Things, Then and Now
Martina Millà

Thirty years have gone by since the film *Der Lauf der Dinge* (better known as *The Way Things Go*), by the Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss, had its first public screening at Documenta 8 in Kassel. In the course of these three decades, the art world has become global and increasingly aware of its history and its modus operandi. This critical perspective – or may I say deconstructive, to use a very 1980s Derridean term – led to a spiral of revisitations and commentaries regarding key references of the visual culture that developed after the Second World War.

For those of us who witnessed the art of the 1980s and remember the hype surrounding painters such as Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer or Miquel Barceló, just to mention three artists who flaunted the use of objects in their works, *The Way Things Go* acquires particular significance as a sign of its times. On the other hand, for the artists born during those years, like those signing the pieces featured in the exhibition *The Way Things Do*, who grew up immersed in rapidly changing technology and the rise of digital culture, Fischli and Weiss's film may seem mysteriously analogical and remote. They may associate it more with Paul McCarthy's videos from the early 1970s or some of Allan Kaprow's happenings than with the iconic painters of the 1980s.

The Way Things Do features three installations by artists in their early thirties and closes with a new presentation of *The Way Things Go*. Therefore, implicitly, it is an invitation to wander through the realm of reception as well as a trigger for memories that many visitors may have of the 1980s, while also focusing on the relationships that the featured artists have with the art of the decade of their birth. Stemming from a specific chronological point of departure which is not presented until the end, and a series of works that represent our current times, the exhibition can be viewed as an almost phenomenological itinerary enabling us to reflect on the last few decades and on how we take stock and reconstruct bygone times according to our own biographies.

The Way Things Do
Serafín Álvarez

Appearing as arbitrary and chaotic, yet without a doubt meticulously choreographed, *The Way Things Go* is halfway between the spectacular and the ordinary, between repose and catastrophe, between comicity and boredom, between expectation, uncertainty and stupor. Wheels, garbage bags, ladders, tables, candles, barrels, ropes, saws, firecrackers and countless other objects that roll, fall, turn, push, burn, inflate, collide... The objects and actions that unfold are the protagonists. These objects are not separate from each other; they are connected by a long sequence of cause-and-effect actions, like in a Rube Goldberg machine with no ultimate practical purpose. These objects relate to each other following their own course somewhat independently from the human hands that arranged them with the utmost care, time and time again, until they behave as expected; somewhat independently from the hands that filmed them and from the hands that edited a succession of more than twenty different takes. Although the film presents itself as one single long take, it actually has several clearly visible cuts that reveal the degree of independence of the objects being used: not all were equally obedient at the same time.

Patrick Frey recorded Peter Fischli and David Weiss while they were preparing for the shoot and produced a video documentary with this material, which was not released until twenty years later. In the video, the objects' independence is evident. The artists manipulated them patiently, with extraordinary concentration. They appear to have all the time in the world as they add and remove items, making endless adjustments, trying and failing one time after another. The way things go and the way the artists want them to go are not necessarily the same. In this respect, the title of the documentary, *Making Things Go*, is most appropriate. The objects do as they wish, as if they had lives of their own; they refuse to satisfy the artists' intentions. Getting them to 'work' one single time is quite an accomplishment. Getting them to do so enough times to be reliable is an odyssey.

The Way Things Do is an exhibition of objects – understood in a broad, non-hierarchical sense – celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of *The Way Things Go*. Material and immaterial, human and non-human objects. Action figures, jockeys, screens, robots, images, pillows, videos, events, seats, sounds, emotions, subtitles. Examining these objects from the perspective of contemporary art allows us to see how a term as widespread and ordinary as 'object' is in fact infinitely complex and inexhaustible.

In recent years, several approaches to the concept of the 'object' have emerged in opposition to the legacy of Kant's transcendental idealism, according to which there is a correlation

between thinking and being, and between subject and object. This correlationism[1] has been unquestionable in many areas of Western philosophical thought, which places the human being at the centre and is responsible for the persistence of many dualities, such as object-subject, material-immaterial, body-mind, nature-culture, human beings and the rest of the world around them. While the new lines of thought opposing anthropocentrism are clearly not unquestionable, we must acknowledge that they have proposed interesting changes in paradigms for our understanding of the world. *The Way Things Do* does not celebrate any of these lines of thought but rather uses them as a basis for proposing a reinterpretation of the renowned film by Fischli and Weiss while also presenting new productions by artists born in the 1980s, when *The Way Things Go* was produced.

Serafín Álvarez focuses on material objects related to science fiction and fantasy narratives in contemporary media such as film and video games. In *One Step Closer to the Finest Starry Sky There Is*, he explores the different ways in which fans relate to their favourite fictional worlds from an explicitly materialistic perspective – collecting, cosplay, homemade film props, and so on – and builds a sculpture inspired by a video game, *Katamari Damacy*, using a large number of tangible objects of varying sizes. In *Creeping Together*, a series of objects drawn from popular fiction that connect different realities transform into each other: the same piece of matter is capable of taking on multiple shapes and appearances, of changing state, expanding and contracting hypnotically, like the T-1000 in *Terminator 2*. Liquid metal, a strange material. Last of all, *Bleed* features a fully customizable professional video game controller that purports to instantly translate the user's tactile commands with the utmost precision into actions that his or her avatar performs at the other side of the screen – at a time when a renewed interest in physical, embodied experiences has replaced the outdated cybernetic desire for transcendence.

At the beginning of Yu Araki and Daniel Jacoby's film *Mountain Plain Mountain*, an elderly man with an expressive face describes how it takes a very strong force to overcome two mountains pulling a heavy burden. One small mountain and one big mountain. A heavy burden. A very strong force. Is he using metaphors or is it a realistic description? This ambiguity between abstraction and figuration continues throughout most of the film. We sense that the images are from some kind of ceremony or celebration, but we don't know what kind. We see numerous screens filled with scarcely decipherable data and people staring at them attentively. We assume it's a sport, possibly a horse race. But it isn't just any kind of horse race: it's Ban'ei, a particular variety that is only held at one racetrack in the world, in Obihiro, in northern Japan. In Ban'ei, ten huge draft horses pull heavy iron sleighs, advancing slowly in

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[1] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2010).

a straight line. It's a competition of strength and strategy rather than speed, in which the winner is the participant which best manages its energies. Although horses are the icons of this sport, many of the people who follow it seem to have no relationship with them. It involves an ecosystem of its own with interconnected elements, like a nonphysical *The Way Things Go* in which the amount of precise information and abstract objects flooding multiple screens is striking. This abstraction is what the film captures, placing its particular focus on the geographic, cultural, social and political context of this sport.

The work of Cécile B. Evans examines the influence of new technologies in the ways we feel, handle and relate to our emotions. *Leaks* is grown out of the project *Sprung a Leak,* first shown at Tate Liverpool in 2016 in which she uses multiple references, from Marina Joyce (a popular YouTuber who made it big on social media in the summer of 2016) to Shakespeare and Delacroix, the attempted coup in Turkey and other events. It is a deliberately complex and unconventional theatre piece performed in collaboration with three robots, a water fountain, a 'chorus' of three users (human performers) and a system of twenty-seven screens, constantly 'leaking' emotionally charged information. The actors follow commands sent by a server with a precise system of call and response, or cause and effect, which could collapse at any moment, in a way that is not entirely different from the system of objects and actions in *The Way Things Go*. This fictional narrative explores information transfers, conspiracies, contemporary idols, emotional contagions, artificial intelligences and possible collaborations between humans and machines. *Leaks* imagines scenes that run parallel to the reality of the play and poses specific questions arising from the complexity of the plot in order to build a constellation of artefacts that serve as touchstones.