**ARTISTIC RESEARCH DOCUMENT 2.0**

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Before I delve into the Artistic Research Document 2.0, I must clarify that this assignment was supposed to be handed in at the end of my second semester at the Master in theater (June 2022) but I am in fact writing it in June 2024, at the very end of my trajectory, when I already presented my AR communication as well as my artistic project. Therefore, in the following pages, I will not only reflect on my plan for a future artistic research, but also on my previous one which heavily influences what is to come.



My artistic research communication comes in the form of a website (that you can visit here : **https://medeasartisticresearch.cargo.site/**) and revolves around my "attempt(s)" at making a documentary theater piece, and particularly one where all the materials gathered (oftentimes very personal and belonging to others than the artist) are used in an ethical way. I organized my communication in a scientific method (Question, Research, Hypothesis, Experiment - or Attempt as I call them - Data Analysis, Conclusion, and Communication) to reflect upon the making process of my performance *Medea(s).* Without delving back too much into my AR communication in this document, I think it is important to notice how for me, in the end, the creative process itself was the subject of research.

When I started having interest in documentary theater and how to make it ethical, I was particularly interested in understanding in what ways - through which methods and try outs - this was possible or not. So I copied ways of working from some documentary theater makers (like for example interviewing, reenactment, bringing documents on stage etc.) and applied them to my artistic process. I then analyzed the results and made my considerations.

Why do I write this assignment only now? In retrospect I think it is because my research ended up being about trying to find a "method". It was the first time I challenged myself through an artistic process from A to Z, so it was very overwhelming for me to plan ahead, on paper and with very little experience, how a creative process could unfold. I felt like I did not know how to get to a creative space or what methods to use. That is why I decided to spend my first two weeks of residency just playing with materials and experimenting alone. It was only later that I was able to see what was working for me and I felt secure enough to include other people in the process.

As I explain in my artistic research communication, I ended up not making a documentary piece but rather a personal and quite unreliable one. A documentary piece is not per se "scientific" or objective, but by putting the document in the center of the work, it aims to convey some sort of "real-ity" even though, in many cases, the document is still modified by the artist. There is of course nothing wrong with that, but through my

spectator experience I found that the artist(s) were not always honest and transparent to the audience on that matter, which pushed me to reflect on the question of ethics.

I tried to create my piece as an ongoing attempt to practice a radical honesty. I started by explaining (on stage) what I was doing while I was doing it and then started manipulating every object I was working with (videos, paintings etc,), in order to openly criticize what they were conveying or to make them say what I wanted them to say.

**The curated days**

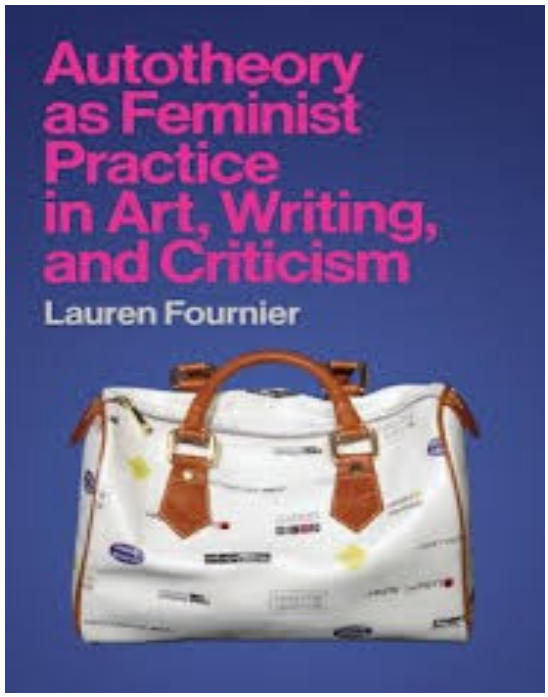
– which took place on the 8th May 2023 - were a good example of me trying out creative methods by putting them under study and trying to see how differently they could adapt to various artists' sensibilities and minds. During the day I organized for my master peers, I asked the participants to bring one object to work with. I proposed them to play with the exercise I was using myself at the time, which was to reenact on the material they brought, to interpret, write upon and manipulate it in whatever ways they liked. The only constraint was that those objects had to stay visible in the final scene, so that the audience could see their process of thinking, from the original object to its reelaboration.

To me the beauty of art lies in the process from which the audience is oftentimes excluded. Since my Master trajectory is about to be over, I cannot formally plan a "curated day" for my next artistic research but I will definitely create the time and space to gather some peers in different moments of the research in order to share with them my findings and work together with the methods or reflections I will be busy with at that moment.

**The research question**

Having already accomplished my artistic project as well as my artistic research communication, I will now use this ARD2 as a moment of reflection upon the continuation of my AR trajectory. In my previous communication, I developed a lot around documentary theater but I didn't delve enough into a research theme that inspired me profoundly during my creation process of *Medea(s):* autotheory.

"The term “autotheory” emerged in the early part of the twenty-first century to describe works of literature, writing, and criticism that integrate autobiography with theory and philosophy in ways that are direct and self aware. The “memoir with footnotes” would be one example. Most simply, the term refers to the integration of theory and philosophy with autobiography, the body, and other so-called personal and explicitly subjective modes. It is a term that describes a self-conscious way of engaging with theory—as a discourse, frame, or mode of thinking and practice—alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment, something very much in the Zeitgeist of cultural production today— especially in feminist, queer, and BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, and people of color—spaces that live on the edges of art and academia."[1]




1 Lauren Fournier, "Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism, Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, 2021, p.18

I encountered the idea of autotheory at the very beginning of my creation process, thanks to the Master program. After my first S.O.T.A presentation, a Master student came up to me and strongly suggested that I look into this concept. They thought the content of my presentation was very much "autotheoretical", so I started reading "Autotheory as a Feminist practice in Art, Writing and Criticism" and I was immediately captivated. I felt that what I was artistically aiming for was in the heritage of the artists I was reading about. I wanted to dig more and more.

At the time I was already reading *Testo Junkie*, by Paul B. Preciado, a "body-essay" where the author nourishes his research through his own gender transition journey and use of testosterone in an almost diary writing style. I was particularly struck by the first scene of the book, where the author describes putting himself in front of a camera, before starting his transition, and stages himself as a male. I was moved by this operation that mixed the staging/performative/conscious fictionalization of the self with the literary description of it. There was a continuous fluctuation between personal experience and theory and one nourished the other. In this very first scene there was already everything I liked, everything I was moved and inspired by: the capacity of staging oneself and to use this as a tool to create both an artistic object as well as a reflective one.

In that same period, another author accustomed to autotheory was suggested to me again and again. People around me seemed to feel a direct association between my project and the work of writer Maggie Nelson, in particular, T*he Argonauts.* Here, the author tackles various themes, from gender, queerness and motherhood, in a non-linear narrative where autobiography meets reflections and quotes from many theoreticians (R. Barthes, G. Delleuze and Judith Butler to name a few).

The drive and motivation to create in the lineage of this genre came up very naturally for me: *Medea(s)* started as a documentary piece on people who regretted becoming mothers and it was, at the time I discovered autotheory, already shifting towards being a project on my personal thoughts and feelings around motherhood. Encountering autotheory at the very beginning of my creative process only pushed me closer to that

direction.

I also feel very strongly about the political revendications of the genre. Autotheory brings to completion the reflection, already started by the 80s feminism, that "has made it possible to see that the personal is also theoretical: the personal is part of theory's material."[2] This came from a larger shift, driven by movements such as critical race studies."

"The act of disclosing to other women what was once private was central to the formation of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, where "consciousness-raising" came to describe practices of disclosing lived experience as a means of becoming conscious of the ways in which so-called personal issues were, in fact, structural and systemic. The revolution of the everyday that took place in the 1960s led to a recognition of daily and domestic life as political: feminist writers, artists, scholars, and activists came to see that, as the slogan had it, "the personal is political," and that their practices (as artists, activists, educators, caretakers) could and should engage with the particularities of their lived experience as women, as queer, as racialized, and so on. This continued through to the third wave, with hooks grounding her antiracist feminist theory in the conviction that "the enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside," a sentiment aligned with the logic of second-wave consciousness-raising."[3]

My initial interest in documentary theater started from the strong belief that there is no better way to learn about something than to listen to the people who have a direct experience of it. Nevertheless I realized that, if that was something that worked for me as a spectator, it did not work for me as a creator. I did not feel comfortable sharing other people's experiences unless they joined in the creative process fully. This pushed me to talk about what I know best, my own experience. Especially as people who are victims of oppression, it is important to revendicate the narrative around our experiences and to share it and denounce it, instead of letting others manipulate it.

I particularly like the notion of "performative"[4] or "embodied" writing at the base of the autotheoretical reflection. This defines really well the idea of starting from one's body experience to create a reflection and to develop further some theoretical ideas. As

2 *Idem*, p.23
3 *Idem* p.21
4 *Idem* p.28

Fournier says : “writing autotheory is a method of using the body’s experience to develop knowledge.”[5]. In fact, autotheory is not only a process of autofiction or autobiography. "Theory" is an essential element in it and it is something that was probably still missing in my previous artistic research as well as in my project.

Now that I explained quite in depth my fascination for autotheory, I will proceed by defining my research question. As Fournier writes, "a great deal of autothoretical work exists in the liminal spaces between contemporary art, writing, and criticism"[6]. In her work "Autotheory as Feminist Practice", she mentions and analyzes quite a lot of works that can be defined as autotheoretical: all of them are beautifully hybrid and impossible to put in one specific case, but we can for sure say that they are mostly quite distant from theater forms. If they show some performative qualities, then they generally associate more to performance art.

In fact "for (Shannon) Bell, performance art is a way of embodying theory"[7] and I fully agree. *Medea(s)* was strongly inspired by many performance art pieces and I will for sure continue being strongly influenced by this art in my creative process. That being said, even though I enjoy working through hybridation, I also realized how my artistic way of expression keeps on being the theatrical medium. Therefore, I would like to research on the specifics of autotheory when applied to it. My research question will then be:

**HOW TO MAKE AN AUTHOTEORETICAL theater PIECE?**

5 *Idem* p.37
6 *Idem* p.33
7 p.29

I understand that this question might seem a bit simplistic at first glance, so here is how I intend to develop it more specifically:

- Step 1: discover and research theater pieces that can be defined as autotheoretical (or that show some characteristics of the genre) and get in contact with artists that operate in the lines of autotheory. This will be helpful to create a list of works I can refer to and study as well as a group of possible mentors and interlocutors that can inspire and support my research. At the moment, I am in contact with Carolina Bianchi, a theater maker whose work is very interesting for my research (*Cadela Força-Trilogy*).

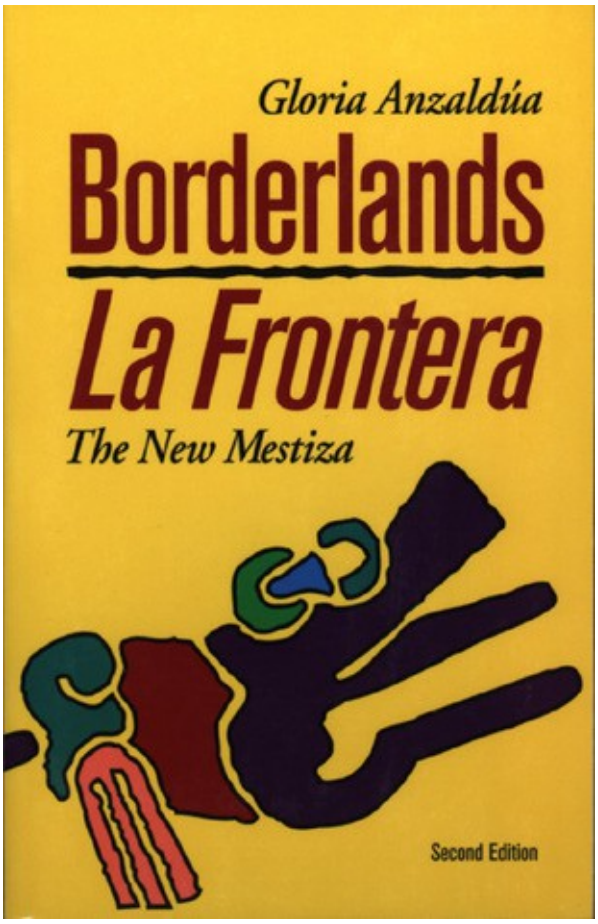



Carolina Bianchi in *Cadela Força-Trilogy.*

- Step 2: through this works, start researching upon the characteristics of an autotheoretical theater piece in order to understand what methods/artistic processes lie behind it. Reflect upon what are the specificities of theater and how they can be used to develop an autotheoretical piece as well as, of course, how can these lines be blurred and mixed with other artistic influences.

- Step 3: after having researched upon other artists' works and methods, create a space and time for experimentation. Try out some of those methods and apply them to my work. My artistic research will in fact, once again, intertwined with my artistic practice. I am currently planning on starting a new solo project on the theme of "identity and territory" which will be the perfect playground for experimentation. The idea is to investigate the notion of country of origin and territory of belonging by spending some time in Morocco, a fatherland where I don't feel at home. My goal is to travel through the discomfort I feel when I visit this place, to investigate my origins and the complex relationship to this country and to my father.
- Step 4: instead of starting from my own feelings and experiences (as I did for *Medea(s)*) and see what comes from it, this time I want to start by researching some theories that could help me through this process and then work creatively around them through my body. I want to note down what comes from it without judgment, what reflections develop from there.

  I intend to start researching around the philosophies of territory by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and see where the reflection brings me from there. I also intend to study the work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and discover through it other thinkers and theories that I could take inspiration from.
- Step 5 (which will not be the last) : tackle what I like to call the "narcissism matter". Reflect upon the limits of autotheory as well as on the limits of what I mean by "starting from my own experience". I in fact want to research about the method(s) in order to be able to share this research with others in the future and to make it the starting ground of artistic collaborations. My ultimate goal is to open up my practice to others, because I think that only starting from myself will eventually show its limits.




This document only shows a non-exhaustive planning of my research to come, but it helps me already to envision how I want to continue my artistic research. It is also very valuable to understand what I want to implement or do differently in my artistic practice.