

Untimely Conversations

By Renato Osoy

Guattari: In order to not state that I am thinking, I would invoke indexes.

Min: I understand. But I think one doesn't have to call forth an index. I am always thinking without any pauses. But, I think I wish to become an agency that no longer has to think. Let me define myself as a being whose life is characterized by discontinuity.

Félix Guattari and Tanaka Min in Conversation

I.

Imagine a text which flows constantly, not only in the physicality of its word count, but in the fluidity of its conceptual propositions. A text that becomes an event of omnipresence through an action of manifestation, a text which is pervasive and immanent in between the pauses, the silences and the gaps as it comes into comprehension. I mean in this case a text that is not only offered in lines and phrases, but actually, in the mode of a conversation. Let us think of the art of conversation and the conversation as art. A conversation as the act of *con-versing*, meaning to take one thing from one side to the other, to turn it. By conversation I mean the informal exchange of ideas by spoken words: “the two men were deep in conversation, from (in the sense ‘living among, familiarity, intimacy’): the Latin *conversatio(n-)*, from the Latin verb *conversari*: ‘keep company (with),’ from *con-* ‘with’ + *versare*, frequentative of *vertere* ‘to turn’; to converse, to engage in conversation”.¹ We learn and we grasp the world through speech, we weave meanings into words through the production of images and the articulation of thoughts, in such complex processes we construct anecdotes and metaphors. We read images as words, we see words as images, we articulate words to create phrases, we produce images and analogies in attempt to bring together sense and coherence. To the notion of a *conversational attempt* Blanchot

¹ New Oxford American Dictionary 3rd edition 2010, 2012 by Oxford University Press.

proposes: “To converse is to turn language away from itself, maintaining it outside of all unity, outside even of the unity of that which it is. To converse is to divert language from itself by letting it differ and defer, answering with an always already to a never yet.”²

II.

A simple conversation between human beings as the act of communicating what one has to transmit to what the other one has to make from it, and viceversa. According to Ranciere this act of passing-on becomes a sort of action where “An intelligence that translates signs into other signs and proceeds by comparisons and illustrations in order to communicate its intellectual adventures, and understand what another intelligence is endeavouring to communicate to it. This poetic labour of translation is at the heart of all learning.”³ We tend to think of conversations as being somewhat more casual, that the passing-on of information is perhaps an event of chance, and in cases it is. But it also happens that someone deliberately wants to say something, or make someone say something to bring specific meanings and thoughts out in the open. In this case the question, *the questioning* becomes a conceptual dispositif, as it is in the case of the interview for example.

“You have a much more fluid view of the social world than Foucault. I am thinking of A Thousand Plateaus. Foucault uses more architectural metaphors. Do you agree with this description?

We did not have the same conception of society. For me, a society is something that is constantly escaping in every direction. When you say I am more fluid, you are completely right. It flows momentarily; it flows ideologically. It is really made up of lines of flight. So much so that the problem for a society is how to stop it from flowing. For me, the powers come later. What surprised Foucault was that faced with all these powers, all of their deviousness and hypocrisy, we can still resist. My surprise is the opposite. It is flowing everywhere and governments are able to block it. We approached the problem from opposite directions. You are right to say that society is a fluid, or even worse, a gas. For Foucault, it is an architecture.”⁴

The question does not only serve rhetoric purposes, say for example of highlighting or making evident what is known, only to constitute an argument per-say, but it also serves to

² “The Writing of the Disaster” By Maurice Blanchot, translated by A. Smock. University of Nebraska Press 1995.

³ “The Emancipated Spectator” Chapter 1, The Emancipated Spectator, Jacques Rancière. Translated by Gregory Elliot, Verso Editions, London 2009.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995, Edited by David Lapoujade, translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina. Semiotext(e) 2006.

open the unconscious of unexpected knowledges. In the previous segment Deleuze cleverly pairs both Foucault and his own view to the question of the interviewer, not only to confirm what the question already states, but to open the question to another question while simultaneously leaving the comparison with Foucault behind. Deleuze states at the end of his statement: *You are right to say that society is a fluid, or even worse, a gas. For Foucault, it is an architecture.* In this case the interviewer is probably faced with two options, either to continue the rhetoric game of comparison or to enter the unexpected universe of *gaseous societies* that Deleuze *opens-up* for the interviewer. Leaving this thought on the side, I want to think rather on how conversations open, move and come about. I want to think on how knowledges and informations become more progressive as they exchange between voices. I want to think on how the borders on the frame of a thought expand or collapse themselves. I want to think that conversations are or that they should be fluid, liquid; that the conversation is a flow where moderation and reciprocity permit a movement and a fluidity throughout the exchange of information(s). Hence, I want to think of the idea of flowing with a conversation, but also of playing with a conversation, the conversation as a field to play with ideas, the conversation as a way to expand interactions and produce connections between sides.

III.

We use conversation as a channel, we open up a conversation, in this sense the conversation becomes a bridge that is in-between the communicating sources, the conversation becomes a medium then. In McLuhan's terms the medium is the message, but also the message is the medium, both reciprocal statements establish a constant interplay in the flow of communications. Although McLuhan doesn't put it this way, you could say that *the medium is the message* is his way of saying not *what does it says*, but *what does it do*. By surveying the notion of *the medium* we not only find out what is happening but also how it is happening. On an interview McLuhan stated: "The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way." Later on he states, "A point of view can be a dangerous luxury when substituted for insight and understanding."⁵ Perhaps McLuhan's latest statements can help us consider that it is the fluidity and the renovation in the constant exchange of thoughts, and the interactions between people which allow the progression of knowledge to occur. This inextricable notion of renovation and flow is also emphasised by Dewey in his text "Having an Experience". Dewey adds, "If a conclusion is reached, it is that of a

⁵ Herbert Marshall McLuhan (*1911 - +1979) lecture recorded by ABC Radio National Network on 27 June 1979 in Australia. Marshall McLuhan Full lecture: The medium is the message - 1977 part 1 v 3 // <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmaH51F4HBw>

movement of anticipation and cumulation, one that finally comes to completion. A 'conclusion' is no separate and independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement." But first let us frame the case of *conversation as an experience* to continue the thread; a conversation as an event, as a happening, as an occurrence, hence a conversation as an experience. To the notion of flow in an experience Dewey adds, "In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself."⁶ This sense of *distinctness* that Dewey proposes is probably to what McLuhan refers to as having *the luxury of a point of view*, to the idea of permitting a sense of fluidity in the constitution of thought through conversation. In this sense, Heathfield also suggests that "Dialogue manifests a form of discourse that is within and partly about the present context of encounter, an intensely social and provisional affair that is not subject to closure." Consequently, in the sense of *a dialogue as an event disclosure*, Heathfield suggests that dialogues, "As such, they are rarely static and final, but highly dynamic and provisional. They are seen not just as representations but also as sayings. What they say is said in relation to, and partly determined by, their context: historical and present, material and spatial, and embodied in terms of the physical and sensual relation between the spectator and the object."⁷ In this sense, conversations, their topics and their environments, can become new or renewed depending on how they are presented and re-represented. The medium of *conversation* allows inexhaustible possibilities for conceptual iterations according to the intention executed in its contextualisations.

On a last note I want to point towards the plasticity that the idea of *conversations as mediums* might facilitate to us. That is, in terms of conceptualising its expandability in the notion of *the interview as a conversation*, or perhaps *the conversation in an interview*. "Few have mastered the art of conversation better than Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-director of exhibitions and programs and director of international projects at London's Serpentine Gallery, who, through his ongoing Interview Project, has recorded some 2,000 hours of his discussions with notable cultural figures."⁸ Paradoxically enough, in another interview with Obrist he is asked about his medium of choice as communicator. In his reply he goes beyond the question and elaborates on the possibilities for potentializing the conception of medium per say. As we read further on the conversation, he also brings awareness towards issues of permanence and ephemerality in speech/discourse production.

⁶ "Having An Experience" Chapter 3, *Art As Experience* by John Dewey. Perigee Books, The Berkley Publishing group, New York 2009

⁷ "Writing of the Event", *Field Station 8*, by Adrain Heathfield. Published in 'A Performance Cosmology', Eds. Richard Gough, Daniel Watt, Judie Christie, Routledge, 2006.

⁸ "The Master Interviewer" by Karen Marta; on *Surface* magazine. "The Art Issue", Issue 104, 2013-2014.

HUO: Medium? You mean if it is the exhibition, or the book, or...?

CP: An exhibition, books, a certain kind of practice, painting, sculpture, video art.

HUO: I have just been speaking this morning, before our conversation, to Ai Wei Wei and he is a great example of being in between. He does sculpture and installation, and he came from a painting background. He draws, has a daily practice of drawing, he writes, he does architecture, architecture as medium, at the same time he curates. Obviously, my medium as a curator is the exhibition. Exhibitions are temporary constellations. They are not usually permanent, they are not collected, because it is very rare that a whole exhibition gets collected, it happens sometimes but they are lucky circumstances, either a museum buys a whole show, but usually it disperses again and it is only for a very short time these things have cohesion. Books have always had the longest staying power. Books are out there, however an exhibition's 'temporariness' is also a great chance to make a lot of experiments possible. If they were permanent one would not dare to experiment, it is a temporary thing. So the exhibition is certainly my preferred medium, the exhibition has lot to experiment with. The exhibition is also an invention of display, a new way of seeing. For example, Marcel Duchamp's hanging coal bags in the Surrealist exhibition in Paris then 'rope' into the Surreal exhibit in New York where great inventions of display are featured. It is a constituent part of an exhibition something I am very interested in. That's why I very often invite artists and architects to invent a display feature for my exhibitions.⁹

In the conversation or rather the interview, the conversation becomes the topic of the conversation as means to get to the core of the question, as Obrist begins his answer by saying, *I have just been speaking this morning, before our conversation, to Ai Wei Wei and he is a great example of being in between.* The being in between clearly opens up a gap, leaving a clearance to connect one side to another. Consequently, I also want to point to the fact that he cleverly uses the idea of bringing others into the conversation as a way to expand possibilities in producing meanings, as he states: *That's why I very often invite artists and architects to invent a display feature for my exhibitions.* As a last remark on Obrist's statements, I want to direct attention to Obrist concern in the translation, or rather transformation of meanings into forms of significance. In the words of Marta referring Obrist work she states, "Turning an interview into a poem would be an interesting achievement in itself. A book of such interviews would be like an anthology of works by poets with varying interests. But the aggregate, the sheer volume and international scope of the interviews HUO has done over the past two decades, gathers the individual voices—the individual

⁹ An interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist by Contemporary Practices; Visual Arts from the Middle East, Volume 4, fall 2010
<http://www.contemporarypractices.net/>

poems—into a master poem, not one rooted in a single nation or heritage, but a vital global epic. It is a unified and unifying poem with a memory of the past, which is our present inheritance and cultural legacy for the future.”¹⁰ In this case Obrist lets the medium become the venue that projects him towards the building of compositions, he makes a case for thinking beyond the conversation of art, towards the art of conversation.

III.

If we consider both the duration of a conversation and the space of a conversation, we can say then that the conversation sets a *spatiotemporal* frame. First, let me point to the fact that my concern in this text is not necessarily to locate measurements of time or to propose a definition of time, rather, I am trying to explore the possibilities of making sense of time while sensing time through the experience of a conversation and its implications. It is in the duration, that we actually become aware of time, because in a conversation someone is always talking, someone is always talking in a conversation taking its time to talk, taking the time to weave the text and produce the meanings through it. It is easy to agree upon that proposing *the notion or a notion of* time is far too abstract and surreal to be grasped in a blow, but still, we need to think of ways to contain time(s) as concept(s) in capsule(s) of coherence. In an attempt to frame time through words and images, the thoughts of Stein open a possible possibility as she proposes that “It is understood by this time that everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition.” Stein proposes a conceptual place as a point of departure in our conception of time. A place-space as a possible option where we can survey the notion of time both in the concrete or/and in the abstract realms. Stein adds, “The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen, and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.”¹¹ Composition becomes then, not only a thought-concept, but also a physical place of exchange where the stream of time and the events that flow through it come to existence. In this sense, let me propose that the space which I wish to refer to, is the space of the physical life, of the daily life, of the presential, of the being there. A space where places become defined by our actual being, by our being there, but

¹⁰ Ibid. “The Master Interviewer” by Karen Marta.

¹¹ “Composition as Explanation” By Gertrude Stein. First delivered by the author as a lecture at Cambridge and Oxford, this essay was first published by the Hogarth Press in London in 1926 and revived in the volume called *What Are Masterpieces*.

also by our where there. I want to think of places-spaces where compositions articulate, and informations are transmitted and established through words and gestures, through physical and sensual ways in a duration of time. Places of coming together and of being together, electrifying places, places and moments that create situations and events where imagination and action take flight through the art of the conversation.

It is when we start the act of composing that all the information and the materials that we have gathered consciously and unconsciously, start to make sense or we try to bring into sense. It is at such a moment that the material starts speaking to us and we to it. It asks us, it demands us to be composed, it wants to be arranged, it wants to be made sense of. At first it is just a chaos, and the chaos needs to be framed, it needs to change its form, its status, in order to enter other levels of exchange. On this notion Latour proposes an approach, which he calls *compositionism*, and although he frames this idea as away to to conceptualize the temporality of history, it seems to me that he also opens up the possibility to think of the concept further, as we iterate possibilities for potential contextualizations. Latour states, "I have come to use the word 'composition' to regroup in one term those many bubbles, spheres, networks, and snippets of arts and science. It is my solution to the modern/postmodern divide. Composition may become a plausible alternative for modernization. What can no longer be modernized, what has been postmodernized to bits and pieces, can still be composed."¹² Latour clearly opens up a conceptual venue with the idea of compositionism. What I wish to propose then, is that we imagine further on Latour's proposition, and consider compositioning as an activity, as a verb (implying action and conjugation); because it is in the act, in the action of composing where we create dialogs, debates and exchanges among sources and concepts. The place where composition occurs. In a way, when compositioning starts to operate, it becomes a thing on its own, it becomes an agent, it acts with agency, demanding and creating its own systems that interacts with other systems. Ranciere also proposes a way of looking at this activity, he calls it instead *the layout or the surface of design*. Ranciere's initial proposition explains, "It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world."¹³ We create methods to compose, we compose with other compositions. In the act of composing, we criss-cross contextual frames, we blend territories, we juxtapose topics, we collage images, we paraphrase sayings and we multiply concepts. We refer to compositions as we produce newer compositions; we stack them, we shuffle them, we re-create them, we re-enact them, we re-read them, we de-compose them

¹² "Steps Toward the Writing of a Compositionist Manifesto", by Bruno Latour, *New Literary History*, 2010.

¹³ "The Future of the Image" By Jaques Rancière, Chapter 4, *The Surface Of Design*. Translated by Gregory Elliot. Verso Editions 2009.

and re-compose them until we get what we need or at least we try to. By composing data, information and materials, we attempt to deal and organise the chaos of reality to bring forth knowledge, we actually tend to de-compose things first, and then we re-compose things again, to give them form, to make sense of them in order to depict the world and its meanings. According to Stein, it is the proper contextualisation of the spatiotemporal frame which permits a given composition to function accordingly in its environment. Stein reiterates again, “There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it”.

In a conversation, the point of interaction becomes also the point of articulation and the point where composition happens. These places where matters become evident, say, in the case of conversations, it could be referred to as a *delineated* or as a *constructed frame*. Conversations are moments of encounter. In the event of an encounter and in the unfolding of an encounter, interactions occur. These occurrences, sometimes deliberate and at others unexpected, produce motion and make related matters become motion, and in motion as well. Such *setting in motion*, consequently and inevitably create intersections or traceable points where traffic occurs. For example negotiations, dealings, translations, transactions, tradings and mediations occur in *places of intersection*. Matters and affairs of knowledge are not static, they flow, they are progressive, they need constant reconfiguration and activation in order to keep their regenerative motion happening. Let us propose at last, in order to make sense of the flow and composition notion, that, there is what is outside the frame of composition (chaos and the unconsciousness) and what is inside its frame (sense and coherence). It is then, *the interior (in the interior)*, that which is framed and separated from the outside. Possibly then, we could say that it is the interior which becomes the location for retaining at least in a given frame of time, the flow of the conversation. In this sense, the conversation only becomes coherent in relation to how it is framed and composed through a given duration. It is then the transition of time or the modulation of time which allows for the composition of a flow (of a conversation) to become a possibility.

If we consider the interior as a place, as a place-space where we experience and make sense, a territory where we produce coherence of the world and its representations. But not only a place where the intellect sits capturing coherences, or the place where the intellect make sense of them, but also the place where we feel them, “Ideas are not the

only modes of thinking; the conatus and its various determinations or affects are also in the mind as modes of thinking.”¹⁴ It seems that in order to grasp it, we need to somehow conceptualise and produce a frame, the action of framing in and of our mind, a framing act which separates one thing from the other, the chaos from the order and vice-versa in order to make sense. Consequently I think we must also consider the mind in a more holistic view, “The pluralist composition of the mind, as a composite idea that possesses as many parts as faculties”.¹⁵ We know that the mind is located in the inside of our body while simultaneously it is also connected to something that is outside of our bodies. We perceive our mind through our intellect, but we also feel the mind in our bodies through our senses and emotions, a situation which causes ambiguity as we try to intellect it with certainty, as we attempt to assure that the mind is alone our brain, our body. Rather, the mind appears to be something a bit more abstract, perhaps we can call it a force, a force from within, a certain type interior energy that needs to rise and liberate itself through us. It seems that this force, this outpour, this desire, this desire for freedom for the mind to act, for it to be itself is a need, a need to become, to manifest in the outside; the mind wants to converse. On this thought, Deleuze provides us with a powerful insight as he reflects on his Spinozian enquire, adding: “What defines freedom is an ‘interior’ and a ‘self’ determined by necessity. One is never free through one’s will and through that on which it patterns itself, but through one’s essence and through that which follows from it. Man, the most powerful of finite modes, is free when he comes into possession of his power of acting”.¹⁶ It seems then, that it is through this power, the power of acting, that the interior of the self outpours while articulating compositions. The speech manifesting itself through a body, to another body, while simultaneously it becomes an expression in the world. Conversations proliferate, as they interact, they multiply. They are like a variations, referring to that thing that is almost the same but slightly different than its iterations; each one becomes another one. The expressiveness materialises itself through the creation of multiple conversations, each conversation a composition.

V.

Conversation starts with a thought or with a word, perhaps something less obvious, a gesture. The notion of conversation is generally conceived as being of an immaterial and volatile nature, most of the time we think they disappear. Although it might be somewhat

¹⁴ “Spinoza: Practical Philosophy By Gilles Deleuze”, Chapter 4, Index Of The Main Concepts Of The Ethics, Translated by Robert Hurley. City Lights Books, 1988.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

truthful, I mean the idea of ephemerality as common condition in the coming to existence of conversations. The ephemeral conversation is nevertheless the most poetic of all conversation forms; because it vanishes as it happens, it becomes an ephemeral flow that only leaves ruins, remains, loose ends, references, echoes, memories and distortions. In an attempt to linger, in an attempt to save it self from fading, it excavates the core of memory wrestling against the passing of time leaving nothing but suggestions. Blanchot meditates on this thought saying, “Memory that I am, yet that I also wait for, toward which I go down toward you, far from you, space of that memory, of which there is no memory, which holds me back only where I have long since ceased to be, as though you, who perhaps do not exist, in the calm persistence of what disappears, were continuing to turn me into a memory and search for what could recall me to you, great memory in which we are both held fast, face to face, wrapped in the lament I hear: Eternal, eternal; space of cold light into which you have drawn me without being there and in which I affirm you without seeing you, knowing that you are not there, not knowing it, knowing it.”¹⁷ Do to such inescapable condition, we recur to producing the documented conversation. The text-the image: the written text, the audio text, the filmed text. The recorded text then becomes a safe haven of indexes, the text that enters into an archive, the text which becomes the archive. The conversation in a text, the text as a conversation, a text that becomes a conversation. In this case the text is not written by me and read by you, but it is being written by you in your mind as you read it. In the words of Barthes, “The text is above all (or after all) that long operation through which an author (a discoursing author) discovers (or makes the reader discover) the irreparability of his speech and manages to substitute the ‘*it speaks*’ for the ‘*I speak*’.”¹⁸ I am writing it, you are talking it, I was listening, now it is you listening, we are and we were talking about it; To read and write, to write and read, to read and talk, to talk while reading, to talk and write, to talk and be talked to. Lastly, let me use the voice of Barthes over and ask you reader, if “Has it ever happened, as you were reading a book, that you kept stopping as you read, not because you weren’t interested, but because you were: because of a flow of ideas, stimuli, associations? In a word, haven’t you ever happened *to read while looking up from your book?*”¹⁹ Let me suggest then that the compositional frame which encapsulates these expressed thoughts in the form of a text, is actually a conversation.

¹⁷ “The Last Man” by Maurice Blanchot, Translated by L. Davis. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

¹⁸ Article: “Research: The Young (Jeunes Chercheurs)”, From Work to Text, Roland Barthes. Published by Communications (nr 9), 1972.

¹⁹ Article: “Writing Reading (Lire - Écrire)”, From Science to Literature, Roland Barthes. Published by Le Figaro Littéraire, 1970.

VI.

Conversation starts with the self. To say I understand, to say that I understand these words, or to say I want to say this or that, already implies an initial dialogue with the self. I am talking to myself while I am talking to you for example, you the reader, me the writer, the talker. I produce speech, we together produce the speech between us, me apart, we together. Let me note then, that for this interaction to be established, for this conversing flow to occur, to begin, something needs to happen otherwise words could just remain as words, speech could just be noise. Blanchot's evocative words locate speech at a tipping point between what is and what is not. He writes, "To say that I understand these words would not be to explain to myself the dangerous peculiarity of my relations with them. Do I understand them? I do not understand them, properly speaking, and they too who partake of the depth of concealment remain without understanding. But they don't need that understanding in order to be uttered, they do not speak, they are not interior, they are, on the contrary, without intimacy, being altogether outside, and what they designate engages me in this "outside" of all speech, apparently more secret and more interior than the speech of the innermost heart, but, here, the outside is empty, the secret is without depth, what is repeated is the emptiness of repetition, it doesn't speak and yet it has always been said already."²⁰ Consequently I want to bring attention to the fact that a conversation needs a trigger to get started; the triggering effect that produces a response, a reaction. Sometimes this response is automatic and some other times it is not. The triggering effect can either fuse the fire of thought which ignites the bonfire of the conversation, or it can just sparkle a spark in darkness, which only shimmers for a moment to later encounter death in the next, disappearance or a never been. Let me bring into awareness then, a paradoxical notion which I find to be present in the act of conversing once the flow of the conversation is in motion. The location of my concern might be located across three different moments in the event of the conversation. It can either be where the conversation begins, while it is taking-place or when it ends, or in all of them at the same time. This matter I want to consider is the probability of the *uninterrupted interruption* in the motion of the conversation. Perhaps what I mean is that while the experience of the conversation is taking place, while the *flow is flowing*, an apparent interruption in its motion manifests, I mean to note the gaps, the silences, the intervals in any case. According to Dewey, "Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centres when we have an experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement." Concepts within the conversation become pervasive and immanent in between the pauses, the silences and the gaps as matters come into the flow of comprehensions. "They sum up

²⁰ "The One Who Was Standing Apart from Me" By Maurice Blanchot, translated by L. Davis. Station Hill Press 1993.

what has been under gone and prevent its dissipation and idle evaporation. Continued acceleration is breathless and prevents parts from gaining distinction. In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so—just as in a genial conversation there is a continuous interchange and blending, and yet each speaker not only retains his own character but manifests it more clearly than in his wont.”²¹ These pauses do not actually stop the fluidity of the motion of thoughts, but actually serve as moments of reflection, or perhaps these intervals act as moments which potentialize new conceptual detonators. In this sense, I am iterating on Dewey’s proposition in order to find a point of departure or a way to rethink *the place of silence* in a conversation, as a condition which allows space for inquire, or as a moment which opens conceptual crevices to explore.

The pointing-to this moments of silence which I wish to briefly survey, could be proposed as the possible finding of fissures. Rather perhaps, as the potential spaces to consequentially intervene, which can aid to enhance the flow of the conversation and the production of information. This interruption in and on conversations, can benefit the activity the thinking activity by opening up the possibility for the unexpected to occur. By the manifestation of the unexpected I mean to say, moments of chance which allow for an aperture into the unconscious to become present, and for its knowledges to manifest unknown matters. I want to point to the fact again, that the unconscious presents an inexhaustible well of knowledges to enquire and to learn upon. This process of enquire was explored at large by the Surrealist movement, and was referred to essentially, as *automatism*. In defining this essential aspect of Surrealism Breton notes, “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought.”²² Describing automatism, the psychiatrist Pierre Janet maintained that, “It is only through the *conventions* of perception that we experience time as linear and the visible world as a continuous field – without preconceptions, reality would appear radically fragmented, in a condition of disaggregation, as subconscious processes became indistinguishable from the consciously perceived world.”²³ But let us make clear then, that if we are to get some sense out of automatism, or if we are to make it somehow functional or useful in producing knowledges, we must at

²¹ Ibid. “Having An Experience” By John Dewey.

²² “The First Surrealist Manifesto”, written by Breton and released to the public in 1924. From *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme*, 1924.

²³ “*Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*” By Jonathan Crary, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1999.

least understand the practicality and the strength of its functionality. Lyer summons matters in a simple way, “Automatism requires a new mode of interrelation between consciousness and the unconscious – passivity is required, but so too is activity; if the unconscious holds the initiative, consciousness is required such that its message can be transcribed. The spontaneous dynamism of the unconscious must be rendered explicit; it is not merely sleeping philosophers that we must become, but thinkers who can make a synthesis between our dreams and waking life.”²⁴ In the words of Lyer, *synthesis* becomes the way to reach and the way to produce coherence, a coherence which allows for the unity of ideas to enter a stream of thoughts which consequently give sense to meanings. Consequently, and in order to maintain the flow of continuity and the motion which is essential in the process of conversation, the gap must be present. This gap becomes an interval in-between the spaces which allows freedom for the automatic prompting of conceptual triggers to rise in the event of the conversation.

VII.

Automatic writing for example becomes a conceptual dispositif, a trigger. After inquiring about it, I felt unexpectedly inspired, and decided to introduce the *automatic writing* technic proposed by the Surrealists on my own writing, but also on my own talking. This form of writing, paradoxically called a free form of thinking, was thought of as being a system of writing without self-censorship, it was among Breton’s first Surrealist innovations. According to his manifesto, “Thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought.”²⁵ Blanchot identifies automatic writing as a means to hear instantly the inexhaustible murmur of inspiration. “Surprisingly, perhaps due to the enthusiasm of Blanchot's position, even Surrealist leader André Breton, who is remembered for being very scrupulous when it came to allegiances, quoted Blanchot in a 1945 interview. Breton stated, 'Thanks to automatic writing,' Maurice Blanchot recently said, referring to its use in surrealism, 'language has benefited by the highest promotion. Language is not merged with thought; it is bound to the only true spontaneity, human freedom in action and manifest.’”²⁶ Perhaps I want suggest that automatic writing or

²⁴ Out of Play (a fiction on Surrealism and Breton) // Excerpt from the blog Spurious, the springboard for the novel, Spurious by Lars Iyer, published by Melville House in 2011. The blog is used for news updates and quotations. http://spurious.typepad.com/spurious/2004/12/october_4th_192_1.html

²⁵ Ibid. “The First Surrealist Manifesto”, written by Breton.

²⁶ “The Negative Eschatology of Maurice Blanchot” By Kevin Fitzgerald. Ch. Proem: Blanchot, <http://www.studiocleo.com/librarie/blanchot/kf/proem/friend.htm>

automatic talking (for the case of my argument) can work to release imaginations and unexpected forms of knowledges from the unconscious do to its unrestricted operational mechanism. Lomas refers to Breton's technic in the following: "Later on, reference to a spirit hand that resonates with surrealist automatism, whose derivation from mediumistic writing and drawing Breton acknowledged in his essay 'The Automatic Message' (1933). It also recalls a passage from the philosopher Roland Barthes's famous text 'The Death of the Author' (1967) that implicitly appeals to the precedent of automatic writing: 'the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin.' Barthes conceives of the writer not as expressive origin but rather as a kind of radio antenna picking up and remixing messages randomly absorbed".²⁷ As expressed before, I wish to reiterate that although I feel there is a certain value knowledge provided by automatic writing. I also think that this sort of automatism might also become counterproductive outside the frame of its own incoherent coherence. Stein, an avid and poetic writer, user of such technics expressed on a conversation after the interviewer asked her to explain her 1923 "Van or Twenty Years After. A Second Portrait of Carl Van Vechten". To which she replied, "...but does it make sense? "If you enjoy it, you understand it." Look here. Being intelligible is not what it seems. You mean by understanding that you can talk about it in the way that you have a habit of talking, putting it in other words. But I mean by understanding enjoyment. If you enjoy it, you understand it. And lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it. . . . But after all you must enjoy my writing, and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you do not enjoy it, why do you make a fuss about it? There is the real answer."²⁸ Although a clever and poetic response on Stein's behalf, it also puts matters on the thin border of everything goes, as long as it goes. To this claim Derrida adds a valuable punctuation expressing that, "Literature can say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything, and stimulate everything: it can feign a trap, the way modern armies know how to set false traps; those traps pass themselves off as real traps and trick the machines designed to detect simulations under even the most sophisticated camouflage."²⁹ Hence, proposing such action like automatic writing as the panacea for all creative speech activities, could clearly end up getting caught in the rhetorics of relativism. As a cure to all evils, it seems safe to suggest that the safest approach when using such technic, is that the author has to somehow define the stream of thought or the type of argument on first hand (as is the case of poetry, fiction or academic

²⁷ "Becoming Machine: Surrealist Automatism and Some Contemporary Instances", *Involuntary Drawing* By David Lomas, November 2012, Tate Papers Issue 18.

²⁸ Gertrude Stein on Understanding and Joy: Rare 1934 Radio Interview from PennSound, the audio archives of my "alma mater", most likely conducted upon her arrival at the Algonquin Hotel in November of 1934. <https://soundcloud.com/brainpicker/rare-gertrude-stein-interview>

²⁹ "Demeure: Fiction and Testimony" by Jacques Derrida. Translated by E. Rottenberg. Stanford University Press, 2000

writing for example). I want to think that automatic writing can possibly function more as a releaser of ideas; allowing the mind to flow and express freely, without censorship. Automatic writing forms a bridge in the conversation, a medium which links the unconscious into the conscious.

VIII.

When considering the conversation as the act of *con-versing*, meaning to take one thing from one side to the other, to turn it, to transform it. The conversation has manifested itself not only as a concept to survey, but also as a poetic assemblage that can connect us to affective experiences, and lastly, as a device that articulates meanings which consequently can produce knowledges. Imagine then a text, or a speech that flows constantly, not only as a physical phenomenon, like sound, but as an endless flow of utterances, a source of conceptual propositions. Expressiveness and the proliferation of meanings materialise themselves not only through the creation of a conversation, but through the multiplication of conversations; each conversation becomes a compositional constellation.

While surveying the interoperation of conversations, it has not only revealed that a complex layering effect of relations is ever present, but also a paradoxical condition manifests in which both sound and silence interweave permanently in order for the mechanics of conversation to occur. As Benjamin recalls, “Whoever speaks enters the listener. Silence, then, is born from the conversation. Every great man has only one conversation, at whose margins a silent greatness waits. In the silence energy was renewed; the listener led the conversation to the edge of language, and the speaker creates the silence of a new language, he, its first auditor.” It seems inextricable that conversing means both: talking and not talking simultaneously, in the evoking phrase of Benjamin, “Conversation strives toward silence, and the listener is really the silent partner”.³⁰ As a last remark I want to point that perhaps, Benjamin’s thoughts rise the notion of conversation to the sphere of alterity. In this sense, being and becoming through conversation is more related to otherness than through self manifestation. In the conversation, it is the other, he or she, who makes me or you, come to existence.

³⁰ “The Metaphysics of Youth”, Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926. Edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.