The Event of Art
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Introduction: Art as Event
The world is a work of art that gives birth to itself.

(Nietzsche)

an event irreducible to signification and indeed to any discursive account given of it
art is more than just an object to be read.
expressions, signatures
a coexistence between the material and the sensation
artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects
a chaosmos, a composed chaos – neither foreseen nor preconceived.

the work of art as self-expressive movements of the sensible.
“the strange temporality of the event, understood as a point of indeterminacy, a point of potentiality before bifurcation, before signification and action. This point operates on and at the very cusp between the virtual and the actual.”
“an art practice, as well as having a certain cohesiveness, also needs to be able to incorporate points of collapse.”
art practice as simply being involved in the actualisation of some of this potential that surrounds us here and now.
an object of sense that in itself involves the short-circuiting of sorts of our cognitive and conceptual capacities
we can think about two different kinds of contemporary art practice with Deleuze: the production of actual artworks or simply of composed things in the world, but also the practice of a life and of treating one’s “life as a work of art”

*simonsullivan

The event is that which has yet to come. It is not known before it has arrived. It may have been anticipated in a certain projection, a certain prescription, in an envelope of possibility, yet its arrival, is new, new enough. Art is the setting up of the event to come, while at the same time, in that setting up, an openness to the unknown, and so, it is the reading of that which comes, as a personal and particular event, and its setting up that may happen as such, or happen entirely not as such, that is the heightened pleasure of the event of art.

Art as an event that frames and figures, that gives form and rhythm, that becomes as such, not the world as is, not the world we know, but neither what we don’t—it is the event of surprised recognition. Ah, I see. I can see that, I can see how one could see that, yes I hear, I see, ah I want to touch that, it’s so palpable. Wow, how did we get here.
Certain objects, certain gestures, certain situations come alive and come to have meaning in a most particular way in the guise of art. This guise of art, this “world of art,” as real as it is imaginary, I consider as a set of practices and conventions, perhaps more so, permissions. Permissions and perceptions and events. These permissions constitute a realm, held together by a sociality that collectively suspends disbelief, to entertain and behold the possible, often in embodied and material ways. To suspend disbelief is to believe, this is why you have believers in front of works of art, those that are convinced or seduced, and those that say, I am not convinced, I don’t believe, meaning I don’t see it, or it doesn’t do anything for me, in short, I am not moved, nor convinced. This seeing, or making visible, making material, is in many ways the conceit of art, for both the maker and the viewer. Its trick, its beautiful illusion, its seduction is in appearance and it is to make things appear, or make them appear as other than what they are, or simply give presence to an appearance, which I will call the event of art. Not only has it possessed its author or creator but its reader and audience as well.

Today the event is the product of art. The very conjuring of it, bringing it forward. How the event is made material and just what constitutes the material event and just what art events is the subject of this book.

I have wanted to do a book on my practice of art, which has been as much about the event of art, to see if I could give some shape, to conjure in words the things conjured in art, to describe the permission it gave me, the framework it afforded me, the sense of it’s unboundedness, its rules and operations, that are always permeable, but always there or possibly there. That is the most exciting part of art, and that is, its invention, and the creation of the circumstances of its event to come.

I did not set out, from an early age, to be an artist. It was more over time its realm, its suggestive operating theatre, its sets of procedures that seduced me. Procedures that are there and not there. Its permission and demand to uncover and undo, to make something ones own, to demand a singularity, a humbling, a cooperation, a going with and against at the same time. Art demands one stop and listen, but also to stand or sit and deliver, that one fall apart, one disappear, one remove his or herself while being present to that removal. There is nothing one can not do artistically or artfully, be it a chef, a soccer player, a surgeon, a barista. but for this project, the event of art, I am going to make a go at circumscribing the domain of art, even though I will argue that it is a way of going, a way of apprehension, of being towards and in the world. The eventfulness of art is always a material relation, be it with words, space, bodies, sound, paint, histories, computation, resin, rubber, rabbit shit, the public, the moving image, every possible kind of material. It is these materials in space, in time. It is these things in relation to the artist and to their histories, to public
knowledge and understanding or invisibility that come to have shape and figure, as an event to make something seen or sensed or apprehended.

The first seeing, or apprehension, comes from the artist. The artist must set up a very intense personal conversation within herself, among the many things swimming about them, things they have seen, read and heard, things tasted, languages spoken, cultural predispositions, and in all this, they begin directing themselves in certain directions, only to be lost and confounded, or turned in a very different direction, as they search and seek out a very unknown thing that they want to make appear. Other times things are perfectly clear, all in an instant but in the doing something else happens. Because between what one thinks and what one manifests is this resistance, material facts, substances, contingencies, contexts, serendipity, something happens, things happen. Art is always a kind of hazard, and a willingness or not to accept what happens. This I think is very different than architecture, or being a pastry chef, or surgery, pursuits that require an exactness, art is something else.

To start one has to claim art for oneself, to bring it close to oneself, to, as I say, conjure it, converse with it, converse with other works of art, with the society of art, with life. One has to create a place for oneself in the conversation, even if, you are not in the conversation, or peripheral to the conversation, the conversation going on at the Venice Biennial, at documenta, or the Setouchi Triennial to Shenzhen or Basel. The world of art, the contemporary world of art is a global conversation, and like the cinema or literature or philosophy, there are those that dominate the conversation, these are the giants in the public’s perceptions in schools and the media, coming in and out of favor, in and out of the conversation, commanding the conversation held in the portfolios of leading museums and powerful collectors and dealers. But as my gallerist recently wrote me, it’s often the artist who gets the most out of art, world-renowned or not. It’s this event of art, through the practice of it, that this book is about, about certain pleasures and defeats, a certain and uncertain beingness.

All art starts with a kind of strategy, a way towards something, a way in and about something, an imagining of something, something sensual, or material, something conceptual. The desire may be to create a certain affect, think of Gericault’s painting, The Raft of the Medusa, how each figure is composed and arranged not unlike a sweeping Kubrick film or Jeff Koons’s Play-Doh sculpture, or Mike Kelley’s videos, they are each very purposively constructed, now think of a Gutai action painting of Kazuo Shiraga, or an Yves Klein body paint performance or Tino Seghal, verbal dance work, or Marina Abramović audience participatory work. These works of instruction or rules set up chance events, and the structure of the event is to put on the event, to capture and
catalyze an event. One of the reasons artists work in series is that they generate an instruction set, a rule set, a set of possibilities; of materials, themes, colors, concerns, narratives, a whole concatenation of things and then through this abstract diagram they start to proliferate these differentiations, bringing works forth in this possibility space they have created for themselves.

One movement is towards exactness, making material do exactly what the program wants and what the artist demands. The other is to follow the material, asking just what is this material or situation and which way does it go. It’s within this spectrum that much art happens.

It can be said that the artist has long ago abandoned the work of producing images for representation. More precisely, the work is an image of thought, the object, the image of this thought, this thought of a procedure, a process a set of instructions.

The artist sets about creating processes, procedures, formats, and signs. In Nicolas Bourriaud’s sense, art is about producing a relationship with the world, with objects, with time, with actions—this relationship to the world and its signs produces the world and looks at how the world is produced. It is an image of becoming. Art is that which becomes and becomes. Becoming, in Deleuze’s sense, is the notion of the world not as a place but always as a becoming place and a becoming being, the world always in front of us, always in motion, always a present.

Becoming, things as process—is indeed an inherent property of algorithmic and interactive structures. But it’s much more than that, older then the now ubiquitous idea of computing and universal machine.

For the most part when people think of art, they think it deals with intuition, inspiration, uniqueness. The public doesn’t often associate the term instructions with art, maybe style or signature but instructions, they more than likely associate with engineering.

Instructions can be understood as an engine between an outcome and an intention. Instructions are the ideas that set forth the art.

Once forms or formats are known, they can in a sense be built by instructions because we know the form, we know the rules, and as we know the rules in a sense we know the instructions to build the form. This can be deceptive because once we know the form or the format often times the work arrives dead or leaden. That’s why artists re-invent forms, to make them contemporary, to make them reflect the moment and sometimes of course as old forms are over turned, entirely new ones emerge. Art is a multiplicity of forms in the making.

In college I saw a great many paintings projected large in my American Art since 1900 class. The luminosity of the images, slides, similar to those my father
projected, along with films, in our home as a child, absolutely entranced me. Paul … our teacher stood in the dark and spoke melodiously over the works, this distribution of various intensities of hues and lights.

At fifteen, I built a light box, a rectangular box about 2.5 feet tall with colored light behind a paper skin. The changing light put a certain spell over me. This, with music and looking out at the water from our home in Miami gave me a delicate sense of vibration and atmosphere. We lived on the bay set off by a large lawn, and the sensation and vibration of the waves rolling in and the colored lights stretching and bending with the waves and their soundings had a magnetic pull.

The influence of those real and hallucinatory fluctuations, lightwaves, and sound waves, the water's seascape and atmosphere above is something, though seemingly so different I found and experienced again in the desert. Though the sparse desert landscape hardly moves, it has an extraordinary expanse, a kind of rolling surface that in time gives forth a great delicacy of differentiation which has a very different sense of time. The hard light of the desert moves thought its terrain, making its plants, its flora and fauna, seem underwater, underwater without the water.

Places and their atmospheres, heat, wet heat, very dry heat, sweltering heat, thinking now of enormous rain drops and rainfalls in Shenzhen, Tobago, Hanoi, a wet, wet, wet, not Thailand, not monsoon wet, the tidal pools and movements of the inland bays of Cape Cod, Point Reyes, their gravity, tides, whirlpools, fog.

Each of these places have fluctuations and atmospheres, states of varying intensities and qualities, not just of light, but touch, humidity, dryness, crispness, hard, cold, they permeate our skin, put us under the weather, yes the atmosphere, the planet's places, each places us in unique tactility, and makes ones body take on, co-habit its condition.

Place conditions us, language conditions us, our culture and its conversations, at war or peace, particular weather, surroundings, all of these things inhabit us, surround us, take hold of us.

When I was sixteen, my eighth-grade classmate Henry Penagos invited me to stay with him in his home for the summer in Bucaramanga, Columbia. I arrived late at night in Caracas, and awoke to an enormous mountain outside my window. I had never quite seen a mountain, certainly not through a window, not from such a high rise building, a towering mountain so perfectly framed outside my window. Years I later I would traverse high up in the Andes. That summer was the profound realization that my life, my American life, was simply one way of going about things. Henry's friends' sense of the U.S. of A. and the many colonial and invasive things they were doing in terms of oil and geopolitics were entirely new to me. I saw myself and my culture at a distance to myself. I knew I been programmed, as everyone was. But I also felt deeply there was so much more than that very surface level. Something I had experienced was me but not me. After that summer I could never see things
simply and absolutely as they were, as given, but more so, that things were contingent and emit all kinds of sensations.

Each of us has a unique tactile and sensate register, a cultural shaping—and the atmosphere of where ever we find ourselves.

Just as the camera has a viewfinder which frames a world, art is framed by various discourses and spaces. In fact the gallery or institution or exhibition space frames the work of art, gives objects and events the status and legitimacy of art. Just as Duchamp’s readymade confronts the sanctioned space of art, its authority whether or not to confer art to such an object, to any thing placed in its space, so does the virtual frame of art, the imaginary that one sets up as arts limit.

But authoritative sanctioning can not alone make an event, for as I said above you may not be convinced. For Duchamp it was not the object of the snow shovel that was art, perhaps its title, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, was, no, it was the select authority of art that would have to ask itself if his store-bought, mass produced, shovel, was or could be admitted to the status of art. It was putting on this question that humored him. How can we take that thing which is the least possible personal thing, the urinal, his famous first ready made, and consider or admit it as art. It was easy enough, soon enough, to see the prodigious Picasso, and anything he touched, as art, but the ordinary coat rack found on the street, that was something entirely different. But it was not the bottle rack or urinal that Duchamp was putting on as a object of art, but rather the jury that embodied the authority, the social institution of the Armory Show, the gatekeepers of art, they and future audiences became the work. What could be would be everything and anything that could be conferred the status of art.

The event of art, one of its pleasures for sure, which was also its disturbances, was, well, what’s art, where are its limits. Who says no, and who says yes. Ultimately you do. You need to be convinced. But believe it or not, that’s unsettling for many people, many people in the art world, art collectors, curators, galleries are themselves at times not sure, not convinced or just don’t know. And so as not to be caught on the side not convinced, only when the tide of insiders is tipping towards or away conviction. a series of permissions must be put in place. This is why we have ever more layers and authoritative sanctioning that vet artists, including certain schools, certain residencies, certain collections. These both shape and sanction the art we get to see and experience and it protects everyone inside so that everything is more or less within the shape of this sanctioned dialogue.

In the complex of the event of art, which are many, is a standing up to, looking at it, looking at you, not just the work, but at the language around it,
the money invested in it, the work itself, if indeed there can be, a work itself.

I write this because I want to be set up this idea of art not simply as objects and things, but as discourses of power, social and academic, market power, and as an artist, those discourses, those societies and the ‘snow shovel’ that puts them on, that turns them out are forever in dialogue.

5

The contemporary artist is a facilitator of events, is facile with materials and discourses, accidents and happenstance, these themselves are events. Where is that limit, beyond which, something becomes other, when something becomes an event. That place, unanticipated, once concealed, now offered, now appearing, that just before was unfamiliar, unknown, is now exposed, to us, uncomfortable and unsure, just what has appeared. How do we suspend disbelief or unknowing and open to what reveals or announces itself as this new thing, this something else, see and sense it, apprehend it. Ah, I see. yes. Oh yes. How do we let ourselves, permit ourselves (not that any permission has been denied, or need be granted by anyone but me, you, each of us) to be receptive to the event, to recognize our surprise and how do we set up, create the instructions, the circumstances, the impetus, the possibility of creating, bringing forth this surprise. This in short is working towards the event of art, its pleasures and possibilities, its hazard.

The event of art is a series of operations, transformations, dissemblings, bringing forth substances and appearances. It is always a possibility to come. It comes by setting up, situating its reception, against, within, outside a certain kind of limit. These limits are cultural, technological, domain expertise, institutional, family, fear, training, too much, too little, each an impasse, each an opening.

Take painting, no longer tied to architecture or a building due to the portability of canvas than lets works travel. Eventually painting can be done out doors, plein air painting, which changes what painters paint. Consider the time horizon of painting with acrylic rather than oil. Take the vcr and the remote control, both allowing for simultaneous and intermittent viewing or freeze framing. There would be no work of Douglas Gordon without this instrument, the video cassette recorder which is no longer used. Take computation or music synthesis or any number of new fabrication techniques, each changes what we can see and what we can know. David Hockney brought forward the theory of art and optics: around 1430, centuries before anyone suspected it, artists began secretly using optical devices, lenses, the concave mirror and the camera obscura to help them make realistic-looking paintings. The camera lucida brought us lens drawing, not recording what the eye sees, but what optics see. Video brought us a new seeing of real time, live time, body-lived time,
Artists used video much differently than television. Same with social networks, Facebook brings forward one attitude and Chatroulette another. The list goes on and on and we’ll explore it more and more throughout the book, this use, misuse, innovative use of ask kinds of tools, events in themselves, bring forth new realities, new social relations and ever new material culture.

Art is always conceptual, of and about material, it is the materialization of an event of appearance.

How to make something appear in the midst of its disappearance. How to make ourselves appear to ourselves so that we see ourselves seeing, sensing ourselves as something emergent, contingent, vulnerable, variable, going with the world, a world that is not simply seen through the screen, commanded by data sets, algorithms and semantic programs, a world that is increasingly being folded into a virtual world, a world making an ersatz double of itself, a world that has already disappeared. That world disappeared in the modern, what Heidegger speaks to us as being taken out of the world, out of nature and its rhythms. With electric light, satellite transmission, global instantaneity, denser and denser cities, ubiquitous recording, insane military hardware, the world becomes profane, and we are unmoored.

As our senses and behavior are captured, observed and modeled, harvested click by click, movement by movement, neuron by neuron, under the pervasiveness watch and contouring of artificial intelligence, we are made other, domesticated and neutralized.

Artists work toward finding new ways to inflect language, to shape experience, to discover new forms, to sound new sounds. Inventors, scientists, designers, musicians do the same. They alter familiar patterns, forge new ones, and see whole new worlds that others haven’t.

But things just don’t happen out of the blue. They happen in context, in the context of cultural everydayness, from political, ideological needs, desires, relationships, the force and flux of things we don’t even think about. We just do things because that’s the way we do them. How else could we do them? We just get on with the doing. The given.

Artists excel at taking the given, the banal and everyday, which we soon enough no longer see, and make that which holds up the given, seen or seen again. This is their stock and trade as the expression goes.

And this goes very deep and very far.

As we transfer authority, our subjectivity and well being to the market and data, to our sensors and screens, and the analytics of such information, the dominant values of our culture increasingly privilege sight over touch, information over empathy, the cognitive over the sensate, the image over the event.
In the age of the Anthropocene, the planet has become a work of human design, its peoples and habitat something to be managed, monitored, and continually observed, all of it in hopes of creating a frictionless and reasoned world. But quite the opposite has happened, “the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity” says Heidegger, all in the name of market and moral authority.

For Nietzsche “only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all eternity.”

For Nietzsche, the world is first and foremost aesthetic: it is a perceptual experience. A phenomenon, not a noumena. A perceptual experience, something that is perceived, not thought. Of course our perception is geographic and cultural – the Eskimo is perceptually more attuned to the varieties of snow—than the pigmy. The perception of snow for the Eskimo gives her 28 words for snow. Perception is perspectival, yes. The delectation of perception as a “good” and “beautiful” of course, the refinement of the senses, yes.

Nietzsche’s claim is to shift the question of the justification of the world from a moral argument — or a conceptual, “reasonable” argument — to an aesthetic, phenomenological one. The artist project—to come to the senses again—without moral argument—without judgement. F. N.’s argument is that art comes first — not truth, not survival, not necessity. In The Genealogy, he argues that man moved from instinct to promise — from immediacy to one who was continuous over time — via art: the artists beat themselves into submission, their bodies a canvas, in order to make something interesting — not something moral or good.

The practice of art, is an excavation of subjectivity, history, memory, in the space now designated art—it is a space to write a new figuration of the social. As Godard said of cinema, we might say of history, that it is alone—away from us, too close to us, and we are its ghost, never certain of the facts, only the affect of a time past. My desire with art is to extend us, me, you and bring us back to ourselves, the world we live in, and our bearing on how it is we make the world, ourselves and art.

Directions, strategies and instructions to create works, often require the removal of the intentionality of the artist. From John Cage’s prepared piano scores, to William Burroughs’s word and image cut ups, to Gerhard Richter’s
scrapping or smear paintings, to Sophie Calle’s chambermaid hotel forays, each author sets up a constraining operation, a kind of limit set that generates material. Think of the Richter paintings and the random optical jumps in the smears, or Calle’s findings of varied personal possessions in hotel rooms, the artist on the one hand opens herself up to the immediacy of chance, while at the same time with this immediacy, makes certain decisions, certain selections such as which articles to photograph, when to stop the painting, which juxtapositions of word image click.

The composing machine, the apparatus of capture, the proliferating engine, whatever we want to call it, sets up, as do algorithms, limits and constraints which allows the apparatus to get on with itself. In this way, the author or artist serves the machine and sets aside herself. The recipe works the artist, works the material, and the artist needs to step aside, alongside, outside, go along and go with, this eventful happening.

The artist allows the recipe to produce all the while setting aside judgment, up until a certain point. Richter does say, now I am finished, it is done, but all along the way unknown things happen. His approach is to allow them to come forth, to appear, to be erased, to appear again, and on and on, the dance goes. Standing aside lets things happen that otherwise we may judge too harshly or abruptly. And that judgement can get in the way of letting the material, or the event of the material, or instructions bring forth sounds and paintings, shapes and ideas, images and happenings.

The artist writes a score, an instruction set, that gives them a way in, a way to go, a going. The production of repeatable strategies may be the most arduous and elusive thing the artist must do, after which it’s just doing.

Is the art the going or is it the trophy brought back by the hunt or the setting up of the strategies? Perhaps it all of it and more.

Art is not all about intentions and the will, in fact not much at all. It is as much about accidents, chance, but a very specific chance. The chance of a form forming, chance as a procedure, more than happenstance. Chance, an intention that puts aside determination, or willfulness. Chance, as in a roll of the dice does not abolish chance, chance that lets things happen, sees things happen, waits and awaits the happening, rides it.

*art is the medium of the day.*

*it is a media.*

*yes, art, the whole of it, its instruments and discourses, its markets and material, it is a media.*

*i want to see art in the event of itself.*
i want to make art
as an activity,
as work,
as a practice,
as a way to live,
as something to do.
something most ordinary
and everyday,
it's work.
its pleasures are its pleasure, no better, no worse, than others.
to each her poison.

The studio then is a set of procedures and operations, a set of recipes and instructions, some made on the go, not yet formalized and others, tried and true. One of them being this background, this and that context.
The work of art than is a kind of forgery. A kind of beautiful deception. Perhaps more in the realm of material objects let’s say, rather than novels or music or architecture. The artwork has so many ways into the con, or forgery, its very existence ordained and predicated on its context. Think of Richard Prince’s painted jokes, a great joke on a joke.
The artwork is a seduction, it can never be simply a fact like a nice photograph that says here I am, aren’t I tasteful and beautiful, I have a good eye. It must be against itself, mock itself, stand for, and at the same time against itself. It operates simultaneously as put down and put up of itself. It is a particular rhetoric. Unlike design or advertising, it is not a communication, it is an expression.

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Art then is an event of finding form and rhythm, and as such, exist. It is that which frames and gives form to the becoming of my sense, my sensations, my play, my touch, my history, any history, it is my becoming with the world, with and through thoughts and things. Art is a mode of going, as much as a thing. Maybe it’s the way things go, the way we make them go and go with them, the way we give our sensations form and rhythm.

What follows then is a series of goings, where art itself, is a media, a language and practice, a discourse and materiality, simultaneously already at the same tome something that hasn’t happened yet, something to come.

10.5

The material of art can be a site, a context, a cultural history, inside the pages of a book, an archive, any space designated as such, even your imagination—can art be made, happen and disappear, dissipate like the clouds in the sky. Can art be an event that is not recorded? Why this insistence on the material work of art. If art is expression and not communication, if it is an intensivity, a turning up or down, a moving sidewise, if it is the movement of sense, moving, then that’s that. It’s complete. As such, whenever, wherever.

We often give and ask of art extraordinary things, like the movement of peoples, the great sway of moving nations, overturning the real, revolution, political becoming, an increased humanity, why don’t we just ask that of life. Art seems to designate something inside life, of life, something we know and don’t know, something already and something yet to be. We certainly ask a lot of art. Perhaps in asking less, there would be more art.

11

The artist asks what the self might be, and how various notions of the self afford and open possibilities.
In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari proffer three modes of artist production that correspond, more or less, to three historical eras: the classical, the romantic, and the modern (see “Of the Refrain”). The classical artist, they claim, is he who lends form to the formless, who forges the very world itself, Yahweh amidst the clay, artist as god. The romantic artist, on the other hand, speaks the forces of the earth: The mountains! The ocean! The undulations of this earthly world!

The modern artist, meanwhile, harnesses the forces of the cosmos. He stands amidst the fray of the cosmic winds, amidst the great swirls of galaxies just taking shape, at the limit of sense, at that precarious juncture of order and chaos. And rather than extending his will over this great teeming, he proffers a gesture or two, hedging here and there, allowing these forces to express themselves within these or those stipulations. The modern artist remains at the periphery of this production, lending shape but not shaping, allowing a form to become, not forging the form.