

It has been 1 month, 7 days, 12 hours, 49 minutes, and 31 seconds since I last smoked a cigarette. Since then I haven't really thought much about smoking at all, with the exception of the past one and a half days. These days consisted mostly of ordering thoughts, refining ideas and gathering courage for the writing of this text.

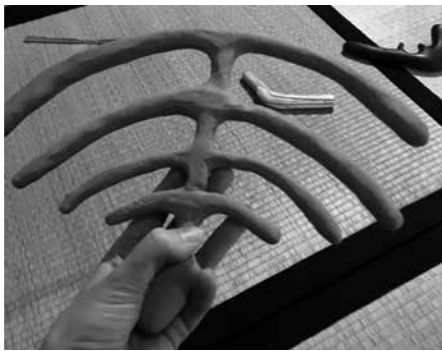
I was always a social smoker and saw cigarettes as good company. There were two moments in which I enjoyed it most, at night in

the company of friends and a glass of something strong, or at home while at work in my writing room. In the latter case smoking had become part of an almost unnoticed routine; after having rounded off a sentence my hands would veer away from the keyboard, two stretched fingers reach for the burning cigarette in the ashtray. While my eyes, fixated upon the screen, reread the last sentence, my fingers make their way for the mouth. I take a deep drag, my back reclines against the backrest while my eyes look away from the screen for one second. Once the smoke has passed through my mouth into the aether, a new sentence, line of thought, or paragraph presents itself.

It might seem sentimental but at those moments my cigarette was a true companion, a trusted switch between my intimate imagination and the outside world where thoughts were put to the test and arranged. Like the symbiosis that occurs between people in a conversation, or like atoms, their thoughts connect with one another inside a bubble and create new formulas. Such a thought bubble resembles a womb in which some ideas nestle, and become impregnated, while others strike a miss. The smouldering fag between my fingers did for me what an interlocutor does, namely, facilitating a pause for breath in which phrases nestle fleetingly before entering the wide world and into relations with other molecular thoughts through my keyboard.

Almost three months ago I received an *Accompaniment* from the artist, David Bernstein. Perhaps it was an encouragement to give up smoking, because an *Accompaniment* was invented by Bernstein as an object for non-smokers to use while others smoke. It is a brass stave approximately 10 centimeters in length with a diameter of 8 millimeters, and comes in an accompanying leather case. Since I was given the *Accompaniment*, it has been displayed alongside a few other 'objects of desire' where I only notice it while watering my plants, dusting or otherwise boredly rummage the corners of my room.

After the absence of cigarettes had passed me by without too much bother, suddenly the lack thereof made itself known to me. Thoughts refused to order themselves, ideas wouldn't spin and my courage failed me. It was reason enough to seek diversion in my 'objects of desire' where almost immediately the leather cased *Accompaniment* offered itself to me.



Thinging

Written in collaboration with Jurgis Paškevičius
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You came to me and said let's make a chair. Then you realized the chair could be cheers. And with cheers we have a glass, and we need a place to put the glass so we need a table. But it's perfect too, because chairs are often with tables. So here we are, Cheers and Tables. What a great misunderstanding! Cheers to Miss Understanding! Ah, but the miss is standing under too. She's standing under the table. Cheers to the miss standing under the table! But how can a miss stand under a table, the table is too low for a miss, unless the miss is very tiny or it's a very big table. But this is just a normal table, it has legs, legs like the miss. But what if this is not a real miss but a representation of the miss? She could be made of stone, like a caryatid. A what? A caryatid; a column in the shape of a woman. Karate? Yes she's doing karate! Cheers to the miss standing under the table doing karate!

But what now? What could it become? Is it an illustrative conversation? It is more than just an illustration. What is it for you, this cheers? It is at once a potential Object and at the same time a story. And for you? A language tool for sculpting secrets. Language is a story and sculpture is an Object, but a tool and a secret are something more. Maybe it's a secret tool? Maybe *thinging* is a secret tool? *Thinging*, could be described as a reciprocal process of making things, thinking through things, and seeing things differently through thoughts.

Thinging is our creature. The creature becomes like a donkey. It carries our things back and forth between us, but what it does in the transit is the secret. We could say it flips the meaning in the movement, or the movement in the meaning; it moves the meaning. The creature makes me think of the transitional Object and the transitional space of psychologist Donald Winnicott. He came up with the idea that the teddy bear or the blanket, which is the first Object of possession, is an Object that exists in order to be a transition between the baby and the mother. When the baby is very young, it does not see a difference between itself and the mother. The mother's breast is its breast. And at a certain point it starts to notice that the mother is a separate being. At this moment, the transitional Object is found. This Object exists as the transition between the internal world of the child and the external world of the mother. This, Winnicott says, is the foundation of cultural life; the thing in between us that we use to communicate our internal and external realities with. This is the creature, but the thing about the creature, is that it exists as a reflection of the relationship between you and I, it is not just the medium between us, it is a product of our exchange. It is a third being, that speaks our third language.

Could this conversation be lucid daydreaming? There is a certain self awareness that happens in the thinging process, but it is usually after we have already spoken. When we realize what we have said, we start to see more pathways. So thinging is the trip, a trip without destination. It is like a navigational tool for drifting in a bath. I think it is like swimming in laps, you are going back and forth, but maybe you made a realization on the way that will change your experience on the way back. I think that thinging could be connected with therapy, like its connection with Donald Winnicott. For example, Winnicott has a therapy game for children called *The Spatula Game*. In a room, a small spatula is placed on the table before the child arrives. When the child enters and sits down, it sees the spatula and wants to touch it because it is an attractive Object. The child picks it up and begins to play with it, feeling it and moving it. Winnicott says this is a crucial moment because here is when you must resist giving explanation to the child. You cannot direct the child in its play because if you do that it might become complacent and not be able to enter its own creative imagination. Winnicott says in this moment there is a pause when the child has to decide to enter into its inner world. In this shift, the spatula begins to flip. It starts to transform into something else. Perhaps it is now an airplane being waved around in delight! This is like the thinging because at once the thing becomes a new thing and the child starts to think differently through the new thing. She starts to dream of what an airplane can do. Of course this can happen in reverse as well, an airplane could become a spatula.

So thinging, as a tool for transition, is a bridge between our inner world of thoughts and outer world of things. Could thinging be a transitional state of mind? It's also a conversation, where language itself becomes the thing. There is a transition between language and perception, a transformation is occurring. But is there something more than language? What is left by asking, "what is not a language?" And if it is not a system of signs, what is it then? Is it a pattern for making sense of our senses? Maybe it is a loose pattern because a lot of surprises happen that make nonsense. So it's an unknown form for making sense. Where did the sense come from? Does it come from thinking? But what is the difference between thinking and thinging? Thinking is just the thin king. If you could try to think about the process of thinking, you would immediately bounce into an enormous reflection cloud of concepts developed in the history of philosophy and particularly the philosophy that deals with language and mind phenomenology. But you should try to do a very big jump and leave the fact alone that language is a medium and an obstacle for an extended expression of the mind. So you say that you can't say because you don't know what you don't know. It is a mysterious force like a muse, and if we mention her name, she takes off her clothes and jumps in the water.

You have a very simple thought, starting with a sample, an example: while in the moment of thinging, the mind starts to produce thoughts and the word becomes a world. You turned one letter around and you woke up in a field of blooms.

Then the first time you heard about synesthesia, you had a paranoid feeling that there is a chance that you might have this involuntary neurological disorder. You could easily agree that characters "A" and "4" are a red empty costume. And "5 B" is a blue pair of shoes next to the previous one. If you would observe synesthesia in a traditional way and put it in simple words, it is a neurological condition where a person transforms one sort of perception into another one, like specific sounds for specific colors, by following some strict pattern. This person is called a synesthete. The pattern collects signs into a system, which could become a language. But in this case, you are interested in a different language. In an unpredictable transformation of language, that's why you don't know if it still could be called synesthesia. But maybe, you could use synesthesia as a tool to loot the meaning. After some more time spent in the city, you realized that in one way or another, everyone has some light form of this automatic experience. Through a natural or obsessive lens, you see what you want to see, and if you look – you will always find it. But who knows where the gold is buried when you don't know how old is the goal? Is it too old? As you understand, one of the possible symptoms of synesthesia could be an exaggerated need to anthropomorphize the world around us. It is a similar condition for transforming the front of a car or a house decoration above the entrance into the face of a human. And it says: "hello, how are you?" ☺ Then we could ask him what time is it? Is it time for spatula? Not yet.

The sky on sun day could suggest to be a transitional station for a convertible conversation.

And through the clouds of look-alikes, a fool moon appears as a grumpy guy. And in French, he is a beautiful lady. But can you imagine what happens especially, when particular languages have genders for every thing? The world comes into interaction, full of six success. But things already have their relation chips as letters have their order. You have seen in YouTube how it is possible to rollover with a kayak. Could we do a Google thinging?

No worries – text can hypnotize.
You are following your strict right-left rule.
Writing, reading, and even conversation is scripted.
Yes, yes. I mean you, imagining me typing this.
Ok, flip this.

Besides its shape, the *Accompaniment* doesn't have much in common with a cigarette at all. It is significantly heavier, which makes it difficult to rest in your hand, if clenched nonchalantly in between one's two fingers it proves to be a right old balancing act. It is not recommended to place in one's mouth as it tastes and smells rather poignant. In fact, the clumsy object doesn't offer itself for any use whatsoever; it is smooth, heavy, slightly too big or slightly too small.

But two things stand out. First, the object is warm. Brass is an efficient conductor and the *Accompaniment* quickly emulates one's own body temperature. Secondly, this rings true and perhaps even kitschy, since holding it in my hands the words, funnily enough, are pouring from my proverbial pen. The question arises, has my *Accompaniment* assumed the role of the companion, and does it help me formulate my thoughts in a way that I can share them comprehensively?

A short text was written by David Bernstein and Jurgis Paškevičius in which they explain the concept of 'thinging'. Here they refer to the principal of the *transitional object*. The term derives from child psychology and refers to a thing that helps baby humans deal with the shocking realization that they are detached from their mother. The thing, a cloth, stuffed toy or dummy, represents the switch from the mother to themselves, between the interior world and the external existence of another being. Such a thing may also come to facilitate the communication between the internal and external realities of adults. The active form of this has been deemed 'thinging' by Bernstein and Paškevičius; thinking as a result of things, thinking thanks to the making and/or touching of things, and thinking about things as a result of thinking through things.

During his exhibition at P/////AKT Bernstein orchestrated *Obsessys*. They were 'sassy' object-obsession sessions, in which the artist invited the public to touch objects and discuss them. The sessions took place in the small apartment in which Bernstein himself lived. There the objects were staled out upon an island of tatami-mats. The viewing and the feeling of the unusual objects lead to the conversation.

Cultural philosopher Walter Benjamin (1925-1940) has often written about craftsmanship and the human relationship to things in which he has emphasised the importance of contact. According to his reasoning, authentic knowledge and experience literally translate into having a grip on the world. Hands play an essential role, metaphorically and figuratively, in making life tangible and familiar, in keeping alive the power of enchantment amidst the insipid capitalistic fetishism of consumerism. According to Benjamin, a physical approach to matter strengthens the memory and experience; in an associative way, it offers an understanding of the history of an object, and awakens a

certain intimacy to, a sensual relation with your possession. So does he come to describe the passion of a collector: "One only has to watch a collector handle objects in his glass case. As he holds them in his hands he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired."¹

During Bernstein's *Obsessys* participants sit on the cosy tatami-mats while the objects were passed around from one member of the group to the next. Their materiality, form, weight and texture form an incentive for candid associations about their use. These 'things' are whatever you want them to be. They can provide every function you need or wish for. In this intimate setting a conversation can occur in which every spoken thought, fancy or attempt at meaning form an incentive for making a new connection and approach to the other. The things become an extension of body and fantasy, and in doing so form a switch between your own interior world and that of others. With this, 'thinging' goes beyond just thinking with things, and it becomes a sensual game between companions. Or as urbandictionary.com describes it 'Thinging: n. \ 'thinj \ - ... the intersection between being a "thing" and just being a "fling".'

1 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my library", in *Illuminations*, p. 62.

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Het is 1 maand, 7 dagen, 12 uur, 49 minuten en 31 seconden geleden dat ik voor het laatst een sigaret opstak. Sindsdien denk ik eigenlijk bijna nooit meer aan sigaretten, met uitzondering van de afgelopen anderhalve dag. Die dag waren grotendeels gevuld met het ordenen van gedachten, het uitspinnen van ideeën en het verzamelen van moed voor het schrijven van deze tekst.

Ik was altijd een sociale roker en sigaretten zag ik als goed gezelschap. Er waren twee momenten waarop ik er het meeste van genoot, 's avonds met vrienden en een glas goed sterk of wanneer ik thuis in mijn werkkamer zat te schrijven. In dat laatste geval was het roken van een sigaret onderdeel van een bijna onopgemerkte routine; na het afronden van een zin lichten mijn handen zich op van het toetsenbord, twee uitgestrekte vingers reiken naar het rokende peukje in de asbak. Terwijl mijn ogen, strak gericht op het beeldscherm, de laatst geschreven regels herlezen, bewegen mijn vingers richting mond. Ik neem een diepe hijs, mijn rug ontspant zich tegen de stoelleuning en ogen draaien een halve seconde weg van het scherm. Zodra de rook uit mijn mond omhoog kringelt dient een volgende zin, gedachtegang of paragraaf zich aan.

Het klinkt sentimenteel maar op zulke momenten was dat sigaretje een ware kompaan, een vertrouwde schakel tussen mijn intieme verbeelding en de buitenwereld waar gedachten beproefd en gesorteerd werden. Vergelijkbaar met de symbiose tussen gesprekspartners die met elkaar een ideeën-bubbel scheppen waarbij gedachten als atomen verbinding met elkaar aangaan zodat er nieuwe formules ontstaan. Die bubbel is als een baarmoeder waar sommige ideeën nestelen, bevrucht raken en groeien, en anderen worden afgeketst. Het smeulende peukje tussen mijn vingers deed wat een gesprekspartner ook doet, het faciliteren van een adempauze waarin frases zich kortstondig nestelen voordat ze de buitenwereld instromen en via mijn toetsenbord verbindingen aangaan met andere moleculaire gedachten.

Circa drie maanden geleden kreeg ik van kunstenaar David Bernstein een *Accompaniment*. Mogelijk was het een aanmoediging om het roken op te geven, want *Accompaniment* dat is een door Bernstein bedacht object voor niet-rokers te gebruiken op momenten dat rokers roken. Het is een staaf van gepolijst messing van circa 10 centimeter lang met een doorsnede van circa 8 millimeter, opgeborgen in een aansluitend leren hoesje. Sinds ik hem gekregen heb ligt de *Accompaniment* naast enkele andere 'objects of desire' opgesteld in mijn eregalerij, waar ik hem vooral opmerk, en er kortstondig van geniet, als ik de planten water geef, stof afneem of om andere redenen de hoeken van mijn werkkamer afstruin.

Nadat het ontbreken van sigaretten een maand lang achteloos aan me voorbij was gegaan drong zich tijdens het schrijven het gemis ineens aan me op. Gedachten weigerden zich te ordenen, ideeën ontsponnen niet en de moed zakte me in de schoenen. Het was een aanleiding om afleiding te zoeken in mijn eregalerij waar het leren hoesje met de *Accompaniment* zich vrijwel direct aandiende.

Behalve zijn vorm lijkt het object in niks op een sigaret. Het is een stuk zwaarder waardoor hij zich maar moeizaam in je hand laat rusten,

nonchalant ingeklemd tussen twee vingers wordt het een ware balancer act. De staaf in je mond steken is af te raden, zowel smaak als geur zijn behoorlijk penetrant. Eigenlijk dicteert het onhandige object op geen enkele manier wat je ermee zou moeten, het is glad, zwaar, net te groot of net te klein.

Maar twee dingen vallen op. Allereerst, het object is warm. Messing is een snelle geleider en de *Accompaniment* neemt in korte tijd de lichaamstemperatuur over. Ten tweede, dit klinkt waarachtig en misschien wel een beetje kitsch, maar sinds het object in mijn hand heb vloeien de woorden uit mijn spreekwoordelijke pen. De vraag dient zich aan, heeft mijn *Accompaniment* de rol van kompaan overgenomen en helpt het ding me, net zoals voorheen de sigaret, mijn gedachten zo te formuleren dat ik ze op een begrijpelijke manier kan delen?

David Bernstein en Jurgis Paškevičius hebben ooit een tekst geschreven waarin ze het concept 'thinging' uitleggen. Daarin refereren ze aan het principe van het transitie object ('transitional object'). De term komt uit de kinderpsychologie en verwijst naar een ding dat mensenbaby's helpt om te gaan met het schokkende besef een wezen te zijn dat los staat van hun moeder. Het ding, bijvoorbeeld een lap, knuffel of speen, vertegenwoordigt de schakel tussen moeder en henzelf, tussen hun innerlijke wereld en het uitwendige bestaan van een ander wezen. Niet enkel bij baby's kan zo'n ding dus de communicatie faciliteren tussen interne realiteit en de buitenwereld. De actieve vorm hiervan noemen Bernstein en Paškevičius 'thinging'; het



denken dankzij dingen, het denken dankzij het maken en/of aanraken van dingen, en dingen omdenken dankzij het denken door dingen.

Tijdens zijn tentoonstelling in P/////AKT orkestreert Bernstein *Obsessys*. Dat zijn sexy 'sassy' object-obsessie sessies, waarbij de kunstenaar zijn publiek uitnodigt om objecten aan te raken en daarover te praten. De sessies vinden plaats in het kleine appartement waar Bernstein op dat moment resideert. Daar liggende objecten uitgestald op een eiland van tatami-matten objecten. Het bekijken, maar vooral ook het bevoelen van de onalledaagse objecten geeft aanleiding tot het gesprek.

Cultuurfilosoof Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) heeft veel geschreven over ambachtelijkheid en de menselijke relatie tot dingen waarin hij het belang van aanraking benadrukt. Authentieke kennis en ervaring laat zich volgens zijn beredenering letterlijk vertalen in "grip" hebben op de wereld. Handen fungeren daarbij, al dan niet in metaforische zin, als essentieel instrument om het leven tastbaar en familiair te maken en, ten overstaande van afstomping door kapitalistisch fetisjisme van consumptiegoederen, de kracht van de betovering in leven te houden. Fysieke toenadering tot materiaal sterkt volgens Benjamin de herinnering en ervaring; biedt op een associatieve manier begrip van verleden van het object; én wakkert een zekere intimiteit aan, een sensuele relatie met je bezitting. Zo schrijft hij de passie van een verzamelaar: "One only has to watch a collector handle objects in his glass case. As he holds them in his hands he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired."¹

Zittend op de knusse tatami-matten gaan tijdens de *Obsessys* van Bernstein de objecten van hand tot hand. De materialiteit, vorm, gewicht en textuur van de dingen vormen aanleiding voor een openhartig gesprek onder de deelnemers vol associaties over hun toepassing. Deze 'dingen' zijn wat je wilt dat ze zijn. Ze vervullen de functies die je er zelf van verlangt. In de intieme omgeving van het gesprek ontstaat een bubbel waarbij iedere uitgesproken gedachte, fantasie en poging tot duiding aanleiding vormt voor het maken van nieuwe verbinding en toenadering tot de ander. De dingen vormen een verlengde van je lichaam en je fantasie en daarmee een schakel tussen je eigen innerlijke wereld en die van anderen. Daarmee gaat 'thinging' verder dan alleen het denken met dingen, en verwordt het tot een sensueel spel tussen kompanen. Of zoals urbandictionary.com het omschrijft 'Thinging: n. \ 'thijnj \ - ... the intersection between being a "thing" and just being a "fling".'

1 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my library", in *Illuminations*, p. 62.

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