combination of various objects to generate a story. Calvino again highlights this function of the cultural production of this millennium:

Someone might object that the more the work tends towards the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the *self* of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But I would answer: Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable. (Calvino 1993:124)

The above passage illuminates all our discussion here and below, but the following, very last, words delivered by Calvino prior to his death open up the potential of Perec's operation:

But perhaps the answer that stands closest to my heart is something else: Think what it would be like to have a work conceived from outside the self, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perching on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic.. Was this not perhaps what Ovid was aiming at, when he wrote about the continuity of forms? And what Lucretius was aiming at when he identified himself with that nature common to each and every thing? (Calvino 1993:124)

These final remarks echo somewhat the sentiment behind the realization of combinatorial systems, particularly in an artistic context. It consists in the intuition that what we want to accomplish through these systems is not really to archive, or, poetically speaking, to immortalize dead fragments of life in a nice cabinet. Instead, we aspire to perfect a life-stowing system that allows life itself to be replayed and even to bring what is dead or seems dead—since it cannot communicate to us—to life. In these terms, combinatorial practices become not only a system for generation but also

for regeneration. By engaging with such a system, the poet, in the obsession to seize reality, might be able to bring it all back to life, at least potentially. Also, as in the case of the art of memory, we learn from Perec that it is important for life-stowing systems to be fixed places in which particular content can be stowed. Although important mentally, this fixedness is not limiting, since a new room for stowing something can be always found inside, outside or parallel to the already existing medium. As in any mechanism, however, these additions should be thought of as working in harmony with the original structures, particularly so as not to confuse the process of life-stowing (these rooms should be distinctive and have distinctive content to be stowed) as well as the process of recombining.

Stowing objects in a place and combining them to generate a story in the manner of Perec is only one of the methods utilized by novelists attempting to represent the multiplicity of reality. While it recalls Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, another way to generate such a multiplicity consists in having an itinerant character move through an undefined space. One example is Chichikov, the protagonist of Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*, who as he travels around buying dead serfs allows the author to depict the nineteenth-century Russian countryside.

What I wish to consider at this point is that both literary methods of portraying reality can be criticized as arbitrary and random. Why did Perec choose 100 rooms and not 66? Why did Chichikov choose to go east and not west? What would have happened if Perec had written a story based on a set of objects on a different day, when, for example, parameters in his life had changed (e.g. gray weather and coughing due to smoking) or if Gogol had met a not-so-disagreeable landowner while writing his novel?

The classical playwright who writes his tragedy observing a certain number of familiar rules is freer than the poet who writes that which comes into his head and who is the slave of other rules of which he is ignorant. (quoted in McNulty 2014:260)

Despite the criticism as pointed out above by Queneau, these writers are only continuing with the classic tradition of representing human nature in a structured manner. I could at this point go further back in time and analyze Roman and Greek poets or even non-Western poetry to discover the explicit use of methods to generate a quasi-total representation of human nature. I shall refrain from that, however, and simply claim that these literary methodologies have removed the connotations of artistic. I suggest that the "artistic" method selected by a writer can be viewed as the direction that Descartes invites us to blindly follow in order to reach a destination without being lost in uncertainty. Whether or not these methods are providentially endowed, like the *Ars Magna* that appeared to Llull in a vision or the Ark to Noah, they provide the framework for stowing the reality of their time.

The only downside of these literary experiments is that, by not making use of other media such as photography and film, they fail to fully mirror the reality around them. Avant-gardists like Dziga Vertov who wished to break with the past would have

criticized those attempting to stow life only in writing without including more contemporary media in their life-stowing experiments. Even traditional artistic expressions, however, are remedialized under new paradigm shifts and, for the sake of a full representation of reality; it is worth bringing them on board along with the new media characteristic of our age.

## 2.7 Outsider Art: From Top-down Science to Bottom-up Existence

In this section I will continue my history of life-stowing by focusing on outsider artists. Acting beyond any given institutional framework, these individuals have dedicated themselves to the creation of works that often encompasses what I have defined as life-stowing: techniques for systematically sampling one's reality. To begin with, let me specify that by "outsider" I mean those artists who have had no connection to an art world (Becker 2008). Marshall McLuhan calls them marginal artists, Noahs building their arks who avoid the mainstream (McLuhan 1994). I could have created this connection using more conventional characters like Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Frida Kahlo or even more contemporary examples like the work of On Kawara, Roman Opalka and Teaching Hsieh (Gold et al. 2010). Given their social recognition, however, I believe that the relationship between these artists and more traditional forms of life-stowing has diminished. In contrast, the outsider artists I have chosen specifically put their "methods" into practice by fully engaging their lives in these methods and are indifferent to the recognition-based frameworks that the art world imposes on them. Also, unlike the scholars I have introduced in the previous sections, they no longer attempt to seize the whole of knowledge but, as I will explain, they document their reality from a perspective that is marginal to the mainstream and secure it in precarious stowage.

I have selected four examples to make my point. By way of introduction, I describe the compulsive diary that Pontormo kept during his secluded painting of the San Lorenzo Chapel. Second, I have chosen the memory palace constructed by the French postman Ferdinand Cheval. The last two examples are the work of Janina Turek and Vivian Maier, who stowed content in less secure environments, a closet and a storage room, respectively. Throughout this section these examples are presented in order to provide a broader perspective on my life-stowing history. This section is essential for relating traditional life-stowing forms like the art of memory and the combinatorial art to contemporary ones. Moreover, my main intention with showcasing these examples is to prove the strong relationship of these individuals with not only life but also, intuitively, with the afterlife.

Giorgio Vasari describes the mannerist painter Jacopo Pontormo as solitary and melancholic. The following passage reports on the Florentine painter's habit of locking himself in his room with a retractable staircase. It is an emblematic description providing further accounts of how Pontormo often refused to open his door to

his few friends, like Agnolo Bronzino, or even to rich art-buyers such as the Magnifico Ottaviano de' Medici:<sup>4</sup>

... to the room where he used to sleep and at times to work, he had to climb by a wooden ladder, which, after he had gone in, he would draw up with a pulley, to the end that no one might go up to him without his wish or knowledge.

While it has been theorized that Renaissance artists consciously cultivated melancholy in order to elevate their artistic production (Kibanski 2002), Pontormo's character is closer to compulsive hypochondria and misanthropy. Despite Vasari's attempt to defend Pontormo from such an accusation, the latter came to acquire this profile particularly in the last ten years of his life, which were entirely dedicated to the frescoes in the San Lorenzo Chapel. With this cycle of paintings Pontormo attempted to surpass Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*. Even in this case we read that for an entire decade he worked completely sealed in the chapel and did not allow anyone inside. The public unveiling was a fiasco and the building was later even demolished because of its orthodox content.

During this period of isolated contemplation Pontormo began a diary, which is ironically all that is left to us from his masterpiece. There he annotated not only the progress of the painting, but most particularly his diet, documenting a broad list of foods, as well as his health (Cecchi 2005). The following is an excerpt of a week of Pontormo's diary from March 1554:<sup>5</sup>

On the 11th of March 1554, on Sunday morning, I ate lunch with Bronzino—chicken and veal—and felt well (it is true that I was in bed when he came for me at home. It was quite late and upon getting up I felt swollen and full. It was a very beautiful day). In the evening I ate a bit of roasted dry meat which made me thirsty.

Monday evening I ate a cabbage and a pancake.

Tuesday evening I ate one half of a little goat's head and vegetable soup.

Wednesday evening I had the other half, fried, and a pretty big measure of grapes, and five cents of bread, and capers in salad.

Thursday morning I felt a dizziness that lasted all day; and even after [it passed] I still felt bad and my head was weak.

Thursday evening, a soup of good mutton and beet salad.

Friday evening beet salad and a pancake of two eggs.

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-24: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/v/vasari/giorgio/lives/part3.56.html>

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-25: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/18/pontormosdiary.php>

Saturday, fasted. Sunday evening, which was the evening of Palm Sunday, I ate a little boiled mutton and salad, and had to eat three cents of bread.

What I would like to point out in this particular example is that Pontormo's fact-based diary can be seen as his ultimate testimony prior to his death. To the same extent, the San Lorenzo Chapel, often disregarded by art historians, is in fact his "personal last judgment," where the artist has stowed a large palette not only of human postures but also of psychological states manifested in the many facial expressions resembling his own physiognomy.

The French postman Ferdinand Cheval created a similar "personal last judgment." According to his short autobiography written two days before his death (Cheval 2002), he dedicated most of his life, thirty-four years, to the construction of a *Palais Idéal*. He started to construct it only at the age of forty-three, and it was conceived much in the likeness of memory palaces in the ancient tradition:

Being a country postman like my 27000 colleagues, every day I used to walk from Hauterives to Tersannes (in a region where obvious signs show it was once covered by the sea) sometimes running in the snow and ice, sometimes in the country in bloom—constantly walking in the same surroundings what could I do but dream? What about? My readers will ask me. Well, to change my mind, I used to build a fairy-like palace beyond imagination with all that the genius of a humble man could conceive (with grottoes, towers, gardens, castles, museums and sculptures) trying to bring back to life all the ancient architectures and primeval times; the whole thing was so pretty, so picturesque that for at least ten years I could remember it vividly in my mind. (Cheval 2002:1)

In other words, as Cheval made his daily thirty-two-kilometers rounds delivering mail on foot, he started imagining a mental architecture that he did not begin to realize until years later, when, like Newton hit on the head by the proverbial apple, he stumbled on an oddly shaped stone. He then walked ten extra kilometers every day to collect stones and worked at night to assemble them into a palace. Even as he slept his brain worked to imagine the figures he would sculpt. As a Noah, he too had measurements and utilized the architecture as a container of a variety of species. He finished the palace just before WWI:

When I had gathered a certain quantity of materials I started working. Naturally the hollowed foundation amazed many people because of the size of the dimensions as follows: the Eastern facade is 26m long, the one in the West also 26m, to the North 14m and the Southern 12m. The height varies according to place from 8m to 10m... . To the amazement of visitors in a total of 1000 small various palaces, they offer a bizarre, grotesque and original world of plants, animals and all kinds of figures. (Cheval 2002:1)

On the basis of Cheval's autobiography, I can claim that his architecture resulted from the use of a method similar to the art of memory. Moreover, his palace not only is the result of a mental architecture in which content has been stowed for years, but, as we

can read in his short autobiography, it also contains an interesting combinatorial aspect:

... you start wondering if you have not been carried away into a fantastic dream with boundaries beyond the scope of imagination. Are you in India, the Orient, China or Switzerland? You can't tell because styles typical of every country and age in history merge and mingle with one another. (Cheval 2002:2)

As I have already mentioned, this combinatorial aspect has a component that was also evaluated by Raymond Lull: it connects not only various elements from reality but also different dogmas, such as the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian religions. In this respect and unconsciously, Cheval, who was also influenced by the many postcards from exotic places he delivered, gave shape to a truly new and pacifistic religion that embraced all others. Considered eclectic today, his work could in fact begin to alleviate what McLuhan (1994:94) sees as the crisis generated by a new medium.

Again, as I have pointed out in my analysis of Pontormo's operation, Cheval's intent also seems clear: the construction of the palace was originally intended to stow the life he was observing in nature, such as the different plants and animals he saw as he delivered mail in the Alpine valleys. It was also a way to stow his daydreaming. Rather than letting his fantasies fly away in the wind, he had developed a way to stow them. Thus as a hobby he found a way to allocate these elements of his outer and inner life, first in a mental architecture, and then in an actual structure. Additionally and more explicitly than in Pontormo's case, Cheval's operation is also directly linked to the stowing of his own life. It was official laws that prevented his dream of being buried along with this stowage of reality from coming true, so that a separate and smaller palace had to be constructed on the grounds of the village cemetery.

I now turn to the less well-known 748 diaries kept by the Polish housewife Janina Turek after her husband was sent to a concentration camp. For over sixty years, from 1943 to 2000, during which her country experienced the horrors of Nazism and later Communism, this Polish woman recorded every single phone call she had received at home, noting who had called (38,196) and how many times she had phoned someone (6,257); where and whom she had met by chance and greeted with a "Hello" (23,397); how many appointments she had made (1,922); how many and what kind of gifts she had given and to whom (5,817); how many she had received (10,868); how many times she had played bridge (1,500); how many times she had played dominoes (19); how many times she went to the theater (110); whom she had seen in television programs (70,042) and so on.<sup>6</sup>

These 748 diaries were kept stowed and hidden and were only found in a closet next to her bed after her death. While going through her things, Turek's daughter

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<sup>6</sup> Retrieved 2014-08-15: <http://zbigkurzawa.tripod.com/Turek.html>

discovered a pile of postcards that her mother used to send to herself. One of them says:

How many women live waiting on the sidelines? Am I living or am I pretending to live? All these notes, these statistics, are they not a way to cheat me? If I were to stop writing, I would have to return to myself. (Szczygiel 2010:1; [my translation])

Another one written six months before her death says:

I am on the border of life and death. At the age of seventy-eight and a half it's not worth hurrying, you should instead slow down. I have suffered a lot in my life. Metaphysics has almost always accompanied me, and at times it was not easy to cope with it. I wanted to love but also to be loved. It is here that I encountered great difficulties. The result? Loneliness!!!” (Szczygiel 2010:1; [my translation])

It is hard to know exactly what drove Turek to dedicate her life to the compilation and stowage of lists. There are a few hints, however. Based on Sigmund Freud's “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (2015) a first conjecture would be to define her operation as a compulsion to overcome a trauma, although the above passage seems to indicate that what she needed was to love and be loved.

To conclude this section on life-stowing from an outsider-art perspective, I will present a “Woman with a Rolleiflex Camera,” the life work of Vivian Dorothea Maier, a nanny born in New York and based in Chicago. Her name is now increasingly familiar, but up to her death a few years ago she lived secretly like Pontormo. In her life of an outsider, she captured photographs that are now touring the world. After being temporarily abandoned by her father, she grew up in an Alpine French village not too far from Ferdinand Cheval's palace and where Georges Perec spent his childhood.

What I am interested in are not Maier's actual pictures, since they are all in museums, but her stowage: the contents of the 200 boxes she collected. Unlike Andy Warhol's famous 612 boxes containing scattered material from the life of the superstar artist, Maier's were systematically stowed and consisted of 150,000 negatives, 8mm films, audiotapes of conversations with others, paperwork and newspaper headlines (Houlihan 2011). We cannot know the full content of these boxes, however, since much of it was lost after her death. Interestingly, financed by the sale of her relatives' farm in France, she set off with her camera to Asia, Europe and Saudi Arabia, making her work a testimony not only to time but also to space. Among the few known precise details of her life, what is certain is that in the 1980s she stopped photographing. In economic difficulties and homeless, she placed all these boxes in a rental storage unit. After her death the 200 boxes were cheaply sold in different street markets. During this process, items of least commercial value, such as the non-photographic part of her stowage and her personal notes, were thrown away.

Thus Maier's stowage was disrupted not only by amateur auctioneers looking for a quick profit, but also by museums, which have focused on showing off her more

aesthetic side and have tended to ignore her life-stowing activity. The montage, or “recombination” that Vertov’s wife Yelizaveta Svilova accomplished in his *Man with a Movie Camera*, has in Maier’s case been done by a series of collectors and curators, who now present a kind of finalized montage to the public. In this sense we see once again how a stowage is disrupted or simply liberated, in much the same way that the animals on Noah’s Ark were set free to create new content, or seeds stowed over the winter are released into the soil in the spring. Some will give rise to new plants, and others will merely fail to germinate and die. It should be noted, however, that Maier’s stowage represents a thorough recovery of the potential of her time, a collection of several distinct aspects of reality which can partially replay in the souls of the museum visitors, conveying to them the spirit of this nanny and her playful outsider perspective on the world.

## 2.8 Avant-garde Cinema: From Constructivism to Archivism

Previously I mainly focused on the construction of life-stowing by means of traditional media. Dziga Vertov and his wife Yelizaveta Svilova’s 1929 masterpiece *Man with a Movie Camera* has not only completed this operation of life-stowing and revealing samples of reality, but has done so using a contemporary medium, namely a movie camera. On one hand, this avant-garde movie presents a quasi-panoptic collection of life from dusk till dawn in the 1930s Soviet Union. The film hints at a plot in which a hero, Vertov, and his squire, Vertov’s younger brother Mikhail Abramovich Kaufman, who take big risks to capture all aspects of life from all angles.

On the other hand, what also elevates this ambitious totalistic representation of life in the course of a single day is Svilova’s montage. She kept indoors next to a big closet in which all film reels were placed in labeled drawers. Throughout the film we see her cutting and pasting clips of films, which particularly when juxtaposed with shots of more traditional women’s jobs, seems to suggest that editing is the modern equivalent of knitting. According to Anette Michelson (1972), however, the relevant aspect of Svilova’s editing is not the cutting but her summation of all possible montage techniques available at that time. Referring to database aesthetics, Lev Manovich (2001) has developed Michelson’s concept. In his view, the well-partitioned closet with all the categorized film reels is a database. In modern life these drawers are in fact the equivalent of our computer folders. Additionally, he implies that the *per se* is not aesthetic: by itself it can simply be conceived as the trophy of a hero who has managed to represent his society from all possible angles throughout a single day. The work can be finally judged only through the operation of montage. As Dziga Vertov points out at the beginning of his masterpiece:<sup>7</sup>

The film is an experiment in cinematic communication of real events without the help of intertitles without the help of a story without the help of theater. This experimental

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<sup>7</sup> *Man with a Movie Camera* (Alloy Orchestra) 1929

work aims to create a truly international language of cinema based on its absolute separation from the language of theater and literature.

It is clear that Vertov is after a universal language, a final work able to transmit a representation of reality to other people across time and space. The multitude of views and techniques adopted in *Man with a Movie Camera* do in fact continue to fascinate not only first-time viewers from different time periods and different places, but also those who have seen it several times. The reason is that this experimental movie consists of a combinatorial system of concentric wheels that present constantly new content. Details that in one screening have escaped the viewer might be more noticeable on a second occasion.

Vertov and Svilova's *Man with a Movie Camera* is one of the main examples cited by Manovich in relation to database aesthetics. According to him, a database is a collection of individual objects that do not tell a story but complement it. Narration is thus only one of many possible ways in which databases can be presented. Also, a database is the new means by which we structure our experience of ourselves and the world in the computer age:

The world is reduced to two kinds of software objects which are complementary to each other: data structures and algorithms. Any process or task is reduced to an algorithm, a final sequence of simple operations which a computer can execute to accomplish a given task. And any object in the world—be it the population of a city, or the weather over the course of a century, a chair, a human brain—is modeled as a data structure, i.e. data organized in a particular way for efficient search and retrieval. (Manovich 2001:223)

In any discussion of algorithms in relation to computer games or in separately considering databases in connection with cultural artefacts like Vertov and Svilova's movie, it should be noted that the very procedure of creating a database can follow an algorithm. When a life-stower like Vertov sets out into the city with his movie camera to collect different items, the city becomes, in Manovich's words (2001:244), a navigable space where the life-stower is acting rather like a computer game character, in that he gives himself a mission, hunting for something new in the predefined but at times unpredictable urban environment. It is clear, then, that in their intention to create a stowage, life-stowers as well have an algorithm-like structure in mind which tells them when and what to document. This algorithm is even more important at present, when digital media allow even more immediate accessibility to documenting devices such as digital cameras with plenty of storage space.

At this point the options are either to let the camera record everything and then allow a computer algorithm to sort the documented reality (e.g. life-logging with all its attendant implications), or to act as an algorithm oneself by deciding in advance what to record. If in the first case the algorithm operates immediately after the data has been collected, I stress the fact that what life-stowers do is to act like computer game characters ruled by self-imposed algorithms which allow them to accomplish

their mission of collecting items from reality, thus compiling a database, without having to post-edit very much, or at least without needing a computer algorithm to make sense of a big chunk of data that cannot be handled manually. To the same degree, I argue that an algorithm to make sense of the data such as that adopted by Svilova when she cooked the ingredients collected by Vertov, can also be accomplished by an active audience when they taste the resulting stowage of life.

## 2.9 Past Chapter Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have provided an alternative look at historical currents that have emerged and re-emerged in disguise. The history would not have made sense without the existence of digital media; it has spanned several others areas such as architecture, writing and film that also exist in digital form. It certainly could have been extended to other media and other practitioners who stow different aspects of their reality. Nonetheless, this chapter has not attempted to provide a complete history of life-stowing, but only to offer glimpses of its nuances.

What I have emphasized in this history is not eclecticism or an arbitrary mix of doctrines and styles, but rather the very heterogeneous nature of digital media that is reflected in life-stowing. It shows how different individuals have used different media to accomplish what I have identified as life-stowing. In this respect, I have also demonstrated the recurrence of certain patterns characteristic of the practice. I have emphasized how its delimited framework provides life-stowing with a generative potential; not only are samples of life stowed within the life-stowers' delimited frameworks, but new ones are sought in order to complete the process.

I have also accounted for the more or less tragic fate of the stowed material; whether accidentally or on purpose, its order is lost and its content remixed. This remixing is often done by someone else (e.g. Dziga Vertov's wife and in Vivian Maier's case a museum curator), and it is the necessary condition for the stowed content to be communicated and, to some extent, for life to be regenerated. This history is one of many possible histories which I find particularly relevant today under the American-dominated narrative I am about to present in the following chapter, which confuses life-stowing with the more recent and opposing emergence of automated ways of recording life.

Digital media life-stowing cannot be understood without the kind of more in-depth history I have presented. What digital life-stowing is in its essence is not merely a systematic recording of time; it combines, in fact, all the many historical examples I have provided. Beyond the literal interpretations that the American history of life-logging can provide, my history invites the reader to look at contemporary digital media life-stowing as the ability to stow with all previous media an ever more complex reality. It invites us to look at life-stowing without the influence of prejudices about privacy infringement and control and to experience its life-regenerating poetry.



Present



### 3. Theorizing Life-stowing

I suppose it's true that those who enter politics sometimes come to a miserable end, and deserve it; but I never bother myself about what happens in Constantinople. I send my garden stuff to be sold there, and that's enough for me.... We find that the work banishes those three great evils, boredom, vice, and poverty.' As he walked back to the farm, Candide reflected on what the Turk had said. 'The old fellow,' said he, turning to Pangloss and Martin, 'seemed to have done much better for himself than those six kings we had the honour of supping with' ... 'You are quite right,' said Pangloss. 'When man was placed in the Garden of Eden, he was put there "to dress it and keep it," to work, in fact; which proves that man was not born to an easy life.' 'We must work without arguing,' said Martin; 'that is the only way to make life bearable.' The entire household agreed to this admirable plan, and each began to exercise his talents.

Voltaire 2001:143-44)

In this chapter I will present and theoretically frame life-stowing, a labor-intensive, "effortful" practice designed to sample aspects of reality with a set palette of technologies and arrange them within a defined container. I will first differentiate life-stowing from life-logging, summarizing the latter and highlighting how its recent technologies explicitly aim to be completely effortless, using automation to replace the tasks of capturing, organizing and retrieving what life-stowers tend to keep charge of themselves. Secondly, I will compare the two practices and focus on the main differences between them. Thirdly, I will discuss life-stowing in contrast to more traditional academic notions of archiving, which will spark an etymological investigation that will ultimately allow me to define life-stowing. In my search for a proper definition, I will recover the old etymology of *tebah* to redefine this kind of practice as a form of anarchism and ultimately of Stoicism. Lastly, I will present two different kinds of life-stowers—the Apollonian and the Dionysian—in an attempt to understand life-stowing as an undertaking that enables us to move closer to our inner nature and the natural environment, respectively.

#### 3.1 Contemporary Life-logging

It is now time for me to introduce life-logging as we know it. It is an exclusively North American-based phenomenon. In 1943 Vannevar Bush, at that time head of the US OSRD (United States Office of Scientific Research and Development), reflected on

the role of scientists after their engagement in developing weapons of mass destruction (the OSRD was behind the development of the atomic bomb). He came up with the idea that scientists could wear a Memex, an artificial memory, not to generate ideas but to quickly sort and retrieve them, essentially to help deal with the knowledge overflow that Nietzsche (1980) found so paralyzing:

There is a growing mountain of research. But there is increased evidence that we are being bogged down today as specialization extends. The investigator is staggered by the findings and conclusions of thousands of other workers—conclusions which he cannot find time to grasp, much less to remember, as they appear. Yet specialization becomes increasingly necessary for progress, and the effort to bridge between disciplines is correspondingly superficial. (Bush 1945:1)

It is in this fashion that much of the wearable technology we know today has developed. The Wearable Computer group at MIT, for example, not only considers Bush a patriarch, but according to Rhodes (1996), also clearly readopts his idea of a Memex, an augmented memory to aid scientists. While the initial work on wearable computers has made way for a generation of commercial gadgets that are no longer addressed to scientists but to general consumers, we can now reflect on the work of those pioneers who have in fact attempted to create digital systems to enhance their mental faculties.

Leaving this last note aside, however, it is essential to describe at least what is now considered Bush's official legacy. His article "As We May Think," published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1945, did not have any particularly strong resonance until the 1990s, when computer technology started to become less clumsy and more portable. The pioneering MIT Media Lab at this time inaugurated the Wearable Computer Group, which included young computer scientists like Steve Mann and Thad Starner. The connection with Bush's ideas is rather obvious and often explicit<sup>1</sup> in the publications that appeared around then. Certain papers particularly strongly promoted wearable devices that work as "remembrance agents" and "memory augmentations" (Rhodes 1996). The computer device stores all information the instant it is received and can retrieve it whenever needed, even when on the move, as the wearable computer scientists advocated (Mann 1997). Thus these technologies automate and replace the actual agency of the wearer. In other words, the user deals with a black box that stores anything the intelligent technologies are capable of storing.

After initial enthusiasm sparked around wearable computers, the advent of social media in 2005 pretty much silenced the discussion about weird scientists walking around media campuses like MIT wearing clumsy computer technology. The criticism, however, started as early as 2003, when a project named Lifelog financed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) was canceled due to strong objections on the part of civil libertarians concerned about the privacy implications

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-21: <http://www.media.mit.edu/wearables/lizzy/timeline.html>

of the system (Wolf 2003). According to DARPA's bid solicitation pamphlet, the Lifelog project was meant to be:

... an ontology-based (sub)system that captures, stores, and makes accessible the flow of one person's experience in and interactions with the world in order to support a broad spectrum of associates/assistants and other system capabilities<sup>2</sup>

Its main objective was "to be able to trace the 'threads' of an individual's life in terms of events, states, and relationships." It has the ability to "take in all of a subject's experience, from phone numbers dialed and email messages viewed to every breath taken, step made and place gone."

It can also

... compile a massive electronic database of every activity and relationship a person engages in. This is to include credit card purchases, web sites visited, the content of telephone calls and e-mails sent and received, scans of faxes and postal mail sent and received, instant messages sent and received, books and magazines read, television and radio selections, physical location recorded via wearable GPS sensors, biomedical data captured through wearable sensors, The high level goal of this data logging is to identify preferences, plans, goals, and other markers of intentionality.

On the other hand, all the heavy and to some extent cumbersome equipment carried by the aforementioned "cyborgs" has been successively minimized to the point that many computational operations could have been achieved through the first generations of smart phones. In the years following the boom of social media platforms and smart phones, however, media attention has shifted to more discreet figures such as Microsoft's senior research and early Internet proponent Gordon Bell.<sup>3</sup> As the official story goes, in 1998 Bell started life-logging. In reality, beginning in 1998 when he was 64, Bell had his secretary scan all his paper documents and go paperless, and, as he himself reports, it was only at the age of 70 that he began to life-log:

In September 2003 the founder of DeJaView contacted me about using their wearable video capture that stored snippets; and then in October, Lyndsay Williams of Microsoft Research produced the first wearable SenseCam with Fisheye lens, based on the Philips USB Key Camera. So it was pretty clear that something for visual capture was going to happen. Lyndsay sent me one of their first prototype SenseCams in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

Thus Bell had a secretary keep track and document his record. In this respect his approach was similar to that of the renowned American architect Buckminster Fuller, who hired a staff to produce his *Dymaxion Chronofile*, a record of every 15 minutes

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved 2015-07-01: <http://www.psychoastronomy.org/old/eerie.html>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-28: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/05/28/remember-this>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-28: <http://blog.autographer.com/2013/05/the-future-of-life-logging-interview-with-gordon-bell/>

of his life from 1920 to 1983.<sup>5</sup> His secretary was later replaced by technology: on one hand, software running on his desktop to store all his digital activities (Gemmell et al. 2002), and on the other, a camera worn around his neck that automatically photographed his surroundings.<sup>6</sup> Here, then, we suddenly find an old man delegating to someone else the task of digitizing his life retroactively and starting to document his life proactively when he is about to retire.<sup>7</sup>

Bell's advocacy of the SenseCam for the memory-impaired (Berry et al. 2007) gained broad media attention in 2007 in articles he published in *The New Yorker* and *The Scientific American* and later through a book prefaced by Bill Gates entitled *Total Recall: How the E-memory Revolution Will Change Everything* (Bell et al. 2009). While SenseCam marketed as Revue was a commercial fiasco, other life-logging devices like Autographer and Narrative Clip became available, not only to memory-impaired people but also to anyone who wanted to log their lives. These devices did not become popular either, and, as I pointed out in the introduction to this book, they were withdrawn from the market. Possibly due to this broad media coverage of these futuristic products, however, several scholars from various fields such as law, geography, surveillance studies etc.,<sup>8</sup> have begun to starkly criticize the vision generated by Gordon Bell and several other researchers, particularly those associated with the Microsoft Research Lab in Cambridge, UK.

As this heavy criticism has brought the advancement of life-logging technologies to a standstill, new technologies have been developing. First of all, there is the Quantified Self movement, which mostly uses “non-compromising” and generally abstract data such as biofeedback tracked directly by smart phones or related gadgets. This trend advocates measuring oneself for self-improvement, but it avoids discussion of memory augmentation. Another example is the upcoming release of Google Glass, which revives the wearable computer scene.<sup>9</sup> These glasses are not provided exclusively to scientists (although at this point they are among the few people testing them) but are intended for the general public. They are augmented reality devices with a memory-enhancing potential as envisioned by Bush half a century earlier and as first prototyped by the wearable computer pioneers. The first wearers of the Google glasses have generated something Steve Mann himself has called “cyborg discrimination”: banners are already available on the internet to deny

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved on 2017-02-03: <http://library.stanford.edu/collections/r-buckminster-fuller-collection>

<sup>6</sup> In this respect Bell, who has always been considered the father of life-logging, was anticipated by artists such as myself, who began systematically photographing their lives months before him.

<sup>7</sup> On June 21, 2015 I met Mr. Bell at the Quantified Self expo, to which we were both invited to talk. I noticed that he was no longer wearing his camera and I asked him why. He replied: “Too many pictures and too little gain.”

<sup>8</sup> Also supported by *Memory for Life*, a grand challenge in computing founded in England by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

<sup>9</sup> As an example to prove my point, I can note that the wearable computer pioneer Tadd Starner later became the technical leader and manager behind the glasses.

cyborgs access to private spaces. Cyborg discrimination is a term described by Steve Mann in relation to his experience of walking in public with a wearable computer. He states that video recording was introduced after this discrimination, at times violent, started to occur (Mann et al. 2004). As discussed by several online reviews,<sup>10</sup> some people get quite upset when a camera is pointed at them, and some wearers feel uncomfortable themselves.

This section has thus far summarized what is officially known about life-logging. Its development has halted due to privacy concerns. The debate around these issues has unjustly affected any systematic attempt to document life; privacy has become a social hinder to undertaking any documenting practice. In the following section I will make a further differentiation in an attempt to rehabilitate a more constructive academic debate also in relation to more manual approaches such as life-stowing.

### 3.2 Life-stowing as an Effortful Challenge to Automation

It is the aim of this section to thoroughly discuss definitions and etymologies relating to stowing. I will go through the characterizations of life-logging already at my disposal, and I will argue that, because stowing is “effortful” in nature, it is not covered by them. I will also present stowing as a more accurate term for describing the documentation of one’s life. I am employing the word “effortful” in contrast to “effortless,” an adjective commonly used to promote life-logging technologies like Memoto and Saga.<sup>11</sup>

As a selling point in advertisements of their technologies, life-logging companies stress the ease of capturing, storing and sharing life information. Thus life-logging is commonly thought of as an automated practice of systematically recording one’s life and surroundings, but the term also carries particular connotations. On one hand, life-logging is generally associated with wearable computers. The Wikipedia article for the voice Lifelog states: “Lifeloggers (also known as lifebloggers or lifeloggers) typically wear computers in order to capture their entire lives, or large portions of their lives.”<sup>12</sup>

According to this definition, then, wearable life-logging devices, whether worn around the neck like *Narrative Clip* and *Autographer* or head-mounted like *Google Glass*, utilize various forms of automation to capture and retrieve data. In addition, they can compromise not only the privacy of the user whose data is stored on some networking server online in the cloud (Mosco 2014), but also that of people around them who are being unwillingly documented, and of environments like their workplaces, which might contain confidential information (Bell et al. 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-12 <http://blog.autographer.com/2014/05/autographers-review-google-glass-price-2014/>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved on 2015-01-26 <http://www.getsaga.com/>

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-26 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelog>

Another attempt to define life-logging has been made in a scholarly initiative sparked by a research grand challenge in the United Kingdom called Memory for Life. However, today's life-logging vision extends beyond the mere storage of desktop objects. Just as we can capture and collect personal interactions with documents, we can capture activities away from the computer, out of the office, in the everyday world. Key to it all is that many everyday activities can be captured automatically and comprehensively through digital tools that allow us to store not only important content, but also contextual details of the activities to help access the content later. Note that we distinguish between life-logging and other more deliberate activities involving the capture of personal data (such as digital photography and blogging) that involve the effortful selective capture and display of digital materials for a particular audience. In contrast, life-logging seeks to be effortless and all-encompassing in terms of data capture (Sellen et al. 2010:3).

Even prior to the advent of sensors to help in the recording of personal information, scientists pioneering the total registration of themselves and their surroundings have also sought human assistance. As mentioned above, Buckminster Fuller, whose *Dymaxion Chronofile* documented every fifteen minutes of his life from 1920 to 1983,<sup>13</sup> and the most famous life-logger Gordon Bell, who since 1989 has made his life paperless,<sup>14</sup> both had secretaries who were specifically paid to archive their lives (Bell et al. 2007). Here, however, we are interested in defining the manual, selective and *effortful* documentation of an individual and his or her surroundings, which cannot be considered a life-log. The new definition I am about to develop also takes into consideration the fact that, while life-logging may be seen as a narcissistic practice for oneself, manual and effortful documentation, because it is more selective by nature, may also result in a more easily “digestible” and “enjoyable” meal that can be shared with others.

My main argument that life-stowing is more readable and thus more meaningful is based on what I find mostly meaningful, namely things that are processed manually and over time. It is my belief that a wall built by a stonemason who places one brick on another has more human meaning than a wall erected by a machine in a matter of seconds. The mason's wall, in my opinion, will absorb more elements from the time during which it was created; there will be minor yet detectable imperfections that show, for example, a moment at which the builder was sick. Thus viewers of this wall will have more details that generate meaning than those who observe a perfectly executed, machine-made structure. The practice of manually performing the potential of technology is an immortal operation which produces a mirror of reality that does not require a machine to be communicated. Because it is humanly created and stowed, this mirror might therefore be humanly conveyed, thereby avoiding all the big data chaos that is currently the topic of much public as well as academic

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-15 <http://library.stanford.edu/spc>

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-14 <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/projects/mylifebits/>

discussion (Mayer-Schönberger, Cukier 2014). In this respect, if “... big data is data that exceeds the processing capacity of traditional databases, ... too big to be processed by a single machine” (Gupta et al 2014:1), life-stowing is data manually generated by a human being that only requires the intuitive capacity of other humans to be understood.

Following this line of thinking, life-stowing also avoids or simply opposes the idea of life-logging devices that act as some sort of “Jiminy Cricket” who is always at the side of the Pinocchio wearers, telling them how to behave based on the data it collects about them and turning what should have been an extension of the mind into an extension of the nose.

### 3.4 Life-stowing in a Nutshell

To explain more thoroughly what effortful practices mean, let me start by introducing a story quoting the Chinese sage Chuang-tzu that is already well known in media research:

As Tzu-Gung was traveling through the regions north of the river Han, he saw an old man working in his vegetable garden. He had dug an irrigation ditch. The man would descend into a well, fetch up a vessel of water in his arms and pour it out into the ditch. While his efforts were tremendous the results appeared to be very meager.

Tzu-Gung said. “There is a way whereby you can irrigate a hundred ditches in one day, and whereby you can do much with little effort. Would you not like to hear of it?”

Then the gardener stood up, looked at him and said, “And what would that be?”

Tzu-Gung replied, “You take a wooden lever, weighted at the back and light in front. In this way you can bring up water so quickly that it just gushes out. This is called a draw- well.”

Then anger rose up in the old man’s face and he said, “I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine, and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes unsure in the strivings of his soul. Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them.” (as quoted in McLuhan 1994:94)

This story has been referred to previously by media scholar Siegfried Giedion (2014), but more particularly by Marshal McLuhan (1994), as it is a significant description of an attitude toward the use of machines. In an apparently masochistic fashion, the Chinese gardener is committed to his manual work in order to avoid automation, which he believes will turn his heart into a cold machine. Similarly, manually life-

stowing reality with the aid of digital media is a way to keep a warm heart by indulging in an absurd operation that could easily be done by a machine such as an automated life-logging device.

The following section is dedicated to further clarifying the meaning of life-stowing in relation to life-logging. First, life-stowing is a manual operation. This manuality implies that humans can regain something that distinguishes them from other living creatures, namely the use of the hands. It can be argued that this also correlates with the development of intellectual abilities and the achievement of consummate mastery that culminated in nineteenth-century classical music, where the use of the hands, to play the piano for instance, was the main focus. This manual dimension of life-stowing implies that more care is taken in selecting the elements of reality. It involves a more human-curated sharing that is not prompted in a social media context or nourished by automatically generated user content. To be processed further, the manually selected elements must be given extra loving care, and they are the result of an interactive balance between the manual collector and the time it takes to complete the operation, which machines otherwise tend to accelerate.

In this respect life-stowing is a tradition that resists the automated collection, organization and communication of samples of reality. According to this line of thinking, life-logging will always be a disruptive practice because it forces users to move from one new technology to another in order to stay abreast of the new technologies on the market and the policies adopted by life-logging providers to boost their business. Also, a life-log will always require a machine to make sense of all the captured data, and since the main philosophy of life-logging developers is to pick up everything, their privacy and that of their surroundings are voluntarily or involuntarily placed at risk.

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, by life-stowing I am referring to the practice performed by life-stowers: individuals who systematically collect one or several aspects of their life and surroundings and carefully pack them away in a secure and intimate, predefined environment. The average life-stower does not actively seek social recognition, and his or her stowage is often brought to life posthumously.<sup>15</sup> Once it is revived, the stowed elements are liberated, bringing new potential life out of the past into a future present, like seeds kept in a cellar throughout the winter and brought out to plant in the spring. This process of “disclosure” is in fact an operation in which the carefully stowed samples of reality are remixed and reconfigured like the turning wheels of a combinatorial system.

The number of possible combinations in which the samples of an undisclosed stowage can be arranged is thus infinite and brings ever new meanings to the person

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<sup>15</sup> Pioneering life-stowers who have created extensive media depictions of their time may at first seem to be exceptions. Although August Sander’s photography and Dziga Verov’s films were in fact celebrated while they were still alive, however, they soon passed into oblivion, and their cultural significance was not realized until decades later.

who experiences them. To this extent life-stowing should be referred to not only as a practice that has to do with the future regeneration of life itself, but also as a way of living, since like combinatorial wheels, stowages retain the implicit potential of generating new meaning—less descriptive than a work of fiction but also less redundant. Following this line of reasoning, the life-stower’s compulsive behavior should be viewed beyond the Freudian notion of the “death drive” (Freud 2015) and under the new concept of the “regeneration drive.”

In defining life-stowing I have had in mind my own practice, which consists in packing away various aspects of reality in a compact “box” that I wish to deposit back into nature. Among many other examples, however, I also include the impressions made on me by the cinematic language of constructivist filmmaker Dziga Vertov, the compulsive writings of Polish housewife Janina Turek and the Italian mannerist Jacopo Pontormo, the categorizing photography of Vivian Mayer, and the architectural commitment of Ferdinand Cheval.

Common to these examples, and thus the second distinctive aspect of life-stowing, is that using various technologies, all these people have systematically stowed *elements* of their times. Long exposure to the age has enabled the resulting stowages to “emanate” the life they depict. This argument is made clear in Lev Manovich’s analysis of *Man with a Movie Camera* (Manovich 2001:242). I agree with him, and I also argue that life-stowing individuals have to a great extent pioneered the new technologies of their era, expanding its potential not to contain life, but to fully and evocatively depict it. At this point however, it is premature to talk about digital life-stowing, all the more so since the digital media establishment that has emerged is far more pervasive and hard to tackle with life-stowing practices. Thus if on one hand it is easy submit to the charm of life-logging gadgets or social media sites and effortlessly sell our souls to the establishment, life-stowing has become harder to configure and maintain. On the other hand, because life itself is becoming increasingly automatized, applying a life-stowing discipline to it is even more difficult.

### 3.4 Toward a Definition of Life-stowing

Having differentiated effortful life-logging—i.e., life-stowing—from the effortless process, I will now delve deeper into the etymology of the words “life-logging” and “stowing” in an attempt to understand what they actually mean. It is revealing to find that the English word “to log” refers to the nautical practice of casting a log attached to a rope into the water in order to measure the speed of a ship.<sup>16</sup> Thus logging was originally identified with the act of measuring while at sea. The term then swiftly came into cybernetics, the communication science concerned with automatic control

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-27: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=log>

systems.<sup>17</sup> The word “cybernetics” comes from the ancient Greek *κυβερναω* (*kyberneticos*) meaning good at steering or piloting a ship. In this respect, the cyborg is the captain, and logging represents the act of measuring the performance of the vessel. S/he sails on a ship that rules the waves and is becoming more and more automated and less and less dependent on the human element. However, back on land and possibly up on a mountainside are the characters we are now seeking to define: the life-stowers. They are not sailors; they fear the sea, but they build boats anyway in places where there is no water on which to sail. Their manual operation consists in life-stowing a ship, an ark, which, once the deluge comes, will not need to be steered but will be completely in the hands of Providence. The box-like architecture of Noah’s Ark, for example, is like this—the vessel is not made to sail and master the sea, but only to float, letting the waves bring it wherever Providence might take it. We are faced here with two very different kinds of operations: one of building to control the forces of nature that humans are not naturally equipped to rule, and the other of anticipating the unpredictable retaliation of these forces.

On the one hand there is human ambition, which attempts to take control of natural forces such as the sea, while on the other we find a different side of the human character that stows away meaning in preparation for a calamity that, at least in the case of Noah, is the result of the human drive to dominate. For the time being, then, life-stowers can be defined as individuals who dedicate their lives to “packing” vessels with the essential elements of life, which they perceive to be endangered.

Can we, then, think of life-stowers who manually record and stow their lives as archivists, much as we view life-loggers who automatically document their lives and surroundings? In this respect, Jacques Derrida provides a good insight into the actual operation of building an archive and being an archivist:

In a way, the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the arkhe in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say to the original, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and even earlier, “archive” refers to the arkhe in the nomological sense, to the arkhe of the commandment. As is the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French “archive,” formerly employed as a masculine singular: “un archive”), the meaning of “archive,” its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee’s house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents’ guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the

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<sup>17</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-14 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cybernetics>

law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this stating the law, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could neither do without substrate nor without residence. (Derrida 1995:1)

Thus according to Derrida, the archivist is a governor, the only difference being that the “cyborg” operates at sea and the “archon” functions on land. This idea also works well for life-stowers if we look at the actual word “ark”—the ark we want to identify to comprehend the activity of its builders. In the Greek version of the Bible, “ark” (*kibotos*) occurs twice, referring not only to Noah’s Ark in Genesis but also to the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus, as it does in the English Bible as well. In this respect, again, as Derrida has pointed out, the ark acquires the connotation of a guardian of the law, as in the case of the later Ark of the Covenant—the chest in which the inscriptions of the Ten Commandments were kept.

Continuing this discussion, I can at last declare that life-loggers at sea, archivists in the city, and our ark builders up on some promontory, are all rulers who not only protect but also dictate the content of their collections. A further etymological investigation, however, brings forward a different understanding of archival practices. The amateur etymologist Ottorini Piangiani, for example, derives the word “archive” from the Latin “arca,” meaning simply a “closet,” and Latin “arceo”, the repairing of something made of wood that is more fragile and therefore needs to be protected in very uncertain situations.<sup>18</sup>

Not content with this ambiguity, however, I have dug deeper into the more remote past, going beyond the Greek Bible to original versions of the Old Testament written in Masoretic Hebrew and Aramaic (the language spoken by Christ). I found here that in this original version, Noah’s Ark and the Ark of the Covenant are designated by two different words (Cohen 1972). The latter is referred to as *arown*, while the former, Noah’s Ark, is תִּבְיָה (TBH) or *tebah* (Hebrew Strong’s H8392), pronounced tay-baw<sup>19</sup> or tā-vā.<sup>20</sup> This word may derive from the similar ancient Egyptian “tebat,” meaning “coffin” or “chest,” but beyond that its origin is debatable. It does indicate a box or a chest or simply a vessel, but what is most interesting—and now I come to the twist—is that the same word occurs again in Exodus, but in a completely different context. There it refers not to the Ark of the Covenant where God’s laws were protected, but to the basket in which the baby Moses was set afloat on the river and found by the Pharaoh’s sister.

Thus in Genesis 6:19 we read:

And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female... . And Noah removed the

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-26: <http://etimo.it/?term=arca>

<sup>19</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-27 <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/8392.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved on 2014-08-27 <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=H8392>

covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. (Bibbia Tabor 1999)

And in Exodus 2:3:

And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.... And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. (Bibbia Tabor 1999)

On one hand, then, there is the giant ark used by Noah to rescue life on earth, while on the other the same word, *tebah*, is used to signify a tiny basket carrying the baby Moses. In both instances we have to do with an ark that represents the last possibility of regeneration from a state of despair, whether caused by an imminent flood or slavery<sup>21</sup>. According to McLuhan, this desperate state is what societies experience at every technological shift. In other words, viewed through the lens of technological determinism, today's great crisis is generated by the process of digitization. Following again McLuhan (1994:77), contemporary forms of *tebah* built by non-mainstream artists might spare society a lot of future conflicts. I shall not be literal here and speculate as to whether the crisis of our digital age will also take the form of the flood environmentalists warn may result from global warming or the enslavement feared by post-autonomist theorists (Lazzarato 2012). Instead I will argue that the marginal practitioners to whom McLuhan is referring, who enable societies to detect the changes ahead, are not so much outsiders as they are mavericks pushing the potential of new media (Becker 1982). A classic example is the Russian constructivist Dziga Vertov.

In support of my argument that *tebah*—stowing, as I call it—is not, as in Derrida's view of archival practices, a form of *arkhe*, I will enlist another French philosopher: Jacques Ellul. His thesis is in fact that Jewish and Christian religions are a form of *an-arkhe* (Ellul 1998:45). Just as Jesus himself can be seen as a prophet sent to peacefully destroy the Roman bureaucratic<sup>22</sup> establishment, Moses' *tebah*, for example, is clearly a manifestation of a potential liberator who has penetrated into the heart of the Egyptian establishment. In line with Ellul, I also believe that the establishment that emerges in a new technological era will necessarily end in corruption and the unavoidable enslavement of human life. By this I mean that, using new technologies,

<sup>21</sup> The Jewish story is not the only one in which the future founder of a nation was placed in an ark. Another example is Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, who were also abandoned in a basket on a river

<sup>22</sup> As Ellul himself points out, the Roman establishment in Jesus' time was not yet an empire and only comprised 120 legions. Thus it was not, as commonly assumed, a military power like Nazi Germany but a legislative one based on skilfully crafted Roman law, which makes it more similar to modern Germany.

this establishment is doomed to amplify worldly human ambitions and consequently bring crisis and destruction.

Stowing, in this respect, is nothing other than *an-arkhe*—threatened life that, in a bricolage fashion, is assembled using the very technology that political, social and economic institutions employ to gradually constrain it. In keeping with this line of thinking, life-stowing is a form of marginal anarchic practice that peacefully seeks to prepare to protect life from the force that would corrupt it, namely any social establishment. Life-stowing is a manually conceived alternative to the self-destructive conduct brought forward by the establishment. Life-stowing inevitably comes into conflict with the latter. This clash occurs as naturally, as when a plant reclaims a piece of ground covered with asphalt: sooner or later the paving will decay and the plant will once again take over.

I have thus countered the negative connotation that has been generally attributed to archival practices, particularly by Derrida and his followers. I am now able to differentiate between the practice of archiving as a way of governing, which might in fact be related to the current digitization process, and a minor and more precarious practice which could be defined as “arkiving” in reference to the ark, which implies the operation of life-stowing a vessel with a potential for the future to regenerate. While the first operation seeks to establish and control, the second is poetic and attempts to transmit a “seed,” or better, a “germ,” a “saver” that will restore life in the future. Etymologists have, in fact, associated the word *tebah* with a life saver (Lovett 2004:3), but not in the sense of an egotistical act of self-preservation. At issue here is not the survival of Noah and his family or Moses, but an attempt undertaken in precarious circumstances to transmit something to the world—in Noah’s case life on earth, and for Moses, the Jewish people from the oppression of the Egyptian establishment.

I am suggesting that in order to be saved, life ought to be first of all stowed, whence my translation of *tebah* as “stower of Life”—Life with a capital “L” to indicate life in a wider sense. Secondly, the term I use is “stowing,” which in nautical contexts usually refers to the act of neatly and compactly packing necessities for a trip, and has no association with the trendy notion of hoarding, which implies a more chaotic type of selection. Also, in regard to stowing, the ancient Greek word *poiesis*, from which the word “poet” comes, is said to derive not so much from the usual term *ποιέω* or “to make” but from the Proto-Indo-European term *\*k<sup>w</sup>ey-* which literally means “to stow.”<sup>23</sup> In this respect, I see stowing of life as a lofty if not the loftiest peak of poetry, and I hereby mark a distinction between stowing and other more popular notions such as hoarding, quantifying and making. Furthermore, I wish to starkly distinguish between what is commonly referred to as “life-logging” and what I have now come to define as “life-stowing.”

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved on 2015-01-21: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=poet>

I have now dug down deep enough to find an alternative term to represent the operation of ark life-stowers and separate them from the negative associations generally attaching to both archivists and life-loggers. The new term *tebah*, which I translate as life-stowing, is in reality ancient, much older than the previous term *arkheion*. At this point, by life-stowing I mean the act of manually stowing elements of reality within a closed architecture. Considering the marginality of life-stowers, their movement is a subtle phenomenon that occurs sporadically throughout different social, economic, political and cultural establishments. However marginal, life-stowing has the capacity to rescue the living potential or aura of life threatened by these technology-enforced establishments.

As an example we can take the work of August Sander, who systematically photographed the German people and German cities from 1911 until the Nazis forced him to stop. In this connection George Steeves writes:

Sander's premonitions of calamitous adversity, triggered by his reading of the signs all about him, impelled him to alter the emphasis of his photographic practice. The collecting for People of the 20th Century slowed while landscape and architectural work accelerated. Sander had been assembling cityscapes and architectural details of his adopted home of Cologne since 1920. In the last years of the 1930s he assiduously pursued his aesthetic convictions in photographs of the city. Could he have apprehended its approaching near total destruction? (Steeves 2013:14)

From his marginal perspective, then, Sander represented a society that was completely annihilated and destroyed by the Nazis' imperial ambitions that led to the Second World War.

### 3.5 Life-stowing as a Form of Self-Discipline

In the following section I will go a step further. Rather than viewing life-stowing exclusively in an obscure religious context, I will follow up on my consideration of the activity as a form of *an-arke* and connect it to the later strands of Roman Stoicism. It can be argued that the main aspect of Stoicism is to keep close to nature. In order to do so, Seneca, the most important Stoic figure, describes several ways to examine oneself and lead a virtuous life (e.g. Seneca 2007:78). In this respect he can be considered the first life-logger.<sup>24</sup> A contemporary of Jesus, he observed the Roman establishment as it transformed from a virtuous republic into a corrupt empire. He therefore stopped taking part in public affairs and suggested to his friends that they take shelter in harbors from which they could guide new generations in the dark future ahead. Thus Seneca conceived of the empire as an agitated ocean fraught with

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<sup>24</sup> Retrieved on 18-12-2016: <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20130102-self-track-route-to-a-better-life>

unavoidable calamities. His harbors can be seen as autonomous retreats in which the foundations of a new republic could be laid.

As I read through mature stowings from other eras, I inevitably come to think in this context of the virtuous lives of the older life-stowers. Because they lived in precarious times, I see no use in viewing their practice as conforming to the Derridean notion of the archive I have presented in this chapter. Doing so would only compare life-stowers to dictators, when in fact they are the victims of authoritarian regimes<sup>25</sup> and, as I will soon show, the saviors of the life these technologically-armed governments kill.

Having said this, however, I am not denying that there is a certain tendency within life-stowing that either leads the life-stower away from society or encourages the creation of an autonomous zone within it, depending on the circumstances. Both instances represent a Stoic return to nature. In the first, life-stowers leave a corrupt social environment to establish contact with the more sublime and purifying natural world, whereas in the second, they remain within society and cultivate their inner nature. Obviously, these are only tendencies, and they can interact, as, for example, in the case of Leo Tolstoy, who widely depicted Russian aristocratic life before it was completely annihilated by Communism soon after his death. Tolstoy left the superficial society of St. Petersburg as a young man to retreat to the wilderness of the steppes (Tolstoy 2005), finally opting to live in a more “familiar” countryside environment.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Henry David Thoreau, the American transcendentalist and voice of a disappearing life, retreated to nature, but he remained in touch with a civilization that was becoming ever more pervasive due to technological progress such as the railroad on the opposite side of the pond where he built his cabin (Thoreau 2008).

Stoically speaking, then, it is clear that the life-stower endeavors to live in harmony with nature. If in some cases this nature is in fact a wilderness, in others it is simply the life-stower’s inner nature. Life-stowers who attempt to live in a sublime natural environment I will call “Dionysian,” and refer to those who are more domestic and stow their inner nature as “Apollonian.” In the following section I will provide examples of both, but I wish to point out already here that, in most cases life-stowers in fact shift from one to the other kind (e.g. the nanny Vivian Maier was mostly Apollonian, but she did undertake some rather Dionysian life-stowing by traveling to exotic places or returning to her native France).

It is one of the last Stoics, Epictetus (1983), who, much as a filmmaker might do, compares the Stoic to an actor. Although actors cannot call their parts into question, they must strive to play them well. The role of God and/or Providence is vital here if

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, my discussion above of Janina Turek, who lived under Nazism and later Communism.

<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Tolstoy died running away from this familiar middle-ground environment to fulfill his ascetic dream.

we are to understand the role of the Stoic. Gandhi can help me to highlight further the role of the life-stower. He notes (*Young India*, 14-10-1926: 359): “While recognizing that “the attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone believing it to be God.” And in one of his last letters he reflects, as follows on what I think might be the role of the life-stower:

He takes notes of things as they happen and reacts naturally to them, fulfilling its part as if propelled by the great Mechanic, even as a piece of machine in good order responds automatically to the call of the machinist. It is the most difficult thing for an intelligent being to be like a machine. And yet, if one is to become a zero, that is precisely what one desiring perfection has to become. The vital difference between the machine and the man is that the machine is inert, the man is all life and consciously becomes like a machine in the hands of the Master Mechanic. (Gandhi 2011:238-39)

I find this passage to be quite crucial. On the one hand, it complies with the Stoic principle of acting out well the role allotted to us by Providence. On the other, however, it presents an idea I have already proposed, namely that the life-stower should act like a machine in order to keep his or her heart warm and, according to Gandhi, fulfill Krishna’s will. Lastly, it is crucial in the sense that it relates the role of the Stoic-like life-stower, who naturally takes note of what Providence offers, to the role of a divine machine that operates in contrast to the mechanical apparatus established by human ambitions. Here it is interesting to consider two kinds of automation. One is the sort familiar to us, which is developed by humans to eliminate human effort. This automation turns away from God and chills the human heart. The other kind is of a spiritual order and has been nicely described by Gandhi. It begins within us, and, as Gandhi says, it helps the life-stower to take note of the natural changes ahead. Bearing these considerations in mind, it is quite clear to me that life-stowing is a Stoic kind of conduct that is in harmony both with nature and the divine will and opposes the ongoing automation of life which is strictly enforced by the digital media paradigm. As I will discuss in the next section with reference to Jacques Ellul, life-stowing is a shamanic technique rather than yet another technology of *Homo faber*. This concept is not far from Foucault’s idea:

... technologies of the self which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault 1988:1)

The very act of life-stowing presupposes acting according to nature, much as taking care—of a garden, for example—presupposes a loving act. We can now be skeptical enough to consider this act ineffective in mitigating the brutalities generated by

humans' use of automation. Gandhi can again help us understand that it is in the very basic discipline of the self that truth can be acquired. He once said:<sup>27</sup>

Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable course of instructions, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his Inner Voice.... Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming to hear the voice of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world, all that I can, in true humility, present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody.

In a time when social media and other public opinion-shaping technologies prevail and the delivery of untruth is reaching its peak, Gandhi makes a clear point: we need rigorous self-discipline of. I am speaking here of the qualified, not the quantified self. Only through experiments is the self able to achieve the consciousness to speak the truth. I want to believe that life-stowing is nothing other than an updated traditional form of such discipline. In my opinion, this updated self-discipline ought to deal with the greatest of evils—the rise of automation that is capable of competing with the divine mechanism itself. The automation generated by *Homo faber* to remove practically all effort from human life has far surpassed the water pump I described in the story of the Chinese farmer who refused to use it.

### 3.6 Introducing the Dionysian-Apollonian Dichotomy

I will now elaborate on the Apollonian-Dionysian duality briefly mentioned above. Friedrich Nietzsche develops this intellectual dichotomy in *The Birth of Tragedy* (2012) Keeping in mind that it was in the merging of this opposition that he sought the highest form of art, in the following passage I will explain it on the basis of its beautiful rendering in Herman Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund* (Reichert 1975).

In Hesse's novel the Apollonian character Narcissus retreats from reality by leading a rather ascetic, rational, and in many ways monastic life that can be described with the Latin dictum *orat et labora*: "pray and work." This perspective on life-stowing is much in line with both this literary character and Derrida's metaphor of the arkeion. The other protagonist is the Dionysian Goldmund, who is drawn to the excitements that life has to offer and whose undertaking can be summarized in the Latin phrase *amor fati*: "love of fate."

As I have said above, a Dionysian perspective per se is neither sufficient nor useful for the investigation of life-stowers or life-stowing in general. As Friedrich Schlegel acknowledged:

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved on 2017-04-17: <http://www.mkgandhi.org/truthisgod/04truthisgod.htm>

... the secret of true poetry is to be at the same time drunk and sober, and not in different moments but at the same time. This distinguishes the Apollonian enthusiasm from the Dionysian. To represent an infinite content ... and represent it in the most complete and most perfect of forms: this is the supreme duty of art. (Schlegel 1991:25)

In this respect, to understand life-stowing I find it necessary to keep the Dionysian-Apollonian dialectic alive as a kind of ongoing tension between the two poles. This tension has not so much to do with the outcome of life-stowing per se as it does with the life-stowers, whose lives are shaped by their decision to engage in the practice.

Having said this, I wish to clarify that the degree to which life-stowing is accomplished can oscillate between the Apollonian and the Dionysian modes. As a matter of fact, not all life-stowers have necessarily “stowed” their collected samples of reality for future review. Those individuals I call Apollonian; secluded in an environment like their household, they follow their vocation only partially and establish a discipline through which they maintain a certain “ascetic” care of themselves without attempting to transmit their stowages further. By ascetic practices I mean regular activities that individuals perform daily to liberate themselves from the burden of reality around them and become immersed in a mandala-like construction. By immersion I also mean that they dedicate themselves to something and cultivate the desire to take care of themselves by attuning to the flow of nature and stowing its elements.

Erich Auerbach (2003:8-23) has similarly distinguished between the Apollonian and Dionysian character in his analysis of Ulysses and Abraham. While Abraham is clearly Apollonian and seeks a single truth without embarking on many adventures, Ulysses is Dionysian and is transported by life, which guides him through a polytheistic world of multiple exploits. While the former is a more psychological and reflective character, the latter is a man of action who does not look back but focuses on reaching his goal: the island of Ithaca. In this respect I find the Dionysian Ulysses to be the prototype of what German Romanticism and particularly Nietzsche attempted to revive as a model to follow in order to escape from the stagnation of the late nineteenth century.

To elaborate further on this dichotomy, in the following section I turn to two extreme contemporary cases: the Dutch artist Danielle Roberts and the American mountain climber John Mallon Waterman. I treat these two figures only as dialectic tendencies; life-stowers can oscillate between being Apollonian or being Dionysian. I present these two individuals because they exemplify characters that are inclined toward one or the other pole. Later my point will be that a more balanced consideration of the two tendencies can in fact generate a more complete form of life-stowing that is fully executed and has in fact the potential to communicate meaning to others.

### 3.7 Life-stowing from an Apollonian Perspective

This section will present the Apollonian practitioner, who is more concerned with perfecting the craft of stowing life than with transmitting his or her stowage. To illustrate, I will consider the work of Danielle Roberts, who since 2005 has been making a physical and increasingly thick “reversed calendar” to which she has been adding short Japanese poems that reveal her state of mind, energy and stress level, and morning pulse.<sup>28</sup>

The Apollonian life-stower may seem to lean towards Derrida’s notion of the archivist living like an ancient Greek magistrate under the protection of his household and storing and dictating the law. In my opinion, however, the Apollonian is in fact a form of Stoic *askesis* like that proposed by Seneca, which promotes “operosity”—laboriousness—at all times. In Stoic terms, this exertion is the precondition for virtue that allows the Stoic to make a just contribution to public life. As already mentioned, however, when the public sphere is taken over by imperialistic attitudes, Seneca suggests taking shelter in a smaller republic, bringing the boat to a safe harbor, avoiding the agitated waters caused by the political, social and economic ambitions of the establishment. It is in this autonomous region—a minor republic, as it were—that Apollonian life-stowers operate and take care of their life-stowing, which can either serve as a guiding light for the larger republic once it is free from corruption, or it can simply remain as a small trace of living potential emerging from the dead ashes of the polity.

I purposely use the verb “take care of” in allusion to Michel Foucault’s last article on the technology of the self (Foucault 1988) as distinct from the maxim “know thyself.” In this text Foucault advances a different and subtle yet relevant interpretation of the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (*gnōthi seauton*). According to Foucault (1988), the maxim usually rendered as “know yourself” should instead be “take care of yourself.” The former seems to be the main motif of self-monitoring trends like those advocated by the Quantified Self movement, whose logo is “self-knowledge through numbers.”<sup>29</sup> If we are to adhere to the latter however, from a Stoic perspective the aphorism “take care of yourself” should be updated to “take care of your small republic.”

From an Apollonian perspective, therefore, life-stowers are people who want to dedicate themselves “reverentially” to an autonomous craft or, as I call it, a personal tradition or simply a passion for personal awareness that becomes a philosophy in its attempt to survive within other knowledge.

Thus the first vantage point from which I am now considering to analyze life-stowing is apparently a very safe domestic setting. To some degree, life-stowing can be seen as an attempt to provide oneself with a higher goal in order to endure the

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved on 2014-11-23: <http://awarenesslab.nl/en/projecten/reversed-calendar-slices-of-my-life/>

<sup>29</sup> As it appears on the QS official website retrieved on 2016-06-21: <http://quantifiedself.com/>

banality of the everyday. Apollonian life-stowers are more likely to look inward, to cultivate and take care of their domain and reach self-satisfaction through the mastery of their craft. They strive to become *demiurges*, in the ancient sense of the word denoting artisans exercising their skills in everyday life and around others. One thinks of Chinese elders eager to demonstrate their “arts” (e.g. not only martial arts but also calligraphy, dancing, singing etc.) in most public parks in Chinese cities. Surrounded by the artificial rules of the megalopolis, they exhibit their human skills in the only natural corners that have been spared.

The Apollonian life-stower attempts to turn contemporary tools into a tradition, by which I mean a discipline performed daily, asceticism in the original meaning of the term (the ancient Greek *askēsis*, which means training or exercise). Life-stowers are naturally in need of creating a tradition from scratch with the contemporary tools available to them. Following this line of thought, I would like to quote here the French thinker Jaques Ellul’s deterministic view of technology:

Technique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own laws and which has renounced all tradition. Technique no longer rests on tradition, but rather on previous technical procedures; and its evolution is too rapid, too upsetting to integrate the older traditions. (Ellul 1964:14)

I am interested in looking at the traditions developed by single individuals like life-stowers, as I believe that these traditions represent a self-reliant alternative for coping with the devastating effects of technology. Let me explain this better. In considering attempts to create a tradition, or craft, or ritual, or discipline, or what Foucault (1988:1) calls a “technology of the Self,” it is important to stress that, rather than utilizing purposely prefabricated toolboxes within predefined frameworks, contemporary life-stowing is designed by practitioners themselves.

This autonomy, to refer to Lev Manovich’s rephrasing of Michel de Certeau (1980:10-18), is not a form of independence or complete break with society, but an attempt to be self-reliant while maintaining a dialectic with it (Manovich 2009:7). In this respect, to go back to the Renaissance discussion about a universal science (Rossi 1982), the life-stower’s operation expands from self-knowledge to a gradual awareness of the surroundings, which it hesitatingly begins to absorb, ultimately becoming a form of increasingly self-reliant personal science.

We are now able to better understand contemporary works such as Danielle Roberts’ calendar described above. I interviewed Danielle in June 2014<sup>30</sup> after we were both invited as plenary speakers to the Quantified Self Conference of that year. Her work, online at <http://awarenesslab.nl/>, immediately brought to mind an Eastern kind of artist diligently compiling paper-based work such as the pages of her calendar, on every single page of which I could read a Haiku, a Japanese short poem revealing

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<sup>30</sup> This and other interviews with other practitioners can be found online at: [http://2004-2040.com/24\\_we.htm](http://2004-2040.com/24_we.htm)

her state of mind on a particular day. Throughout this eight-year experiment, Danielle also noted for each day her energy and stress level, mood, inner peace, and morning pulse via a customized program on her PC that asks her every two hours how she is. Additionally, what struck me was how her lifestyle corresponded to a simple and fresh aesthetic that in Japanese would be defined as *wabi*.<sup>31</sup> In Stoic terms, her Apollonian practice can be conceived of as a safe harbor, a haven from stormy waters.

I have now looked at one extreme kind of life-stowing in which the life-stower establishes a Cartesian-like method, faithfully adhering to a scheme in order to reach a destination in the dark wilderness of life. From this perspective, life-stowing becomes a Stoic and/or Confucian philosophy of life or guidance, what Marcus Aurelius would call a “directive principle” (e.g. Aurelio 1980:24). In this section I have analyzed life-stowing as a discipline related to Stoicism and more recently to certain Confucian thought that is now disappearing in the East. To conclude, I would like to point out how the emergence of these practices in the West does not imply that society will grow more selfish and opposed to the spirit of solidarity. As science and technology scholar Tamar Sharon writes:

But while proponents view self-tracking as a means of empowering citizens to take more responsibility for their health, critics anticipate that it will become a duty, and that the growing emphasis on personal responsibility is a threat to solidarity. This talk seeks to move beyond this debate, insofar as it fails to grasp the new types of subjectivities, socialities and understandings of the good life that are taking shape in self-tracking practices. Drawing on empirical philosophy and STS, and based on some preliminary research, I argue that in a number of self-tracking practices, people “enact” the values of autonomy, solidarity and authenticity in ways that diverge from these anticipated promises and fears. Furthermore, I suggest that these practices have a normative potential that should be articulated and fostered.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond mere solidarity, as I have pointed out in this chapter using Seneca and Gandhi as my references, life-stowing itself can in fact be considered the self-examination which enables people to reach the necessary wisdom for a governance which keeps society close to nature and therefore free from corruption.

### 3.8 Life-stowing from a Dionysian Perspective

By the term Dionysian I mean to emphasize the aspects of precariousness, infiltration and salvation present in life-stowing practices. Dionysian life-stowers attempt to fully secure their life-stowing by only partially devising a discipline to collect it. Most

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved on 2014-12-16: <http://mercury.lcs.mit.edu/~jnc/nontech/wabisabi.html>

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved on 2014-11-17: <http://socialsciencehealthmedicineatkingstonscollegelondon.com/2014/02/11/tamar-sharon-on-you-are-what-you-track-practicing-autonomy-solidarity-and-authenticity-in-an-age-of-personalized-healthcare/>

importantly, they attempt to actually stow in a sublime environment like a mountain, for example. They seem to come closer to the Freudian notion of the death-drive (Freud 2015:30). In my opinion, however, to return to Seneca and his example of great Stoics such as the fierce defender of the Roman republic against imperialism Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis (Plutarch 2001:237), they are individuals who pursue a higher goal in their existence, a virtue worth attempting to achieve and fight for. Unlike Apollonian life-stowers, they dare to leave the harbor and face the stormy sea. They are hermit-like individuals who reject social norms and attempt to seek independence, an undertaking that often ends badly. I view them as both the most extreme and “tragic” examples of life-stowers and the most poetic.<sup>33</sup> I am referring to poetry here in the original Proto-Indo-European sense of *\*k<sup>w</sup>ey*: “the act of stowing.”

To talk about this particular notion in relation to life-stowing, I’d like to make use of the additional example of the late Alpinist John Mallon Waterman. While his compulsive practice of self-tracking may simply be a case of a young man compulsively generating a personal history, his life, like the lives of many of the outsiders I have discussed in the historical chapter, was characterized by a tragic existence combined with incorruptible virtue, much like the aforementioned Stoic Cato Uticensis. Not much is known about Waterman, but Jon Krakauer provides an insight into his adventurous spirit:

John was very self-critical, always analyzing himself. He’d always been compulsive. He used to carry around a stack of clipboards and notepads. He’d take copious notes, creating a complete record of everything he did during the course of each day. Somewhere he must have had piles and piles and piles of notes like that.... He laid plans to make a solo ascent of the south face of Denali, the mountain’s steepest aspect, in winter, with a minimum of food. He wanted to underscore the waste and immorality of the standard American diet. As part of his training regimen for the climb, he immersed himself in bathtubs filled with ice but in Talkeetna, the cabin he was staying in caught fire and burned to rubble, incinerating both his equipment and the voluminous accumulation of notes, poetry, and personal journals that he regarded as his life’s work. Waterman was completely unhelmed by the loss. (Krakauer 1996:78)

This example is a good description of what I mean by a Dionysian life-stower. Waterman was not only compulsive in the way he kept track of all his conversations with others but also sought to serve as an example based on his own extreme actions. As this account clearly indicates, he did not attempt to secure his life-stowing, which had instead become a part of him, a living testimony that followed him in his existential pursuit of something “lofty.” Once the life-stowing caught fire he had to embark on his last expedition:

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<sup>33</sup> In this case let me point out that at first sight, a life-stower’s production can be conceived as an historical record, something that Aristotle in his *Poetics* (335 BCE) would not in the least consider a form of poetry. And yet it is in the life of the life-stower that the poetic is unveiled.

A day after the fire he committed himself to the Anchorage Psychiatric Institute but left after two weeks. Then he launched yet another solo attempt on Denali. This time he decided to up the ante even further by beginning his ascent at sea level. Waterman was last placed on the Northwest Fork of the Ruth Glacier on April 1. His tracks led toward the east buttress of Denali, straight through a labyrinth of giant crevasses, evidence that he had made no apparent effort to circumvent obvious hazards. He was not seen again; it is assumed he broke through a thin snow bridge and plummeted to his death at the bottom of one of the deep fissures. The National Park Service searched Waterman's intended route from the air for a week following his disappearance but found no sign of him. Some climbers later discovered a note atop a box of Waterman's gear inside the Sheldon Mountain House. It read "My last kiss." (Krakauer 1996:79)

What we see in this long quotation is an acute desire to die along with one's own testament, the result of a compulsive operation of life-stowing, a death log completely disconnected from any urge to fame but linked to a desire to disappear heroically.

Waterman's story is narrated along with that of Christopher McCandless, another restless figure whose life has been depicted in Sean Penn's movie *Into the Wild* (2007). To conclude this section on Dionysian life-stowers, I want to note that it was only when McCandless got caught in the deadly Alaskan winter that he discovered through the writings of Boris Pasternak that "happiness is only real when shared" among intimate people and in a more friendly natural setting like the Russian countryside (Krakauer 1996:189).

### 3.9 Present Chapter Conclusion

It has been the aim of this chapter to make a clear distinction between life-logging and life-stowing. While life-logging is a form of storing data that utilizes automated technologies and commercial interfaces, life-stowing presupposes a sampling of data that is undertaken using manual techniques and predefined constraints. The distinction is relevant, as it can lead to a different analysis of the implications of the respective practices. The academic debate and public opinion have pointed out the dangerous consequences of life-logging. What I have discussed as life-stowing has not been taken into consideration. In this chapter, however, I present it as an opposing energy, or rather as a lifeboat in the Titanic launched by the social media industries which all humanity is boarding.

Moreover, the last sections shed light on two different Stoic tendencies. On the one hand there is the Apollonian variant, where the life-stower stays within a safe harbor to take care of his or her nature. On the other is the Dionysian, in which the life-stower leaves society to achieve a more sublime and purer nature. To conclude this chapter, I would like to repeat that these tendencies should not be envisaged as mutually exclusive. Life-stowers who are more inclined toward digital media are in fact able to follow both the Apollonian path, by devising a good methodology to stow data, and the Dionysian one, by finding the proper means to deliver it.

Overall, my effort in this chapter has been to point out a different way to look at what are commonly defined as life-logging and quantifying-self practices carried out in an effortful manner. I did not focus on technology per se, since contemporary life-stowers, myself among them, make use of whatever media they have available, including pen and paper. I have not discussed the actual role of any specific technology, but have instead pointed out that new technologies affecting to some extent our present are threats to life, and that the life-stower acts as someone who rescues samples of this threatened life for future regenerations. In this respect, while the medium becomes the message and renders human life ever more artificial, the life-stower makes of this medium a medium that leads back to nature.

Future



## 4. Experiencing Life-stowing

The captain was made large amends for the unpleasant minutes which he passed in the conversation of his wife ... , by the pleasant meditations he enjoyed when alone... he pleased himself with intended alterations in the house and gardens, and in projecting many other schemes, as well for the improvement of the estate as of the grandeur of the place: for this purpose he applied himself to the studies of architecture and gardening, and read over many books on both these subjects; for these sciences, indeed, employed his whole time, and formed his only amusement... But while the captain was one day busied in deep contemplations of this kind, ... he himself—died of an apoplexy.... He took, therefore, measure of that proportion of soil which was now become adequate to all his future purposes, and he lay dead on the ground, a great (though not a living) example of the truth of that observation of Horace: *Tu secunda marmora Locas sub ipsum funus; et sepulchri Immemor, struis domos.* Which sentiment I shall thus give to the English reader: "You provide the noblest materials for building, when a pickaxe and a spade are only necessary: and build houses of five hundred by a hundred feet, forgetting that of six by two.

Fielding 2008:118

This chapter is dedicated to a case-study that illustrates the meaning-making of life-stowing. For this purpose I have conducted twelve interviews with visitors to a barn in the Italian Alps where I have stowed and shown my project in an installation and in an archive, respectively. The main question behind my case-study is to understand how these visitors make sense of the various elements of my project and investigate how and what kind of meaning people create.

Generally speaking, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents the actual material used to set the study up, namely my own life-stowing project, which is presented to provide the reader with an insight into its various components. In the second part I present and analyze interviews I have made with selected individuals invited to make sense of my project. Given the complexity of my undertaking, I made use of the constructivist theory of perception developed by James Peterson to understand non-normative cinema and more specifically poetic cinema (Peterson 1994). Following Peterson, by non-normative cinema I mean avant-garde cinema, which does not follow conventional narrative schemes (Peterson1994:1).

While Lev Manovich analyzes a database that has been both captured spatially and montaged sequentially, I will attempt to go a step beyond his analyses, which are

limited to pre-digital media such as cinema. In this respect I will let the visitor to my project analyze database aesthetics in relation to an environment in which the data collected sequentially is presented spatially. The elements of my life-stowing project are thus shown as the elements of the architecture I have created in which to stow it.

#### 4.1 Introducing my Life-stowing Practice

In previous chapters I have discussed life-stowing by looking at the operation of many earlier and some contemporary life-stowers. I have done so in order to understand their aspirations, also given that their life-stowing practices have often been incomplete or dispersed. In this chapter I intend to investigate what the results of a mature life-stowing practice can provide to others. I will also focus on life-stowing that has been created using digital media.

For this purpose I will make use of my own project, a manually produced stowage of the life I have been experiencing since 24 September 2003. Prior to describing each of its architectural elements, I will motivate my choice to use my own project as an example. I could, of course, have investigated other contemporary stowages, but either I do not know about them due to the marginality of the life-stowers, or they are simply inaccessible. One publicly known example is “Virtual Persona,” a half century “personal archive” compiled by the Finnish inventor Erkki Kurenniemi.<sup>1</sup> While by the time of his death this work gained considerable attention both from museums and from scholars like Jussi Parikka,<sup>2</sup> according to the terms of Kurenniemi’s will, it will not be presented until 2048. Further below I will discuss the benefits and disadvantages of using my own project.

My project will be presented here by describing the architecture I have created to host it in 2040, when I plan to finish it. This architecture constrains the undertaking, and it has led me to think of how to complete it by mapping all its parts and various architectural elements. By doing so I intend to enable the reader to become fully immersed in its construction and to have a better understanding of the upcoming case-study.

Each part of my project can be viewed online at <http://2004-2040.com>. When completed it will comprise 36 parts partitioned in 432 monthly productions and totaling 7776 files. More in-depth accounts of its various parts can be found under the “JURIDIC” section of this website. Since the beginning of the project I have been progressively adding a total of 36 parts in order to represent my reality like a painting, attempting to use all the primary colors of a palette that the new digital technologies of my age put at my disposal. Lev Manovich’s essay on Database Aesthetics has in this respect been very inspiring (Manovich 2001).

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved 2015-01-16: <http://www.lahteilla.fi/kurenniemi/a-man-from-the-future>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved 2015-01-16: <http://www.lahteilla.fi/kurenniemi/julkaisu/Parikka.pdf>

I also attempted to look into completing my documentation of time, adding to an initial documentation of myself a documentation of the surroundings and lastly, a documentation of the weather. While attempting to escalate the different kinds of media, I also tried to repeat myself in the different kinds of representation. After several years I ended up conducting eighteen different kinds of self-tracking projects, six of which document myself, six document the surroundings and the last six the weather. Additionally, of these eighteen self-tracking projects, nine make use of graphic media such as photographs, text and drawings, and nine use dynamic media such as video, animations and audio-recordings (Frigo 2015).

While attempting to complete the palette both of the media I could utilize to represent my life and the different perspectives from which I could document it, I also began in a constructivist fashion to conceive of my project as an exploration of reality not simply through time but also through space: I have partitioned the world into eighteen areas that I intend to explore by the end of the project. Conversely, this limitation does not restrict my future actions, but on the contrary, motivates me to actively create the premises allowing me to explore new regions of the world, to dilute my personal framework into new social frameworks, and to make my project more universal as a pure representation of a human being at the beginning of the new millennium.

At this time, on top of my eighteen self-tracking initiatives, I am also conducting eighteen additional projects. These are meta-projects, meaning that, using different media and perspectives, they reflect upon my practice in a more retrospective and less disciplined fashion.

## 4.2 Presentation of Each Part of the Project

At the end of this book is a graphical presentation of my case-study. The first page presents my project, the second the building where I plan to host it, and the third the prototype I have created for the case-study. The remaining eighteen pages present each part of the project, showing at the top its location in the final building, in the middle a close-up of the material. The bottom view shows the prototype being experienced by the interviewees, which for the purpose have also been anonymized.

## 4.3 Explaining the Case-study

In 2015 I bought a field in the Italian Alps where I would one day build the architecture that has set the constraints on my life-stowing project. For the purpose of the case-study I purchased and completely renovated an abandoned barn near this field. In the attic of this barn I have set up an installation presenting only one of the thirty-six years of my project. In the first place, then, it is important to highlight that this case-study is just a small sample of what life-stowing can generate. My project is being revealed prematurely, since I am only thirteen years into its preconceived duration of

thirty-six years. Also, only one of these thirty-six years is shown. For the sake of this book, however, it sufficed to make the experiment interesting.

The installation is therefore only a hint of the full body of work I am undertaking. It is meant to be a sensorial experience where the data resulting from my project is presented. In the floor below the installation I set up an archive comprising thirty-six boxes in which the material related to each part of my project is stowed. In one box, for example, visitors will find my old cameras, in another all the drawings I have digitized and in another my entire exhibition catalogues.

For the sake of understanding how visitors make sense of a non-normative and non-mainstream media text like life-stowing, I have opted to make a reception analysis based on a case-study. Media scholar Klaus Bruhn Jensen identifies two different conceptions of such analysis: a more humanist one that is text-centric and sees media texts as having a direct and powerful effect on the audience, and a uses-and-gratification conception that instead asks what individual users do with the media text (Jensen 1990). He argues that the latter has been too focused on quantitative methods and that more qualitative methods should be adopted to better understand the meaning-making process. The case-study I have done is also qualitative in nature, but in the future I intend to build a much larger analysis presenting the entirety of my life-stowing project. At that time I will conduct a great many interviews over a long period of time, thus using a more quantitative approach in my research.

Thus my main objective is to analyze the meaning-making of an audience in relation to life-stowing media. In this respect I have opted for a qualitative approach that makes use of the constructivist theory of perception. This theory has earlier been used to analyze the reception of avant-garde cinema through its aesthetics, guiding viewers to make sense of it (Carroll 1978). With reference to avant-garde cinema, James Peterson writes that making sense occurs “when [the viewers] have established sufficient coherence among the film’s elements by matching those elements to template schemata” (1994:21). With constructivist theory he implies that non-normative movies both challenge and frustrate understanding. Cognitively, then, viewers have to attempt to optimize this understanding by taking the pool of clues they collect while watching a film and relate it to increasingly less complicated schemes in their heads. For example, when watching a Hollywood movie the viewer can easily relate it to one of the most complex patterns in the brain, namely the narrative scheme, but—as is often the case in avant-garde cinema—if no narration is recognized, less complicated schemes are adopted, such as those identifying minor and surface clues which the brain otherwise wants to erase. Now, in this respect the viewer is forced to maintain a wider range of clues in order to slowly create some kind of understanding, which in the case of personal cinema is often oriented towards a construction of the life-story of the author (Peterson 1994:35).

Given its similarity to avant-garde cinema, my case-study is a readaption of the constructivist theory used by James Peterson (1994), with the difference that while

the film presents itself sequentially to the viewer, my project also shows spatial elements and might thus be even harder to understand as a whole. I could have adopted other approaches that are closer to the understanding of the meaning-making of digital texts. I did not do so, however, given the non-normative as well as multimedia nature of my life-stowing project. I am not interested in a specific digital text but rather in the overall meaning-making experience of several texts generated using different media and presented to a viewer. In this section I will introduce Peterson's ideas about the general reception of avant-garde cinema and progressively discuss in relation to my project what he defines as the personal strain.

As a starting point, I want to acknowledge that the additional labor that viewers have to perform to make sense of avant-garde film becomes even greater in the attempt to make sense of my project. My audience is not a comfortably seated viewer in front of a cinema screen but a pilgrim who needs to travel a long way and later has to keep moving around the project to try to understand it.

My main assumption in the use of constructivist theories of perception to analyze my project is that, in line with Peterson, the "exploration" of it becomes a problem-solving task. To make sense of my project, visitors will need to try to discern its overall meaning as well as a coherent structure that reflects their own heritage, as explained by Peterson (1994:5). Much like avant-garde film, my project is a poorly structured problem lacking a final solution, and visitors will need to "optimize" from a wide range of entries.

If a normal cinematic experience of a Hollywood movie is in itself a highly demanding mental operation that reconstructs the story on the basis of a great many cues (Bordwell 1985), my project will require a higher level of mental management of not only basic semantic elements but also surface details which, as Peterson explains (1994:8), the human brain otherwise readily deletes. What he says in this respect is that avant-garde cinema frustrates comprehension. This is true also of my project, which is rich in surface elements and details such as the trash I pick up on the sidewalk.

Peterson also acknowledges that, while the avant-garde cinema requires the viewer to process a higher level of information, it also demands the development of not so much a taste but rather the skill to relate the information delivered from the film to inner templates in which are also stored contextual information like the history of the filmmaker and the history of avant-garde cinema in general. Peterson claims that while untrained viewers minimize problem-solving (a process called "satisficing"), better-trained ones optimize it (Peterson 1994: 21-22).

Following Peterson, then, I am interested in understanding how visitors to my project attempt to optimize meaning by reflecting it in their already existing experiences. Will they try to classify it as a particular genre? How will they relate it to their own lives and to the world as they have thus far experienced it, as pointed out by reception theories?

Additionally, I acknowledge the distinction that Peterson makes between Hollywood and avant-garde films. While the former attempt an overall structure, the latter, like my project, are a condensation of multiple structures that often overlap. In this richness of structure I admit the notion of “free interpretation sets” (Van Dijk 1979), meaning that visitors to my project will only try to establish coherence on certain structures. A main question of my study will then be: which of the parts of my project have the visitors attempted or not attempted to make meaning of? Why did a particular visitor go for one part of the project and not another?

In this respect I am also interested in examining what life story comes out of a viewing. As Peterson acknowledges, narrative is the first organizational structure perceivers try to impose. Therefore, as my life-stowing is a representation of me and my surroundings, I am interested in finding out if the viewers will create a life story by montaging the various elements of my project that they find relevant. Additionally, I will be curious to see if the more contextual information included in my project (e.g. my journal and the small documentaries I make of my practice) will be used to construct this story.

It is also useful to draw a parallel to one particular strain of the avant-garde, namely personal cinema. As Peterson argues, the personal element in personal cinema not only describes the content of a film but also, as in the case of my project, implies that the filmmaker himself or herself shoots/edits, performs and self-finances the production. This, according to Peterson, provides the viewers of personal cinema with a sense of the autonomy of a work unshaped by any institution (Peterson 1994:31). In this respect, viewers experiencing my project should be more apt to apply open-ended strategies to deal with its comprehension as they attempt to detect my private concerns. In other words, while the viewers assume that, like a poetic cinema filmmaker according to Peterson, I have full control of the content of my project, they are urged to interpret it as an autobiography. This is all the more so the case because my project is personal also with respect to the very content I present. Additionally, while personifying me as the character of my project, viewers will also personify the style as a way to look into more profound aspects of my life (Bordwell 1989). Even though it might be difficult to analyze that factor in my interviews, I will certainly be interested in whether the interviewees recognized a certain style.

However, Peterson theorizes that if no narrative schemata are recognized in the more poetic and personal strain of the avant-garde cinema, viewers tend to move to less structured schemata until they are satisfied. Alternatively, they can adopt an interpretative schema supplied by knowledge of particular genres such as the commentary of an art critic, which may help to contextualize the work within identified cultural phenomena. This latter schema, however, is more appropriate for minimalist avant-garde films that tend to resemble contemporary art objects. Because different individuals can have different interests, I am openly curious to learn whether visitors to my project are interested in its structure, specific details, myself as the author, a particular technology and so forth. After finding this out, my aim is to

understand how meaning is created or attempted by these visitors and which parts of my project they have utilized to do so. In this respect, however, it is important to say that I am not a psychologist and I do not have the necessary scientific skills to dwell more in depth on cognitive processes in the brains of the visitors.

In this respect, considering further Peterson's reflection on how multiple viewing is an ideal scenario for the comprehension of poetic cinema, throughout the case-study I will analyze what happens if visitors come repeatedly (e.g. they live in the neighborhood of my project or are my guests), and one additional question I will try to answer is in what way a second and/or third viewing of my project improves their understanding of it.

#### 4.4 Interview Preparation and Questions

Twelve interviews were conducted in a barn in the small village of Santa Caterina, located in the Venetian Alps. Throughout the time I renovated the old barn and set up the case-study within it, I kept an eye out for respondents. The ones I chose were in the end those who became curious about my undertaking. While some of them were locals who kept dropping in while I was working on the barn, others were international acquaintances of mine who were willing to travel a long distance to come to view my work. Six of the interviewees were locals I did not know before, while the six others were acquaintances of mine who live or have lived outside Italy. The language skills of the latter helped them to access the parts of my project written in English, and I decided to interview them despite being my acquaintances, since I also wanted to have perspectives from non-local, educated persons, which, given the remoteness of the place, was otherwise difficult to arrange.

Although it is controversial, I am not alone in this choice. Feminist researchers such as Joke Hermes (1995) and Celia Kitzinger (1987) have also interviewed acquaintances as part of their studies. They have partially motivated this by the fact that the recruitment of interviewees can be "a frustrating phase" (Hermes 1995:181). Kitzinger has opted to use a recruiting method defined as "friendship pyramiding" or "snowballing" (Kitzinger 1987:87). Even though the method involved asking friends to ask their friends to be interviewed, the researchers have often ended up interviewing acquaintances (Hermes also notably interviewed her own mother). I have also been literally standing on top of a pyramid: the mountain where I was renovating the barn to accommodate my case-study. I made use of the locals for my interviews, and to get other perspectives I invited acquaintances who undertook a long journey to reach me at this summit. I am aware that pre-existing friendship adds a unique dimension to the research that has implications for both the researcher and the researched. One of the main consequences is that the interviewees may overidentify with the researcher and modify their behavior or comments to please him or her (Glesne, Peshkin 1992). Another important implication is that an interview with a relative or friend might be carried out in a less formal manner, as might also the

analysis of its content (Cotterill 1992). Despite this, Nonie Harris, another feminist researcher, has argued that interviewing friends has in fact resulted in successful and fruitful research, mostly due to willingness on the her part and that of her friends to disclose information (Harris 2002).

Another problematic factor is that I am the producer as well as the researcher of my project. I am aware that interviewees' responses to my questions are likely to be influenced by the fact that I, the creator, am also the interviewer. In other words, the warning that Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin bring forward in relation to interviewing friends is here intensified: certain answers might have been given with the intention of pleasing me. Moreover, certain answers that could have been offensive, such as those in which the interviewees express a personal opinion about my project, have likely been formulated so as not to offend me.

Given the difficulties in enlisting a different audience and arranging someone other than myself as interviewer, I opted anyway to conduct the interviews myself and partially with people I already knew. I was not deterred by the above warnings, possibly because I do not conceive of my life-stowing project as too subjective; it is, in my view, a rather objective collection of samples from reality. In other words, I was not afraid to be judged as a painter showing paintings he has been working on for months. My method of life-stowing could be criticized, but the actual outcome is just extracts from reality, although this reality has been curated by me or rather through my attempt to find a way as perfect as possible to present it (e.g. in thirty-six years, all the photos of my right hand will make up a 36 x 36' installation of 1,000,000 images). As each part of the installation is there to fulfill a specific function within a rationally conceived machinery, the most relevant questions for this study are those in which the interviewees reveal the ways in which they found this machinery meaningful. In other words, I conceive of my project as a kind of medieval machine that allows users to generate new content based on a wide range of combinations. My main interest, therefore, is to understand how visitors will combine various elements of my project and make meaning of it.

I am, however, aware that a specific journal entry or a particular photo might be a sensitive subject for a person who is particularly close to me, and, with the exception of one individual who has been one of my best friends since 2007, I have therefore chosen interviewees with whom I have not been particularly involved since the start of my project. Also, interviewees have been thoroughly informed about the scope of my research, the way in which I have planned to carry it out, and a formal letter of consent has been signed prior to the actual interviews. Only after their ethical consent was granted was each interviewee given a short introduction to the work that basically states that I have installed one year of different records from my life. The interviewees then spent from one to two hours exploring the prototype, and were later asked whether they wanted to access my archive located downstairs. The actual interview consisted of thirteen questions, to which I have always adhered in chronological order, omitting only those relating to the archive in the event that, as happened three

times, the interviewees were afraid to climb the ladder to access it. Follow-up questions were made to allow the interviewees to further develop any concept they have expressed in answering one of the thirteen inquiries. All interviews were conducted in the kitchen of my nearby apartment. I intended to analyze four aspects of the survey, namely the interviewees' understanding of the installation and the archive, their emotional engagement, their meaning-making and how they related this to their earlier experience of art and life. Except for the last two questions, which were asked for later feedback, I have grouped the first eleven under these four aspects.

Using Peterson's theory as a point of departure, my interviewees were asked the following:

#### Understanding the installation

- 1) How would you describe the installation?
- 2) How did you like the installation? Why/why not?
- 3) What did you think about the different parts? Why?

#### Engaging emotionally

- 1) What did you like most? Why?
- 2) What did you not like? Why?

#### Making meaning

- 1) What do you think my project is about? Why do you think so?
- 2) How do you understand my project? What parts have you used the most to understand it? Any of the more contextual parts?
- 3) Have you understood anything about me while experiencing my installation? If so, how did you do it and who do you think I am?

#### Earlier experiences of art and life

- 1) Have you identified any style or media in my project? And if so, have they provided you with any hint that helps you understand it better?
- 2) Can you relate my work to any previous experience of, for example, art and digital aesthetics?
- 3) Do you have any questions about my project? If so, what do you understand now after I gave you additional explanations?

#### Follow-up of interview

- 1) Shall I walk you to the field where I plan to build my cathedral and introduce you my idea? Has the viewing of the field and my explanation improved your understanding of my project? If so, how?

- 2) Could you write me an email in the following days if you have anything further you want to tell me in relation to my project?

As noted above, I have conducted a total of twelve interviews. These were carried out during the summer of 2016 as I was finishing setting up my project in the barn. Due to financial as well as time restrictions, I did not manage to complete construction as expected. Despite the “friend pyramiding” method I have adopted to recruit my interviewees, the turnout was a mixed pool of people of different genders, nationalities, ages, upbringing and education. This variety was not preconceived from the beginning but was merely accidental and possibly also reflects the kind of people, both locals and tourists, who roam around the Alps in the summer season. In order to protect the identity of the interviewees, in the following text they have been anonymized using pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms is central to ethical research practice (Crow and Wiles 2008). I could have gone a step further and made the location anonymous as well, but during the course of the interviews the fact that the location is my native environment where I wish to conduct further and larger scale studies turned out to be meaningful.

To facilitate my analysis I have clustered the interviewees in two different groups. The first consists of old acquaintances and the second of new ones. The members of the former are international; they are better educated, speak English, have traveled abroad and have been more exposed to contemporary art culture than those in the second group, which is made up entirely of local people. I chose to construct my respondents in this manner mainly for two reasons. The first has to do with access to the material; none of the locals interviewed here know English and thus cannot derive meaning from large parts of my project (e.g. the book of dreams, the LED displaying the fables I improvise, my journal, etc., which are all written in English). The international respondents were also more used to experience contemporary art and culture than the locals and might thus be differently prepared to perceive my installation. The analysis I introduce in this chapter, then, presents distinctive results that are characteristic of one or the other group, despite the fact that they were thirteen individuals with very unique and different understandings of my project. Let me introduce you to the first group, my old acquaintances:

Giovanni, Italian film director who has been recording and transcribing a year of his life. He is in his 30s and we lost contact since he moved to Canada in 2003;

Filip, Polish sound artist and media scholar who since 2007 has recorded several aspects of his life. He is in his 30s and a close friend;

Paola, Italian former medical doctor who has lived and worked abroad and now runs a hostel in Italy. She is in her 60s. Although she is a relative, I have only met Paola five times in my life;

Sarah, American journalist, Duke University graduate working at Radio Sweden. She is in her 30s and is a former student and friend;

Daan, Dutch biologist in his 40s. He is Connie's husband and my girlfriend's neighbor in the Netherlands.

Connie, Dutch art teacher in her 40s. She is Daan's wife and my girlfriend's neighbor. I met Daan and Connie informally only a few times before they visited the barn in Italy.

These are my older acquaintances. The group is gender-balanced, and their ages range from 30 to 60.

Two of my acquaintances, Filip and Giovanni, are people to whom I have committed myself. They are my friends; I share personal things about my life with them and vice versa. Filip and Giovanni are also life-stowers just like me. Both have been using digital media extensively to record their lives. I was thus curious to see what kind of meaning their experiences as life-stowers would bring forward. All other interviewees I have seldom met, particularly since I began my project.

The other kind of interviewees I call locals. Their knowledge of English is limited. In comparison with the previous group, they have not traveled as broadly or been exposed as much to contemporary culture, although many of them are actively pursuing different forms of traditional arts such as poetry, music and painting. These interviews were conducted in Italian, and in two cases with two interviewees at once. This second batch is also gender-balanced and like the first, presents a broad age spectrum, from 30 to 60. In this respect their selection is not problematic. Let me introduce them to you:

Teresa, former janitor in her 60s;

Vincenzo, welder in his late 30s with a passion for Italian aestheticist poetry;

Laura, salesperson and amateur painter in her late 50s and Rosario Costa, factory worker and musician in his late 40s;

Antonio, unemployed, in his 20s;

Mario, woodworker in his early 40s and Ursula graphic designer in her late 30s;

Ernesto, art teacher and painter in his 50s.

## 4.5 Thematic Analysis

In the following section, I plan to discuss the interview material by thematically examining my findings, which will in turn enable me to revisit the constructivist theory of perception proposed by Peterson to analyze the meaning-making of American avant-garde cinema. These findings are as follows:

interviewees automatically make use of **two emblems**, one to describe the space and one to describe the creator of the space;

interviewees make meaning based on what they like, which is in turn a reflection of their **identity**, meaning their experiences, education and personal inclinations.

interviewees are bombarded by different fragments launched by different media and yet a **unified reality** is constructed;

interviewees recollecting their experience of my project at a later stage reflect that it is in fact a **mirror of themselves**.

I have based the subsections below on the following findings.

### 4.5.1 Meaning-Making as Emblemizing

In this section I will describe how, within the limited scope of the case-study, interviewees have assigned an emblem to both the installation and its creator. By emblem I mean a metaphorical object that interviewees have used to represent what they have not been able to identify, namely the function of the space and the function of its creator. This phenomenon occurred among the international and the local interviewees alike. The section has been divided in two parts. The first deals with emblems assigned to the installation and the second with those assigned to its creator.

#### *Emblemizing the installation*

In Peterson's analysis of avant-garde cinema, viewers did not have to ask themselves the question "Where am I?" They were in fact probably in a defined social environment: the cinema. In the case of my project, the level of disorientation is heightened; the visitors are in a semi-remote and out-of-the-way mountainous place.

When asked how she would describe the installation, Sarah specifies: "It is a multi-year project that takes many forms, visual, audio, etc., and occupies a barn in northern Italy in a place which is rather difficult to reach." The barn is either completely new, in the case of the international interviewees, or very familiar, as it was to the locals. But what they experienced inside the old barn where my project is located was new to everyone. The locals were intrigued as to why I chose this surrounding. Vincenzo, for example, asks: "Why did you choose to exhibit here and not in London or New York?"

“How would you describe my project?” was a voluntary open-ended question to hear how they interpreted the installation in their own words. Nonetheless, all interviewees were direct in answering it. Prior to the interview, Vincenzo wrote his first impressions on a piece of paper. The first sentence can be translated from Italian like this: “An accumulation of days and thoughts that got lost in space but were saved in time through images that become pieces of a gigantic puzzle that will never be able to be completed.” A welder but also a poet in his free time, Vincenzo associated the installation with a “gigantic puzzle,” thus with an emblem. In his notes he also writes: “Welcome to the brain of a madman” could be the title of this work made up of personal matters and sensations that the spectator can hardly make his own.” Although during the interview he says he would need more time to be able to provide a description of my project, in his first notes he uses two emblems; “a gigantic puzzle” and the “brain of a madman.”

Many of the interviewees promptly referred to the installation as being inside my “brain.” Vincenzo, for example, says that the installation “is a brilliant way to visualize what is going on in our brains every day and every second the whole year.” Daan in particular defines it as a way to represent anything that the brain experiences, and Connie calls it a novel way to represent “any impression in a person’s head.” Antonio says that the installation is “an artistic representation of everything going through your brain.”

My friend Giovanni goes a bit further, saying that the installation is “gray matter, a pyramid of the brain. It relates to the modern world contained within a monument that attempts to be immortal. It is contradictory in that, contrary to the archetype, it goes towards the future and yet, once it is done, it will be the past.” Giovanni is not the only one to define the installation as a pyramid. Ernesto describes it as a “pyramid of time.” Giovanni also defines it as a “Zen temple,” and my other friend Filip comes to identify it as a “temple of modernity.” Also, both Giovanni and Filip, two practitioners doing related work and, in my opinion, two life-stowers, often use the word “monument” to emblemize my project. For Giovanni it is a monument that “relates to the modern world contained within.” On the other hand, it is “melancholic” as it “attempts to be immortal ... it goes towards the future and yet, once it is done, it will be the past.” Filip also detects this poetic element. For him my project is a monument representing a conflict that makes him feel sad. It represents the “attempt to realize a life dream” yet using “technology,” I “try to escape.” This definition shifts the focus from the brain of an individual to a representation of modernity at large which is folded back on the personal tragedy of the creator. It was Giovanni and Filip, my closest friends and two creators, who seized upon this chain of emblems.

For certain interviewees, however, the metaphors were slightly different or more obscure. Ursula calls it a “clock” in which time is captured but cannot be paused. My relative Paola addressed the same concept, seeing it as a machine that bombs the sensibility of the viewer and inevitably penetrates it. Besides a quasi-scientific representation of the brain as thought of by, for example, Daan, other interviewees saw in

my project something deeply spiritual. Laura thought of it as a representation of the “akasha,” a place where souls set out to record everything, while Rosario saw in it a place where people can come to “heal” their souls. Only Connie and Antonio described it as a contemporary art museum.

Teresa, my relative Paola, and Ernesto came up with a further metaphor, thinking of my project as a journey not only in time but also in space. So far we have not detected any particular distinction in the way these metaphors were applied among both the international and local interviewees. One aspect that emerged, however, is that Filip and Giovanni, interviewees who not only know me best but are also life-stowers themselves, readily identified in the upper floor of my project a congested urban milieu surrounded by a natural environment (namely the corridors and the windows at the perimeter of the installation). Giovanni reports that this ambivalence had a charging and discharging effect, respectively. As in the case of Filip, also Giovanni saw this opposition as a tragic element, something that no other interviewees perceived. He says: “Right when I felt this edge between nature and the artificial, I started to generate emotions, feeling where you have been.”

In relation to the surrounding nature, Ernesto, an art connoisseur, thinks of my project in terms of a forest, a green cloud that never changes its place but slowly grows. It was he, however, who went beyond the simple association of the viewing section of my project with a museum space. He relates it to a monastery cell in which only one monk would be able to experience, for the duration of his life, a fresco by Fra Angelico. He says that while contemporary art must be experienced by hundreds of visitors, my project was experienced in solitude, much like the monk in his cell.

#### *Emblematizing the creator*

So much for the emblems that interviewees have assigned to the actual installation. I will now describe how they have described me, the creator behind it, using emblematic characters. According to Peterson, when comprehension is not achievable, viewers of an avant-garde film try to understand the author behind it (Peterson 1994). The findings of my qualitative study indicate that viewers of my installation have not attempted to understand me but have instead associated me with an emblem. To some extent this emblem has come to match the emblem assigned to the space. In this respect, after emblematizing the installation as a temple, my friend Giovanni says: “The one comparison I would make is with some monk transcribing a religious book. More than an association with art, your work evokes a religious feeling. It would be like a monk’s work of art that has to do with life and time and their ephemerality.” Similarly, Laura says: “You are a very ancient soul who has been a monk in a previous life... You are one of the scribes, beings who transmit history.”

For the most part, however, the emblems describing me have no connection with those characterizing the installation I have created. Teresa, for example, recalls the time when I presented the installation to her: “I can be very instinctive, but then I need to look at things more elaborately. I need to be alone and close my eyes. I can

see things passing and I can feel them from within. At times it happens that looking at a person I see an image in a flash. The first times I talked to you I clearly saw the moon and the water. You were a fisherman and this clearly indicated that you are patient and you are there to take things out from the water that represents life.”

Also, as I will later discuss, Giovanni sees nothing of me in the installation but rather assigns me the role of a “craftsman making mirrors.” Other interviewees, however, have given me more traditional roles. Connie, for example, says: “The real artist has a need to record. You are an artist because you need to do this. Somehow you are conceptual because you make borders for yourself.” Also Antonio, who visits contemporary art shows, does not hesitate to think of “a sort of personal reflection of you as an artist. You have narrated a year of your life. It is a point of view.” However, having viewed so many different works, Antonio sees that I am not only an artist and says: “Wow, so you are also a composer! Will you be the next great writer?” Later he also adds: “I like you, though, because you are crazy in a good sense. You throw yourself into various branches. You don’t represent your art only through paintings but also through photos, videos, the dreams you have transcribed... it gives me the idea that you are the lord of the world, a person with a thousand faces. If tomorrow you bring me an egg and you tell me that it is art I will believe you because very peculiar things come out of your ego.” He introduces the emblem of “lord of the world.”

This is as far as the more visual context of my installation goes. There the emblems of a monk, a scribe, a craftsman, a fisherman, a lord of the world or the more traditional ones of artist, composer and writer came up. To understand this visual material a visual character representing the author is introduced. Different, however, is what has emerged via a more in-depth reading of the textual elements presented in the archive. Sarah, who took the reading of my journal seriously and had all the prerequisites to be able to read through my English writings, understood my project as an attempt to assume the lifestyle of yet another character. She said: “Well, I didn’t read the whole journal, but I now see this as a big life project that is only partially about art. Basically I think you are trying to achieve a certain lifestyle, and this is part of it. The lifestyle is that of the farmer-philosopher. As you describe in your journal, you want to get away from consumerism.”

A specific passage in the early part of my journal leads her to conclude that the emblem I am myself seeking through my life project and commitment is that of a farmer-philosopher. However this conclusion is also guided by other factors: “I say you are a farmer-philosopher also because I know you. Somehow now you sort of achieve it. You have a vegetable garden below the barn. I always thought you were doing it because there is a certain amount of ego in a person who spends a lot of time on his art, much of which is centered on himself, but the garden helps you to learn, to recognize patterns from your environment.” Like other interviewees, then, Sarah also associates me with an emblematic character, which this time emerges through my writings. She sees, however, a contrast between the playful artist exhibiting in the installation and the farmer-philosopher character emerging in the archive and says:

“There was some kind of incongruity for me. Some work is very playful—like the drawings, the organs, the bright tiles with the trash, the people you met—but then in your journal there is not as much playfulness. I got the picture of a more judgmental and sometime contemptuous person. But maybe this is a function of you sitting alone and writing a journal.”

#### 4.5.2 Meaning-Making as Liking

In the following section I will discuss what interviewees liked about my project and how what appealed to them coincided with how they created meaning from it. At first, interviewees had a hard time saying straight out whether or not they liked the installation. Antonio, for example, says that “it is something bizarre and at the same time fascinating.” Ursula says that the installation “is a bit bulimic in the sense that it doesn’t allow any possibility to pause.” Mario also says: “Emotionally I felt it was claustrophobic, while intellectually I felt interested and fascinated.” My relative Paola also says: “I have found it very emotional. It is particularly engaging to be bombarded from different perspectives. This makes it impossible to defend oneself from these experiences.” Other interviewees, whether from the international or the local group, have no clear answer; they all seem to struggle with formulating a straightforward response such as “Yes I liked it!” or “No I did not!” Certainly, given the reactions I have brought forward here, the overall experience was compelling and a far from pleasant one.

Generally, in answering whether they liked the installation, all interviewees opted to make use of an adjective often followed by a sentence expressing their appreciation of the great effort behind it. Vincenzo, for example, answered: “It is difficult to seize the meaning. You get lost in what he wants to communicate to us. You cannot give a final judgment as to what is represented. It got me curious. It is fascinating to see the work that is behind it, the effort to put together what one has thought. From this point of view it is admirable.” One element that has emerged from answers such as these is that all interviewees are unsure whether they liked the work, but they nonetheless admire the labor behind it. In this respect the process becomes more relevant than the actual result. The effort which distinguishes life-stowing from ordinary life-logging is highlighted.

My relative Paola goes so far as to see my effort as a duty. In one of her comments she says that the installation: “speaks about life, mankind, time that passes, the attempt to stop it; and it is also clearly an attempt to communicate this to others. You communicate your relationship with time, with life, with your emotions. The fact that a person like you makes the effort to leave these traces is like a duty; there are obligations and it requires energy. Therefore it is clear to me that the motive is to communicate to others the traces you leave.” While other interviewees seek to evaluate a final product, a traditional work of art like a sculpture or a painting, and get lost in the process, Ursula says: “It is clear that at this point it is a work in progress. It is nonsense to make declarations. It is a becoming.”

Unanimously, however, they all liked the drawings of ideas I displayed in the corridors. Filip, who is best acquainted with my project, was not positive about the presentation of the drawings and said: "I could hear the noise of the devices and I wondered if screens were necessary, particularly because one reason you do these drawings in the evening is to get away from devices. I kept looking at them and thought that the strongest are the sexual ones, although there are also very interesting ones tapping into the idea of civilization versus nature." All other interviewees thought they were hilarious and spent a long time in front of the screens in the corridors. Despite their positive feelings about the drawings, they were generally unable to express why they liked them so much. My relative Paola, who had a vague idea about my work, was particularly impressed by them. She says: "The drawings were far more immediate than reading a text. It would have required significantly more time to read a text."

Teresa could also explain why she liked the sketches so much. She says: "I liked the drawing, since from simple elements the author has expressed allegories. I have seen how from simple elements, like from a dog, a kid and a man, he has seized interesting meanings." At times, however, Teresa perceives negative elements that she doesn't like. In the written reflections I received from her after the interview she writes: "At times his drawings express an almost cruel suffering, at times they are surreal, at times childish and ironic." This makes Teresa think "you have used your work to deal with difficult experiences in your life. Drawing, for example, can be seen as a therapy."

While the drawings were in general well received and regarded as funny, several visitors disliked the recordings of my thoughts. Daan cannot deal with their negative content and says: "It is a bit scary. Like someone else reading your thoughts. It was really a voice in your head and I did not feel pleased about it." On the other hand, these unpleasant thoughts enabled Filip to reflect as follows: "I put on the headphones, and the voice created a natural sound track to the video and everything became more interesting. There were interesting random connections, and that worked really well. A lot of your thoughts were about the artificiality of technology. I then had a conflict with the execution of your project, which involved a lot of technologies. I felt it was an interesting monument to this conflict. I felt sad; you can look at your work as an attempt to realize a life's dream, but at the same time it does so through the technology you try to escape." Filip was then able to grasp this meaning by overcoming the unpleasantness of the thoughts and trying to reflect on them in relation to my overall undertaking.

Beside these thoughts, there were other parts of my project that were not popular. The plaques in which I report the casualties I read about in the news is the second most relevant example. Connie thinks they are too much, and my relative Paola and Mario both explain that they did not like them because they could not read them. In this respect Mario says: "I didn't like the braille plaques but this is because I don't know how to read them." They were unpopular because it was impossible for these interviewees to read or experience them, but even if they had been able to do so,

would they have liked the list of casualties presented there? According to Teresa, represented negativity makes her dislike something. In this respect she says: “I did not like the introduction you gave me of the braille, where you record casualties. I don’t like the negative aspect of it nor do I like the negativity I perceived at times when looking at the drawings.” So far, then, if people did not like what they could not make sense of, such as the plaques written in braille, why did they approve of what they did like? Even in the limited study of my project, interviewees have generally not cared for what they thought was carrying negative meanings, and they liked what carried positive and (in the case of the drawings) ironic meaning. In *Poetics*, Aristotle hints that people like to view imitations of themselves (Aristotle 1997:1). Also, as researchers like Manuel Castells have pointed out, viewers are more inclined towards positive rather than negative content. Research in the field of advertising, for example, has shown that a positive message in an ad is more effective than a negative one (Castells 2009: 147).

Beyond disliking negative content, however, it is also clear to me that for other elements of my project interviewees preferred or rejected what they generally like or dislike, respectively. Antonio, for example, says, “I have always been fascinated by paintings. The colors of your paintings are really beautiful. This one, for example, I like the most. It appears to me as a setting sun. Also, these hundred faces looking at me really hit me. But were you thinking of the sun when you made this painting? ... I also liked the fable in the display. It really draws my attention. I come to think now that all these things are different from one another and what they have in common is you. Wow!”

Contrary to Antonio, Sarah did not care for the paintings, saying she wasn’t “crazy about them. Not for any reason, only aesthetically I prefer other things.” These oppositions lead me to argue that different interviewees liked or disliked what agreed with their identity. This finding corresponds to Stuart Hall’s seminal “Encoding/Decoding” model, which stresses that the audience’s interpretation is dependent on the individual’s assumptions and social context (Awan 2007:3). Antonio, for example, reacted to the various parts of my installation by maintaining the identity he has built around his sexual identity as a gay man, explicitly emphasizing stereotypical feminine values. As an example, three times in the interview he declared that the idea of me picking up trash to make collages was “disgusting.” On one occasion he says: “The very idea of you picking up trash for a year really revolts me.” On the other hand, the collages were well received by my relative Paola, who says: “I found the idea of the trash collages very beautiful and original because they are an important part of the society in which we live.” Unlike Antonio, Paola has lived abroad and traveled outside Europe. The fact that she likes the collages reflects her identity of a traveler, and she says: “You may ask yourself if in a less systematic way it would have been relevant to use even one of these modes only for a small part of one’s life. For a person like me, who is getting old and has problems remembering, it would have been beautiful to be able to look back in one of these modes to stop time.”

So far I have shown how the parts certain interviewees disliked were actually liked by others. To enforce this statement, let me give you a further example. My friend Giovanni, a film director working mostly with 3D animations, admits that he “did not like the projection of the clouds, as I noticed that the 3D shapes were designed by someone else. The clouds are not your design, and I thought they resulted in a technical contradiction. I have recognized in them a design that was too explicit.” Giovanni could relate to the clouds because of his profession. Ursula, also working as a graphic designer, says: “Nothing is taken for granted and it is as if there are two entities and the clouds are the key to reading them. One entity is the maniacal recording. There is an intellectual will behind this. The other is your soul. It is like there was a soul and your thinking that are both present in your project. Your thinking is the constant grip on reality while the clouds are what is beyond this. It is the oneiric aspect of passing time.”

Asking about the specific parts that enabled the interviewees to understand my project was not completely useful. Interviewees were quite unclear as to whether there was any specific part that enabled them to make sense of it. As I have noted, in some cases— Teresa, for example—the part she liked the most, namely the drawings, enabled her to make sense of the installation. Similarly, Filip, a sound artist, based his understanding of my project on what he himself likes: working with sound. Antonio also made sense of my project based on what he liked and consequently on the way he presents himself to society. Abstract paintings are the part of the project that best related to his sexual identity, and it is also what he uses to declare that what he has experienced is art.

This qualitative study indicates, therefore, that along with Peterson’s constructivist theory of perception, interviewees use their acquired skills to make meaning of the work. I will add in this respect that their interpretations are moreover coherent with their identity. By identity I mean the way they project themselves in relation to society, the role they have come to define within it. They use it not only to judge what they like but also to make meaning of what they experience. This said, the question of which components of the installation have enabled meaning making is perhaps not so important. The parts correspond pretty much to what the interviewees are most inclined to make sense of based on their identity and earlier experiences in life.

If media scholar Stuart Hall has claimed that any media text is polysemic, providing different possibilities for the audience to decode meaning (Hall 1980:90), my installation has pushed this polysemy to the extreme; it would take a lifetime for any audience to experience all the media fragments presented in the installation and all its possible combinations. Also, as my project lacks an overt political and/or ideological message, it did not result in a “politically patterned” audience response as in the finding of David Morley (1980), but merely brought forward the lived experiences and assumptions of each interviewee with the multidimensional complexity advocated by later media scholars as Kim Schröder (2000).

On the other hand, however, in the context of the archive the interviewees have been more inclined to read text. This archive has been conceived by many of them as the backstage of the viewing section. My relative Paola compares it with the installation and calls it: “the laboratory of the artisan. Above in the exhibition you see the finished work. Below you see that there has been a work of selection, an extraction procedure. You see the raw materials and they are interesting. It is as though the material below is more concrete, more normal, because in this extraction there is also a process of abstraction. Above there is an aesthetic work while below there is the primal matter.” She then reflects: “I also read some of the work below, looked at some photos and read some of your old poems. Especially in the photos I saw how you were and it gave me the idea of a past. Going below to the archive then is like diving into the past.”

It was Sarah in particular who could read through my journal and get a completely different understanding of my project, namely that I am attempting to reach a certain lifestyle. Interviewees were therefore seeing the archive as a trace of the process, as in Dziga Vertov’s use of the cabinet to stow the film reels that his wife would later bring to life through an additional process of selection. It is here that both my relative Paola and Ursula understand the selective work behind the installation. The latter comes to look at my work in opposition to hoarding; she sees it as the “accumulation of a poor man” where only the essence of life is kept in a systematic order. In this respect, the installation has been conceived as the place where the project comes to life.

#### 4.5.3 Meaning-Making as Unifying

In this section I will present how some of the interviewees have made sense of my project as a unified experience despite the fact that it is presented in fragments. To begin with, throughout the interviews I have detected many attempts to classify my project. As I have already discussed, Antonio and Connie, thanks to their contemporary art experiences, came to identify it as a work of art. Laura and Rosario, on the other hand, say it is absolutely not art but something spiritual, while my friend Giovanni sees it as something between religion and art.

Although these attempts to define my project within the humanities blur, for other interviewees like Daan and my relative Paola there was a clear scientific logic to it. They both wanted to see a goal, namely the representation of the brain, and to judge the method I was applying. Paola says in this regard: “Let me tell you first what I generally think: it is a complete picture of a person’s experience. The photos, the videos of public spaces, the drawings, are all modes linked to the realm of images. In this respect the visual is certainly analyzed. I also think that the graphical reproduction to which you add some humor, like the drawings, also becomes a form of criticism. Making a comical drawing becomes a plus value that gives an additional image of reality. Also the notations of the songs you have heard, your writings, your notes, your dreams... I wouldn’t think of any other mode to represent reality. It is a truly complete way of presenting not only your daily but also monthly experience,

and the further analysis you do of time. Let me tell you also that this completeness is not boring. It is based on the will of the spectator to dig more or less into the material that is there and it is complete.” Daan, however, who experienced the installation when some elements were missing, reflects that other details should have been added to make my scientific pursuit of representing the human brain more complete. He says: “Your project is about visualizing all those forces determining your memories. The seasonal changes of light in the atmosphere were missing. In all these different aspects of social media it is also an important factor that is missing. You can compare them to dreams.”

It is by now clear to me that people with an art history background saw the installation from this perspective. Those with experience in the natural sciences saw it from a more scientific angle. Others who were self-taught saw it from yet another viewpoint. Nonetheless, despite all these different perspectives, both the international and the local batch of interviewees made sense of the installation as a “one.” Daan, from his natural-scientific point of view, says: “It’s an intelligent way of visualizing all the things that influence one’s memory, from different directions, which in my view are different factors. It is strange to realize that there are so many of these factors. It makes it a bit chaotic to realize how much the brain, an organ made of liquids, can handle. You visualize it as if it was very chaotic, but in reality it all comes down to one thing.” My relative Paola also reflects: “Most certainly there is a global signature. There is a strong perception that one person alone has executed all the work. There is unity. It does not give you the feeling that several people have worked on the installation; there is a red thread. I do not have the technical skills to go more in depth. I can tell you, however, that it is not a mesh of stuff you could see at a show with various artists. There is a dominant feeling that there is one single person behind all the various facades of the work.”

From their autodidactic perspective local interviewees as well have detected this unity. Laura, for example, says: “Since everything is one, it expresses itself in many faces. You are manifesting the expression of this one through the faces you display in the columns and the drawings in the corridors. You are bringing a part of the akasha into the real.” Although all the fragments presented in the installation use different media technologies, ultimately a sense of unification has been perceived in both groups. This sense diverges from Peterson’s understanding that viewers of an avant-garde film attempt to solve a puzzle. My interviewees have instead explored the installation with a willingness to experience and be impressed. There is an underlying syncretism, or, as Ernesto points out, my project has at least generated a reality that is more real than the reality I have documented. He says: “Looking, for example, at your drawings, you come to realize that you did not create anything surreal. On the contrary, you have brought back reality. Let me explain to you this concept. The mediated life we live is surreal, and what you have created is a portal that brings the viewer back to reality. You need the creation of an authentic reality like yours to be able to transcend the fictional reality we are experiencing.”

Ursula also experiences my project not as a single answer but as a universe that has opened up in front of her. Ultimately Rosario and Laura agree that the installation serves to awaken those people who have the sensibility to be awakened. The latter goes as far as to say: “Looking with my spiritual eyes I can tell you that everything here is connected. Every human being is a matrix. You have created this because the new age is underway. Ancient souls like you are recovering old knowledge to enlighten humanity. Your work enlightens the human being. Each human being has parts of their souls that are asleep and your work touches these sleeping parts. You must never force this, however. Many will never understand. Your images, your words, your notes, work as messages that open the inner doors of the viewer. If they don’t seem to understand, don’t worry. It is the unconscious that will set to work for them. You created a great thing, and even though it won’t be understood immediately, it will be in the future. You have a precise duty, and it is not by chance you have ended up here. In this area all the ancient souls are gathering.”

#### 4.5.4 Meaning-Making as Mirroring

In this section I will discuss how the installation has been conceived as a mirror of the actual interviewee. At the end of each interview, each of them was asked to send me further reflections, if they had any, about their experience and understanding of my project. Only Giovanni and Teresa did so. The former sent me an email, while the latter wrote me a letter. Other interviewees clarified that the installation would require more time to be understood. Ursula, for example, says: “I would need to come back here many, many, many times. Every drawing has its own history. Maybe it is necessary to accompany the viewer, maybe not. Perhaps it is only necessary to help them to pause.” To the question whether she understood anything about me while viewing my installation she says: “No, on the contrary, you open a whole new universe. Let’s say we are only experiencing one of many frames. Perhaps once your work will be finished.”

Only my friends Giovanni and Teresa reflect further on their experience after visiting the installation. Days later they come to realize that my project took a different stance within them. So while most of the interviewees agreed that, just as in a cult or an avant-garde movie, the installation requires continuous reviewing over a long period of time, Giovanni and Teresa realize that the installation might have been in fact acting as a mirror of themselves. Teresa, for example, reflects that her interpretation of my drawings as “therapy in which you fish through your past sorrow” corresponds to what she actually does herself with her writing: “I use writing when I experience difficult moments. I write what I immediately think. What I feel I write. What I write I burn; I often also write beautiful things and not always when I am experiencing a difficult moment. This helps me a lot. This helps me get rid of a lot.” She then concludes that: “The person in front of you is your teacher and simply your mirror.”

Already in the interview Giovanni notes: “I think your project is about an observation that uses your individuality and at the same time erases it, like a drop falling in an ocean. I did not see in your installation things that are characteristic of Alberto Frigo, rather I have seen things characteristic of humanity. Everyone touches objects with their right hand, everyone has dreams, everyone sits in public spaces, but not everyone catalogues. You de-identify in order to talk about life in an objective way because you allow every person of every land and belonging to any generation to look at himself or herself. You are a craftsman making mirrors. It is only the entire system I find to be unique and truly uniquely Alberto Frigo.” Giovanni’s comment reinforces my reflection that what I do as a life-stower is not only put effort into performing what contemporary media would otherwise do for me through sensors and algorithms. The comment implies that I, the life-stower, am the actual media. In this respect, the life-stower as the media regains his agency through a process of mimicking the very media which subtract it from him or her. Life-stowing can be conceived, then, as a way to reappropriate the humanity of the self which the media otherwise extremizes and or extinguishes.

Later, in an email, Giovanni declares that the experience of the installation has resonated with his senses and that finally he starts thinking of it as a “digital divination machine” or an O-mikuji, a Zen temple where many small tickets with fortune notes are hanging. Giovanni thinks that visitors do not randomly pick one or another note, just as viewers do not randomly perceive one or another element among the various parts displayed in my project. He wrote: “It doesn’t matter what one uses (digital files can also be like bones), but it is important to read something about this randomness, and your archive encloses all the fortuity of life in one single place. In my opinion then, as soon as someone explores your archive, they start subconsciously to make intuitive choices that represent the silhouette of their own psychological anatomy. The opened files are not random, but they retain certain audiovisual connotations that perhaps reflect/resonate in the subject who experiences them.”

According to Giovanni, in other words, what the viewer picks are not a fragment of me or my reality but rather a message meant for him or her. This notion diverges from Peterson’s idea of surface elements retained only insofar as they help make sense of an avant-garde movie. Instead, according to Giovanni and also Teresa, these messages are meant for individuals to give them a better understanding of themselves and the surrounding reality. What leaves an impression on interviewees is literally what their sensibility is most open to receive. It is therefore not illogical to think that the fragments retained by the viewers are the ones that represent them. Weeks after experiencing my project, Giovanni reflects in his email that it gave him an image of the world and made him think of his role in it. At the same time, Teresa discovers in her later reflection that the image she had of me, a fisherman who trolls through past sorrow in the life-stowing work I do to create my project, actually coincides with her own practice of writing and then burning thoughts in her moments of sorrow.

## 4.6 Future Chapter Conclusion

To conclude this chapter I should acknowledge that Peterson's constructivist theory of perception has been of only partial help. It focuses on the idea that film viewers use the surface elements they retain to create an understanding of a movie through already established mental schemes. If this comprehension does not occur, the viewer attempts to use these details to understand the filmmaker behind it. In my case, the surface elements, or rather the many audio-visual fragments presented in the case-study, were irrelevant to the interviewees, and so was my autobiography. What was most relevant to analyze was their overall understanding. As pointed out in the analysis, a sense of unity was detected.

The interviews indicate that what is retained by each interviewee is not so much material that is later placed within a narrative scheme or the other schemes pointed out by Peterson (1994). Rather, it is clear that the interviewees applied their acquired skill to make sense of the installation. Additionally, what a person liked or disliked was very much based on his or her earlier experiences and identity. What people liked, what impressed them, was also what enabled them to make sense of the work. In this respect, there was no divergence between the international and local groups of interviewees. My project has acted on them like a machine shooting information that has more or less hit them based on the experiences they have acquired. In a later stage, however, the information that has managed to impress them may act differently according to an individual's different sensibility. Some may allow a certain meaning to deeply penetrate them and others may simply have a developed sensibility that is touched by it.

I have also observed another factor within the small pool of interviewees I have analyzed; namely, their tendency to assign an emblem to the place they visit as well as to the author behind it. Every interviewee was quick to tell me that my project was, for example, a clock, and that I was an artisan. Other than that, however, I was unable to detect any willingness to create an autobiography as indicated by Peterson (1994:29). My project was understood as syncretic reality, a "one." A whole new universe opened up as to who I am, and in this respect, the "author" theory proposed by Peterson fell short. Contrary to reflecting me as the author, some interviewees indicated that the installation in fact serves to mirror themselves.

After these considerations, I believe that a more in-depth study of the reception of life-stowing can bring forward conclusions that are quite opposite to the premises investigated by Peterson. While the work I have proposed has in some instances come close to divination, it may in effect develop new scenarios for science and the humanities. While my study borrows from pre-Enlightenment traditions, it can suggest an approach to academics wishing to examine users through the representation of other users. I started from avant-garde cinema, but life-stowing is a much larger-scale, explorative and multimedia-based way of constructing new, syncretic

realities. As the interviewees have remarked, the life-stowing of reality that resulted in my project offers a reality that is more real than the real.

After this case-study I can now also write some initial reflections on my project in the context of what I have discussed in my book. It is clear that interviewees had a hard time identifying it as a traditional art form. Some of them defined it as a completely new and novel approach to representing the brain. Most of them agreed that, as in the case of cult and avant-garde films, several screenings are required. This is as far as the aesthetic part of the work is concerned.

Theoretically, interviewees perceived the effort behind it. Even those who were most skeptical about the actual result recognized and admired the labor that went into the installation. This fact reinforces my theoretical point of departure from effortless technologies like life-logging, with which life-stowing is often associated. My theoretical departure from Derrida's notion of the archive as a form of power is also largely supported by the interviews. In this respect, some of the interviews conceived a tragedy behind the installation: for example, that it is located in nature but still has to rely on the technology it tries to escape. Others saw it as a temple with the occult function of healing its visitors. Still others have understood the importance of stowing my project in nature.

Theoretically, however, my basic assumption is that the disclosure of life-stowing material re-enacts life that is being threatened by the current technological paradigm. In reflecting about his experience, one interviewee claimed that thanks to it, he has rethought his role in society. I am not sure whether what he defined as a "divination machine" has had any effect in resorting life. My effort and the natural context have allowed a level of empathy to emerge. My death or the viewing of my project at a later stage might reinforce this perception. Whether the interviewees were inspired by a sprinkle of life or not is too early to say. The interviewees certainly did retain many potential seeds, and it is also up to them to make something of them.



## 5. Conclusions

The man who can sketch his purpose beforehand in words is regarded as a wonder, and every artist and writer possesses that faculty. But gestation, fruition, the laborious rearing of the offspring, putting it to bed every night full fed with milk, embracing it anew every morning with the inexhaustible affection of a mother's heart... This is the task of execution. The hand must be ready at every instant to come forward and obey the brain... If the artist does not throw himself into his work... if he contemplates the difficulties before him instead of conquering them one by one, ... it perishes in the studio where creativeness becomes impossible, and the artist looks on at the suicide of his own talent... Steinbock had acquired fashionable habits; he went to the play, to the opera; he talked admirably about art; and in the eyes of the world he maintained his reputation as a great artist by his powers of conversation and criticism... Steinbock ... became the artist in partibus; he was popular in society, and consulted by amateurs; in short, he became a critic, like all the feeble folk who fall below their promise.

De Balzac 2004:250–55

### 5.1 Life-stowing as Syncretism

Recently, upon returning from a summer spent in the Italian Alps working on the case-study of this book, I paid a visit to Ferdinand Cheval's Ideal Palace. What most impressed me about it was not only how he had stowed life as if in a Noah's Ark, but also the way in which he stowed different meanings and religions. Walking an average of thirty kilometers a day in his life as a postman, he conceived a mental architecture inspired both by the natural landscape he crossed and also by the mail he delivered: postcards and magazines depicting distant places such as mosques and Hindu temples. It was not until he was forty years old that he started working evenings to build the palace. A book I found at the shop there reinforced this strong impression. The author, an Italian postman by the name of Trasciatti, had also reflected on Cheval's work. He writes:

In his palace Cheval stowed everything he knew, including also what he had only heard about, but his work is not an ordered encyclopedia; rather, it is a triumph of syncretism (Trasciatti 2014:139; [my translation])

Trasciatti sees Cheval's operation as a form of life-stowing that differs from the encyclopedic works I have described as antagonistic toward the preceding "Ciceronian" tradition. He also provided me with the term I was looking for: "syncretic," meaning a fusion of different styles, philosophies and religions. Syncretism is defined as "the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion"<sup>1</sup>. The term comes from a historical anecdote (Plutarch 2012), according to which the people of Crete were divided, but as a foreign enemy was about to invade them, they ultimately united and were able to repel the invasion. In this respect, I refer to life-stowing as syncretic media that bring together what current media forms break apart. It can be argued, for example, that the social media have transformed from a network of acquaintances into a network of enemies. Users side for one or another opinion, turning acquaintances who do not agree with them into adversaries. As Marshal McLuhan says, the electronic technology we are deploying in our everyday life inevitably stretches our nerves and can also incite rage. I suggest in line with Marcel Mauss (2001) that the purpose of life-stowing is to act as a divination mechanism for transcending this rage. Through sampling their social context, life-stowers are the shaman-like inventors of a form of catharsis; through syncretism they acquire the means to reunify life.

We have reached the concluding chapter of this book. After introducing my project and my aim, in the second chapter I have presented a history of life-stowing. A review there of the merger of past memory techniques with sixteenth-century combinatorial methods is followed by a discussion of how these techniques radiated from the humanities during the Enlightenment and have been applied by experimental and outsider individuals down to the present day. The third chapter presents a theoretical introduction to the concept of life-stowing. Comparing the latter with notions of life-logging and archiving, I propose life-stowing as a manual practice conducted by individuals as an attempt to rescue life from imminent extinction.

The fourth chapter focuses on an analysis of the reception of life-stowing based on interviews of thirteen visitors to an installation of my own project, who viewed my life-stowing as a form of syncretism that can only be interpreted emblematically, comparing, for example, the installation itself to a pyramid or temple, and its author to a fisherman and a monk. The result of the interviews is in line with the historical as well as the theoretical preface. The life-stower is regarded as a manifestation of a self-disciplined effort, and life-stowing expresses a unified and therefore syncretic reality. These are two main aspects that have emerged through my analyses. In my theoretical framework, however, I also discuss life-stowing as a medium that restores life, and in the historical chapter I describe *ars mnemonica* techniques not with respect to their touted ability to augment the memory of the user, but rather in connection with their combinatorial aspect. While both encyclopedic knowledge and specialized science have come to divide notions and definitions, the early *ars*

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on 2017-03-31: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/syncretism?s=t>

*mnemonica* techniques had the potential of recombining them. I have described Arab-inspired combinatorial wheels, which were later normalized by religious institutions into trees. Trees have branches that inevitably grow apart from one another and eventually clash with the branches of the same tree or other trees. Combinatorial techniques like life-stowing hinder this clash through syncretism by remixing universal content and maintaining a focus on the trunk.

## 5.2 Life-stowing and Digital Media

Considering the power and pervasiveness of digital media, the crisis we are in now and will continue to experience in the future may be exponentially greater than those caused by previous media. Contemporary automation has overtaken the whole of human life; it is now capable of replacing any inherent human ability. Beyond that, it has itself become a form of automated intelligence. While digital media per se fragment life into different files of different formats, life-stowing brings these pieces together. If we agree, however, that the media characterizing our age are digital, one may wonder whether ever-progressing technologies might not make the work of contemporary life-stowers obsolete. Although my case-study has been created as a physical work, unlike Cheval's technology, much of mine will malfunction in a matter of years. More than ever, life-stowing in the digital age may require a very broad strategy if it is to leave any traces in the real world. Creating such vestiges, however, is not the goal of life-stowing—its objective is instead poetic.

A stowage may remain undiscovered for a long time or be scattered until someone is able to understand its value based even on just a few fragments. My life-stowing has been disclosed prematurely, for it covers only one of the thirteen years I have completed of the thirty-six years it is projected to last. This disclosure has also led to public exposure and many interviews and invitations to exhibitions I neither expected nor wanted. It was good to run this initial experiment anyway, however, as it also gave me ideas on how to conduct future undertakings. I have noticed, for example, that in order to be absorbed by viewers, the various parts of my life-stowing should be performed. The book of dreams, the musical notations and other textual elements in the life-stowing were barely looked at or mentioned unless visitors took the initiative to perform them, e.g. by reciting the dreams or playing the notes on the organ.

In the epilogue of her famous book *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle (2011) describes how her mother used to write silly poems behind the family pictures she kept in her drawer. Later, however, she makes use of my project<sup>2</sup> to criticize contemporary attempts to systematically record life “clean of remembrance” and “messy, unreliable associations” (Turkle 2011:487). Probably only aware of a small part of my project, namely my photographs of all the objects I use with my right hand, Turkle develops a dichotomy between those who similar to her mother and Marcel Proust are more

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<sup>2</sup> My project is briefly described in footnote 11 (Turkle 2011:588), which refers to me as Albert Frigo.

poetic and Dionysian, and those who like Gordon Bell and me are more ordered and Apollonian. She suggests that it is more meaningful to resemble the former. What my study has shown, however, is that while the operation of stowing fragments of life is executed in a clean manner, I abstain from making the messy associations myself and instead leave them to the visitor.

It is of course I who have designed in my own way both the practice of stowing and the case-study, but the design is based on an attempt at pure geometry, and I have not provided any information to link one element to another (e.g. a drawing to a picture or a dream to a journal entry). Everything is presented as a combinatorial wheel—an architecture that would take a lifetime to experience in its entirety and quasi-infinite combinations. If I had followed Turkle’s advice to provide the visitor with the messy links between the various samples of my life-stowing, they would have been given a key that would have discouraged them from finding their own path to making sense of my life-stowing. Providing stowed samples of life “clean” of associations and remembrance is therefore fundamental to allowing visitors to combine life and regenerate meaning without the generally added layer of information (metadata) that is the primary concern of scholars who deal with surveillance and profit-oriented social media platforms.

On a similar note, the case-study has helped to reinforce the idea that the life-stower is conceived as the medium behind the life-stowing; the medium is the life-stower and not the life-stower the medium. Here we can revise McLuhan’s famous dictum that “the medium is the message.” When human agents are able through intense effort to subdue the technology designed to substitute their faculties, they maintain the role of the medium, becoming such a medium and thereby the message to the audience. As I have observed in my case-study, the message is not my life made up of small autobiographical details. The audience was neither able nor interested in finding out about it. The message, according to this line of thinking, is Life per se, which is reflected onto the lives of the viewers.

### 5.3 Life-stowing as Life-saver

Throughout this book I largely rely on McLuhan’s notion that marginal artists can create Noah’s arks that show society how to “ride the punch instead of taking it on the chin” (McLuhan 1994:78). My case-study has shown that visitors were able to perceive its unity. I think the latter is a fundamental medicine to combat the feeling of disruption that contemporary media can arouse. Life-stowing media bring together what others, such as social media and other contemporary automated media, divide. This division, I believe is what causes the crisis McLuhan talks about:

In the history of human culture there is no example of a conscious adjustment of the various factors of personal and social life to new extensions except in the puny and peripheral efforts of artists. The artist picks up the message of cultural and

technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand. (McLuhan 1994:77)

Having analyzed life-stowing, I suggest how society can prevent a crisis by facilitating as well as experiencing the creation of syncretism. If a crisis fragments public opinion into many conflicting branches, in the process of stowing life the marginal artist, for example, shows society how to transcend these conflicts through recombination and consequently regeneration. Given the importance of this quotation from McLuhan throughout my whole book, I should have claimed earlier that life-stowing needs to be addressed in the context of Medium Theory. My contribution, however, is to point to syncretism as the way in which contemporary Noahs can provide society with a message to face the changes ahead. Again, Ferdinand Cheval's Ideal Palace is a great example of this. Using the new media of his time— postcards depicting various places around the world—he created a syncretic architecture that brings together the world's religions and cultures.

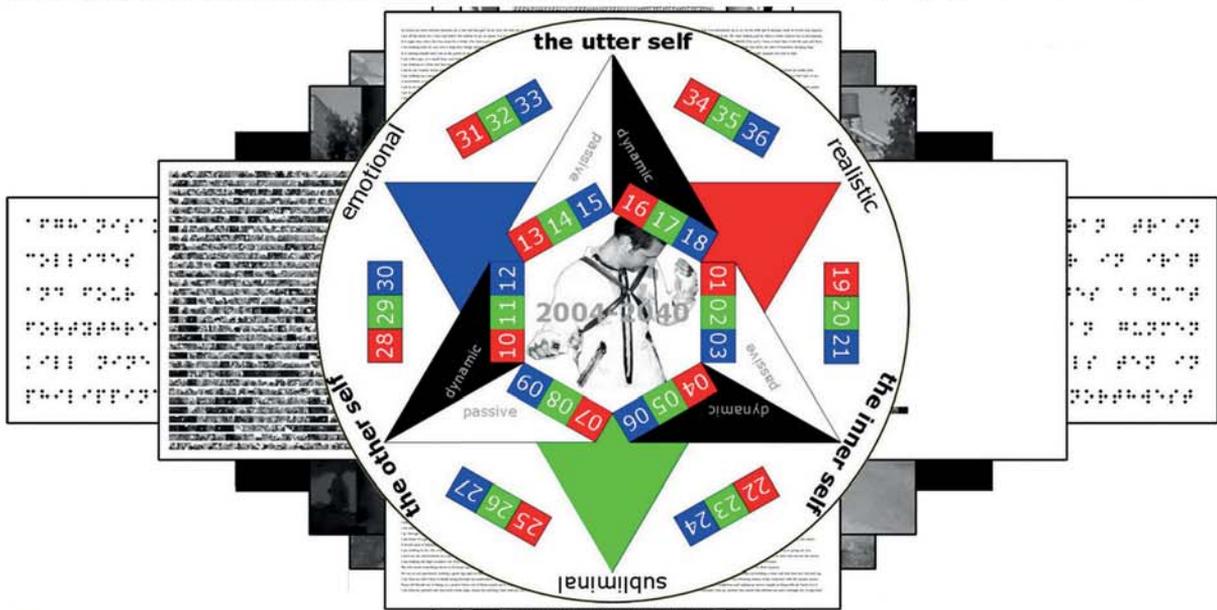
Future researchers, then, should perhaps focus more on these aspects of life-stowing: is there any form of syncretism emerging and what does this imply for the actual visitors? This question also concerns my future research. I have now dismantled the case-study and will shift my focus to the construction of the cathedral-like building which by 2040 will enable me to host the entire thirty-six years of my project. In the initial phase I am planning to build the foundation of the cathedral by using augmented reality to superimpose the various elements of my life-stowing onto the architectural components. This experiment will enable me to dwell further on what I have attempted to do in a limited fashion in this book.



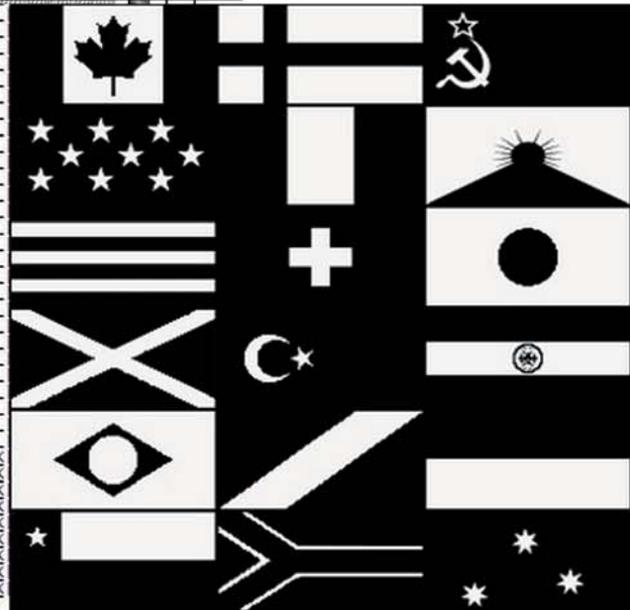
02 Images of the dreams remembered when awaking  
 03 Notations of the songs recognized while heard  
 04 Mists of the smells inhaled in the atmosphere  
 05 Uncials of the fables improvised at nighttime  
 06 Zings of the times measured for a running lap  
 07 Lightboxes of the persons recently acquainted  
 08 Tiles of the things picked from the side-walk  
 09 Plaques of the casualties read among the news  
 10 Films of the public spaces documented sitting  
 11 Drawings of the ideas inspired around society  
 12 Recordings of the thoughts made walking alone  
 13 Knittings of the patterns created in painting  
 14 Glass of the trajectories drawn roaming about  
 15 Holes of the windows based on emotional state  
 16 Brightness of the colours felt on the weather  
 17 Transfigurations of the clouds observed above  
 18 Quivers of the forces detected along the wind

19 ACCOUNT  
 20 EXTRACT  
 21 JUVENIL  
 25 ARCHIVE  
 26 EXHIBIT  
 27 JOURNAL  
 31 AUCTION  
 32 EDITION  
 33 JURIDIC

22 OCCULAR  
 23 VITROES  
 24 WEBSTER  
 28 ORIGINS  
 29 VIRTUAL  
 30 WEBSITE  
 34 ORIGAMI  
 35 VISNING  
 36 WEBSHOP

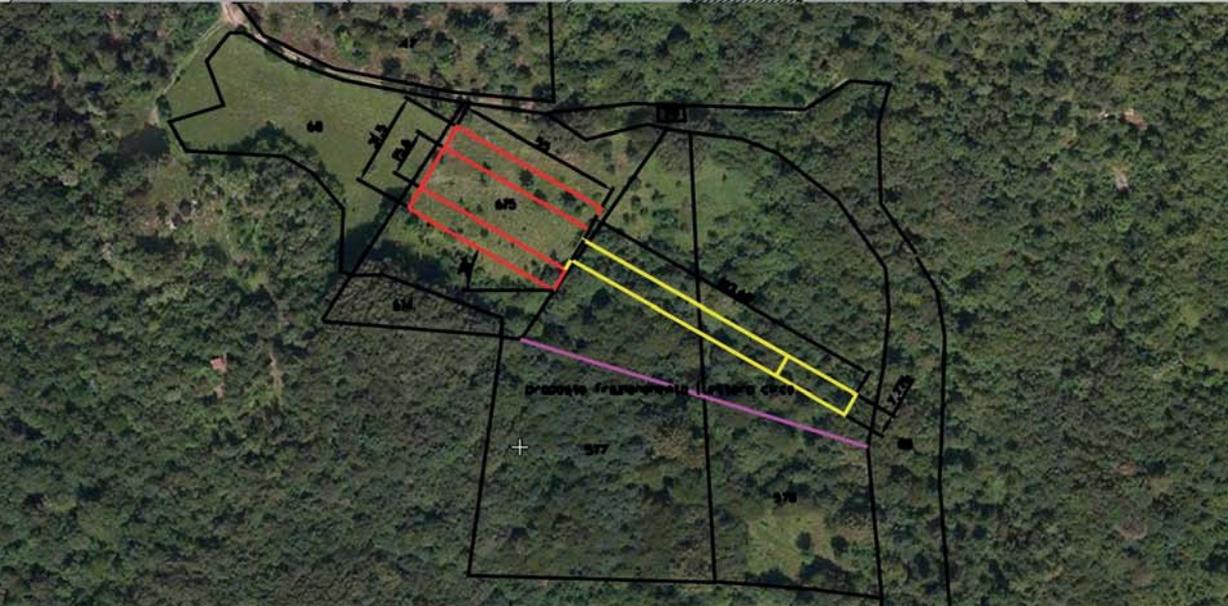
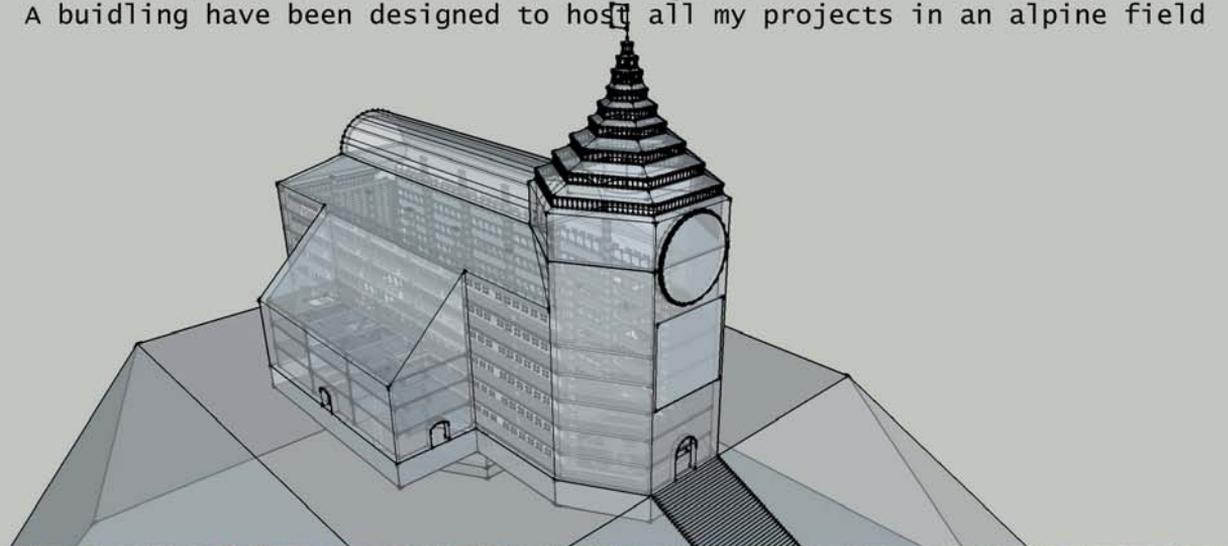


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2038												
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2004	XXXX											



# 29 virtual of the records generated for 36 years

A building have been designed to host all my projects in an alpine field



# 25 Archive of the records generated for 36 years

A barn has been renovated to stow all my projects and show-cases one year



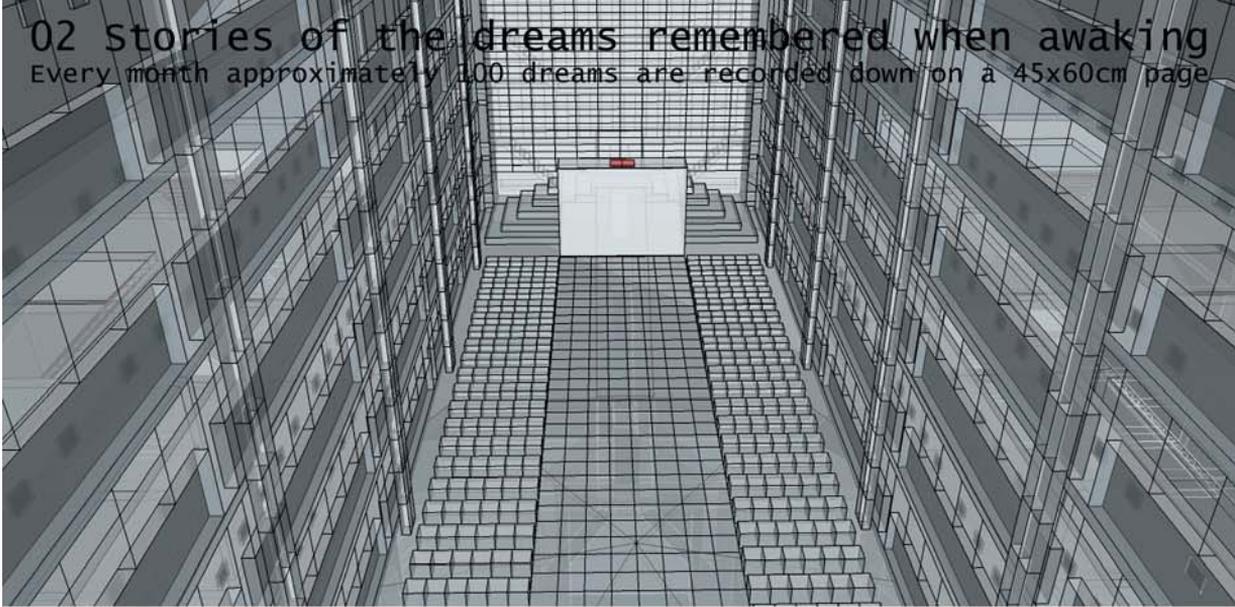
# 01 Images of the artifacts used by the main hand

Every panel is a month every line is a day of all objects used in 36 yrs



# 102 stories of the dreams remembered when awaking

Every month approximately 100 dreams are recorded down on a 45x60cm page

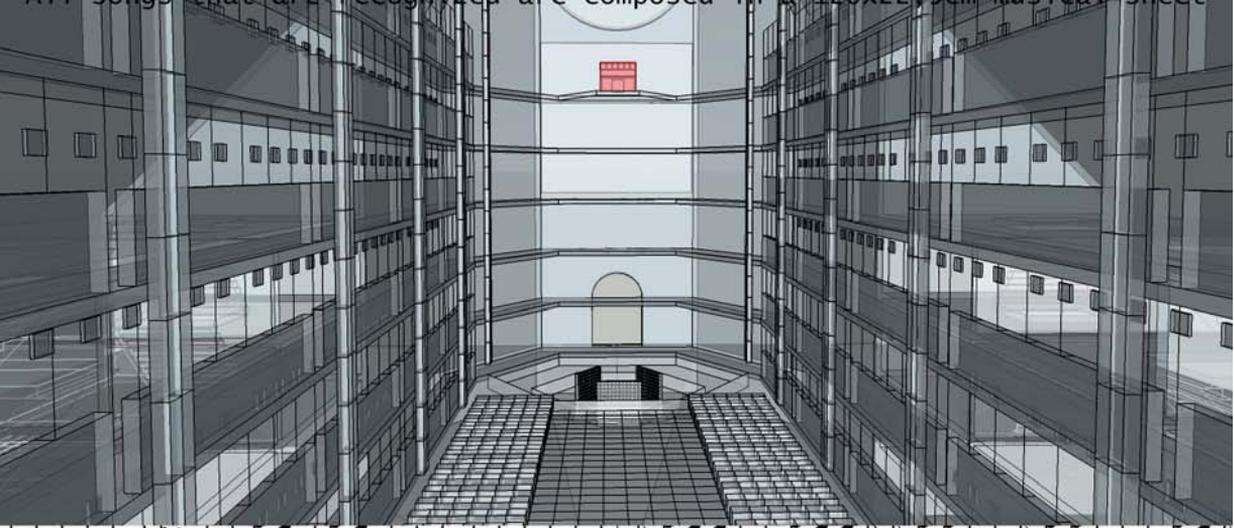


...e back. He is actually helped by two slaves and makes it to the end. He starts celebrating his victory among other  
... but I find her ugly. We keep walking and she tells me how much she loves me but her face is too ugly and I don't  
... hen go in but find that it has been broken. I then carry the main part with me down a very high staircase going d  
... n try to walk out again but end up in the living room where three kids are playing. The mother also shows up bu  
... o show me how to drive it. I then ride a scooter behind him and we end up on a mountain plateau. We actually s  
... r song of a band. I can't remember it and sing the old song but then get in my parents car to go on holiday. My st  
... From there there is allot of gravel that connects us to another mountain top but I am afraid of crossing. A man v  
... laying with her legs up and against another building. One of the legs is actually a skyscraper and I go in. The rec  
... vated thinking that I spent so much time and it is now a present for my son. There is actually my dead grandfath  
... orts moving ahead but three guys with an orange uniform stops us at the corner of a small house. They then let u  
... iber that it is the place where I have been with my stepfather the neighbour appears. As I look at his beautiful fa  
... likes it allot and I tell him about a bike competition coming through here. He already checked the villages where  
... wedish artist sees me and I go to talk to her. She is actually from the Netherlands and I leave her outside while I  
... rdered. The latter was my Chinese teacher and I invite them to see an exhibition I made with her portrait. They



### 03 Notations of the songs recognized while heard

All songs that are recognized are composed in a 120x22.5cm musical sheet



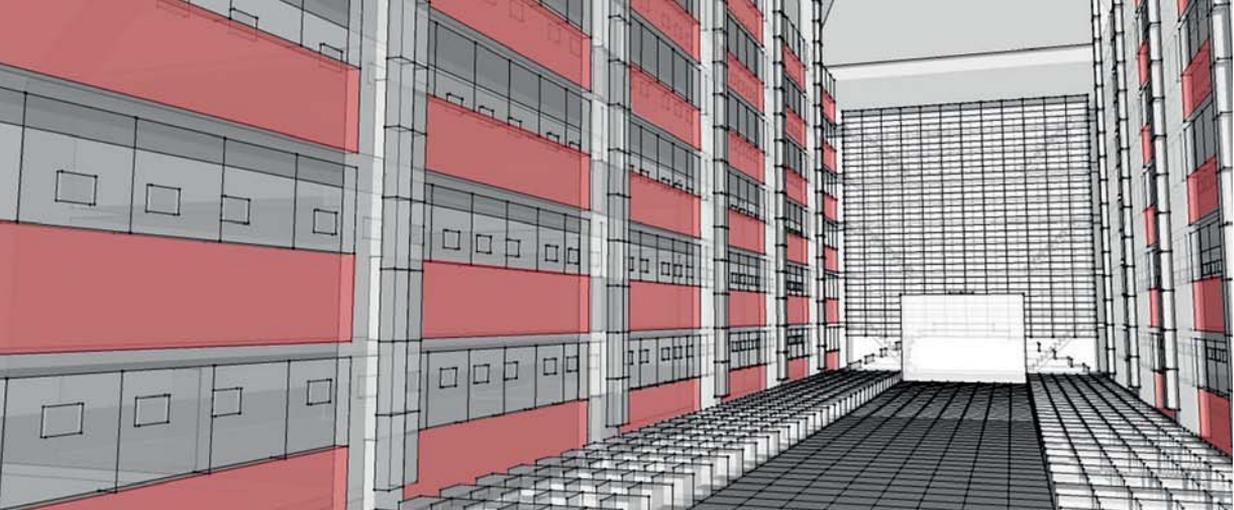
# 04 Mists of the smells inhaled in the atmosphere

The daily air quality is classified using a numerical scale 1,2,3,4,6,12



# 05. Uncials of the fables improvised at nighttime

Improvised fables are based in the air, tree, grass, earth, river, water

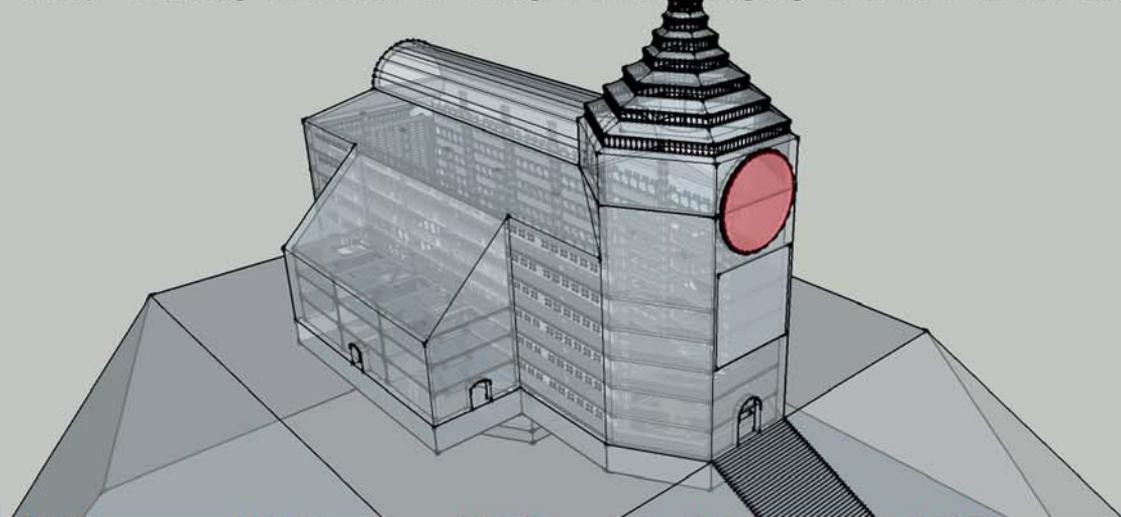


MOLE TRAPPED IN A WALL SHE WAS NOW FINDING MUCH OF HER SIGHT WITH MUCH OF THE LIGHTS BLINKING EVEN AT NIGHT WHEN SHE WOULD WOULD ATTENTIVELY THROUGH ALL THE WALLS SHE HAD NOW FIGURED OUT AFTER LONG VIGILANCE AND MUCH EXPOSURE TO ALL THAT ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE WHICH IN FACT GOT OUR MOLE TO DEVELOP A THIRD EYE WITH WHICH SHE WOULD NOW USE TO MOVE UNDISTURBED IN THE MANY CORRIDORS OF THE EMPLOYED MALL AT NIGHT WITH STILL MANY ANIMATED LIGHTS AND PRODUCTS SHE SO HAPPILY OUR MOLE TOOK CARE TO FIND IT MOST COZY FOR HERSELF AND FILLING UP HER OTHERWISE MOST DEPRESSIVE MOMENTS OF TOTAL AND MOST COMPLETE SOLITUDE IF IT WASN'T FOR THE OLD GUARD WHO OFTEN WOULD ROUND BUT IN FACT WENT TO SLEEP ON THE FIRST SOFA FOR SALE HE WOULD FIND WHILE IN FACT OUR MOLE REARRANGED THE ENTIRE WALL TO MAKE IT THE MAGICAL FANTASY PLACE SHE HAD KEPT THINKING ABOUT THROUGHOUT THE LONG DAYS WAITING FOR THE THOUSANDS OF CONSUMERS TRAMPING LIKE A LOST ARMY OVER THE PRECARIOUS MOLES IN THE MOST HARD TO REACH CORNERS OF THE MALL SHE OUR MOLE NO LONGER EVEN BOTHERED TO DIG AS SO IT WAS THAT EVERY A NIGHT SHE WOULD START ALLOVER FROM THE BEGINNING AND QUICKLY REARRANGE THE CONFIGURATION OF HER DREAM PALACE AND EVERY NIGHT AT LAST SHE WOULD MANAGE BEFORE THE COMING OF THE NEW DAY TO IMPROVE IT AND MAKE IT EVEN MORE OF A SPECTACLE AND TO GET A COMMERCIAL SUCCESS FOR THE AMOUNT OF CUSTOMERS THAT IN FACT NOW WOULDN'T BUY ANY OF THE MERCHANDISES SO ARRANGED BY OUR MOLE BUT WILLING THEY BECAME TO PAY FOR IT HOWEVER IT WAS NEEDED TO VISIT THE PLACE NOW A WALL BECOMING MOST DEFINITELY A MUSEUM WHICH IN FACT MADE OUR MOLE PROGRESSIVELY LESS AND LESS ACTIVE ALSO DUE TO THE FACT THAT NO FOOD SUPPLIES WERE ANY LONGER BROUGHT IN TO THE FOOD DEPARTMENT AND ONLY MOST TRASHY FAT FAST-FOOD LEFTOVERS TO FEED THE LARGE MOLE OF VISITORS AND IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES OUR MOLE NOW FELT LIKE A STUFFED ANIMAL AND FINALLY DECIDED TO STEP OUT ONCE AGAIN WHERE SHE OR DEFINITELY HER ANCESTORS CAME FROM AND RIGHT OFF TO THE WILD SHE WENT ABANDONING FOREVER HER CREATION AND THE SAFETY OF A PLACE SHE WAS TOTALLY IN CONTROL OF AND YET WILD THE OUTSIDE WAS NOT IN THE LEAST IN A MOST UNEXPECTED SENSE AND MUCH STERILITY THERE ALSO SHE FOUND IN THE MOST TIDY AND MARBLE LIKE STREET WHERE SHE FELT CONSTANTLY THREATENED TO BE EXCHANGED FOR A RAT AND THE MOLE WAS KILLED IN AN INSTANT BY MANY OF THE ROBOT CATS SENT OUT FOR THE PURPOSE AND NOW NO WHERE OUR MOLE COULD HIDE IN SUCH AN ARTIFICIAL DESERT UNTIL BY A STROKE OF LUCK SHE MET A DYING AND VERY OLD BEGGAR BELONGING TO A FAR MORE HUMAN ERA SHE FOUND AND IMMEDIATELY IN HIS FILTHY BLANKETS OUR MOLE WAS ABLE TO MAKE A MOST COZY HIDING SPOT WHICH WAS FAR MORE MISERABLE AND FAR GRANDIOSE THAN WHAT SHE IN FACT MOST OWNED BEFORE AT THE MALL BUT THE VERY POETIC SITUATION NEXT TO THAT OLD MAN REALLY FILLED OUR MOLE'S HEART AND NOW REJOICING SHE WAS TO KEEP IN SUCH A MISERABLE OBSCURITY AND FEELING THE VERY HEAT OF THE OLD HOMELESS NOW GRADUALLY IMPROVING TO THE POINT THAT THOUGH SHE WAS UNKNOWN IN HIS UNKNOWN VICINITY WITH OUR MOLE HE WAS SOON ABLE TO GRADUALLY MAKE HIS FIRST STEPS UP MUCH DISTURBING THE COMPLETE STERILITY OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AROUND HIM IN THE MOST PARTICULAR OF THE VERY PEOPLE WHO WERE MOST SURPRISED TO SEE SUCH A MAN SO MATURED AND SO FILLED OF HUMAN SMELLS AND PROTUBERANCES THAT AT ONCE HIS BREASTS WOULD SPREAD A MOST TOTAL DISEASE WHICH FOUND NO BARRIER ON SUCH A STERILE ENVIRONMENT AND LIKE PLAGUE NOW IT IN FACT STARTED KILLING OFF EVERYONE ALMOST AT AN INSTANT AND RIGHT OFF OUR MOLE'S WALL BECAME THE ONE BUNKER FOR THE FEW MOST PRIVILEGED OF SOCIETY TO SAFELY HIDE FROM THE PLAGUE AND ANYWAY HAVE MUCH PROVISIONS AND EVEN PAID FOR THEM BY HIS UNKNOWN VICINITY WITH OUR MOLE HE WAS SOON ABLE TO GRADUALLY MAKE HIS FIRST STEPS UP MUCH DISTURBING THE COMPLETE STERILITY OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AROUND HIM HE EXPERIENCED SUCH A WARM BLOOD THAT IN A WAY BAPTIZED SHE WAS AND RIPPING OFF THE EYES OF THE OLD MAN TRANSPLANTING THEM IN HER EYELESS HEAD SHE WAS NOW ABLE TO ATTEMPT TO GET OFF TO THE MALL ONCE AGAIN BRINGING WITH HER NOT ONLY THE MOST DREADFUL OF DISEASES BUT ALSO A MOST UGLY SENSE OF REVENGE WHICH IN FACT TURNED HER MOLE WHERE SHE HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY SPENDING HER YOUNG YEARS IN TOTAL INNOCENCE NOW IN A MOST CHAOTIC ALMOST LIKE MILITARY HOSPITAL WHERE ALL THE ELITE NOW SUFFERED FAR MORE HEAVILY THAN ANYONE OUTSIDE THE MALL GIVEN THAT TERRIFYING ECHO OF SUFFERING THAT WAS PROVOKED WITHIN AND SO HIGH WAS THIS ECHO THAT NOW A NEW CREATURE MOLE HIS VISION WAS THAT THAT WAS IN FACT THE WHITE MOLE WHO DWELLS IN THE CLOUDS AND WAS TO ALL DEGREES SHOCKED OF ALL THE AGONY BELOW HIM TO THE POINT THAT HE COULD NOT BUT MAKE HIS WAY TO DOUBLE CHECK ON HER COUSIN THE BLACK MOLE AND HOW CYNICAL TO FIND HER THE TINY BLACK MOLE WHO KEPT MOST OF HER LIFE INDOOR HOW CYNICAL FOR OUR WHITE MOLE TO TRY TO FIND OUR BLACK MOLE THE VERY MASTER MIND BEHIND ALL THIS AND TOGETHER NOW THEY OPTED TO WORK INTENSIVELY SIDE BY SIDE TO AT LAST RESCUE WHAT WAS POSSIBLE TO RESCUE NOW IN FACT THEMSELVES DIGGING IN ALL THE SICK BODIES AND RECOVERING ALL THE MOST CANCEROUS OF THINGS FROM THEM EXTRACTING SO MUCH THAT WHAT WAS LEFT NOW WAS LEFT FOR OUR SPECIALIZED INTERIOR DESIGNER BLACK MOLE TO REASSEMBLE TOGETHER USING THE VARIOUS HUMAN COMPONENTS STILL UNCORRUPTED AT HER DISPOSAL WHILE LIKE A DRESS NURSE OUR WHITE MOLE KEPT MORE LIKE AN ARMY DOCTOR IN FACT HE KEPT IN AND OUT ALL THE SICKENED BODIES MAKING NOW SUCH A MOUNTAIN OF CORRUPTED ORGANIC MATTER THAT HE WAS EFFECTED AND SOON MUCH CONTAMINATED WITH WORMS WHICH LIKE SPAGHETTI LIKE HAPPY FAMILY THE WHITE AND BLACK MOLE TOGETHER WITH THE FRANKENSTEIN HUMAN THEY HAD CREATED THEY STARTED EATING AND EATING SUCKING EACH AND EVERY WORM WHICH THEMSELVES QUICKLY BECAME QUITE LONG AND IN FACT OUR MOLES LIKE BUDDHIST MONKS HAD TO BECOME BETTER AT EATING FAT BUDDHAS CONSTANTLY SEATED AND CONSTANTLY SUCKING THE VERY SAME SPAGHETTI FOR EVER AND EVER AND NOW EVEN HAVING TO LEARN TO BREATHE THROUGH THE NOSE BUT TO REMAIN ALIVE THEY COULD CONTAIN OUR FRANKENSTEIN HUMAN TO EXPLODE IN PIECES AGAIN AFTER SO MUCH EATING AND THEMSELVES ALSO WERE IN FACT ON THE VERGE OF CRACKING LIKE FAT MEN AND THEY DECIDED TO GIVE UP ALL THAT MASS AND SAT OFF FOR FREER AND OPENER ENVIRONMENTS THE OF THEM NOW WITH THEIR EYES AT LAST WIDE OPEN AFTER SO MUCH TRAGEDY AND THEY WERE NOW LEAVING BEHIND TO VENTURE IN THE UNKNOWN THE BLACK MOLE SON OF THE EARTH AND OUR WHITE MOLE SON OF THE CLOUDS AND WHERE COULD THEY END UP IF NOT IN A MOST BEAUTIFUL ADVENTURE PARK NOW COMPLETELY ABANDONED BY ALL HUMANS AND THERE ALL THEY HAD EVEN A FANTASY CASTLE WHERE TO PROCREATE AT LAST MANY A GRAY SMALL MOLE TO BE BORN TO EVEN A BROWN BUT FOR AS MUCH AS THEY TRIED OUR WHITE AND BLACK MOLE COULD NOT SQUEEZE OUT ANY WHITE NOR BLACK MOLE AND MUCH THEY CONTINUED AND CONTINUED TO TRY TO DO SO NOW ALL THE FAIRS WERE FULLY OCCUPIED BY MOLES MOSTLY SPENDING THEIR TIME IN TOTAL IDLENESS AND WHAT A SHAME NOW FOR THEIR PARENTS TO SEE IN FACT NO PASSION IN SUCH MOLES BUT A LIFE SPENT IN TOTAL DULLNESS WITHOUT REALLY ANY MOTIF IN LIFE BUT TO HANG IN ONE RIDE OR ANOTHER NOW EVEN BUILDING MOST HARDCORE FRACTIONS TO RIVAL EACH OTHER THE BETTER AND MOST EXCITING RIDES AND WHAT A SHAME FOR OUR WHITE FATHER AND BLACK MOTHER MOLE TO SEE SUDDENLY ALL THEIR GRAY AND BROWN MOLES ENTRANCED FIGHTING WITH ONE ANOTHER AND NOW ONCE AGAIN OUR PARENTS THE WHITE AND BLACK MOLE AT LAST TOOK UP THE ROLE OF NURTURING THE MANY WOUNDED WHICH SO MUCH INCREASED IN SUCH A DECIDAL WAR THAT IT WAS IN FACT A TOTAL BLOOD BATH AND SOON THE ONLY SURVIVAL IN THE TRENCHES ALL DIED DROWNED AND REALLY NOW OUR MOLE PARENTS HAD NOTHING OF THEIR MOLES LEFT AND THEY BEGAN STUFFING ALL OF THEM AND WASHING THEM AND NOW REPLACING THEM IN THE VERY FAIR THEY SO MUCH FOUGHT FOR AND WHAT FUN FOR OUR BLACK MOLE TO GO ON DECORATING ALMOST LIKE GIANTIC CHRISTMAS TREES ALL THE MANY DIFFERENT ROLLER-COASTERS WITH THE MANY REANIMATED TEDDY MOLES NOW RE-ATTRACTING AT ONES THE HUMANS MOST INTEREST WITH MANY PERSONS NOW COMING TO PLAY VARIOUS GAMES OUR WHITE AND BLACK MOLE NOW CREATED TO ALLOW PLAYERS TO WIN ONE OF THE MANY STUFFED MOLES AND WHAT A SUCCESS IT WAS SO MUCH THAT NOW OUR BLACK AND WHITE MOLES STARTED BECOMING QUITE RICH UNTIL IN FACT ALL THEIR PARTIES WERE ALL GONE AND ALL WAS LEFT WAS TO TRY TO



# 06 Zings of the heartbeats measured per training

Every training is measured using a scale ranging from 100 to 155 HB/min.

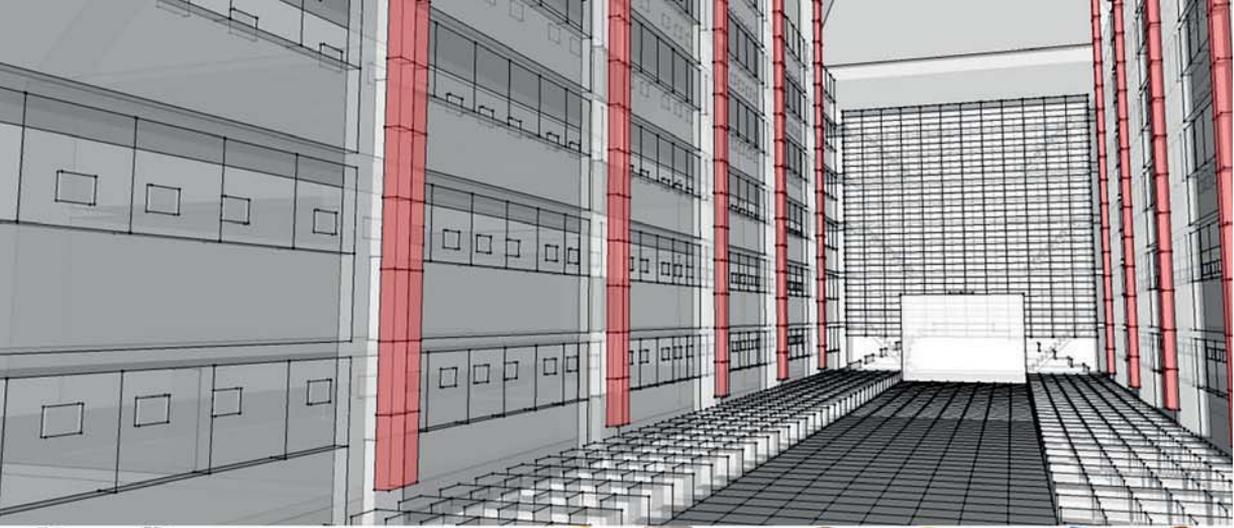


120	125	115	145	120	120
120	130	130	110	110	115
140	130	130	150	115	125
130	140	130	130	125	120
125	125	140	140	130	130
130	125	125	110	125	120
120	110	110	120	125	120
115	115	125	115	125	135
135	130	125	130	155	130
120	150	115	125	140	135
150	130	120	150	140	130
125	110	120	120	120	135
120	110	110	120	125	120
115	115	125	115	125	135



# 07 Lightboxes of the persons recently acquainted

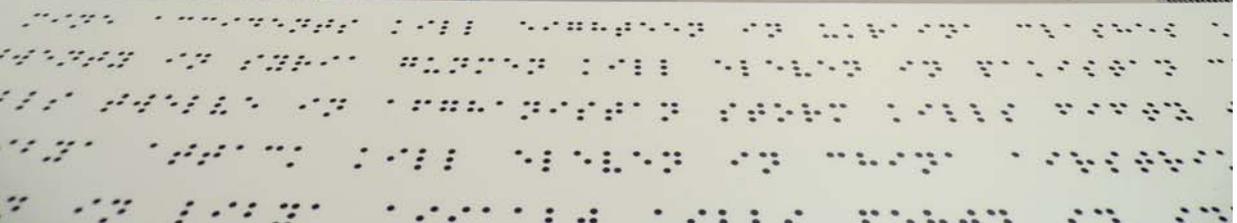
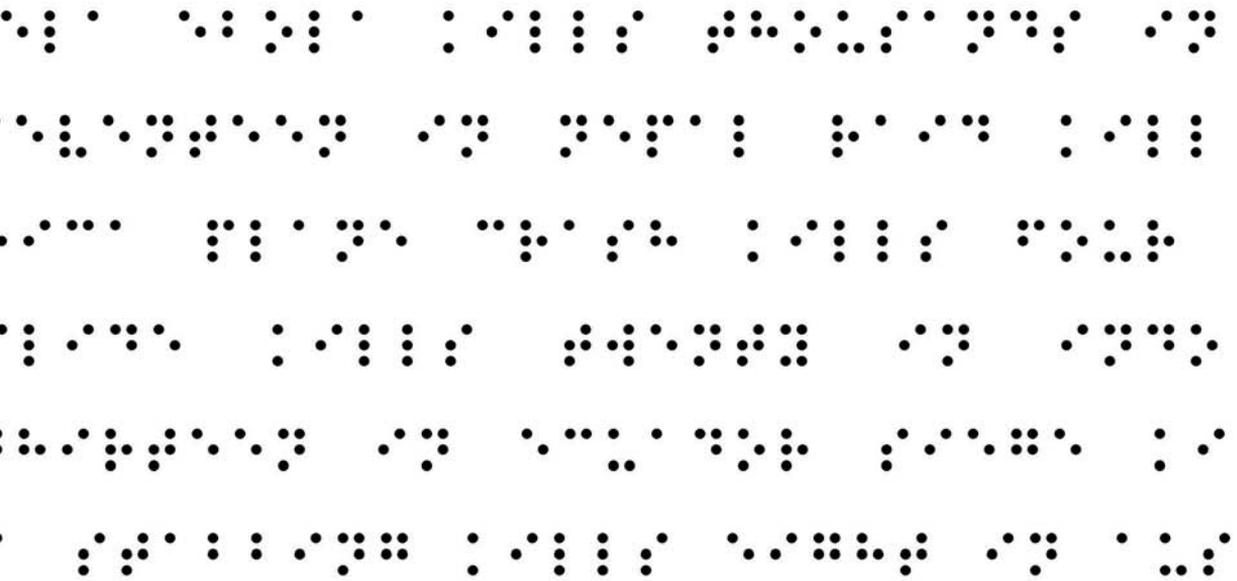
8 new friends are portrayed monthly and positioned in a 30x90cm lightbox





# 09 Plaques of the casualties read among the news

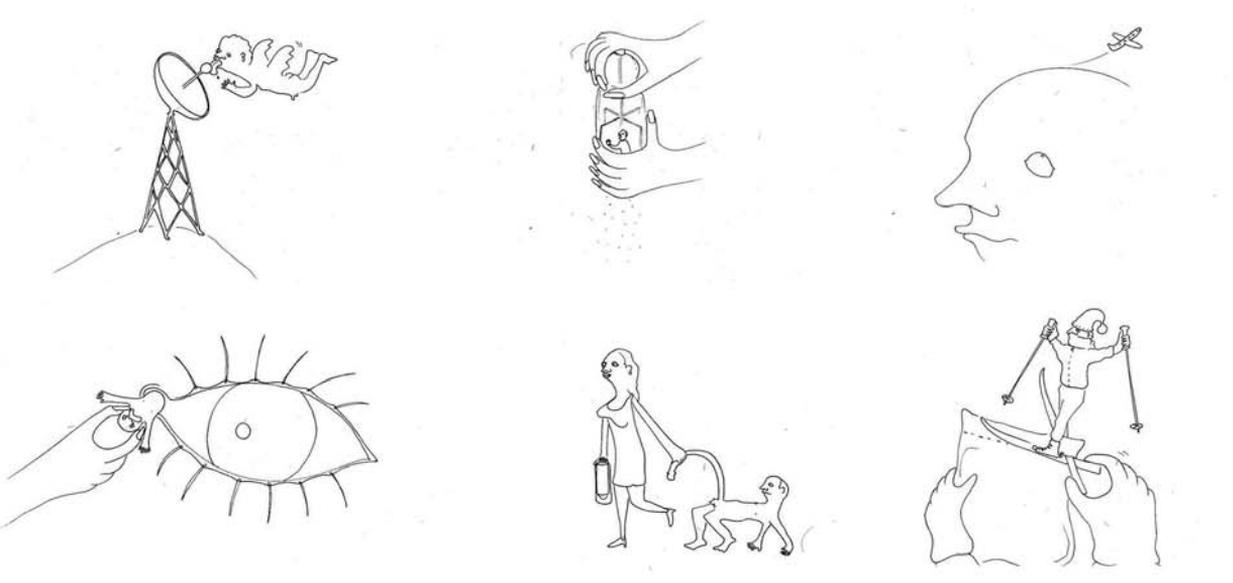
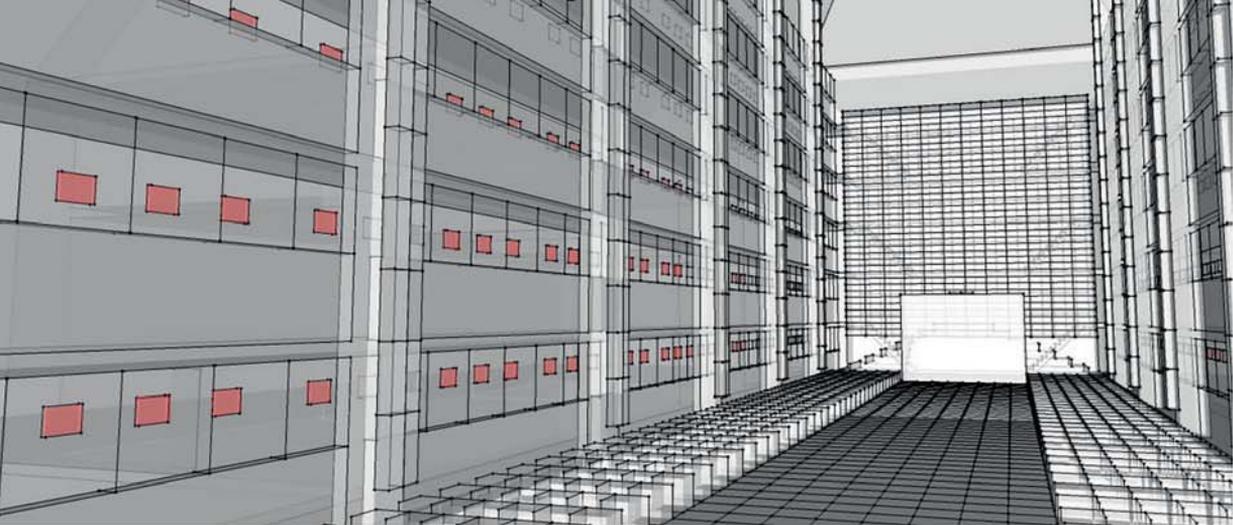
Deaths read on world news are inprinted in braille on 120x22,5cm plaques



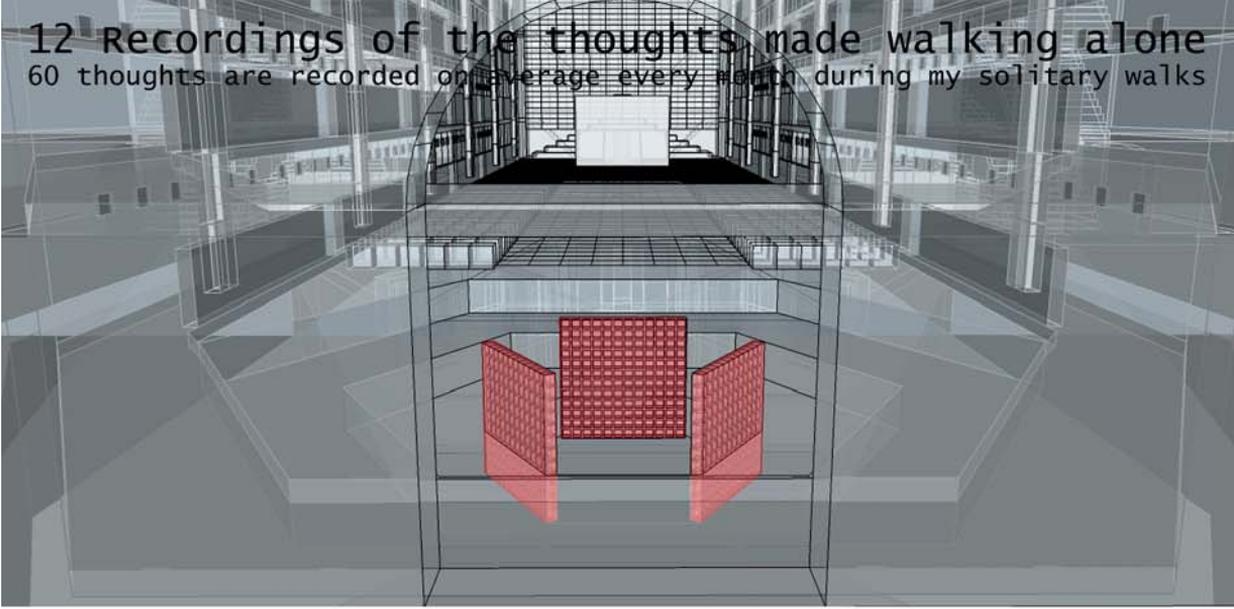


# 11 Drawings of the ideas inspired around society

Each screen slide-shows 90 drawings of social ideas collected in a month

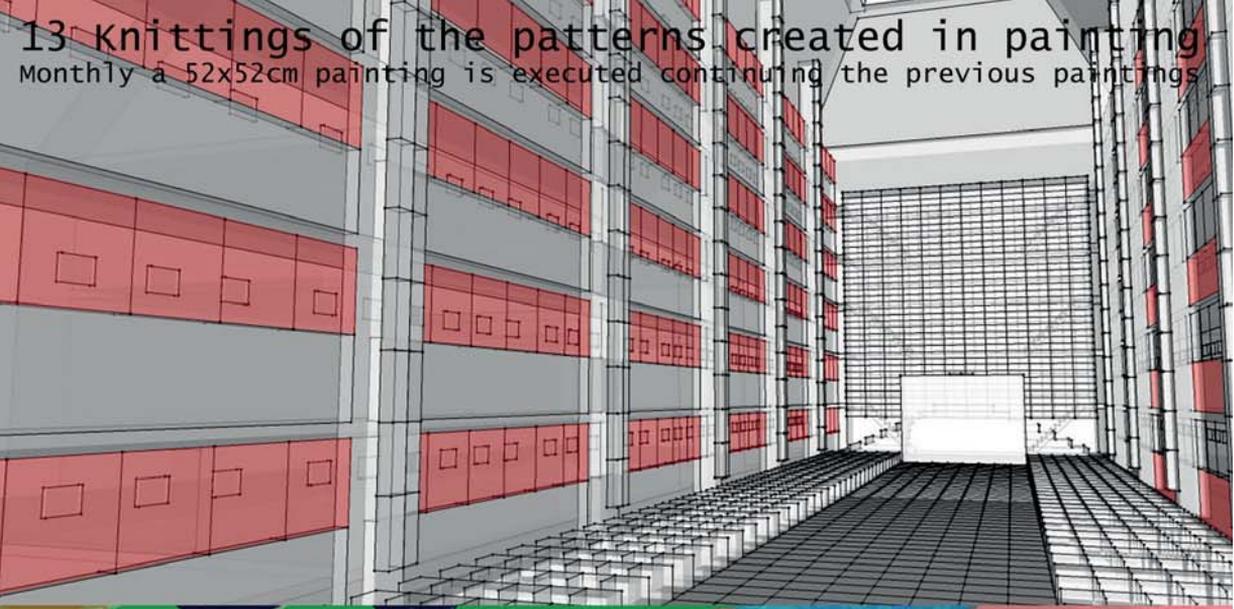


12 Recordings of the thoughts made walking alone  
60 thoughts are recorded on average every month during my solitary walks



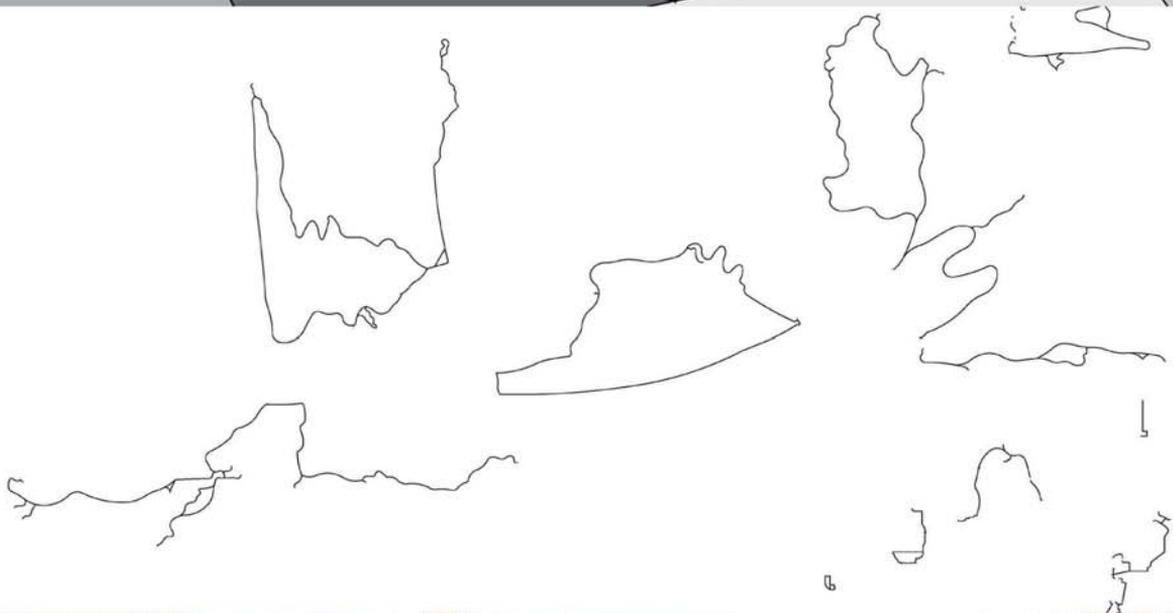
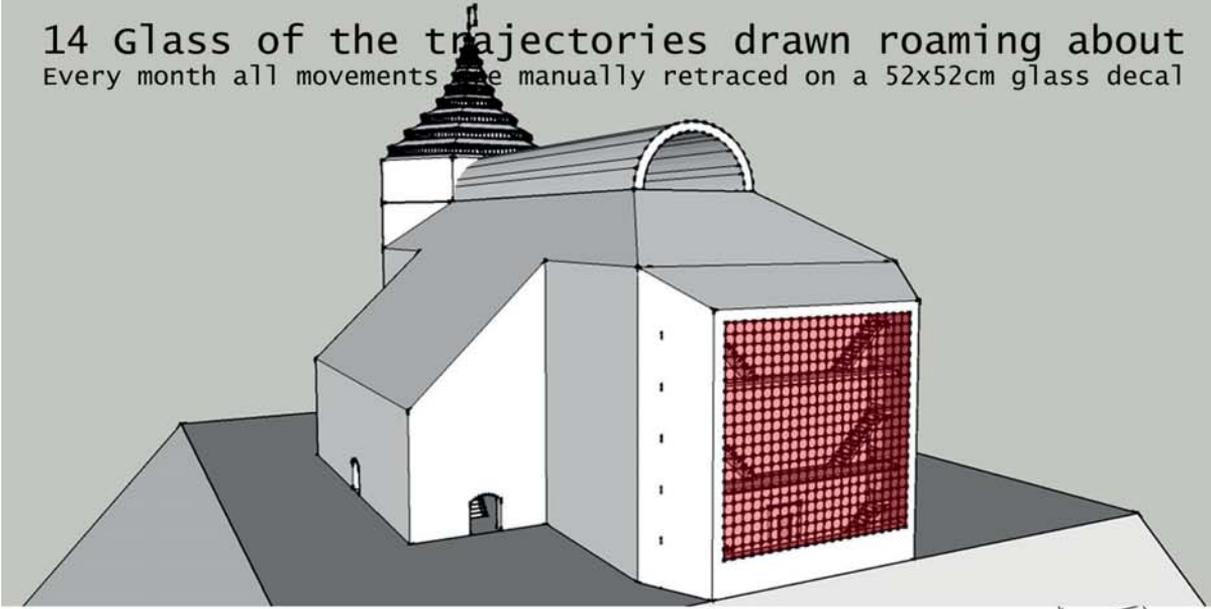
# 13 Knittings of the patterns created in painting

Monthly a 52x52cm painting is executed continuing the previous paintings



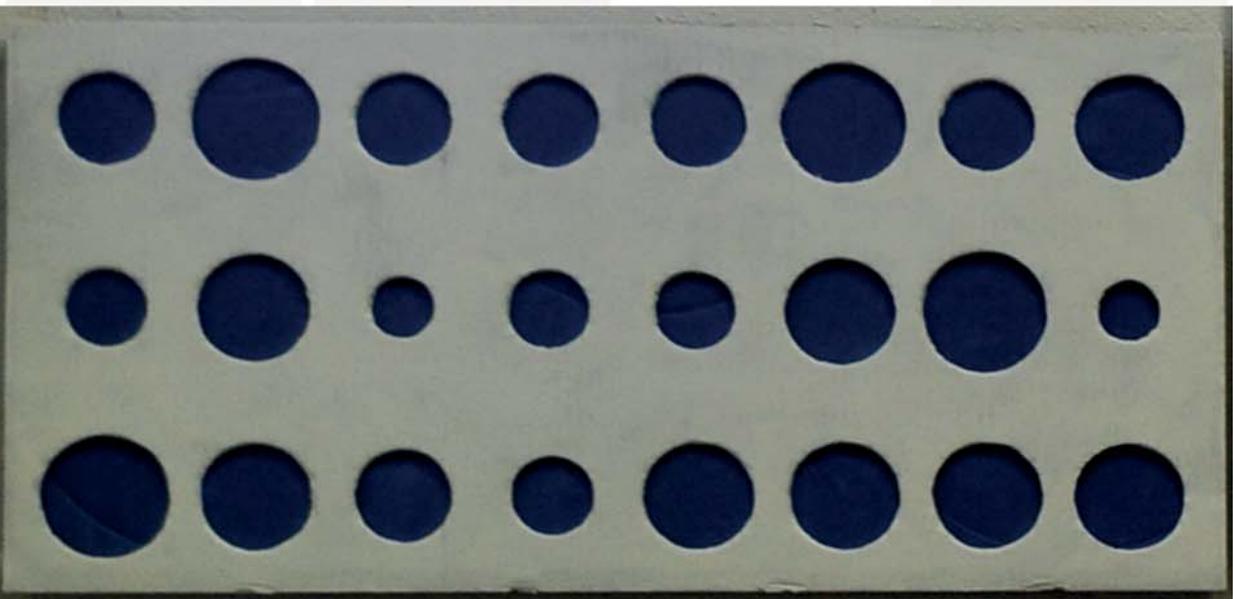
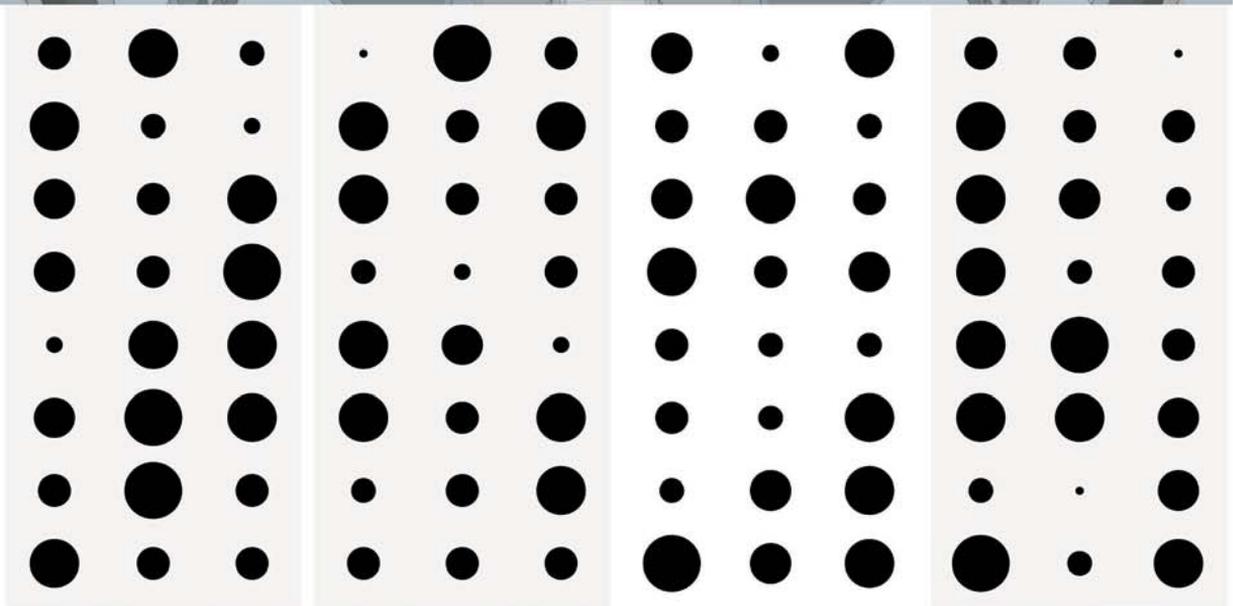
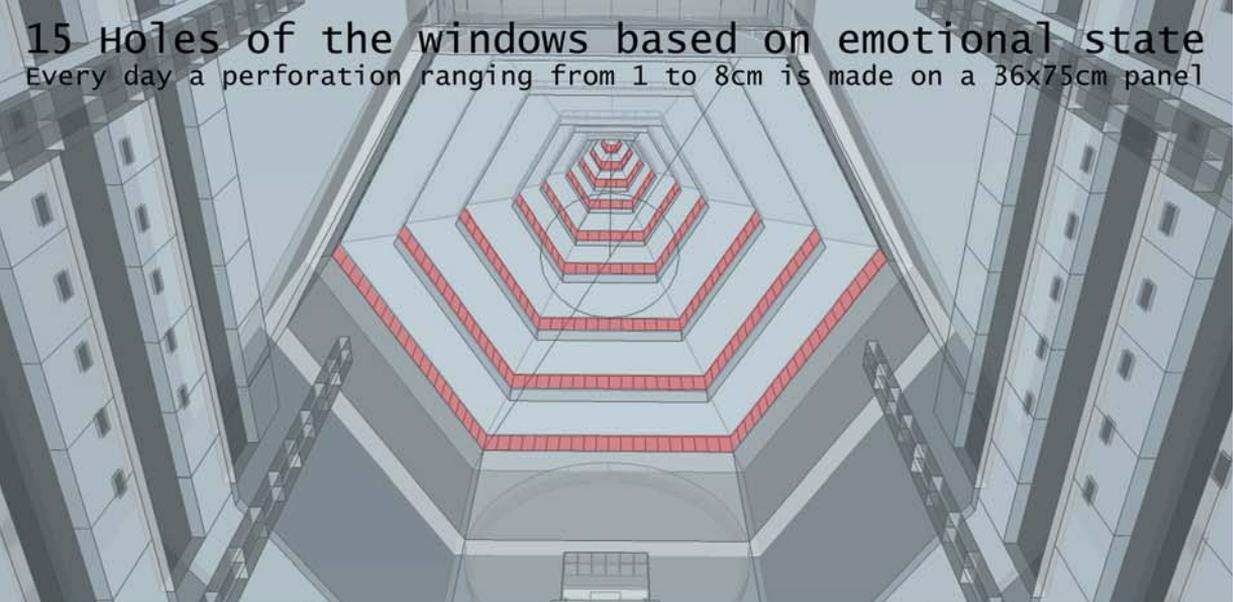
# 14 Glass of the trajectories drawn roaming about

Every month all movements are manually retraced on a 52x52cm glass decal



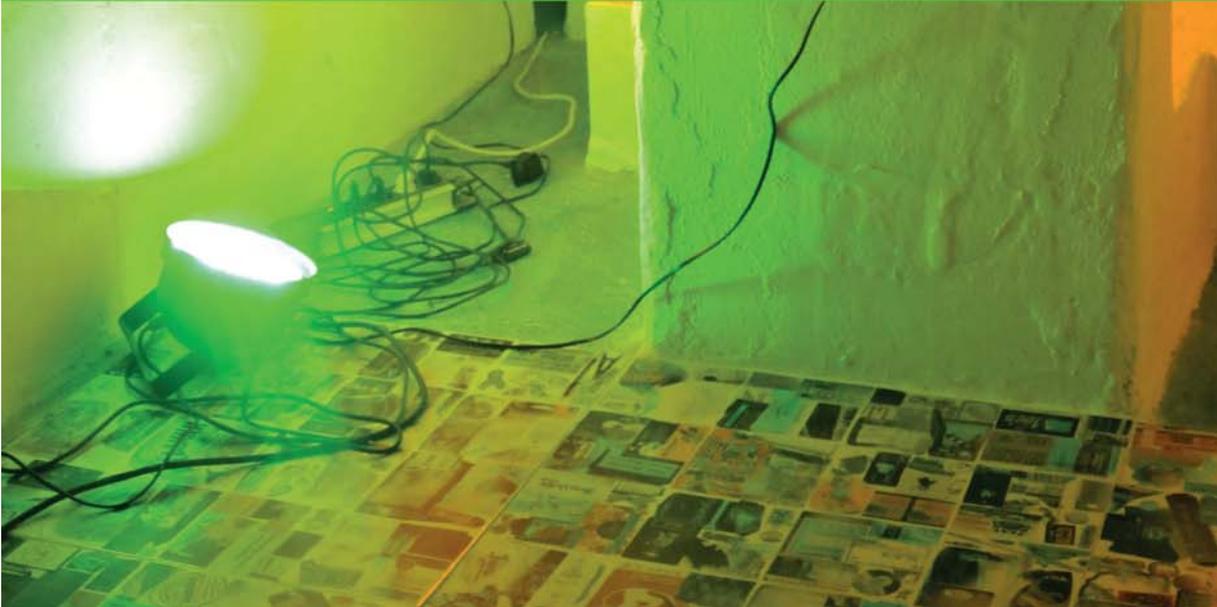
# 15 Holes of the windows based on emotional state

Every day a perforation ranging from 1 to 8cm is made on a 36x75cm panel



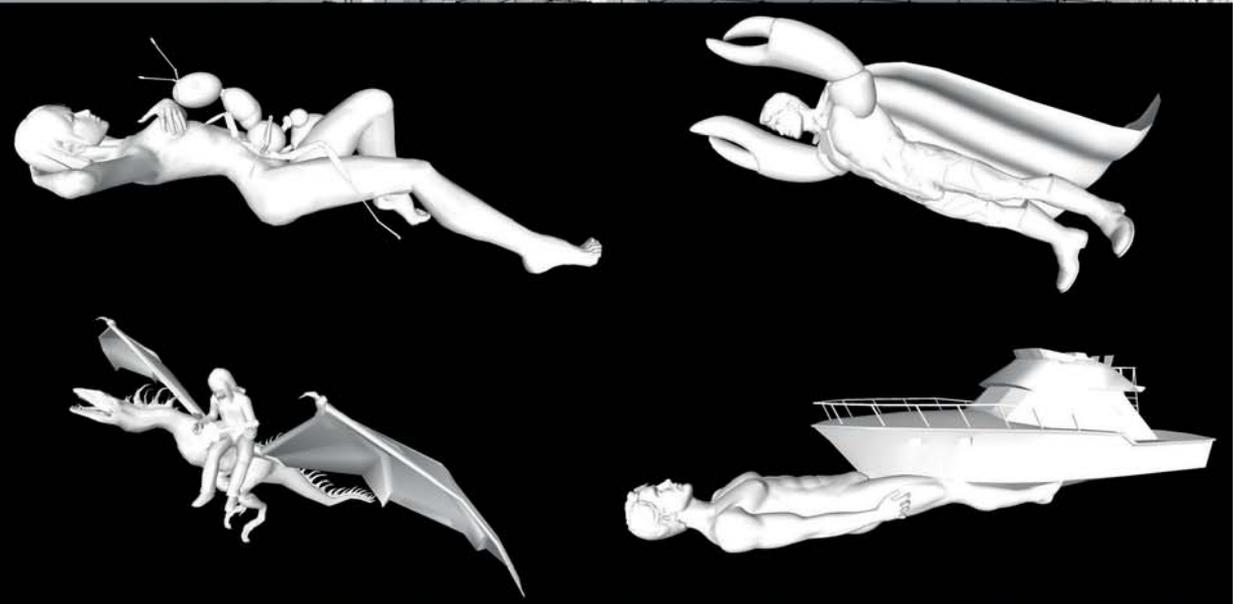
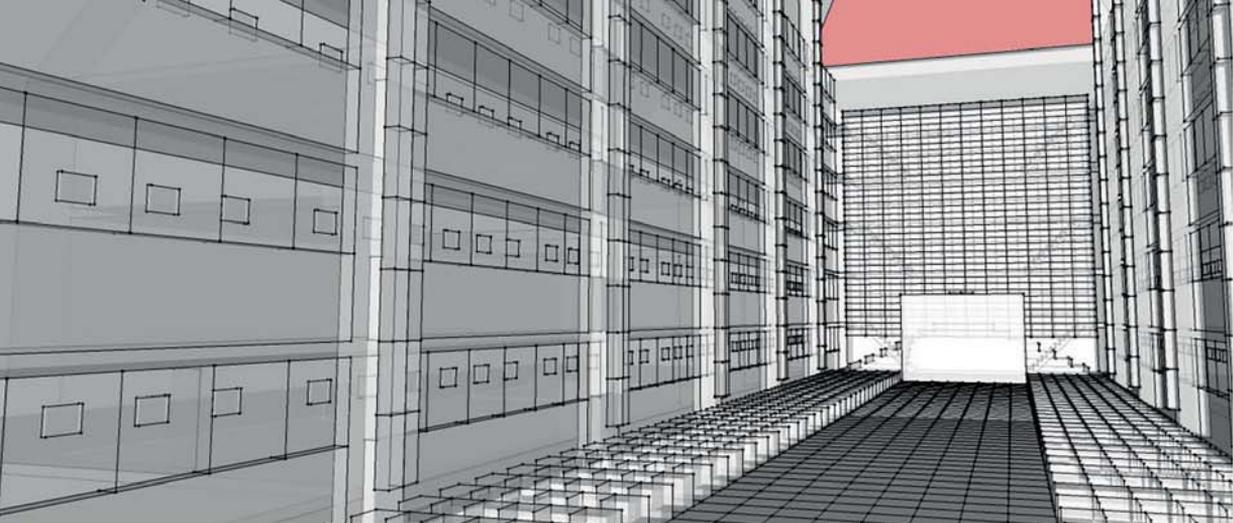
# 16 Brightness of the colours felt on the weather

The daily weather is determined using a scale of 36 different RGB colors



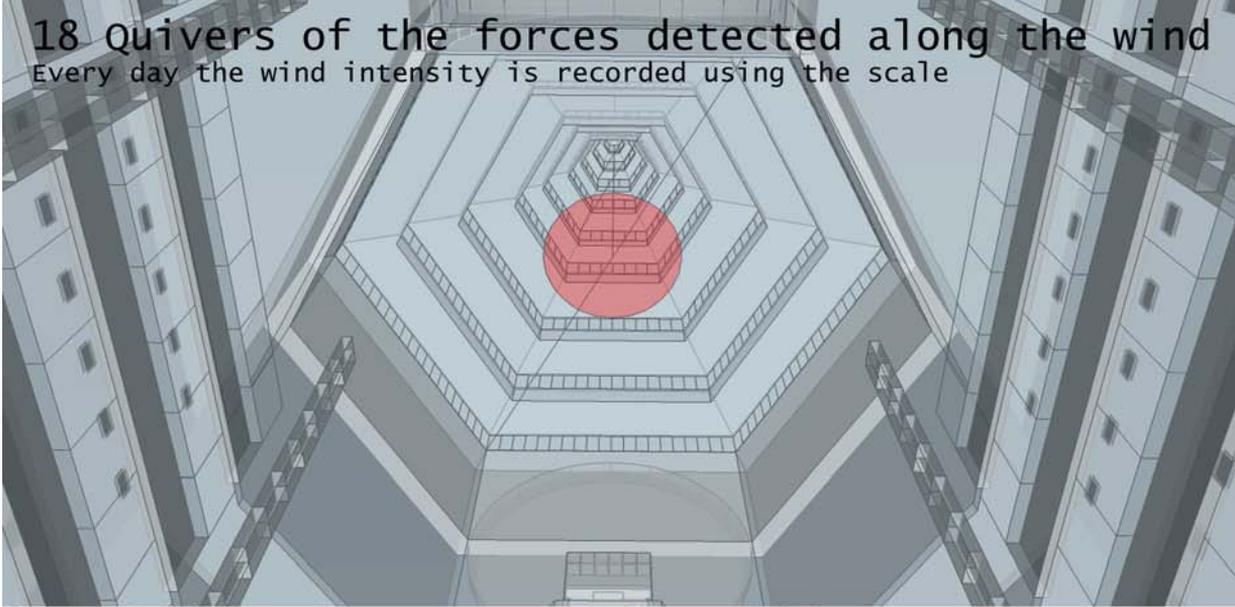
# 17 Transfigurations of the clouds observed above

The shape of clouds is detected and later reproduced in three dimensions



# 18 quivers of the forces detected along the wind

Every day the wind intensity is recorded using the scale



01	1,2,1	01	1,2,1
02	1,2,1	02	1,2,1,2,1
03	1	03	1
04	1,2,1	04	1,2,1
05	1,2,3,2,1	05	1,2,1,2,3,1,3,1,2,1
06	1,2,1,2,5,1	06	1,2,1,2,1
07	1,2,1,2,1	07	1,2,1,3,2,1
08	1,2,1	08	1,2,1,2,1,3,2,1,2,1
09	1	09	1,2,1
10	1,2,1	10	1,2,1,2,1
11	1,2,3,1,2,1	11	1,2,1,3,1,3,2,1,2,1
12	1,2,1	12	3,2,1,3,5,6,10,3,6,5,10,3,6,3,5
13	1	13	1,2,1,3,1
14	1,2,1,5,10,15,3,2,1,2,15,30,10	14	1,2,1
15	15,6,5,3,5,3,2,1,2,1	15	1
16	10,6,1,2,1,3,2,1,5,3	16	1,2,1
17	5,3,2,1,2,1	17	2,3,5,2,1
18	2,1	18	1,2,1
19	1,2,1	19	1,2,1,2,1
20	1	20	1,2,1
21	1,2,1,2,3,1,2,1,2,1	21	1
22	1	22	1,2,1
23	1,2,1	23	1
24	1,2,1,2,1	24	1,2,3,2,1





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While both public opinion and scholars around the world are currently pointing out the danger of increasingly popular life-logging devices, this book articulates this debate by distinguishing between automatic and manual life-logging approaches. Since new definitions of life-logging have excluded the latter approach and have been mainly focused on effortless life-logging technologies such as Google Glass and Quantified Self applications in general, this book theoretically frames life-stowing.

Through extensive etymological research, this book defines life-stowing as a manual and effortful practice conducted by life-stowers, individuals who devote their life to sampling reality in predefined frameworks. Also as part of this book, an historical overview introduces life-stowers and distinguishes between Apollonian and Dionysian varieties of these practitioners. Lastly, in order to understand the future reception of life-stowing, particularly in relation to digital media, this book discloses the author's ongoing life-stowing project to a small audience

**Alberto Frigo** (born 21 July 1979 in Asiago, Italy) is regarded as an early proponent of life-logging. He is known for having photographed every object his right hand has used since the 24th September 2003. Continuously documenting 18 aspects of his life, Frigo intends to create a Rosetta Stone of time to be concluded at 60 years of age, in 2040, after 36 years. The most extreme example of self-tracking, Frigo is the only known person to have digitally documented his life manually and for over thirteen years.

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