The objet ambigu. The artwork as a process.

Renate Wiehager
Luca Trevisani’s work makes productive use of the justified suspicion that the 20th century has formulated against the work of art as an autonomous, creative, individual ‘posing’. It works toward achieving understanding and a practice of artistry that not only reflects concepts such as transformation, ambiguity, transgression, translation, process-orientation and the abolition of hierarchies in theory, but also constantly differentiates itself primarily through its use of artistic and material-related procedures. Luca Trevisani’s concept of work can essentially be understood as a laboratory-like situation that combines theoretical and scientific, formal and material ‘ingredients’ on a temporary basis. The artist finds the ingredients for his experimental arrangements in a wide variety of different fields: art, physics, philosophy, design, alchemy, biology and the natural sciences.

The aim of his open-structure artistic experiments is to redefine the ‘artwork’ as the materialization of aesthetic forms at the boundary between nature and art, at a particular place and time. This means that Trevisani ‘releases’ his ‘components’ in a process of technical reproductions, chemical reactions and material collisions in order to put the results as far as possible outside his aesthetic and formal control. He deliberately uses moments of chance, uncontrollable balance and losses of energy, misunderstanding and redefinition, he works with copies, references and self-references, collage and montage in order to initiate amalgamations of geometry and nature, the organic and the inorganic, and creatural and aesthetic structures. Luca Trevisani’s sculptures, installations, videos and printed objects are really the result of processes of ‘cultivation’—creating and maintaining the conditions that allow aesthetically determined organisms to grow.

Paul Valéry and the ‘objet ambigu’

Hades. Ilissos, the river in the underworld, the river of time in which all things lose their substance. This is the setting that Paul Valéry 1923 chose in his work *Eupalinos or the Architect* for a philosophical dialog on architecture, music and the hierarchy of the arts. While walking with Phaedrus along the banks of the Ilissos, Socrates recalls a pivotal moment in his intellectual biography while he was still living. As a young man, still entirely open to all of the possibilities of life, he finds an object on the beach, “something white, hard, delicate, and light, polished and of the purest white. Socrates picks it up, cleans off the sand, rubs it on his cloak, and immediately all of his thoughts are dominated by the uniqueness of its form. […] it is an object that is not reminiscent of anything and yet not without shape. […] But especially because this objet ambigu is ‘nothing’ and means ‘nothing’, its significance increases unimaginably: it asks all questions and leaves them all unanswered.”

For Socrates, the objet ambigu seems to be a nameless ‘thing’ on the boundary between nature and culture, perhaps an experiment by nature inspired by the creative powers of human hands, or even derived from the idea of an artist or researcher and given shape by the forces of nature. While the objects created by an artist are limited by the finiteness of time, nature creates using the endlessness of potential forms over time. The objet ambigu brings together this juxtaposition of the finiteness of form as a never-ending endeavor, and in so doing makes a self-declared ideal that can never be obtained comprehensible to the artist/philosopher in a visual and tactile manner. In Valéry’s story, Socrates, realizing this, throws the objet ambigu, this natural creation seemingly shaped by human hand, back into the sea.

Creating sculptures as objets ambigus, working on the invention of forms that have many meanings, are ambiguous and cannot be classified is at the core of Luca Trevisani’s work. Many of his plastic objects openly articulate and inherently address doubt surrounding the possibility and meaning of a pre-defined, ‘definitive’ form. Although for Trevisani, ‘sculpture’ can also mean implementation through the media of a video, a printing etc. insofar as the artist is constantly working on translations between processes: a three-dimensional object may be photographed, then filmed, then scanned and printed etc. in the same way that graphical objects can be made into three-dimensional structures suspended in space.

We refer in this respect to the sculpture *Non uno di meno*, 2007, which Trevisani based on a Roman military shield that was formally derived from a turtle’s shell before scanning it, reproducing it, copying it and presenting it alongside a shell shape formed by hand: “I investigate the limits between space we know as ours and space that doesn’t belong to us. The project for the sculpture *Non uno di meno* started with and developed from the testudo shape used in battle by soldiers during the Roman Empire. The testudo shape represents an ideal ephemeral architectural prototype, assembled only when necessary, and as the result of a collective effort by all its components. While developing the project, I also came to abandon the formation developed by the Romans, in order to reconsider the natural shape of the turtle’s shell, the real iconic shield image. The work consists of two spheres obtained from natural shapes. The first derives from a 3D scan of two turtle shells put together digitally, to create a shape that is closed off from the world. The second derives from the pressure exerted by a pair of hands on fresh plaster. What remains visible is the mark of the imprint, as an attempt to create a perfect sphere.”

The Architect on the Beach

The experience that transformed the rationalist/technicist prophet of modernity Le Corbusier into the ‘new’ architect of the chapel at Ronchamp, the designer of biomorphic, organically curving forms, took place on the beach at Long Island: “On the drawing table lies the shell of a crab that I
picked up on Long Island near New York in 1946. It becomes the roof of the chapel […] Thick walls, a crab shell in order to give life to the structural plan through curves. So I take the crab shell and place it on the walls.4 In the 1930s, Le Corbusier began putting together a constantly growing collection of flotsam and jetsam, shells, snails, fossils, tree roots, algae, but also broken pieces of civilization polished by the sea such as broken and eroded pieces of brick etc. At the same time he took photographs: traces left by the sea in the sand, blocks of stone hollowed out by the water, the way the light plays on the waves. In the language of Le Corbusier, these are all ‘objets à réaction poétiques’.5

As in the case of Valéry’s objet ambigu, the form and origin of the items collected by Le Corbusier was often unclear and ambiguous as to whether they were natural or man-made, and their purpose could not be determined. “It was in this ambiguity surrounding an object’s origin that was what Le Corbusier referred to as its ‘poetic potential’ lay: the object raises questions, provokes assumptions, pleases the eye and irritates the mind. The ‘objet à réaction poétique’ introduces the architect to a new world of forms that goes beyond his usual categories of thought—and therefore beyond what he himself could come up with. It acts as a generator that mobilizes forms that were previously unimaginable.”6

For Le Corbusier, the step of completely reinventing himself as an architect was directly linked to reading Paul Valéry’s work Eupalinos and the aesthetic theory of the objet ambigu. Le Corbusier’s approach of allowing himself to be inspired, guided and motivated by forms found on the boundary between nature and civilization also provides an important backdrop for Luca Trevisani’s work. For Trevisani, however, the associatively compiled world of forms draws from a broader, multi-media (i.e. contemporary) source: graphic and product design, cultivation processes, scientific materials, literature, techniques of craftsmanship, art history, materials and elements taken from nature, photographs and materials from the world of fashion. All of this is put through a continuous process of reading and re-reading and translation and deconstruction and construction, and this ‘ordered chaos’ gives rise to artistic models and objects which hark back to their original materials in order to perhaps be re-interpreted in a different, new direction.7

Examples of Luca Trevisani’s work that show the processes of collecting, treating and construction/deconstruction include the group of large-scale UV prints on copper (Flyfishing, 2011) and aluminum, which itself references back to a multimedia installation involving organic and inorganic materials, projection and movement (Floating Bananas, 2011) which is further differentiated and translated using multi-channel video work.

“Fly fishing is an angling method in which an artificial ‘fly’ is used to catch fish. Fly fishermen use hand tied flies that resemble natural invertebrates or other food organisms, or ‘lures’, to provoke the fish to strike. I played with their methods. To create minuscule sculptures, new forms, and to present them to viewers, I decided to scan them and to print them on copper. Sometimes I folded them, to give energy to the composition, the same energy that is transmitted through copper, which is an excellent conductor of electricity. The idea of the work series Placet experiri, 2012, is to reduce the body of the sculpture, by thinking of the sculpture as a frozen image, as a translation of forms and identity. I compose sculptures, attaching natural materials that are subject to change on the bed of a scanner placed in the open air. During the long period of time necessary for things to become images, the objects frequently move, fall and change, and this is reflected in the image. I would call it cultivation—I am thinking of Candide by Voltaire, which ends with this sentence: ‘Il faut cultiver notre jardin’, or ‘we must cultivate our garden.’ In a stable, definitive, marmoreal space, there is no need to cultivate. We, on the other hand, are called to cultivate, to take care.”8

In around 1920, the magical zone between the beach and the sea was described in yet another groundbreaking artistic work of the 20th century as a surreal landscape that gives birth to foaming white, coarsely dirty, metallic and black-encrusted monsters made from the stuff of nature and civilization. In Ulysses, James Joyce intersperses the encounters of Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom with the people in their environment with brief walks along the beach that equate for the protagonists to submerging themselves into a twilight zone in which the forms and bodies of stones, shells, people, animals and the detritus of society seem to merge metamorphically.

The artist in the laboratory

Paul Valéry’s aesthetic/philosophical position as expressed through the image of the objet ambigu and the concepts behind Luca Trevisani’s work could be described as an attempt to neutralize the antithesis between nature and civilization: mental and physical activity provide the sub-structure on which the experiments of the scientific researchers, the designs of the architects and the aesthetic models of the artists can come closer together. The reality of the objet ambigu, writes Hans Blumenberg, “lies in the inability to overcome its ambiguity, in the unanswered questions which it takes back with it into the sea […] the realistic character of the aesthetic work...”9
reinforces the encryption that the world already presents to the human mind.”  

For Valéry, who was influenced by symbolism, the image of the crystal stands for the inorganic poetic work that is always in the process of creation. Crystalline structures ‘break’ the observer’s expectations of clear, understandable, well-structured content and meaning. As early as 1857, Stendhal used the term ‘crystallization’ as a mental activity, and refers to the beauty of the physical hardening of materials: “At the salt mines of Salzburg a branch stripped of its leaves by winter is thrown into the abandoned depths of the mine; taken out two or three months later it is covered with brilliant crystals; the smallest twigs, those no stouter, are arrayed with an infinity of sparkling, dazzling diamonds; it is impossible to recognize the original branch.”

Artificial blue crystals grown using chemical reactions represent another current group of works by Luca Trevisani. Dried plants, partially covered with reflective, Yves Klein-blue crystals are attractive both haptically and visually while also constituting disturbingly beautiful objets ambigus, discovered/invented forms on the boundary between nature and art.

“The main character in James Ballard’s The Crystal World, 1966, goes off to Central Africa in search of his two lost friends, Suzanne and Max Clair. Once he arrives, he finds a surreal environment permeated by a strange phenomenon that has the power to trap plants, animals, objects and people in crystals, removing them from the dimension of time. A crack in the fabric of time and a saturation of matter causes leaves to sparkle like jewels, crocodiles to swim in solid streams protected by a second armor, and in certain conditions people are turned into frozen statues encrusted with brilliant gems and fused into the ground.” (Trevisani)

In the video A tribute to Geoffrey Nathaniel Joseph Pyke, 2014, Luca Trevisani allowed the crystalline structures resulting from the intentionally erroneous application of a technical process to ‘grow’ as video images as a further, parallel step. “Images of crystals, glaciers, quartz and Newtonian refractions, mixed and fused in a digital mashup, a tribute to Geoffrey Nathaniel Joseph Pyke (1895–1948). Journalist, educator, atypical inventor and nerd ante litteram, Pyke owes his fame to pykrete, a material that he invented at the beginning of the 20th century that was named after him. Consisting of water mixed with wood pulp and frozen solid, it was stronger than ice, being more stable and less inclined to melt.” (Trevisani)

Translation, the removal of hierarchy, transcoding

Translation, the removal of hierarchy, transcoding, transgression / fluidity, variables, diversity / the migration of forms into differing contexts / circulation of ideas and concepts—as key terms, these apply not only in the contemporary art context, but also in the context of new developments in architecture, design, literature and theater. These expressions go hand-in-hand with a new understanding of materials and processes, but also with the decisive deconstruction of any hierarchy, in relation to one another, of art, product design and craft work. Additionally, this levelling of hierarchies as a central factor of contemporary art brings with it possibilities for declining all forms of a theme by making use of a variety of artistic media, for the mirroring of individual inventions in the themes of architects working in parallel and in the works of forerunners in various disciplines. Luca Trevisani, the co-curator of the exhibition “Conceptual & Applied” (Daimler Contemporary Berlin, March – Nov. 2014, with works from the Daimler Art Collection and loans), who was represented by a new spatially expensive installation in the center space of the Daimler Contemporary, summed all this up in the
following prosaic words: “I believe in pro-
liferation, in the absence of hierarchy.
What’s the relationship between an object
of yours and the photo you take? Is it an
echo, a replica, a double, a mirror, or just all
the hypotheses I’ve written? [...] It’s like
my dirty habit of melting elements and
stories; I can’t stop the continuous dialog
between works of others and one of mine,
between documentation and creation,
between two and three dimensions. It is a
process of growth that has something or-
ganic about it.”

Further current phenomena in interna-
tional contemporary art include “transcod-
ing” and “translation”. In other words,
many artists of today detach meaningful
context and constellations of meaning from
their standard coding—cultural, national,
politically-determined. These artists re-
produce themes and adapt them to new
parameters, thereby allowing the various
contential factors and intentions of the
artwork to circulate, as it were, between
different languages and contexts. On the
one hand, this is a critical and selfcritical
act. On the other hand, it is a strategy that
articulates an understanding that the meth-
od of ‘translation’ accepts the artistic work
as a process with the end result left open,
possibly with an indefinable ‘remainder’,
rather than as a constant. Asked whether
the scanning, reproduction and circulation
of images and ideas are central to his artistic
aesthetic, Trevisani responds: “It doesn’t
really matter what you want to say, but
how you say it. While I’ve always been in-
terested in reasoning, talking and drawing
attention to this idea of things that go to-
gether, combine, grow and celebrate an idea
of unity, the main thing is thinking about
how to do it. Consequently, the idea of tak-
ing my most cherished concepts and seeing
them multiplied is central, since I am con-
vinced that their combined value is much
greater than their individual worth. As I
gained confidence with this method, in the
end things exploded: they exploded in my
hands and I gradually became braver about
doing it.”

Nicolas Bourriaud has coined the term
‘altermodernity’ to describe the concepts
of ‘duplications’ and ‘in toto value’. This
relates directly to ‘translation’ and ‘syn-
chronisation’ in aesthetic praxis: “This
twenty-first-century modernity, born of
global and decentralized negotiations, of
multiple discussions among participants
from different cultures, of the confronta-
tion of heterogeneous discourses, can only
be polyglot. Altermodernity promises to be
a translation-oriented modernity, unlike
the modern story of the twentieth century,
whose progressivism spoke the abstract
language of the colonial West. And this
search for a productive compromise among
singular discourses, this continuous effort
at coordination, this constant elaboration
of arrangements to enable disparate ele-
ments to function together, constitutes
both its engine and its import. The opera-
tion that transforms every artist, every
author, into a translator of him- or herself
implies accepting the idea that no speech
bears the seal of any sort of ‘authenticity’;
we are entering the era of universal sub-
titling, of generalized dubbing. An era that
valorizes the links that texts and images
establish, the paths that artists forge in a
multicultural landscape, the passageways
they lay out to connect modes of expression
and communication.”

So, how does the term ‘translation’ made it-
self felt as a key category for the exhibition
“Conceptual & Applied” and more specifi-
cally for the work of Luca Trevisani? Many
of the figures from the worlds of art, archi-
tecture and design featured in the exhibi-
tion subject their themes and methods to a
gradual modification and translation as part
of their working process, so that the method itself becomes a transitional phase. The artwork may initially find expression in a sculptural form, but, in the next stage, may experience a process of reinterpretation, through photography, copying, transformation into language, material destruction etc. This approach is demonstrated by organically shaped furniture objects (Helga Philipp, Lina Bo Bardi), meandering text images (Natalie Czech), abstract/ornamental spatial structures (Luca Trevisani), fashionable accessories that can be worn (Carmelo Tedeschi) or temporary and performative “objects of aggression” (Georg Winter). In addition, the transfer of ideas, materials and histories between diverging ‘systems of order’ and ‘codes’ invariably produce factors of deconstruction or ‘chaos’ in terms of identifiable and comprehensible perspectives of meaning. In his productions, Luca Trevisani constantly addresses the collision of two factors—‘order and chaos.’

Leveling, transgression

Previously, the term ‘de-hierarchization’ was introduced. We might add the term ‘leveling’ (used in a positive sense), seen as a conceptual and reflective leveling of existing values, as a new evaluation and an opening up of new horizons for idea and form invention. Let us return to a statement made by Luca Trevisani during the run-up to the ‘Conceptual & Applied’ exhibition; his statement could be taken to represent the views of many of the participating artists: “It’s all about lowering the level of things [...] to move the reading. [...] It’s an exercise in respect towards a tradition, handled with lightness, humility and the awareness of possible failure. In confrontation with history, I show my respect for it and line up behind all those who have already done this. When I approach something I’m unfamiliar with I want to lower my tone, but not to desecrate it, because desecrating something means taking it off a pedestal in order to somehow throw it down on the ground as if it were a dictator’s statue. Lowering the level in order to put it within everyone’s reach, to unmask a certain reverence towards certain things. For me, placing everything on a horizontal plane and saying they are all the same is not the same as taking away their ‘power’, rather it means putting them within everyone’s reach. [...] I’m interested in drawing attention to unconscious gestures, without reflecting about any kind of mould. Without expressing judgments, without pledging my allegiance. I find it quite annoying when people have to line up in support of something at all costs. This thing happens, and that’s all. When someone faces it, they have to formulate their own opinion, I just want them to face it. And I try to do that.”

A recent publication by Rachel Sara—in which she presents the architectonic life’s work of architect/artist/curator/author Lina Bo Bardi, who also featured in the ‘Conceptual & Applied’ exhibition—is entitled ‘The Architecture of Transgression’. The kind of ‘transgression’ that is under discussion here is the subversion or exceeding of standard norms of behavior, the radical reinterpretation of architectonic praxis, of how architecture understands its role in social and political terms: “Transgression suggests operating beyond accepted norms and radically reinterpreting practice by pushing at the boundaries of both what architecture is, and what it could or even should be. The current economic crisis and accompanying political/social unrest has exacerbated the difficulty into which architecture has long been sliding: challenged by other professions and a culture of conservatism, architecture is in danger of losing its prized status as one of the pre-eminent visual arts. Transgression opens up new possibilities for practice. It highlights the positive impact that working on the architectural periphery can make on the mainstream, as transgressive practices have the potential to reinvent and reposition the architectural profession: whether they are subvertising notions of progress; questioning roles and mechanisms of production; aligning with political activism; pioneering urban interventions; advocating informal or incomplete development; actively destabilizing environments or breaking barriers of taste. In this new dispersed and expanded field of operation, the balance of architectural endeavor is shifted from object to process, from service to speculation, and from formal to informal in a way that provides both critical and political impetus to proactively affect change.”

This neatly and concisely describes the wide-ranging inventory of forms that can be encountered in the ‘Conceptual & Applied’ exhibition as well as in Luca Trevisani’s work in general. “When he was commissioned to create an artwork in the Museo di Santa Giulia (as part of the exhibition ‘Novecento mai visto’, staged by the Daimler Art Collection in Brescia 2013) Luca Trevisani quickly concentrated on the Domus Ortaglia part of the complex. In particular, the artist was fascinated by the mosaic floors of Roman city houses dating from the 1st to the 4th century AD. His artwork (Die Befindlichkeit des Landes [The mental state of the land], 2013, 5 parts, UV print on plastic mirror foil, each ca. 152 x 270 cm), which aims to allow people to experience the location in a new way both physically and mentally, therefore uses the abstract patterns found in the mosaics of the Domus Ortaglia—reconstructed to scale by the Italian artist in the form of wood models—as its basic forms. Trevisani juxtaposes these maquettes with living snakes—pythons and boas—whose patterns are based on the original coloration of the flooring. Trevisani deploys the snakes simultaneously in a symbolic and in an instrumental way—the creatures make the shapes accessible, centimeter by centimeter. As they enliven and fully explore the wooden lattice, their smooth forms contrast with its angular form. ‘Snakes know that feeling an object’s surface is learning it, but

symbols and abstract spatial figures—this world of forms drawn from culture, nature, abstract geometry and architecture approximately describes the wide-ranging inventory of forms that can be encountered in the ‘Conceptual & Applied’ exhibition as well as in Luca Trevisani’s work in general. “When he was commissioned to create an artwork in the Museo di Santa Giulia (as part of the exhibition ‘Novecento mai visto’, staged by the Daimler Art Collection in Brescia 2013) Luca Trevisani quickly concentrated on the Domus Ortaglia part of the complex. In particular, the artist was fascinated by the mosaic floors of Roman city houses dating from the 1st to the 4th century AD. His artwork (Die Befindlichkeit des Landes [The mental state of the land], 2013, 5 parts, UV print on plastic mirror foil, each ca. 152 x 270 cm), which aims to allow people to experience the location in a new way both physically and mentally, therefore uses the abstract patterns found in the mosaics of the Domus Ortaglia—reconstructed to scale by the Italian artist in the form of wood models—as its basic forms. Trevisani juxtaposes these maquettes with living snakes—pythons and boas—whose patterns are based on the original coloration of the flooring. Trevisani deploys the snakes simultaneously in a symbolic and in an instrumental way—the creatures make the shapes accessible, centimeter by centimeter. As they enliven and fully explore the wooden lattice, their smooth forms contrast with its angular form.‘Snakes know that feeling an object’s surface is learning it, but

Honeycombs, grids, chain elements, networks and (numeric) symbols/spheres, circles, bowls, Möbius strips, spirals/ stylized

Wandering forms

Luca Trevisani, Che io sceglio di essere me stesso (Choosing to be Myself), 2009
understanding it in its depth means inventing it.’ (L.T.). Additionally, the title, which references a song by the German music group ‘Einstürzende Neubauten’ (‘collapsing new buildings’), reveals the political dimension in Trevisani’s work: it is a criticism of the zeitgeist or spirit of the times and of the way Italy’s cultural heritage is currently being treated.”

Synchronizations of geometric and organic abstraction

Nicolas Bourriaud has coined the term “semionauts” to describe the representatives of “transportable practices” in art. Rather than trying “to pile up heterogeneous elements in their works”, the artists of today are trying “to create significant connections within the infinite text of world culture. In a word, to produce itineraries in the landscape of signs by taking on the role of semionauts, inventors of pathways within the cultural landscape, nomadic sign gatherers. […] What I am calling altermodernity thus designates a construction plan that would allow new intercultural connections, the construction of a space of negotiation going beyond postmodern multiculturalism, which is attached to the origin of discourses and forms rather than to their dynamics. It is a matter of replacing the question of origin with that of destination. ‘Where should we go?’ That is the modern question par excellence.”

For his commissioned artwork for the Daimler Art Collection exhibition at the Museum Santa Giulia Brescia, 2013, Luca Trevisani, as discussed above, had five hanging banners printed. They show the characteristic abstract ornaments from the Roman mosaic floors of the Domus Ortaglia (2nd century BC), translated into a bronze or silver pattern on semi-transparent reflective foil. Trevisani has enriched the two-dimensional, ornamental latticework by adding curved forms in the form of snakelike bodies of different sizes. These transport the ancient motifs into the present day and a contemporary artistic interpretation, but they also bring these abstract forms derived from natural shapes back into ‘synchronization’ (Bourriaud) with emblems of organic nature.

“For the ‘Conceptual & Applied III: Surfaces and Pattern’ exhibition, we, in our turn, asked Luca Trevisani for a space related commissioned work. His design is based on an ornamental, abstract/organic grid of individual elements that meander over the floor and height of the exhibition space. This net-like structure is inspired by the structure of maritime nets used for raising mussels in the sea or for conveying them. When one looks at Trevisani’s spatial/urban interpretation, one is put in mind of the minimalist structures of a Japanese Zen garden—gardens that one traverses only with the eye and that invite one to imagine and to meditate. At the same time, the artwork is conceived in such a way that the elements, made from stone-like Corian material, can be walked on: the viewer, balanced on the unstable web elements, is more like an active dancer than a passive user. The structure plays over the right angle between the floor and the wall, putting one in mind of an abstract choreography, a terraced topography or a field of oversized, abstract rice grains.

“It’s the empiricism that leads me to play with things,” explains Luca Trevisani, “somehow, for my own personal development, I’ve never limited myself to the sphere of images and art because I don’t think that there are inert materials and maybe there are no rejects in the world. I mean that everything also depends on what light you look at it in. […] For me,
it’s important to start with things that are important to me, which I choose, but have their own intrinsic quality, which somehow I have the presumption to think of as objective. [...] It’s fundamental to believe in your own fallibility, doubt, modifiability and openness towards others and towards things. These days, as ever, I think it’s important to repeat that others may be more right than us and we must always be modified by the world around us. It is an exercise in humility, but also in real breathing, you could say. [...] I’ve recently realized for me true research is never-ending research, a laboratory that’s not putting up results. What’s important, in my opinion, in order to avoid a waste of time, is to elaborate your own rules and regulations. A settled operating system.”  

The image of the ‘laboratory’ occupies a central place in Nicolas Bourriaud’s book ‘The Radicant’. The book’s title refers to a plant shoot (which occurs, for instance, in strawberry plants), which, depending on the ground available to receive it, puts down secondary roots. “Contemporary art provides new models for this individual who is constantly putting down new roots, for it constitutes a laboratory of identities. Thus, today’s artists do not do such much express the tradition from which they come as the path they take between tradition and various contexts they traverse, and they do this by performing acts of translation. Where modernism proceeded by subtraction in an effort to unearth the root, or principle, contemporary artists proceed by selection, additions, and then acts of multiplication. They do not seek an ideal state of the self or society. Instead, they organize signs in order to multiply one identity by another.”

To finish by quoting Nicolas Bourriaud once again: “The altermodernity emerging today [...] is fueled by the flow of bodies, by our cultural wandering. It presents itself as a venture beyond the conceptual frames assigned to thought and art, a mental expedition outside identitarian norms. Ultimately, then, radicant thought amounts to the organization of an exodus. [...] Translation, which collectivizes the meaning of a discourse and sets in motion an object of thought by inserting it into a chain, thus diluting it’s origin in multiplicity, constitutes a mode of resistance against the generalized imposition of formats and a kind of formal guerrilla warfare.”

2 Cf. Paul Valéry, Eupalinos oder der Architekt, translated into German by Rainer Maria Rilke, Hamburg 1962, p. 127.
3 Please refer to p. XX in this cat. for quote
6 Maak, as for comment 4, p. 53.
7 Luca Trevisani already implemented this process-orientation of his work in a graphically imposing manner in the early publication The effort took its tools, argobooks, Berlin 2008. With informative texts by Simone Menegoi, Luca Cerizza and Dominic Eichler.
8 Luca Trevisani, please refer to p. XX in this cat.
9 Blumenberg, as for comment 1, p. 105.
11 Luca Trevisani, please refer to p. XX in this cat.
12 Luca Trevisani, please refer to p. XX in this cat.
14 Ibid., no page given (p. 64).
16 Trevisani (as with note 13), no page given (pp. 78, 80).
19 Bourriaud (as with note 15), p. 38 f.
20 For photographs of important details see: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Categorie:Ancient_Roman_mosaics_in_the_Domus_dell’Ortaglia_(Brescia).
21 Trevisani (as with note 13), no page given (p. 71, 75, 67).
23 Bourriaud (as with note 15), p. 77, p. 131.