

A Deviant Script on Jani Ruscica Written to be Read as a Text to Come

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In the field of contemporary art, a text is an object that comprises a communicative extension of an exhibition –a deviant record, or a translation from a text medium to another that inserts itself into the commemorative framework of the publication that accompanies it. It is drawn out in time, as is the duration of its reading: the writing endures beyond the ephemeral nature of the exhibition as a document that aspires to become a reference; the fate of the words deposited on the pages depends on the decision of others to take the time to read them, just as the artwork that they refer to depends on the moment at which it is presented to an audience.

The time of thinking an artwork is different to the time of writing –it is the extra time of static movement, an expression of distance translated in terms of proximity. Texts happen during train journeys, laps of a pool, or while waiting for a delayed flight at an airport. As such, a text is a temporary position in an undetermined space or in transit, and entails the internalised recounting of a process of interpretation that can endure beyond the moment of fruition with the artwork that it refers to. In relation to the exhibition, it is the difference that stems from the performance of its intellection. Between the expectations of the reader and the new reading difference that he will generate through the act of reading, a text is a meaningful deferred echo. Somewhat like perceiving the effects of living with

ambient music once this music stops: a banal normality revealed as symbolic excess, as threatening exuberance.

Texts about art are a record of an error of perspective, of a misreading: like artworks that continue the tradition of contemporaneity, they are also an aberration in culture, in the machine for reading the world itself, that produce agency or provoke mutation in those who decipher it. In other words, writing is a way of expressing the exteriority of the work of art as a subjective effect on its spectator: writing as an object in the midst of representation.

This textual object is a commission sight unseen from Jani Ruscica and CIRCA Projects. The original is written in Spanish, a language that they don't understand, and they won't be able to read it until the translation is in their hands. By reproducing the relationship of trust that develops with an artist who is invited to create a new work for an exhibition, this dynamic sets up an unusual emotional relationship among strangers. The artwork doesn't exist yet, it is in the Hereafter of possible exhibitions, and some of the intimacy of that work rubs off on the text. When somebody writes prospectively about things that don't yet exist, about art that is to come by an artist who already has a body of work behind him, he is projecting the vectors that this previous work posits as possibility, while at the same time contributing to its invention. This is a deviant script for Ruscica's future production.

In curatorial terms, an artwork is always a dialogue-based collaboration framework. As it happens, the series of works to come that this text is being written to accompany is entitled *Conversation in Pieces*. It is a project, or more precisely a series of ideas, that will materialise in the form of objects and of the relationships that will be established between them and their audiences. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze described interviews as maps of becoming, as if the thoughts of the future could be read in them, like coffee grounds. The relationship by which a curator and an artist produce a text is not unlike an interview: a writing process in which the

deferred dialogues merge with appropriations of previous texts that have influenced them in their subjective and objectual production, finding their place in the narrative chain as quotes or other relational forms for a reading act that performativises this relationship as the eyes jump from character to character. A conversation in pieces.

The title *Conversation in Pieces* is a play on the traditional iconographic framework of a subgenre of eighteenth century painting known as 'Conversation Pieces'. The term originated in the Netherlands with the secularisation of a type of Renaissance religious painting, the *Sacra Conversazione*, in which the holy family consisting of Virgin and Child was depicted in dialogue with saints or other figures from sacred history. As a secularised version, the Conversation Pieces portrayed informal groups of identifiable individuals –not fictitious characters or types– engaged in everyday conversations in private or intimate spaces or in domesticated outdoors landscapes. Their scale was small, human, in comparison to the monumental painting formats in vogue at the time. The meticulous detail and gestures of dialogue express connections between the figures and the domestic animals and objects in their homes, illustrating the occupation, the moral order, and the social position of the people who live there. The Conversation Pieces reflected a semi-private reading used to represent hierarchies of private everyday life in the high spheres of culture, politics and finance for at least two centuries. In England, the genre gained significance through artists such as Hogarth, Reynolds and Stubbs, and spearheaded the development of British portraiture.

One of the historians who is most knowledgeable about this genre, Mario Praz¹, was the inspiration for the main character of *Conversation Piece*², which is

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- Praz, Mario: *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America*. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

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- The film was released in 1974 with the original title: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*. *Conversation Piece* is the English title.

generally considered the film testament of the filmmaker Luchino Visconti. In it, a retired North American teacher played by an aging Burt Lancaster lives a solitary life in his luxurious palace in Rome. Chance leads him to rent the attic of his home to an Italian *marchesa*, who invades his voluntary seclusion with her companions, disturbing his tranquil existence and upsetting the logic of the objects in his collection, which were the only beings that he had any relationship with until then. The film dialogues with Praz's own singular autobiography, *The House of Life*, which is written through the interconnected stories of pieces of his home, of his objects. In it he tells how Catherine the Great ordered a house to be built out of ice on the frozen Neva River in Saint Petersburg, for a pair of dwarfs to live in. It was a house down to the last detail, with pieces of frozen furniture and candelabra with blue fire that did not melt the ice. The cold was so intense that the two dwarves froze to death during their first night. Praz also tells of the discovery of a lock of hair kept inside a watch. He discovered the significance of the concealed relic by chance, while investigating love letters from the period of English Romanticism: it was a lock of Lord Byron's hair, an excrescence of his body offered as a gift to one of his lovers. Under the ascendancy of the strict golden Empire style that fascinated Praz, objects and their corresponding stories played their roles in the text in a kind of sustained collaboration between the author, writing, and things – between being, having, and endowing– within a narrative in which erudition updated history in the here and now –the there and then– of the exposed house: a concatenation of anecdotes that trigger emotional effects on the continuous present of their coexistence in life and in space. In other words, the text transforms a house into a conversation among inanimate pieces, objects that are independent of their spectators but have unforeseen effects on them.

It was Walter Benjamin who defended the use of the anecdote as a lever for reenactment in the writing of history³. Among the hidden revelations that anecdotes

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- The true method of making things present is: to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). That's exactly what the collector does, and the anecdote does it too. Benjamin,

can bring to the surface of the flow of the past over the present, Benjamin was one of the first to detect signs of a history of the relationship between humans and things. He was the first to notice the increasing unease of the bourgeoisie in the relationship between their bodies and the things that surrounded them in everyday life as the culture of modernity progressed. Benjamin was not describing an intellectualised historical taste, but reconstructing a body-space phenomenology in the bourgeois period. He considered Grandville's cartoons as a clear sign of this: in them, ordinary objects, pieces of furniture, came to life or moved independently of their owners, expressing physical discomfort in the face of the modern object and mental mistrust of the vulgar usefulness of everyday interiors⁴. Benjamin saw a further sign of this history of objects in the uneasy suspense that exists in the home as revealed by the detective genre: in Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle, things sustain the plot, which becomes a chain of clues that serve to solve the mystery. The house is a Freudian *unheimlich*, a new logic for the privileged and attentive eye of those who know how to make objects speak. Benjamin has quite reasonably been linked to surrealist circles, which materialised that unease over the object in the form of a new imaginary reality, a new system for its possibilities of occurring in the world. The same was true of his fellow writer-philosopher George Bataille⁵. In *La Part maudite*, in the late forties, Bataille explored the crisis of man's relationship to objects in early modernity: 'The fundamental proposition of Marxism is to free the world of *things* (of the economy). It was by going to the limit of the possibilities implied by *things* (by complying with their demands without reservation, by replacing the government of particular interests with the "government of things", by

Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 206.

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- Giorgio Agamben (Agamben, Giorgio, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1992) further developed Benjamin's idea, making the aesthete – the Dandy – with his absolute control of the interior of his home, into a redeemer of the objects of modern everyday life.

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- It was precisely Bataille who saved Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* by hiding it from the Nazis in the National Library of France when Benjamin fled occupied Paris in 1941.

carrying to its ultimate consequences the movement that reduces man to the condition of man, and man to the free disposition of himself)⁶. In response to the bourgeois principle of a realm of things based on an inherent principle of servitude against which things silently rebelled, Marxism advocated a future, perfect adaptation between them and being.

Now that the end of history is behind us and we are in the midst of an economic crisis, with capitalism again compromised and Marxism once more becoming a commonplace critical lexicon, the relationship between human beings and objects has undergone another change. Or at least, a new, fragmented, conversation is taking place in the cultural production of philosophy and contemporary art, revealing the awareness or the anxiety linked to rethinking this relationship.

An artwork is a framework for collaboration. In writing as a means for establishing relationships, as in improvised dance in groups, repetition is fundamental. But variation opens the way to time, and allows for a kind of conclusion. A text for a non-existent exhibition is, by nature, curatorial: once it is in text form, the in-depth collaboration between the background and the analysis of the end products should give voice to things that do not appear to fit, or to have taken place, naming that which has never been spoken. An artwork is a work of representation, and any exercise of representation is an action: it is something that is to be done, not a given fact. A curatorial text should be a common venture in which subject and object are intertwined; it should abolish its status as a text in order to 'give' itself.

All readings are constituent relationships, and all listening to speech entails incorporation. A context is not a series of given conditions; it is a political production within a range of open-ended possibilities. Rather than a one-off agreement, it is a series of interconnected attachments that allow the performative

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- Bataille, Georges: *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy. Volume I. Consumption*. Zone Books: New York, 1991, p. 135.

happening of the subjects involved. Similarly, in his work, Jani Ruscica presents a series of coordinated practices: deferred space-time experience, *détournées*, which trigger the appearance of subjectivity. The core theme of his work is this emergent position of the subject, its interactions with the natural world –be it through the body, the environment or culture, through gender, race or place– resulting in assemblages.

Since the eighteenth century, philosophy gradually came to see the problem of subjectivity as merely an aesthetic matter. In the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that existence could only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. In the mid-twentieth century, Paul de Man interpreted his words as ‘an indictment of existence as a panegyric of art’⁷. Guy Debord reformulated this anathema in his own terms as ‘the society of spectacle’ and *Matrix* turned it into a film.

The rise of representation as a new order of the real coincided with the development of history as a discipline. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy wrote about the consequences of this relationship between history and representation on the written practice of history itself: ‘The historian’s work –which is never a work of memory– is a work of representation in many senses, but it is representation with respect to something that is not representable, and that is history itself. History is unrepresentable, not in the sense that it would be some presence hidden behind the representation, but because it is the *coming* into presence, as happening’.⁸

In his 2010 film *Travelogue*, Jani Ruscica experimented with the motion or emotion generated by a historical means of representation: the mechanical mechanism that

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- De Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1979. p. 93.

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- Cadava, Eduardo. *Words of Light. Theses on the Photography of History*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1997. P. 63.

moved a backdrop depicting a landscape before a stationary spectator so as to suggest movement –a mental journey in which movement is produced in representation, and the stationary place of the viewer becomes event. The convention of text, superimposed onto image, generates a basic way of experiencing the world as an eidetic projection, as an imaginary. By returning film to its status of pre-cinematic ‘display’, the medium itself becomes the mechanism that can generate narrative through its self-referentiality. The moving screen attaches itself to the white flowing of the empty screen of the ‘travelogue’. The inevitable idealisation of the film medium is stitched together in black and white with the imaginary-real of the flowing of its text. Film happens in a becoming that is indistinguishable from the unfolding of history.

The philosopher Ernst Jünger wrote about how event became object in modernity: ‘To a great degree, it has turned into an object (...) The event is bound neither to its particular space nor to its particular time, since it can be mirrored anywhere and repeated any number of times.’ Later he adds: ‘These are signs that point to a great distance.’⁹ The same great self-referential distance of film that proves to be a ventriloquist's contraption.

In *Scene Shifts*, a film produced a year later, Jani Ruscica carried out a more explicit exercise in ventriloquism, in which the narrative was driven by a multi-layered structure. The film plays with the viewer's expectations through iconically powerful settings and images that appear familiar but turn out to be false or displaced. Ruscica appropriates images and places, and appropriation is always a political modality of representation. The use of sound is also deceptive: it is used as a subterfuge of the events of the real. Through voices and soundscapes, different cultural objects become film; as the different episodes progress, they turn into narrated stories. Further still: objects and spaces turn into facts to be staged in a cultural space that is film itself. In his *Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot wrote: ‘We had the

experience but we missed the meaning,/ An approach to the meaning restores the experience'¹⁰. And that experience always involves the other: the off-screen voice with a strong African accent, the caricature of an Arab woman, the Chinese people imagined in the decoration of a baroque harpsichord... against the constant backdrop of the estrangement of the exotic, the experience of meaning is transmitted through translation.

Art history, as a discipline that combines aesthetic thought and history, also played a part in addressing the aesthetic nature of subjective construction, and in the modern age its renewal was driven by the exotic. The historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg has been reinstated as a major figure in recent years. His great feat was to approach art history as a history of the images of works of art; history as the imaginary appropriation of cultural objects arranged into a series of relationships that constantly shift between past and present, panel after panel, in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. When he began the project in 1927, his initial stimulus was Pueblo Indians.

In 1895, more than three decades before he started his Atlas, Warburg had travelled to New York to attend his brother's wedding. His passion for anthropology led him to interview experts such as Franz Boas at Harvard University, but he also took the opportunity to visit California, Arizona and New Mexico, driven by his curiosity about the Hopi Indian tribes. This curiosity was linked to a romantic idea of bourgeois tourism at the time, which proclaimed the possibilities of a final encounter with the primitive cultures that were still alive in America: a unique opportunity for contact just before progress caught up with them¹¹. One of the main

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T.S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages', No. 3 of *The Four Quartets*. New York: Harper, Brace and Company, 1943.

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- Freedberg, David: "Warburg's Mask: A study in idolatry", in *Anthropologies of Art*, Mariet Westermann ed. Williamstown: Clark Institute, 2005.

custodians of his legacy, Fritz Saxl, wrote: 'What Warburg owed to America was that he learnt to look at European history with the eyes of an anthropologist'¹².

In any case, Warburg returned to Europe in the middle of the following year without having managed to attend the snake dance rituals of the Pueblo people that took place in August each year. After suffering a nervous breakdown in the late 1910s, Warburg was confined to a mental hospital in Switzerland. Halfway through the 1920s, in an attempt to show his doctor that he was cured, Warburg threw himself into preparing a lecture: 'Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America'. His followers later published it in the form of the famous book *A Lecture on the Serpent Ritual*, but it had initially been a single public performance intended to secure his release from the clinic and certify his social reintegration. The lecture was structured around a series of photographs that Warburg had taken on that initiatory journey to America, and images of the serpent dance that he had never managed to see: in his letters he suggested a link between appropriating images from an Indian imaginary that he had not witnessed, and the recovery of his mental health¹³. Warburg did in fact manage to secure his release from the hospital, and immediately devoted himself to creating his Atlas. When he already had nine hundred images arranged on panels, he wrote to friends about his desire to return to America: he thought that the Atlas would only be complete if he could go back to the Pueblo people. In other words, the origin of one of our current genealogical forms of art history is rooted in the colonial anthropological and disciplinary apparatus.

In the late 1990s, a secret scandal shook the Warburg Institute in London when it announced the publication of a commemorative edition of Warburg's journey, which would consist of his text, his photographs and the images appropriated from the

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- *Idem*, p. 93.

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- See: Warburg, Aby / Binswanger, Ludwig: *La guarigione infinita. Storia clinica de Aby Warburg*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005.

Indians. The Office for the Preservation of Hopi Culture wrote to Institute to prevent the book being published, because the images of the rituals did not respect a sacred code: for the Pueblo people, the images are the ritual itself. It is as though the ritual were happening, performatively, in each image, over and over again, in the present. The Warburg Institute paid no heed and published them anyway. The coloniality of this dispute is nothing new in this story: during his trip, Warburg was taken to Oraibi by the reverend H. C. Voth, who had been a Mennonite missionary in Hopi country from 1893 to 1902. Voth had been repeatedly accused of colonial practices by the Indian Don C. Talayesva, particularly in relation to obtaining ethnographic objects for collectors such as Warburg¹⁴. A quote from Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* that Warburg used on many occasions serves as one of those anecdote-levers that are woven through his story: 'The tragedy of the costume and implement is ultimately the history of human tragedy.'

As David Freedberg has recently pointed out, art history has expressed nothing but admiration for Aby Warburg, choosing to overlook the context in which his research was produced. But modern anthropology has responded forcefully against this uncritical acceptance of his work as tradition. Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro explains how the discipline of anthropology is in itself an appropriationist phenomenon that reverses the colonial relationship of power that is genealogically established in the modern history of art according to Warburg's *Atlas*. In *Cannibal Metaphysics* he writes: 'non-trivial anthropological theory is a version of an indigenous practice of knowledge, all such theories being suitable in strict structural continuity with the intellectual pragmatics of the collectives that historically occupied the position of object in the discipline's gaze.'¹⁵ Western anthropology is a version of the forms of knowledge of its objects: almost as a kind

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- In January 1896, Warburg wrote to his parents from Santa Fe announcing that he would: 'shortly send a whole lot of Indian pots, clothes and tools to Hamburg. Please unpack them and have a large glass cabinet made by Knock – like those in an ethnography museum'. Freedberg, David: *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.

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- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo: *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Univocal Publishing: Minneapolis, 2014. Online at: <https://hamtramckfreeschool.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/de-castro-eduardo-viveiros-cannibal-metaphysics.pdf>

of revenge, the indigenous object appropriates the anthropologist's way of thinking. As well as favouring the decolonisation of thought by integrating the other, the 'perspectivism' that Viveiros advocates also allows us to go beyond the idea of developing multiple points of view about each object, and instead create a multiplicity of worlds based on a single point of view.

Jani Rusica uses a kind of perspectivism in *Travelogue* and *Scene Shifts*: both contain different temporalities –that is, the temporal arrangement of spaces, the use of time-producing media, and of technical devices that connect them– and different epistemologies –based on nature, culture, and science– which merge together with no limits other than the syntagmatic ones that film editing allows. These residues of history and a wariness of ways of knowing the world –like a cosmogony that is torn apart and put together again in narrative form– give rise to a viscous feeling of nostalgia: a yearning for the tradition that has been broken, which returns in the form of a queerness that becomes an emotional framework. As the philosopher Julia Kristeva suggested in *Black Sun*¹⁶, in reference to cultural productions linked to grief, emotional ties strengthen the bonds of signification. Over and above the film narrative itself, that nostalgic effect underpins the cosmogonic aspiration construed as impossibility or error: in pieces.

If we accept that film is an object with a capacity for dramatisation –and thus for provoking a space of socialisation– then *Conversation in Pieces* is a natural continuation of these earlier works. Objects, such as a book and the texts in it, are a crystallisation of specific socio-historical conditions of production. The objects that will come together in this project are supposedly fragments of cultural history: three-dimensional images unearthed from the collective imaginary and returned to it in the form of tools. Each one is a device waiting to be unfolded, to become a shared instrument or performance, through a process that reverts the contemplation of the film projection.

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– Kristeva, Julia: *Soleil noir. Dépression et mélancolie*. Gallimard: Paris, 1989.

The objects in *Conversation in Pieces* have a mistaken identity: if it is true that any reading is a bad reading, then a subjective shift of the text objectified on paper –a reproduced object, with its original use displaced–, is a bad object. Chosen in the way that anecdotes are chosen to illustrate history, they serve as a lever, in this case for the exhibition system: having become institutional critique or relational pattern, the ‘display’ turns the objects into characters in search of an author. These objects are not interpreted: their meaning happens. An Indian totem becomes a musical instrument. The Kennis brothers’ reconstruction of the Neanderthal woman known as Wilma becomes a disguise, a mask, a costume: a re-enactment that goes from diorama to performance, from presentation to event. A Soviet cartoon music box from the 1970s becomes a real object, an instrument that can receive compositions. The Kennis brothers themselves, twins with a remarkable capacity to reconstruct historical fictions based on scientific data, become a pair of puppets, a potential vehicle for additional theatrical performances. Lastly, the instrument that the composer Mahler used in a 1907 cartoon becomes real, and can once again make sounds like any other imaginary thing. All these objectual pieces appeal to historical complexities, social-political spaces that are rich in content and references. Only reading and use can bring movement and interaction to these references. As the artist Paul Chan wrote, ‘A thing is a web of relations at a standstill’¹⁷ .

These future objects are phenomenological and relational scores, open to the eventuality of their happening, unleashing a chain of interpretations, readings and narratives that are the equivalent of Praz’s autobiography, or of the anecdotes of history for Benjamin, or of the history of art as a comparative visual history in Warburg; and their emotional capacities also create significant connections. The theoretician Brian Massumi describes affect as the ‘gaps between positions on the

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- Chan, Paul: “Occupy Response” in *October*, Fall 2012, p. 40.

grid'¹⁸: objects –relations fragmented in time and space– are filled with forms of affect; peculiar forms of attachment in the experiential space of the future exhibition. The logical proposed uses for mistaken objects go hand in hand with an overlapping of all possible periods: from prehistory to the present, from the political situation before World War I to the tensions of Stalinist Russia. History is not linear; only its naturalised narrative is linear. History, like experience, is circular, spiral, elliptical. The past belongs to the present, and so does that future that will once again re-determine them into 'something' other than they were.

Elisabeth Freeman coined a term that is particularly productive for these purposes: chronopolitics. Up against the productive time of neoliberal capitalism and the biological time of the reproductive heterosexual couple, up against traditional, single, teleological time, artists develop other relationships between body and time, between the dissent produced by differential affects and the new social presences. Poses, as empowered gestures, are chronopolitical expressions. Freeman describes the present as a hybrid that 'admits contact with historical material that can be precipitated by particular body dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations'¹⁹. The time of Western rationality opens up to the beginnings of dialogue in which there are many bodies, and in which every pose is a vector that expands its relational potential. This is why adopting any gesture means reappropriating an earlier gesture of another; non-synchronously mimicking another body for a moment. The performativity of the body has the same semiotic weight as a text.

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- From the introduction to: Gregg, Melissa / Seigworth, Gregory J.: *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press: Durham, 2010.

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- Freeman, Elizabeth: *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Stories*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012. p. 96.

The body is the agent of history, the quintessential historiographic instrument. History is somatic –a choreographic repertory of gestures read in a particular order. Gestures are learnt, legitimised, codified: they belong to a particular gender, class, and race, and they are also naturalised within historically defined and objectified social fields. Poses, on the contrary, dismantle the language of appropriate gestures: to pose is not to pose a gesture, but to approach the existing code as a repertory available to bodies, which embody them on each occasion as event, taking apart and reassembling the relations constructed by history. To pose is to be aware of how a body makes history. A pose is history's flesh, against the grain. The North American critic Craig Owens wrote: 'To strike a pose, is to pose a threat'²⁰.

Poses decipher the choreographic phrases of dissent; the micro-histories that reveal twists, turns and repetitions: they are history dancing. Just as the anarchist Emma Goldman refused to be part of a revolution in which she couldn't dance²¹, *Conversation in Pieces* can be read as a proposal for new gestures, through the invention of deviant objects with which to strike up a conversation: in Jani Ruscica's hands, history is a choreographic repertoire to come, one that threatens its hegemonic readings. The mediation that hovers over *Conversation in Pieces* also addresses this performativity: a series of texts presented as cue cards for public speeches, a desire for the spectator to be present, for his speech act, for his participation in the exhibition textuality, for shared experience. This future conversation would be like an epidemic of differential signification, an emotional contagion by means of affected objects that can trigger contaminating poses. History is a choreography threatened by every new gesture, every new object. As the poet Wallace Stevens wrote: 'A new meaning is a new object'.

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- Craig Owens, 'The Medusa Effect, or, the Spectacular Ruse', in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. P. 192.

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- 'If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution.' From her book: *Living my Life*, 1931.

The latest instalment in the history of objects is being written now by a group of philosophers working in the field of speculative realism. Their Object-oriented Ontology or OoO argues that objects and the relationships between them are independent of human actions, even if their existence is due to human activity. This basic premise stems from the fact that we have come to the end of a framework for understanding the world, a period known as the Anthropocene: the age of man, immemorial but validated in the Renaissance, has passed. We have now entered a new age, in which humans no longer have a privileged position: a new potentiality of objects must become legible so as to impose new fluctuating relations with the real.

According to anthropocentric philosophy, man created culture as an apotropaic mechanism of protection from the absolutism of the real, personifying thunder in the form of a mythological character, or the ocean as a god. Quentin Meillassoux argues that this is a by-product of the 'correlationism' that has governed modern Western thought: the idea that there is no object without a subject, that the object-world gets its properties from the subject who experiences it²². Meillassoux's work is a far-reaching critique that aims to abolish this hierarchical relational principle, and to this end he reinstates one key element as the only basic law of the world: the need for contingency. To resist the totalisation of the experience of the world, we have to break it down into multiple contingent experiences, which return facticity to objects, and allow humans to recover being as event, in an evolving stability.

Having reached this point we can ask: what facticity should this text share with the work that it refers to? What is the meaning of this textual object, and what relation should it provoke in others? Can 'art things' be the script, like the cue cards for a

speech, that recovers a relationship with the world in which it again becomes possible as an intense, critical experience every time? Wouldn't then history – having become event once more in relation to its possible objects– be the space-time that allows the exhibition its maximum capacity for agency?

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