

Introduction: almost nothing

Precarious/ephemeral

In 1999, the Mexico City based Belgian artist Francis Alÿs asked a street cleaner on the capital's main square (the Zócalo) to sweep debris into a line, which consisted mainly of dust and cigarette butts (figure 1). As the work's title, *To R.L.*, indicates, Alÿs dedicated this work to the British pioneer of Land Art, Richard Long. From 1967, Long had traced lines in the landscape, for example by walking in the grass in a straight line (figure 2). Like Long's work, Alÿs's *To R.L.* was ephemeral: photographs document the works' brief, momentary existence. In both cases, the line acts as a trace of human presence. Alÿs's homage to Long was, nevertheless, at least partly ironic. In *To R.L.* the romantic wanderer's fleeting passage is turned into a derisory pile of rubbish. The street sweeper's efforts, at Alÿs's request, to tidy up the busy square contrast with Long's solitary, leisurely walk. Accordingly, Long's photograph shows a ghostly trail in the grass, whereas Alÿs shot six successive photographs of the sweeper at work on her fragile construction, and one portrait of her smiling afterwards. Furthermore, the paved Zócalo square, a public and political place, is a far cry from the apparently virginal spaces that serve as blank pages for Long's pedestrian markings.

I would like to argue that the differences between Long's work and Alÿs's homage point to a broader distinction – between the ephemeral and the precarious. I am following here the distinction proposed in 2000 by artist Thomas Hirschhorn. 'The term "ephemeral" comes from nature', Hirschhorn explained, whereas the 'precarious' concerns human actions and decisions.¹ According to the *OED*, the word 'precarious' designates that which is 'vulnerable to the will or decision of others'. Nature, as Hirschhorn noted, 'doesn't make decisions'. Examples of ephemeral art can be found in the work of Robert Smithson, as he let his 1970 *Spiral Jetty* be transformed by the tides and currents of a salt lake, or relied on the forces of gravity to slowly destroy his *Partially Buried Woodshed* that same year. Similarly, Giuseppe Penone let nature give shape to his 1968 *Alpi Marittime*, by affixing a steel cast





Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967

of his hand in the place where he had grasped a tree trunk, which went on to grow around the sculpture (figure 3).

In contrast, Hirschhorn's street *Altars*, dedicated to his favourite artists or writers, were modelled on those spontaneous shrines improvised in the street after fatal accidents: such arrangements suddenly appear, change and disappear according to unpredictable removals and contributions by anonymous passersby (figure 4). In Hirschhorn's *Altars*, which he started to install in the street in 1997, handwritten banners and signs, soft toys and balloons are often rearranged or taken away by visitors and passersby, who may also choose to light candles, or add a bouquet of artificial flowers. Both the ephemeral and the precarious suggest a fragile, uncertain process of transformation and disappearance. The word 'precarious', however, designates a temporary state whose existence and duration are subject to repeal; it is at the mercy of another. Indeed, the word derives from the Latin *precarius*: that which is obtained through prayer.

Rather than the cyclical regularity of natural phenomena, or the ineluctable logic of geological shifts and the laws of physics, precarious temporalities tend to coincide, in works such as Hirschhorn's or Alÿs's, with the ebb and flows of anonymous pedestrian traffic, cycles of waste and consumption, rhythms of work and exhaustion. Rather than staging a discrete or monumental





Thomas Hirschhorn, *Raymond Carver Altar*, The Galleries at Moore, Philadelphia, 2000

encounter, like Land Art or Arte Povera, between the natural and the man-made, precarious works usually consist of daily activities, banal objects and situations, or rubbish – to the point of sometimes disappearing completely into the very fabric of the viewer's everyday. Precarious works thus question the emergence, maintenance and disappearance of human constructions and endeavours, and hence their potential success or failure. They articulate a fragile balance between presence and absence, material and immaterial, something and nothing. This in-between state sets precarious practices apart from artistic investigations of entropic forms and processes (such as Smithson's), as well as works involving their own planned destruction, whether spectacular or systematic. As we shall see, the inherent uncertainty of precariousness equally inflects the artist's use of impermanent materials, whether natural or man-made, and the fleeting performative gesture – both recurrent features of twentieth- and twenty-first century art. Though many precarious works are transient, not all transient works are precarious.

An example of 'transient art', classified as such in Tate's excellent 2012 online exhibition *The Gallery of Lost Art*, was an ice construction which was left by British artist Anya Gallaccio to melt over three months in a London warehouse in 1996 (figure 5).² At first sight, Gallaccio's *intensities and surfaces* brings to mind Allan Kaprow's 1967 *Fluids*, which consisted of seven structures similarly built with ice blocks (figure 6). The structures were built



5 Anya Gallaccio, *intensities and surfaces*, 1996. Installation view, Boiler Room, Wapping Pumping Station, London, 1996

by seven different teams simultaneously across various locations in Los Angeles, following the artist's instructions. While the texture and light effects falling on the ice appealed to Kaprow as much as to Gallaccio, what mattered to the former was the teamwork involved in the construction of each of these short-term architectures, and the responses from passersby who may have come across them by chance in the cityscape. Thus, the human effort and individual experiences sought by Kaprow characterise *Fluids* as a precarious, rather than an ephemeral work, even though the artist drew on the same natural properties as Gallaccio's melting installation. And it is the urban location, as well as the time and effort of labour involved in constructing the work, that link Kaprow's *Fluids* to Alÿs's *To R.L.* An even more striking analogy between these two artists' works can be found in Alÿs's earlier *Paradox of Praxis I* of 1997, in which he pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City for many hours until it melted (see cover image and figure 47). Indeed, I will argue in this book that 1990s works such as Alÿs's *To R.L.* or *Paradox of Praxis I*, like Hirschhorn's *Raymond Carver Altar*, occupy a specific field within contemporary art that can be traced back to 1960s art practices.

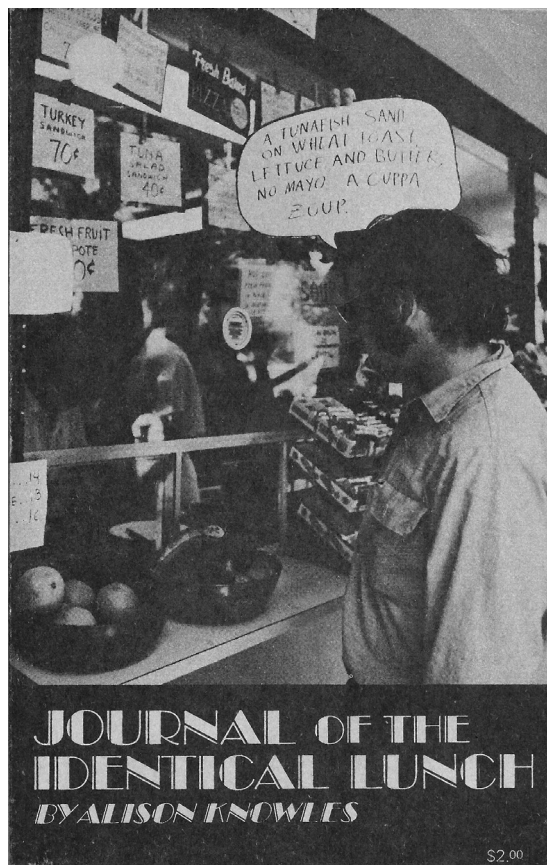
Moving away from the ephemeral associated with natural materials, whether in nature or in the gallery, I would like to broaden this comparison between the transient and the precarious by drawing two examples from the field of non-sculptural performance. In the first instance, visitors were invited to participate in Marina Abramović's performance, entitled *The Artist is Present*, staged over the course of the artist's 2010 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the museum atrium, Abramović sat at a white table. After waiting in line, each participant was allowed to sit silently across from her, looking at her for however long they wished. As the



Allan Kaprow, *Fluids*, Trousdale Estate, Los Angeles, 1967

artist looked back at them, some viewers smiled, some were uncomfortable, others spoke of a 'transforming experience'.³ A crowd usually gathered in the atrium to watch the ongoing performance. One year later, visitors to the same institution were given the opportunity to participate in another form of performance. On seven different days in the winter of 2011, anyone could sign up to have lunch with artist Alison Knowles in the museum's first-floor café. On their arrival, around eleven visitors were shown to a long table, identical to the others, except for paper placemats listing the unique menu that they would subsequently be served: a tunafish sandwich on brown bread, and a choice of soup or buttermilk. After having enjoyed their meal, and perhaps chatted with the artist, the participants left. Few eaters in the busy café noticed that this had been a performance of Alison Knowles's *Identical Lunch*.⁴ While Abramović has sought, from the late 1960s onwards, to confront and provoke her audience through her bodily presence, Knowles and her fellow Fluxus artists have preferred to create 'event scores' that can be performed by anyone who reads them, sometimes in the course of their everyday lives. While Abramović cast her encounter with the viewer as an event, Knowles turned a daily occurrence, such as eating a sandwich, into a performance. Indeed, *Identical Lunch* was born when Knowles noticed, some time around 1967, that she often ate the same meal in a diner near her workplace. This prompted her to start keeping a diary of her 'identical lunches', and to invite her friends and acquaintances to eat the same meal, with or without her, and to record their experiences in turn. The results would be gathered in the 1971 *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (figure 7).⁵

The short-lived, transient and intangible quality of much performance art, which characterises both Abramović's and Knowles's works, remains



7 Alison Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch*, San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971

markedly different in each. Although both occupy the realm of human activities and decisions outlined by Hirschhorn, the banality of the *Identical Lunch* contrasts with the spectacular nature of Abramović's use of the museum as a stage. Unlike *The Artist is Present*, the *Identical Lunch* is precarious, I would argue, inasmuch as it occupies the space of mundane routines, to the point that it may pass completely unnoticed.

Knowles's aesthetic of the everyday was strongly influenced by the event scores of another Fluxus artist, George Brecht. These verbal instructions, consisting sometimes of a few single words, were written on individual cards, which the artist started to mail to friends and acquaintances around 1961, before publishing them as a Fluxus boxed collection in 1963 (figures 21, 23). The 1961 *Three Lamp Events*, for example, reads:

- on.
- off.
- lamp
- off. on.

Such words can be used as instructions for a performance, involving switching a light on and off, in front of an audience, or as a signal to consider this banal activity, which we perform many times a day, as an ‘event’ in itself. That same year, Brecht described his practice in terms of what he called ‘borderline’ art. As he described ‘an art verging on the non-existent’, ‘an art at the point of imperceptibility’, he provided an insight into what, in my eyes, is the fundamental uncertainty that characterises the nature of precarious art.⁶ An artwork ‘*at the point of imperceptibility*’, *on the verge of* disappearance, an action that *risks* passing unnoticed, an object that *teeters* on the point of destruction: such is the vocabulary that describes the field of precarious practices since the 1960s. Indeed, this converges with another other set of meanings associated with the word ‘precarious’ according to the *OED*: ‘liable to fail, exposed to risk, hazardous’.

Often, as we shall see, the borderline outlined by Brecht is mapped on to others, such as the line between success and failure, as per the definition of ‘precarious’, but also that between value and waste, as the work is ‘exposed’ to destruction and disposal by others. Since the ‘borderline’ work risks being thrown out or disappearing into the banality of the everyday, this uncertain state between appearance and disappearance also coincides with a more general borderline: between something and nothing. This status as ‘*almost nothing*’ is what allows precarious works to raise a fundamental question: at what point does nothing becomes something, and vice versa?

Nothings

It is the uncertain oscillation of ‘borderline’ art between the perceptible and the imperceptible, between something and nothing, which warrants my use of the adverb ‘almost’ in the title of this book. In order to underscore the significance of this adverb, I would like to situate the precarious practices discussed in this book in a context outlined by a number of studies and exhibitions which have focused, in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century, on ‘nothing’ as a theme of art since the early twentieth century. Indeed, precarious works of artists such as George Brecht or Francis Alÿs were referred to or included in some of these projects, along with those by other artists that I will be discussing in this book. Two of Alÿs’s works were illustrated in a publication edited by Ele Carpenter and Graham Gussin that accompanied the 2001 travelling exhibition *Nothing*, which set out to investigate a field of interests including ‘absence, formlessness, invisibility and the immaterial’.⁷ For their part, Brecht’s event

scores were included in *Fast Nichts (Almost Nothing)*, an exhibition that took place in Hamburg between September 2005 and April 2006. The exhibition proposed a focus on a 'minimalistic tendency' in art since the 1960s, characterised by a 'new silence' and a general withdrawal from visibility.⁸

A year earlier, in their 2004 exhibition titled *Densité ± 0*, curators Caroline Ferreira d'Oliveira and Marianne Lanavère had highlighted the importance of Brecht's scores in their catalogue, as well as including a work by Francis Alÿs in the show. In their catalogue essay, they described this type of work as 'micro-events' or 'micro-actions' tending, along with a number of other practices, towards the 'invisible, the void, the impalpable and the fugitive'.⁹ Like Carpenter and Gussin, Lanavère and Ferreira d'Oliveira listed 'the immaterial' as a theme of their exhibition, alongside emptiness and the imperceptible.

Speaking of 'nothing', Carpenter pointed out the 'difficulty of pinning down a concept which – paradoxically – is impossible to quantify'.¹⁰ Indeed, this difficulty comes through in the variety and inconsistency of many exhibitions on the theme of 'nothing'. *The Big Nothing*, a 2004 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, embraced an extremely broad definition including not only the 'void', the 'invisible' 'absence' and 'zero', like the aforementioned exhibitions, but also notions as widely different as 'anarchy, the absurd, nonsense, zip ... infinity, atmosphere, ellipsis, negation, annihilation, whiteness, blackness' and 'abjection' (in addition to the 'formlessness' also of interest to Carpenter and Gussin).¹¹

Within this potentially sprawling field of nothingness can be singled out some more specific strands. As a starting point, let us compare for example the above-mentioned references to George Brecht's scores in *Densité ± 0* and *Fast Nichts*. In *Fast Nichts* Brecht's scores were inscribed within a trajectory of 'reductive, minimalist tendencies in art since circa 1960' characterised by an 'art of simplicity'.¹² The exhibition also included Minimalist sculptures by Dan Flavin, Carl Andre and Richard Serra, conceptual pieces by Joseph Kosuth, On Kawara and Lawrence Weiner, as well as abstract works by Josef Albers and Blinky Palermo, and photographs spanning the twentieth century, from the work of Albert Renger-Patsch and Alfred Stieglitz to that of Thomas Ruff.

In contrast, *Densité ± 0* focused less on this 'reductive' tendency than on what the curators perceived as the 'field of possibilities' opened by Brecht's event scores, which can be interpreted in a potentially infinite range of ways, whether through action or imagination. For the curators, Brecht's scores thus belong to a field of 'immanence', influenced by a Zen-inspired philosophy.¹³ Brecht's interest in Zen, they reminded us, was mediated by the crucial figure of composer John Cage, whose engagement with Zen master D.T. Suzuki was pivotal for his exploration of silence, chance and everyday noise. That Cage was also included in *Fast Nichts* suggests, in my eyes, that this exhibition collapsed two radically different tendencies in the exploration of nothingness:

one bent on the minimalist and the reductive, and the other open to chance and the everyday. Since my study of precarious 'borderline' art will resolutely follow the latter trajectory, I would like to take this opportunity to touch further on this fundamental divergence.

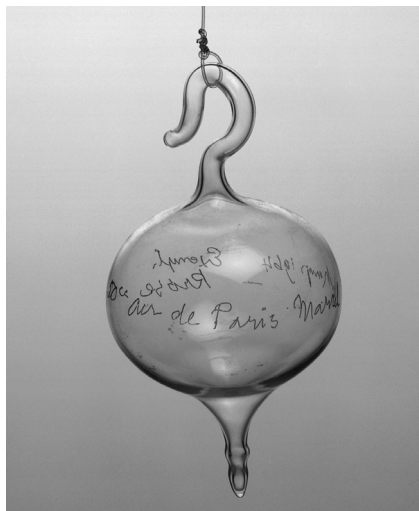
In particular, I would like to link the reductive, subtractive trajectory to a broader tendency put forward in a number of exhibitions that sought to position the artists' turn to 'nothing' as a strategy of negation and refusal. In the above-mentioned catalogue for the *Big Nothing*, for example, curator Ingrid Schafner pointed to two genealogies of such a strategy. On the one hand, her vocabulary appears indebted to the anti-art stance inaugurated by Dada's refusal of meaning and value, often accompanied by a celebration of destruction – hence her references to 'anarchy, the absurd, nonsense' and to Marcel Duchamp's affirmation, cited in the catalogue, that 'Dada is nothing'.¹⁴ On the other hand, Schafner's references to 'whiteness' and 'blackness' evoke the history of the monochrome – which she calls 'modernism's tendency to zero', citing works by Kasimir Malevich, Robert Ryman and Ad Reinhardt.¹⁵ When we look at these two genealogies more closely, however, it becomes evident that both tendencies exceeded the logic of 'reductivist impulses, refutations and refusals' emphasised by Schafner.¹⁶ Indeed, Martina Weinhardt's very good essay, in the catalogue for another exhibition on 'nothing' (*Nichts*, at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt in 2006), also singled out Duchamp and Malevich as the two central historical references in this history, but provided a more nuanced analysis than Schafner's inventory.¹⁷ Let us briefly look at each of these two genealogies in turn.

Rather than navigate the immense literature on Dada and Duchamp in order to single out these artists' relation to nothingness, I would like to sketch some general divergences that might emerge from different interpretations of Duchamp's readymades. When Duchamp submitted a urinal, dated and inscribed with the signature 'R. Mutt', to the Salon des Indépendants in New York in 1917, this *Fountain* appeared as a radical challenge to accepted definitions of taste, value and meaning in the institutional and discursive field of art. The readymade could thus be read as a destructive Dada 'nothing' in multiple ways: it was an insignificant object, it was an artwork that involved no work beyond its selection, and it challenged existing categories of aesthetic judgement. On the other hand, however, numerous interpretations of Duchamp's *oeuvre* have revealed the wealth of other issues, ideas and practices that ran through his work, including the readymades. For our purposes, I would like to point to one study in particular, by Thierry Davila, that has proposed an in-depth reading of Duchamp's *inframince*, a term which also came to the fore in the essays for *Densité ± 0*.¹⁸ In his notes on the *inframince* or 'infra-thin', Duchamp ventured into the realm of the barely perceptible, citing examples such as 'the heat of a (recently occupied) seat' or the sound produced by the

friction of two legs clad in velvet trousers as one walks.¹⁹ Just as the *Densité ± 0* curators highlighted the exhibition artists' quest to capture 'the slightest nuance' in the world, Davila proposed that Duchamp's *inframince* was a means 'to open the field of perception' by introducing infinitesimal differences.²⁰ Like Davila, the *Densité ± 0* curators found examples of this *inframince* in works by Duchamp such as his 1919 *Air de Paris*, a glass apothecary phial containing, as a label informs us, 50 cubic centimetres of Paris air (figure 8).

Here an infra-thin transparent surface – both present and vanishing (if perfectly clean) – serves to mark an imperceptible difference between two apparently identical, if intangible, materials: the Paris air captured by the artist in 1919 and whatever other air surrounds the work as we view it. Significantly, Davila extended his analysis of the *inframince* to the readymades themselves, which, as he suggested, similarly perform an *inframince* 'écart' – a gap or displacement – and a 'distinction without thickness' between the mass-produced urinal and its *Fountain* double, appropriated by the artist through an inscription, a title and a change of position.²¹ It is in this sense that Duchamp's readymades, in Davila's terms, 'describe nothing but a threshold of visibility, of perceptibility, of intelligibility'.²² Rather than a negation, the readymade thus opens up a field of enquiry into the very nature of perception as a performative process.²³

The monochrome may also appear at first sight, like the Duchampian readymade, to be driven by a list of refusals. Following the rupture inaugurated by abstract art, the monochrome excluded the illusionist, perspectival space of representation. Furthermore, unlike much abstract art, the monochrome



evacuated any suggestion of figure/ground relationships and reduced composition to its barest minimum – whether to suggest an immaterial space (as did Malevich), to explore the picture's materiality (like Robert Rauschenberg), or to search for an 'essence' of painting devoid, in Reinhardt's words, of 'symbols', 'signs', 'ideas', 'attributes' or 'qualities'.²⁴ As a contrast with such refutations, however, I would like to turn to Cage's texts on Robert Rauschenberg's monochromatic *White Paintings* of 1951 (figure 9).

While a 1953 essay lists, very much like Reinhardt, a series of refusals – of 'subject' and 'message', 'image' and 'idea', as well as 'technique' and 'talent', 'intention' and 'beauty' among others²⁵ – a well-known text of 1961 focused on what actually happens once these elements are removed. Rauschenberg's monochromes, Cage argued, became 'airports for the lights, shadows and particles' and 'caught whatever fell on them'.²⁶ Indeed, with this interpretation, the *White Paintings* appear as the visual counterpart of Cage's famous 1952 *4'33"*, a musical composition that invites the performer to remain silent for this specific duration of time, during which the audience inevitably ends up focusing on the sounds, noises and micro-events that occur in the concert hall.

Just as Duchamp's readymade can be read as both a strategy of refusal and an *inframince* intervention in the everyday, then, the two trajectories of the monochrome similarly diverge when it comes to their relation to nothingness. In one narrative, Minimalism is read as pursuing the monochrome's rejection of representation and illusion by further turning the viewer's attention away from the art object's visual properties, and towards the specific conditions of its production and exhibition. In the other account, the monochrome contributed to dissolve the art object into the mundane space of the everyday, thus inviting the kind of heightened attention to dust particles and infinitesimal nuances at play in Duchamp's performative *inframince*.

Dematerialisations

These two tendencies were brought together by John Chandler and Lucy Lippard in a 1968 essay on what they famously diagnosed as a contemporary 'dematerialization of art'.²⁷ This dematerialisation, they argued, involved challenging the status of 'art as an object' through a 'deemphasis', as Lippard would subsequently call it, of the 'material aspects' traditionally ascribed to the autonomous artwork: 'uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness'.²⁸ Contrasting the work of Rauschenberg with that of Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd or Sol LeWitt, Chandler and Lippard highlighted two 'sources' or drives for this trend towards dematerialisation: Rauschenberg's work pointed to 'art as action', whereas Minimalism opened the way for 'art as idea'.²⁹ With Minimalism, observed Chandler and Lippard, 'more and more work' was 'designed in the studio but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen'. Like



9 Robert Rauschenberg, *White Paintings* [two panel], 1951

LeWitt himself, Chandler and Lippard interpreted this new division of labour as signalling a possible conception of the art object as ‘merely the end product’, whereas the ‘idea’ had become primordial. It is in this sense that Chandler and Lippard concluded that in such cases, ‘matter is denied, as sensation has been transformed into concept’. This gesture of denial, it seems, extended the refusals embodied in Reinhardt’s monochromes to Judd’s ‘specific objects’ and beyond, as it found its logical conclusion not only in LeWitt’s structures, but also in text-based works by conceptual artists such as John Baldessari, Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language. In some of these artists’ works, as Martina Weinhart has pointed out, the black or white monochrome became, in effect, the material support for the exploration of art-related ideas.³⁰

In the other trajectory, inaugurated with Rauschenberg’s works according to Chandler and Lippard, ‘matter has been transformed into energy and time-motion’.³¹ Here the monochrome – in its Cagean interpretation – is the first step in the direction of opening the artwork to fields beyond art in a variety of ways: through the use of intangible materials, or the focus on process, performance and experience. Thus a line can be drawn from Duchamp’s *inframince*, via Cage’s *4’33”* and Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* in the 1950s, to George Brecht’s event scores or Allan Kaprow’s performances in the early 1960s, and beyond, to conceptual practices later in the decade by artists such as Bruce

Nauman or Tom Marioni, whose work I will also discuss in this study. While this lineage is well established in the history of contemporary art, I wish to map out the specificities of its defining features and of the issues at stake.

In order to further distinguish between various forms of dematerialisation in the late 1960s, I would like to introduce into this discussion a lesser-known essay, written by art critic Lawrence Alloway shortly after Chandler and Lippard's. Like them, Alloway addressed the changing status of the art object in contemporary practices. As Alloway explained, an artwork traditionally required 'a degree of compactness (so that the object is united, composed, stable)'.³² In the 'sixties', however 'a number of non-compact art forms' had started to proliferate that appeared either 'diffuse or nearly imperceptible'. Unlike Chandler and Lippard, however, Alloway chose to describe this shift not as a dematerialisation, a 'deemphasis' suggesting operations of subtraction or reduction. Instead, he spoke of an 'expanding and disappearing work of art', the contours of which were being shaped and blurred according to new 'interfaces' between art and fields of enquiry lying outside the world of art. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Alloway's discussion may have been informed by his reading of the 'borderline' precarious practices developed by George Brecht and Allan Kaprow during that decade. In the context of this introduction, I will only point out that Alloway's definition of an 'expanding and disappearing work of art' comes closer to the Cagean and the *inframince* genealogies than to the logic of 'strategies of refusal' and negation. Chandler and Lippard had themselves remarked, like Alloway, that 'art as action' had 'expanded' to the extent that it had become 'inseparable from its non-art surroundings'. Nevertheless, they appeared to give priority to 'art as idea', in the form of an 'ultraconceptual' form of dematerialisation 'in which the object is simply an epilogue to the fully evolved concept'.³³

After the publication of her article with John Chandler, Lippard herself acknowledged that this 'rejective' stance, as they had called it in 1968, did not characterise all forms of conceptual art.³⁴ As she declared in a 1969 interview, some conceptual artists adopted 'an acceptive instead of a rejective approach', inasmuch as they sought to 'include ... far more than ... they exclude'. A 'rejective approach' was attributed to those artists concerning themselves exclusively 'with Art' and 'with retaining a consistency, or coherency'. Whereas such artists were influenced by the 'rejectively self-contained' structures of Minimalism (as Lippard would describe them in a later text),³⁵ other conceptual artists embraced a Dada and Surrealist lineage of acceptance instead. As examples of such 'acceptive' conceptual practices, Lippard cited Bruce Nauman, alongside the chance experiments of Cage and the 'borderline' practices of Brecht, Fluxus and Allan Kaprow, all discussed in the first part of this book.

Artists such as Robert Barry, noted Lippard, hovered on the boundary of

these two categories: his work is 'acceptive' in that it tends to 'use non-art, immaterial situations' but it is 'rejective' to the extent that it may impose 'a closed instead of an open system' that will work to assert 'a formal or structural point of view'.³⁶ In this way, Lippard extended Alloway's opposition between the 'solid', 'united, composed, stable' object on the one hand, and 'diffuse' or 'expanded' art forms on the other. Even 'non-compact' forms, she suggested, can carry over certain artistic concerns with 'compact', coherent and consistent structures. Although Lippard's inventory in *Six Years*, like Alloway's list of 'non-compact' art forms, made no distinction among these two radically different approaches, I would argue that this divergence played a crucial role in the development of various kinds of dematerialisations in the late 1960s, including the emergence of precarious artworks. In this study, I will trace the trajectory of a specific form of 'diffuse or nearly imperceptible' work back to the early 1960s, and pinpoint some of the ways in which it evolved throughout the decade, before being taken up again by artists in the 1990s. In the lineage of Duchamp's *inframince* as well as Cage's experiments with chance, this kind of precarious practice will prove to be 'acceptive' and inclusive, as well as 'expanded' to the point of sometimes 'disappearing'.

Material, immaterial, invisible

In the late 1960s, dematerialised and expanding practices promised to challenge the fetishism of the modern art object, whose value had traditionally been defined by its status as a unique commodity exchanged in an art market with its own discursive hierarchies and economic rules. Indeed, in their 1968 article, Chandler and Lippard assumed that art dealers would not be able to 'sell art-as-idea': hence, they argued, dematerialised art posed a simultaneous challenge to 'physical materialism' as well as 'economic materialism'.³⁷ By the time Lippard published her compendium of dematerialised practices in 1973, however, she had to admit that: 'Hopes that "conceptual art" would be able to avoid ... general commercialization ... were for the most part unfounded'.³⁸ This inevitable commodification of art – however dematerialised – will serve as a backdrop for my observations on the evolution of precarious practices from the early 1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Rather than throwing out the baby with the bathwater, retrospective readings of conceptual art's ultimately failed attempt to escape the nets of capital have nevertheless yielded significant conclusions. Some of the more relevant questions today have been raised by a number of studies in the past ten years that have revisited a central innovation of conceptual art: the creation of exhibitions in which there appeared to be, quite simply, nothing to see. Inaugurated in 1958 with Yves Klein's *Le Vide* at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, such forms of empty exhibitions multiplied in the late 1960s,

and included Lippard's own curatorial experiments. In addition to being discussed in the above-mentioned studies and exhibitions focused on an art of 'nothing', these empty displays or exhibitions of so-called invisible works have also been the subject of exhibition surveys, including curator Ralph Rugoff's 2005 *A Brief History of Invisible Art* and its updated version in 2012 under the title *Invisible: Art about the Unseen, 1957–2012*, and the travelling 2009 exhibition entitled *Voids: A Retrospective*, curated by John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret and Clive Phillpot. As with discussions of nothing, a dividing line separates those curators who considered the empty gallery as a refusal, and those who sought to tease out the specificities of these voids. For example, the exhibition *Voids* literally presented visitors with a series of empty rooms that contained no object or document whatsoever. An explicative wall text displayed at each room's entrance replaced the actual recreation of each historical exhibition with information about the event and the component elements present at the time. (Yves Klein's exhibition, for example, had involved two Republican guards standing on each side of a curtained entrance, as well as painting the gallery's furniture white and serving blue cocktails at the opening.) In their choice to leave the exhibition rooms empty, the curators of *Voids* put forward a logic of refusal similar to that showcased in the previously mentioned exhibition *The Big Nothing*, which had included a documentary section mapping out the history of closed exhibitions which visitors were unable to enter – the mirror image of the empty gallery. In contrast to *Voids*, Rugoff's exhibitions foregrounded the rich variety of meanings historically attributed to the empty gallery and apparently invisible art. Like *Densité ± 0*, Rugoff's exhibitions included works so tenuous or commonplace as to be *nearly* imperceptible, as well as practices that mobilised other senses than the visual. The empty gallery was shown to be used to different ends, ranging, according to Rugoff, from 'institutional critique', 'avant-garde antagonism' or 'cultural commentary', to 'personal humility', 'social idealism' and even 'transcendental mysticism'.³⁹

The first conclusion that can be drawn from Rugoff's exhibitions – in marked contrast with *Voids* – is that there has never been, in fact, such a thing as either nothing or a completely empty gallery. In this sense, such exhibitions chimed with Cage's demonstration, with 4'33", that there was no such a thing as silence. As Chandler and Lippard noted in 1968, the detractors' frequent cry that in conceptual art 'there is "not enough"' – or even, one might add, 'nothing' – "to look at", needed be rephrased: was it not rather a matter of there being 'not enough of what they are accustomed to looking for'?⁴⁰ So-called empty exhibitions or invisible works, it turned out, contained in fact a range of non-visual material – whether sounds, texts or information, nearly imperceptible objects or interventions in the architectural space of the gallery. They played with the viewers' expectations, actions or imaginary

projections, as they stood looking for something to see in the white cube of the gallery.

In the same way as simplistic definitions of emptiness or nothing have been challenged, the very term 'dematerialization' has repeatedly been rephrased since Chandler and Lippard's usage. Just as Robert Barry's 'dematerialization' was described by the curators of *Densité ± 0* as a 'materialization of the invisible',⁴¹ some studies of conceptual practices have defined them more precisely as experiments with language, publicity or systems, as well as new forms of work and exchange.⁴² Other authors have proposed replacing the term 'dematerialization' with more accurate descriptions such as 'displacements and rethinkings of materiality itself' (according to Michael Newman) or 'differently material' practices (Shannon Jackson).⁴³ My study of precarious practices similarly aims at developing a more specific vocabulary to describe and analyse some of the new forms of materiality as they emerged in the 1960s and evolved at the end of the twentieth century. In this way, I will inscribe these artistic forms within broader shifts in the development of capitalism during this period, from the accelerated production and consumption of material goods of the late 1950s, to the increased development of a service economy in the late 1960s, and the 1990s explosion of the information economy's 'immaterial' products.

Significantly, such shifts in perspective in the definition of dematerialised art practice allow us to leave behind a vocabulary relating to absolute values often associated with terms such as 'nothing' or 'emptiness' – be it the provocative rejection of all forms of order, reason and meaning, an abdication to the overpowering depths of the void, or a metaphysical search for the invisible and the infinite. It is this move away from the absolute, of course, that the *almost* in 'almost nothing' signifies. By existing on the brink of disappearance, on the borderline between art and the everyday, the precarious practices discussed in this book occupy a space of immanence far removed from any mystical, nihilistic or scientific aspirations. Rather, the material existence of the 'almost nothing', as we will see, has often been shaped by the artists' desire to be as matter-of-fact, to add as little to the world, as possible; reality is disturbed only in discreet, casual, minute and often reversible ways, at the risk of passing unnoticed. This is why precarious practices shun the illusionistic ambiguities between reality and artifice, as in the case of other practices verging on nothing by artists such as Ceal Floyer, whose work has been frequently included in exhibitions on this topic. Above all, precarious works are attached to concrete actions and constructions in the here-and-now, in order to capture the fleetingness of the everyday. Here, my perspective dovetails with British philosopher Simon Critchley's use of the term 'almost nothing' as the title of one of his books.⁴⁴ In his attempt to avoid both nihilism and the desire to overcome it, Critchley proposed 'almost nothing' as a refusal

of absolutes, in favour of an Emersonian focus on the ‘particulars’ of the everyday.

Paradoxically, the ‘almost nothing’, according to my definition, turns out to be invisible precisely *because* it is visible everywhere and anywhere. This ‘hypervisibility’, as Mieke Bal called it in her essay for the exhibition *Nichts*, is able ‘to join forces’ with ‘invisibility’ in the exploration of forms that challenge ‘imagery’, ‘figuration’ and the fetishised materiality of the commodified art object, while nevertheless staying clear of either ‘abstraction’ or the ‘sublime’.⁴⁵ As Bal suggested, artworks that plumb the fields of both invisibility and hypervisibility can make ‘visible what is there for everyone to see but which remains unseen, because it does not have a form that stands out’. Unsurprisingly in my eyes, Bal related that which ‘is there for everyone to see but which remains unseen’ to the everyday itself, which has been defined in these terms.⁴⁶ As Maurice Blanchot explained in a 1962 text to which I will return later in this book, the everyday may be everywhere, but we cannot, in fact, grasp it.⁴⁷

In addition, Bal’s repeated references to the ‘formless’ echo the recurrence of this term in discussions of nothingness in art – as we saw earlier – as well as Blanchot’s definition of the everyday as evading form. In this book, I will seek to demonstrate how the material specificities of precarious practices were shaped through diverse interrogations of the very processes involved in defining a ‘form that stands out’, as Bal put it,⁴⁸ or, in other words, an order and logic that gives the artwork its ‘compact’ and ‘coherent’ character, as Alloway would phrase it. Based in the elusive field of lived experience, the everyday according to Blanchot evades both administrative structures and forms of knowledge. It is distorted through either representation or classification. Furthermore, unlike the sensationalist news story, the everyday is fundamentally devoid of spectacular events.

Indeed, the second characteristic that the invisible or nearly invisible works discussed by Rugoff had in common – and what his exhibitions did share with *Voids* as well as with most of the previously mentioned shows revolving around the question of ‘nothing’ – involves a general resistance to definitions of the art exhibition as entertainment and spectacle. As early as 2002, Rugoff had pitted ‘invisible art’ against recent ‘architectural showpieces such as the Guggenheim Bilbao or the new Tate Modern’ which encourage ‘ever more spectacular exhibitions’.⁴⁹ Over ten years later, he could only confirm this tendency, which constituted, alongside the multiplication of international art exhibitions and the increasingly high prices reached in auction sales, so many ‘flamboyant displays’ of capital.⁵⁰ In his 2004 foreword to *Densité ± 0*, Henry-Claude Cousseau similarly located the exhibition in a context dominated by ‘immediate spectacularity’.⁵¹ Just as *Voids* co-curator Laurent Le Bon described the exhibition as a ‘pause’ in the ‘frenetic race’ of the cultural industry, the curator

of the above-mentioned *Nichts* described ‘stillness, emptiness and silence’ as a response to the excessive quantity of images in contemporary society.⁵² In the same way, the ‘insignificant’ and uneventful everyday defined by Blanchot resists its spectacularisation through mass media.

In this sense, the art of the ‘almost nothing’ discussed in this book dovetails as much with the aforementioned field of practices concerned with ‘nothing’ or the ‘invisible’, as with a range of other contemporary practices that set themselves against the spectacular by exploring the insignificant, the trifling, or the anti-monumental. Thus we shall see how precarious works intersected with practices of junk art, assemblage, the ‘makeshift’, the ‘derisory’ and the ‘unmonumental’ (both in the 1960s and more recently), as well as with various forms of performance, participatory and conceptual art, and even certain kinds of optical and kinetic experiments. Comparing precarious works from the 1960s to more recent contemporary practices will allow us to draw out their specificities and carve out a new field of enquiry beyond any single medium or format. Most importantly, I will argue in this book that it is the precarious materiality of such artworks that allows them to explore political and economic issues.

The opposition I have just sketched out between almost imperceptible works and spectacular tendencies in contemporary art logically steers us towards a discussion of the politics of the ‘society of the spectacle’, as Guy Debord famously termed it in 1967, and of the Situationists’ refusal to produce art objects in favour of the practice of *détournement* and ‘psychogeographic’ experiments such as the *dérive*. Certainly, the Situationists’ celebration of lived experience against the alienation of capitalism was directly echoed in Blanchot’s definition of the everyday as ‘*ce qui se vit*’ (‘what is lived’) rather than ‘*ce qui se regarde ou se montre*’ ‘*sans nulle relation active*’ (‘what is watched or is shown’, ‘with no active relation’), in mass media in particular.⁵³ Like the Situationists, artists producing precarious works explored the everyday as an alternative to capitalism’s ever more ubiquitous spectacle. As Brian Kuan Wood suggests in a 2015 essay, the *société du spectacle* described by Debord had mutated, by the first decade of the twenty-first century, into a global capitalism based on visibility and speculation.⁵⁴ Moreover, Kuan Wood argues that the ‘dematerialization’ of 1960s conceptual art, which highlighted the relations between material support and immaterial ideas, processes and affects, opened a path for reflections on the ‘economy of visibility’ that appears to drive capitalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁵⁵ In this book, I will analyse the alternative ‘economy of visibility’ at work in ‘borderline’, ‘hypervisible’ or nearly imperceptible artworks. By relating their status as objects to the capitalist practices of consumption and production of commodities, and to forms of artistic and non-artistic work, I hope to shed some light on what Kuan Wood aptly described as a ‘tangle’ of ‘symbolic, informational, and economic

values'⁵⁶ which dematerialised, or 'expanding and disappearing' practices (as I prefer to call them), sought to embed in new material forms.

Precariousness, precarity and the 'human condition'

In order to start unpacking this complex nexus of ontological issues connecting the status of the object to political questions raised by socio-economic developments, I have turned to Hannah Arendt's 1958 study *The Human Condition* for several reasons. Firstly, Arendt's interest in 'human existence as it has been given' shares the same basis as the 'acceptive' approach of precarious practices: it is a matter of addressing the situation of the individual, here and now, in the concrete world, on a human scale.⁵⁷ Arendt's starting point, like Critchley's in *Very Little, Almost Nothing*, is a condemnation of the way '[o]ur culture is endlessly beset with Promethean myths of the overcoming of the human condition'.⁵⁸ Secondly, Arendt's analysis of this condition focused on its 'most elementary articulations', which are none other than human activities themselves.⁵⁹ There are three main activities for Arendt: work, labour and action. Whereas work aims at the human production of artificial goods, the term 'labour' designates, according to Arendt, the non-productive activities required by 'vital necessities', such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children.⁶⁰ The third form of activity that Arendt highlights is action, also closely connected to thought and speech. The relations between precarious artworks and these three activities will be one of the guiding threads running through this study. Such human activities were defined by Arendt in terms of their relations to biological and natural cycles, and the kind of relationships they set up between individuals. Clearly dependent on the limits of the human body as much as on the contingent networks of collective decisions, these human activities are shown to be precarious – a third reason why I believe Arendt's perspective to be a key reference for this study. Indeed – and this is a fourth and final point – Arendt tried to situate the evolution of these activities historically, thus relating developments in the human condition to socio-political changes. And it is within this initial historical context that this study similarly seeks to inscribe the origins and evolution of precarious works.

In fact, *The Human Condition*, written by Arendt in late 1950s America, provides us with indispensable insights into the evolution of the three fields of human activity – work, labour and action – and its impact on the 'human condition' in the expanding consumer society of that time. In this way, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, Arendt's study sheds light on the very context in which the precarious practices of assemblage and happenings emerged. By relating Arendt's study to contemporary sociological reflections on 1950s America, I will outline a network of concerns with the precarious condition of goods and workers in a society organised around the single-minded logic

of planned obsolescence and profit-driven organisation. In the eyes of some commentators, as for Arendt, such developments led to an alienation of the individual characterised by an atrophy of both lived experience and the political will to action. These were the conditions to which artists also responded through their precarious works.

Since that moment, I will argue in this book, precarious practices have been intrinsically connected to the ‘human condition’ of individuals living in the capitalist consumer society that took shape in the 1950s and continued to evolve over the next six decades. As capitalism during this period found new ways of pursuing and refining the logic of efficient production and consumption pioneered in 1950s America, the fundamental shifts in the human condition pinpointed by Arendt continued to serve as a reference for political philosophers. Writing, thirty years after Arendt, about the *Metamorphoses of Work* in capitalist society, French philosopher André Gorz explicitly aligned himself with her thinking, as he cited in full, as an epigraph to his book, the statement of intent that Arendt included in the prologue to *The Human Condition*:

What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ that have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.⁶¹

By the late 1980s, the ‘heedless recklessness’ of what Gorz called ‘economic reason’, and its direct impact on the human condition first observed by Arendt, were increasingly observable, as the principles of a neoliberal economy had been aggressively applied across Europe and North America throughout the decade. Two developments, in particular, preoccupied Gorz. On the one hand, Gorz deplored the deep disparity in the distribution of work between an elite of ‘privileged’ workers and ‘an increasing mass’ of ‘precarious’ and unemployed workers.⁶² On the other, he followed Arendt in mourning the loss of an *art de vivre* – an art of living – in an ever more efficient and consumer-oriented society.⁶³

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman also witnessed the ‘profound changes to the human condition’ inflected by the advent of an expanding global neoliberalism.⁶⁴ Although Bauman did not refer to Arendt, he seemed to be following in her footsteps as he focused on these changes from the perspective of the individuals living under this economic regime. For example, Bauman highlighted an increasingly widespread ‘combined experience of insecurity (of position, entitlements and livelihood), of *uncertainty* (as to their

continuation and future stability) and of *unsafety* (of one's body, one's self and their extensions: possessions, neighbourhood, community)'.⁶⁵

By 2000, as Bauman noted, this experience had already been analysed from different perspectives by a number of European thinkers. A growing sense of uncertainty could be partly attributed to neoliberal onslaughts – unprecedented since the 1950s – on stable employment, workers' rights and benefits. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, had condemned in 1997 an increasing 'precarity' whereby the far-reaching effects of job insecurity were knowingly mobilised by neoliberalism in order to create 'a generalised subjective insecurity'. This led, according to Bourdieu, to a 'destructuration of existence, and a subsequent degradation' of any possible 'relation to the world, time, space', as well as relations among individuals willing to rebel collectively against this situation.⁶⁶ Precarity, as Italian activist Alex Foti would put it in a 2004 interview, can describe a 'precarious' life in times of global war, or in a general state of 'total domination', as well as 'the condition of being unable to predict one's fate', let alone rely on 'degrees of predictability on which to build social relations and feelings of affection'.⁶⁷ By the late 1990s, a number of groups in Europe had started to organise discussions, actions and demonstrations against 'precarity'. Bourdieu lent his support to demonstrations by the French unemployed in 1998, and Foti headed the ChainWorkers organisation in Milan which put in place the first European May Day demonstrations against precarity in 2001.⁶⁸ The English term 'precarity' (a latinised form of 'precariousness') as well as the expressions 'precarisation' and 'precariat' (an updated version, for many activists at that moment, of the proletariat) were derived from such Italian, French and Spanish debates at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this book, I will be using such terms to describe the socio-economic phenomena that started to be contested at this time.

In contradistinction, I will use the adjective 'precarious', and the noun 'precariousness', to describe the broader, existential state that accompanies the socio-economic phenomenon of precarity. In the footsteps of Arendt, and of the above-mentioned analyses by Gorz, Bauman or Bourdieu, I consider this experience as affecting the very core of our emotional and political beings. This slippage from precarity to precariousness lies at the heart of the precarious art practices discussed in this book. My distinction is aligned with those made by theorists such as Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant who have emphasised that 'precarity' as a socio-economic condition affects different individuals in radically unequal ways, while 'precariousness' can be a shared condition of uncertain experience.⁶⁹ Another theorist, Isabell Lorey, makes the distinction in German between *Prekarität*, precarity, and *Prekärsein*, a term that aptly describes precariousness as a state of being.⁷⁰

In her 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant develops case studies in which she analyses the very forms that precariousness takes as an experience, which

she usefully describes as an affective state of being. Precariousness, Berlant argues, emerges as a ceaseless attempt to ‘maintain footing, bearings, a way of being, and new modes of composure amid unraveling institutions and social relations of reciprocity’.⁷¹ This precarious experience is thus embodied in the individual’s affective, physical and social existence. The intrinsic relation, in Berlant’s and Butler’s writings, between precarious existence and the vulnerable body recalls in my eyes Arendt’s analysis of the relations between human activities and biological life. The legacy of this specific aspect of Arendt’s thinking was explicitly retrieved by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his 1990s writings on what he called ‘bare life’, a form of precarious life that exists at the crossroads of political precarity and biological vulnerability, as we shall see in Chapter 5.⁷² For the purposes of this introduction, I will point to the conception of precariousness as an embodied ‘way of being’, as Berlant called it – an idea that also seems to run through the writings of Agamben as well as Butler. For this book’s argument hinges on a central analogy between a precarious ‘way of being’ in a state of uncertainty, insecurity and ‘unsafety’ (to use Bauman’s terms), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ways of being of what I call precarious artworks, which exist, as we saw, on the threshold of imperceptibility, on the ‘borderline’ between appearance and disappearance, on the cusp of failure.

Ways of being, ways of doing

In his catalogue essay for the aforementioned *Fast Nichts* exhibition, Hannes Böhringer traced an interest in the ‘almost nothing’ back to the Baroque period. It was at that moment, he observed, that the ‘How’ – instead of the ‘What’ – became ‘crucial’.⁷³ Böhringer cited two French terms which reflected such a shift during this period: the *presque rien* (almost nothing), and the untranslatable *je-ne-sais-quoi*. These two terms were analysed in depth by French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch in a 1957 study, which similarly located their appearance within a specific body of sixteenth-century philosophical, theological, political and literary writings.⁷⁴ As Christine Buci-Glucksmann has pointed out more recently, Baroque poetry and painting betrayed a new aesthetic of the ephemeral, as artists sought to explore the fragile, the fugitive, the unstable and the perishable.⁷⁵ According to Jankélévitch, terms such as *je-ne-sais-quoi* and *presque rien* articulated corollary concerns in Baroque philosophy with the elusive and the intangible ‘How’, in particular in the *manières* – the manners, or ways – of being and appearing. Above all, argued Jankélévitch, such concerns brought to the fore a new conception of being as *becoming*, in which temporality played a crucial role. While I will not discuss, in this book, works from the Baroque period, nor try to trace a Baroque genealogy for contemporary art, I believe that Jankélévitch’s study provides

a number of useful terms to map out and analyse the field of the almost nothing.

In the first place, Jankélévitch's focus on *ways* or manners of becoming and appearing chimes with my definition of precariousness, discussed above, as a *way* of being and becoming. Such ways are characterised by an elusive *je-ne-sais-quoi* that resists all forms of absolute, stable, ontological definition. Of interest to Jankélévitch was precisely that which exceeds definition, categorisation or comprehension. I would like to draw a parallel here between Jankélévitch's focus on the *manière* and the *manières de faire* that lie at the heart of Michel de Certeau's groundbreaking 1980 study of everyday life, *L'Invention du quotidien* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*). Like Blanchot, whom I mentioned earlier, Certeau believed that the everyday is inherently elusive.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, his study of everyday life sought to develop a vocabulary of terms with which to articulate recurrent patterns and issues that link together such varied 'ways of doing' as walking or cooking. In both Jankélévitch's and Certeau's studies, the authors set themselves an 'acrobatic' challenge (to use one of the former's expressions): that of examining a dynamic, fugitive movement of doing and becoming.

Just as the everyday, as Blanchot put it, is difficult to grasp (*ne se laisse pas saisir*),⁷⁷ the *presque rien* is characterised, according to Jankélévitch, by its *apparition disparaissante*, a momentary appearance which threatens to disappear as immediately as it emerged.⁷⁸ Like precarious works, then, such studies focus our attention on the very moment of appearance and the fragile maintenance of such a moment. This resonates with the Duchampian *inframince*, which, as we saw earlier, similarly questioned 'the threshold of appearance' of an artwork, as Davila put it. Furthermore, the term 'appearance' is crucial for Arendt in *The Human Condition* to the extent that it relates to the birth of the individual into a world governed by enduring as well as ephemeral structures, as much as to the public space in which individuals 'appear' to each other through action and speech. Not only are the appearance and disappearance of things and human beings intrinsically connected for Arendt, but, crucially, this 'space of appearance' constitutes, according to her, the very space of politics. Significantly, the relationships between man and the man-made, just as the relations among individuals, are subject to change and transformation. Since the 'space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action', it is in fact as precarious as the human activities through which it comes to exist.⁷⁹

The challenge, then, for students of the 'almost nothing' – be they Jankélévitch, Certeau, Arendt, or creators of precarious artworks – is to find the right tools with which to apprehend this precarious 'disappearing appearance'. For Jankélévitch, the nature or 'charm' of the *je-ne-sais-quoi* may perhaps be grasped in the instantaneous, 'infinitesimal space' of the 'opportunity'

(*occasion*). The Greek term used by Jankélévitch for this opportunity, the '*kairos*', is also extensively discussed by Michel de Certeau as a central focus of practices of everyday life. Such practices, according to Certeau, operate through a 'way' or 'manner' of taking advantage of opportunities as they arise – the *kairos*, this opportunity, is 'seized' rather than 'created'.⁸⁰ Before developing the political implications of the *kairos* in Part II of this study, I would like to follow Certeau's definition of everyday practices as operating in the space of the given, a set of circumstances of which one has to make the most. Since, as Jankélévitch emphasised, the *kairos* is by nature unpredictable and fugitive, seizing it requires a heightened form of attention, a 'vigilance' to the world, as well as an ability to improvise in response to a specific conjunction of events.

Crucially, such conjunctions are never the same, so that the ruses of the *kairos* can only be conceived, according to Jankélévitch, as an 'art of turning' a singular situation 'into an opportunity' (*art de tourner le cas en occasion*).⁸¹ Similarly, this study will try, like Davila in his book *De l'inframince*, to 'find' the appropriate 'means' with which to pay attention to the 'particularity' and singularity of each case study.⁸² This will involve analysing, in every instance, the *ways* or *manners* in which each precarious work stages its modes of appearance and disappearance, by inscribing it within a specific context and mapping out a circumscribed set of issues and concerns. Like the Duchampian *inframince*, which cannot be defined otherwise than through examples, like the everyday which loses its singular relation to lived experience in the moment it is theorised on a general level, precarious practices lend themselves to fragmentary, provisional observations rather than a systematic survey. This is why I have selected case studies from different artistic and geographical contexts in order to draw a mobile constellation of practices that shed light on a range of art historical and socio-political issues revolving around precarious art.

Overall, these examples will be drawn from two different periods: 1958–71, and 1991–2009. Arendt's 1958 study *The Human Condition*, as we have seen, will serve as a guiding thread throughout this book. In the first part, Arendt's response to the rise of consumer society in the United States in the 1950s will provide the backdrop for a study of the emergence of precarious practices from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. In the second part, I will outline a correlation between the development of new precarious practices in the 1990s such as those of Thomas Hirschhorn and Francis Alÿs (discussed at the beginning of this introduction) and the aforementioned re-readings of Arendt's earlier study provided by authors such as André Gorz, Pierre Bourdieu, Zygmunt Bauman and Giorgio Agamben in the period between the late 1980s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. More specifically, this study seeks to articulate a central relationship between three crucial terms: firstly, a critique

of consumption and organised labour; secondly, an alternative worldview to the systematic enterprise of channelling natural and human resources towards an ever more efficient, profit-driven organisation; and, thirdly, new artistic and cultural forms which privilege instability and precariousness.

In terms of periodisation, then, the publication date of Arendt's book serves as the starting point for this study. In addition to providing a fruitful analysis of the socio-economic context of the 1950s, the questions raised by Arendt's study will be shown to resonate with central tenets of Zen Buddhism, as it was popularised in the 1960s by writers such as D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. The articulation between critique and liberatory aspirations that runs through Arendt's writings as well as such Zen principles and precarious practices during this period will be situated within a field divided between a dominant culture on the one hand, and a rebellious counterculture on the other. This countercultural movement, which came to the fore with 1950s Beat culture, exploded with student protests around the world in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, I suggest, such a movement had petered out, and was being channelled in different ways.

The title of Part I, 'Dharma bums', refers to Jack Kerouac's 1958 Beat novel of that title, which resonated with critiques of consumer society such as Arendt's as well as the newly proposed Zen alternatives. While Chapter 1 outlines some of the links between Kerouac's Beat aesthetic and the assemblage and happenings of the early 1960s, in the reception of assemblage art in particular, Chapter 2 points to some overlaps between Zen philosophy and a new scientific worldview, at play in other precarious practices in the 1960s. The dropout celebrated in Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* continued to serve throughout that decade as a countercultural model for artists concerned with precariousness. This type of 'dharma bum' figures among the 'good-for-nothings', who – as we will see in Chapter 3 – celebrated leisure, laziness and what Kaprow called 'useless work', as so many challenges to the capitalist work ethic.

Chronologically, Part II is roughly framed by two events in recent financial history: the market crash of 1987 and the so-called global financial crisis running from 2007 to 2009. I would suggest that 1987 marked, symbolically, the end of a period of increased prosperity – accompanied, as Gorz pointed out, by greater inequalities. With the realisation that this prosperity was as fragile as it had been short-lived emerged a growing interest in the precarious 'human condition' of workers and consumers in Europe and North America. Debates concerning a growing precariat and possible alternatives to a globalised capitalism would continue into the first decade of the new millennium. My purpose in Part II is to locate the precarious practices developed in the early 1990s in this context. Its title, 'The light years', is inspired by contemporary studies such as Bauman's analysis of a new 'liquid modernity' which suggested that global capitalism was increasingly characterised by its

'weightlessness', 'motility' and even 'buoyancy'. Part II starts in 1991, four years after the economic crash. The chosen date coincides with the publication of Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X*, which I will propose as the 1990s equivalent of what Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* had been for the Beat generation (as I will explain in Chapter 5). Indeed, at the heart of my study lies a reflection on the similarities and differences between the 1990s and the 1960s, and the precarious practices that emerged in both these moments.

Chapter 4 will frame 1990s precarious practices as both responses to forms of aggressive capitalism that had become widespread since the 1980s, and reactions to some of the more visible art practices that had emerged during that decade. Certainly 1987, the year of the major market crash, also saw the release of Swiss duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss's film *The Way Things Go*, which exploits to great effect the highly precarious nature of a chain reaction that sets a whole range of banal objects in movement. This duo's unique combination of humour, low-tech *bricolage* and interest in wasted time and failure set them apart from many of their contemporaries, and placed them as important precursors for the precarious art developed by a generation of younger artists in the 1990s. In spite of this and other significant exceptions, however, this book's periodisation reflects my general hypothesis that precariousness did not figure prominently among the concerns of 1970s and 1980s art practices and their critical reception at the time. These two decades will thus be considered as a hiatus in the history of precarious practices from the late 1950s to the first decade of the twenty-first century.⁸³

Chapter 5 will pursue the study of those selected precarious practices that emerged in the 1990s as they developed over the next decades, in parallel with a generalised renunciation of both the utopian aspirations of the 1960s and the political activism of the 1970s. The emergence of new forms of protest at the beginning of the twenty-first century will also serve as a point of reference. I have chosen the end of the 2007–09 economic crisis as the cut-off point for this study because it may also mark a critical turning point. As we will see in Chapter 4, two different art historical texts from 2009, by Nicolas Bourriaud and Hal Foster, acknowledged 'precariousness' as a characteristic feature of art at the beginning the twenty-first century, thus suggesting the culmination of a trajectory begun in the 1990s.⁸⁴ In this sense, this trajectory paralleled the evolution of capitalism during this period, which led to a major economic crisis in the first decade of the new millennium. I imagine that a new generation of artists will respond to this crisis in their own ways, while working through the precarious practices developed before them.

Geographically, Part I of this study generally focuses on practices developed in the United States. In Chapter 1, practices of New York-based artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg will be compared to those of Californian 'junk' artists such as Bruce Conner, while the relations

between assemblage and new forms such as environments and happenings will be explored, in the work of Allan Kaprow in particular. The evolution of Kaprow's work will constitute a running thread in Part I, as I go on to compare his early to mid-1960s activities to George Brecht's 'borderline' art in Chapter 2, and, in the subsequent chapter, his works later in the decade to works such as Alison Knowles's above-mentioned *Identical Lunch*, as well as a collaborative project developed by George Brecht and Robert Filliou on the Côte d'Azur between 1966 and 1968 entitled *La Cédille qui sourit*, and contemporary practices by American artists such as Tom Marioni and Bruce Nauman, both based on the US West Coast at the time. Indeed, I will return in Chapter 3 to the work of Bruce Conner, another artist discussed in Chapter 1, to point to the inter-generational links established on the West Coast between 'junk' and 'funk' sculpture. Thus I will demonstrate how the varied practices that emerged throughout the 1960s – ranging from event scores to publications, from assemblage and sculpture to performance and early video – contributed to what I called, earlier in this introduction, the 'expansion and disappearance' of the artwork into the artists' daily activities.

Furthermore, in Chapters 2 and 3, these 1960s practices developed by North American artists (and the Frenchman Robert Filliou working with Brecht), will be compared to the works of Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. Although these practices evolved independently on each of the two continents, and the artists did not know each other, an analysis of their work will serve three specific purposes. Firstly, Clark's and Oiticica's works provide an alternative genealogy for precarious practices. Significantly, their work was received in Europe in the context of constructivist and kinetic art as it was presented at the Signals Gallery in London between 1964 and 1966. The particular concerns with the invisible displayed by artists at the Signals Gallery will be compared in Chapter 2 to Brecht's and Kaprow's explorations of 'borderline' art. Secondly, Clark's and Oiticica's works in the mid- to late 1960s will point to the radical political models provided by art in Latin America at the time. As in Brazil, dictatorial regimes forced artists to address urgent debates concerning both precarity and precariousness, yielding a great variety of precarious art forms. Finally, as debates concerning precarity came to the fore in Europe and North America at the turn of the twenty-first century, the model provided by Hélio Oiticica's works and writings in particular was taken up by a number of critics and curators as they brought Latin American practices into the global art scene. Thus I will argue that the works developed in 1990s Mexico City by Gabriel Orozco and Francis Alÿs, discussed in the second part of this book, can be related to those earlier Brazilian practices as much as to the North American precarious practices also discussed in Chapter 3.

If the transnational exchanges among artists involved in Fluxus and the Signals Gallery point to the growing internationalisation of the art world

in the 1960s, Part II of this study will navigate the global art scene at the beginning of the twenty-first century as it expanded and spread through biennials and other international exhibitions in which a growing number of Latin American, Asian and African artists started to be included. In the face of this global art's variety and plethora, I have chosen to focus on four artists only, in order to address a number of specific issues in contemporary art and politics at the turn of the millennium. These four artists are of different nationalities. While Thomas Hirschhorn is a Swiss-German artist based in Paris and Francis Alÿs a Belgian artist living in Mexico, I will also study the work of Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco, who has lived between Mexico, New York and Paris. The fourth contemporary artist in this study is the Briton Martin Creed. Although Alÿs and Orozco know each other, and the works of these four artists have sometimes been shown or discussed together in various constellations in the course of international collections and exhibitions – not least in those exhibitions on the theme of 'nothing' that I discussed earlier – I am less interested in such encounters than in the common features that I perceive in their works. Part II will be largely dedicated to bringing out the links among these four artists' practices that define them as 'precarious' in my eyes, and to relating them to the 1960s practices discussed in Part I. Furthermore, I will compare them to other contemporary practices and situate them within socio-economic developments at the time, including the new 'liquid modernity' described by Bauman, global flows of migration, as well as the 'alterglobalisation' movements that sought to find alternatives to global neoliberalism.

Although anchored in the global development of capitalism over the four decades between 1958 and 2009, this study will thus focus on a small selection of case studies limited both geographically and historically. In order to carve out a new field of enquiry in the history of art from the late 1950s to the present, I will map out a network of forms and questions uniting the singular 'ways of being' staged by the art practices within this small selection. Analysing the similarities and differences among such works as these will not only help us trace the evolution of precarious practices from the 1960s to the 1990s: it will also provide a new vocabulary to define and describe a specific tendency in contemporary art, and to understand its political ramifications. To this effect, I will inscribe the selected artists' practices and writings, and the contemporary reception of their work, within their socio-cultural contexts by occasionally drawing on contemporary literature, film and socio-political texts. Like Arendt's writings, other philosophical references will be used as historical documents as well as methodological tools.

By focusing on a particular nexus of artistic, intellectual, socio-economic and political issues, I hope to draw out the specificities of each practice and context, and acknowledge the differences, as well as the similarities, among them. To return to an example cited at the beginning of this introduction,

I will underline how the construction of Kaprow's ice architectures in the 1967 *Fluids* carries socio-political connotations that are different from Alÿs's melting block of ice in the *Paradox of Praxis* thirty years later. Geographical differences are also important. For example, in his relation to Mexico City, Alÿs's attitude as a Belgian artist diverged as much from Kaprow's engagement with the landscape of Los Angeles in *Fluids* as it did from the position of Mexican-born Gabriel Orozco. Similarly, American 'junk' practices on the West Coast differed from those on the East Coast, while artists working under the Brazilian dictatorial regime were evidently confronted with another set of constraints than their European or North American counterparts.

In different ways, the Brazilians Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, the Mexican Orozco, as well as the American artist Alison Knowles, whom I mentioned earlier in this introduction, constitute some of the exceptions in the body of artists selected in this study, who are largely white, middle-class and male. Thus, for example, I have chosen (in Chapter 5) to mention in passing, rather than analyse in depth, the works of American-Indian Jimmie Durham and the African-American David Hammons, which were conceived in the 1980s in response to forms of precarity experienced by marginalised, non-white individuals in American culture. If precarity, as I suggested earlier, is unevenly distributed among different constituencies, then the forms of precariousness explored by female or African-American artists, for example, certainly diverge from those that will be discussed in this book within a more circumscribed body of works.

As we will see, the kind of precariousness at the heart of this study emerges with the anxieties of the white middle-class man faced in the 1950s with a choice between two masculine roles: middle-class white-collar worker, or Beat dropout. While attracted to African-American music and seduced by the model of the unemployed 'bum', Beat culture nevertheless remained largely white and middle-class. Some forty years later, the type of precariousness at stake in the artistic practices that I have selected comes close to the experience of 'self-precarization' analysed by Isabell Lorey: a status sometimes voluntarily adopted by freelance workers, for example, who work at home and sometimes choose part-time or intermittent contracts.⁸⁵ In terms of class and income, such 'self-precarizing' individuals may appear, at first sight, to be exposed to a very different kind of economic precarity from a labourer or a domestic worker on short-term contracts. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the term 'precarariat', which I mentioned earlier, signified a political desire to unite these various constituencies and highlight their common experience of precariousness. In this book, I will explore the complex forms of alliance, empathy and solidarity that are suggested by precarious works, while pointing to some of the issues that they raise concerning the (in)commensurability of such different experiences.

One may wonder, for example, what happens when, in Alÿs's *To R.L.*, a white European artist works with a female Mexican street sweeper, whose social and economic status is obviously more precarious than his. In this way, this study will address some of the uncertainties specific to the evolving place of a largely white, middle-class, heterosexual European and North American male population, as it has been subjected to the developments of capitalism over six decades.

Focusing on a selection of works, the positions of which have by now generally been established within mainstream art history, allows us to further delve into their particularities and address the specific questions raised by such precarious practices. How does an artwork exist? And how does it relate to other kinds of actions and materialities in a shared economic, social and political context? Ultimately, I would like to argue that such questions can be answered from two intrinsically connected perspectives. On the one hand, this study aims to shed new light on a specific trajectory of art since the 1960s that addresses its status as a material object, and the material conditions of its existence, in its appeal to the spectator's heightened perception and ever-renewed validation. On the other hand, the radical *material* instability of precarious works will be related to the *political* instability of the human condition in the age of capitalism. Just as individuals, as Berlant put it, struggle to find the means to 'maintain' 'a way of being', in the face of conditions beyond their control, I will demonstrate that precarious practices have explored ways of existing on the brink of disappearance, and manners of making the most of the 'almost', in order to fend off the 'nothing'. Related questions then emerge: how do we exist? And how do *we* relate to the economic, social and political conditions in which we live?

Notes

- 1 'Alison Gingeras in Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn', in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, A. Gingeras, Carlos Basualdo et al., *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004), p. 24.
- 2 See Jennifer Mundy (ed.), *Lost Art: Missing Artworks of the Twentieth Century* (London: Tate, 2013), pp. 234–8.
- 3 Marco Anelli, who participated in the performance over 14 times, quoted on the MoMA blog on http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/05/10/visitor-viewpoint-momas-mystery-man (accessed 3 July 2011).
- 4 My thanks to Alison Knowles for letting me watch unpublished video documentation of some of the lunches. For more information about the event, see Randy Kennedy, 'Art at MoMA: Tuna on Wheat (Hold the Mayo)', *New York Times*, 2 February 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/03/arts/design/03lunch.html> (accessed 3 July 2011).
- 5 *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971).

- 6 George Brecht, 'Events: Scores and Other Occurrences', 12/28/61, cc V TRE No.1 *FLUXUS* (January 1964), 2.
- 7 Ele Carpenter, 'Something about Nothing', in Ele Carpenter and Graham Gussin (eds), *Nothing* (Sunderland: Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, 2001), p. 7.
- 8 Peter-Klaus Schuster, 'Foreword' and Catherine Nichols, 'Silence and "nothingto-seeness" in contemporary art', in Eugen Blume, Gabriele Knapstein and Catherine Nichols (eds), *Fast Nichts: Minimalistische Werke aus der Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof*, exh. cat. Hamburg, Hamburger Bahnhof, 2005 (Berlin and Cologne: SMB-Dumont, 2005), pp. 263 and 272.
- 9 Caroline Ferreira d'Oliveira and Marianne Lanavère, 'Densité \pm o', in Caroline Ferreira d'Oliveira and Marianne Lanavère (eds), *Densité \pm o* (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2004), pp. 24, 27, 23.
- 10 Carpenter, 'Something about Nothing', p. 7.
- 11 Ingrid Schafner, 'Doing Nothing', in *The Big Nothing* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2004), p. 29.
- 12 Schuster, 'Foreword', p. 263.
- 13 Ferreira d'Oliveira and Lanavère, 'Densité \pm o', p. 27.
- 14 Schafner, 'Doing Nothing', p. 18.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 17 Martina Weinhardt, 'Seeing Nothing: Experiences of Radical Reduction in Image and Space since the 1960s', in M. Weinhardt and Max Hollein (eds), *Nichts/Nothing*, exh. cat. Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2006 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pp. 9–51.
- 18 See Didier Semin, 'A Note on the Duchampian "infra-thin"', in Ferreira d'Oliveira and Lanavère (eds), *Densité \pm o*, pp. 49–53; Thierry Davila, *De l'inframince: brève histoire de l'imperceptible de Marcel Duchamp à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du regard, 2010).
- 19 *La chaleur d'un siège (qui vient d'être quitté)*. Marcel Duchamp, *À l'infinif* (New York: Cordier & Ekstrom, 1966), n.p. The notes were written between 1912 and 1920. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from the French are the author's.
- 20 Ferreira d'Oliveira and Lanavère, 'Densité \pm o', p. 23; Davila, *De l'inframince*, p. 16.
- 21 *Une distinction sans épaisseur*. Davila, *De l'inframince*, p. 54.
- 22 *seuil de visibilité, seuil de perceptibilité, seuil d'intelligibilité*. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 23 For another reading of the *inframince* and its legacies, see Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 142–5; and 'Space, Body and the Self in the Work of Bruce Nauman', in Anna Deuze (ed.), *The 'Do-It-Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), ch. 8.
- 24 Schafner, 'Doing Nothing', p. 21
- 25 John Cage, untitled statement, 1953, reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1971) pp. 111–12.

- 26 John Cage, 'On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and his Work' (1961), in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 98.
- 27 Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, 12:2 (1968), reprinted in Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971), pp. 255–76.
- 28 Lucy Lippard, 'Preface', in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973) (Berkeley: University of California Press, new edn, 1997), p. 5.
- 29 Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 255. Other quotes in this paragraph are from the same page.
- 30 See Weinhart, 'Seeing Nothing', pp. 16–25.
- 31 Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 255.
- 32 Lawrence Alloway, 'The Expanding and Disappearing Work of Art', *Auction*, III/2, October 1969, reprinted in *Topics in American Art since 1945* (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 207.
- 33 Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 256.
- 34 Lippard, 'Preface', p. 7. This passage is drawn from a 1969 interview with Ursula Meyer.
- 35 Lippard, 'Escape Attempts' (1995), in *Six Years*, p. xiii.
- 36 Lippard, 'Preface', p. 7.
- 37 Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 270.
- 38 Lippard, 'Postface', in *Six Years*, p. 263.
- 39 Ralph Rugoff, 'A Brief History of Invisible Art', in Ralph Rugoff (ed.), *A Brief History of Invisible Art* (San Francisco: California College of the Arts Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2005), p. 17.
- 40 Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 257.
- 41 Ferreira d'Oliveira and Lanavère, 'Densité ± o', p. 25.
- 42 See, for example, Liz Kotz, *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Donna de Salvo (ed.), *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* (London: Tate, 2005); Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Work Ethic* (Baltimore and University Park, PA: Baltimore Museum of Art and Penn State University Press, 2003); and Miwon Kwon, 'Exchange Rate: On Obligation and Reciprocity in Some Art of the 1960s and After' (2003), in Deuze (ed.), *The 'Do-It-Yourself' Artwork*, ch.12.
- 43 Michael Newman, 'The Material Turn in the Art of Western Europe and North America in the 1960s', in Milena Kalinovska (ed.), *Beyond Preconceptions: The Sixties Experiment* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2000), p. 73; Shannon Jackson, 'Just-in-time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity', *The Drama Review*, 56:4 (2012), 19.
- 44 Simon Critchley, *Very Little, Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (1997) (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2004).
- 45 Mieke Bal, 'Invisible Art, Hypervisibility, and the Aesthetics of Everyday Life', in Weinhart and Hollein (eds), *Nichts/Nothing*, p. 83.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

- 47 Maurice Blanchot, 'L'Homme de la rue', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 114 (June 1962), pp. 1070–81, reprinted as 'La Parole quotidienne', in M. Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 355–66.
- 48 Bal, 'Invisible Art', p. 92.
- 49 Ralph Rugoff, 'Touched by your Presence: Invisibility in Art', *Frieze*, 50 (January–February 2000), http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_article/touched_by_your_presence/ (accessed 6 May 2015).
- 50 Ralph Rugoff, 'How to Look at Invisible Art', in R. Rugoff, *Invisible: Art about the Unseen, 1957–2012* (London: South Bank Centre, 2012), p. 27.
- 51 Henri-Claude Cousseau, 'Preface', in Ferreira d'Oliveira and Lanavère (eds), *Densité ± 0*, p. 9.
- 52 Laurent Le Bon, 'Qui ne risque rien n'a rien', in Mathieu Copeland (ed.), *Vides: une retrospective* (Paris and Zurich: Centre Pompidou and JRP Ringier, 2009), p. 163; Weinhart, 'Seeing Nothing', p. 10.
- 53 Blanchot, 'La Parole quotidienne', p. 360.
- 54 Brian Kuan Wood, 'Is it Heavy or Is it Light?', *e-flux journal*, 61 (January 2015), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-it-heavy-or-is-it-light/> (accessed 9 January 2015)
- 55 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 57 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1998), p. 2.
- 58 Critchley, *Very Little*, p. xvii.
- 59 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 5.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 7. Quoted in its French translation in André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail. Quête du Sens. Critique de la raison économique* (Paris, Galilée, 1988), n.p.
- 62 Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail*, p. 87.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 64 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press and Blackwell, 2000), p. 8.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 66 Pierre Bourdieu, 'La précarité est aujourd'hui partout' (1997), in *Contrefeux: propos pour servir à la résistance contre l'invasion néo-libérale* (Paris: Editions Liber, 1998), p. 96.
- 67 'Precarity and North American/European Identity: an Interview with Alex Foti (ChainWorkers) by Merijin Oudenampsen and Gavin Sullivan' (2004), in John Barker et al., *Mute Precarious Reader: Texts on the Politics of Precarious Labour* (London: Mute, 2005), p. 45.
- 68 For one account of this history, see Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).
- 69 See, for example, Jasbir Puar, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejic, Isabell Lorey and Ana Vujanovic, 'Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable', *The Drama Review*, 56:4 (2012), 163–77.
- 70 Isabell Lorey, 'Post One', in *ibid.*, 165.

- 71 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 197.
- 72 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 73 Hannes Böhringer, 'Almost Nothing', in Blume, Knapstein and Nichols (eds), *Fast Nichts*, p. 265.
- 74 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque rien* (1957) (Paris: Seuil, new edn, 1980).
- 75 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Esthétique de l'éphémère* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 23–5.
- 76 Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien, vol. I: Arts de faire* (1980), ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Gallimard, 1990)
- 77 Blanchot, 'La Parole quotidienne', p. 357.
- 78 Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi*, p. 57.
- 79 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 199.
- 80 Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, p. 130.
- 81 Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi*, p. 120.
- 82 *A nous de trouver les moyens d'accueillir la particularité du cas*. Davila, *De l'inframince*, p. 25.
- 83 Other exceptions include Swiss artist Roman Signer, who influenced Fischli/Weiss, and British sculptor Richard Wentworth's ongoing photographic series titled *Making Do, Getting By*, started in 1977. See my 'Photography, Ways of Living, and Richard Wentworth's Making Do, Getting By', *Oxford Art Journal*, 36:2 (2013), 281–300.
- 84 'Precarious: Hal Foster on the Art of the Decade', *Artforum*, 48:4 (2009), 207–9, 260; Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radical. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation* (Paris: Denoël, 2009).
- 85 See, for example, Isabell Lorey, 'Governmentality and Self-Precarization: On the Normalization of Cultural Producers', *transversal*, 11 (2006), special issue on 'Machines and subjectivity', <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lorey/en> (accessed 15 May 2015).