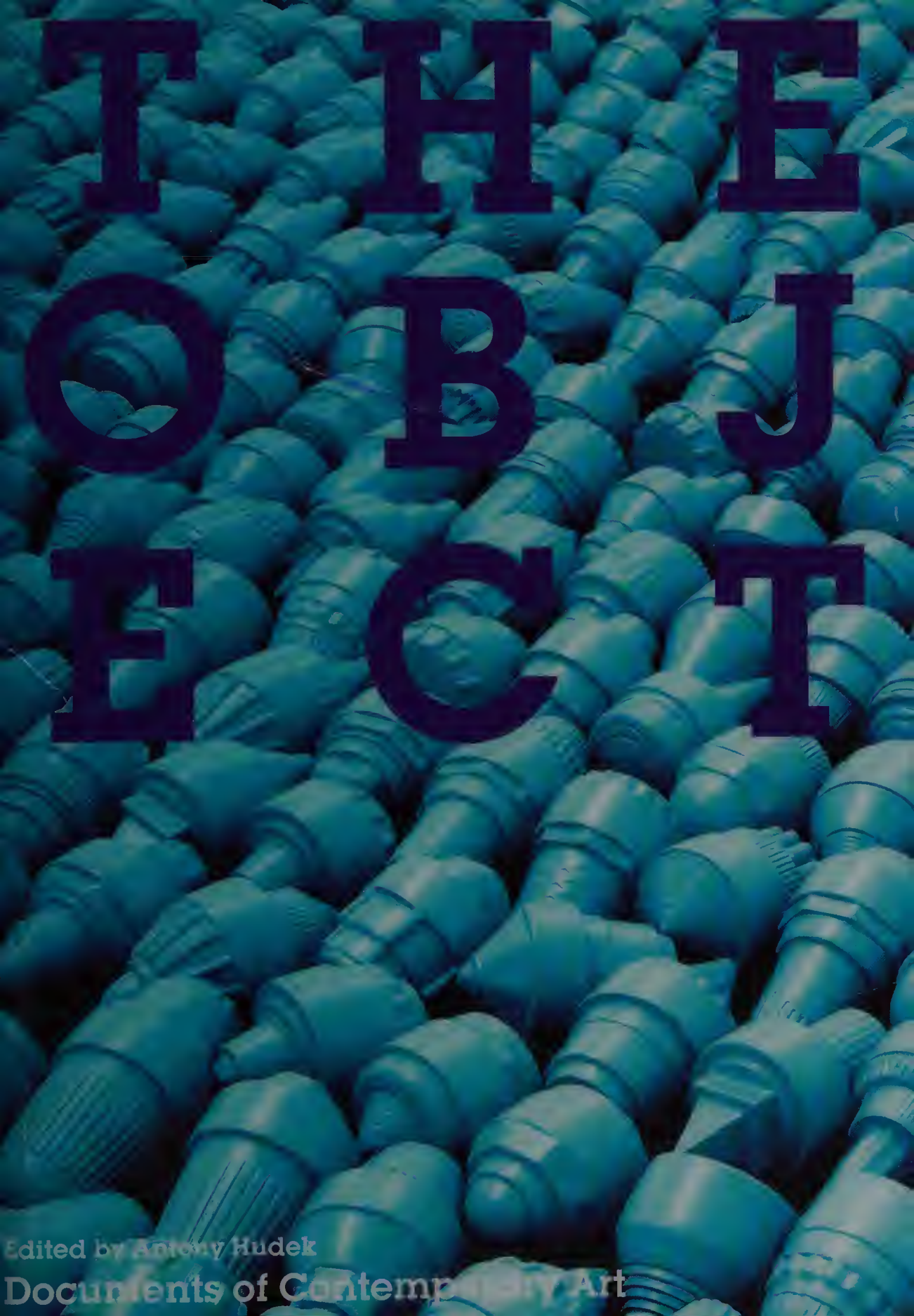
THE OBJECT



Edited by Antony Hudek

Documents of Contemporary Art

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The Object

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Whitechapel Gallery

Documents of Contemporary Art

In recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding of art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

The Documents of Contemporary Art series emerges from this context. Each volume focuses on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence in contemporary art internationally. Edited and introduced by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each of these source books provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives defining a significant theme or tendency.

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has offered a public platform for art and ideas. In the same spirit, each guest editor represents a distinct yet diverse approach – rather than one institutional position or school of thought – and has conceived each volume to address not only a professional audience but all interested readers.

The object-type work is not based, as has been supposed, on a particular, limiting, geometric morphology or a particular, desirable set of materials **Lumps are potentially as viable as cubes, rags as acceptable as stainless steel rods**

Robert Morris, Statement, *Minimal Art* (Haags Gemeentemuseum), 1968

SUBJECT, OBJECT, THING

EVERYDAY OBJECTS, USEFUL OBJECTS

DISCURSIVE OBJECTS, AFFECTIVE OBJECTS

EACH OBJECT IS ART

DESIGNED TO AMUSE, ANNOY, BEWILDER, MYSTIFY, INSPIRE REFLECTION, BUT NOT TO AROUSE ADMIRATION FOR ANY TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE USUALLY SOUGHT OR VALUED IN OBJECTS CLASSIFIED AS WORKS OF

Man Ray, '100 Objects of My Affection', 1961

Antony Hudek

Introduction//Detours of Objects

Objects Define Us

The difficulty with such an apparently simple phrase as 'objects define us' is in defining what is, simply, an object. Jean-François Chevrier proposes this useful maxim: 'Every object is a thing, but not every thing is an object'.[1] Yet if splitting the object from the thing allows the latter to come into view, it does not say much about their identities and relationship with one another. The thing, in any case, is posited as potentially broader than the object, but also more essential. For Martin Heidegger, perhaps the best known philosopher to have tackled the thing (*Ding*), it differs from the object in that it is autonomous, self-supporting. Taking a jug as an example, Heidegger describes the thing as assertive of its independence, its presence as well as nearness.[2] Objects, on the other hand, are everywhere in equal measure, neither near nor far. The Heideggerian thing, in its self-composure, resists appropriation, use and representation, most notably by science, modernity, novelty and capitalism. In another register, that of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, *Ding* similarly resists; it stands, he says, outside of language and consciousness: the *Ding* 'is the true secret'.[3] Thus the object as *Ding*, or thing, stands apart, running the risk of being cancelled out by the rational subject who believes erroneously in the uniform accessibility of objects.

One of the aims of this collection of texts is to lend support to the view that objects are not reducible to the material, perceptible and consumable goods we commonly refer to as 'objects'. The world of objects, however 'ordinary',[4] is a trove of disguises, concealments, subterfuges, provocations and triggers that no singular, embodied and knowledgeable subject can exhaust. This is precisely why artists have a say in any discussion of the object's plurivocality, since the artwork is a prime example of the object's capacity to evade the knowing grasp. The study of objects through the prism of art, and through the words of artists, allows one to see how complex the world of ordinary and less ordinary objects and things truly is. The texts by anthropologists, philosophers, psychoanalysts, sociologists and writers in the present collection in many cases broach this key question, namely of the exemplarity of the art object to elucidate the multi-facetedness of objects and things in general.

This view of objects as partaking in a complex world of varying textures and densities strays from the conventional understanding of the object as gauge of reality and truth. The idea that the object is the yardstick of objectivity is perhaps most clearly formulated in Thomas Aquinas' famous proposition that truth can

be verified by the conformity between a thing and the intellect (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*): the closer the conformity, the closer the thinking subject is to truth; and if objects are the measure of truth, then perceiving objects that are not there, or imagining impossible, virtual and fictional objects, belongs to the realm of error and pathology.[5]

Once admitted that 'objects' can be many things – including tools, imaginary constructs, artworks, even other subjects – how to interpret 'define', in 'objects define us'? Do objects define us by catering to our needs as users, consumers or collectors, and by limiting our movements by their physical properties? This interpretation assumes the primacy of the object's function in a world dependent on the human capacity to define her or his environment. But 'define' can equally mean the opposite: objects define us because they come first, by commanding our attention, even our respect; they exist before us, possibly without us.

This last version of 'objects define us' – where the 'us' becomes an answer to the multiplicity and collectivity of objects and things inviting us into their midst – is a far cry from Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution', whereby subjects no longer attempt to conform to existing objects, but rather possess the necessary a priori knowledge to understand and perceive objects.[6] Kant thus positions the subject as the anchor of the object's apprehension; beyond the categories of human understanding, the object remains out of reach, a 'thing in itself' (*Ding an sich*).[7] By contrast, at the turn of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl dismissed the existence of a thing in itself that would lie beyond the subject's intentional grasp, since for him objects can only be perceived through their phenomena. Husserl's phenomenological call 'To the things themselves!' is not to be limited to material things, however, as it extends to the 'modes of givenness' of objects to consciousness, regardless of their nature.[8] With Heidegger's grappling with something like an autonomous thing in itself – an object's 'thingliness' – and Lacan's identification of the thing as withholding a secret unavailable to objects as well as subjects, the thing as blind spot seems to have become simultaneously closer (in that it can be perceived intuitively) and further from the perceptual mastery of the subject.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the awareness of the object's or thing's unknowable proximity, or avowed distance – that is, its capacity to define us, to come before us – has steadily gained ground in theoretical and philosophical discourses. Bill Brown's influential collection *Thing Theory* from 2001 brought the thing squarely within the realm of academic knowledge, even though it lies 'beyond the grid of intelligibility … outside the order of objects'.[9] In 2005, Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel organized the exhibition 'Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy' at ZKM in Karlsruhe. The exhibition sought to implement a *Dingpolitik* inspired by Heidegger's *Ding*, where things would

become heralds of a political call for less reliance on objects and matters of fact, and greater faith in 'matters of concern'.[10] A year later, French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux published *After Finitude*, in which he denounced the presupposed correlation between thinking and being, subject and object in most of philosophy from Kant onwards (what he terms 'correlationism').[11] In 2007, a seminar at Goldsmiths College in London brought together four main proponents of what would be called 'speculative realism': Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier and Iain Hamilton Grant.[12] Harman is of particular interest, as his defence of an 'object-oriented ontology' is deeply indebted to Heidegger and Husserl. Whereas Heidegger saw objects as dehumanizing forces, masking the 'thingliness' of the thing, we have now entered, with speculative realism (or 'speculative materialism' for Meillassoux), a world where the object, whether thing, tool, commodity, thought, phenomenon or living creature, has regained its rights, freed from the subject's determining mind, body and gaze.

The energy with which the contemporary art world has embraced speculative realism and object-oriented ontology[13] should not blind us either to their immediate philosophical precedents, such as so-called Actor-Network Theory from the 1980s and subsequent work by Bruno Latour in particular,[14] nor to the numerous other strands of thought associated with poststructuralism that subscribe to a view of the world as a series of events in flux, rather than revolving around the thinking human subject.[15] Nor, too, should enthusiasm for the elision of the subject blind us to other traditions, mostly non-Western, which for centuries have invested the object with unique properties, many of which are only faintly discernible to the subject.

Despite this collection's aim to highlight the diversity of objects and things in the subject-object relationship, this relationship itself remains important for many of the authors featured here. Indeed, the focus on the object productively unmoors and destabilizes the subject, rather than simply doing away with it. Many of the following texts reflect on the object's impact on the subject, and how the latter depends on the former for her or his consistency and coherence. Conversely, one observes that whenever the limits of the subject are probed – as in certain mystical or animistic traditions, philosophies premised on the collective rather than the individual, or in psychoanalysis – the object loses its focus and stability. Instead of a one-to-one relationship, therefore, this book describes various detours around, between and through the object, led by subjects as well as other objects. Again, artists have much to teach us in tracking the object's detours. The terminology may vary – Stephen Willats speaks of transformational objects,[16] while Joëlle Tuerlinckx refers to deviated objects[17] – but what this collection of texts underlines is the artist's privileged role in rerouting, recycling, deviating, transforming and *deturning* (if such a verb could be derived from

'detour', as in the French *détourner*) the object. This role is far from one of mastery or 'subjectivity'; rather it hints at a capacity to inhabit the object world, to engage with and translate it for the benefit of other objects and subjects alike.

De- and Re-Materializations of the (Art) Object

Artists are still generally accepted to be makers of objects. The particularity of the artist's objects may be the multiple uses to which they can be put: from economic value in a private or public collection to the aesthetic value they are assumed to offer. Another essential characteristic is precisely the interfacial and ambiguous quality the art object affords between fellow objects and regarding subjects, almost despite its physical properties: as a fundamentally 'open' object, the artwork may be enhanced by size, matter or elevated position, but no amount of material justification will guarantee its aesthetic value.[18] Unlike Plato's beds or tables, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's apples and Heidegger's shoes struggle with their status as model: they are at once real and represented, object-like and thing-like, static and dynamic.[19]

The 'categorical confusions'[20] engendered by mimetic representation did not wait for Marcel Duchamp's readymades to become apparent. The contest in antiquity between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius, as reported by Pliny the Elder,[21] is exemplary in that Parrhasius won not for having painted the most convincing still life, but by painting a life-like curtain which Zeuxis thought could be pulled away to reveal another still life. For Lacan, Parrhasius' theatrical device proved not a mastery of technical means (a trap for the gaze) but rather a successful *trompe-l'oeil*, an eye-trick, which brought the subject's unconscious gaze to light.[22]

The object world's inaccessibility to the thinking subject except through deceptive, theatrical lures could serve as a fictional key to twentieth-century Western modernist art history. Clement Greenberg's quest for pictorial flatness, non-composition and independence from the support could be read as a march towards, precisely, the bare medium condition of painting. It is when nothing more is supposed to lie behind or beyond the canvas, when all illusion is purged from the pictorial plane, that illusion is at its most powerful and the gaze triumphs over the eye. To this lurking theatricality, Donald Judd answered with 'specific objects', intended to be everything Greenbergian modernism was not: neither sculpture nor painting but a three-dimensional object that gets 'rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colours'.[23] Against Greenberg's Zeuxis comes Judd's Parrhasius: the object must allude to nothing beyond what it is. But just as in Pliny's story, the triumphant realism is itself an illusion, for in the end Judd himself is accused of theatricality. 'The literalist espousal of objecthood', Michael Fried famously wrote in 1967

with reference to sculpture like Judd's, 'amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art.'[24]

This modernist contest between illusion and reality, featuring among others Greenberg, Judd and Fried, is well known – too well known to feature in this collection. What does merit inclusion is another important text that prefigures Judd's search for a category of art object that would be neither sculpture nor painting (Ferreira Gullar's 'Theory of the Non-Object' from 1959) and a number of reactions to the Greenbergianism-Minimalism fight, which can be divided roughly into two groups. The first is an immediate reaction to the American modernist debate, mainly through the abandonment of objects and the turn to language and philosophy. The second, less immediate reaction is a history of performative art practices, which proposed new bodily interactions with objects.

Loosely referred to as 'conceptual art', the first reaction quickly became attached to the fate of the object through the expression 'the dematerialization of the art object', coined by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler in 1967.[25] One could call this phase, marked by a rebuttal of object-making, 'first phase dematerialization'; it is represented here by the writings of Art & Language, Charles Harrison and Ursula Meyer. In the latter's article 'De-Objectification of the Object', the author makes explicit the effect of this first-phase dematerialization of the (art) object: 'The new trend', she writes, 'is indicative of the loss of power not only over the object but of the object itself. There is no rigidity which is associated with objecthood. The object is de-objectified.'[26]

Meyer's text presents the advantage of referring to the second reaction of first phase dematerialization of the art object, namely artistic expressions she calls 'destructionist', including performances and happenings. Such dynamic, time-based manifestations, which include Fluxus events and the destructive art of Gustav Metzger – to which one could add Gruppe Geflecht's 'anti-object', Hélio Oiticica's 'trans-objects', Michelangelo Pistoletto's 'minus objects'[27] and Adrian Piper's autobiographical subject as art object – are important correctives to the Zeuxis/Parrhasius model of art history instituted by Greenberg. Objects were not wholly evacuated from such 'destructionist' events, far from it: one could cite objects demanding the body's participation in kinetic, behavioural, systems and cybernetic art, as well as performative situations staging the interaction between objects and bodies.

If the first phase of the dematerialization of the art object could be categorized generally as anti- and non-object, the second phase took a more hybrid form. Second-wave dematerialization occurred when it became apparent that things – automated machines, cybernetic devices and computers – could in fact *plausibly* render the subject obsolete. Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard marked this transition from first to second-wave dematerialization in 1985, when he curated

the exhibition 'Les Immatériaux' at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition included a variety of instances in which the traditional interaction between subject and object was modified by machines capable of acting either on behalf of humans or, more radically, as their surrogates: robots, virtual environments, new possibilities of artificial insemination, were all showcased as examples of immateriality. Often mistaken for a motley assortment of 'postmodern' gadgetry, 'Les Immatériaux' in fact staged the new historical condition of living amidst what Gilbert Simondon would call 'technical objects': objects capable of mediating between humans and machines, creating 'transindividual' spaces where neither has the upper hand.[28] On the cusp between postmodernism's promise of medium hybridity and the stark realization that subjects and objects still matter, if not more so, when they begin to merge, 'Les Immatériaux' was a decisive moment in the acknowledgment of technology's role in modifying the subject's relationships to objects.

The third phase of the dematerialization of the art object coincided with the rise of the abject, no longer what is 'thrown against' (*ob-ject*), but what is 'thrown out' or 'away' (*ab-ject*). Discussions of the abject by Julia Kristeva and Rosalind Krauss became popular lenses in the 1990s through which to consider artworks that seemed to attack their medium specificity, not so much as acts of physical violence (as had been the case in the 1960s) but as psychical aggression or trauma.[29] Yve-Alain Bois' and Krauss's 'Formless' exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1996 featured a number of works in a state of deliquescence or deflation (e.g. Claes Oldenburg's soft sculpture *Green Beans* of 1964, or Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* of 1969), performing an operation towards horizontality characteristic of Georges Bataille's 'base materialism' – a passage from object to thing, one could say. The exhibition's aim was to retell the story of modernism 'against the grain', through artworks overlooked by Greenberg's teleological, medium-based version of it.[30] The medium as definable entity had seemingly run its course, and with it the recognizable objects in painting and sculpture upon which artistic discourse had relied for centuries.

Object-Oriented Returns

In 1999, Krauss put forward the expression 'post-medium condition', not only to argue that the era of the discrete, identifiable medium had passed, but also, paradoxically, to 'retain the word "medium"', because 'for all the misunderstandings and abuses attached to it, this is the term that opens onto the discursive field' that she wants to address.[31] By describing certain art practices such as those of Marcel Broodthaers, Krauss is able to keep the spectre of mediumness alive. It is precisely a spectre, an after-life of the medium, alive only in dreams, memory and fiction. Broodthaers' work from 1971 *Ma Collection* enables Krauss to read, after many

others, the artist as a collector, as defined by Walter Benjamin as someone who 'liberates things from the bondage of utility'.[32] Broodthaers, in a letter reproduced as an illustration to Krauss's text, describes his work *Ma Collection* as a 'new form of readymade, a baroque readymade. This dubious readymade would therefore be equivalent to a dubious work of art.'[33] By casting the 'readymaker' as a collector rather than as a chooser, selector or editor, Broodthaers is able to redeem the object in the face of its supposed dematerialization by conceptual art, while rendering it nostalgic, an anachronistic thing of the past.

Transforming the Duchampian readymade into something dubious and obsolete was a widespread preoccupation in the 1960s and 1970s, as the post-war euphoria at the potentially infinite multiplication of consumable objects turned into doubt. In 1968 in Vancouver the artist Iain Baxter would go around the city photographing piles of industrial cast-offs, without order or explicit meaning.[34] Andy Warhol, too, was seeking to render not so much the banal as the non-descript, that which defies language and leaves the spectator mute, numb. The readymade, once it is processed through Warhol's factory, becomes a passive recorder of obsessive repetition: wanting to become a machine, he used as many technological processes as he could find to capture his times, via silkscreen, television, film, book and magazine. In this sense the opposition between an artist like Broodthaers, who exhibited the fictions of collectors and museums in order better to counteract them, and Warhol, with his various collections (exhibition installations, time-capsules),[35] is overstated: both use the technique of the re-display of objects to create a sense of estrangement for/in the subject, turning the author and viewer into things among many. The mediums employed by Broodthaers and Warhol are not technological in the sense of 'new media'; rather they are 'technical supports', as Krauss calls them. Regardless of their physical qualities, the technical support allows 'the artist to discover its "rules", which will in turn become the basis for that recursive self-evidence of a medium's specificity'.[36] Krauss here effects an ingenious re-appropriation of modernism's purist logic: instead of the support's material attributes, these will reveal themselves anamnesically. As she puts it, the medium is no longer the message, but the memory;[37] the object now operates as a Proustian catalyst for the posthumous recollection of modernism.[38]

In both *Voyage on the North Sea* and *Under Blue Cup* Krauss rails against 'the spectacle of meretricious art called installation', which she saw proliferate in the 1990s.[39] Although she rightly traces this turn from sculpture to installation back to the minimalists' reaction to Greenberg's pictorial flatness, she does not dwell on the possibility, crucial to the present collection of texts, of a crisis, or indeed series of crises, of sculpture. The history of modernism is commonly understood to be pictorial, with the main breaks produced by abstraction, the monochrome

and the blank canvas. Thierry De Duve's well-known cross-reading of Kant and Duchamp pits Greenberg's modernism against both the readymade and conceptual art, the latter positing the limits to which Greenberg was drawn but could not breach.[40] The passage from specific object to art in general is not wholly applicable, however, to sculpture, for the simple reason that sculpture interferes with space and is, since the readymade, continuously pushing back against the encroachment of the ordinary object, not the aesthetic *tabula rasa* of the blank canvas. One could thus argue that if the late modernist pictorial battle was waged mainly on aesthetic grounds against the deferred threat of the blank canvas, the sculptural battle occupied an economic plane against the real and present threat of the commodity. For Arthur Danto, the definitive art-historical crisis of modernism occurred with Warhol's *Brillo Box*, first exhibited at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964. With the *Brillo Box*'s merging of the minimalist cube and the look-alike consumer object, what had come to an end 'is a certain narrative, under the terms of which making art was understood to be carrying forward the history of discovery and making new breakthroughs'.[41] Similarly, for Benjamin Buchloh, the artist Isa Genzken 'confronts one of the prime calamities of sculpture in the present: a terror that emerges from both the universal equivalence and exchangeability of all objects and materials and the simultaneous impossibility of imbuing any transgressive definition of sculpture with priorities or criteria of selection, of choice, let alone judgement'.[42]

'Installation art' could well be the most readily available antidote to this sculptural terror after the *Brillo Box*, an admission that aesthetic categories, as well as aesthetic crises, have been replaced by a kind of Warholian *anomie*, a feeling that subjects and objects, viewer and artwork, modernism and postmodernism, no longer require the historical and aesthetic definitions they once did.[43] Without taking as hard a stance as Krauss against the 'forgetting' of modernism and its attachment to the medium, this collection does aim to retrieve the uneasy confrontation of the subject in the face of the duplication of objects under capitalism and, more recently, globalization. The art object still insists on the question of its categorical specificity, resisting the generic role of prop given to it in 'installation art'; meanwhile, the spectre of the object's technical support continues to haunt the space left vacant by sculpture. As Warhol was embarking on his image and object multiplications in the early 1960s, a number of artists began questioning precisely the art object's submission to mechanical reproduction, without, however, embracing manipulated form as unalloyed evidence of subjective expression. Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* are mutable works bordering on clothing that promote interaction between object and viewer; in the artist's words, they are an 'exploration of the basic structural constitution of the world of objects, the search for the roots of the objective birth of the work, the direct perceptive moulding of it.'[44] Moulding

or casting, as it happens, are favoured techniques of replication after the readymade, combining both the subjective, or 'positive', application of plaster, clay or *papier-mâché* on an object and the objective, or 'negative', indexical trace of the object's voided form. Alina Szapocznikow refers to her partial body casts as 'awkward objects'; a similar term could apply to Eva Hesse's and Louise Bourgeois' casts of quasi-body parts, Broodthaers' riffs on mussels[45] or Marina Abramovic's clay mirrors. These indeterminate objects are yet again indebted to Duchamp, but not so much for his readymades as for his small casts such as *Objet Dard* (1951/1961) and *Feuille de vigne femelle* (1950/1961) that oscillate between negative and positive imprints and phallic and vaginal shapes.[46]

If matter in these art objects still matters, it is to better confuse genres (and genders), swapping still life for dead life, or still life for a strangely organic, not necessarily human life form. A certain art-historical literature on the work of Bourgeois and Hesse – referencing Sigmund Freud's theory of the drives and Melanie Klein's 'part objects' – has foregrounded the subject in the encounter with the art object.[47] This angle is effective in reconnecting the object to the human body – the viewer's as well as the artist's – but in the process the object loses some of its capacity to lure the subject into an in-between where it is not so much the latter's psychic drives that compel as the object's own destabilizing forces. Unlike some of these psychoanalytic readings, Krauss sees in Hesse's reliefs a demonstration of 'a wonderfully humourous elaboration of Duchamp's interest in the mechanics of desire and the relays established by the readymades between bodies and objects'.[48] This mechanistic as well as psychic interpretation identifies the artwork closely with other intermediary or, to borrow D.W. Winnicott's term, 'transitional' objects, such as toys. Indeed, one of the indisputable achievements of psychoanalysis is to have identified the object as more than 'a thing in itself' lying statically outside of the subject, but as a dynamic element in constant flux, mediating the subject's inner and outer worlds as well as coercing the subject into varying configurations with itself and (other) objects.[49] The toy, like the relational art object, is unpredictable; there is no telling when it will lose its aura and lapse into thingness, or, on the contrary, change from mere thing to object of ceaseless wonder.

Like the toy, the fetish exerts a transformative power upon itself as well as other objects and subjects. The fetishist, in Freudian psychoanalysis, is someone (presumed male) who, out of fear of castration, invests an object (often one related to female attire, like shoes) with erotic characteristics. By extension, particularly in the late 1970s and 1980s, the male gaze was seen as an objectifying one, fetishizing entire female bodies through language and representation. But as the subject finds itself increasingly 'mired', as Hito Steyerl argues, 'in its own contradictions',[50] and the object less dependent on it, the fetish becomes a

double-edged instrument in the hands of those cognisant of its power: while Alexis Hunter and Ana Godel represent shoes to indict them as targets of objectifying male desire, Sherrie Levine's multiplication of shoes or readymades plays on the substitutive quality of the fetish. Levine's objects, produced as if in the absence of an authorial subject position, ask the question Giorgio Agamben ascribes to the fetish: 'Where is the human?'[51]

The Marxian fetish no less than the Freudian one asks this same question, but covertly. Here the fetish seeks to subsume relations between humans under those between objects, specifically commodities. These 'social things'[52] are assumed to operate autonomously of human social relationships, rendered equal by the fantastical role attributed to money. In this capitalist economy, the gift, like the artwork, is of particular interest, as it symbolizes and acts out the commodity's exchange value to the detriment of its use value. As Arjun Appadurai observes, 'gift giving in highly commoditized societies, like the United States, exemplifies a fundamental problem: how to create human relations in a world where all things are potentially in the market or on the market'.[53] Sophie Calle's ritualistic accumulation of gifts on her birthday takes up this problem, as she attempts to channel some of the commodity's aura back to social relations between people. By meticulously listing the gifts along with their dedications, and by specifying that she 'did not use the presents' but 'kept them as tokens of affection', Calle acknowledges the fantastical properties of the commodity fetish and its power to condition intersubjective relations. The abundance of 'for', 'to' and other prepositions in Calle's text further suggests that we are in the presence of things resembling Michel Serres' 'quasi-objects', generative of 'tight interlacings of new relations'.[54]

The quasi-object generates relationships for subjects circulating around the object. This in-betweeness on the side of the object leads to a new consciousness of the inherent objectness of our world. Not only does the object have a life of its own, but our lives as subjects depend on it. To quote Jacques Derrida on Francis Ponge (an early defender of objects), the thing is what 'dictates or which writes the law, a law which is … an infinitely, insatiably imperious injunction to which I ought to subject myself'.[55] Or, to put it in the terms of vital materialism proposed by Jane Bennett, we are much more caught up in dense networks of vibrant matter than we would like to think, trained as we are in the tradition of Kantian transcendental idealism. As Bennett argues, 'if matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated.'[56] The political, ethical and ecological implications of this view are clear: gone are the days when the subject's mastery over the world of objects and things could allow her or him to cast it off permanently. As objects, from financial data to food packaging, increasingly return

transformed, endlessly recycled and reconsumed, the once stable boundary between object and subject proves increasingly unreliable: the subject must now contend with its own availability and attraction as an almost-object, while the object accrues the status of almost-subject, bearing little relation with the material, graspable thing. This turn towards the object is not necessarily cause for celebration, nor a sign of emancipation.[57] What the latest detour in the shifting subject/object relationship does indicate, however, is that as subjects participating in increasingly dense and volatile networks of objects, we seem ready to turn to them for lessons on how to live, socialize and organize ourselves publicly and privately. We may be ready, in other words, to accept that objects define us.

1 Jean-François Chevrier, *The Year 1967: From Art Objects to Public Things, Or Variations on the Conquest of Space* (Barcelona: Fundació Tàpies, 1997) 117.

2 Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 167. For Heidegger to see the jug as much more than a serviceable utensil, in fact as evidence of nearness independent of human need, he affects what would become a decisive reversal for future re-appraisals of things – from subject to subjected object. Heidegger traces 'thing' [in modern German, *Ding*] back to the Old High German word *dinc*, meaning 'an affair or matter of pertinence' (174), but also 'gathering' (177). When the jug is taken as thing, Heidegger can say that it gathers, or 'things': 'Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged ...' (181).

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, in Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992) 46.

4 For a persuasive and detailed argumentation in defence of ordinary objects, see Amie Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q.1, A.1-3.

6 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, first part, trans. F. Max Müller (London: MacMillan, 1881) 371–2.

7 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, second part, trans. F. Max Müller (London: MacMillan, 1881) 220–6. For one of the better-known critiques of Kant's *Ding an sich*, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891) 145–169.

8 See Daniel Birnbaum, *The Hospitality of Presence: Problems of Otherness in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008) 18; and Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Foundation of the Sciences, Third Book: Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980) 86.

9 Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001) 5.

10 Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Making Things Public* (Karlsruhe: ZKM/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005) 23.

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

12 For an accessible recounting of the origins of speculative realism, see Amanda Beech, Robin Mackay and Suhail Malik, 'Beyond the Contemporary', *Spike*, no. 36 (Summer 2013) 90–104; and the companion article by Quentin Meillassoux, 'Time without Becoming', *Spike*, no. 35 (Spring 2013) 91–105.

13 See Graham Harman, *The Third Table* (*100 Notes–100 Thoughts* series, vol. 85) (Kassel: dOCUMENTA 13/Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

14 On Actor-Network Theory, where the object-subject divide is replaced by the relationship between actors and actants, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press) 1987. On Latour's later formulation of a 'parliament of things' populated by 'quasi-objects', see *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 142–5. Finally, for an exchange between Harman and Latour, see Bruno Latour, Graham Harman and Peter Erdélyi, *The Prince and the Wolf* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011).

15 See for example Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

16 Stephen Willats, 'Transformers' (1989), in *Stephen Willats: Art Society Feedback*, ed. Anja Casser and Philipp Ziegler (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 2010) 454.

17 Joëlle Tuerlinckx, 'Lexicon English', *Aux Dimensions de: Quelque Chose* (Brussels: Wiels, 2012) 18.

18 See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 7.

19 On Plato's furniture, see for example *The Republic*, book X; for Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cézanne's apples, see 'Cezanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964); on Heidegger's study of Van Gogh's paintings of shoes, see 'The Origin of the Work of Art', *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 33–6.

20 Mike Kelley, 'Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny', in *The Uncanny* (Arnhem: Sonsbeek, 1993) 17.

21 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, book 35, section 36 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963).

22 Jacques Lacan, 'La ligne et la lumière', in *Le séminaire XI: les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973) 95.

23 Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects' (1964), in *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955–1968* (New York: D.A.P., 2002) 94.

24 Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (June 1967) 12–23.

25 See Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* (1973) (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) 42–3.

26 Ursula Meyer, 'De-objectification of the Object', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 8 (Summer 1969) 20.

27 'Pistoletto's *Ogetti in meno* [Minus Objects] ... challenged the minimalist norm in advance, and the community of a "poor family" was a way for the Turin-based artist to set himself apart from the Pop art with which he had been associated...' (Jean-François Chevrier, *The Year 1967*, 195); see also Michelangelo Pistoletto, 'The Minus Objects' (1966), http://www.pistoletto.it/eng/testi/minus_objects.pdf (accessed 15 October 2013).

28 Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958) 248.

29 Citing Kristeva and Krauss together in relation to the abject is to confuse two very different takes on the notion. See Rosalind Krauss, 'The Destiny of the Informe', in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, eds, *Formless* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 235–52.

30 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Use Value of "Formless"', in *Formless*, 25.

31 Rosalind Krauss, *'A Voyage on the North Sea': Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999) 7.

32 Ibid., 38.

33 Ibid., 35, 62.

34 See 'Piles' by Kurt von Meier (1968) in the present volume.

35 See Warhol's 1970 exhibition 'Raid the Icebox with Andy Warhol' at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Art and Design.

36 Rosalind Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011) 19.

37 Ibid., 127–9.

38 On the relation of the medium to memory, see Ian Farr, introduction, *Memory* (London: Whitechapel Gallery/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012) 16.

39 Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, foreword.

40 Thierry De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996).

41 Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992) 10.

42 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'All Things Being Equal', *Artforum* (November 2005) 224.

43 On the role and position of the subject in 'installation art', see Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 10–11.

44 Hélio Oiticica, 'Fundamental Bases for a Definition of the *Parangolé*' (1964), in *Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Guy Brett, Catherine David, et al. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1992) 86.

45 *Moules* in French is close to *moulage*, casting. For an insightful analysis of Broodthaers and moulding in response to Pop art see Jean-Philippe Antoine, *Marcel Broodthaers–Moule, Muse, Méduse* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2006) 78.

46 On Duchamp and impressions – in casts as well as photography – see Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance par contact* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2008).

47 See, for example, Mignon Nixon, 'Posing the Phallus', *October*, no. 92 (Spring 2000) 103; and Briony Fer, 'Objects Beyond Objecthood', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1999) 29.

48 Rosalind Krauss, 'Eva Hesse', in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Part Object Part Sculpture* (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts, 2006) n.p.

49 See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973) 273–6.

50 Hito Steyerl, 'A Thing Like You and Me', *e-flux journal*, no. 15 (April 2010).

51 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 59.

52 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel

Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970) 72–3.

53 Arjun Appadurai, 'The Thing Itself', *Public Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2006) 21.

54 'Why should philosophy continue to speak this telegraphic language consisting only of verbs and substantives, without any prepositions, without any declensions or pronouns, when without them we can express neither relations nor subjects nor objects?' (Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, trans. Roxanna Lapidus [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995] 202).

55 Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 12. Ponge's collection of prose poems from 1942, *Le parti pris des choses*, stands out as an exemplary attempt at taking the side of things. Ponge further coined the term *objeu* ('objest') to come close to the role of language in the playful engagement with the object. Among other writers and psychoanalysts, Pierre Fédida (represented in this volume) took considerable interest in the 'objest' – see his *L'absence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

56 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 12.

57 See Diedrich Diedrichsen, 'Animation, De-reification and the New Charm of the Inanimate', *e-flux Journal*, no. 36 (July 2012), trans. Gerrit Jackson, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/animation-de-reification-and-the-new-charm-of-the-inanimate/#_ftnref10 [accessed 27 September 2013]).

AS YOU LOOK AT OR,
MORE APPROPRIATELY,
WATCH THE BACK OF
THE BLACK GRANITE
EYES, THE FRONT IS
REVEALED THROUGH
THE MIRRORS. THIS IS
A SCULPTURE WITH
EYES AT THE BACK OF
ITS HEAD

Phyllida Barlow, on Louise Bourgeois' *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)*, 1996

Theodor W. Adorno
On Subject and Object//1969

[...] The difference between subject and object slices through subject as well as through object. It can no more be absolutized than it can be removed from thought. Actually everything that is in the subject can be attributed to the object; whatever in it is not object semantically bursts open the 'is'. The pure subjective form of traditional epistemology, according to its own concept, is always only a form of something objective, never without that objectivity, indeed not even thinkable without it. The solidity of the epistemological ego, the identity of self-consciousness, is obviously modelled after the unreflected experience of the enduring, identical object; even Kant fundamentally relies on this. He could not have claimed that the subjective forms are conditions of objectivity if he had not tacitly granted them an objectivity borrowed from the one to which he contrasts the subject. However, at the extreme where subjectivity contracts, from the single point of its synthetic unity, what is taken together is always only what in itself belongs together anyway. Otherwise synthesis would be mere arbitrary classification. Of course, without the subjective act of synthesis such a belonging together is just as inconceivable. Even the subjective a priori can be claimed to have objective validity only in so far as it has an objective side; without it the object constituted by the a priori would be a pure tautology for subject. Finally, by virtue of its being indissoluble, given and extraneous to the subject, its contents, what Kant calls the matter of cognition, is likewise something objective in the subject. Accordingly, it is easy to think of the subject as nothing and of the object as absolute, a tendency not far from Hegel's thoughts. But this is once again transcendental illusion. Subject is reduced to nothing through its hypostasis, making something out of no thing. The hypostasis defaults because it cannot satisfy the innermost, naïve-realistic criterion of existence. The idealist construction of the subject founders on its falsely taking subject to be objective in the sense of something existing in-itself, precisely what it is not: measured against the standard of entities, the subject is condemned to nothingness. Subject is all the more the less it is, and all the less the more it believes itself to exist, to be for itself something objective. As an essential moment, however, it is ineradicable. Upon the elimination of the subjective moment the object would come apart diffusely like the fleeting stirrings and twinklings of subjective life.

Object, though attenuated, also is not without subject. If object itself lacked subject as a moment, then its objectivity would become nonsense. This is flagrantly obvious in the weakness of Hume's epistemology. It was subjectively

oriented while still believing it could dispense with the subject. Therefore it is necessary to judge the relationship between individual and transcendental subject. The individual subject, as has been stated since Kant in countless variations, is an integral component of the empirical world. Its function, however, its capacity for experience – which the transcendental subject lacks, for no purely logical entity could have any sort of experience – is in truth much more constitutive than the role idealism ascribed to the transcendental subject, which is itself a profoundly, precritically hypostatized abstraction of individual consciousness. Nevertheless the concept of the transcendental is a reminder that thinking, by virtue of its own immanent elements of universality, transcends its own inalienable individuation. The antithesis between universal and particular too is necessary as well as deceptive. Neither one can exist without the other, the particular only as determined and thus universal, the universal only as the determination of a particular and thus itself particular. Both of them are and are not. This is one of the strongest motives of a non-idealist dialectics. [...]

Theodor W. Adorno, sections 10 and 11 from 'On Subject and Object', *Stichworte: Kritische Modelle 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969); trans. Henry W. Pickford, in Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 256–7.

General Idea
Manipulating the Self//1970–73

(Phase 1 – A Borderline Case)
The head is separate; the hand is separate. Body and mind are separate.

The hand is a mirror for the mind – wrap your arm over your head, lodging your elbow behind and grabbing your chin with your hand. The act is now complete. Held, you are holding. You are object and subject, viewed and voyeur.

Please send photos of yourself in this position to General Idea [...]

General Idea, text from *Manipulating the Self (Phase 1 – A Borderline Case)*, issued as a mail art invitation beneath a photograph of the action being performed; published in *Manipulating the Self*, offset pamphlet reproducing the invitation and a selection of the photographic responses received (Toronto: General Idea/Coach House Press, 1971); courtesy of A.A. Bronson.

Adrian Piper
Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object//1970–73

[...] The idea of an art object as a potency or catalytic agent is present in practically any aesthetic, if only implicitly. But in most cases, this aspect is more a concern of the viewer and the critic than of the artist: it represents a reflective rather than an involved vision of the work. Up to now, my aesthetic concerns have been of a more self-involved, self-referential nature: developing the implications of a previous work, solving a problem encountered in my own work or in art history, making a 'statement' about a particular formal problem (for example, two- versus three-dimensional space). But now I find that I feel compelled to deal with the reflective perceiver's standpoint as a primary concern of the work, equal in importance to the former concerns. At the same time that I abandon traditional art media for the plastic possibilities of my own body, it appears that I must also abandon the self-enclosed aesthetic concerns which motivated me: (1) as a human being, any identity I may assume seems to depend largely on my interaction with other human beings. And just as I define myself as an individual partially in terms of how I affect others, defining myself as an art object seems to necessitate the significance of my effect on others in much the same way; (2) as an artist separate from my art, I saw the effect of my existence in the existence of the work: The work changed the world for me by adding something new that wasn't there before. Thus in the existence of the work, I saw my effect on the world at large. But now I become identical with the artwork, and the sequence is shortened: as an art object, I want simply to look outside myself and see the effect of my existence on the world at large, rather than first in another, secondary object.

This includes making or doing anything as artifice independently of the artist's physical person. Previously I encountered a problem about this within the framework of conceptual art. In the *Hypothesis* series (which in many ways led into what I'm doing now), I documented activities and perceptions that were completely within the context of my personal life, such as reading a magazine, walking across my loft, buying food in a supermarket, and so on, by taking photos at predetermined spatio-temporal intervals and plotting them along a graph with space and time coordinates. Some of *many* problems with this: (1) the documentation process gave artifice to the chosen parts of my personal life, making them artificial and constructed situations; (2) the documentation process was something over and above my personal life. One may object that my 'personal life' may not include *being* art, but it does include *making* art. And this is, of course, true by definition in most cases. The problem arises only in so far as I choose to

explore the artistic possibilities of being itself. If documenting something is making art, and that's within my 'personal life' – which is itself the art – then why not document *that*? And then why not document myself documenting myself documenting myself? It seems to me now that the only way of resolving this is to recognize that if my actions and my existence become a subject of aesthetic exploration, then I *must* treat the presentation of this subject, the documentation of this subject, as something other than the subject itself. And then the criticism does indeed apply; (3) the documentation finally presented was necessarily aesthetic artifice, and was itself a discrete form, with all the attendant difficulties (section I); (4) I compromised the aesthetic possibilities of me as art object by 'being art' privately and separating that event from its public presentation. That is, the documentation referred to art but was not itself art. Yet it was shown in art-defining contexts, galleries and museums, as the art itself – or a much-diluted version thereof; (5) the nature of the activities was such that they couldn't have interest or impact for anyone besides me. Then any interest or impact the final product did have would have to lie in the method of presentation, that is, documentation, itself: The work was viewed formally, as graphic art subject to purely visual standards. And this was exactly contrary to my intent in documenting, which was to convey clearly or report that to which the documentation referred.

When I say, 'decreases its potential strength as a catalytic agent', I don't mean to imply that all art that exists in discrete forms is weak but just that it is not first and foremost a catalytic agent. [...]

Adrian Piper, extract from 'Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object' (1970–73) [section II. 'Notes and Qualifications' (September 1970)], in Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968–1992* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996) 34–6. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation, Berlin.

Jean Baudrillard
In Conversation with Guy Bellavance//1983

Jean Baudrillard [The] banality of the masses and the silent majorities is all part of our ambience. But for me it still remains a fatal strategy: in other words, it is something unaccountable for itself, inescapable, but also indecipherable, an immanent type of fatality. It is something at the heart of the system, at the strategic core of the system, something like its point of inertia, its blind spot. This

corresponds to my definition of the fatal (even though there can be none). For all this behaviour of the masses, mass art, Beaubourg [the Centre Pompidou], etc., is the extreme limit of banality, the apogee of banality. Of course, my work used to revolve around these things. But let us say that it was the kind of fatality that takes systems of simulation to their limit and that produces this 'mass' object.

On the other hand, seduction is for me a fatal strategy as well. For me, it is the finest or most beautiful example of a sort of fatality – something quite different, let us say, from the banality of sex, but a wager of another order, an enchanted order; even though, when it comes to the strategy of the masses, it is in fact more disenchanted. But the fatal can cover both aspects. To put it simply, they have no point in common: there is always something like irony behind the fatal. It isn't a tragic, pathetic or romantic type of fatality, nor is it a religious fatalism: it is something ironic. And it isn't even a subjective irony – there is no subject behind it. Perhaps the grand epoch of subjective irony or radicality has now come to an end. It would be the end of an era in which all philosophy had a stake (Kierkegaard as well as the Romantics) and the beginning of a type of objective irony.

It seems to me that behind these strategies there exists something like irony with respect to finalities: not a refusal of finalities, not a transgression, or a violent destruction, of tragedy, but an ironic deviation of things from the finalities always prescribed by the subject. So, for me, irony would be almost an anti-definition: isn't this the secret, but perhaps the most obvious one ... of objective irony?

Bellavance It is the revenge of the object?

Baudrillard Yes, it is. It is what I have called 'the revenge of the crystal', and in reality I started out from that. [...] What is the crystal? It is the object, the pure object, the pure event, something no longer with any precise origin or end, to which the subject would like to attribute an origin and an end even though it has none, and which today perhaps begins to give account of itself. Perhaps there is now the possibility that the object will say something to us, but above all the possibility that it will avenge itself! I was quite happy to see it in a relatively impassioned form, for it may be that objects have passions as much as subjects do: passions not unlike ruse, irony, indifference – indifferential and inertial passions, which are in direct opposition to those tonic and finalistic passions of the subject (e.g. desire, the demand for enjoyment, etc.). The object, on the other hand, is something like indifference. This is also a passion, but an ironic one to my mind. That remains to be explored [...] I haven't done that yet. But if I do maybe it would be a theory of *object-passions*, of the object's passions, of objective passions.

Bellavance It is clear that your relation to the object has changed considerably since *Le Système des objets* (1968) ...

Baudrillard Yes, it has completely changed! It's no longer even the issue, except as a kind of reference to this obsession with objects. It is the same term. But what really appeals to me – and there's an irony in this, too – is to be completely immersed in objects, to have started from objects, from an obsession with them. Of course, the problem was not immediately one of objects. It was simply a means of moving beyond them. But finally it was nonetheless a departure from objects, and so ends up in ... the Object! (*laughter*)

In any case, the analysis of the system of objects was still a roundabout way of grasping the problematic, the dialectic of subject-object. There is a system at work here, but something different all the same. There is another logic simply than the alterity of the object, alienation by the object. These are already tired problematics. So the attempt to grasp objects as a system already went a little way towards disrupting the traditional view of things. But ultimately this analysis went off in a different direction.

Bellavance This object that you talk about seems to be a quasi-subject. It isn't totally passive. And it expresses many things.

Baudrillard No, it isn't passive, and yet it is not a subject in the sense that it has imaginary. It is without imaginary, but this is its strength, sovereignty. This is because it is not caught in a system of projection identification: the mirror stage, desire, or whatever. The object without desire. It is what in a sense escapes desire, and so belongs to the order of destiny. In my opinion there are only two things: either it's desire, or it's destiny!

Bellavance It is without negativity as well?

Baudrillard Yes, it is without negativity.

Bellavance It is always in the superlative?

Baudrillard Yes, certainly. But here it links up with many of the recent trends: not the search for a positivism, but for a positivity, for an immanence of things. With Deleuze for example, even though we are undoubtedly very far apart, there is exactly the same search, one that goes beyond even the most radical kind of subjectivity – to discover what exists, there, what the object has to tell us, what the world as such has to tell us. Could it really have no immanent processes?

There is no emotivity in it, and yet something comes to pass. It is not passivity. On the contrary it is playfulness.

Bellavance What exactly do you mean by this passion for potentialization and redoubling [...], this truer than the true, this more beautiful than the beautiful, these qualities that have entirely absorbed the energy of their opposites?

Baudrillard A fantasy ... I don't know. Some might even say it is mystical. I don't think so because there is no cosmic principle here. It nonetheless remains a game, and so there must be a rule of play, which precludes unification or a kind of fusion of things. On the contrary, these intensified effects stand out in direct contrast to other things, precisely those things which belong to the order of the mirror, resemblance, and the image. It is strictly beyond the imaginary. And in that sense it is also a hyperreality, because such intensification is equivalent to a sort of absolutization. Basically, as soon as it is accepted as a process (for that is what a mobile state would be), it becomes something that passes into radical objectivity – not objectivity in the scientific sense, but, as the *other* would say, radical '*objectity*'.

That may well be a sort of revenge. We have placed the object in the position of object: the subject has devoted itself to it as object, but with all the safeguards, etc. And the object escapes this kind of trap, this strategy which belongs to the subject, by entering into radical objectivity. At this moment it actually escapes the systems of decoding and interpretation. The problem is a bit like knowing if this thing that interests me is a modern detour or vicissitude, or if it is ultimately a question of metaphysics. I believe it is both. For me, there is an increasingly metaphysical dimension, or an anti-metaphysical one – which amounts to the same thing. Yet my interest lies in the actual modern conjunction: not a banal fatality, nor even the object of metaphysics or philosophy. Basically I'm not a philosopher, in the sense of being interested in arguments or terminology. Such things don't escape me, but I don't start out from that. It's not what I try to do. That's the way it goes! What interests me is to set out from contemporary nuclear situations: from object-situations, or even from strategies of the masses. They are the vicissitudes of modernity – or postmodernity, I have no idea – but those which are our lot. Even at the beginning, the 'system of objects' was nevertheless something that had never been produced within other cultures. Here we might have a specific destiny. [...]

Jean Baudrillard and Guy Bellavance, extract from interview, *Parachute*, no. 31 (1983); reprinted in *The Revenge of the Crystal: A Baudrillard Reader*, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London: Pluto Press, 1990) 17–20 [footnotes not included].

Michel Serres and Bruno Latour
Where *Things* Enter into Collective Society//1995

Bruno Latour I agree with you that the social sciences remain obsessed by subjects alone, by people interacting among themselves, and never speak of objects per se. But how do you introduce the object into these relationships? What myth can you propose? – for such a description must rely on myths, it seems to me.

Michel Serres Here it is. Neither *I* nor *thou* nor *we* nor *you* is a pronoun; rather, they are like wildcards in certain card games – multivalent and interchangeable jokers exchanged indifferently by certain relations. As a result, they remain precious notions for the collective itself and quite indispensable to the juridical disciplines, one of whose major functions is to define a subject of the law. The ego was first of all the subject of the verb *credo*, in the sense given it by Roman law and then by Christian theology, which is the source of its usage by Augustine, from whom Descartes sprang. It remains a good legal and theological concept.

Probably the very first contract was empty, and being institutional, concerned only us. We were still animals, and we remain so still when, as political creatures, we remain caught in the dizziness of pure and simple relations. In such a situation, we only experience the eternal return of a law that has become formal or imaginary.

Latour I'm still waiting for the appearance of the object.

Serres So, then, along comes the first referent of the contract. For example, an apple – the one Eve gave to her first lover. A gift, a stake, a fetish, a first commodity, tracing heavily for the first time the relation of love, of disobedience, of knowledge, of risk, and of mad prophecy – this fruit brought about the first human collectivity, the simplest one in history. We discovered ourselves naked, lovers, mortal and sinful, standing already before the tree of science and standing already before a tribunal – divine, moral, civil, penal, deciding about good and evil – all because of this apple, *cause* and *thing*, the first object.

I neither can nor wish to cut up these multiple languages: philosophy speaks in several voices, as though in fugue and counterpoint; it uses a multivalent language, like mathematics; it expresses itself in polysemic parables and, through this pluralism, produces sense.

We would be nothing without *it/him/her*, and from the beginning we speak only of the third person. We don't talk about anything, we don't think anything if

we don't think some*thing*, even if this some thing is the network of our relations – proof that *he/she/it* does not exist in the first person if *he/she/it* does not exist previously in the third person, even in our discourses.

The third person is the basis of truth or meaning established verbally, in the sense that it gives them weight and stability long before giving them meaning and grace. No, discourse cannot be woven without it, since the third person designates and describes the entire universe: men, things, God and being, climate and obligation – in sum, either the *causes* of the law and the things of science, or, definitively, the totality of our moral questions, both ancient and modern.

Latour So the quasi-object is a pronoun?

Serres You are the one who brought it up! So, this is how history went: it begins with the repetition of an empty contract, concerning only the fluctuating relations of the group. The first object makes the contract heavier and denser, and history, becoming more viscous, brakes and slows down, as though it were coming to a halt. Then the era of the law emerges, in which the only objects are stakes, fetishes or commodities, marking the unanalysable mingling of objects in our relations. Finally, science arrives, in which objects become detached from relations but construct new ones. This 'feedback' between our relations and objects will never end.

Latour So the collectivity is produced by this double circulation of objects that create social relations and social relations that create objects. Nonetheless, morality does not come from this co-production of things and people?

Serres The moral problems that weigh upon us today no doubt spring from our era when objects pilot relations, whereas we are just emerging from an archaic era in which relations piloted objects. Indeed, we must continually untangle the relations between the one and the other. We do not yet have an adequate idea of what the deluge of objects manufactured since the industrial revolution by science, technology, laboratories and factories implies for our relations – and now for those universal relations brought about by our global enterprises.

We are certainly not mistaken when we believe in the objective usefulness of our products, but we never see clearly enough that they create tight interlacings of new relations, which are all quasi-objects. Today, and perhaps ever since we became *homines fabri*, we have been working at fabricating some of these object relations. Henceforth we will produce the most global of these objects conditioning the totality of our relations, and which are the foundation of *obligation*, in the most obvious sense, *ties*. This is the reason for the globally

objective state of morality; henceforth once we *make*, we *must*.

Latour So the conception of morality you are developing here is linked to what we said earlier about the transcendental in relations – about this famous synthesis of the totality of relations, based on relations?

Serres The totality of the causes of evil is the totality of relations. As we said before, to know what these are one has only to describe the network of prepositions.

Latour For every quasi-object there is a mode of relation, a preposition and a deadly sin?

Serres Yes. All of them, and each one expresses a portion of evil, and this is why God – whom tradition calls 'the Good Lord' – is the sum of relations, with interest.

Latour So your philosophy introduces pronouns and prepositions into its language?

Serres Why should philosophy continue to speak this telegraphic language consisting only of verbs and substantives, without any prepositions, without any declensions or pronouns, when without them we can express neither relations nor subjects nor objects? In this new language, which is very close to everyday language, you will also see a whole new process of abstraction. [...]

Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, extract from *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, trans. Roxanna Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 200–203.

Jane Bennett
Vibrant Matter//2010

[...] Yes, [critics of vital materialism say], objects possess a certain power of action (as when bacteria or pharmaceuticals enact hostile or symbiotic projects inside the human body), and yes, some subject-on-subject objectifications are permissible (as when persons consent to use and be used as a means to sexual pleasure), but the *ontological* divide between persons and things must remain lest one have no moral grounds for privileging man over germ or for condemning pernicious forms of human-on-human instrumentalization (as when powerful humans exploit illegal, poor, young or otherwise weaker humans).

How can the vital materialist respond to this important concern? First, by acknowledging that the framework of subject versus object has indeed at times worked to prevent or ameliorate human suffering and to promote human happiness or wellbeing. Second, by noting that its successes come at the price of an instrumentalization of non-human nature that can itself be unethical and can itself undermine long-term human interests. Third, by pointing out that the Kantian imperative to treat humanity always as an end-in-itself and never merely as a means does not have a stellar record of success in preventing human suffering or promoting human wellbeing: it is important to raise the question of its actual, historical efficacy in order to open up space for forms of ethical practice that do not rely upon the image of an intrinsically *hierarchical* order of things. Here the materialist speaks of promoting healthy and enabling instrumentalizations, rather than of treating people as ends-in-themselves, because to face up to the compound nature of the human self is to find it difficult even to make sense of the notion of a single end-in-itself. What instead appears is a swarm of competing ends being pursued simultaneously in each individual, some of which are healthy to the whole, some of which are not. Here the vital materialist, taking a cue from Nietzsche's and Spinoza's ethics, favours physiological over moral descriptors because she fears that moralism can itself become a source of unnecessary human suffering.

We are now in a better position to name that other way to promote human health and happiness: *to raise the status of the materiality of which we are composed.* Each human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant, matter. If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated. All bodies become more than mere objects, as the thing-powers of resistance and protean agency are brought into sharper relief. Vital

materialism would thus set up a kind of safety net for those humans who are now, in a world where Kantian morality is the standard, routinely made to suffer because they do not conform to a particular (Euro-American, bourgeois, theocentric, or other) model of personhood. The ethical aim becomes to distribute value more generously, to bodies as such. Such a newfound attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression, but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of being inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations. And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself. Such an enlightened or expanded notion of self-interest *is good for humans.* [...]

Jane Bennett, extract from *Vibrant Matter* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010) 12–13 [footnotes not included].

Toby Ziegler and Elizabeth Johnson
The Alienation of Objects//2010

He develops a disregard for the objects around him – *Silly lamp for believing it is on the countertop. Ridiculous chair for concurring to hold me up.* Lamp and chair stare back at him blankly. He forgets, he agreed to all this, he gave consent for each second to murder the last.

Toby Ziegler and Elizabeth Johnson, extract from *The Alienation of Objects* (London: Zabludowicz Collection, 2010) 57.

Marcus Steinweg
What is an Object?//2011

Trying to grasp a rainbow is the surest way to make it vanish.
– Theodor W. Adorno[1]

Comment inventer un objet fascinant, un objet qui tient l'homme en respect?
– Georges Didi-Huberman[2]

An object that marks a distance, a chasm, a rupture – what kind of an object is that? Fascination digs a trench between subject and object. The subject is faced with an object that opens a distance not easily bridged. Difference or trench, rupture, chasm or distance – in any case there is a gap that gives way to an absence and a disappearance, a non-identity and an unstable presence. The objectivity of the object cannot be compared to a constant entity. It is characterized by all manner of fractures and what it presents is this fragility, this instability and contingency. Clearly the question of the object is tied to that of the subject, so long as the subject is defined as that which can become an object in its own right, namely by reflecting upon itself as a consciousness of objects. The Cartesian formula *ego cogito me cogitare cogitatum* expresses precisely this: I think myself (am thought) as a subject that thinks an object. At the same time, I think myself (am thought) as something other than only an object, in so far as I can objectify myself. In the possibility of self-objectification, the subject transcends its status as object and moves toward its status as subject. Opening with this self-awareness is the space of the future self-awareness metaphysics, which anchors the objectivity of the object – the objectness of the object – in an instance of transcendence that has been called transcendental subjectivity. This thinking has often been defined as epistemology. Yet clearly what we are dealing with is ontology, with the object of knowledge's constitution of being within the subject of knowledge. The condition of the possibility of the knowledge of the object is the condition of the possibility of its objectivity. The objectivity of the object – its being – is established in the subjectivity – in the being – of the subject. In *Après la finitude* (2006), Quentin Meillassoux calls this position correlationism. Correlationism reduces the reality of the objective to a transcendental instance of enabling, which is the subject. Kant, but also Heidegger (whose *Sein* needs *Dasein* as a site for clearing)[3] are the sort of correlationists that cannot imagine an object without a subject, in that they – despite the Heideggerian critique of modern subjectivity – developed a subject or *Dasein*-centric thinking that contemporary thought has begun to counter with a new materialism or

realism. And no doubt, the transcendental empiricism or materialism of Gilles Deleuze was already an attempt along these lines, an effort to explode correlationism in order to evoke a subject-independent realm of objects. The object – that is first and foremost the Other. And wherever there is an Other or Others, there is a narcissistic wound. The object cannot be reduced to the subject and its capacity for knowledge. Flashing within the object is the non-subjective, the heterogeneous or alien that defies any valid understanding. Thus the Greek *antikeimenon* can be interpreted as this resistance, as this thing that locks itself in. The *antikeimenon* rebels against being reduced to a subject. It resists homogenization in a subject perspective that objectifies reality in so far as it conceives of objectification as the – scientific or non-scientific – understanding of 'world', whereas here, 'world' is a name for the totality of objects. And yet even correlationist thought acknowledges that there is a side of the object that is turned away from the subject. The Kantian *noumenon* – the thing-in-itself – is an example of the intelligible aspect of the object accessible to the subject. It is the problematic X that points to a kind of ontological unavailability. We now know that the unavailability applies to more than simply an object that is external to the subject: the subject itself is unavailable, it addresses itself without possession of self, it is – as Lacan and Derrida have shown – dislocated/dismantled in relation to itself. There is a crack that runs through the subject, a fracture marking its incongruence, its foreignness to itself. Joining Freud and Lacan, Julia Kristeva addresses foreignness or uncanniness – these ghost-like occupants at the heart of the subject, a kind of abject object – as its displaced owner: 'With Freud indeed, foreignness, an uncanny one, creeps into the tranquillity of reason itself [...]. Henceforth we know that we are foreigners to ourselves'.[4] The determining factor is the apriorism of the visitation, the non-'deferred action' of the phantomatic co-occupant. We can speak of an unconscious that prefigures every knowledge construction and every self-addressing undertaken by the subject qua subject. The basis for its facts is full of holes, right from the start. Establishing this requires twice as much courage. First, the courage to confront an irreducible inconsistency that clouds all evidence of the subject. Its knowledges are not anchored in absolute awareness. They are floating architectures without a transcendental foundation. As Derrida – and others – have repeated again and again: there is no absolute meaning, no fundamental origin, no transcendental signifier. The tear in the present means precisely this: that there is always something missing or absent, that every present is permeated by a non-present.[5] It also means that the tendency to crack is inherent to the subject, the (original) breaking of its narcissistic integrity. Part of this process of subjectification is the subject's disengagement from substance. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel describes the first step of this disengagement process as a transition of the spirit or of the absolute from consciousness to self-consciousness, from in-itself to for-

itself. The transition is essentially appropriation of the self: the consciousness reveals itself as the subject of its consciousness activity. It emancipates itself from mere bondage to the in-itself of objects of consciousness and grasps itself as an essentially active consciousness-of-object, or -subject. In psychoanalytic terms, the subject's self-comprehension can be characterized as the switch from childish primary narcissism to 'object love'. The process of becoming a subject also consists in the ability to open oneself to the dimensions of the non-subjective, to the order of objects, without immediately regressing to the internalization of objects. This opening marks the primary narcissistic subject's withdrawal from its autoerotic, object-alien disposition. The subject frees itself from the 'fixation of libido on one's own body and person', in other words, from its 'general and original condition', which Freud refers to as primitive narcissism.[6] The emancipation becomes possible in the subject's changing from its self-disintegrating, instrumental object-relations and assuming the risky position of object love, thereby constituting itself as subject for the first time. What does this mean for a theory of objects? How to think an object in a horizon of fractured presence? I would like to distinguish between the following three types of objects: 1. the fact object, 2. the heterogeneous object, 3. the fascinating object. [...]

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970); trans. C. Lenhardt (London and New York: Routledge, 1984) 122.

2 Georges Didi-Huberman: 'How to invent a fascinating object, an object that keeps a respectful distance from man?', in *L'Homme qui marchait dans la couleur* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2001) 20.

3 In *Contributions*, Heidegger defines the event – the common bond between *Sein* and *Dasein* – in terms of *Brauch* (usage) and *Zugehörigkeit* (belonging). *Sein* needs *Dasein*, whereas *Dasein* is part of *Sein*. See Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38); trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) GA 65.

4 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988); trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 113.

5 Should we not ask ourselves whether the ('deconstructive') hypostasis of difference/otherness/absence – which started the unravelling of the hypostasis of identity, individuality and presence – is not overly bound to a pathos of radical novelty or foreignness and the (empty) gesture of revolutionary absoluteness?

6 Sigmund Freud, 'The Libido Theory and Narcissism', in Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*; trans. G. Stanley Hall (New York, 1920).

Marcus Steinweg, extract from 'What is an Object?', in *Antje Majewski: The World of Gimel. How to Make Objects Talk*, ed. Adam Budak and Peter Pakesch (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2011) 218–20.

Hito Steyerl
A Thing Like You and Me//2012

Whatever happened to Leon Trotsky?
He got an ice pick, that made his ears burn.

Whatever happened to dear old Lenny?
The great Elmyra, and Sancho Panza?
Whatever happened to the heroes?

Whatever happened to all the heroes? All the Shakespearoes?
They watched their Rome burn.

Whatever happened to the heroes?
No more heroes any more.
– The Stranglers, 1977

I

In 1977, the short decade of the New Left violently comes to an end. Militant groups such as the Red Army Faction have descended into political sectarianism. Gratuitous violence, macho posing, pithy slogans and an embarrassing cult of personality have come to dominate the scene. Yet it is not 1977 that sees the myth of the leftist hero come crumbling down. The figure has on the contrary already lost all credibility, beyond rehabilitation – even if this will only become clear much later.

In 1977, the punk band The Stranglers delivers a crystal-clear analysis of the situation by stating the obvious: heroism is over. Trotsky, Lenin and Shakespeare are dead. In 1977, as leftists flock to the funerals of Red Army Faction members Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan Carl Raspe, The Stranglers' album cover delivers its own giant wreath of red carnations and declares: NO MORE HEROES. Any more.

II

But also in 1977 David Bowie releases his single 'Heroes'. He sings about a new brand of hero, just in time for the neoliberal revolution. The hero is dead – long live the hero! Yet Bowie's hero is no longer a subject, but an object: a thing, an image, a splendid fetish – a commodity soaked with desire, resurrected from beyond the squalor of its own demise.

Just look at a 1977 video of the song to see why: the clip shows Bowie singing

to himself from three simultaneous angles, with layering techniques tripling his image; not only has Bowie's hero been cloned, he has above all become an image that can be reproduced, multiplied and copied, a riff that travels effortlessly through commercials for almost anything, a fetish that packages Bowie's glamorous and unfazed post-gender look as product.[1] Bowie's hero is no longer a larger-than-life human being carrying out exemplary and sensational exploits, and he is not even an icon, but a shiny product endowed with post-human beauty: an image and nothing but an image.[2]

This hero's immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ordeals, but from its ability to be xeroxed, recycled and reincarnated. Destruction will alter its form and appearance, yet its substance will be untouched. The immortality of the thing is its finitude, not its eternity.

III

What happens to identification at this point? Who can we identify with? Of course, identification is always with an image. But ask anybody whether they'd actually like to be a JPEG file. And this is precisely my point: if identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with this material aspect of the image, with the image as thing, not as representation. And then it perhaps ceases to be identification, and instead becomes participation.[3] I will come back to this point later.

But first of all: why should anybody want to become this thing – an object – in the first place? Elisabeth Lebovici once made this clear to me in a brilliant remark.[4] Traditionally, emancipatory practice has been tied to a desire to become a subject. Emancipation was conceived as becoming a subject of history, of representation, or of politics. To become a subject carried with it the promise of autonomy, sovereignty, agency. To be a subject was good; to be an object was bad. But, as we all know, being a subject can be tricky. The subject is always already subjected. Though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations. Nevertheless, generations of feminists – including myself – have striven to get rid of patriarchal objectification in order to become subjects. The feminist movement, until quite recently (and for a number of reasons), worked towards claiming autonomy and full subjecthood.

But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why not be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things? 'A thing that feels', as Mario Perniola seductively phrased it:

> To give oneself as a thing that feels and to take a thing that feels is the new experience that asserts itself today on contemporary feeling, a radical and extreme

> experience that has its cornerstone in the encounter between philosophy and sexuality ... It would seem that things and the senses are no longer in conflict with one another but have struck an alliance thanks to which the most detached abstraction and the most unrestrained excitement are almost inseparable and are often indistinguishable.[5]

A desire to become this thing – in this case an image – is the upshot of the struggle over representation. Senses and things, abstraction and excitement, speculation and power, desire and matter actually converge within images.

The struggle over representation, however, was based on a sharp split between these levels: here thing – there image. Here I – there it. Here subject – there object. The senses here – dumb matter over there. Slightly paranoid assumptions concerning authenticity came into the equation as well. Did the public image – of women or other groups, for example – actually correspond to reality? Was it stereotyped? Misrepresented? Thus one got tangled in a whole web of presuppositions, the most problematic of which being, of course, that an authentic image exists in the first place. A campaign was thus unleashed to find a more accurate form of representation, but without questioning its own, quite realist, paradigm.

But what if the truth is neither in the represented nor in the representation? What if the truth is in its material configuration? What if the medium is really a message? Or actually – in its corporate media version – a barrage of commodified intensities?

To participate in an image – rather than merely identify with it – could perhaps abolish this relation. This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates. How about acknowledging that this image is not some ideological misconception, but a thing simultaneously couched in affect and availability, a fetish made of crystals and electricity, animated by our wishes and fears – a perfect embodiment of its own conditions of existence? As such, the image is – to use yet another phrase of Walter Benjamin's – without expression.[6] It doesn't represent reality. It is a fragment of the real world. It is a thing just like any other – a thing like you and me.

This shift in perspective has far-reaching consequences. There might still be an internal and inaccessible trauma that constitutes subjectivity. But trauma is also the contemporary opium of the masses – an apparently private property that simultaneously invites and resists foreclosure. And the economy of this trauma constitutes the remnant of the independent subject. But then if we are to acknowledge that subjectivity is no longer a privileged site for emancipation, we might as well just face it and get on with it.

On the other hand, the increased appeal of becoming a thing doesn't

necessarily mean that we have reached the age of unlimited positivity, whose prophets – if we are to believe them – extol an age in which desire flows freely, negativity and history are a thing of the past, and vital drives happily splash all over the place.

No, the negativity of the thing can be discerned by its bruises, which mark the site of history's impact. As Eyal Weizman and Tom Keenan remark in a fascinating conversation on forensics and the fetish, objects increasingly take on the role of witnesses in court cases concerned with human rights violations.[7] The bruises of things are deciphered, and then subjected to interpretation. Things are made to speak – often by subjecting them to additional violence. The field of forensics can be understood as the torture of objects, which are expected to tell all, just as when humans are interrogated. Things often have to be destroyed, dissolved in acid, cut apart, or dismantled in order to tell their full story. To affirm the thing also means participating in its collision with history.

Because a thing is usually not a shiny new Boeing taking off on its virgin flight. Rather, it might be its wreck, painstakingly pieced together from scrap inside a hangar after its unexpected nosedive into catastrophe. A thing is the ruin of a house in Gaza. A film reel lost or destroyed in civil war. A female body tied up with ropes, fixed in obscene positions. Things condense power and violence. Just as a thing accumulates productive forces and desires, so does it also accumulate destruction and decay.

So then how about a specific thing called 'image'? It is a complete mystification to think of the digital image as a shiny immortal clone of itself. On the contrary, not even the digital image is outside history. It bears the bruises of its crashes with politics and violence. It is nothing like, say, a carbon copy of Leon Trotsky brought back to life through digital manipulation (though of course it could show him); rather, the material articulation of the image is like a clone of Trotsky walking around with an ice pick in his head. The bruises of images are its glitches and artefacts, the traces of its rips and transfers. Images are violated, ripped apart, subjected to interrogation and probing. They are stolen, cropped, edited and reappropriated. They are bought, sold, leased. Manipulated and adulated. Reviled and revered. To participate in the image means to take part in all of this.

IV

Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades.
– Aleksandr Rodchenko[8]

So, what's the point of becoming a thing or an image? Why should one accept alienation, bruises and objectification?

In writing about the surrealists, Walter Benjamin emphasizes the liberating

force within things.[9] In the commodity fetish, material drives intersect with affect and desire, and Benjamin fantasizes about igniting these compressed forces, to awaken 'the slumbering collective from the dream-filled sleep of capitalist production' to tap into these forces.[10] He also thinks that things could speak to one another through these forces.[11] Benjamin's idea of participation – a partly subversive take on early twentieth-century primitivism – claims that it is possible to join in this symphony of matter. For him, modest and even abject objects are hieroglyphs in whose dark prism social relations lay congealed and in fragments. They are understood as nodes, in which the tensions of a historical moment materialize in a flash of awareness or twist grotesquely into the commodity fetish. In this perspective, a thing is never just an object, but a fossil in which a constellation of forces are petrified. Things are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged. While this opinion borders on magical thought, according to which things are invested with supernatural powers, it is also a classical materialist take. Because the commodity, too, is understood not as a simple object, but a condensation of social forces.[12]

From a slightly different perspective, members of the Soviet avant-garde also tried to develop alternative relations to things. In his text 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing', Boris Arvatov claims that the object should be liberated from the enslavement of its status as capitalist commodity.[13] Things should no longer remain passive, uncreative and dead, but should be free to participate actively in the transformation of everyday reality.[14]

'By imagining an object that is differently animated from the commodity fetish ... Arvatov attempts to return a kind of social agency to the fetish.'[15] In a similar vein, Aleksandr Rodchenko calls on things to become comrades and equals. By releasing the energy stored in them, things become co-workers, potentially friends, even lovers.[16]

Where images are concerned, this potential agency has already been explored to some extent.[17] To participate in the image as thing means to participate in its potential agency – an agency that is not necessarily beneficial, as it can be used for every imaginable purpose. It is vigorous and sometimes even viral. And it will never be full and glorious, as images are bruised and damaged, just as everything else within history. History, as Benjamin told us, is a pile of rubble. Only we are not staring at it any longer from the point of view of Benjamin's shell-shocked angel. We are not the angel. We are the rubble. We are this pile of scrap.

V

The revolution is my boyfriend!
– Bruce LaBruce, *Raspberry Reich*

We have unexpectedly arrived at quite an interesting idea of the object and objectivity. Activating the thing means perhaps to create an objective – not as a fact, but as the task of unfreezing the forces congealed within the trash of history. Objectivity thus becomes a lens, one that recreates us as things mutually acting upon one another. From this 'objective' perspective, the idea of emancipation opens up somewhat differently. Bruce LaBruce's queer porn film *Raspberry Reich* shows us how by presenting a completely different view on 1977. In it, the former heroes of the Red Army Faction have been reincarnated as gay porn actors who enjoy being each other's playthings. They masturbate on pixelated photocopied wall-size images of Baader and Che. But the point is not to be found in the gayness or pornness of the film, and certainly not in its so-called 'transgressivity'. The point is that the actors do not identify with heroes, but rip their images. They become bruised images: sixth-generation copies of dodgy leftist pin-ups. This bunch looks much worse than David Bowie, but is much more desirable for it. Because they love the pixel, not the hero. The hero is dead. Long live the thing.

1 I tried unsuccessfully to find production details for Bowie's video. I am referring to [a Youtube posting of Bowie's performance in Bing Crosby's 1977 Christmas special show]. [...]

2 David Riff pointed out the connection to Andy Warhol's work, especially in Bowie's song 'Andy Warhol' (Andy Warhol looks a scream / Hang him on my wall / Andy Warhol, Silver Screen / Can't tell them apart at all). [...]

3 The concept of participation is explained in detail in Christopher Bracken, 'The Language of Things: Walter Benjamin's Primitive Thought', *Semiotica*, no. 138 (February 2002) 321–49. 'Participation, which is the "absence of relation", merges the subject of knowledge, which is not necessarily a human being, with the object known' (327). Bracken goes on to quote Benjamin directly: 'In the medium of reflection, moreover, the thing and the knowing being merge into each other. Both are only relative unities of reflection. Thus, there is in fact no knowledge of an object by a subject. Every instance of knowing is an immanent connection in the absolute, or, if one prefers, in the subject. The term "object" designates not a relation within knowledge but an absence of relation' (Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland [Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996] 146, emphasis added). Accordingly, participating in an image is not the same as being represented by it. The image is the thing in which senses merge with matter. Things are not being represented by it but participate in it.

4 This comment was based on her interpretation of Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's propositions in *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), in which both authors investigate the role of the inanimate in cinema. Another great proposition by which to think through this issue was made by Carsten Juhl, who suggested Mario Perniola's *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*.

5 Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 1.

6 According to Benjamin, the expressionless is a critical violence that 'completes the work, by shattering it into a thing of shards, into a fragment of the true world'. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, op. cit., 340.

7 According to Weizman, their idea is based on putting forensics back in the frame of rhetoric (where it originated in Roman times) meaning 'in front of the forum', and implying the speech of objects in professional or legal courts. When evidence is given the capacity to speak, objects are treated as "material witnesses"; they also therefore possess the capacity to lie.

8 Quoted in Christina Kiaer, 'Rodchenko in Paris', *October*, no. 75 (Winter 1996) 3.

9 See Bracken, 'The Language of Things', op. cit., 346ff.

10 Ibid., 347.

11 Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Languages of Man', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, op. cit., 69.

12 The last paragraph is taken from Hito Steyerl, 'The Language of Things' (June 2006).

13 Boris Arvatov, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)'; trans. Christina Kiaer, *October*, no. 81 (Summer 1997) 119–28.

14 Ibid., 110.

15 Ibid., 111.

16 Lars Laumann's touching and amazing video *Berlin Muren*, about a Swedish lady who married the Berlin Wall, makes a strong and very convincing case for object-love. The lover would not just love the Berlin Wall while it was functional but would continue to love it long after it had come down, after history had impacted violently on the object she desired. She would love it through its destruction and agony. She also claimed that her love was not directed to the things the Wall represented, but to its material form and reality.

17 See for example Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Struggle, Event, Media'; trans. Aileen Derieg, *republicart* (May 2003), or Hito Steyerl, 'The Language of Things', op. cit. – 'To engage in the language of things in the realm of the documentary form is not equivalent to using realist forms in representing them. It is not about representation at all, but about actualizing whatever the things have to say in the present. And to do so is not a matter of realism, but rather of relationalism – it is a matter of presencing and thus transforming the social, historical and also material relations which determine things.'

Hito Steyerl, 'A Thing Like You and Me', *e-flux journal*, no. 15 (April 2010); reprinted in Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, in association with e-flux journal, 2012).

Jacques Lacan
Das Ding//1959–60

[...] The *Sache* [in *Sachvorstellung*, Freud's term for a 'thing-notion'] is clearly the thing, a product of industry and of human action as governed by language. However implicit they may first be in the genesis of that action, things are always on the surface, always within range of an explanation. To the extent that it is subjacent to and implicit in every human action, that activity of which things are the fruit belongs to the preconscious order, that is to say, something that our interest can bring to consciousness, on condition that we pay enough attention to it, that we take notice of it. The word is there in a reciprocal position to the extent that it articulates itself, that it comes to explain itself beside the thing, to the extent also that an action – which is itself dominated by language, indeed by command – will have separated out this object and given it birth.

Sache and *Wort* ['word', in Freud's term *Wortvorstellung*, 'word-notion'] are, therefore, closely linked; they form a couple. *Das Ding* ['the thing'] is found somewhere else.

I would like today to show you this *Ding* in life and in the reality principle that Freud introduces at the beginning of his thought and that persists to the end. I will point out the reference to it in a given passage of the *Entwurf* ['Project of Psychology', 1895] on the reality principle and in the article entitled '*Die Vemeinung*' or 'Denegation' in which it is an essential point. This *Ding* is not in the relationship – which is to some extent a calculated one in so far as it is explicable – that causes man to question his words as referring to things which they have moreover created. There is something different in *das Ding*.

What one finds in *das Ding* is the true secret. For the reality principle has a secret that, as Lefèvre-Pontalis pointed out last time, is paradoxical. If Freud speaks of the reality principle, it is in order to reveal to us that from a certain point of view it is always defeated; it only manages to affirm itself at the margin. And this is so by reason of a kind of pressure that one might say, if things didn't, in fact, go much further, Freud calls not 'the vital needs' – as is often said in order to emphasize the secondary process – but *die Not des Lebens* [the necessity/need of life] in the German text. An infinitely stronger phrase. Something that wishes. 'Need' and not 'needs'. Pressure, urgency. The state of *Not* is the state of emergency in life. [...]

Jacques Lacan, extract from 'Das Ding', *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–60); trans. Dennis Porter, in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 45–6.

Kurt von Meier
Piles//1968

There is no problem about a pile being a work of art – not since Marcel Duchamp. At least half the creative act is in the eye/mind of the perceiver/creator; art is not a *thing* – it is an event (at least since Heidegger). Concrete objects may condition the aesthetic event, even though they may not be essential for a generic concept of art (as in music, the dance, bullfights?, mental chess). Also since Duchamp (e.g. 'Roue de bicyclette' [*Bicycle Wheel*] 1913) it has not been terribly important for the artist to be one and the same man who made the object/thing in the sense of *ars fabricans*. His creative act may consist in compiling (combining, juxtaposing, even separating or otherwise 'posing') constituent elements of the art. Duchamp posed the milk bottle rack for his great creative sculpture, 'Porte-bouteilles' or 'Séchoir à bouteilles' or 'hérisson' [*Bottle Rack*] 1914.

Now, well over a half a century later, it may be enough to call attention to parts of the world as art through assertions, claims, titles or other directions of attention. Duchamp's 'Cheque Tzanck' (dated 3 December 1919) was a bogus cheque tendered in payment for dental work, i.e. a $115.00 draft against a non-existent pile of money. The reality: illusion problems of the recurrent Art:Life dialogue are stated again in Yves Klein's *Receipt for the Immaterial Zone of Sensibility* (1959). Iain Baxter's proposed (and sometimes executed) extensions of works by various other artists extend this tradition. Extensions for Al Held and Frank Stella are material; for Dan Flavin they are also conceptual, one such extension being the claim for all the city lights in Vancouver as they are turned on in the evening, plus the second movement of the theatre piece, as they are turned off again after sunrise. As a Baxter extension piece, I have already claimed the sun itself (*Art International*, vol. 11, no. 4, 52–3) on Baxter's behalf; other suns, other galaxies and the *idea* of light I here offer as extensions of Iain Baxter.

But our concern here is with piles. The virtue of radical extensions even for rooted mentalities (apart from being *fun*) is that they provide or provoke new perceptions – especially along the return trip back from the extremes to wherever it is you are still at. Take the concept of piles out for a long dream and idea ride and you will probably return with fresh responses to and reflections on piles in the material realm. (Let us not say 'reality' – what about thoughts and dreams, as if they weren't real too.) By the very same token, the artist has no obligation to avoid material manifestations of his creativity – indeed, it is right and proper that prime samples of Baxter's explorations into the Platonic realm of piles be displayed. As a parallel, or anyway sympathetic gesture (in the

word-bag of all introductions) we may augment the exhibition with a few more probes and reflections.

The penalty for what used to be known as 'piling on' in American football has been abstracted to the generic phrase 'unnecessary roughness'. Apart from considerations of 'necessary' roughness, there are still piles on the turf.

An old *Shorter Oxford* suggests 'a heap of things lying one upon another', with some incredible (but, alas, imaginable) orgiastic possibilities. They didn't actually mention *people* though.

Kurt von Meier, extract from 'Piles', in *N.E. Thing Co: A Portfolio of Piles* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1968) n.p.

Jacques Derrida
Signéponge/Signsponge//1975

[...] '[The poet] Francis Ponge will be my thing' should give us an opportunity to test out the law of the thing.

No longer simply the *natura rerum*, about which he speaks very well to us, but the law of the thing. Not the law which rules the order of things, the one which sciences and philosophies know, but the *dictated* law. I speak of a law dictated, as in the first person, by the thing, with an intractable rigour, as an implacable command. This command is also an insatiable demand; it enjoins the one who writes, and who writes under this order alone, in a situation of radical heteronomy in regard to the thing.

Insatiable, yes, and insaturable, a point I insist on since it always also involves water, and thirst. He never has enough, neither of water nor of thirst.

In the disproportion of this heteronomy, an erotics engages itself between two laws, a duel to the death whose bed and turf, object or objective (objest) will always sketch out a signature in the *pre* of a text in abyss.

This duel, which puts into play the life and honour of the name, calls for some intercessors and witnesses. We shall seek them out.

Many a ponderosity has been put to use in the so-called question of anthropomorphism. Does Ponge return to the thing itself? Is Ponge a phenomenologist? Does he, on the contrary, project human meanings (psychological, subjective, etc.) onto things? And other more subtle variants, which nevertheless turn in the same rut. He himself has responded to all those

questions, it suffices to go there, to see and to read – what he has said, for example, to an American academic, *obstinately*.

What to my knowledge has been misunderstood, and what the whole rut of anthropomorphism was undoubtedly destined to avoid or deny (and he has often been in agreement with it), is, perhaps, the following: for him, the thing is not something you have to write, describe, know, express, etc., by foraging within it *or* within ourselves, according to the alternating circuit of the rut. It is this too, certainly, and abundantly so, and hence there arises a just confusion. But not in the first place, and not simply. The thing is not just something conforming to laws that I discuss objectively (adequately) or, on the contrary, subjectively (anthropomorphically). Beforehand, the thing is the other, the entirely other which dictates or which writes the law, a law which is not simply natural (*lex naturae rerum*), but an infinitely, insatiably imperious injunction to which I ought to subject myself, even when this involves trying to acquit myself afterwards, at the end of a duel, having offered it, with my life and desire, something akin to my signature. We will come to this later on: this dictate, this inscription can require the muteness of the thing. It gives orders while remaining silent.

The duel and the gift carry on to the death. The thing remains an other whose law demands the impossible. It does not demand this thing or that, something which could turn out to be impossible. No, it demands the impossible, and demands it because it is impossible, and because this very impossibility is the condition of the possibility of demand. [...]

Jacques Derrida, extract from *Signéponge* (1975) (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984); trans. Richard Rand, *Signéponge/Signsponge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 10–14.

Julia Kristeva
Thing and Object//1987

The depressed narcissist mourns not an Object but the Thing. Let me posit the 'Thing' as the real that does not lend itself to signification, the centre of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated.

Of this Gérard de Nerval provides a dazzling metaphor that suggests an insistence without presence, a light without representation: the Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time. 'It is a well-known fact that one

never sees the sun in a dream, although one is often aware of some far brighter light' [*Aurélia, ou le rêve et la vie*, 1853].

Ever since that archaic attachment the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, of something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might represent, or an *invocation* might point out, but no word could signify. Consequently, for such a person, no erotic object could replace the irreplaceable perception of a place or pre-object confining the libido or severing the bonds of desire. Knowingly disinherited of the Thing, the depressed person wanders in pursuit of continuously disappointing adventures and loves; or else retreats, disconsolate and aphasic, alone with the unnamed Thing. The 'primary identification' with the 'father in individual prehistory' would be the means, the link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing. Primary identification initiates a compensation for the Thing and at the same time secures the subject to another dimension, that of imaginary adherence, reminding one of the bond of faith, which is just what disintegrates in the depressed person.

With those affected by melancholia, primary identification proves to be fragile, insufficient to secure other identifications, which are symbolic this time, on the basis of which the *erotic Thing* might become a captivating *Object of desire* ensuring continuity in a metonymy of pleasure. The melancholy Thing interrupts desiring metonymy, just as it prevents working out the loss within the psyche. How can one approach the place I have referred to? Sublimation is an attempt to do so: through melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs, is the sole 'container' seemingly able to secure an uncertain but adequate hold over the Thing.

I have assumed depressed persons to be atheistic – deprived of meaning, deprived of values. For them, to fear or to ignore the Beyond would be self-deprecating. Nevertheless, and although atheistic, those in despair are mystics – adhering to the pre-object, not believing in Thou, but mute and steadfast devotees of their own inexpressible container. It is to this fringe of strangeness that they devote their tears and jouissance. In the tension of their affects, muscles, mucous membranes and skin, they experience both their belonging to and distance from an archaic other that still eludes representation and naming, but of whose corporeal emissions, along with their automatism, they still bear the imprint. Unbelieving in language, the depressive persons are affectionate, wounded to be sure, but prisoners of affect. The affect is their thing.

The Thing is inscribed within us without memory, the buried accomplice of our unspeakable anguishes. One can imagine the delights of reunion that a regressive daydream promises itself through the nuptials of suicide.

The looming of the Thing summons up the subject's life force as that subject

is in the process of being set up; the premature being that we all are can survive only if it clings to an other, perceived as supplement, artificial extension, protective wrapping. Nevertheless, such a life drive is fully the one that, *at the same time*, rejects me, isolates me, rejects him (or her). Never is the ambivalence of drive more fearsome than in this beginning of otherness where, lacking the filter of language, I cannot inscribe my violence in 'no', nor in any other sign. I can expel it only by means of gestures, spasms or shouts. I impel it, I project it. My necessary Thing is also and absolutely my enemy, my foil, the delightful focus of my hatred. The Thing falls from me along the outposts of significance where the Word is not yet my Being. A mere nothing, which is a cause, but at the same time a fall, before being an Other, the Thing is the recipient that contains my dejecta and everything that results from *cadere* [Latin: to fall] – it is a waste with which, in my sadness, I merge. It is Job's ashpit in the Bible.

Anality is summoned during the process of setting up this Thing, one that is our own and proper Thing as much as it is improper, unclean. The melancholy person who extols that boundary where the self emerges, but also collapses in deprecation, fails to summon the anality that could establish separations and frontiers as it does normally or as a bonus with obsessive persons. On the contrary, the entire ego of those who are depressed sinks into a diseroticized and yet jubilatory anality, as the latter becomes the bearer of a jouissance fused with the archaic Thing, perceived not as a significant object but as the self's borderline element. For those who are depressed, the Thing like the self is a downfall that carries them along into the invisible and unnameable. *Cadere*. Waste and cadavers all. [...]

Julia Kristeva, extract from *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancholie* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987); trans. Leon Roudiez, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 13–15 [footnotes not included].

Bill Brown
Thing Theory//2001

[...] The story of objects asserting themselves as things [...] is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.

And, yet, the word *things* holds within it a more audacious ambiguity. It denotes a massive generality as well as particularities, even your particularly prized possessions: '"Things" were of course the sum of the world; only, for Mrs Gereth the sum of the world was rare French furniture and oriental china.' [Henry James, *The Spoils of Poynton*, 1896 (New York, 1987) 49.] The word designates the concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday: 'Put it by that green thing in the hall.' It functions to overcome the loss of other words or as a place holder for some future specifying operation: 'I need that thing you use to get at things between your teeth.' It designates an amorphous characteristic or a frankly irresolvable enigma: 'There's a thing about that poem that I'll never get.' [...] *Things* is a word that tends, especially at its most banal, to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable. [...]

On the one hand, then, the thing baldly encountered. On the other, some thing not quite apprehended. Could you clarify this matter of things by starting again and imagining them, first, as the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, perhaps, as an after-effect of the mutual constitution of subject and object, a retroprojection? You could imagine things, second, as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects – their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems. Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects). But this temporality obscures the all-at-onceness, the simultaneity, of the object/thing dialectic and the fact that, all at once, *the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names some thing else.*

If thing theory sounds like an oxymoron, then, it may not be because things reside in some balmy elsewhere beyond theory but because they lie both at hand and somewhere outside the theoretical field, beyond a certain limit, as a recognizable yet illegible remainder or as the identifiable that is unspecifiable.

Things lie beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of museal exhibition, outside the order of objects. If this is why things appear in the name of relief from ideas (what's encountered as opposed to what's thought), it is also why the Thing becomes the most compelling name for that enigma that can only be encircled and which the object (by its presence) necessarily negates. In Lacan, the Thing is and it isn't. It exists, but in no phenomenal form. [...]

Bill Brown, extract from 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Fall 2001) 4–5 [footnotes not included].

Bruno Latour
From Objects to Things//2004

[...] It's to underline the shift from a cheapened notion of objectivity to costly proofs that we want to resurrect the word *Ding* and use the neologism *Dingpolitik* as a substitute for *Realpolitik*. The latter lacks realism when it talks about power relations as well as when it talks about mere facts. It does not know how to deal with 'indisputability'. To discover one's own real naked interest requires probably the most convoluted and far-fetched enquiry there is. To be brutal is not enough to turn you into a hard-headed realist.

As every reader of Heidegger knows, or as every glance at an English dictionary under the heading 'Thing' will certify, the old word 'Thing' or 'Ding' designated originally a certain type of archaic assembly. Many parliaments in Nordic and Saxon nations still activate the old root of this etymology: Norwegian congressmen assemble in the *Storting*; Icelandic deputies called 'thingmen' gather in the *Althing*; Isle of Man seniors used to gather around the *Ting*; the German landscape is dotted with *Thingstätten* and you can see in many places the circles of stones where the Thing used to stand. Thus, long before designating an object thrown out of the political sphere and standing there objectively and independently, the *Ding* or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together *because* it divides them. The same etymology lies dormant in the Latin *res*, the Greek *aitia* and the French or Italian *cause*. Even the Russian *soviet* still dreams of bridges and churches.

Of all the eroded meanings left by the slow crawling of political geology, none is stranger to consider than the Icelandic *Althing*, since the ancient 'thingmen' – what we would call 'congressmen' or MPs – had the amazing idea of meeting in

a desolate and sublime site that happens to sit smack in the middle of the fault line that marks the meeting place of the Atlantic and European tectonic plates. Not only do Icelanders manage to remind us of the old sense of *Ding*, but they also dramatize to the utmost how much these political questions have also become questions of nature. Are not all parliaments now divided by the nature of things as well as by the din of the crowded *Ding*? Has the time not come to bring the *res* back to the *res publica*? This is why we have tried to build the provisional and fragile assembly of our show on as many fault lines from as many tectonic plates as possible.

The point of reviving this old etymology is that we don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible or wish to fuse together but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern into some neutral, isolated place in order to come to some sort of provisional makeshift (dis)agreement. If the *Ding* designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions, it should become the centre of our attention: *Back to Things!* Is this not a more engaging political slogan?

But how strange is the shape of the things we should go back to. They no longer have the clarity, transparency, obviousness of matters-of-fact; they are not made of clearly delineated, discrete objects that would be bathing in some translucent space like the beautiful anatomical drawings of Leonardo, or the marvellous wash drawings of Gaspard Monge, or the clear-cut 'isotypes' devised by Otto Neurath. Matters-of-fact now appear to our eyes as depending on a delicate aesthetic of painting, drawing, lighting, gazing, convening, something that has been elaborated over four centuries and that might be changing now before our very eyes. There has been an aesthetic of matters-of-fact, of objects, of *Gegenstände*. Can we devise an aesthetic of matters-of-concern, of Things? [...]

Bruno Latour, extract from 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik' (2004), in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe: ZKM/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005) 22–3 [footnotes not included].

Arjun Appadurai
The Thing Itself//2006

[...] How does gift giving work in a capitalist, market-driven society? On the face of it, the gift is the exact opposite of a fundamental unit of the marketplace, the commodity. In abstract, general form, the commodity is standard. Each is inherently identical to the others. Available to anybody, it has nothing to do with who has given it to whom, and its value is determined in no way by the context of who did the buying and who did the receiving. The thing has its price.

In contrast, the gift is highly personal. The gift is very special. The gift is even magical. As the great anthropologist Marcel Mauss first showed, the gift contains both the quality of the giver and of the receiver, and though it may have another life as a commodity, the givers don't mind if it comes mass-produced. What is crucial is the identity between each gift and the particular relationship it solidifies. Even when a gift-giving society has rules about what types of gifts one must give – say, for example, the only allowable gifts are blankets and coins – those 'standard' objects quickly become my gift, the thing you gave me, and so on. Again, we can recognize this in the contemporary United States. It is a little more complicated, when the gift arrives in the receiver's mail in a package mailed from Land's End, to say, 'It's my gift', but we manage to make the leap.

The closer one looks, however, the harder it becomes to sort things out. Gifts and commodities don't have an apples-and-oranges relationship. Rather, a gift and a commodity are often one and the same thing: if I catch it here, it's a gift. If I catch it one week later, when someone's having a garage sale, it's on the road to Commodity Land. It's hard to think of any substance in the world that is singular – outside the commodity system – forever and ever. In the same way, a commodity can be many things, but it is not a singularity. One thing cannot be a commodity, for once it is a commodity, something is lost about its singularity. The minute you put a thing – be it a piece of clothing or food, a tool, a person, anything – on the market, you have to believe there could be others of its kind.

Consider the great paintings that command incredible prices at Christie's or Sotheby's. Of a single painting on the auction block, you might be tempted to say that it commands such a huge price because it is unique. But if it is a real singularity, what makes it marketable? Are you, for example, buying a Picasso? A piece of Picasso? A piece of that set which is all of Picasso's paintings, but a piece we can buy because it's on the market? As these questions imply, something that appears totally singular – one-of-a-kind – is also totally a commodity – one of a set. Picasso himself is part of a set: the set of 'great painters who are very

expensive to buy'. The painting on the block is general in a hundred ways. Its singularity has been eroded.

And so gift giving in highly commoditized societies, like the United States, exemplifies a fundamental problem: how to create human relations in a world where all things are potentially in the market or on the market. [...]

Let us [consider] India, which is a society whose material life is in the throes of deep change. On the one hand, [there is] a segment of Indian life in which the sheer materiality, the undisciplined profusion and the promiscuous presence of things may be seen as a victory of materiality over abstraction, as a refusal to concede entirely to the empire of the commodity, and as a victory for the virtues of the social life of things, in which every thing can become any thing, since the market is not yet the strict controller of abstraction and equivalence.

Yet no one can deny that 'art' in India is increasingly separate from the rest of its material context, and furthermore that the world of art is increasingly tied to the related worlds of collection, criticism, auction, appraisal and commodification. And nor is this necessarily a sign of degeneration, especially in a global world where artists are more or less able to benefit from a global market that values some sites of abstraction more than others. As some parts of India's art world enter, however tentatively, into the empire of the exhibit, the collection and the commodity, there is a healthy countervailing tendency in the wider social world of things in India, which is the world of the 'thing itself'.

The idea of the thing itself is a way to capture the stubbornness of the materiality of things, which is also connected to their profusion, their resistance to strict measures of equivalence and to strict distinctions between the maker and the made, the gift and the commodity, the work of art and the objects of everyday life. In India, and in societies where the rule of the market is as yet incomplete, there is a certain chaotic materiality in the world of things that resists the global tendency to make all things instruments of representation, and thus of abstraction and commodification. The challenge for India's artists and critics is to find pathways through the global market without losing entirely the magic of materiality and the unruliness of the world of things. This unruliness thrives on the ephemerality of the artwork, the plenitude of material life, the multiple forms and futures that the social life of things can take, and the hazy borders between things and the persons whose social life they enrich and complicate. This tension between the rule of the commodity and the unruliness of the thing itself marks the space where Indian art and its makers can find a possible space of redemption, in which abstraction can remain the servant of materiality rather than its master. [...]

Arjun Appadurai, extract from 'The Thing Itself', *Public Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2006) 19–21.

Kristie Miller
Thing and Object//2008

[...] Things and objects are equally *real*, they are simply two different kinds of entity, where 'entity' refers, in this sense, to the most general ontological category. It is true that things are ontologically innocent, in the sense that unrestricted compositionalists use the term: nothing more is required for their existence than the existence of some particulars. The arrangement of, and relations between, those particulars, is irrelevant to whether a thing exists, and to what sort of thing it is. A thing exists just so long as the particulars that are the parts of that thing exist. The identity conditions for things are just the identity conditions for mereological fusions,[1] but to be ontologically innocent in this way is not to fail to be fully ontologically real. It is just to fail to be the kind of entity that you and I are usually interested in. Not so for objects. Objects are entities that, by and large, persons tend to care about. Their individuation conditions are complex. Different things at different times have to have just the right properties and be related to one another in just the right way to bring into existence an object. In this sense, objects are meaty, but they are no more, or less, real than things. They sit alongside things in our ontology, but objects are not things, and vice versa.

Objects, in my sense, sit rather uneasily in the current ontological terrain. Objects are, by extension, with some notable exceptions, (like van Inwagen)[2] the entities that restricted compositionalists wish to allow into their ontology. My account does not attempt to provide any firm individuation conditions for objects: it does not attempt to tell us when things constitute objects. Rather, it attempts to show how objects are related to things, and why we should think that both entities exist. So many different accounts that attempt to set out the individuation conditions of objects will be consistent with what I have said here, and that is all to the good.

According to my account, the properties of an object at a time cannot be reduced to the properties of the thing that constitutes it at a time, but the account stays silent on *exactly* what sorts of properties objects instantiate. It is not only consistent with, but is in the spirit of my view that objects have real essences and robust modal properties of the kind proposed by Kripke,[3] defended by Rea,[4] and rejected by Heller,[5] but nothing in the view entails a particular view about essentialism. Likewise, my account is largely consistent with views like that of Elder[6] and Merricks[7] at least in so far as it agrees with Elder about which objects exist (though disagrees about overall ontology because Elder does not include any things in his ontology). One noteworthy difference is that Elder and Merricks

see it as part of their task to show that objects have causal powers over and above the simples that compose those objects at a time. It is no part of this paper to show that objects have causal powers over and above the powers of the things that constitute them at times. While I have argued that the *properties* of an object at a time cannot be reduced to the properties of the thing that constitutes it at a time, this in no way entails that objects have causal powers that things lack. Those who think that we can only admit objects into our ontology if they have causal powers over and above the powers of the plurality of simples of which they are composed, or, in my case, the thing that constitutes them at a time, might then have reason to be eliminativists about objects in my sense, and embrace only things, but since it is no part of my account to suppose that objects must have these causal powers in order to be admitted into our ontology, I feel no such push towards eliminativism.

Ultimately though, much of what is said about ordinary objects will be consistent with the view I outline here. For that view is not designed to tell us about the nature, properties or essences of objects. Rather it is designed to show that these entities are not identical to things, and to elucidate the relation between objects and things. This means that in many cases, one's favourite account of the nature of objects in terms of their essences, and individuation and persistence conditions, can be plugged into the account I provide. [...]

1 [fusions in terms of relations of parts to a whole entity or of part to part within it.]

2 See Peter van Inwagen, 'Four-Dimensional objects', *Nous*, no. 24 (1990) 245–55, and *Material Beings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

3 Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972).

4 Michael Rea, *World without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5 Mark Heller, *The Ontology of Physical Objects: Four-Dimensional Hunks of Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

6 Crawford L. Elder, *Real Natures and Familiar Objects* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004).

7 Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Kristie Miller, extract from 'Thing and Object', *Acta Analytica*, vol. 23, no.1 (February 2008) 88–9.

Dieter Roelstraete
Art as Object Attachments: Thoughts on Thingness//2008

[...] A true understanding of the irreducible thingness of things requires not so much *knowledge* (which attends to the domain of objects, and out of which science is born) as care, the deep empathy of humans for that with which (and not just for those with whom) they share the world, the consideration for things. In seeking truly to think the thing, and to reclaim the concept of thingness, hence also the thing in and of itself, from the various reductions it has had to endure, we are in fact attempting a rescue operation of sorts; that is, we aspire to restore the thing to its former wholeness and position of enigmatic centrality to our everyday experience of the world (which is a world of things first and foremost); we are thinking that world whole again. And if works of art, to name but one example, are among the things we care about most in this world (hence also the mystery of sheer value that is so puzzlingly incarnated by the work of art: through what magic is value bestowed on things?), then surely there must be an ethical impulse at play here (i.e. in our caring for works of art) that could be put to bettering use in other, more mundane domains and aspects of our daily dealings with the 'world of things'. The ability or readiness to care for the world of things is something we really only regain in our experience of, and encounter with, art – picture the amateur's sensuous handling (amateur means 'lover') of a precious piece of antique teaware! – and what we learn from art must certainly be channelled back into our sharing of the world.

It will be noted that one of the defining features of this aesthetic/ethical understanding of thingness has so far been that of a distinction between the thing and the object: 'things are modest in number, compared with the countless objects everywhere of equal value.'[1] Indeed, if the history of the thing as a philosophical concept is really a history of nuances, distinctions and bifurcations, it seems intuitively clear that in this history, the thing *predates* the object or, more precisely, that it predates the scission between the subject and object itself that is generally considered to be the inaugural drama of the modern period, ushered in by Cartesian philosophy; in the words of Bill Brown, 'the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.'[2] As is commonly known (or at least intuited), this subject-object relationship, the familiar axis around which we continue to organize the world, is primarily defined in terms of *knowledge*, and secondarily in terms of *possession*. And they are, of course, one and the same thing: the thing becomes an object of knowledge (and its classification and disciplining become the touchstone of the modern scientific

paradigm), and the thing becomes an object which we buy, sell, trade or own – the historical convergence of both transformations being the exact reason why the emergence of a modern market economy, in early Renaissance Europe, was inextricably linked with the establishment and institutionalization of said scientific paradigm. From there and then onwards, science will be held responsible for further degrading, dismantling and reducing the thing – not just to a mere object, but also to a commodity, to a product, or to a tool ('equipment'): all starkly impoverished shades of an original quality of 'thingness': all ends irreversibly transformed into means. Let us quote Heidegger once again: 'Science's knowledge, which is compelling within its own sphere, *the sphere of objects*, already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded.' (my italics) – we must remember here that Heidegger was delivering his lecture in the immediate, still-palpable shadow of the mushroom clouds that had incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki: the advent of the atomic age naturally caused a great deal of apocalyptic anxiety around the future of *material* life – 'The bomb's explosion is only the grossest of all gross confirmations of the long-since accomplished annihilation of the thing: the confirmation that the thing as a thing remains nil'.[3] More to the point, for the thing to become an object of the subject's potentially destructive mastery, an essential relationship of distance must be established, unilaterally obliterating the dialectic of nearness and estrangement, of proximity and alienation, that is at the heart of the enigma of thingness. When seen from afar – and it is important to understand the role vision played in this process of degradation – the thing becomes an object, the most important characteristic of which is its transparency, the ease and convenience with which it is handled and managed, and the cynical finality with which it is domesticated and put to good use; it finally loses all powers of resistance, where *resistance* is in fact the thing's very essence. In thus un-doing the Riddle of the Thing, the reductionist regime of the instrumentalization and of the literal *evacuation* of things certainly contributed in no small measure to the so-called 'disenchantment of the world', a process commonly associated with the advent of the modern world-view, and one which should in turn be brought into connection – an important one, in the light of the current argument – with Hegel's famed suspicion that with this glaring dawn of the modern era, art (or at least its *history*) had come to an end.

What all this – our speculative suggestion that the reification ('death') of things is somehow related to the apocalyptic Hegelian spectre of the end of art, and our view of the thing as a philosophical emblem of otherness/strangeness, as the singular 'worlding' entity that enacts the simultaneity of distance and proximity may lead us to suspect the following: *that the work of art is the thing par excellence.* Let us finally bid farewell to Heidegger with the following quote from 'The Origin of the Work of Art': 'the true thing has the character of having taken shape by itself

(like the boulder) and by its self-sufficient presence the work of art is similar rather to the mere thing which has taken shape by itself and is self-contained.'[4] (Once again, the concept of *containment* comes to the surface, here understood as containing one's self – being one's own law, as in 'autonomous'.) Many 'things' are enigmatic in the work-of-art; it is this enigma, after all, which lures us into the world-of-art in the first place: the artwork's promise, not of happiness, but of the certainty that we will be shown the limits of our understanding, of logic and reason. But perhaps the artwork's most essential feature is the enigma of its *Dinglichkeit*, its thingness pure and simple, which should of course never simply be confused with its physicality: the ambiguous fact of its self-doubting, self-questioning materiality – a 'spirit in the material world?' Indeed, in confronting the enigma of the artwork's very thingness, in our perceptual and/or intellectual experience of the work of art as a thing pure and simple, we are granted a tantalizing glimpse of a world that 'predates' the drama of reduction of that world to one of mere objects, products, commodities, etc. A world more total and whole, and richer in depth – 'thickness,' as phenomenology's *lingua franca* would have it – and meaning, riddled with things *we don't understand*. In this, the work of art regains its status as a material fact of critique – it is a *critique of reduction*.

1 [footnote 16 in source] Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1935–60); trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Hofstadter, ed., Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971; 2001 edition) 180.

2 [17] Bill Brown, ed., *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 4.

3 [20] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927); trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 168.

4 [23] Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', op. cit., 28.

Dieter Roelstraete, extract from 'Art as Object Attachment: Thoughts on Thingness', in *When Things Cast No Shadow: 5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic and Adam Szymczyk (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2008) 446.

when i put
the multi-
coloured
ribbon onto
the lamp,
for a long
time i thought,
this was
one of the
few practical,
meaningful
and good
things i have
done in my
life

Josef Strau, *The Lamp and the Ribbon*, 2009

EVERYDAY OBJECTS, USEFUL OBJECTS

Lawrence Alloway
Six Painters and the Object//1963

The artists in this exhibition [at the Guggenheim Museum, New York], all born between 1923 and 1933, have been persistently aligned, in group exhibitions and survey articles, with object-makers, and two of the artists, Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine, are themselves object-makers. In the present exhibition, however, all six artists are presented as painters; some of their works include moderate collage elements, but no three-dimensional appendages. The association of paintings and objects has tended to blur both media differentiations and the individuality of the artists concerned. The unique qualities of the separate work of art and of the artist responsible for it have tended to sink into an environmental *mélange*, which in practice favours the object-makers, but not the painters. Object-makers, like the producers of happenings (often they are the same person), work towards the dissolution of formal boundaries and sponsor paradoxical cross-overs between art and nature. However, the painter, committed to the surface of his canvas and to the process of translating objects into signs, does not have a wide ranging freedom in which everything becomes art and art becomes anything. Because the painters have been identified with the object-makers, under various slogans, the definition of painting *qua* painting has been attached recently, more than it need have been, to abstract art. It is hoped, therefore, that by presenting six *painters* in this exhibition, they can be detached from an amorphous setting and, also, that the definition of painting can be extended to cope with the problem that their work presents.

What these six artists have in common is the use of objects drawn from the communications network and the physical environment of the city. Some of the objects are: flags, magazines and newspaper photographs, mass-produced objects, comic strips, advertisements. Each artist selects his subject matter from what is known not only to himself, but also to others, before he begins work. Subject matter provides a common ground, either for intimacy or for dissent, as it does not in abstract or realist painting. When the subject matter consists of pre-existing conventional signs and common images, however, we can properly speak of a known, shared subject matter. This approach to the city is, of course, the common ground between the object-makers and the painters. However, the translation of the urban object into a painted sign involves the painters in very different procedures from the object-makers. Let us consider some of the different ways in which six painters make signs of their chosen objects.

Jasper Johns' images are complete and whole: his maps are coextensive with

a known geography; his flags unfurled. His art-historical importance rests particularly on his early work in which he found a way to reconcile the flatness required of painting by all aesthetic theories of the twentieth century, with figurative references which the demand for flatness had tended to subdue or expunge. What he did was to filter objects through the formal requirements of a flat painting style. It was, of course, the Dadaists who had released the potential of use and meaning for art in common objects and signs, but the assimilation of such objects to a rigorous and delicate painting standard was a new development. (Johns accomplished this, it should be remembered, in the mid 1950s, when New York painters were open to far fewer alternatives than is now the case).

The use of complete signs or objects involves the artists in a certain kind of spatial organization. Displays tend to be symmetrical, or at least, orderly, with the area of the painting identified fully with the presented forms. Dine, like Johns in this respect, presents his signs and his objects, such as clothing or tools holistically or sequentially (as in the series of paintings in which colour changes or other transformations take place). Andy Warhol, as a rule, presents his monolithic bottles or cans intact; where his images are incomplete or hazy, they are repeated, and the repetition of the basic unit introduces a regular order which the single image may not possess. Robert Rauschenberg, in his recent paintings with silk-screen images printed from photographs, uses incomplete but legible images. Order is established not by using forms but by the recurrence of evocative fragments. [...]

Lawrence Alloway, extract from Introduction, *Six Painters and the Object* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1963) 1–5 [footnotes not included].

Gillo Dorfles
The Man-Made Object//1966

[...] We handle or see about us ballpoint pens, paper-cutters, clocks, books, eyeglasses, refrigerators, scooters, jets, pots, etc., all of which doubtless condition us in an almost absolute manner toward a certain formal orientation. So complete is this conditioning that only with great difficulty can we conceive the existence of forms different from those to which we are accustomed. But – and here lies the core of the problem – with the immense diffusion of mass production, objects similar or identical one to the other are more numerous than those different from one another. In other words, our glances are struck above all by objects of a

standardized type. This fact necessarily gives rise to two phenomena which are opposed to each other, but which in point of fact are equivalent – phenomena to which I have frequently alluded because they seem to me to be determinative for the aesthetic structure of our age.

The first of these two phenomena consists in that which I would like to define 'formal conformity': the equalizing and levelling of ubiquitous *vis formativa* which leads to a levelling of creative fantasy and to a worldwide acceptance of certain champion-forms.

The second phenomenon, directly bound and at the same time in opposition to the first, is the reaction to this equalizing and levelling, a reaction which consists in gratuitously redesigning or restyling objects for the sole purpose of making a stronger impression on the consumer and inducing him to buy. Exceptional forms are thus conceived and constructed, exclusively or at least principally for the reason of rendering them more evident and spectacular. And this in turn leads to a devaluation of the intrinsic value of the form itself. This does not mean that today there are not objects equally 'beautiful' – the forms of which are equally 'pure' and 'eurhythmic' – as in the remote past, but it does mean that this happens very rarely, and exactly because of this necessity on the part of the producer to modify the form of the object, even when this form already can respond to every practical and functional demand, only to facilitate its sale.

Thus today as never before, the object is universalized: all over the world men come in contact with objects analogous except for small national differences which are always diminishing and are limited to minimal particulars. And yet think of the enormous impact of the presence of foreign objects to which we are not accustomed. Think of the extraordinary importance in creating the atmosphere of a country that the presence of certain forms and colours belonging to that country have. In this connection these forms and colours, which above we defined as the 'urban furnishings', have an importance greater than the architecture of a country and almost greater than the physical nature of a land. Think of the effect of the red double-decker bus of London, of the particular type of billboards in Switzerland, of the fire escapes in Chicago or other American cities, of the form and colour and type of cigarette packaging, canned foods, bottles of beer, wine flasks, etc. All this indicates the immense influence which the formal element constituting the object of everyday use has on us, and also how as differentiating element the man-made object is almost stronger than the natural elements of the landscape.

Must we then consider as near, the end of this very particular differentiation between the countries of the earth? We can respond affirmatively regarding the rapid generalization of the technical structure and the universalizing of the use of the major part of the objects; but negatively in light of the equally rapid

changing of the prototypes created by industrial design due precisely to the process of obsolescences. And this explains why today we are witnessing a new phenomenon: the urgency on the part of man to 'fix' certain objects of common use and to avail himself of them as provocateurs of works of art; to introduce into the work of sculpture or painting elements taken from daily life almost as if to halt their transitoriness. At the base of this fact I believe are to be recognized very profound reasons, still not well investigated. There is no doubt, for example, that the 'taste' of the masses is today more than yesterday based on the presence around us of a tide of mass-produced elements. I refer, for example, to television programmes, advertising, industrially produced objects. The presence, very nearly coercive, of all these elements is indisputably responsible for the particular formation of our taste. And indeed, as Harold Rosenberg has affirmed, it is likely that the usual devaluation of such objects of kitsch is completely erroneous; it is instead in just these objects that we must discover some of the fundamental aesthetic 'constants' of our epoch. The best proof of this is to be had in the fact that the most refined and accomplished artists make use of such elements, 'incorporating' them in their work, be it as collages (from Kurt Schwitters to Robert Rauschenberg), be it by 'copying' or reproducing by hand common industrially produced objects (Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein).

The other fundamental reason for the utilization for an artistic end of industrially produced objects and in general of products commonly found on the market, must be discovered in a precise will to 'mythicize' exactly the elements used by the masses. This is a phenomenon which I believe has never been encountered in an epoch previous to our own. Indeed, can we not consider as deriving from an analogous principle the archaeological orientation of our contemporary culture? The present tendency to 'fetishize' the excavated object, the most humble instrument discovered as a result of historical or archaeological investigations, and to raise it to the dignity and value of a work of art, most of the time only in virtue of its archaicness, must make us reflect seriously. At this rate, could it not be asserted that in a distant – and yet not too distant – future, one might see conserved in museums objects belonging to our civilization, the exact mechanical understanding of which will by then have been lost, while the objects themselves will be considered not as 'technical' prototypes of successively developed mechanisms, but rather conserved and 'idolatrized' exactly for their formal-aesthetic quality? We can easily imagine fragments of old steam engines, rusted gears of turbines or electric trains, minute elements of old transistors or of 'electronic brains' religiously kept within glass cases, and considered important 'pieces', precious testimony of twentieth-century art. The idea is quite other than impossible or improbable. Furthermore, we must confess that already today visiting the rooms of some museums of technology that house old machines of

the last century, we cannot but experience, in front of such relics, a sensation of aesthetic pleasure, very near to that which we experience before certain contemporary works of art which make use of mechanical fragments, such as those of Eduardo Paolozzi, John Chamberlain, César, David Smith, etc. [...]

Gillo Dorfles, extract from *The Man-Made Object* (New York: George Braziller, 1966) 4–6 [footnotes not included].

Dick Hebdige
Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle//1988

[...] The first wave of modernist youth emerged in or around London in the late 1950s. Most commentators agree on certain basic themes: that Mod was predominantly working class, male-dominated and centred on an obsessive clothes-consciousness which involved a fascination with American and Continental styles. The endorsement of Continental products was particularly marked.

The Dean in Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (1959) is a 'typical' (i.e. ideal) early modernist:

> College-boy smooth crop hair with burned-in parting, neat white Italian rounded-collared shin, short Roman jacket very tailored (two little vents, three buttons) no turn-up narrow trousers with seventeen-inch bottoms absolute maximum, pointed toe shoes, and a white mac folded by his side ...[1]

His (unnamed) girlfriend is described in similar detail:

> ...short hem lines, seamless stockings, pointed toe high-heeled stiletto shoes, crêpe nylon rattling petticoat, short blazer jacket, hair done up into the elfin style. Face pale-corpse colour with a dash of mauve, plenty of mascara ...[2]

But here the absence of precise calibration (no twos or threes or seventeens) pinpoints her position within the signifying systems of both the novel and the subculture itself. In the same way, though her style is rooted in the Italian connection, derived in all likelihood from the 'new race of [Italian] girls', this isn't stated. The Dean, on the other hand, is defined through a geography of dress. He is English by birth, Italian by choice.

According to sociological and marketing sources, Mod was largely a matter of commodity selection.[3] It was through commodity choices that mods marked themselves out as mods, using goods as 'weapons of exclusion'[4] to avoid contamination from the other alien worlds of teenaged taste that orbitted round their own (the Teds, Beats and later the Rockers).

Mods exploited the expressive potential within commodity choice to its logical conclusion. Their 'furious consumption programme' – clothes, clubs, records, hairstyles, petrol and drinamyl pills – has been described as 'a grotesque parody of the aspirations of [their] parents' – the people who lived in the new towns or on the new housing estates, the post-war working and lower-middle-class ...'[5] The Mods converted themselves into objects, they 'chose' (in order) to make themselves into mods, attempting to impose systematic control over the narrow domain which was 'theirs', and within which they saw their 'real' selves invested – the domain of leisure and appearance, of dress and posture. The transference of desire ('... their parents' ... aspirations ...') on to dress is familiar enough. Here the process is auto-erotic: the self, 'its self' becomes the fetish.

When the Italian scooter was first chosen by the mods as an identity marker (around 1958–59 according to eyewitness accounts),[6] it was lifted into a larger unity of taste – an image made up out of sartorial and musical preferences – which in turn was used to signal to others 'in the know' a refinement, a distance from the rest – a certain way of seeing the world. Value was conferred upon the scooter by the simple act of selection. The transformation in the value of the object had to be publicly marked:

> There was a correct way of riding. You stuck your feet out at an angle of 45 degrees and the guy on the pillion seat held his hands behind his back and leant back ...[7]

Sometimes the object was physically transformed. According to Richard Barnes,[8] Eddie Grimstead, who owned two scooter shops in London during the mid 1960s, specialized in customizing scooters for the Mods. The machines were resprayed (Lambretta later adopted some of Grimstead's colour schemes) and fitted with accessories: foxtails, pennants, mascots, chromium, horns, extra lights and mirrors, whip aerials, fur trim and leopardskin seats. Such features extended the original design concept organically.

Although the scooter imposed no constraints on the rider's dress (this, after all, was what had originally made the scooter 'suit-able' for the fashion-conscious Mods), a style became fixed around the vehicle – a uniform of olive green (parka) anoraks, Levi jeans and Hush Puppies. Sometimes French berets were worn to stress the affiliation with the continent and to further distinguish the 'scooter boys' from the Rockers whose own ensemble of leather jackets, flying boots and

cowboy hats signalled an alternative defection to America, an immersion in the myth of the frontier.

The innovative drive within Mod, the compulsion to create ever newer, more distinctive looks was eventually to lead to another customizing trend, one which, once again, seems to contradict the logic of the scooter's appeal. As the banks of lights and lamps began to multiply, a reaction set in amongst the hardcore of stylists – scooters were stripped: side panels, front mudguards, sometimes even the footboards, were removed and the remaining bodywork painted in muted colours with a matt finish.[9] These were the last, irreverent transformations. By this time Mod had surfaced as a set of newspaper photographs and Bank Holiday headlines. Fixed in the public gaze, Mod turned, finally, against itself. After baroque, minimalism: the image of the scooter was deconstructed, the object 'rematerialized' [...]

1 [footnote 43 in source] Colin Mclnnes, *Absolute Beginners* (London: McGinnon & Kee, 1959) reprinted edition (London: Alison & Busby, 1980).

2 [44] Ibid.

3 [45] See Richard Barnes, *Mods!* (London: Eel Pie Publishing, 1980), on which I drew heavily for the mod sections in this paper; *Generation X*, ed. Jane Deverson and Charles Hamblett (London: Tandem, 1964); Gary Herman, *The Who* (London: Studio Vista, 1971); Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Paladin, 1972). see also my 'The Style of the Mods', in Stuart Hall, et al., eds, *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

4 [46] Baron lsherwood and Mary Douglas, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980). Isherwood and Douglas define consumption as a 'ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events ... rituals are conventions that set up visible public definitions'. Luxury goods are particularly useful as 'weapons of exclusion'. This idea compares interestingly with Pierre Bourdieu's definition of 'taste': 'Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference ... asserted purely negatively by the refusal of other tastes ...'

5 [47] Richard Barnes, *Mods!*, op. cit.

6 [48] Ibid.

7 [49] Ibid.

8 [50] Ibid.

9 [51] Ibid.

Dick Hebdige, extract from *Hiding the Light* (London: Comedia/Routledge, 1988) 110–12.

Stephen Willats
Transformers//1989

Transformation

'Transformation' may be viewed as a fundamental creative act, basic to expression and survival; transformation here being viewed simply as the taking of an object and altering of its function, meaning and character, effectively making it into another object. As a consequence of transformation the cultural system of references that surrounds the object is also changed into another system, related to its new meaning and function. The Transformer who makes these changes recognizes the psychological as well as physical possibilities inherent in an object; the resulting development in the object's existence being a product of the Transformer's imagination.

One of the premises of my work is that within everyone there is a Transformer and that the initiation of transformations is essential to an individual's personal and social expression of self-organization and self-identity. Yet while I see conceptually this possibility of a latent Transformer within everyone, I also recognize its social inhibition: the repression of self-organization, on which transformation relies, is implicit in the norms, rules and conventions of what we call normality. In a cultural sense, the concept and reality of self-organization exists as a counter-consciousness in almost perpetual opposition to the determinisms that predominate in modern life. The structure of my works is predominantly centred on this polemical conflict between our potential as Transformers and the cultural inhibition of basic human expression.

This polemic is expressed clearly through the role that objects have come to assume in the present cultural situation. The elevation of the object in social relations, so that it plays a central part in interpersonal relations, derives from possession having become a parameter for authority, the object symbolizing the social power of the possessor. The object becomes a central preoccupation of our culture; it becomes a carrier of society's idealizations and hence becomes an icon through which people may recognize a dependent system of references that can capture a whole way of life.

In the concept of a counter-consciousness the object's status as an icon is replaced with the perception of the object functioning as an agent or tool that is integral to our social relationships and the forging of society. In my work the Transformer is presented as a symbolic person for the audience – not just anyone but an actual person who has made transformations from an object-based determinism in contemporary culture to a counter-consciousness based on self-

organization between people. Here the role of objects is still crucial, as the Transformer expresses via those objects a corresponding change in his or her own consciousness, assigning to the object a new, self-given function which is other than its predetermined role. The metamorphosis of objects from one state of consciousness to another is the creative force of the Transformer, and it is this force that I want the audience of my works to find and feel is possible in themselves.

Transportation

I always look for symbols of modern living that are readily identifiable as such and which can be embodied in the work as recognizable catalysts that stimulate acts of transformation. One such territory of symbolism centres on the projected idealizations that appear to show us a future way of life, a future to be emulated, and hence lay out a possible normality for us all: it does not matter that you have had a direct experience of the actuality surrounding the idealization, as you still know all about it by its cultural projection. One such symbol is the residential tower block, another is the office computer. Whether or not you live in a tower block or use a computer, this is not a precondition for having strong associations concerning them and knowing their controversial status in modern life.

The symbols and resulting situations that the work focuses on have arisen from an associated system of objects collected together by people to enable acts of transformation. These objects have been transported from outside to a context strongly associated with the symbol – people's living rooms in the tower block, or the desk in the office – this action having the effect of freeing psychologically an individual's imagination, the creative potential of his or her transformations.

While working on a project centred on a group of tower blocks on the Avondale estate in West London, I noticed that an area of adjacent wasteland that residents called the Lurky Place was used as an escape from the isolating, inhibiting confinement of the flats in which they were entrapped and, more importantly, a key factor in their escape was the everyday objects they possessed or appropriated and then took to the Lurky Place.

A whole spectrum of objects was transported into the wasteland specifically as a source of agency for activities that expressed a counter-consciousness. These objects gave a new meaning to that place which was acquired at the same time as they were being transported into what was perceived as a contrasting, anarchic, natural cover from the prying eyes of society. Some objects which were prohibited had a predetermined function, or were taboo in the context symbolized by the tower blocks, such as the air rifle, track bike or can of glue. These then became the means for gaining a personal freedom, of being able to create a self-found identity and role, which as often as not had as its central rationale the creation of community.

Similarly, the expression of counter-consciousness was powerfully stated by Punks and those who can loosely be termed 'night people' of the late seventies and early eighties, who externalized their transformations into the street and the public domain. It has often been from the far margins of society, its undercover, that the most explicit and radical transformations have been created, by the transportation of the unwanted, rejected and prohibited both into and out of society's normality. Central is the taking of objects that have been discarded, or are even considered taboo by the dominant culture, which are then synthesized, recycled into a new language that articulates the Transformer's own sensibilities and identity. These new languages also display the Transformer's separation, even alienation, from the values of the dominant culture. This language and sensibility is embodied in the works as symbols of a creativity that has directly involved the here and now of the modern world. So the transportations and appropriations made by the Punks and night people to construct their confrontational languages have been bodily transported into the works to confront the audience and challenge their own perceptions of normality.

While the transportations of Punks were intentionally overt and outrageous, subtle transformations to the world of normality are made all the time as part of an individual's everyday struggle to counter the pressure from deterministic surroundings which are in some way confining. In situations of normality the language of normality is itself used but subverted by the gathering together of objects permissible within that particular situation, but which have their origins elsewhere in the domain of normality. In the confinement of a living room high up in a tower block, or in the uniformity of an office, objects are transported in from the outside that often relate directly to outside experiences. These displays of identity act to relieve internal pressures and also to project the person outwards psychologically. These objects, by the act of being transported into that fixed space, transform the rigidity of the surroundings. In some situations transportation is fundamental to a person's survival, even sanity, and certainly to the ability to say make a personal statement within a context that implicitly denies this possibility. Within an environment and cultural context that is moulded to inhibit the personality of the individual, even small, innocent transformations have a great significance, denoting another hidden structure of personal and social values from those that dominate the basis of the surrounding working environment. Thus the representations in the works of transformations made within the centre of normality are seen to be as strategically important as those confrontations that express the alienation of people at the far margins of society. It is through this recognition by the audience of what is possible within normality, a normality that mirrors aspects of their own lives, that I want them to make a step towards remodelling the reality that they themselves occupy.

Stephen Willats, 'Transformers', *Beeld*, no. 4 (Amsterdam, 1989); reprinted in *Stephen Willats: Art Society Feedback*, ed. Anja Casser and Philipp Ziegler (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 2010) 452–4.

Mike Kelley
The Readymade and the Double// 1993

[...] When Hans Bellmer says 'An object that is identical with itself is without reality', I immediately think of Marcel Duchamp's readymades. These objects are, without doubt, the most important sculptural production of the twentieth century, precisely because, in the simplest and most concrete package, they present reality as impossible to concretize. He does exactly what I presented [earlier in the text] as an absurdity, he sculpts an object in its true material. He performs the sin of literalism and demands that it is art. The problems these pieces raise are so numerous that it is difficult to know where to begin to talk about them. The works can be thought of in so many ways. On the one hand, they go against the accepted notion of art as being the arena of façade, concerned as it is with representation, by presenting a 'real' object as art. On the other hand, they reduce the modernist idea of art as a materialist self-referencing to an absurdity, for it is impossible for these 'real' objects, once presented in the context of art, to maintain their 'real' status. As 'art' these objects dematerialize; they refuse to stay themselves and become their own *doppelgänger*. The categorical confusions raised by the readymade make them the father of all the time-based works that follow, all of the various works that played with the slippery dividing line between sculpture and theatre, between what is in time, and what is out of time. One need only think of Piero Manzoni's obviously Duchampian act of signing live nude models as artworks in 1961. Here the problem raised by Duchamp is made evident. If real objects are going to be art, what are the rules and limits of this as defined in time? Duchamp's readymades do stick to one historical convention of art-making: they are in permanent materials; he can be credited with inventing sculptural still-life. Yet, their status as real objects problematizes this reality; one wonders when they are a real object, and when are they an illusion. It is not a difficult jump, then, to shift to the use of organic materials that have a limited life – they die, they rot. Were Manzoni's nudes art when they put their clothes on? Were they art when they were no longer young? Are they still art, and how, after they are dead and gone? [...]

Mike Kelley, extract from 'Playing with Dead Things', *The Uncanny* (Sonsbeek: Sonsbeek '93, 1993) 17.

Boris Groys
Simulated Readymades by Fischli & Weiss//1994

[...] The insight that reproduction is more appropriate to human subjectivity than production is one of the oldest in the history of human thought. Nature produces, a person who still lives in and with nature also produces – the wise reproduce. Plato wanted to reproduce the eternal ideas in his soul; the true believer wants to reproduce the Passion of Christ; Freud believed in the reproduction of sexual traumas in dreams; Peter Fischli and David Weiss reproduce milk cartons, drills and saws in polyurethane. Subjectivity is something invisible, which is why it must not and cannot become visible, identifiable, objectified. Actually, the reproduction of things without an observable difference indirectly reveals subjectivity through the very absence of productive intervention.

When we first look at Fischli & Weiss's exact polyurethane copies of ordinary, objects – they might best be called replicants after Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* – we find that they are indistinguishable from the originals. Only on close inspection will the viewer perhaps realize that they are not the 'real thing' but only artificially made replicants. It would in fact be better if the viewer knew this to begin with – from the artists themselves, from their friends or at worst from a catalogue. Fischli & Weiss's replicants refuse to give us any insight into their inner nature and structure, which we, as products of a scientific age, automatically want to investigate. Instead, we are radically confronted with a surface that cannot be penetrated because it conceals nothing but a void. The polyurethane used by the artists is merely a physical metaphor for this void: and it is, of course, no accident that the items weigh practically nothing. Fischli & Weiss thus create a situation that obviates study and insight, a situation in which art alone has power over us. They reproduce a pre-scientific, pre-philosophical world that deals with only two things: what we see with our eyes and, as additional information, how what we see with our eyes has been created out of nothingness. It was once possible to find this information in the Bible – nowadays people look for it in exhibition catalogues.

But the greatest, most immediate effect of Fischli & Weiss's objects and installations lies in undermining certain expectations entertained by contemporary viewers. We are all familiar with the practice of the readymade, and when we see the simple things of daily life on view in a museum, we believe implicitly in their authenticity. In fact, our faith in their authenticity is even greater on seeing them in a museum than in reality. We know how hard it was for the practice of the readymade to garner acceptance; we know how long it

took the artist to earn the right to put real things, and not only their representations, on display in museums. Then why should someone come up with the idea of depicting and simulating the readymade itself? One can argue that Fischli & Weiss simulate readymades rather than the objects themselves, because in real life these object-replicants would immediately be exposed for what they are, namely useless in actual practice. In a museum context, however, the readymade is not required to pass a test of authenticity or practicability thanks to a firmly established convention which prescribes that only surfaces may be viewed, for we are not allowed to touch, take along, or use the objects on display. It is this convention that has made it possible to simulate the readymade.

Our perception of readymades in a museum is, incidentally, profoundly influenced by the assumption that they are real, genuine things that could potentially be returned to reality. Fischli & Weiss's readymade replicants repudiate this assumption by demonstrating that we have been led astray by a convention that cannot give us a guarantee of reality, for readymades also travel a one-way street from reality to art. Once the classical readymade crosses the invisible threshold that separates art and reality in our culture, the possibility of retracing its steps becomes purely theoretical. The threshold has been inscribed in the inner structure of these readymade replicants; the act of becoming art precludes their return to reality. But how does this practice enhance our understanding of art? What is the point of copying a copy or of reproducing a reproduction?

Actually the practice of the readymade is itself an act of copying, of duplication: everyday objects are duplicated by the mere fact of being placed in a museum. Duchamp's discovery consisted of demonstrating that it was no longer necessary for art to resort to painting or sculpture in order to depict reality: the context in which an object is presented suffices for us to perceive it as an artistic copy of itself. We can say that the ordinary object that escapes conscious notice, although we use it every day, captures our attention in the context of the museum and acquires new meaning. Its once utilitarian value gives way to a new symbolic value: the object becomes mysterious, fraught with meaning, mythical. It begins to inspire darkly religious associations, to imply a ritual function – in short, it begins to carry the entire weight of our culture. It becomes erotic. It becomes pure presence. It becomes spiritual. It brings Joseph Beuys into play.

Here the threshold between art and reality is given a purely spiritual interpretation: it is defined by the individual's inner, purely mental decision to see things differently; it acquires mythical dimensions. Crossing it begins to resemble a religious conversion, an inner enlightenment that allows us to see the familiar from a new angle and to contemplate what is hidden below surfaces. The classical practice of the readymade has the duality of a mythical experience, about which Fischli & Weiss obviously have misgivings. Their strategy evidently

seeks to desecrate the distinction between art and reality. A thing made by Fischli & Weiss becomes art by virtue of the fact that it has been carved out of polyurethane. This definition replaces the old one, according to which a thing becomes art upon being seen in the light of inner enlightenment. The astonishing thing about this substitution of polyurethane for a higher spirituality is that the effect basically remains the same: divested of any practical, ordinary functionality, the thing can be used only as an object to be viewed. [...]

Boris Groys, extract from 'Simulated Readymades by Peter Fischli and David Weiss', *Parkett*, no. 40/41 (June 1994) 33–5.

Mel Chin
The Elementary Object//1993

The history of the tobacco pipe curls its smoke around the world.

In 1586, Governer Ralph Lane of Virginia gave an aboriginal *calumet* to Sir Walter Raleigh that set a trend among English courtiers. Over time a nicotine fix spread to every known continent. The Native American signifier of peace was handed into the clutches of a British explorer who had a six-year authorization to take possession of 'any remote barbarous and heathen lands not possessed by any Christian prince or people', and who was a leading advocate of assassination to get rid of Irish leaders. With Raleigh's help, it appears the tobacco plant lost some spiritual ground for 'the others', but gained prominence as a cash crop for 'the few'. No doubt it had a part in lining the royal Elizabethan coffers (coughers?) with enough jack to do such things as continue sponsorship of Cambridge and Oxford Universities, which Elizabeth had incorporated and reorganized in 1571.

Cut away from Raleigh in prison penning his version of the *History of the World* ... to a present day American university professor, unlit pipe clenched firmly in his mouth, deeply immersed in the contents of Sir Walter's text, as an anonymous package on his desk explodes, tearing word and body into forensic bits; to a roof top blasting away in the Corsican night as nationalist terrorists make their point to some small-time tourism developer; to the docks where greatly desired Corsican briar wood is to be shipped to Germany and France to produce pipe bowls in time for Christmas; to Germany where parents map out Corsican vacations and kids check out *Max and Moritz* loading up the poor accountant's pipe and getting a chuckle out of the (racist?) blackface result; to an archetypical white, middle-aged,

middle-class dude with his slippers and pipe, signifying relaxation and, yes, peace, at home watching one more report on the World Trade Center bombing.

All these scenarios apply to *The Elementary Object*. Fashioned from European briarwood, loaded with triple F, superfine blasting powder, nestled in a bed of excelsior (shaved wood), surrounded by vermiculite/concrete, and encased in a locked steel attaché case, its fuse unites sardonic humour and the potential for tragic destruction. *The Elementary Object* utilizes an image that has been reproduced in art and literature, and that has come to signify qualities of power, leisure, pleasure and contemplation. This version loads an actual source for physical harm into the benign pipe in order to bring forward new fodder for explosive contemplations. *This is a pipe*: (lit) *this is not a pipe*.

Mel Chin, 'The Elementary Object' (1993), artist's writing (www.melchin.org)

Lev Manovich
Friendly Alien: Object and Interface//2006

Since 1996 the artist Miltos Manetas has made paintings that systematically portray the new essential objects of contemporary life: joysticks, computers, computer game consoles and computer cables (lots of them). Manetas also paints people engaged, usually intensely, in activities made possible by consumer electronic devices, such as the playing of computer games. But he never shows what games they are playing or what images they are looking at. Instead, he focuses on the human-computer interface: hands clutching a joystick, a body stretched across the floor in intense concentration or, alternatively, relaxing besides a laptop, a computer console or a TV.

Manetas' paintings of the 1990s reflect the then popular view of the computer as an unfamiliar and foreign, even alien presence, with computer work seen as immersion and withdrawal from one's physical surroundings, the laptop or game console 'sucking in' the user, away from the immediate space (similar to the vision of TV in Cronenberg's 1982 film *Videodrome*). In these paintings, the orgy of electronic cables, which seem to grow and multiply, recalls the references of cyborg and science fiction films such as *Aliens* (1986) or *The Matrix* (1999).

By contrast, recent paintings such as *Girls in Nike* (2005) represent technology as completely integrated and fused with the lived environment: items of fashionable clothing and computer cables become complementary; the atmosphere is

decorative and festive. Technology is neither threatening nor is it some outside force that has been domesticated. Rather, it is playful and playable, it brings a party into the everyday. The sound that accompanies our interaction with the icons that playfully unfold into windows in Mac OS X; colourful desktop backgrounds; shiny reflective surfaces and anthropomorphic shapes – all these make computers and consumer electronic devices stand out from the everyday greyness. Technology is a pet that surprises us, sometimes disobeying and even annoying us, but always animated, always entertaining, always fun, and almost fashion.

My visit to the famous Collette store in Paris, on the same day in October 2005 that I saw *Girls in Nike* at Manetas' studio, only confirmed this new identity of consumer technology. In the mid 1990s Collette introduced a new concept that today is an accepted genre – the store as a collection of the most interesting design objects being created around the world, with an obligatory cool café and changing art exhibitions.

Situated across the entrance was the new display, positioned right in the centre of the store. It housed the latest cell phones, PDAs and a portable Sony Playstation. These 'techno-jewels' came to dominate the store, taking the space away from albums, perfumes, clothes and various design objects which were all now occupying the perimeter. But just as in Manetas' new paintings, the techno-objects in the display did not look dominating, threatening or alien. They seemed to acquire the same status as perfume, photography books, clothes and other items in the store. Put differently, they were no longer 'technology'. Instead, they became simply 'objects', and as such they now had the same right as other objects which we use daily to become beautiful and elegant, to have interesting shapes and textures; to reflect what we use and at the same time allow us to reinvent ourselves. In short, they now belonged to the world of design and fashion rather than engineering.

Yet, as another display at Collette made clear, the integration was far from complete. Sony had just commissioned ten top fashion designers to design cases for PSP (Portable Sony Playstation) and they were presented in the store. The cases were disappointing – although they used a variety of materials, patterns, colours and designs, none of them felt integrated with PSP design: the refined and minimal logic of PSP menu screens, the way they slide horizontally, etc. What I saw was two completely different design logics not speaking to each other at all.

I feel similar unease with some of the recent attempts to make cell phones more 'fashionable' by adding easily recognizable signs of fashion – encrustation, silver textures, 'art deco' patterns. The problem is that techno-objects are not ordinary objects. This applies equally to cell phones, PDAs, portable game players, portable music players, portable video players, etc. They all contain interfaces – most often a screen for output and input and a few buttons, and sometimes also a trackwheel, or a small built-in keyboard. And behind the screen lives a whole

separate world with its logic, aesthetics and dynamics. And when this electronic screen and the world it presents to us ends (I am talking about the physical boundary of the screen), this creates a visual and psychological feeling of discontinuity. Suddenly we are in a different world – that of non-interactive, 'dead' surfaces that enclose the screen. And typically the design of these surfaces does not have much to do with the design of the screen interface. The 'fashion' cases for PSP exemplify this situation. All cases were nice by themselves, but the associative worlds they invoked had nothing to do with the world inside a PSP screen.

Let me put these experiences in more general terms. Today the design of forms becomes intricately linked to the question of interface. First of all, we need to give some visual form to what will appear on the screens of computers, mobile phones, PDAs, car navigation systems, and other devices – as well as to buttons, trackwheels, microphones and various other input tools. Therefore, human-computer interfaces that involve a set of visual conventions such as folders, icons and menus (i.e. a Graphical User Interface), audio conventions (as in voice-recognition interface), and particular material articulations (such as the shape, colour, material and texture of a mobile phone) represent the whole new category of forms which need to be designed today. Even more importantly, as computation becomes incorporated in our lived environment (the trend described by such terms as 'ubiquitous computing', 'pervasive computing', 'ambient intelligence', 'context-aware environments', 'smart objects'), the interfaces slowly leave the realm where they safely lived for a few decades – that is, stand-alone computers and electronic devices – and start appearing in all kinds of objects and on all kinds of surfaces, be it interior walls, furniture, benches, bags, clothing, and so on. Consequently, the forms of all these objects that previously lived 'outside of information' now have to address the likely presence of interfaces somewhere on them.

This does not mean that from now on 'form follows interface'. Rather, a physical form and an interface have to learn how to accommodate each other. Beyond the traditional requirements that the material forms have to satisfy – a chair has to be comfortable for sitting, for example – their design is now being shaped by new requirements. For instance, at least so far, we are used to interacting with text presented on flat and rectangular surface, and therefore if a screen is to be incorporated somewhere in the object, a part of it needs to be reasonably flat. Which is easy to do if an object is a table but not as easy if it is a piece of clothing or Gerry's Disney Hall in Los Angeles, specifically designed not to have a single flat area. (Of course, as new technologies such as Rapid Manufacturing may soon enable easy printing of an electronic display on any surface of any object while it is being produced, it's possible that we will be able quickly to adjust our perceptual habits so that moving and shape-changing display surfaces will be accepted more easily than I can imagine. In fact, computer-

controlled graphic projections on the bodies of dancers, as in Klaus Obermaier's *Apparition* (2004), or Art+Com's interactive *Medial Stage and Costume Design* system (2002) already show the aesthetic potential of displaying information over a changing non-flat, not-rectangular form, i.e. a human body.)

In short, today the interface and the material object that supports it still seem to come from different worlds. The interface is a 'friendly alien', but it is still alien. The task of rethinking both interface and objects together so they can be fused into a new unity is not an easy one, and it will require lots of work and imagination before aesthetically satisfying solutions will be found. [...]

Lev Manovich, 'Friendly Alien: Object and Interface', 2006 [revised for this publication]. (www.manovich.net)

Joseph Strau
The Lamp and the Ribbon//2009

for many years now a floor lamp stands just behind the pillows of my bed. it was not a very practical thing. it doesn't look practical, since probably the bed would be better against the wall rather than having a small space in between, a space reigned by the white and silver floor lamp. it was not practical as well, because i had to get up from the comfortable sheets in order to turn it off before sleeping, but I refused to make any changes for many years. then, once without planning i took a green ribbon, which was bought for wrapping a present, and attached it to the little metal chain that switched the light on and off. from then on i could turn the light off without getting up from the bed. still i was not sure if this sudden decision was really made only to spare me this last moment's effort before sleeping. i think the lamp, or rather the interior of the lamp shade was some mysterious object for me. but why? lying down in bed with the rest of the apartment a dark zone, looking up into the golden interior of the lampshade from far below was a reminder. many people believe it is a very retarded quality if people remain in their youth once they get older, but I thought of myself as remaining in a much earlier state, the earliest pre-language state sometimes and tried to search for the situation which gave me this mysterious feeling. it was the time when the few objects one had experience with seemed to stand in for the whole universe. or there was already an ability to experience many objects of this universe and give them names even, but it could not be used since the objects

were just the few of the little room around you. so they replaced the universe of objects and thus were endowed with a dark mysterious aura. for me that object was an actually quite ugly lamp which was fixed on the wall above me and i had nothing else to meditate on, nothing else to project all my capabilities on than the inside of the lamp shade. as well it was the last object before darkness and it remained as strange afterimage once in darkness, sending out ... so my desire to find security or better to find the comfort or still living with just a few objects and giving to them too many qualities in my imagination is found in the lamp behind the pillow. the last object of reality is disappearing and is the first of the more comfortable world of dreaming. when i put the multi-coloured ribbon onto the lamp, for a long time i thought, this was one of the few practical, meaningful and good things i have done in my life. But the reason, the true reason was not practicality, it was an effort to create a physical elation between me and the mysterious space within the lampshade, to make a kind of imaginary, but still physical ladder to this in between space of dream and reality.

Josef Strau, *the lamp and the ribbon*, reproduced in Karl Holmqvist, 'Josef Strau at Konsthall Malmö', *May Magazin*, no.1 (Paris, 2009) 114.

Karl Marx
Grundrisse//1858

[...] Raw material is consumed by being changed, formed by labour, and the instrument of labour is consumed by being used up in this process, worn out. On the other hand, labour also is consumed by being employed, set into motion, and a certain amount of the worker's muscular force, etc. is thus expended, so that he exhausts himself. But labour is not only consumed, but also at the same time fixed, converted from the form of activity into the form of the object; materialized; as a modification of the object, it modifies its own form and changes from activity to being. The end of the process is the *product*, in which the raw material appears as bound up with labour, and in which the instrument of labour has, likewise, transposed itself from a mere possibility into a reality, by having become a real conductor of labour, but thereby also having been consumed in its static form through its mechanical or chemical relation to the material of labour. All three moments of the process, the material, the instrument, and labour, coincide in the neutral result – *the product*. The moments of the

process of production which have been consumed to form the product are simultaneously reproduced in it. The whole process therefore appears as *productive consumption*, i.e. as consumption which terminates neither in a *void*, nor in the mere subjectification of the objective, but which is, rather, again posited as an *object*. This consumption is not simply a consumption of the material, but rather consumption of consumption itself; in the suspension of the material it is the suspension of this suspension and hence the *positing* of the same. This *form-giving* activity consumes the object and consumes itself, but it consumes the given form of the object only in order to posit it in a new objective form, and it consumes itself only in its subjective form as activity. It consumes the objective character of the object – the indifference towards the form – and the subjective character of activity; forms the one, materializes the other. But as *product*, the result of the production process is use *value*. [...]

Karl Marx, extract from *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy), uncompleted manuscript (1858), first published in 1939; trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 300–301.

Marcel Broodthaers
Statement//1964

I, too, wondered whether I could not sell something and succeed in life. For some time I had been no good at anything. I am forty years old ...

Finally the idea of inventing something insincere crossed my mind and I set to work straight away. At the end of three months I showed what I had produced to Philippe Édouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie St Laurent. 'But it is art', he said, 'and I will willingly exhibit all of it.' 'Agreed', I replied. If I sell something, he takes 30%. It seems these are the usual conditions, some galleries take 75%.

What is it? In fact it is objects.

Marcel Broodthaers, statement printed on pages from magazines, for his exhibition at Galerie St Laurent, Brussels (10–25 April 1964).

Georges Perec
Things//1965

[...] Like almost all their colleagues, Jérôme and Sylvie had become market researchers by necessity and not by choice. No one knows, in any case, where the untrammelled development of their natural inclinations towards idleness would have led them. There again, history had chosen for them. Of course, like everyone else, they would have liked to give themselves to something, to feel in themselves some powerful need that they would have called a vocation, an ambition that would have raised them up, a passion that would have fulfilled them. But they possessed, alas, but a single passion, the passion for a higher standard of living, and it exhausted them. When they were students the prospect of a mediocre degree and then a teaching post with a tiny salary at Nogent-sur-Seine, Château-Thierry or Etampes terrified them so much that virtually on meeting each other – Jérôme was then twenty-one, Sylvie nineteen – and without needing to talk it over, they dropped out of courses they had never really begun. The thirst for knowledge did not torture them. Far more prosaically, and without hiding from the fact that they were probably making a mistake and that sooner or later they would come to regret it, they thirsted for a slightly bigger room, for running hot and cold water, for a shower, for meals more varied, or just more copious, than those they ate in student canteens, maybe for a car, for records, holidays, clothes.

Motivation research had emerged in France several years earlier. That year it was still expanding fast. New agencies were springing up by the month, out of nothing, or almost. You could get work in them easily. Most often it involved going into parks or standing at school gates or knocking on doors in suburban housing estates to ask housewives if they had noticed some recent advertisement and what they thought of it. These instant surveys, called mini-tests or quickies, earned a hundred francs each. It wasn't much, but it was better than babysitting, working as a night watchman or as a dishwasher, better than any of the other menial jobs – distributing leaflets, book-keeping, timing radio advertisements, hawking, cramming – which were traditionally the preserve of students. And then the very youth of the agencies themselves, their almost informal state of development, the still total absence of trained staff, held out the prospect, at least potentially, of rapid promotion and a dizzying rise in status.

It was not a bad guess. They spent a few months handing out survey questionnaires. Then came an agency director who, for lack of time, took a chance on them: and so they set off for the provinces with tape-recorders under their arms. Some of their fellow travellers, scarcely older than they were, introduced

them to the techniques of the open and the closed interview, which were actually less difficult than is commonly supposed. They learned how to make other people do the talking and to weigh their own words carefully; they learned how to unearth from people's muddled hesitations, perplexed silences and shy hints the lines that needed pursuing; they pierced the secret of that universal 'aha …', a truly magical intonation with which the interviewer punctuates the interviewee's words, to bolster his confidence, to show that he understands, to egg him on, to query and even sometimes to threaten him.

They obtained respectable results. They built on their success. They picked up, from here and from there, snippets of sociology, psychology, statistics; they acquired the vocabulary and the signs, the mannerisms that make the right impression: for Sylvie, a particular way of putting on and taking off her glasses, a particular way of taking notes, of thumbing through a report, a particular way of speaking, of inserting in her conversations with employers and in a barely interrogative tone of voice turns of phrase like 'indeed …', 'I guess maybe …', 'up to a point …', 'what I'm wondering is …', a particular way of quoting at appropriate points the names of C. Wright Mills, William Whyte, or – even better – Lazarsfeld, Cantril or Herbert Hyman, of whose works they had read not three pages.

They proved very adept at acquiring these indispensable basic items of professional equipment, and, scarcely one year after their first involvement in motivation research, they were entrusted with the highly responsible task of a 'content analysis': it was one rung only below the role of project supervisor, which was always performed by an office-based executive, the highest, thus the best-paid and consequently the most prestigious position in the whole hierarchy. Over the following years they almost never slipped from these heights.

And so for four years and maybe more they explored and interviewed and analysed. Why are pure-suction vacuum cleaners selling so poorly? What do people of modest origin think of chicory? Do you like ready-made mashed potato, and if so, why? Because it's light? Because it's creamy? Because it's easy to make – just open it up and there you are? Do people really reckon baby carriages are expensive? Aren't you always prepared to fork out a bit extra for the good of the kids? Which way will French women vote? Do people like cheese in squeezy tubes? Are you for or against public transport? What do you notice first when you eat yoghurt? – the colour? the texture? the taste? natural odour? Do you read a lot, a little, not at all? Do you eat out? Would you, Madam, like to rent your room to a Black? What do people think, honestly, of old age pensions? What does the younger generation think? What do executives think? What does the woman of thirty think? What do you think of holidays? Where do you spend your holidays? Do you like frozen food? How much do you think a lighter like this one costs, eh? What do you look for in a mattress? Describe a man who likes pasta. What do you think of

your washing machine? Are you satisfied with it? Doesn't it make too many suds? Does it wash properly? Does it tear the clothes? Does it dry? Would you rather have a washing machine that dries as well? And safety in coal mines, is it alright or not good enough, in your view, sir? (Make the target speak; ask him to give personal examples: things he has seen; has he been injured himself? How did it happen? And your son, sir, will he be a miner like his father? So what will he be, then?)

There was washing, drying, ironing. Gas, electricity and the telephone. Children. Clothes and underclothes. Mustard. Packet soups, tinned soups. Hair: how to wash it, how to dry it, how to make it hold a wave, how to make it shine. Students, fingernails, cough syrup, typewriters, fertilizers, tractors, leisure pursuits, presents, stationery, linen, politics, motorways, alcoholic drinks, mineral water, cheeses, jams, lamps and curtains, insurance and gardening. *Nil humani alienum* ... Nothing that was human was outside their scope. [...]

Georges Perec, extract from *Les Choses: Une histoire des années soixante* (Paris: René Juillard, 1965); trans. David Bellos, *Things: A Story of the Sixties* (1965) (New York: Collins Harvill, 1990) 35–9.

D.W. Winnicott
The Use of an Object and Relating through Identification//1968

[...] Object-relating is an experience of the subject that can be described in terms of the subject as an isolate. When I speak of the use of an object, however, I take object-relating for granted, and add new features that involve the nature and the behaviour of the object. For instance, the object, if it is to be used, must necessarily be real in the sense of being part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections. It is this, I think, that makes for the world of difference that there is between relating and usage.

If I am right in this, then it follows that discussion of the subject of relating is a much easier exercise for analysts than is the discussion of usage, since relating may be examined as a phenomenon of the subject, and psychoanalysis always likes to be able to eliminate all factors that are environmental, except in so far as the environment can be thought of in terms of projective mechanisms. But in examining usage there is no escape: the analyst must take into account the nature of the object not as a projection, but as a thing in itself.

For the time being may I leave it at that, that relating can be described in terms of the individual subject, and that usage cannot be described in terms of

acceptance of the object's independent existence, its property of having been there all the time. You will see that it is just these problems that concern us when we look at the area that I have tried to draw attention to in my work on what I have called transitional phenomena.

But this change does not come about automatically, by maturational process alone. It is this detail that I am concerned with.

In clinical terms: two babies are feeding at the breast. One is feeding on the self, since the breast and the baby have not yet become (for the baby) separate phenomena. The other is feeding from an other-than-me source, or an object that can be given cavalier treatment without effect on the baby unless it retaliates. Mothers, like analysts, can be good or not good enough; some can and some cannot carry the baby over from relating to usage.

I should like to put in a reminder here that the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena (according to my presentation on the subject) is the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object. I tried to draw attention to this aspect of transitional phenomena by claiming that in the rules of the game we all know that we will never challenge the baby to elicit and answer to the question: did you create that or did you find it? [...] To use an object the subject must have developed a capacity to use objects. This is part of the change to the reality principle.

This capacity cannot be said to be inborn, nor can its development in an individual be taken for granted. The development of a capacity to use an object is another example of the maturational process as something that depends on a facilitating environment.

In the sequence one can say that first there is object-relating, then in the end there is object-use; in between, however, is the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development; or the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending. This thing that there is in-between relating and use is the subject's placing of the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control; that is, the subject's perception of the object as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity, in fact recognition of it as an entity in its own right.

This change (from relating to usage) means that the subject destroys the object. From here it could be argued by an armchair philosopher that there is therefore no such thing in practice as the use of an object: if the object is external, then the object is destroyed by the subject. Should the philosopher come out of his chair and sit on the floor with his patient, however, he will find that there is an intermediate position. In other words, he will find that after 'subject relates to object' comes 'subject destroys object' (as it becomes external); and then may come 'object survives destruction by the subject'. But there may or may not be

survival. A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object-relating. The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hello object!' 'I destroyed you', 'I love you.' 'You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you.' 'While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy.' Here fantasy begins for the individual. The subject can now use the object that has survived. It is important to note that it is not only that the subject destroys the object because the object is placed outside the area of omnipotent control. It is equally significant to state this the other way round and to say that it is the destruction of the object that places the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties.

In other words, because of the survival of the object, the subject may now have started to live a life in the world of objects, and so the subject stands to gain immeasurably; but the price has to be paid in acceptance of the ongoing destruction in unconscious fantasy relative to object-relating. [...]

D.W. Winnicott, extract from 'The Use of an Object and Relating through Identification' (1968), *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971) 103–6 [footnotes not included].

Allan McCollum
Perfect Vehicles//1986

I have observed that a common vase becomes an art object upon the suspension of its utility; that is, it is filled with meaning and value only after it is emptied of its substance. Thus its privileged status must be maintained according to a tacit agreement amongst the social body (a body, perhaps, represented by the vase itself): that the object should not be used for what it was intended.

That more modern type of object – the 'Fine Art' object – seeks to transcend this clumsy and fragile contingency by purporting to be without utility in the first place; it claims to exist in a world by itself. To admire a work of Fine Art, therefore, one need not self-consciously restrain oneself from the exercise of productive labour; nor need one continually remind oneself of one's tacit agreements, one's social contracts. The appreciation of Fine Art, in fact, barely requires one to acknowledge the existence of other people at all.

In light of these truths, one might say that the Fine Art object is the precise

opposite of the vase-turned-art-object, in that it is used exactly for what it was intended. Such is the triumph of Fine Art.

With my newest work, I feel I have solved the tiresome problem of having to remember not to fill the vase. My *Perfect Vehicle*s carry no risks of any regressions to usefulness: they are cast in plaster, and are thoroughly, irredeemably solid, all the way through.

In extinguishing absolutely the possibility of any recourse to utility, I mean to accelerate the symbolic potential of the *Vehicle*s toward total meaning, total value. I aim to fashion the most perfect art object possible.

Is this not a perfectly scientific and modern approach? After all, a work of Fine Art needs only to function as a signal, a signal directing one to lapse into a particular state of mind, a state which one reserves especially for one's aesthetic adventures. To the degree that one is a connoisseur, one needs only the subtlest of cues blithely to slide into a heightened blend of one's receptivities, into that familiar and narcissistic state of exaggerated susceptibility and associativeness. It is thus to the artist's advantage that he learns to trigger one's elevation in the most economical way possible, and to usher one's sensual, emotional and symbolic worlds towards tentative affiliation in a purely physical object which exists quite apart from oneself, and well away from any real human relation.

Shouldn't I be able to isolate this signal, and reproduce it with the sparest of means? Then my objects could exist as pure potential, with no superfluous meaning or value other than that which they may accrue in relation to our aesthetic pleasures. Is it not my role as an artist to reproduce – and repeat at will – that psychic effervescence associated with the unrepeatable and perfectly unique timeless moment in which the rest of the world simply fades away?

As an artist, I will repeat this signal, like a flashing beacon. I will rehearse my position, over and over, as a gesture to you, in and of itself. I will construct for you a world of fabulous substitutes for what is already a world of substitutes. I will muster the world for your review, and I will make you the object of the world's address.

As for me, I will disappear into the parade of things.

My objects salute you.

Allan McCollum, 'Perfect Vehicles', in *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York; New Museum of Contemprary Art, 1986) 6.

Neil Cummings
Reading Things: The Alibi of Use//1993

[...] The use of things, in the broadest sense, is not a space necessarily made manifest by its own production. It is clearly impossible for everyone to intervene at the level of manufacturing. Instead, procedures have evolved for ways of articulating existing objects often imposed by a hostile economic order. I am thinking here of a whole spectrum of prosaic gestures, from assembling the furnishings for a room to choosing what clothes to wear, or more obviously charged actions: for example, black youths wearing deerstalker hats. In this sense of use, anyone can slip through prescribed material typologies. It is possible, for instance, to walk consecutively through a museum, gallery, shop or flea market, browse through catalogues, magazines or newspapers, watch some TV, buy a hat, receive a present and find something beautiful in the street on your way home. What I want to emphasize and encourage is not only the feeling of use or practice as a space untouched by advertising, but also as a process for empowering the person who is subject to industrial production. Effectively, I am inviting everyone to step into the author's/producer's place.[1]

Perhaps it is through this multitude of possibilities that individuals write themselves into the dominant material text, and alter its fabric. An equivalent could be the construction of sentences within an established verbal vocabulary and syntax. As Michel de Certeau proposed: 'consider the use of things as analogous to the speech act within the linguistic system.'

There manifestly exists a syntax of use. Certain arrangements of things conform to our sense of propriety. I might recognize a beautifully made gesture – like the way cut tennis balls protect towing brackets on cars – as well as acts of transgression – plasticine used to stem the flow of water from a leaking pipe joint. These actions may constitute enunciation, a parallel to the construction of a verbal sentence, transposed to the material text. These momentary expressions, like the joke, pun, the apposite phrase, elude transcription and only conventionally enter vocabulary as they congeal into cliché. Coat hangers used as car aerials might be a good example. It would be foolish to propose a formal grammar of things. This may form part of the Design Museum's project, similar to the conservative linguist who tries to impose the idea of proper usage. The best I can hope for is a momentary snapshot, in an effort to engender a heightened sensitivity to the articulation of the material lexicon.

By attending to the rich collisions of objects, the playful frictions, the linguistic diversity of culture is mirrored in the dialects, slang and vernacular of use.

The relative economy of use may allow our attention to wander over the particulars of a material syntax, the joins, fits, slips and ruptures of material culture. The discontinued bags for your old vacuum cleaner may turn up in a flea market, next to the carved soapstone African head, 3/8 pop rivets, and that old Beastie Boys tape you once owned and gave away. Perhaps the repair, customizing, DIY, improvisation, something recycled, all these activities would repay attention. This local inflection, generated by the friction of use, requires the most detailed reading and is, it seems to me, the most resistant to representation.

How can we recoup the abundant production of things that rests between self-conscious design, outside the morphology of tradition, or falls through the rationalism of market forces. What is left is the pink plastic suction hook that never works. This is not to retreat into the realm of kitsch, but to attend carefully to moments of industrial capital's failure.[2] Only here may lie exposed, in the suction hook's reinscription, the unauthorized inventiveness of use.

Use in its purest sense – not the gift – is the inverse of the commodity, it does not yield easily to metaphor.[3] A functional object has a metonymic relationship to meaning while in service; the effect and implementation of its function can be juxtaposed to produce a figure of meaning by contiguity. Outside of its immediate context, stripped of its function, in a museum, gallery or photograph, for instance, an object operates more conventionally, like a sign in written language.

It is conceivable to theorize away any absolute value of use and to erode distinctions based qualitatively upon function. Jean Baudrillard, amongst others, in his earlier writings helped sever the link between a Marxist use value and the establishment of a concrete, absolute need.

> Commodities induce the logic of utility and mobilize the psychology of need in order to perpetuate themselves.[4]

However, there remains a certainty, that an object we may call a parachute either works or it does not. The simple test is you jump, plummet to earth and die, or your descent is arrested and you survive. It is possible to play with the semiotic difference of those actions, to luxuriate in the endless possibilities of signification, but there is a bottom line, a referent, some resistance.

The basic purpose of slowing a fall brackets the form of a parachute: it could not be made of sponge, or be completely rigid, or too heavy, etc. In some sense the form and action are reciprocally defining. Sharp things move more quickly through the air than blunt things. What I hope to make evident is that the relationship between form and function, or sign and referent, in use fails to be arbitrary.[5]

I am straying close to an ideal of use most closely associated with 'high'

modernism.[6] Perfect use would render the object invisible, this may be the ideal of Supa Screws, or Fischer Nylon Anchors, or microprocessors. Only in excess of their sublime function do they begin to represent. Unfortunately no degree zero of utility exists, there is no direct drive between form and function, a gap always exists. There is no ideal parachute. Use opens itself to language; corrupted, language frames use, the two enter a reciprocally binding relationship.

I have no desire to reintroduce a mechanistic relationship between form and function, nor do I wish to confuse a pure (Marxist) value for use, with the sense of resistance that I have suggested. I cannot pretend the grounding of interpretation within use will terminate the 'semiotic free fall' of recent theory.[7] It's impossible to regulate for a useless corkscrew beautifully holding the door open. But I would suggest we can look to material objects that operate around the locus of function for some opposition. Use could serve as a brake, generate friction and slow the constant acceleration of a media-saturated interpretation. If the commodity is characterized by arbitrariness, use is not.

1 [footnote 5 in source] I am conscious of conflating two ghosts within this passage: Roland Barthes ('The Death of the Author', 1968) and Michel de Certeau (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1980).

2 [6] I lean heavily here on Susan Buck-Morss's evocation of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades* project in her book *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990). Part of Benjamin's project may have been to write a materialist history of nineteenth-century Paris, literally to seek out transient political formations made legible in material things.

3 [7] This statement approaches a Marxist theory of use, where use value is a privileged relation prior to any act of exchange. For Marxism use value is assumed to operate directly upon need, it is the very heart of the object, its moral foundation.

4 [8] Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Objects' (1968), in *Design after Modernism*, ed John Thackara (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989). Baudrillard reverses the received logic of a Marxist theory of value. Instead of a privileged sense of use operating directly upon need. Baudrillard proposes use as an effect of exchange, its alibi.

5 [9] Things in use rarely have an arbitrary relation to their function. Language, in contrast – following an analysis derived from Saussure – does; a written or visual sign has an ambivalent relation to its referent. There are no reciprocally binding relationships; Saussure sites the now famous example of the chess set, where a mislaid piece could be replaced by any agreed token, a button for instance. In Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye (New York: McGrawHill, 1959).

6 [10] I should outline my understanding of this caricatured position from Martin Heidegger: 'The Thing' (1950), in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Heidegger evolves a model of ideal utility, to contrast with the work of art from an earlier essay, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1935–60). Taking an example of a jug, Heidegger proposes that in action the jug would be invisible in its own perfect efficiency: 'the Thing is.' The moment the jug

enters consciousness, through reflection or in representation, it becomes 'an allegory of use'. A 'Thing' can never be itself, fully present, and simultaneously a symbol. The moment it migrates as a symbol, it expresses something that does not belong to it, and ceases to be in its essential state.

Neil Cummings, extract from *Reading Things* (London: Chance Books, 1993) 19–24.

Art in Ruins
Sans Frontières: Simulation and Contamination//1994

[...] As we wander from fragment to fragment through the Cities of the Dead of our museum culture, a designer world of ruined intentions, we recognize that we 'are living through the disintegration of a whole social system which threatens to survive its own death by entombing us for decades in its own lifeless structures. The weight of reality is dragging us towards a living-dead capitalism where the means of social production and social control can no longer be distinguished, where a normalizing technocracy continues to glorify an already extinct order in the name of values which have long lost all meaning'.[1]

In our era of postmodernisation, post-industrialization is validated by the critical interaction of the concepts of the Global and the Local (that is, the Ultramodern – the world of telecommunications, which like most advances made in communications is the result of military research and development; and the Ruin – 'second-order' culture, rooted but more or less contaminated by modernization). An era where, as Paul Virilio says (in 'The Overexposed City'), 'the metropolis is no longer anything but a ghostly landscape, the fossil of past societies for which technology was still closely associated with the visible transformation of substance, a visibility from which science has gradually turned us away.'[2]

In our wonderful culture everyday life has become nothing more than a form of window shopping and as we wander (like Baudelaire's *flâneur*) as detached and aristocratic 'free individuals' from object to object (fragment to fragment) through the Cities of the Dead of our great museum of ruined intentions searching for signs of life, we are at the same time afraid that our sentimental attachments may turn into Fatal Attractions (*liaisons dangereuses*).

When attitudes become sales we live a life of ruins in the new realism of our postmodern social condition where we buy time as tourists in our cultural supermarket, awaiting the 'catastrophe' which will liberate us from the twilight zone of corporate bodies and designer subjectivities.[3] [...]

1 [footnote 17 in source] Art in Ruins, 'Contamination' (1998); unpublished essay, quoting from André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class* (1980) (London: Pluto Press, 1982).

2 [18] Art in Ruins, 'One (Art) World (Market)', *Alba*, no. 12 (Summer 1989).

3 [19] Art in Ruins generic text used in differing versions since 1984. This version from rucksack produced for 'D & S Austellung', Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1989.

Art in Ruins, extract from 'Sans Frontières: Simulation and Contamination', *Camera Austria*, no. 47–48 (1994).

Claude Closky
From 1 to 1000 Euros//2002

... Profiteroles crème vanille nappage chocolat, 3 euros. Masque en carton, 4 euros. Canard au poivre vert et gratin de pommes de terre, 5 euros. Super décapant 0,25 litre, 6 euros. Cahier de vacances du CE1 au CE2, 7 euros. Diffuseur portable antimoustiques, 8 euros. Foie gras de canard du Sud-Ouest, le bloc de 200 grammes, 9 euros. Valisette de transport pour chat, 10 euros. 12 préservatifs, 11 euros. Casquette en plastique, 12 euros. Culotte en coton, 13 euros. Bouteille de 70 centilitres de vodka, 14 euros. Chausettes argentées, 15 euros. Lait 1er âge, la boite de 1 kilo, 16 euros. Sac en daim, 17 euros. Boîte de 30 capsules de ginseng, 18 euros. Coffret de 8 boules de pétanque, 19 euros. Bonhomme en peluche, 20 euros. Rouleau de papier peint vinyle expansé, 21 euros. Sac en velours, 22 euros. Roman de Mary Higgins Clark, 23 euros ...

Claude Closky, extract from *De 1 à 1000 euros* [from 1 to 1,000 euros] (October 2002) (Paris: Jalouse, off-print, 48 pages); reproduced in *Claude Closky: 8002–9891* (MAC/VAL [Musée d'art contemporain du Val de Marne], 2008) 12.

Michael Landy
A Production Line of Destruction: In Conversation with Julian Stallabrass//2001

Michael Landy The basic idea [of *Break Down*][1] is to destroy every possession I own in a two-week period. The work is based on material reclamation facilities, in which materials that have value are reclaimed from the waste chain. Conveyor belts carry the materials and people sort them. Other facilities use different filtering systems, such as X-rays to sort waste automatically.

Break Down is a bit like a Scalextric version of a material reclamation facility, with all my possessions circulating on a roller conveyor until they are taken apart. I'm building an audit of my life. Objects that have been classified into different categories – for instance, leisure, clothing, reading – are numbered, weighed and detailed on an inventory. As the disassembly and destruction process begins, further details of each object will be logged onto a PC. Break Down draws on reclamation techniques (identifying, sorting and separating) but I'm not reclaiming or recycling anything.

Stallabrass What will go on the conveyor belt?

Landy During the fourteen days of the event, there will be objects displayed on the conveyor system which are readily identifiable but also things that have been broken down into parts or pieces, as well as trays with granulated material. The conveyor is like a plinth in a way: it, er, conveys what's going on.

Stallabrass So it's not functional, like one on a production line?

Landy Not exactly but I like the idea that the production process is being reversed here as consumer items are stripped back to their component parts. I see it as an examination of consumerism.

It's not unlike surgery, finding out what goes on inside. Like many children, I liked to dismantle things. I remember my uncle used to buy me really expensive toys, though I had no idea that they were expensive, and I used to take them apart, quite often without being able to put them back together again. I was inquisitive about the mechanism, being able to see what was inside.

My uncle was in the motor trade, and my family always thought I was going to become a mechanic or something like that. It wasn't on really: I'm good at taking things apart but not good at constructing them.

Stallabrass Why are you looking for a store in which to present this work?

Landy I'm part of that generation that was entrepreneurial and didn't look to the established art institutions for opportunities. This is something I continue to do: last year I had a show in my studio in Fashion Street, just opened the doors and people came along. Being able to do things like that for yourself, without having a commercial gallery acting as an arbiter between you and the public, is something I find quite liberating in itself. [...]

1 *Break Down* took place at the former C&A Store, Oxford Street, London, in February 2001.

Michael Landy and Julian Stallabrass, extract from discussion, 'A Production Line of Destruction', in *Michael Landy: Break Down* (London: Artangel, 2001) 107–8.

Piet Vanrobaeys
Trading Art: The Museum Shop//2001

In Belgium there are quite a few people who are reticent about or even dismissive of the idea. Even though every museum has a museum shop, they're opposed to it anyway. A museum is about art and not about commerce. The merchandising that takes place in the museums of New York, for instance, is a lesson in how not to proceed, even though it does produce income. It might be all right for other fields, but art is still sacrosanct. Art has a message, a vocation, and if we start transacting business there it will lose its power of expression. That's what the historical avant-gardes of Europe have taught us, isn't it? They tried to couple art with the ideals of freedom and political action, or in any case with ethics and emancipation. An artist has clean hands and works for the noble goal, the collectors do the rest. They express their appreciation for the proposed ideals by colonizing them, acquiring them.

Ideas like these seem exotically remote when you walk through the Museum Shop at the Museum of Contemporary African Art in Ghent. It's a floating shop with small works of art for sale. The artists are mostly young Europeans, invited by Meschac Gaba to participate as partners in a cooperative. All the works are moderately priced and produced in limited editions. They're displayed on the deck of a barge that once sailed as a ferry on the mythical river Rhine and now, after a great deal of drifting in the harbour of Ghent, has come here to rest. The

atmosphere in the bazaar is pleasant and unhurried. The European trinkets stimulate curiosity, and a few collectors are seen walking around. Because there amongst the works by former students of the Rijksakademie are a few highly promising items, and for a good price there may be discoveries to be made.

In the Europe of old, a great deal of thought has been given to what constitutes the attraction of a work of art. What is it that bestows on the work its ineluctability, its revealing allure? Is it the mystique of the energy-charged materials, the tangible proximity of something that offers such solace, the luminescent source of the good feeling that bridges the chasm of longing and loss? Attempts to answer these questions, which have been flitting all over Europe, have already given rise to many exhibition projects. But now that all points of view have been invaded by a triumphant post-capitalism, a decisive answer has come to this ultimate ideological question: money. The spirit of the work of art and the boundless fascination it incites have their roots in the connection of imaginary value with real value: money.

People in younger continents such as Africa have known this for a long time. Within the context of the international cooperative project Trafique in Ghent, producers of images who have their roots in the southern hemisphere have in turn invited their European colleagues to participate, creating a climate of benevolence and mutual respect. In this way they offered their own suggestions for confronting current artistic problems. The Museum Shop of the nomadic Museum of Contemporary African Art in Ghent on the boat Basilea (christened in around 1920 in honour of a well-known Swiss industrial and financial centre) was the final episode in the Trafique project. On his boat, Meschac added to the generous gesture of the African masters. As a friend and a good family man, he gave a chance to young artists from the North who still have their entire careers ahead of them. He focused attention on them and literally put their work, amongst his own, on the market. For that we continue to be grateful.

Piet Vanrobaeys, 'Trading Art,: The Museum Shop', in *Meschac Gaba* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2001) 93–5.

WHY DO WE HOLD ON TO SANDALS THAT WE'VE HAD SINCE WE WERE FOURTEEN?
WHY DO WE KEEP THESE SANDALS IF THEY DON'T SPEAK TO US ANY LONGER?
NO THEY DO SPEAK
OBJECTS SPEAK BUT SPEAK THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

Issa Samb, 'How to Make Objects Talk', In Conversation with Antje Majewski, 2010

FOUND OBJECTS, LOST OBJECTS, NON-OBJECTS

Bruno Munari
Theoretical Reconstructions of Imaginary Objects// 1966

[...] Every now and then archaeologists digging in the Sahara, or in some cave that was once on the sea shore, find a fragment of animal remains. By close examination they discover that it is a bit of the tooth of a creature that lived in the Upper Palaeolithic age, some hitherto unknown species of Man.

This fragment passes into the hands of other experts, who try to reconstruct the whole animal, man or object (as the case may be) on the basis of structural measurements and analysis of the material and so on.

We see a lot of these reconstructions in natural history museums, especially of course in the departments dealing with life on our planet in remote eras of which we know little or nothing. In other departments we see vases reconstructed from tiny scraps of pottery found in some tomb, and if there is a design on these an effort is made to reconstruct this as well as the pot itself.

As everyone well knows, the genuine part is left just as it was found while the reconstructed parts are made of quite different materials, partly to make the reconstruction work stand out.

Let us carry this idea over into the field of art. Let us set our imaginations to the task of reconstructing something which we assume to be unknown and build up a fantastic and unexpected thing according to the structural and material data provided by the few fragments we have to go on.

Let us in fact make a theoretical reconstruction of an imaginary object, basing our work on fragments of unknown function and uncertain origin.

Whatever emerges from this, we will not know exactly what it is, or what world it belongs to. Maybe it will belong solely to the world of aesthetics and imagination. This is how we do it.

We take a few scraps of black paper, or coloured paper, or paper from a packet, wrapping paper, a sheet of music, a rag, or anything else that comes to hand. We tear the first of these into two or three pieces and drop the pieces onto a sheet of drawing paper. Then we go on to the next kind of paper. The objects (they are nothing less than the fragments we have discovered) will fall on to the paper any old how. We then look at them for quite some time, and maybe we will want to move something, but we must not do this according to any rule of logic, but simply (as Hans Arp said) according to 'the rule of the movement'. We must 'feel' something that makes our hand move. Having made any required changes of this kind we go on to join up the various fragments and their internal structures. If a fragment is torn it has a different outline from one that is cut, so that torn

fragments will be joined by ragged lines and cut fragments by straight ones. [...]

Sheet music is marked with the lines of the stave and the notes, and we assume that these will behave rather like the threads of a torn piece of cloth, only they will be rigid. If a fragment is stained or marked in any way, the stains will be reproduced also in the reconstructed part.

And thus, slowly and without thinking of Raphael, we shall have reconstructed something that never existed, something no one has ever seen, something that even we had no inkling of, something we will at once bung into the wastepaper basket because it is a mess.

If at first you don't succeed ...

Bruno Munari, extract from *Design as Art* [*Arte come mestiere*, 1966] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 203–7.

Lynne Cooke
Making Good//1984

'The best sculpture in the world', Richard Wentworth commented in a recent lecture as a slide of one version of Picasso's *Glass of Absinthe* flashed onto the screen. Ripped from its context, reported baldly like this, the remark can take on associations so far from its original and intended reference as to become completely misleading, falsifying the original sense. It sounds assertive, declamatory, even dogmatic restated bluntly in this fashion: the actuality was very different. Delivered almost as an aside, with a deceptive lightness and casualness, it carried overtones at once self-mocking and teasing. This is unquestionably a bold claim, one which could stimulate prolonged discussion; the finesse with which it was delivered, however, meant that if it provoked it did so without becoming either confrontational or aggressive. Indeed it was quickly swallowed up in the ensuing rapid flow of the lecture, only to resurface sometime later, after which it continued to haunt the mind, requiring attention without impertinently insisting upon it.

Both the content of the statement and the manner of delivery throw telling light on Wentworth's recent work. For at its best his sculpture manages to reveal and evoke meaning without bludgeoning or preaching, without posturing or rhetoric. Indeed, at moments he almost courts the opposite danger, that of seeming inconsequential, slight or fey. Yet, as with the remark quoted above, this

unassuming lightness integral to his sculptural practice is duplicitous. Often very little has been done to the original objects, yet the sureness of aim, the deftness and subtlety in touch have been so dexterously calculated that the results are unexpectedly eloquent. This method of approach, including the manner of working, makes Wentworth sound like a conjurer, one who transfers by sleight of hand the egg from his fingers to the interior of his hat without discernible movement. In fact, little magic is involved and no sense of trickery.

In Wentworth's work the process of discovery and realization is more akin to that of discerning the animals concealed within the drawing of the landscape in the children's game. They are there all the time; it only requires knowing how to look in order to spot them. Of course the subject of Wentworth's enquiry is not play or puzzles but certain kinds of anomaly found in everyday experience. These anomalies are the outcome of a specific set of circumstances, or chance or coincidence. He eschews the overtly bizarre, the extraordinary and the utterly untoward, for the occurrences which interest him are generally overlooked, simply not noticed in the normal course of events. The delicacy, impromptu resourcefulness and imaginativeness intrinsic to such situations – which Wentworth has christened 'Making Do and Getting By' – are celebrated in a series of almost 3,000 photographs he has taken sporadically over the past fifteen years. The body of this work records encounters which may be passive but are nevertheless articulate. Although Wentworth likens his activity to that of a detective, perhaps his position is closer to that of the writer of crime fiction than to that of the principal protagonist, for he widens our gaze, alerts us, informs us, teases us and even at times resorts mischievously to misleading us in order to allow us to arrive at the necessary insight, the flash of understanding.

These photographs were not made with the aim of producing a body of photographic work per se. His relationship with the camera is pragmatic and utilitarian. Initially conceived as 'personal reminders ... with little forethought as to an overall theme and its possible syntax', these 'resident specks in the eye' reveal, as Wentworth himself gradually came to realize, as much about his own obsessions as about human ingenuity.[1] 'Signs of an enduring individual resourcefulness', en masse they not only highlight aspects of human behaviour too easily dismissed as negligible or beneath contempt but they alert us to the world at large:

> We become accustomed to natural partners – the door and its doormat. When their positions are disrupted something fundamental happens. The displaced doormat has a new identity, a shift of an inch or two changes it from passive to active. Such adjustments invigorate tired and overlooked relationships, as the contradiction, humour and absurdity of the new alliance presents itself. [2]

In this relationship the camera is but the means, the eye and the mind are the real determinants. No physical interference or manipulation takes place either in the situation as encountered or in the processing of the shot. Wentworth is the 'uninvited agent', the components or subjects of his observation 'unwitting contributors'. The resulting works are linked not by appearance, type or theme; it is a question of recognizing the spirit. [...]

1 In 1970 Wentworth began taking the photographs that have become known as 'Making Do and Getting By', but 'consistency of subject matter was not recognized until about 1975, the import of content not well understood much before 1977–78'.

2 Richard Wentworth, 'Making Do and Getting By', *Artscribe* (September 1978); all quotations in this paragraph come from this article.

Lynne Cooke, extract from 'Making Good', *Richard Wentworth* (London: Lisson Gallery 1984) 5–7.

Issa Samb and Antje Majewski
How to Make Objects Talk//2010

Issa Samb Create it. The way a snake casts its skin. You don't have to undo yourself, but you have to create your past. You have to accept it as it is. And when you are an artist, you have to work the process of your transformation, because it is through this transformation that the future is born. It is this metapsychosis, this metamorphosis or this meta ... or rather, this transmutation. Everyone needs to mutate, especially those who create, and they have to accept that. This takes place from the start through socialized cultural objects. A direction is taken, a difficult, complex one for sure, but it is perhaps one of the best directions to take because it allows for an understanding of the Other. That sets us free, it gives us an attitude to the world that says, 'Ah, we are not alone in the world.' [...]

I, who thought I was my mother's only daughter, I realize that my father is in fact the mother of my father, and so on. And objects, they allow for a lot of things ... but respect is necessary, and that is the most difficult thing to achieve from a Western perspective. It is very, very difficult to consider the object in and of itself, to grant it another energy charge over and above a superficial one, or the one that a machine may have given it. Because we know it to be fortuitous that we are unwilling to grant that stone this energy, this word that force without seeing a god, a unique creator in front of us. And even with the death of the god, mechanical or

industrial civilizations don't want to go that far. Because it would mean facing up to a unique creator. And this brings us back to polysemy. We would like to give objects a new meaning, several meanings. We would want there to be several meanings. But there is still the refusal to accept that beyond the meaning we give or that people give to socialized cultural objects, there is the meaning that objects give to themselves, which we haven't created. But we have to have the courage to take that step. To recognize that beyond the fact of being able to charge the object, to charge it ourselves, the object in and of itself possesses a force, a life that is meaningful and does so independently of our volition, of our needs, of our wishes and our aesthetic concerns to make objects go in those directions that we indicate to them. That is why if we leave them in their place, they remain in their place. But since we know this, we now have to help them to change place. If we don't help that object there to change place, it won't do it by itself. And even the most powerful wind that exists won't be able to lift it. And the most destructive fire that exists won't burn it because, even if it burns to a cinder … this will just take us back to the arguments between the creationists and the materialists.

But these are rearguard arguments. Those contemporary artists who think they know their past and who know they are too late with regard to this past, and later still with regard to their future – because they're waiting for a future that they themselves have to create – find themselves in a situation where they have refused until now to treat an object for what it is in the simplest way, through the corporeal, by incorporation, by desperation, by getting hold of matter and by handling it. If we understand objects merely through a promotional sales pitch, we hear a lot of words. But that's the salesman speaking, even if he is doing it in the name of science. Okay, so he improvises a little, makes up messages and codes for the object beyond the meanings given to the object by the initial producer. The more the object passes from hand to hand, the less it will be charged and the more it will discharge, like a briefcase, an object which carries the trace of all the hands that have held it, all the people, all their looks, and all the locations. Let's assume that you are going to place your objects here. They'll acquire meaning from here, they will share this meaning with the things that are here, and this goes right into the heart of the object. Inevitably. And wherever you will place them – in your studio, in an apartment, on the street, or mislaid somewhere in a station – this object will carry meaning with it, the history of this country, the history of the men of this country, the women of this country, the history of the birds that will migrate soon and perhaps take the same trajectory they took either before or after the object arrived. That's normal. Yes.

Majewski And when you move the object, you said it brings all this history with it, didn't you?

Samb Yes.

Majewski And on the other hand, doesn't it also – how should I say – lose something? It seems to me that if I moved the object several times from China to my apartment, from my apartment to the studio, and I even moved it on to the street ...

Samb Yes ...

Majewski ... I placed them on the street in front of my house. I hid them in corners there ... and moving them again from Germany over here ... I spoke to a friend and said that it's a bit like a washing machine, like a washing machine that purifies them of meaning.

Samb Purifies?

Majewski This object, and detaches it more and more from the meaning it once had.

Samb Initially.

Majewski Yes. That helps me to see whether the object is finally emptying itself of meaning. If it is getting me closer – how can I say – to a mute meaning that is in the object itself as you said earlier, and this mute meaning is definitely not a word in our language.

Samb The fact that the object is mute – who says so? You do. You're the one who decided that the object didn't speak, didn't articulate and said nothing. But if all this is true, then why do we need to carry objects with us in our lives? Why do we hold on to sandals that we've had since we were fourteen? Why do we keep these sandals of our teens if they don't speak to us any longer? And never have spoken anyway? No, they do speak. Objects speak. But speak their own language.

Majewski Yes.

Samb Objects speak their own language. The wind speaks. It speaks its own language. Birds speak. They speak their own language. There you are. Personally, I think that with an object that was born in China and that makes a trip from China to Europe, from Europe to Africa and from Africa to Europe, you can't say that this object is meaningless. Even if you wanted to deprive it of meaning and

make nonsense of it. Even if you felt like doing that, you couldn't. Or if you did, it would be an arbitrary, scientifically inadmissible decision. And if you did it simply for an intellectual peer group or for some kind of aesthetic snobbism then you would be doing something very fascistic and dangerous.

Majewski Why?

Samb Because through the object you would be denying the culture of the Other. That is terrible. You would be denying all its charge. Because no matter how small an object is, even if it is an object that breaks quickly – because which of the mass-produced goods by the Chinese, Japanese or European markets wouldn't break quickly? – it still brings with it the whole of China and beyond China, all of humanity. So the problem is not that the object breaks quickly, but that the object that breaks quickly, that has come to us from China – what moment in China's history does it bring with it? It brings that moment in which China heads off into a new direction down the capitalist road of development in the face of globalization, a globalization which doesn't permit the polite rivalry of deferential bows, the story of nice people. It is a ferocious rivalry. An object has to be ready to get onto the market quickly. You have to go in there fast to sell it. It has to break fast, so you sell it quickly in order to make money. That object there carries meaning. It teaches us about ideological situations not just in China, but in the globalized world system. Globalization as the dominant ideology of the world today.

Majewski So, I'd forgotten that when I said I had no African object, I had forgotten one. But at the same time as being African, it is also a natural object; that's why I didn't really think about it, but I'll show it to you.

Samb If you wish.

Majewski So that's it. (*I unpack the shell and show it to him. Abdou Ba picks up the video camera and points it at me.*)

Samb Put it on the table and bring into relation to the objects you brought from China.

Majewski Okay. (*I put the meteorite on the table.*)

Samb Relate them to one another. Have you related them to one another?

Majewski Yes, but there is …

Samb But there's what?

Majewski There's another Chinese object. (*I put the Buddha hand on the table.*)

Samb Very well. Relate them to one another. Now. The object to the object that comes from Africa, open it and put it to your right ear. The object you got from Africa. Open it.

Majewski Yes.

Samb Put it to your left ear. Listen to it.

Majewski Yes, I hear the sea. I had a shell like that when 1 was a child.

Samb Speak, speak, speak, speak, speak.

Majewski My father had got it, and I always liked that so much, to listen to the sea.

Samb Speak, speak, take your time, listen to it and speak aloud. Speak, we're listening.

Majewski Yes. but that, that's the sea, and I always loved the sea.

Samb Speak, speak.

Majewski It talks to me very easily.

Samb Speak, speak, say what it tells you, tell, tell ...

Majewski It says comforting things to me.

Samb Tell, tell. Tell us these things.

Majewski Comforting and at the same time a little detached, remote.

Issa Samb and Antje Majewski, extract from conversation (2010), in Antje Majewski, *The World of Gimel: How to Make Objects Talk* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2011) 244-9.

Yacouba Konaté
The Art of the Extreme Petrol Can//2011

[…] Objects are not, as we like to imagine, inert realities. Their presence can take over all the energies and attention of which man is capable. The Botswanan film of the South African director Jamie Uys [*The Gods Must be Crazy*, 1980] illustrates this idea. The opening sequence shows a pilot flying over an area [of the Kalahari desert], as he carelessly throws a Coca-Cola bottle overboard. Near a village below, a man discovers this object. What a beautiful gift from the gods! Its transparency fascinates him. And then, when he blows across its mouth, it whistles. The man takes the object back to the village, where it passes from one hand to another, being used as a pestle, a milling-wheel, a flute. Everyone wants a turn with it and often at one and the same time, to the point where the bottle becomes an object of contention and discord. The peaceful life of the once united village becomes disrupted by this object.

The black jerry-can didn't fall from the heavens. But is it an object of discord? On the contrary, it is one of the utensils responsible for the reinvention of Africa by Africans themselves. The petrol can remains intrinsically linked to the underground smuggling of adulterated fuel that appears everywhere on the streets of Benin's villages as nowhere else in the region. The development of this black-market economy between Nigeria, the African Petroleum giant to the east, and her western neighbour Benin has opened up an entire field of commerce in the collection, transportation, buying and selling of this fuel. It is precisely in the area of this general history of both the object and the region that Romuald Hazoumè carves and fashions these masks furrowed and stained by the sweat of peoples' lives.

Romuald's photos bear witness to these lived experiences and lead towards unheard-of conclusions. One ten-litre canister might hold 30 litres if you know how to push it ever so gently towards the extreme limits of its existence. A good canister is one that offers the greatest scope for flexibility; one supporting the metamorphosis of one into two and of two into three. This feat of engineering can be defined as the intensive production of quantity. The can must offer its maximum in quantity while still ensuring the minimum amount of security required for life. The engineers of these extreme canisters engage in the unending pursuit of a point of equilibrium: a limiting point at which the material will have given all it has to offer in terms of extension while still maintaining sufficient overall thickness to guarantee an acceptable level of security. Under acute risk of bursting apart, this extreme container adds the inflammable character of its contents to the excessive fragility of its containment. Carried away in turn by this

logic of excess, each motorcyclist overloads his mount with a giant bouquet of canisters filled to bursting before setting off at full throttle. 'It's a rolling time-bomb', adds Hazoumè. In this passage beyond ordinary limits, these resourceful engineers reveal the canisters' hidden potential for plasticity. Faced with the unpredictable circumstances of chance, the cans inflate, deflate and become wrinkled in complicated series of folds. It hurts itself, breaks, cries or just drops down stone dead. Hence Romuald Hazoumè's telling description: 'Each can is covered in the traces of a personal history!' The artist's photos frame this intimate history of men surrounded by a corona of countless cans. They give an index of just how much the world of men has been invaded by this ubiquitous object. To show this, Romuald presents just a body, some feet, some arms, the merest bits of the ends of bodies engaged with the object that nourishes even as it subjugates them.

The history of the intimate relationship between the trader and the canister itself finds its extension in the encounter between the artist and the black-marketer. In fact Hazoumè never just picks up the first canister he finds. Nor does he work exclusively with broken and burst canisters that are finished. When he encounters a can that says something to him, that speaks to him by its shape, its pedigree, its patina or inscriptions, he negotiates its retirement from the field. He retires it from active duty, withdraws it from the trafficking world and reinvests it with an aesthetic mission. Negotiations to acquire a can on active service can take days or weeks, even months ...

These cans become living embodiments of Romuald Hazoumè's artistic message exposing the hidden truth of the situation: 'I wanted to show that our societies have become receptacles for rubbish of which the black drums are simply the non-biodegradable symbol.' In fact the petrol canister can be taken as paradigmatic of a general situation of emergency. Indeed the succession of economic and social crises that African countries have suffered since the beginning of the 1980s have regularly eroded the buying power of Africans, even including the elites among them. Trade networks in second-hand goods, including cars, electronics and clothes, flood the towns and villages. The aestheticization of recycled cans bears witness to what's happening to the refuse that flows into Africa as a major outlet. To portray this environment why should we resort to make-believe or use make-up to disguise it? Romuald Hazoumè opens himself to the dull crudity of the system to which he links his canisters: flat tyres, the battered plates, broken kettles, indestructible mats, nylon locks of hair, flip-flops, not to mention the packets of water and the lugubrious black bags that have invaded even the meanest of roadside shops. [...]

Yacouba Konaté, extract from 'The Art of the Extreme Petrol Can', in *Romuald Hazoumè* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2011) 114–16.

Nancy Spector
Mapping the Universe//2012

[...] Recently renovated as a recreation complex, [Pier 40, New York City] boasts some five acres of playing fields covered with artificial grass. This perfectly uniform turf is deceptive; beneath its top layer of synthetic blades lies a hidden universe of refuse, countless tiny objects in whole or fragmented form left behind by so many athletes and their spectators. Gabriel Orozco gathered a selection of these discarded items – hair clips, coins, sneaker logos, bits of soccer balls, zipper pulls, bent paperclips, tangles of thread, candy wrappers, taxi receipts, pieces of glass, bottle tops, wads of chewing gum, and cigarette butts, to name only some of the myriad articles he discovered. The collection of some 1,200 items, which range from the intimate to the abject, looks like loot from a scavenger hunt performed on the most minute of scales. These incidental remains suggest family outings, soccer matches, baseball games, sunbathing stints and other activities made possible by the unlikely collision of open green space and the relentless urban grid. This narrative dimension augments the intricate design formed by the objects when arrayed on a large platform like specimens from a lost civilization. The composition is reminiscent of Orozco's self-reflexive 'working tables' (1991–), which display a combination of miniature models of existing works, organic elements, ceramics and the vestiges of projects deemed to be 'failures', among other seemingly random elements. In *Astroturf Constellation* (2012), the objects are organized into loose groupings, some specific like 'chewing gum', others more generic like 'metals'. Collectively, the objects coalesce to form an overall pattern that resembles cuneiform; one can imagine that these tiny, twisted forms could actually spell out some long-lost tale of their past. At the same time, they suggest a diagram of the night sky, points on a map of a distant galaxy. The conflation of archeology and astronomy here underscores Orozco's penchant for thinking of nature and culture in the same breath, while oscillating freely between the outermost registers of scale.[1]

The sculptural component of *Astroturf Constellation* is augmented by twelve framed photographic grids that amplify Orozco's lyrical intermingling of the organic and the industrial. Each of these grids comprises ninety-nine 4 x 6 inch images of the objects retrieved from Pier 40. Like the sculpture, the photographs are sorted into categories, in what appears to be a rationalizing effort on the part of the artist to rend order from the chaos of accumulated trash. This taxonomic impulse reflects the systematizing principles of the natural sciences, which impose logic and structure on an otherwise eccentrically heterogeneous world.

Here it borders on the absurd, with the construction of a classification system for miniature particles of garbage that have no use or exchange value other than through their absorption into this artwork. Without Orozco's intervention, these bits and pieces would only have further decomposed while hidden away in the artificial grass of the urban pitch. Redeemed from total obscurity, this junk is transfigured onto a philosophical realm and given physical prominence within the organizing structure of the project. Orozco photographed each object with clinical exactitude, blowing up its image so that every detail comes into focus. Dramatically disproportionate in size, some of these items border on the grotesque; others appear coolly classical.

The shift in scale from minuscule thing to enlarged reproduction marks an inversion of Orozco's usual photographic practice, in which entire landscapes or smaller views of specific, circumscribed settings are condensed to fit within 16 x 20 inch borders, In his multidimensional work, photography has always coexisted with sculpture in a free-flowing exchange of gesture and form. As early as 1987, he deployed the camera to record incidental sculptures he created in the street from chanced-upon objects. This process soon expanded to include interventions, ever-so-slight transpositions of things in nature and the city that he captured on film. His photographs are thus receptacles for the subtle and ephemeral shifts in reality that he generates or, in some not easily distinguishable cases, simply encounters in the world.[2] The degree of his manipulation is not always detectable, nor does it matter, really. His presence as either instigator or witness is quietly implied. The predetermined and formulaic quality of the Astroturf Constellation photographs is, therefore, unusual if not unprecedented in Orozco's oeuvre. Singular objects have never before been shown out of context and never magnified to such an exaggerated degree. Visually riveting through their precision and repetition, these images accentuate the diminutive size of the found objects and create a dynamic tension between sculpture and picture that permeates the installation.

1 [footnote 2 in source] See Briony Fer, 'Sculpture's Orbit', *Artforum*, vol. 45, no. 3 (November 2006) 264, for an eloquent explication of this primary dialectic in Orozco's art. [...]

2 [3] Orozco has been quoted as making an analogy between photography and a box: 'You put things in a box when you want to keep them, to think about them. Photography is more than a window for me. Photography is more like a space that tries to capture situations.' Interview with the artist (2003) cited in Mia Fineman, 'The Cypress in the Orchard', in *Gabriel Orozco: Photographs* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden/Gottingen: Steidl, 2004)16.

Nancy Spector, extract from 'Mapping the Universe', in *Gabriel Orozco: Asterisms* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2012) 62–4.

Joëlle Tuerlinckx
Lexicon//2012

O.T. (Objet trouvé) (*Found object*). Every found object, including the book on Marcel Duchamp, found in a bookstore in Berlin, which was used to dry flowers and leaves, among them the originals of *Plates* (letter, butcher's paper, kitchen towel), among which are all the *Présents* (the Willem, the red, the 'Generali Foundation' green ...).

Objet (see also *Volume d'air*, *Objet objet*). By object, I understand a visible and palpable manifestation of my thought. At bottom, these are tools that help me see, and which I end up naming and grouping under the generic term *Object*.

Examples: bars, sticks, volumes, balls, pellets ... (collection *Livret # inventaire des noms pour Matières/Matériaux*, 1988–2002)

Among these, the *Volumes d'air* return regularly, under the name *Volume* or *Objet d'air*.

Objet adaptée (*Adapted object*). Adapted to the circumstances of an *Étant donnée*. See also *Rehaussé*.

Objet d'ombre (*Shadow object*). Marked by a shade on the floor, drawn or transferred, the *Objet d'ombre* (*absent*) can sometimes take shape in the vestiges on the floor after the removal from the room of an inner wall (*Cantos*, Casino Luxemburg, 2005).

Objet dévié (*Deviated object*). See *Rescued object*.

Objet 'objet' (*Object 'object'*).These are geometric volumes, 'the very ideas' of objects, materialized using no other means than their skeletons. They are made of 'borrowed' materials on the site itself of the exhibition: display glass, the PVC of plumbing pipes, the metal of laundry lines, garden bamboo ...

All in thin sections of I, 2 or maximum 5 mm. (Some among these bear a name, or an indication like 'garden object', 'toilet object', 'Belgian object' ...).

They can also be seen as boxes meant to transport air, vision and language. The *Objets 'objets'* – also called *Volumes d'air*, *Objets volumes d'air*, *Volumes-couleurs* – that appear in documentary films are barely visible on the video image.

They allow one, above all, to see the space around them, like the set of construction scenes whose actors are the people building the volumes. They render

visible the gestures of labour, the movement of bodies during the transport.

Objet objets (*Object objects*). An object placed on a fabric-base, on a plank, a crossed-out base or level with the floor, marked out, in cases, with crayon lines, or marker, or paint. In most cases, an *Objet objet* finds itself designated, in a new situation, as an *Objet 'objet'*, and vice-versa. In effect, an object, qualified with a label or a *Barre de destinée* as 'red', 'large', 'Belgian', etc., loses – once it has been moved or changed context, as a result of this new context – its quality relative to the origin. That's what the hatching, of the surface it occupies on the floor or of the chosen *Base*, translates.

Objet perdu *ou* **Objet trouvée** (*Lost object or Found object*). Since 1991, an object can be lost or found depending on how one envisages it. A glove, for example, one of the two gloves in a pair.

A glove, stitched using a reflective plastic material, thrown on the floor, on a window sill, set out somewhere in the exhibition.

As for knowing how many species of it exist, the number will never be made explicit, it will not be the object of a public report of any sort.

Given its reflective properties, the object shines in the sun, it is seen, picked up. That's how it (the glove) circulates, how it has got lost and found since 1991.

Objets permanents (*Permanent objects*). Copies (in plaster, resin) from a unique original (the five organs shown at the Museé des Beaux-Arts in Paris, from a single cast orange).

Objets X ans d'âge (*Les 10 ans d'âge, les 20 ans d'âge, les une semaine, un jour, une année*) (*X-year-old object: 10 year-old, 20 year-old, one week old, one day old, one year old*). Objects marked by time, their ageing accelerated by natural, artificial or mixed procedures. [...]

Joëlle Tuerlinckx, extract from 'Lexicon', in *Aux Dimensions de: Quelque Chose* (Brussels: Wiels, 2012) 18–19.

Ferreira Gullar
Theory of the Non-Object//1959

The expression 'non-object' does not intend to describe a negative object nor any other thing that may be opposite to material objects. The non-object is not an anti-object but a special object through which a synthesis of sensorial and mental experiences is intended to take place. It is a transparent body in terms of phenomenological knowledge: while being entirely perceptible it leaves no trace. It is a pure appearance? All true works of art are in fact non-objects, if this denomination is now adopted it is to enable an emphasis on the problems of current art from a new angle.

The Death of Painting

This issue requires retrospection. When the Impressionist painters, leaving the studio for outdoors, attempted to apprehend the object immersed in natural luminosity, figurative painting began to die. In Monet's paintings the objects dissolve themselves in colour and the usual appearance of things is pulverized amongst luminous reflections. Fidelity towards the natural world transferred itself from objectivity to impression. With the rupture of the outlines which maintained objects isolated in space, all possibility of controlling pictorial expression was limited to the internal coherence of the picture.

Later, Maurice Denis would say, 'a picture – before being a battle horse, a female nude or an anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered by colours arranged in a certain order.' Abstraction was not yet born but figurative painters, such as Denis, already announced it. As far as they were concerned, increasingly the represented object lost its significance and consequently the picture, and similarly the object, gained importance. With cubism the object is brutally removed from its natural condition, it is transformed into cubes, virtually imposing upon it an idealized nature; it was emptied of its essential obscurity, that invincible opaqueness characteristic of the thing. However, the cube, being three-dimensional, still possesses a nucleus: an *inside* which was necessary to consume – and this was done by the so-called synthetic phase of the movement. Already not much is left of the object. It was Mondrian and Malevich who would continue the elimination of the object.

The object that is pulverized in the cubist picture is the painted object, the represented object. In short, it is painting that lies dying there, dislocated in search of a new structure, a new form of being, a new significance. Yet in these pictures (synthetic phase, hermetic phase) there are not only dislocated cubes,

abstract planes: there are also signs, arabesques, collage, numbers, letters, sand, textiles, nails, etc. These elements are indicative of the presence of two opposing forces: one which attempts relentlessly to rid itself of all and any contamination with the object; the other is characteristic of the return of the object as sign, for which it is necessary to maintain the space, the pictorial environment born out of the representation of the object. The latter could be associated with the so-called abstract painting, of sign and matter, which persists today in *tachisme*.

Mondrian belongs to the most revolutionary aspect of cubism, giving it continuity. He understood that the new painting, proposed in those pure planes, requires a radical attitude, a restart. Mondrian wipes clean the canvas, eliminates all vestiges of the object, not only the figure but also the colour, the matter and the space which constituted the representational universe: what is left is the white canvas. On it he will no longer represent the object: it is the space in which the world reaches harmony according to the basic movements of the horizontal and the vertical. With the elimination of the represented object, the canvas – as material presence – becomes the new object of painting. The painter is required to organize the canvas in addition to giving it a transcendence that will distance it from the obscurity of the material object. The fight against the object continues.

The problem Mondrian set himself could not be solved by theory. He attempted to destroy the plane with the use of great black lines which cut the canvas from one edge to the other – indicating that it relates to the external space – yet these lines still oppose themselves to a background and the contradiction between space and object reappears. Thus, the destruction of these lines begins, leading to his last two paintings: *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944). But the contradiction in fact was not resolved, and if Mondrian had lived a few more years, perhaps he would have returned once more to the white canvas from which he began. Or he would have left it, favouring construction into space, as did Malevich at the end of his parallel development.

The Work of Art and the Object

For the traditional painter, the white canvas was merely the material support on to which he would sketch the suggestion of natural space. Subsequently, this suggested space, this metaphor of the world, would be surrounded by a frame that had as a fundamental function the positioning of the painting into the world. This frame was the mediator between fiction and reality, a bridge and barrier, protecting the picture, the fictitious space, while also facilitating its communication with the external, real space. Thus when painting radically abandons representation – as in the case of Mondrian, Malevich and his followers – the frame loses its meaning. The erection of a metaphorical space within a well-protected corner of the world no longer being necessary, it is now the case of establishing the work of

art within the space of reality, lending to this space, through the apparition of the work – this special object – significance and transcendence.

It is a fact that things occurred with a certain level of sluggishness, equivocation and deviation. These were undoubtedly inevitable and necessary. The use of collage, sand and other elements taken from the real already signal the necessity to substitute fiction by reality. When the dadaist Kurt Schwitters later builds the *Merzbau* (1919–37) – made from objects and fragments he found in the streets – it is once again the same intention which has further developed, now freed from the frame, and in real space. At this point it becomes difficult to distinguish the work of art from the real objects. Indicative of this mutual overflow between the work of art and the object is Marcel Duchamp's notorious *blague*, submitted to the Independents' Exhibition in New York in 1917, a fountain-urinal of the kind used in bar toilets. The readymade technique was adopted by the Surrealists. It consists of revealing the object, dislocated from its usual function, thus establishing new relationships between it and the other objects. This process of transfiguration of the object is limited by the fact that it is grounded not so much in the formal qualities of the object but in its connection with the object's quotidian use. Soon that obscurity that is characteristic of the *thing* returns to the *work*, bringing it back to the common level. On this *front*, the artists were defeated by the object.

From this point of view some of today's extravagant paintings pursued by the avant-garde appear in all their clarity or even naïveté. What are the cut canvases of Lucio Fontana, if not a retarded attempt to destroy the fictitious pictorial space by means of introducing within it a real cut? What are the pictures by Alberto Burri with kapok, wood or iron, if not a return – without the previous violence but transforming them into fine art – to the processes used by the dadaists? The problem lies in the fact that these works only achieve the effect of a first contact, failing to achieve the permanent transcendent condition of a non-object. They are curious, bizarre and extravagant objects – but they are objects.

The path followed by the Russian avant-garde has proved to be more profound. Tatlin's and Rodchenko's counter-reliefs, together with Malevich's suprematist architecture, are indicative of a coherent revolution from represented space towards real space, from represented forms towards *created* forms.

The same fight against the object can be seen in modern sculpture from Cubism onwards. With Vantongerloo (De Stijl) the figure disappears completely; with the Russian constructivists (Tatlin, Pevsner, Gabo), mass is eliminated and the sculpture is divested of its condition of thing. Similarly, if non-representational painting is attracted towards the orbit of objects, this force is exerted with far greater intensity amongst non-figurative sculpture. Transformed into object, sculpture rids itself of its most common characteristic: mass. But this is not all. The base – sculpture's equivalent to the painting's frame – is eliminated. Vantongerloo and Moholy-Nagy

attempted to create sculptures that would inhabit space without a support. They intended to eliminate weight from sculpture, another fundamental characteristic of the object. What can be thus verified is that while painting, freed from its representational intentions, tends to abandon the surface to take place in space, thus approaching sculpture, the latter liberates itself from the figure, the base, and of its mass, therefore maintaining very little affinity with what traditionally has been denominated as sculpture. In fact, there is more affinity between a counter-relief by Tatlin and a sculpture by Pevsner than between a Maillol and a Rodin or Phidias. The same could be said of a *painting* by Lygia Clark and a *sculpture* by Amilcar de Castro. From which we can conclude that current *painting* and *sculpture* are converging towards a common point, distancing themselves from their origins. They become special objects – non-objects – for which the denominations *painting* and *sculpture* no longer apply.

Primary Formulation

The problem of the frame and base, in painting and sculpture respectively, has never been examined by critics in terms of its significant implications as static. The phenomenon is registered, but simply as a curious detail that escapes the problematics raised by the work of art. What had not been realized was that the actual work of art posited new problems and that it attempted to escape (to assure its own survival) the closed circuit of traditional aesthetics. To rupture the frame and to eliminate the base are not in fact merely questions of a technical or physical nature: they pertain to an effort by the artist to liberate himself from the conventional cultural frame, to retrieve that desert, mentioned by Malevich, in which the work of art appears for the first time freed from any signification outside the event of its own apparition. It could be said that all works of art *tend towards* the non-object and that this name is only precisely applicable to those that establish themselves outside the conventional limits of art: works that possess this necessary limitlessness as the fundamental intention behind their appearance.

Putting the question in these terms demonstrates how the *tachiste* and *informel* experiments in painting and sculpture are conservative and reactionary in nature. The artists of these tendencies continue – although in desperation – to make use of those conventional supports. With them the process is contrary: rather than rupturing the frame so that the work can pour out into the world, they keep the frame, the picture, the conventional space, and put the world (its raw material) within it. They part from the supposition that what is within the frame is the picture, the work of art. It is obvious that with this they also reveal the end of such a convention, but without announcing a future path.

This path could be in the creation of these special objects (non-objects) that

are accomplished outside of all artistic conventions and reaffirm art as a primary formulation of the world. [...]

Ferreira Gullar, extract from 'Theory of the Non-Object', *Jornal do Brasil* (December 1959); trans. Michael Asbury, in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts/ Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005) 170–73 [footnotes not included].

Gustav Metzger
1959–61: From Painting to Spraying with Acid//n.d.

In 1959, GM felt the need to distance himself from London. He moved to King's Lynn at the end of the year. He liked the small town. It had good train connections with London, passing through Cambridge where he had started his art studies in 1945.

In the course of 1959 he returned to London. He found space in a flat in Chelsea, off the Fulham Road. It was here, in front of a shop, that he found the Cardboards in the late summer of 1959.

That summer, the artist Brian Robins had started a basement café at 14 Monmouth Street for artists and writers. GM began to frequent the place and showed a few of the paintings made in King's Lynn.

GM then showed Brian Robins, who was then making kinetic sculptures, the set of cardboards, there were six pieces. Brian Robins had an extremely positive response, and a decision was made to show the Cardboards in early November.

In the course of all this activity, the ideas around auto-destructive art were taking shape. It had started with the concept of a sculpture of modest size on a normal pedestal. The sculpture would be submitted to a group show, perhaps the London Group. In the course of the exhibition, the sculpture would be transformed, and by the end of the exhibition period there would only be a remnant of collapsed matter remaining on the pedestal.

Whilst preparing the Cardboard show, the first auto-destructive art manifesto was written and was added to the hand-out for the Cardboards.

The Cardboards and the ideas associated with them proved to be a key for the development of the theory of auto-destructive and auto-creative art. The Cardboard text: 'They have reference to the greatest qualities in modern painting, sculpture and architecture.' And the first manifesto: Auto-destructive art can be machine-produced and factory-assembled.'

GM started to work to put the various ideas into some kind of form. The model for the first auto-destructive monument was developed and publicized as a photograph in the Daily Express in March 1960, with a brief text by John Rydon. The model was made of office staples glued together and mounted on a metal base: all materials were found on the, street.

In the beginning of 1960, GM left the Chelsea flat, and moved to the first floor of a house in Camberwell where he stayed for some years. Around the time of the Cardboard exhibition, GM had come across other fascinating found objects. These were the clear polythene bags outside premises in Soho. They were the rubbish bags from shops, businesses and clothing manufacturers. He collected the ones with paper and textile fragments and took them back to Camberwell. The random association of form, colour and texture had a deep appeal and seemed to be significant; but how to understand that appeal and significance?

So here were two extremes to be resolved. The clarity and purity of the abstract cardboards and staples, and the chaotic 'formlessness' of the reflective bags and their 'useless' contents.

It was by working on the first model that some clarity began to emerge. That sculpture would begin, like the cardboards, as a statement about ultimate, abstract form, and the beauty, and perhaps also terror, inherent in the machine product. And then, imperceptibly, in time turns into something that is the opposite of the starting point.

Rust appears, soiling the abstraction. Then ragged holes emerge, grow unpredictably at different parts of the structure. The sculpture increasingly takes on the characteristics of chaos and disorder of the found bags. Finally, all that will remain are piles of fallen metal and collapsed girders, ready for the scrapheap or to be shovelled into rubbish bags. The cardboards and the rubbish bags are in equal measure the product of human endeavour.

The bags showed the significance and beauty that can reside in chance. This understanding led to the acceptance of the potential and validity of chance activity in the collapsing monument. It was acceptance of the totality of the possible experience from the severely ordered to the utter displacement of that coherence that opened a path into the further development of theory, leading to the first demonstration of auto-destructive art, the acid on nylon paintings.

As can be seen in the photographs of the King's Lynn experiment, and the demonstration in London in June 1960, the rips and tears of the nylon are very close to the scraps of paper and odd bits of textile or leather found in bags outside clothing workshops. Painting with oil on canvas or board involves measures of control and of chance. So does painting with acid on nylon. But here there is an inbuilt 'instruction' for the material – acid – to go on a kind of rampage, obliterating the material – nylon – in unprecedented and wholly uncontrollable ways.

The next stage was the demonstration on the South Bank in July 1961. Here the elements of chance or chaos were maximized, and in that sense mark the end of acid painting on nylon. It starts with a pristine material that is a throwback to the Cardboards, and ends with nothing that is visible save for some hanging scraps of nylon, the frame, and nylon fragments on the ground.

But in acting on the three stretched screens coloured white black and red, a world is entered into that is radically different to that of any painting of the past. There is, first, the relating of the artist to the work, the actual movement in space, in and out of the different screens. There is the potential of spraying a screen from one side and also from the other, a continuous interpenetration betwreen performer and the static set-up. There is the transformation, visible to the viewer, where colour and shapes are revealed as the process of disintegration takes place. There is the visible and invisible transformation of nylon as it is hit by the acid spray. There are complex chemical interactions. There is a creation of 'nothing'. The act of pumping acid is aggressive. The gas mask and gloves worn are a necessity, and suggest danger and threat. And central to the event are time and duration, decisions on beginning and ending, and the descent into an end. The South Bank demonstration is recognized as the first outdoor 'action' by an artist in this country.

Gustav Metzger, '1959–1961: From painting to spraying with acid. Sketch of a development', undated typescript (London: Tate Archives: 200717/2/folder 1/2).

Gruppe Geflecht
Anti-Object//1967

The Transformation of Concrete Artistic Means, As Seen in the Anti-object

Concrete art uses clear, self-contained, coloured plastic [three-dimensional] forms. Colour forms and plastic forms are the same thing and not abstractions of something: they are concrete. Concrete art simply seeks to allow artistic means, as material things, to come into their own. It thus excludes the mutability of these means and demonstrates a fundamental, plastic stance that is not in keeping with our present-day experience of reality. We avail ourselves of concrete artistic means only to abrogate them. However, the abrogation of material thingness is not enough in itself; it is merely the precondition for the provocation of a dynamically mutable space.

We use unmixed colours. In our view they have no irrational order-creating function. They leave their concrete form-tracks and continue on other surfaces as illusory tracks. A reversal and interchange of concrete and painted forms comes about, which sees concrete forms being relativised and losing their identity. The colour tracks and form-tracks create boundaries of interpenetrating, non-fixable spaces, which are tangible yet not graspable. The ultimate goal is a reversibility of material and energy. In terms of pictorial categories this means that the interchangeability and mutual interaction of illusory space (arising from the intersection of colour-tracks) and concrete space would lead to a new artistic phenomenon of a supra-spatial kind. In order to achieve this tensile interrelation of illusion and concrete, three-dimensional forms the painter had to abandon pure picture planes and the sculptor had to embrace colour as well as three-dimensionality, in order to counter the objecthood of the work.

Painting and plastic art, that is to say, colour and concrete space enter into a relationship; they impinge on each other in the process of artistic forming and can no longer be separated. A coloured spatial mesh ensues: the anti-object. In this process space acquires temporal legibility. Space and time now interweave dynamically, that is to say, the fourth dimension comes into play. The formations that arise from an intrinsically changeable form-seed could also be called 'polydimensional'. They are polyfocal spatial constructs and are also 'anti-objects' or 'polydimensional' in so far as they are continuable and not statically finished like the colour objects of our own time, where the local application of colour only confirms the sheer banality of the thing.

Although graspable (in the original sense of the word) our coloured montages are transparent and not things, for they are open on multiple sides and have no artistically evaluated boundaries, unlike conventional sculptures. They generally relate to a white plane, whereby the colour of the ground, the wall for instance, also appears on the tracks and surfaces within the spatial structure. Concrete and imaginary space permeate each other.

One could say that precisely in these circumstances, when just such an anti-object is encountered, otherwise formless, undefined space is dynamized and articulated, and becomes a tangible reality.

Gruppe Geflecht, extract from *Anti-Objekt* (Kiel: Kunsthalle/Schleswig Holsteinischer Kunstverein, 1967) n.p. Translated from German by Fiona Elliott, 2013.

Ursula Meyer
De-Objectification of the Object//1969

Coinciding with contemporary art, progressive industry is intensely concerned with reduction and abstraction. In a recent interview, the French economist and author David Servan-Schreiber expressed his boredom with the hardware industries. He discussed a 2 x 2 inch micro-circuit which powered a large TV screen. 'The more abstract, the more interesting.'

The recent crop of oeuvres suggests that the notion of abstraction is substantially changing. Abstraction no longer refers to reduction of form only, but to abstraction for its own sake. 'Hardware sculptures' are giving way to something much more subtle and much more abstract. Engineering and construction devices are either disappearing or altogether absent. The object, deprived of its third dimension and apparent weightiness, loses power and presence. Denied its upright stance, it falls to the ground prone and spineless. The *objet d'art* looks more like a configuration of sorts than like an object. Is the metamorphosis of the object indicative of the end of the minimal-hardware art-package?

The change from the cool structural principle to the hot line of human expressionism seems to be the message of the Castelli Warehouse Exhibition (December 1968). Materials were anti-industrial, unclean and unsolid. Suggestive of the human condition – or the brand new scene and scenery – these works cowered helplessly on the ground, prostrate, accessible to the next blow. Anthropomorphic allusions, psychological gesturing, the arch defects of yesteryear's structural art, are in. The impeccable slickness of industrial art gives way to the vision of human frailty. A leaf in the wind, a speck of dust in the universe. Man is expendable. While structural concepts affirmed man's object mastery, the drooping materials acknowledge the collapse of the great illusion. The let-it-fall material flexibility demonstrates the transitory and impermanent. The new work is possibly also a protest, a reaction, against some of the pat intellectual solutions of recent minimal art. Yet a merely psychological interpretation – or an aesthetic one, for that matter – does not suffice. To me, the new trend is indicative of the *loss of power* not only over the object but of the object itself. There is no rigidity which is associated with the objecthood. The object is de-objectified. The air is out of the balloon. No longer does the compulsive need for object-control prevail, but a much more relaxed attitude of letting it be. A less forceful statement of the Cartesian Gap. The subject – the perceiver – is less alienated from the understated object.

Minimal artists did Minimal art with non-minimal means. Using pliable instead of rigid materials, their oeuvres convey an expressionism of sorts. It has

been called 'Funk-Minimal'. The pendulum is swinging back from the Apollonian to the Dionysian principle, from the universal to the particular, from the Absolute to the relative. At this stage of relative minimalism one should beware of discrediting the awesome machine-made perfection of structural art as cold and 'inhuman'. It is precisely that flawless perfection which allows for omission of all unnecessary particulars, reducing the object to its essence. Thus, at its best, it becomes a universal: the idea of object. This lofty goal cannot be reached without the flawless cooperation of the machine. One tends to forget that idea is as human as emotion – and that the machine is but an extension of the human hand. In his discussion of Surrealism, Mondrian stated the issue succinctly: 'we must recognize that it deepens feeling and thought, but since this deepening is limited by individualism, it cannot reach the foundation, the universal'. Non-figurative art, he feels, 'frees art from all particulars' – obviously the new configurations enjoy an abundance of particulars.

During the last few years several artforms and artists challenged the autonomy of the object. The destructionists directed their ire mainly against ready-made commodities. Minimalists displaced the authority of objecthood with less obvious and dramatic means than those espoused by either destructionists or Funk Minimalists. To name but a few: Dan Flavin's light works destroyed the object's objective boundaries. Sol LeWitt's 3-D drawings outlined the *Gestalt* of the non-existent object. Tony Smith's *Die* (1962/68) caused the object to crumble uuder the weight of its own *Gestalt*. The multiple sub-units of Carl Andre's prefabricated modules usurped the authority of the total *Gestalt*. Al Brunelle's network of modules destroyed the homogeneity of the *Gestalt*. As early as 1963 Ellsworth Kelly and David Lee dealt with the possibility of the divided object. At that time, my own work anticipated the decadence of the geometric object with the use of caved-in areas and uneven edges.

I mention Happenings briefly as an artform concerned with the downgrading of the object. The scenery was usually neither preconceived nor constructed. A loosely assembled environment was filled with humble objects – dirty boxes, discarded tires, torn paper and old burlap bags. Happenings exist only in the present, when they happen. They are blatantly temporal and ephemeral. No patrons, no collectors, for there is nothing to collect. Man is as unprestigious as the surrounding object and often purposefully equated by being enclosed in a box or being wrapped up in a paper shroud. There is no manifest conflict between the subject and the object, but a playful interaction. Happenings are putting the 'precious' object in its place. A Happening is an *object leveller*. Unfortunately, Happenings moved to a commercial destiny, and thus to an early demise. Department stores' and finally supermarkets' stagings gave Happenings the *coup de grâce*.

Multimedia and *radical abstraction* are the scene of the non-existent object. Multimedia, in contrast to radical abstraction, exposes the viewer to a superabundance of sensory stimuli. Both artforms convey the fascination of *all-at-onceness* which is achieved either with an excess or a lack of stimuli. Minimal art is the only artform *with* object, which allows for immediate recognition.

The younger generation of painters and sculptors, having been weaned on multiperspective media, film and TV, isn't 'turned on' by traditional art – and I am using that term for all art concerned with objects. The young want to create powerful emotional experiences which, for them, neither traditional literature nor art provide. Through theatrical and projector art, the drug-induced experience of the expanded consciousness is emulated and sublimated. An overload of stimuli reacts as a repressant of ordinary critical faculties. The discriminating capacities recede under the onslaught of Rocks and Rolls, beeps and boops, combined with the onrush of images simultaneously projected on multiple screens. The perceiver's mind becomes threadbare and a raw nerve is exposed. With his rational defences gone he now becomes accessible to subliminal perception. This is mind-blowing, and in their art the young won't settle for anything less. Voracious emotional appetites crave that which will stimulate more hunger, more craving.

In contradistinction to the theatricality of multimedia, *Radical Abstraction* – like much Minimal art – favours introspection and contemplation. Rather than discussing here earthworks, waterworks and fireworks, I am concerned with the essential laboratory example of art without form, or aesthetics without art – that is the dust concept of Bill Bollinger, shown at the Sykert Gallery (January 1969) which is neither sculpture nor painting. It is a revolutionary statement leading into Sartre's 'Nothingness'. Bollinger's work is philosophy which has become real. And as such, it is easily misinterpreted. Personal projections become interpretations reminiscent of H.C. Anderson's story of the pile of coals – a housewife sees only the mess, a young couple anticipate warmth in winter, and a businessman translates the coals into gold. Fear can obstruct authentic perception. Dust becomes disturbing. This most humble of materials spells a most radical orientation. Al Brunelle called it Bollinger's most dangerous work in *ARTnews* (January 1969). There is neither object nor systemic formation, but a confrontation with the very nonexistence of the object.

Art has become objectless abstraction no longer weighted down by extraneous hardware, Creativity is conceptual thinking and the criterion of art is the expansion of consciousness. If we accept this premise and *in this sense only*, almost all ulterior manifestations could be dispensed with. Bollinger's oeuvre forces us to think through to the inevitable conclusion. The result of this mental exertion could be devastating. The pursuit of pure abstraction vitiates manifest

object-art. Artists might follow in the footsteps of that famous drop-out, Marcel Duchamp, though for altogether different reasons. The contradiction between object and idea is obvious. 'Where do we go from here?' Bollinger told me that he likes objects and intends to continue making them. He refuses to be categorized, even though the category is of his own making.

Douglas Huebler exhibited 'beyond direct perception' at the Seth Siegelaub Gallery (February 1969). He photographed the disintegration of a rectangle of dust placed in front of the Gallery, and this photographic documentation then became the oeuvre itself. In the catalogue, Huebler states: 'The world is full of objects, more or less interesting. I do not wish to add to it any more.'

An eseentially revolutionary event in contemporary art is the cessation of the object, the thing-in-itself, which according to Kant, man had no way of knowing. It is irrelevant whether artists are driven to radical abstraction by inner anguish, or whether they are taking an egocentric intellectual trip. The issue is the idea. Has art with a capital 'A' ceased to exist? Nietzsche's *Umwertung Aller Werte* (*Re-evaluation of All Values* in the sense of *Reversal of All Values*) is becoming a 'bloody truth'. Continuous upheavals in art, the multitude of stylistic expressions, the de-objectification and annihilation of the object, are all part of the total disorientation of values. Art does not merely reflect culture. It *is* it. It is the decaying city culture, the deteriorated human condition. Yet art is much more than the immediate societal environment. Above and beyond, it is conceptual. Artforms are manifestations of thought, and radical abstraction – iconoclastic and revolutionary – opens unknown avenues of thinking. In ceasing to be an object, art has become *idea*. On this level, criteria of aesthetics no longer apply. The full and final meaning is philosophical: it is abstraction *per se*, and not abstraction *from*.

Art is speculative philosophy, perhaps more so in our age than at any other age, or so we think, because we are more aware. In this respect it is interesting to recall the philosopher's struggle with the elusive thing: *object*. It is a loaded term, an entity of significant doubt. Hume believed that it did not exist other than in consciousness. For Malebranche the object, the physical world, existed only because the book of Genesis said so. Kant stated that the subject can never know the object, the 'thing-in-itself'. And Nietzsche junked the question of object-knowledge altogether, declaring that it was unnecessary to know the object. All that matters is to control it. Hence the *Will to Power*. The thorny issue of the subject-object dichotomy has haunted Western thought – and man – for centuries. The perceiver has no way of knowing the perceived. Today, 'alienation' is the term for the Cartesian Gap, the subject's inability to relate directly to the object, be it thing or man.

This philosophical transgression adds another dimension to the artist's

intense concern with object and non-object. In a sense, de-objectification cuts through the difficulty of knowing the object. The Gordian knot is split in effigy. In the wake of the disappearing object, the subject-object dichotomy disappears. It is simple, yet quite extraordinary.

According to Guillaume Apollinaire, art's great potential is surprise. The significant aspect of contemporary art is the enormously accelerated speed of change. The work is Here and Now. Today eliminates yesterday: yesterday's work becomes a *déjà vu* experience. Tomorrow is already encroaching on today. All of a sudden prominent Minimalists have become conservatives; entrepreneurs of the new establishment, but establishment nonetheless. The art of the object is a merchandisable commodity. An artist like Judd refers to his time-consuming managerial tasks. The objectless artists are not burdened with such problems. How do you merchandise dust? Apparently, the profit motive is woefully missing. Alas, capitalism! Alas, establishment! 'Dust, thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.' Radical abstraction is against the very fibre of our acquisitive society. The objective reality is the absence of the object. Not a solid investment, but a handful of dust. The handwriting is on the wall or, rather, on the floor.

In his manuscript *Die Gegenstandlose Kunst – The Objectless Art* (officially translated: *The Non-objective Art*) – Kasimir Malevich stated: 'When in 1913, in my desperate attempt to liberate art from the useless burden of the object, I sought refuge in the form of the square, and exhibited a square on white ground, the critics did not like it; nor did the public: "All that we loved has been lost. We are now in the desert. Before us there is nothing but a black square on white ground." The perfect square seemed to both critic and public something incomprehensible and menacing – which is what one might have expected.' The loss of object could be felt keenly and was (is) painfully reminiscent of Freud's description of our relation to 'object-loss'. Yet those disconcerting feelings of pain and deprivation relate to the birthpangs of the new. Malevich's black squares prophetically anticipated the main artform of the age. Fear and anger were evident then, as they are now; anxieties concerning one's own self are projected on the oeuvre. I suppose there is a temptation to rest one's mind on 'history-repeats-itself' comfort. Yet the nagging question persists: Why does one fail to comprehend art other than in terms of one's mental idiosyncrasies? In authentic perception, seer and seen, and act of vision, are identical. There is no preconceived opinion. As William Blake wrote: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'

Ursula Meyer, 'De-objectification of the Object', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 8 (Summer 1969) 20–22.

Charles Harrison
Art Object and Artwork//1989

[...] In a retrospective view the moment of conceptual art forms a hiatus between the point of failure of the hegemony of American modernism in the mid to late 1960s and the announcement of artistic business as normal under the sobriquet of postmodernism in the later 1970s. In some accounts of this history it is to the moment of conceptual art that we should look for the initiation of the artistically postmodern; in other accounts the success of a (managerially-tractable) and readily distributable postmodern art represents the cultural defeat of those critical aspirations by which conceptual art was impelled. Meanwhile the relics of the movement serve to confuse and to bemuse a new generation of spectators. The aim of this essay is to represent an *Art & Language* point of view on the moment of conceptual art, and to encourage some speculation about the objects of conceptual art as these appear under a retrospective regard.

It is conventional wisdom that various forms of 'critique of the object' were conducted in avant-garde artistic circles during the later 1960s. Claims for epochal forms of change and liberation accompanied the broad anti-formal tendency surveyed in such exhibitions as 'Op Losse Schroeven' (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1969), 'When Attitudes Become Form' (Kunsthalle Berne and ICA London, 1969) and 'Information' (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970). In the years between 1967 and 1972 these claims took public form in the slogans and neologisms of cultural journalism. There was talk of the 'Dematerialization of Art',[1] of a 'Post-Object Art',[2] of 'Art as Idea',[3] of an art 'liberated from all its fetters'.[4]

There were indeed various strains of idealism in the broad avant-garde movement of the time. With the benefits of hindsight a weak anti-materialism may be seen to connect artistic Greens (from Joseph Beuys to Richard Long) with Californian conceptual artists, Concrete poets and autistic savants of the New York art world. Like the idealism of the Expressionist avant-gardes before the First World War, this anti-materialism was or implied a form of rejection of the modern – or, at least, of certain interpretations of the meaning and value of modernity. For this reason the idealist tendency in the late-sixties avant-garde has been associated with the critique of modernism.

Yet the pursuit of (a Baudelarian) modernity had been abandoned both in the mainstream critical theorization and in the canonic artistic practice of modernism long before the 1960s. (Indeed in 'modernist painting' as represented by Clement Greenberg[5] that abandonment was effective as early as the later 1870s, by which time the Realist aspirations of Impressionism had already been practically diverted

or frustrated). In turning their backs on the political culture of the time, the avant-garde idealists of the late sixties were doing little to threaten the authority of modernism as a dominant culture of art. Such critical force as attached to their rejection of modernity was already instinct in the priorities of standard modernist aesthetics and in the clichés of *l'art pour l'art*. Modernist critical theory was also alert to the possibility of an avant-gardism of attitude. The pursuit of 'purity' in desert spaces and the necrotic exploration of a psychological Bohemia were already prescribed in modernism's own account of evasive and marginal practices. The same may be said of the extension of the Duchampian 'readymade' into the realm of 'ideas'. That agnostic disposition which had been productive of interesting anomalies in 1913–15 could not be adopted to the same critical ends in the late 1960s. Idea-tokens as art objects were merely literal fulfilments of that reductive tendency which had already been observed in modernism's historicist view.

Certainly the idea of a conceptual art provided a form of context within which the members of an avant-garde might identify themselves and each other. The artists both in England and New York who were to adopt the name of Art & Language were among those who had produced or proposed various forms of exotic artistic objects during the years 1965–68, as means to test or to resist the habits and assumptions of modernist production and connoisseurship. It was a perception common to the four founders of Art & Language, however – as well as to Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn and to the independent Victor Burgin – that the conclusion of inquiry into the artistic objects of modernism was not that avant-garde idealism should be licensed, but rather that the practice of art was in need of more intellectually adequate concepts of 'objecthood'. In 1966–67, in a discussion of their projected 'Air Show',[6] Atkinson and Baldwin noted 'a challenge to the million years habit of identifying 'things'. They continued, 'The recognisance of something as something is another question bound up with aspects of things, and not solely with "identification" per se.' The object of the 'Air Show' itself was not an avant-garde 'least object' but rather the hypothetical case around which a series of critical questions were explored. In 1970 Victor Burgin proposed 'a 'moratorium' on things – a temporary withdrawal from real objects during which the object analogue formed in consciousness may be examined as the origin of a new generating system'.[7] He showed what he had in mind in textual works such as *All Criteria*, composed in the same year.[8]

If we are to talk of significant change associated with the moment of conceptual art and if we are to associate that change with some effective critique of the culture of modernism, we must look to more radical differences than the mere promotion of the marginal into the mainstream or the mere projection of 'language' (words) into the physical and cultural space of 'art'. We will look not to global or epochal critiques of 'the object', or of the 'materialism' of the modern,

but rather to those forms of critical address which have as their focus the artistic object as specifically framed in the discourse of modernism. Further, we will look for some critique of modernism which is a critique of the grounds of its authority to represent art. This is to say that we will look for a critique of the concept of 'art' which assumes that its intensional character [i.e. its status in terms of the sum of attributes contained in the term 'art'] is open to question, and which thus seeks to explain – and so far as possible to undo – the historically specific mechanisms of cultural mystification and dominance. In so far as alternative forms of artistic work are proposed in the spirit of this critique, we will require of them that the principles according to which they are individuated are epistemologically adequate and philosophically interesting and not just neological.

In a project of this order the status of the work of art as object will be at best provisional and may have to be strategically cast as incidental. The occasion of the work of art is the point of intersection of two arcs: one formed by the range of intensions, from 'author' or 'creator' to 'producer', which is bounded by the concept 'artist'; the other formed by those terms, such as 'reader', 'spectator', 'audience' and 'consumer', which are values of the variable 'public'. Both 'artist' and 'public' are subject to more precise quantification as qualifying predicates are applied. Thus the point of intersection of that form of public which is represented by the 'adequately sensitive, adequately informed spectator'[9] with that form of artist which is an individual and expressive author locates the normal and normative work of modern art. Of those novel forms of artistic object which were variously proposed during the sixties, though many may have escaped inclusion within the categories of painting and sculpture, the majority were still capable of being accommodated within a standard form of relationship of artist to public. The practice of some significantly different form of art depended on the possibility of conceiving the intersection (sense of) artist with a changed (sense of) public, and of acting accordingly. It was this conception which distinguished the critically interesting forms of conceptual art from mere post-Minimal avant-gardism. As a critical project in this sense conceptual art was primarily a European possibility; that's to say it required emancipation from that historicistic view of the reductive development of art which was a coercive condition of existence in the North-American art world. [...]

1 See Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International* (February 1968).

2 See Donald Karshan, 'The Seventies: Post-Object Art', *Studio International* (September 1970). [...]

3 'Art as Idea' was the title given to the collection of conceptual art 'works' and 'documents' acquired in 1970 by the circulation department of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. [...]

4 'avec ce nouveau mouvement, l'art s'est libéré de tous ses carcans!'. Grégoire Muller, catalogue

introduction to *When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969).

5 See Clement Greenberg, 'Modern Painting', *Arts Yearbook* (New York, 1961).

6 [footnote 8 in source] 'Air Show', a 1966–67 project by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin. [...]

7 'Thanks for the Memory', *Architectural Design* (August 1970).

8 First published in *Idea Structures* (London: Camden Arts Centre, 1970).

9 This form of specification of the ideal public is due to Richard Wollheim. See his *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, 1987). [...]

Charles Harrison, extract from 'Art Object and Artwork', in *L'Art conceptuel: une perspective* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989) 61–3.

Éric Watier
Inventory of Destructions//2000

Silvia Bächli draws a lot, and fast. Then she carefully chooses the drawings to keep, organizes and files them, before destroying all the others.

In May 1998, Laure Baldwin asked the road maintenance department of Romans-sur-Isère to destroy a white monochrome piece composed of 60 slippers.

On his death bed Richard Baquié asked his wife to destroy all of his work. She never did.

Michael Batalla threw a book of poems of his youth in a bush fire. He had written them while sitting on the back seat of his parents' car during a trip to Italy.

On Tuesday, 17 April 2012, Severine Bourguignon (an artist) agreed that Antonio Manfredi, Curator of the of Casoria Museum for Contemporary Art, would burn one of his works to protest against the Italian government's cultural policy. Two hundred other artists in the same museum collection agreed to act likewise.

In 1923, Marianne Brandt destroyed all her paintings and joined the Bauhaus in Weimar, where she became a designer.

Eternally dissatisfied and often doubting about his talent, Paul Cézanne never stopped wrecking his work.

Philip Guston says he destroyed his paintings when he found them unacceptable. He also says that he would sometimes repeat the same ones, exactly, five or six years later, and then find them quite acceptable.

Since 1972 Susan Hiller has made her *Hand Grenades* series out of ashes from her earlier paintings.

In 1993, Thomas Hirschhorn deliberately left in the street a series of small cardboard pieces for the garbage collectors. They threw them in the bin.

In 1906, before leaving Kursk for Moscow, Kasimir Malevich burned his realistic paintings and romantic landscapes.

In 1967, after ten years in New York, Agnes Martin destroyed all the paintings in her studio. Then she went to Cuba and New Mexico and did not paint at all for the next seven years.

Richard Prince destroyed almost all drawings, paintings, collages and prints he realized in the 1970s, which represented about five hundred works. He still refuses to recognize the survivors.

At the 1964 Venice Biennale, Robert Rauschenberg exhibited his work in the US Pavilion. He received the International Grand Prize for Painting and a two million lire grant. As soon as he got his prize, he called his assistant in New York, Tony Holder, and asked him to destroy the 150 screen-painted works in his studio.

Hubert Renard cannot precisely remember what he did with the few pieces he did not find satisfying. Although he is sure he destroyed everything that could prove their existence.

In 1993 at Mimet, Véronique Vassiliou threw away a full box of quotations she had accumulated over the past ten years. The box she had built to contain her 'cut-ups' was broken, and she did not feel like fixing it.

Éric Watier, selection of extracts from *L'Inventaire des destructions* (Rennes: Éditions Incertain Sens, 2000) n.p. English language edition (Geneva: Boa Books, 2012).

you've insisted on the
terminology you want
your work *experienced*
in relation to ...
'specificness',
'wholeness',
'objectivity',
'facticity',
'large scale',
'simplicity',
'non-associative',
'non-anthropomorphic',
'anti-hierarchical',
'non-relational'

Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, 'Don Judd', 1975

DISCURSIVE OBJECTS, AFFECTIVE OBJECTS

Dom Sylvester Houédard
Concrete Poetry and Ian Hamilton Finlay// 1963

[...] *constructive*: concrete poems just ARE: have no outside reference: they are objects like TOYS & TOOLS (toys can be tools), jewel-like concrete things-in-them-selves, *pretiosa*; a placed comma, a flower, a blank, something admired in the *tokonoma*. Constellations: the simplest possible in use of words – just word-groups like star-groups. Concrete poetry is 'I'-less ego-less self-effacing, not mimetic of the poet, not subjective (at least explicitly). Poet: dissolves, issue no *orders* to reader who has to provide his own mind-gum syntax. Readers not bossed – hence new poetry is new anarchy of free symbiosis, like looking at non-demanding nature, viewer sees image of himself. Like mysticism, and zen, breakthru in Oxford semantic problems. Like Allen Ginsberg in *Pa'lante*: 'Give up any poem-practice depending on living inside the structure of language – on words as the medium of conscious being.' Existential source of contradiction (objectivity/ subjectivity) disappears.

Concrete poetry communicates its own structure: is an object in & by itself. Its material: word (sound, visual shape, semantical charge); its problem: the function & relation of this material; factors: nearness & similarity – gestalt psychology; rhythm: relational force. Like cybernetics: the poem as self-regulating machine. Concrete poems can be dull amusing grand satirical playful sad – anything except epic. 'Help serious thought & mind play; concrete poet: play – expert making speech - rules' (Eugen Gomringer: independently of Wittgenstein?). The constructed poem attracts: it is human, friendly, makes words move on the page – they move as quick as the eye the poem attracts. Eyeverse is not 'read' – it creates an impression through the gestalt shape of the whole toy-tool, architected, poem – through each word as the eye wanders over them in any order. [...]

Dom Sylvester Houédard, extract from 'Concrete Poetry and Ian Hamilton Finlay' (1963), in *Dom Sylvester Houédard: Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter*, ed. Nicola Simpson (London: Occasional Papers, 2012) 159–60. By kind permission of the Prinknash Abbey Trustees.

Marcel Broodthaers
Ten Thousand Francs Reward//1974

Do objects function for you as words?

I use the object as a zero word.

Were they not at first literary objects?

One could name them as such, although the most recent objects have escaped this denomination, which has a pejorative reputation (I truly wonder why?). These recent objects carry, in a sensational manner, the marks of a language. Words, numerations, signs inscribed on the object itself.

Did you, at the beginning of your activity, follow such a precise direction?

I was haunted by a certain painting by Magritte, one in which words figure. With Magritte, there is a contradiction between the painted word and the painted object, a subversion of the sign of language and that of painting, to the benefit of tightening the notion of the subject.

Are there any objects you still value?

Yes, a few. They are poetic ones, that is to say, guilty in the sense of 'art as language' and innocent in the sense of language as art. Those, for example, that I shall describe to you.

A tricoloured femur, 'Femur d'Homme Belge'. And an old portrait of a general that I picked up in some flea market. I made a little hole in the general's pinched mouth, so as to insert a cigar butt. In this object-portrait, there is a fortunate tonal harmony. The paint is brown, sort of pissy, and so is the cigar butt. Not just any cigar would suit any general's mouth ... the calibre of the cigar, the shape of the mouth.

Is this the art of portraiture?

I prefer to believe that it is a pedagogical object. It is necessary to unveil – whenever possible – the secret of art; the dead general smokes an extinguished cigar. As such, I have made, together with the femur, two useful objects. I would have liked to have made others that gave me as much satisfaction. But I distrusted the genre. The portrait and the femur seemed to have the virtue of eroding the falsity inherent in culture. With the femur, nationality and the structure of the human being are united. The soldier is not far behind.

There are many mussel shells and eggs in your work. Are these accumulations?

The subject is rather that of the relationship established between the shells and the object that supports them: table, chair or cooking pot. It is on a table that you serve an egg. But on my table, there are too many eggs and the knife, the fork

and the plate are missing. Absences necessary to give speech to the egg at the table or to give the spectator an original idea of the chicken.

And the mussels, a dream of the North Sea?

A mussel conceals a volume. The overflow of mussels from the pot does not follow the physical laws of a boiling point. It follows the rules of artifice resulting in the construction of an abstract form.

So, you are close to an academic system?

To a rhetoric that thrives on the new dictionary of received ideas. More than objects and ideas, I organize the encounter of different functions that return to the same world: the table and the egg, the mussel and the pot to the table and to art, to the mussel and to the chicken.

The world of the imaginary?

Or that of sociological reality. It is for this that Magritte didn't fail to reproach me. He considered me more a sociologist than an artist.. [...]

Marcel Broodthaers, extract from 'Ten Thousand Francs Reward', text written in the form of an interview after a conversation with Irmeline Lebeer, originally published in French in the exhibition catalogue *Catalogue/Catalogus* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974); translated by Elizabeth Zuba in collaboration with Maria Gilissen, 2013.

Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn
Don Judd//1975

Don Judd, is it possible to talk? What must we each do to construct a relationship which is not merely institutionally-mediated? Can we cut through the public mythology of 'Don Judd'? How do we deal with an almost sacrosanct figure, a reputation seemingly above ordinary criticism, a powerful reference point for so much during the sixties and apparently still 'fundamental' to a lot of the high art produced today?

What do we know of you? You 'exist' in Castelli, in the Modern, in the Stedlijk, on Philip Johnson's front lawn. For a while, you wrote criticism to earn a living; now you exhibit and sell to earn a living, to be able to make more work. You like John Chamberlain's work, you don't like Robert Morris's, Tony Smith's even less. Barbara Rose says your work is 'pragmatic'; Michael Fried says it is 'theatrical'. Is this what we are addressing? By addressing this are we addressing *you*?

Should we accept your admonition that a 'thorough discussion' of an artist

should involve 'the primary information [which] should be the nature of his work', and 'almost all other information should be based on what is there'? What does that leave for us to say?

More to the point, can we ask what sort of relation your writing has to your work? Your writing does function differently to the writings of other artists, say Malevich's, or even Newman's. Maybe the easiest way to summarize the function of your writing is to say it operates almost like a manual for the sculptures or objects you make. For a lot of artists, particularly Morris, but also Smithson, Bochner and Kosuth, this became a model for 'controlling' the public image of their work in the art magazines. Emphatically enough, you've insisted on the *terminology* you want your work *experienced* in relation to ... 'specificness', 'wholeness', 'objectivity', 'facticity', 'large scale', 'simplicity', 'non-associative', 'non-anthropomorphic', 'anti-hierarchical', 'non-relational', and so on. These intermesh to provide a more or less linguistically defined context. The language which constructs this context reflects a collection of assumptions about a particular *form of art* – what sorts of assumptions are these? In other words, what can we say about the form of art this context presupposes?

By your own reiteration, specificity seems to be the key concept. It is not always easy to understand what you intend by 'specific'. In one sense, you often use it to set up a comparative value; for example, 'I'd like my work to be somewhat more specific than art has been ...' But doesn't this hold the implication that your work is specific only within a history of art objects, and so the value 'specific' depends on the acceptance of that history as unproblematic? Doesn't the specificity of your work hold in a 'world' categorically limited to what counts as 'art', and thus it is a tacit claim for immunity to 'anything to do with society, the institutions and grand theories'?

But you have used 'specific' in another sense: 'Materials vary greatly and are simply materials – formica, aluminum, cold-rolled steel, Plexiglas, red and common brass, and so forth. They are specific. If they are used directly, they are more specific. Also they are usually aggressive.' Doesn't this suggest that the materials (and techniques) you use are 'specific' to an advanced industrial society? In as much as we know America is technologically the most advanced nation, wouldn't that locate 'specific' in what are generally held as American ways of doing things?

Of course, you would claim this has nothing to do with your work, that people who associate your work with advanced industrial materials and American life are being simple minded.

On the other hand, you have said that the structure of your work is 'barely order at all'. You dismiss technology and mathematics, 'the scale ... is pragmatic, immediate and exclusive ... the work asserts its own existence, form and

power.' Finally we are left with 'whatever the boxes are made of'. That is, we are left with materials.

In this light, the use of 'practical' industrial materials appears almost as an end-in-itself. Put this with a disavowal of transcendental qualities and it suggests that the identity of the art object is embodied *in* the materials (– that is, if we understand what you said about [Duchamp's] *Bottle Rack* as an interesting *object*, and ignore the Dadaist gesture of it). Would you perhaps want to add that the identity lies also in the *arrangement* of the materials, and in the physical context of that arrangement? Or doesn't it matter? If you take the identity for granted, you must also take its function for granted and presuppose the whole context of art as given. Do you?

You have also asserted 'there is an objectivity to the obdurate identity of materials' and that 'most of the new materials ... aren't obviously art'. You are saying that materials which don't 'belong' to art are more objective. But you are also saying that by appropriating these materials 'for' art purposes they lose their extra-art associations. They become materials 'without histories'. That is the explicit claim, but what is implicit in it? Isn't it an implicit appeal to a notion of art history in which that history is totally divorced from social history? Doesn't your assertion rest on the assumption of *autonomy* for art history? Without that assumption, can we understand your claims at all? And given what we know about the political and ideological appropriation of the function of art, is the autonomy of art history an assumption we can abide any longer?

If you assume an autonomous art history, you are assuming autonomy for the category of art – at least, so long as it continues to be assumed that art is historical, and not social. Even if 'specific' has nothing to do with materials, this presupposition of art still underwrites so much you've done. You stated it succinctly when you said 'an activity shouldn't be used for a foreign purpose except when the purpose is extremely important and when nothing else can be done.' But in the same article you said, 'I've thought that the situation was pretty bad and that my work was all I could do' – which means things would have to be much worse than 'pretty bad' before you would use your art for a 'foreign' (or extra-art) purpose. That is an indication of the degree of autonomy you associate with the form of art you presuppose.

This has ramifications for many of your other concepts. When saying you 'prefer art that isn't associated with anything ...', aren't you saying you want the 'associations' to be restricted or localized to the object or its immediate (i.e. architectural) environment? Along with an autonomous form of art, you wanted *a more autonomous art object*, what you would call 'more objective', at that. Traditionally art objects are associated with other art and art history by way of their materials and by being a conventional *type* of art object. Such associations

would, I suppose, in your words, be specific. But this was the last thing you wanted. The 'autonomy' you developed for your objects had to function in respect to your presuppositions of an art (historical) context, and hence you still needed a means of associating the object with that context. Since the object itself denied any associations, *the physical situation* became a more important vehicle. That is to say, the object had to be *circumstantially* associated with its art context.

The ramifications of this are plain. You've said that works of this sort, what you've called three dimensional work, are 'real space'. But this 'real space' ends up being not a neutral space but a particularly *loaded* space. It is this which provides the circumstantial association. Which is an indirect way of saying that the sense of art and art history being appealed to is an *institutional* sense. It means that the more, 'objective' you make your work, *the more necessarily dependent the work is on a culturally institutionalized situation*. It also exposes – and perhaps this isn't so surprising – the interdependence of the autonomy of art and art history with their institutionalization. [...]

Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn [New York members of Art & Language between 1970 and 1975], extract from 'Don Judd', *The Fox*, no. 2 (1975) 129–31 [footnotes not included].

Julia Kristeva
Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection//1980

The 'Object of Phobic Desire: Signs

The point [...] of the hallucinatory metaphor of the phobic is precisely that, while displaying the victory of 'the forces that were opposed to sexuality', it finds a certain 'object'. Which one? Not the object of sexual drive; the mother, or her parts, or her representatives; no more than some neutral referent or other, but *symbolic activity itself*. If the latter is often eroticized, and if the phobic, in that case, cumulates with the obsessive, this does not detract from the originality of the structure, which consists in the following: symbolicity itself is cathected by a drive that is not object-oriented in the classic sense of the term (we are not dealing with an object of *need* or *desire*), nor is it narcissistic (it does not return to collapse upon the subject or to cause its collapse). Since it is not sex-oriented, it denies the question of sexual difference; the subject that houses it can produce homosexual symptoms while being strictly speaking indifferent to them: that is not where the subject is. If it is true that such cathexis of symbolicity as sole site of drive and desire is a

means of preservation, it is obviously not the specular *ego* – the reflection of the maternal phallus – that sees itself thus preserved; on the contrary, the ego, here, is rather in abeyance. Strangely enough, however, it is the *subject* that is built up, to the extent that it is the correlative of the paternal metaphor, disregarding the failure of its support – the subject, that is, as correlative of the Other.

A representative of the paternal function takes the place of the good maternal object that is wanting. There is language instead of the good breast. Discourse is being substituted for maternal care, and with it a fatherhood belonging more to the realm of the ideal than of the superego. One can vary the patterns within which such an ascendency of the Other, replacing the object and taking over where narcissism left off, produces a hallucinatory metaphor. There is fear and fascination. The body (of the ego) and the (sexual) object are completely absorbed in it.

Abjection – at the crossroads of phobia, obsession and perversion – shares in the same arrangement. The loathing that is implied in it does not take on the aspect of hysteric conversion; the latter is the symptom of an ego that, overtaxed by a 'bad object', turns away from it, cleanses itself of it, and vomits it. In abjection, revolt is completely within being. Within the being of language. Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores or seduces the symbolic but does not produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages.

Aiming at the Apocalypse: Sight

To speak of hallucination in connection with such an unstable 'object' suggests at once that there is a visual cathexis in the phobic mirage – and at least a speculative cathexis in the abject. Elusive, fleeting and baffling as it is, that non-object can be grasped only as a sign. It is through the intermediary of *representation*, hence a *seeing*, that it holds together. A visual hallucination that, in the final analysis, gathers up the others (those that are auditory, tactile, etc.) and, as it bursts into a symbolicity that is normally calm and neutral, represents the subject's desire. For the absent object, there is a sign. For the desire of that want, there is a visual hallucination. More than that, a cathexis of looking, in parallel with the symbolic domination taking the place of narcissism, often leads to voyeuristic 'side effects' of phobia. Voyeurism is a structural necessity in the constitution of object relation, showing up every time the object shifts towards the abject; it becomes true perversion only if there is a failure to symbolize the subject/object instability. Voyeurism accompanies the writing of abjection. When that writing stops, voyeurism becomes a perversion. [...]

Julia Kristeva, extract from *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980); trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 44–6.

Terry Eagleton
Ludwig Wittgenstein//1990–93

[…] *John Maynard Keynes* […] Let me tell you a little story. There was once a young man who dreamed of reducing the world to pure logic. And because he was a very clever young man, he actually managed to do it. And when he had finished, he stood back and admired his handiwork. It was beautiful: a world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy, like countless acres of gleaming ice stretching silently to the horizon. Each object in this world sparkled in the purity of its being, each thing cleanly demarcated from its neighbours. So the clever young man looked around at the new world he had created, and decided to set out and explore it. He took one step forward, and fell flat on his back. You see, he had forgotten about *friction*. The ice was smooth and level and stainless, but you couldn't walk there. So the young man sat down and viewed his marvellous creation and wept bitter tears. And after some years had passed, he grew up into a wise old man who came to understand that roughness and ambiguity and indeterminacy aren't imperfections – they're what make things work. He wanted to run and dance; so he had to dig up all those gleaming acres of ice until he discovered the rough ground beneath them. And the words and things scattered up on this ground were all battered and tarnished and ambiguous; and the wise old man saw that this was the way things were. But something in him was still homesick for the ice, where everything was radiant and absolute and relentless. And so, though he liked the *idea* of the rough ground, he couldn't bring himself to live there. So now he was marooned between earth and ice, at home in neither; and this was the cause of all his grief. […]

Terry Eagleton, extract from script commissioned in 1990 by Tariq Ali for Channel Four television, later adapted by Derek Jarman for his film *Wittgenstein* (1993); in *Wittgenstein: The Derek Jarman Film/The Terry Eagleton Script* (London: BFI Publishing, 1993) 55.

Alfred Gell
The Art Object//1998

[...] A purely cultural, aesthetic, 'appreciative' approach to art objects is an anthropological dead end. Instead, the question which interests me is the possibility of formulating a 'theory of art' which fits naturally into the context of anthropology, given the premiss that anthropological theories are 'recognizable' initially, as theories about social relationships, and nothing else. The simplest way to imagine this is to suppose that there could be a species of anthropological theory in which *persons* or 'social agents' are, in certain contexts, substituted for by *art objects*.

This immediately raises the question of the definition of the 'art object', and indeed, of 'art' itself. Howard Morphy ['The Anthropology of Art' (1994) 648–85] in a recent discussion of the problem of the 'definition of art' in the anthropological context, considers, and rejects, the (Western) institutional definition of art, that 'art' is whatever is treated as art by members of the institutionally recognized art world [Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld' (1964)] – critics, dealers, collectors, theoreticians, etc. This is fair enough: there is no 'art world' to speak of in many of the societies which anthropologists concern themselves with, yet these societies produce works some of which are recognized as 'art' by our 'art world'. According to the 'institutional theory of art', most indigenous art is only 'art' (in the sense we mean by 'art') because we think it is, not because the people who make it think so. Accepting the art world's definition of art obliges the anthropologist to bring to bear on the art of other cultures a frame of reference of an overtly metropolitan character. To some extent this is inevitable (anthropology is a metropolitan activity, just like art criticism) but Morphy is understandably disinclined to accept the verdict of the (anthropologically uninformed) Western art world as to the definition of 'art' beyond the physical frontiers of the West. He proposes, instead, a dualistic definition; art objects are those 'having semantic and/or aesthetic properties that are used for presentational or representational purposes' (Ibid., 655), that is, either art objects are sign-vehicles, conveying 'meaning', or they are objects made in order to provoke a culturally endorsed aesthetic response, or both of these simultaneously.

I find both of these conditions for art object status questionable. I have already expressed the opinion that 'aesthetic properties' cannot be abstracted, anthropologically, from the social processes surrounding the deployment of candidate 'art objects' in specific social settings. I doubt, for example, that a warrior on a battlefield is 'aesthetically' interested in the design on an opposing warrior's shield; yet it was so as so as to be seen by this warrior (and to frighten

him) that the design was placed there. The shield, if it resembles the one [reproduced earlier in the text] is indisputably a work of art of the kind interesting to the anthropologist, but its aesthetic properties (for us) are totally irrelevant to its anthropological implications. Anthropologically, it is not a 'beautiful' shield, but a fear-inducing shield. The innumerable shades of social/emotional responses to artefacts (of terror, desire; awe, fascination, etc,) in the unfolding patterns of social life cannot be encompassed or reduced to aesthetic feelings; not without making the aesthetic response so generalized as to be altogether meaningless. The effect of the 'aestheticization' of response-theory is simply to equate the reactions of the ethnographic Other, as far as possible, to our own. In fact, responses to artefacts are never such as to single out, among the spectrum of available artefacts, those that are attended to 'aesthetically' and those that are not.

Nor am I happy with the idea that the work of art is recognizable, generically, in that it participates in a 'visual' code for the communication of meaning. I entirely reject the idea that anything, except language itself, has 'meaning' in the intended sense. Language is a unique institution (with a biological basis). Using language, we can talk about objects and attribute 'meanings' to them in the sense of 'find something to say about them' but visual art objects are not part of language for this reason, nor do they constitute an alternative language. Visual art objects are objects about which we may, and commonly do, speak but they themselves either do not speak, or they utter natural language in graphemic code. We talk about objects, using signs, but art objects are not, except in special cases, signs themselves, with 'meanings'; and if they do have meanings, then they are part of language (i.e. graphic signs), not a separate 'visual' language. I shall return to this subject at intervals, since my polemic against the idea of a 'language of art' has many different aspects to it, which are better dealt with separately. For the present, let me simply warn the reader that I have avoided the use of the notion of 'symbolic meaning' throughout this work. This refusal to discuss art in terms of symbols and meanings may occasion some-surprise, since the domain of 'art' and the symbolic are held by many to be more or less coextensive. In place of symbolic communication, I place all the emphasis on *agency*, *intention*, *causation*, *result* and *transformation*. I view as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it. The 'action'-centred approach to art is inherently more anthropological than the 'alternative semiotic approach because it is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects 'as if' they were texts.

Having rejected Morphy's two criteria for discriminating the class of 'art objects' for the purposes of the anthropology of art, I am, of course, still left with the unsolved problem of proposing a criterion for art object status. Fortunately,

however, the anthropological theory of art does not need to provide a criterion for art object status which is independent of the theory itself. The anthropologist is not obliged to define the art object, in advance, in a way satisfactory to aestheticians, or philosophers, or art historians, or anybody else. The definition of the art object I make use of is not institutional, nor is it aesthetic or semiotic; the definition is *theoretical*. The art object is whatever is inserted into the 'slot' provided for art objects in the system of terms and relations envisaged in the theory (to be outlined later), Nothing is decidable in advance about the nature of this object, because the theory is premised on the idea that the nature of the art object is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded. It has no 'intrinsic' nature, independent of the relational context. Most of the art objects I shall actually discuss are well-known ones that we have no difficulty in identifying as 'art'; for instance, the Mona Lisa. In as much as we recognize a pre-theoretical category of art objects – split into the two major subcategories of 'Western' art objects and 'Indigenous' or 'Ethnographic' art objects – I conduct the discussion in terms of 'prototypical' members of these categories, for convenience's sake, But in fact anything whatsoever could, conceivably, be an art object from the anthropological point of view, including living persons, because the anthropological theory of art (which we can roughly define as the 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency') merges seamlessly with the social anthropology of persons and their bodies. Thus, from the point of view of the anthropology of art, an idol in a temple believed to be the body of the divinity, and a spirit-medium, who likewise provides the divinity with a temporary body, are treated as theoretically on a par, despite the fact that the former is an artefact and the latter is a human being. [...]

Alfred Gell, extract from *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 5–7.

Amie L. Thomasson
Ordinary Objects//2007

[...] Of course, there are objections to the claims that the ontology developed [in *Ordinary Objects*, 2007] is a common sense ontology. One common objection is that the principles I have argued for entail *not only* the existence of our familiar ordinary objects (along with physical objects, scientific objects, etc.) but *also* that

of many more objects than common sense accepts. This objection can take two forms. The first is to suggest simply that views which accept ordinary objects give us a counter-commonsensical *number* of objects. So, for example, Katherine Hawley describes the challenge facing constitution theorists as offering 'some explanation of why we tend to say there is just one thing there' (*How Things Persist*, 2001: 163) when, for example, the theory officially accepts that there is a sweater and a length of thread. I think this is indeed an intuition that must be respected (though we should note that the claim that there is a sweater *and* a length of thread sounds bad largely because it violates the independence presuppositions that normally govern conjunctive claims). But by now it should be clear how a view like mine handles this intuition. As I have argued, the claim that there 'is just one thing there' is not well formed and truth-evaluable if it uses 'thing' in a category-neutral sense; but the intuition that it's true that there is just one thing there likely comes from our standard sortal use of 'thing' to count, for example, separate physical masses – using this sortal, there is only one. But the truth of the claim that there is one 'thing' here in that sortal sense does not undermine the idea that, if we use 'thing' in a covering sense involving both the sortals 'piece of thread' and 'sweater', we wind up with a count of two.

The other form an objection like this often takes is to suggest not that the problem is simply countenancing more objects than there seem to be, but rather that we gain commitment to various specific kinds of things (that have no place on a common sense view. Certainly it is true that common sense does not recognize the existence of gollyswoggles [an invented term for complex-shaped lumps of clay which are so shaped as part of their essence], and the like. Nor, of course, does it deny their existence –there are no terms in ordinary English for these things, and conmon sense understandably does not consider such things at all since, given our current range of practices, such entities would be quite irrelevant and uninteresting. But suppose one introduced the terms for such entities, and taught people the associated application and coapplication conditions. Would people then say that it's just common sense that there are no such entities?

You could try to lead them to do this with inflammatory remarks like 'Look, then there are *millions* of objects there on your desk' or 'Then there is some *object* composed of the Eiffel Tower and my left ear' and so on. But our earlier discussion of the term 'object' should make us suspicious of such rhetorical appeals. These appeals clash with our intuitions because the term 'object' has at least two different uses. First, there is the covering use of 'object' on which one can say that since there are sums (provided that the relevant parts exist) and there are gollyswoggles (provided there is properly shaped clay), there are such 'objects' as sums and gollyswoggles. This use of the term 'object' differs from the ordinary use in which 'object' is used sortally, roughly to pick out cohesive, enduring, medium-sized

separate physical entities (as in the birthday party memory game 'Name the objects on the tray', when the tray is only briefly uncovered). The above rhetorical appeals make the philosophical thesis sound bad by tacitly appealing to the sortal sense of 'object', which is associated with existence and identity conditions that would rule out the existence of a disjoint 'object' like the sum of tower and ear, and would rule out the possibility that there be a million objects on my desk. But this is irrelevant to the question of whether or not there are sums or gollyswoggles (i.e. whether the application conditions associated with such terms are fulfilled, and thus whether there are such 'objects' given a covering use of the term).

But suppose, less inflammatorily (and less misleadingly), that we explained to 'normal' people how the terms 'gollyswoggle' and 'sum of x and y' were to be used – such that, for example, the former applies just in case there is a properly shaped piece of clay, and the latter just in case x and y exist. Then simply ask them, for example, is there a gollyswoggle (here on the pedestal)? I think in this case 'common sense', with a *vocabulary* suitably expanded to include the new term, would certainly accept that there is. (And much the same, I think, would go for the case of sums, once the whole language game of mereology was sufficiently introduced.) So while everyday English may not include the relevant vocabulary, and may rightly neglect to have any interest in the referents of such gerrymandered (but referring) terms as we care to introduce, I do not think that its indifference to such terms suggests that it is contrary to common sense (once the terms are introduced) to allow that they refer.

So I accept, and do not think that common sense denies (or would deny) that there are gollyswoggles, sums and referents of whatever other terms may be introduced in a way that (unlike 'hoverball' or 'wishdate') genuinely guarantees that their application conditions are met, provided the truth of other sentences accepted (e.g. there is clay shaped in the following way; there is the Eiffel Tower and my nose). Indeed, wherever we have a sortal with coherent application and coapplication conditions, and the application conditions are fulfilled, we may then, if we use 'object' in a covering sense, say that there is an object of that sort.

Is this then a ridiculously profligate, bloated ontology? To see that these accusations are inappropriate, one need only return to the discussion of counting and parsimony above. But doesn't this entail massive amounts of colocation, and thereby violate common sense? [Earlier] discussion of colocation has already shown how to handle this objection. Barring any further lines of worry, then, we can conclude that although the approach to ontology I have recommended entails colocation and the existence of many more objects than are naturally mentioned in an inventory of the world, properly understood, these consequences do not undermine its claim to preserve a common sense ontology. [...]

Amie L. Thomasson, extract from *Ordinary Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 183–5 [footnotes not included].

Brian D. Collier
Using the Collier Classification System//2007

Naming Very Small Objects with the Collier Classification System can be an interesting and rewarding experience. By following these simple instructions you can become a participant in the global effort to name and catalogue these previously unclassified and ever-present things. With our help we can further the goal of maintaining order and control over a chaotic world filled with ever-increasing amounts of detritus. At this work station you'll find a printed classification chart, forceps, note pad, a pen or pencil, blank labels, and small glass vials. These items are all you will need to name your Very Small Object.

1 First you should collect a Very Small Object to name. Very Small Objects can be found all around you. Simply reach into your pockets or look on the table or floor around you. If you need help in finding a Very Small Object you can refer to the 'point of origin' section on the Classification Chart. This section gives many examples of where these objects can be found. On the wall next to these instructions you'll find definitions to help you determine the parameters of what exactly a Very Small Object is. Using the forceps, carefully pick up the object and place it in 'maximum dimensions of a very small object' area on the work station table.

2 Using the classification charts, proceed from A through H to construct your new name. The finished name should be three separate words, each one compiled from the name fragments provided in charts. If you find that the charts do not adequately describe your object you may add a description to one of the categories. When adding a description please write it on a page from the note pad and tack it to the small cork board mounted on the wall near the work stations. Descriptions work best when they are fragmented before insertion into the overall name. Review the classification charts to find examples of the practice. Additions will be included in the classification charts when they are periodically updated.

3 After you finish constructing the name of your Very Small Object, you should write it on one of the provided labels with the black sharpie marker. Please print clearly.

4 Using the forceps, carefully pick the Very Small Object up and place it on one of the glass vials. Screw the top on the glass vial. Peel the label off of its backing and stick on the vial near the cap.

5 Now take the vial and place it in one of the empty holes in the rack labelled 'Newly Classified Very Small Objects', mounted on the wall near the work station.

Thank you! You have just become a contributor to The Very Small Objects Master Collection.

Brian D. Collier, 'Using the Collier Classification System', in *Say It isn't So: Art Trains its Sights on the Natural Sciences* (Bremen: Neues Museum Weserburg/Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2007) 116–17. The Collier Classification System for Very Small Objects (verysmallobjects.com)

Katrina Palmer
An Essay about Absalon//2010

A book sits on Addison Cole's desk, in the quietly oppressive confinement of the sealed studio. It is closed, mute and apparently insanely content in its objecthood. It has a white hardback case, with a blank jacket. It does look really cool, but so satisfied within its whiteness and its paperiness and so persistent in its presence that it draws Addison's attention. The student leans forward and picks the object up, in a casual way, as if it is a very ordinary thing.

The pages contain monotone images of artwork by an artist called Absalon. Addison flicks nonchalantly through them and barely registers a difference between one picture and the next before putting the book back down. As Absalon apparently makes white objects in achromatic spaces, it's a wonder, thinks Addison, that any image is visible on the paper. The strange notion creeps into Addison's mind that the artwork has been usurped by these pages; an entire practice has been absorbed.

Despite being unnerved by this publication, Addison is desperate for the sterile

distance of the School to be supplemented with an outburst of physical passion, or anything that would acknowledge a positive material presence, and so, feeling there could be something potentially antagonistic about the book's insistence, decides to look at it again, only to be instantly irritated by the preciousness of its presentation and its untainted content. Addison reluctantly reads the array of texts about Absalon printed inside, the whole time aware of nasty student fingers touching and spoiling the bloodless images until finally a bright red marker pen is picked up and the title page is viscously defaced with a thick diagonal line. Addison then decides a short essay might be a more appropriate response and so closes the book and writes the following by way of an introduction:

Whiteness and Objecthood in Absalon's *Cells*

Between 1987 and 1993, Absalon created a body of work that formulates a sustained proposition of white objects composed to form white rooms which he called *Cells*. These *Cells* are specifically designed to suit the proportions of a single artist inhabitant. A number of issues arise from this proposition with regard to Absalon's use of the object and how it makes meaning. In order to expose and then respond to these issues this essay will be formulated through a classic Hegelian dialectical model. This model is chosen for its appropriateness, its shape will develop through contrasting dynamics: From white, to black to grey. The thesis will describe the *Cells*' whiteness, purity, geometry and formal efficiency. The resulting formulation suggests an idealized futuristic space capsule, or the confines of religious asceticism.

The antithesis of this proposal is the dark presence of the body. A comparison will be made at this point to Louise Bourgeois' cells and cell-like rooms. Bourgeois' cells are thick with autobiographical narrative played out through a historic, and at times abject, combination of domesticity and the surreal. Her *Red Room–Child*, (1994), for example, is a contained area demarcated by wooden panels. The confined chamber, full of dark mahogany furniture, is scattered with blood-red objects ranging from spools of thread to a contorted arrangement of human hands, twisted together and cast in red wax. Although Bourgeois' cells, like Absalon's, cannot be entered, her spaces are consistently stained with human presence making the two practices almost impossible to reconcile.

A closer fit is found in the modular living units of Andrea Zittel. Zittel's *A–Z Management and Maintenance Unit* and *A–Z Comfort Units* have a similar sense of coherence to Absalon's *Cells*. The objects in both practices have the look of the commercial prototype. They are compact functional spaces, consisting of basic cubic elements such as shelves, tables and cupboards. Zittel makes reference to a contemporary design aesthetic but hers are used spaces rather than show-room clean, so there are odd items like books, drinking glasses and CDs scattered

about. Zittel's work suggests an only temporarily absent body, whereas Absalon promotes negation to the point of spirituality. The inhabitant evoked by Zittel is an independent figure. In contrast Absalon further excavates the solitary space, emptying it out so the vacancy that is left echoes with and even depends upon the complete denial of the human subject. This abstraction defines the cell as a space of exclusion and social non-identification. Absalon's work looks so white because there is no inscribed body. No traces are visible because there was no expulsion, the body was never there to begin with.

The conclusion of this essay will be a synthesis that uncovers Absalon's relationship to both minimalism and conceptualism. An issue for sculpture has been that it can appear as materially rather than conceptually based, and so it is closely associated with the dumb sensuality of the body as opposed to the elevated mind. Absalon situates this work as reaching beyond minimalist sculpture, through architecture and design and towards a conceptual ideal of the artefact that is somehow untainted by its materiality. Surely this suggestion of the transcendence of the object sculpture from the visceral corporeality of the object body, is somewhere between a utopian dream and a fictional vision? Absalon's *Cells* are propositional models; they are like the fictional scenarios of an idealized future occupant who inhabits the spaces while allowing them to remain as they are. However, the purity of the *Cells*' whiteness retains an inherent anxiety that stems from the violence of the initial act of abstraction. [...]

Katrina Palmer, extract from 'An Essay about Absalon', *The Dark Object*, Semina series (London: Book Works, 2010) 30–33.

Falke Pisano
Affecting Abstraction 3 (The Complex Object)//2007

1 The object of which this is the first sentence doesn't exist yet.
2 The object needs to be constructed.
3 Because it needs to be constructed, the implications of its possible reality will derive from the associations and meanings that are projected on its imminent existence as well as the structures within which it is thought out and made.
4 Before the object begins, the context of its origin sets the conditions for the development of its conceptual form.
5 The object originates in the practice of its architect or the author of this text.

6 The practice of the author leads towards a point at which the conceptual form of the object is instigated. It is the setting in which the nature of the object is developed and its purpose is defined.

7 The main elements constituting the context in which the object originates are:

8 A strong interest in the constructive potential of thought and in the possibilities of constructing and solving problems in the field of language by making use of internal systems of logic in language, writing and text.

9 A concern with and affection for the existence and features of objects and in particular concrete abstract objects.

10 As well as ideas about written language, the specific conditions of writing a text, the (re)construction: and development of an idea through the construction of a text.

11 These elements and others exist in connection with ideas that revolve around the confrontation between text and matter, the relation and exchange between both and the specific problems and kind of existence that can be created by working in the area where those two affect each other's existence and form. These ideas are moved around while the author tries to come to works in which new conditions prevail., in which things – in text – are enabled to exist in a different way – which she tries to achieve by confronting, and/or forcing a collaboration between, the logic of language and text and the logic of the concrete reality that is connected to the text and by traversing both by and during the writing.

12 The beginning of the object lies at a point of the author's practice at which the different elements that constitute the structural foundation display a movement that points towards the possibility of an articulation of the various ideas, in practice.

13 The object begins when an applied research into the possibilities of constructing an object without consideration for actual possibilities of centralized material existence, becomes a part of the practice of the author.

14 The object's conceptual form is set off by the realization of a problem: The problem of the exact relationship between objects and the plot or story explaining their existence and consistency.

15 Or the question: To what extent are objects the result of their story and in what way does the story persist to inhabit the object?

16 Around that same time the author's practice is extended through the development of an interest in the problems related to impossible transformations, for instance the transformation of a sculpture into a conversation, and an urge to determine a logic that can traverse these different manifestations of existence.

17 These two problems remain separate for a while and the problem of impossible transformations proves to be difficult to solve.

Falke Pisano, *Affecting Abstraction 3 (the Complex Object)*, text for performance (2007), in *Falke Pisano: Figures of Speech*, ed. Will Holder (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2010) 31.

Anders Kreuger
What Things Mean//2011

[...] The object is *always already* both image and word. This is ultimately because we modern humans are defined by our use of language. There are no human communities today without language and no 'primitive' versions of language reflecting previous stages of development. Inquiry into the origin of language has been a flourishing field of research and speculation for the last twenty years. One compelling recent theory is that our ancestors, who left Africa some 50,000 years ago, must have acquired language in a singular moment of new and unlimited clarity, for which their mental capacity had been building up gradually – like the momentous change of state when a bird or an aircraft is suddenly airborne and ready to conquer the whole sky![1]

Once we had learned the secret of combining a limited amount of sounds into an infinity of statements we could not unlearn it. This secret has been called 'double-scope integration', which is just a translation of a crucial human capability into the jargon of cognitive research. 'Two or more mental spaces can be partially matched and their structure can be partially projected onto a new, blended space that develops emergent structure.'[2] Analogy, metaphor and metonymy are classic philological terms for what is happening here: the blending of material from different kinds of perception into distinct images that help us make sense of what we perceive. Language may be complex and infinite, but the world outside it is even more so. As speaking animals we are defined by our ability to perform the operations of displacement and condensation, which for Freud were characteristic of 'primary psychical processes'.[3] Through such re-routing and re-packaging of sensorial data we are able to situate ourselves, to respond in a measured and deliberate way to events outside our control and to form coherent, retrievable memories.

To bring the things of the outside world into a sphere where we can influence them is one important function of language. In this sense it is close to that other

signifying and symbolizing human activity, visual art, which is our real concern here. Double-scope integration is a fairly accurate technical description of what artists do. Yet we must not confuse art with language; we must try to grasp what distinguishes the word from the image and the object.

This is easier said than done, not least because the word itself is always already an ambiguous entity. Strictly speaking, it is just a segment of language placed between two silences or blank spaces. Moreover, the linguistic signs which make up words and refer to objects can only become manifest through various kinds of images. The standard model, formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, divides the sign in two. The signifier is the agent that creates meaning: a sonorous image that can also be expressed visually, as writing. The *signified* is the mental image evoked by the act of signification.

In his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* Louis Hjelmslev elaborates the Saussurean scheme.[4] He speaks of expression and content, and he insists that both aspects of the sign are always already formed when they come together. This allows us to imagine a *substance of expression*, something like an inarticulate voice that needs to be organized as speech. Although Hjelmslev claims to be interested only in a 'scientific' vision of language, his model also yields the intriguing notion of a *substance of content*, which invites speculation about how we can think without language – another unresolved issue that has inspired new research lately.[5] Is there a mental 'thing' that could somehow be seized and inspected before it is conceptually formatted by language? It is worth noting that communication, usually considered to be the first duty of language, is perhaps only a side effect of such formatting. Communication does not require double-scope integration, but human thinking does.

Is this review of basic facts about language of any special relevance to Haegue Yang's art? It might be, if we can use Hjelmslev's four notions to illustrate what image is to object and word to image, and if we can ground this in the actual artworks. We must also remind ourselves that what we identify as three aspects of the thing is a field of tension to be sensed and exploited rather than a problem to be formulated and resolved. We shall use Yang's *Storage Piece* as an example. This work, exhibited on the first floor of Kunsthaus Bregenz, is both singular and plural. It is a configuration of pieces from before 2004, which would have been condemned to homelessness (or costly self-storage) if they had not been brought together as wrapped and packed components, to be unwrapped or unpacked by a potential buyer. *Storage Piece* is a highly performative sculpture. Like many works by Yang it was inaugurated with a written speech, in this case a dialogue between two characters, made distinguishable by being named 'a man' and 'a woman.'

In *Storage Piece* Hjelmslev's form of expression might simply be the constituent objects, images, and words taken as carriers of already specified meaning: pre-

existing artworks and a script for two speakers. The *form of content* might be the specific relations between the author's objects, images, and words as they come together in the work, and the images and words they evoke in the viewer and listener. How are these two perceivable dimensions of form mirrored in the next dimension, that of a substance which can perhaps only be thought? The 'substance of expression' might be the objects that constitute the individual earlier works, as well as the bubble plastic that wraps them, the pallet that defines their new collective outline and the words spoken to the bulk of the combined piece – but only if we interpret *Storage Piece* as a fundamentally new act of formatting that annuls the articulation already given to its constituent parts.

We could extend this reasoning to *Warrior Believer Lover*. The light sculptures' form of expression would be the objects used to compose them, in their capacity as use-objects or art-objects with identifiable value and meaning, whereas their form of content would be the new relations set up between them. Their substance of expression would be the same objects, understood as emptied of all previous meaning by the act of composing and choreographing them.

The last of Hjelmslev's four notions is the most obtuse and difficult one. Is it the substance we need to fill out an empty form, or is it an empty substance in need of formatting? Is it a flowing movement of objects that we somehow mentally register before we associate it with specific images or words? Or is it a graspable but always already nameless absence of meaning, the origin and final destination of all things? Is the 'substance of content' the stuff of life or dead matter? More specifically, how can Hjelmslev's enigmatic creation be meaningfully exploited for analysing visual art? Does his ineffable substance perhaps make us feel that the objects and images of a work of art need our words to become fully present and empowered? Can it be interpreted as some kind of 'drive' for meaning?

Trustworthies (2010/11) is another new series, for which Yang has used torn pieces of thin paper envelopes printed with an elaborately dense so-called security pattern. She has transfigured their abstract 'writing', designed to block content from inquisitive viewers, into gently vibrating contentless collages. The dense print has been deprived of its functional meaning, and we might be excused if we think of these collages as the visualized substance of expression and content.

We have illustrated the difficulty to isolate object, image, and word from each other, but we have also insisted on the necessity to try. We have repeatedly used the pretentious compound adverb 'always already' without any scruples, even with a certain relish. Usually it acknowledges a writer's debt to written language, to a text that has always already spoken for him, to *text in general*. Our interest was to see if the formula might be reused for thinking about a visual art practice that is always already both form and substance, both expression and content. Haegue Yang invites such readings, especially when she puts naked objects or

images in front of our eyes without any words to cloak them. It is only fair that we should continue by enquiring how her art relates to text, which after all is the only thing we can actually *read* in a non-metaphorical way. [...]

1 See Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, 'The Origin of Language as a Product of the Evolution of Modern Cognition', in Bernard Laks, ed., *Origin and Evolution of Languages: Approaches, Models Paradigms* (London and Oakville, 2008) 133–56.

2 Ibid., 133–4.

3 Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious' (1915) in *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 11. On Metapsychology*, trans. James Strachey) (London, 1991) 190.

4 First published as *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse* ('On the Fundamentals of Linguistic Theory'), in *Traveaux du Cercle lingustique de Copenhague*, vol. 25 (Copenhagen, 1943).

5 See Jose Luis Bermudez, *Thinking without Words* (Oxford and New York, 2007).

Anders Kreuger, extract from 'What Things Mean', in *Arrivals: Haegue Yang* (Bregenz, Austria: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2011) 87–90.

Jean-François Lyotard
Psychoanalysis and Painting//1972

Should we not relate the element of plastic uncertainty that we detect in Cézanne's painting to a 'refusal', whether conscious or not, to 'instantiate' the work, a refusal to place it in a space of bestowal [*donation*] or exchange, a desire 'not to' put it into circulation in the network ultimately conditioned by the oedipal structure and the law of castration? This refusal would be precisely what prevents Cézanne from contenting himself with any plastic formula, either (as in the first period) the imaginary and literary restitution of fulfilled desire or (as in the third) the reference to a strict and transcendent law of arrangement of objects on the support. One notes in the painter the strange desire for the painting to be itself an object, that it no longer operate as message, threat, petition, defence, exorcism, morality, allusion in a symbolic relation, but that it operate as an absolute object, freed from the transferential relation, indifferent to the relational order, active only in the energetic order and the silence of the body. This particular desire allows for the emergence of a new position of the object to be painted. The 'denial' of the transferential function, of the place it is meant to occupy in the drama of castration, its decoupling from symbolic exchange – this is a significant transformation. We argued that this

transformation pushes the pictorial object from a neurotic position to a psychotic or perverse one, insofar as an object occupying this last position presents itself detached from all symbolic law, that it defies the rule of sexual difference and castration, that it is the seat of masochistic and sadistic manipulations, and that this is where desire is denied at the same time as the gaze is fascinated. The fetish object is the sum of these characteristics. One could reasonably venture to recognise them in Cézanne's last works, just as one would inevitably recognise them in the works of Cubism, Klee, Kandinsky and the American abstractionists.

This, in turn, would allow us to understand Cézanne's legacy, its importance, and more generally the resonance of this displacement of the object and painting from the 1900s onwards. For if the object to be painted undergoes the transformation we described – ceasing to be a referenced and represented object to become the site of libidinal operations generating an inexhaustible polymorphism – one might need to put forward the hypothesis that the same goes for other objects: object to be produced and consumed, object to be sung and heard, and object of affection. We are indeed in a position to suggest that the real transformation with which capitalism – especially in its most recent forms, let's say for Western Europe since the 1950s – brands objects circulating in society, in fact all objects sooner or later (and not only economic objects, as would posit an economism a little too confident in the impermeability of its borders), is not their 'growth' and the 'development' of societies. Instead it is the annihilation of objects as symbolic values referred to desire and culture, and their constitution in indifferent terms of a system that no longer has outside of itself any ground in which these objects circulating in its midst can be anchored – neither God, nature, need, nor even the desire of the supposed subjects of the exchange. The pictorial object of Cézanne and his successors, as long as they bear the traces of psychosis or perversion, is much closer than one would think to, for example, Marx's economic object in *Das Kapital* or, for that matter, the linguistic object erected by structural linguistics. One sees that by extending the reach of an aesthetics centered on a libidinal economy, one would be able to simultaneously situate accurately the Cézannian object, to possibly make sense of the aesthetic blindness of Freud, too bent as he was on locating a position of neurotic object, and to take into account this event in which we are immersed since the beginning of the twentieth century, namely the upheaval of the very position of the various social objects and the transformation of the desire underpinning institutions.

Jean-François Lyotard, extract from 'Psychanalyse et peinture', *Encyclopédie Universalis*, 13 (Paris, 1972); reprinted in *Encyclopédie Universalis*, 19 (Paris, 2002) 68–9; translated by Antony Hudek, 2013.

Giorgio Agamben
Mme Panckoucke, or The Toy Fairy//1977

The history of the semantic migrations of the term 'fetish' conceals some instructive insights. What is initially confined to the otherness of a 'savage' culture as 'something so absurd that it offers hardly any purchase to the discourse that would combat it' returns first, in the economic sphere, as an article of mass consumption and subsequently as the choice of perverse desire in the intimacy of sexual life. The proliferation of cases of fetishism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (cutters of braids, coprophiliacs, sniffers of clothing, and fetishists of footwear, nightcaps, mourning crêpe, lingerie, spots on lingerie, furs, wigs, leather objects, rings and finally words and symbols) goes hand in hand with the complete commodification of objects and, after the transformation of things endowed with religious power into useful objects and of useful objects into commodities, announces a new transformation of the *facticia* produced by human labour.

The entrance of an object into the sphere of the fetish is always the sign of a transgression of the rule that assigns an appropriate use to each thing. It is easy to identify this transgression: for Charles de Brosses, it concerned the transfer of a material object into the impalpable sphere of the divine; for Karl Marx, the violation of the use-value; for Alfred Binet and Sigmund Freud, the deviation of desire from its proper object. The map of the migration of the concept of fetishism traces thus, in filigree, the system of the rules that codify a type of repression that the theorists of liberation have not yet considered: that which exercises itself on objects and fixes the norms of their use. In our culture, even if not apparently sanctioned, this system of rules is so rigid that, as ready-made products demonstrate, the simple transfer of one object to the sphere of another is sufficient to render it unrecognizable and disquieting. But objects exist that have always been destined to such a particular function that they can be said to be withdrawn from all rules of use. I am speaking of toys. Once again, it was Baudelaire who noticed that an intelligent artist might find in toys material for reflection. In 'The Moral of the Toy,' published in the *Monde littéraire* of 17 April 1853, he recounts his visit, as a child, to the house of a certain Mme Panckoucke:

> She took me by the hand and, together, we traversed several rooms. Then she opened the door of a room that offered me an extraordinary spectacle, worthy of a fairy tale. The walls were no longer visible, so covered they were with toys. The

> ceiling disappeared under an efflorescence of toys that hung down like marvellous stalactites. The floor scarcely yielded a small path on which to walk ... It is because of this adventure that I cannot pause before a toy shop and scan the inextricable medley of the bizarre forms and disparate colours without thinking of the woman, dressed in velvet and fur, who appeared to me as the Toy Fairy.

The evocation of this infantile recollection offered Baudelaire the pretext for a classification of the possible uses and abuses of toys. In children who transform a chair into a stagecoach, in those who meticulously order their toys, as in a museum, without touching them, but above all in those who, following 'a first metaphysical tendency', wish rather 'to see the soul' and, to this end, turn the toys in their hands, shake them, strike them against the wall, and finally eviscerate them and tear them to pieces ('but *where is the soul?*' – and this is where torpor and sadness set in), he saw the emblem of the relationship – of impenetrable joy mixed with stupefied frustration – that is the basis of artistic creation as of every relation between human and objects.

A text like Rilke's on dolls eloquently proves that children maintain a fetishistic relation to their toys. Developing Baudelaire's observations on toys, Rilke juxtaposed dolls – 'soulless supports' and 'empty sacks' – to handy and grateful objects. Dolls

> fed on fictitious food, like *ka*; befouling themselves, like spoiled children, with reality, every time that one attempted to make them ingest it; impenetrable and, at the extreme stage of a precocious plumpness, incapable of absorbing at any point even a single drop of water ... It [the doll] makes us almost indignant at its tremendous and crass forgetfulness; that hatred that, unconscious, has always constituted a part of our relation to it, breaks forth, the doll lies before us unmasked like the horrible strange body on which we have dissipated our purest warmth; like the drowned corpse painted on the surface that allowed itself to be lifted up and borne along by the floods of our tenderness, until we would dry up again, abandoning it in some hedge ... Are we not singular creatures, we who have allowed ourselves to be guided to place our first inclination where it remains deprived of hope?

With respect to things, the doll is, on the one hand, infinitely lesser, because it is distant and beyond our grasp ('of you only, soul of the doll, it could never be said where you really were'), but, perhaps precisely because of this, it is on the other hand infinitely more, because it is the inexhaustible object of our desire and our fantasies ('in it [the doll] we would mix, as in a test tube, whatever unknowable things happened to us, which we would see boil up and turn colours there'). If one keeps in mind how much Rilke had written on the eclipse of authentic

'things' and on the task falling to the poet to transfigure them into the invisible, the doll, at once absent and present, appears then as the emblem – suspended between this world and the other – of the object that has lost its weight 'in the hands of the merchant' and has not yet transformed itself in the hands of the angel. From this derives its disturbing character, on which Rilke projects the implacable memory of a terrible infantile frustration. But from this also derives the doll's aptitude for providing us with information on the essence of the thing that has become an object of desire, which Rilke, with his morbid sensitivity to relationships with things, registered almost unawares.

If toys are not, as is apparent, simple and reassuring, then their situation in the world of objects is also not as definite as it seems. Philippe Ariès, in a chapter of his book *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien régime* (Family Life and the Child under the Ancien Régime) informs us that the border between toys and objects for adults has not always been as rigid as might be imagined. Until the eighteenth century, adult Europe avidly sought out miniature objects: dollhouses, the *jouets d'Allemagne* (German playthings), and the *petites besognes d'Italie* (little Italian necessities). As the name shows (*bimbelot*; from *bimbe*, baby), the *bibelots* that burdened eighteenth-century interiors and that today populate petit-bourgeois decors are but a residue of these toys for adults. If we attempt to find out their origin, toys send us still further back in time, to a moment when they cannot be distinguished from other things. As Ariès writes:

> The historians of toys, the collectors of dolls and miniature objects, always encounter great difficulties in distinguishing the doll-toys from all the other images and statuettes that excavations restore in almost industrial quantities. In the greater number of cases these had a religious significance: domestic ritual, funerary ritual, ex voto, and so on.

Things that to us appear as toys were originally objects of such seriousness that they were placed in the tomb to accompany the deceased during the otherworldly sojourn. The greater antiquity of tombs that contain miniature objects with respect to those that contain real objects shows that the presence of the former is by no means a consequence of substitution based on 'economic' motives.

If the foregoing is true, then the treasure guarded in Mme Panckoucke's room points to a more originary status of the thing, about which the dead, children, and on the one hand, infinitely lesser, other fetishists can give us precious information. D.W. Winnicott's research on the first relations between the child and the external world have led to the identification of perhaps precisely because of a kind of object, by him defined as 'transitional', that comprises the first things (pieces of bed linen, of cloth, or the like) that the child separates from external

reality and appropriates, and whose place is 'in the zone of experience which is between the thumb and the teddy-bear, between oral eroticism and the real object-relation'. These objects, however, apparently properly belong neither to internal and subjective nor to the external and objective spheres, but to something that Winnicott defined as 'the area of illusion', in whose 'potential space' they will subsequently be able to situate themselves both in play and in cultural experience. The localization of culture and play is therefore within nor outside of the individual, but in a 'third area', distinct both 'from interior psychic reality and from the effective world in which the individual lives.

The topology that is here expressed tentatively in the language of psychology has always been known to children, fetishists, 'savages', and poets. It is in this 'third area' that a science of man truly freed of every eighteenth-century prejudice should focus its study. Things are not outside of us, in measurable external space, like neutral objects (*ob-jecta*) of use and exchange; rather, they open to us the *topos outopos* (placeless place, no-place place) in which our experience of being-in-the-world is situated. The question 'where is the thing?' is inseparable from the question 'where is the human?' Like the fetish, like the toy, things are not properly anywhere, because their place is found on this side of objects and beyond the human in a zone that is no longer objective or subjective, neither personal nor impersonal, neither material nor immaterial, but where we find ourselves suddenly facing these apparently so simple unknowns: the human, the thing.

Giorgio Agamben, extract from *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1977); trans. Ronald. L. Martinez, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 56–9 [footnotes not included].

Man Ray
One Hundred Objects of My Affection//1961

In whatever form it is finally presented: by a painting, by a photograph, by an arrangement of various objects, or by one object itself slightly modified, each object is designed to amuse, annoy, bewilder, mystify, inspire reflection, but not to arouse admiration for any technical excellence usually sought or valued in objects classified as works of art.

There has been a tendency in the past fifty years to extend the boundaries of legitimate art; in painting by the use of material extraneous to canvas and

pigment, in sculpture by the employment of other materials than the classic bronze or stone that identify such sculpture as a work of art. Of course, many have remained faithful to the traditional materials for fear that their authenticity as works of art might be questioned, at the same time forcing their medium into new paths and utilizing it in as unacademic a manner as possible. To attain this end, it has been necessary to resort to new sources of inspiration such as primitive art, the works of the insane and children, the dream world, black magic, mathematics, and logically uncontrolled, or automatic impulses. However, the human interest in a basic order and logic, governed by pre-established rules remains intact. The surprises that may occur within such limits are sufficiently exciting to most men. There is also a security in this interest not to be found in the uncertainties and diversity of opinions that are involved in art appreciation. Which leads to such activities as stamp or butterfly collecting, chess playing and sports in general of a competitive nature. These more or less scientific interests justify themselves by precise measures of value and excellence based on comparisons or numbers, just as in school our proficiency is indicated by graduated ratings. Now, we all love a mystery, but very few of us would be content with a mystery for its own sake, that is without a solution. Little does it mater that, once the solution is obtained, we go on to another mystery, or once a champion has proven himself, by however slight the margin, that he must still defend his title.

Between these two domains of art and play, another spirit exists which seeks neither the authority of consecrated art nor the justification of any effort in work or play of a competitive nature. It is a sort of gratuitous invention an *establishment* of mystery inspired by and responding immediately to the contacts that might be ignored by specialists and professionals. Whatever form of expression this spirit may take, since it cannot easily be classified among the more recognised activities, one cannot approach it with the usual critical bias. In assembling 'Objects of My Affection', the author indulged in an activity parallel to his painting and photograph, an activity which he hopes will elude criticism and evaluation. These objects are a mystery to himself as much as they might be to others, and he hopes they will always remain so. That is their justification, if any is needed.

'We all love a mystery, but must it necessarily be murder?'

Man Ray, 'Preface from a proposed book, *One Hundred Objects of My Affection*', in *The Art of Assemblage* (New York; The Museum of Modern Art, 1961) 48–9.

Cecilia Vicuña
A Diary of Objects for the Chilean Resistance//1974

in june 1973 the c.ia., the pentagon, the chilean right wing and part of the army were openly conspiring to overthrow the popular unity government. i decided to make an object every day in support of the chilean revolutionary process. after the coup d'etat and allende's assassination the objects intend to support the popular resistance against the dictatorship. the objects try to kill three birds with one stone. politically: stand for socialism. magically: help the liberation struggle. aesthetically: be as beautiful as they can to recomfort the souls. give strength. the objects have to be very small in order to travel with me. they are also very precarious. i put them together with what i find, little nails, glue. looking at them you must always remember i belong to other culture. i have not chosen to stay in england

Cecilia Vicuna, text from *A Diary of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (typewriter on red silk, London 1974).

Pierre Fédida
The Absence//1978

'She is scared of objects', the mother of three and a half year-old Myriam immediately tells me at our first meeting. 'If I move, even for a moment, the tiniest thing in the house, she immediately starts to wail. She cannot stand it if my blouse is undone, the bed is unmade or a door remains open. She had a tantrum at lunchtime and I understood that she was scared of my half-full glass wobbling on the table. She screams until an object is put back in its place ... As soon as I am with her, she doesn't leave me one second. *She doesn't know how to play.* Nothing interests her and yet she is quick and smart. Cunning like no other! She hides my bag, shoes, comb ...' Myriam, who is huddled up against her mother, her face buried in the folds of her raincoat, pretends not to see or hear anything. Yet she plays with the belt of the raincoat, twisting and untwisting it before trying to slip it through the bars of the back of the chair as if she were about to tie her mother to it – all this while the mother tells me the story of the 'shoe's eyelets'.

'The first time she began to scream was several weeks after her father left'. (According to the mother, the father left the household shortly after Myriam turned two.) 'A friend came to see me at home and we were having an aperitif. All of a sudden she screamed so loudly I thought a wasp had *left* – I mean *stung* – her; she was running across the room like a fly in a jar. She hid under the bed frame, and no matter *how many names* I used to coax her, she would resume her screaming louder and louder.' (The mother adds that she would often 'play' with her by calling her by different names, depending on the whims inspiring her at that moment.) 'I immediately thought that my friend's shoes were to blame; these had no laces and the eyelets were empty!' (The mother admitted finding this vestimentary negligence embarrassing and was herself made 'uncomfortable' by these 'gaping' shoes.) At the end of this tale, Myriam agreed to turn her gaze towards me and she remained, for a moment, surprised that I was playing by blinking my eyes in front of her. A few times she attempted to see me at which point I would suddenly turn my head away or close my eyes. This is how we established contact.

After separating herself from her mother and giving up on her game with the raincoat belt, Myriam began to examine the desk. She moved up close to me – not without hesitations and steps backward – and began to rummage through an open drawer containing sundry objects I come to accumulate during psychotherapies. These objects discovered and collected according to my own imagination have nothing in common with 'toys'. They are objects either brought by children to their session or found by me on my own associative paths – while still in relation to the children in my care: such and such a carpenter's nail, twisted like a frightened silhouette; a puffed up stone; a piece of wood whose knots summon all the eyes of a face; a shivery bird feather; a crumpled box now ecstatically content; etc. *In sum, objects turned objests* [objeux] *by the words they have the power to invent and the stories they like to tell, for laughs, secretly.* These objects are picked up 'at random' since they got lost for having been thrown away. It is with them that the world can be dreamt of and rebuilt.

Thus Myriam was before this drawer of treasures. Each one of her discoveries was accompanied by a kind of joyful gasp: she would grasp the object and hand it to me, asking me to name it; then found it extremely entertaining that I would question it and hear me find a word inspired by its appearance. She too would suggest words to speak the object she holds in her hand before throwing it back violently to the back of the drawer. In the meantime I try nonetheless to remain attentive to her mother's conversation, now on the subject of her move into the apartment she rented when her husband left! This husband – described as someone offhand and disorganised – 'would always leave everything around and never put anything away'. Married life had become 'insufferable' to her, for

having to endlessly put back what was disturbed or displaced. 'We no longer got along. I wanted order in my life and in the house. I value tranquillity and *do not tolerate that things go awry*.'

Pierre Fédida, extract from *L'Absence* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1978) 100–101; translated by Antony Hudek, 2013.

Jean Fisher
Object of Fetishism//1982

Women's legs continue to be amongst the most persistent images displayed by advertising distributors in the Underground – an ideal location to catch the gaze of the commuter as she waits in those captive limbo moments between home and work. Currently on view are several stocking ads: one from Aristoc ('Say knickers to panties'), and two from Pretty ('They beat the pants off trousers') Polly. In one image the model bends over at an acute angle exposing the product from hips to toes, addressing our gaze with vivacious complicity; in the other two the legs are disembodied from the personality of their owners. As our eyes slide from the 'glistening thighs' ('Gloss over your best features') down the slim calves ('Pretty Polly brings back lovely legs'), they come to rest at a pair of feet each clad inevitably in one of the principle icons of male fetishism, the outrageously impractical high-heeled shoe, cut-away to reveal the toes, and or strapped at the ankles.

The advertisements appear to be addressed to women (women, after all, are the wearers of the product), but it is not so straightforward. An adjacent image advertises women's underwear. The repressive ideology underlying this particular image has already been succinctly dealt with by Rosalind Coward ('Underneath We're Angry') in *Time Out* earlier this year. The inscription, 'Underneath They're all Lovable', is itself, however, not without significance. Who is 'they' and to whom is the message speaking? Assuming that 50 per cent of the commuter population are women, the use of 'they' (rather than 'we') clearly alienates the female sector in a two-fold manner: either 'they' are women other than 'we' but whom 'we' are encouraged to emulate, or 'they' refers to women (us), but the caption is couched in terms that imply that the reader, the conspirator in the message, is male.

In a painstakingly researched book recently published by the Women's Press, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Andrea Dworkin, drawing on the statements

of (male) psychologists, discusses the way in which man has used objects 'to feel his own power and presence'. Objectification has traditionally included women, whose function as 'chattels' – objects of possession, and therefore exchangeable and disposable commodities – still pervades attitudes within society. Advertising remains complicit with these attitudes through its persistent use of images of women which focus primarily on sexuality. The film *Lipstick*, recently screened on TV, purported to examine the after-effects of the rape of a fashion model. In general, it fell far short of discussing the important issue of representation, but in the courtroom sequence the model states that she projects the image of overt sexuality because this is the way that women would like to look. This undoubtedly has some truth, but it nevertheless begs the question of why this should be so. The image of woman propagated through the media is an idealization of 'beauty' and 'femaleness' defined historically by man focusing on the *otherness* of female sexuality; and historically to transgress this standard through 'ugliness' or 'wilfulness' resulted in punishment (restraint, ridicule, social ostracism or mutilation). Not surprisingly, being without power, women conformed.

Representation is double appropriation: firstly the possession of the object by the image-maker himself; and secondly by the spectator, who through theft and possession of the image perpetrates a further act of violence. What was subversive about the seventies fashion images of Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin (for example, the latter's hit-and-run auto-accident which advertised Charles Jourdan shoes), was that they made explicit the sexual violence covertly inscribed in much fashion imagery – of which the 'Lovable' ad is a currently good example (when 'they' say no, what 'they' really mean is yes). Nevertheless, culture's ability to neutralize the publicly unutterable is seemingly boundless: witness the fate of punk's appropriation of the iconography of S&M and prostitution. All this is well-covered ground. What remains important is that the way we use language and present images is instrumental in the construction of meanings within society. Consequently, if violence against women, or any other group, is not to be perpetuated, then women must reclaim the images of themselves. This is one of the most important objectives of women's art.

Two artists, Ana Godel (whose work is currently at Angela Flowers) and Alexis Hunter (whose work was recently seen at the Edward Totah Gallery) both return consistently to the image of the high-heeled shoe. Their use of this image contrasts sharply with that of Andy Warhol, whose 'Shoe' prints were also recently on show at Waddington Graphics. Although his bland and direct presentation appears to deny specific connotations, shoes nevertheless are icons of culture and therefore not without significance. There are two versions of shoes, both richly screened with diamond dust, in which the objects arc either presented in a row, or presented scattered – in other words, 'displayed' or 'discarded'.

If woman-as-object serves the primary function of arousal of male sexual desire, than any other object which can evoke the 'woman-object' could serve the same function. The substitution of one object of arousal for another constitutes the basis of fetishism. The reasons why a particular style of shoe should be a key fetish may include the fact that it encases like a second skin that part of the body furthest removed from the head, and therefore the personality, of the owner; that excessively high heels are a form of shackling through inhibition of movement; that ankle straps suggest bondage; and that there is the excitement of danger – the stiletto heel can be turned as a weapon.

In Godel's drawings the focus is on shackling: the feet and shoes become organically inseparable, bound together by prehensile vines (*The Vase*), bolted (*The Choice*) or tied to the floor (*Blue Lady*), or plugged into an electric socket (*The Connection*). Women are fixed within *The Walk*. The image is of cruelty.

Hunter's shoes are used to symbolize freedom from bondage. In an early series entitled *Approaches to Fear* (1977) she presents us with serial photographic images: in *Pain – Solace*, a hand removes the offending object, a silver high-heeled shoe; in *Pain – Destruction of Cause*, the shoe is burned and rendered ineffectual. This concept is returned to in a more recent work, *Soho Square* (1978–81) in which two feet progressively liberate themselves. Both artists address themselves primarily to women, but the importance of their work in terms of its engagement with the meanings of cultural images cannot be overstated. Culture 'launders' violence through the way it presents its images. There is a pressing need for us all to re-name and re-draw those repressive structures that society has 'normalized', and expose them for the divisive strategies that they really are.

Jean Fisher, 'Object of Fetishism', *Art Monthly*, no. 52 (December 1982); reprinted in *Framing Feminism*, ed. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1992) 322–3.

Slavoj Zizek
There Are Objects and Objects//1991

[...] In [Patricia Highsmith's story] 'The Pond', a recently divorced mother with a small son moves to a country house with a deep, dark pond in the back yard. This pond, out of which strange roots sprout, exerts a strange attraction on her son. One morning the mother finds her son drowned, entangled in its roots; desperate, she calls the garden service. Their men arrive and spread all around

the pond a poison designed to kill the weeds. This does not seem to work: the roots grow even stronger, until, finally, the mother herself tackles the task, cutting and sawing the roots with an obsessive determination. They now appear to her to be alive, to be reacting to her. The more she attacks them, the more she gets caught in their web. Eventually she stops resisting and yields to their embrace, recognizing in their power of attraction the call of her dead son. Here we have an example of [the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's redefinition of the concept of the symptom] the *sinthôme*: the pond is the 'open wound of nature', the kernel of enjoyment that simultaneously attracts and repels us. We find an inverted variation on the same motif in 'The Mysterious Cemetery': in a small Austrian town, doctors of the local hospital perform strange radioactive experiments on their dying patients. In the cemetery behind the hospital, where the patients are buried, strange things begin to happen: extraordinary protuberances shoot out from the graves, red spongy sculptures whose growth cannot be stopped. After an initial unease, the townspeople resign themselves to these outgrowths, which become a tourist attraction. Poems are then written about these 'sprouts of enjoyment.'

It would, however, be a theoretical mistake to equate these strange protuberances with the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire. The 'object small a' would be rather the 'black house' in another Highsmith story: a quite ordinary, everyday object that, as soon as it is 'elevated to the status of the Thing', starts to function as a kind of screen, an empty space on which the subject projects the fantasies that support his desire, a surplus of the real that propels us to narrate again and again our first traumatic encounters with *jouissance*. The example of the 'black house' demonstrates clearly the purely *formal* nature of the 'object small *a*': it is an empty form filled out by everyone's fantasy. In contrast, the protuberances at the Austrian cemetery are almost too present, they are in a way a formless content forcing upon us the massive, inert presence, their nauseous, glutinous bulk. It is not difficult to recognize, in this opposition, the opposition between *desire* and *drive*: the object small a names the void of that unattainable surplus that sets our desire in motion, while the pond exemplifies the inert object, the embodiment of the enjoyment around which the drive circulates. The opposition between desire and drive consists precisely in the fact that desire is by definition caught in a certain dialectic: it can always turn into its opposite or slide from one object to another, it never aims at what appears to be its object, but always 'wants something else'. The drive, on the other hand, is inert, it resists being enmeshed in a dialectical movement; it circulates around its object, fixed upon the point around which it pulsates.

But even this opposition does not exhaust the range of objects that we encounter in psychoanalysis: there is a third kind, perhaps the most interesting,

which escapes the opposition between the object of desire and the object of drive described above. Such an object would be, for example, the button in the story of the same name by Highsmith. This is a story of a Manhattan family with a mongoloid child, a small, fat freak who is unable to understand anything – it just laughs stupidly and spews out its food. The father cannot get accustomed to this mongoloid child, even long after its birth: it appears to him as an intrusion of the senseless real, as a caprice of God or Destiny, a totally undeserved punishment. The idiotic cooing of the child reminds him daily of the inconsistency and indifferent contingency of the universe, i.e. of its ultimate senselessness. Late one evening, fed up with the child (and with his wife who, in spite of her aversion, tries to conceive an affection for the little freak), the father takes a walk through the lonely streets. In a dark corner, he runs into a drunk, has a scuffle with him, and kills him in a frustrated rage, fed by the perceived injustice of fate. The father notices that he is in possession of a button from the drunk's overcoat; rather than throw it away, he keeps it as a kind of souvenir. It is a little piece of the real, a reminder both of the absurdity of fate and of the fact that at least once, he has been able to take his revenge by means of a no less meaningless act. The button confers on him the power to keep his temper in the times to come, it is a kind of token guaranteeing his ability to cope with the everyday misery of life with a freak.

How then does this button function? In contrast to the object small a, there is nothing metonymic-unattainable about it: it is just a little piece of the real that we can hold in our hands and manipulate like any other object. And in contrast to the cemetery protuberances, is it not a terrifying object of fascination: on the contrary, it reassures and comforts, its very presence serves as a guarantee that we will be able to endure the inconsistency and absurdity of the universe. Its paradox is then the following: it is a little piece of the real attesting to the ultimate nonsense of the universe, but in so far as this object allows us to condense, to locate, to materialize the nonsense of the universe in it, in so far as the object serves to represent this, it enables us to sustain ourself in the midst of inconsistency. [...]

Slavoj Zizek, extract from *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991) 133–5.

Bracha Lichtenberger-Ettinger
The Matrixial Gaze//1994

[...] For the phallic *objet a*, the arresting margins are the One, the Nothing and the All, designating the difference of the feminine as madness; for the matrixial object/*objet a* – it is the Several, the more-than-one or less-than-one, the '*Un-en-moins*'(One- less) and the not-all, what is becoming borderline yet never all-encompassing, never limitless. Therefore, a matrixial multiple and plural subjectivity is also singular and partial. It emerges from joint corporal resistance, shared affected instances, from exchanges of phantasy relating to non-Oedipal sexual difference, and from inter-connectivity.

'*Corporal resistance* produces the Real as an unconscious psychic dimension, testifying to the existence of the subject'.[1] Matrixial events do not remain on the level of affected space-time-body instances or of inter-connectivity in the Real. Retunings of distance-in-proximity are beyond-the-phallus psychic events which testify to the matrix in the field of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic – those three distinct-yet-linked faces of each event. With the imaginary and the symbolic matrix we identify and locate inscriptions of traumas and fantasies in which, behind the veil, traces of archaic, transformed relations-without-relating between *I* and unknown *non-I* and of shared matrixial *objet a*(s) are hidden.

The matrix is not a psychotic aspect of subjectivity. With phallic 'castration' as the only possible passageway from the Real to the Imaginary and the Symbolic, matrixial qualifications of the feminine are *foreclosed* and a certain dimension of the feminine becomes psychotic; but, passing through metramorphic processes, matrixial qualifications can find their way to the Unconscious not only by what Freud [in 'The Uncanny'] classifies as 'beyond' the 'meaning of *repression*', and without being foreclosed.

The object may be phallic if viewed in the context of *erogenetic zones/clear-cut objects* like the mouth/the breast, the anus/the faeces, etc., and matrixial if viewed from within a context of shared and diffuse, yet not confuse, experience. With this analysis of Freud's 'The Uncanny' and Lacan's *Le Sinthôme*, I wish to support my proposition that 'Oedipal castration' is only one of the prisms through which the passage to the symbolic field occurs, either for men or for women – from the male viewpoint of difference between the sexes.[2] The matrixial passage – the metramorphic borderlink – precedes and transcends the phallic castration and the Oedipal gender difference. Metramorphosis engages in the becoming threshold of borderlines, for both sexes – as feminine.

These different passages to the Symbolic (*phallic castration* and *matrixal metramorphosis*) indicate two variations of repression and two different kinds of complexes that lies behind repression, which equally but differently induce (one class of) the 'uncanny'. An *Urverdrangung* may re-approach psychic reality and struggle to re-emerge either as a phallic or as a matrixial trace of a loss (*objet a*). The originary repression induces unconscious desire following different paths if traced by phallic 'castration' and repressed or by multifocal, diffuse and *shared* metramorphosis. [...]

1 [footnote 45 in source] [unsigned] 'Le Sujet et l'act sexuel: une affaire de réel', *Scilicet*, no. 5 (Paris, 1975) 35.

2 [46] See 'Matrix and Metamorphosis' (1991), in *Differences* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, extract from *The Matrixial Gaze* (Paris: BLE Atelier, 1994); published in English by Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Dept. of Fine Art, University of Leeds (1995) 36–8.

Louise Bourgeois
Sunday July 27 – 95//1995

I am a fetishist at the level of the house – it leads
no where
Relation of maggots, are they fetishes no because they
are transitory – the maggot becomes a fly – maggots are
controllable – flies are not. *Who has sent the meat, the eggs who has laid the eggs. the maggots are worms. the meat is covered with worms* – crawling maggots.
garage sale *and* street fair *and auction house and* 475 Van Duzer
african: animism
fetishism is not wrong, it is crude, lowly – animalistic.
Do not fall for the fetish you can do better, do not waste your time.
example: the beautiful clothes from your youth – so what – *sacrifice them, eaten by the moths. is it a sacrifice* yes it is
to be able to sacrifice or are you instant gratification – I can wait
I can sacrifice ~~the time~~, the immediacy - *The tangible and the immediate*

are your pieces, resist, say no – *it is a sacrifice, it is a renunciation*
I am not self-indulgent.
I do not need to possess it or to touch it I can : Jimmy Carter
suspend my instincts – Sin in thought only.

The fetishists and the Collectors they
are the squirrels, babies,
Are the fetishists dangerous They
have no sense of proportion.

Louise is anti fetishist.
which is to say that
The Substitute
The metaphor.
suit her perfectly
The australian fetishes
smelled, to the point of
making us faint
The fetishists like
cats. and want
real cats the smell
of 347 475 Dean
The fetishists is anti sublimation

The big apron with a pocket Sunday July 27 – 95
The " " of the butcher *I want to be protected*
Let the little children come to me _____ *I want to protect the others*
| the real Estate. |
The purpose of a bag to fit neatly |Preservation| *from passive to active*
1°) into a larger one | they are the real Market is
2°) over a small one | houses based on fetishism.

Louise Bourgeois, handwritten manuscript text dated 27 July 1995. Loose sheet, 21.6 x 27.9 cm (LB–0769); typographically reproduced in *Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed: Psychoanalytic Writings*, ed. Philip Larratt-Smith (London: Robert Violette, 2012) 183–4. The italics denote text in French in the original, translated by Richard Sieburth and Françoise Gramet.

Parveen Adams
A Little Object//2000

Sleep

These are small and intimate objects [in the exhibition space at the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research, London, June 1997]. They are tucked away in unexpected places; Lygia Clark's *Air and Stone* in a corner of the bookshop, an album called Absence on a ledge, a transparency on a window, a plastic tube, cones, and stones somewhere beyond the window. And down the stairs, a picture at the eye-level of an absent child, or a delicate assemblage of needles, thread and broken spring on a narrow protrusion of wall.

The first effect of searching is doubled in some of the work as a surprise. The surprise at the moment of something, just that little more than the registration of meaning, as in Sharon Kivland's *nous deux*, where the shadows of the letters fall across two armchairs, placed side by side, the one a little larger than the other. I note these details then I register the oval glass on which the words are etched – the glass absent from the small picture that might well have once mirrored the absent couple back to themselves. They are all gone.

Loss is everywhere. Sylvie Bélanger's silver-covered album by that name reveals the press of the body which had once lain on the folds of rich red cloth. But it is Lucia Noguera's conjuring up of what is not there that I want to talk about. She has called it *Sleep*. It is abstract. It is spare. It drains off any remnant of worldliness, of sumptuousness. Here making and unmaking stand still.

How can I describe *Sleep*? It is fashioned from three different materials – frayed thread, broken spring and three large rusty needles. The thread passes through the eyes of the needles; the spring is caught only at one point and it curls off on its separate way. And all the while there is the movement set off by one's breath. It is so fragile. What more can our breath say? That it begins at the bottom end of the picture for that's where the final knot of the thread is and the thread runs through all the eyes right to the top. And to explain what happens on the way there we have to start at the top and see that the two sections of thread (on either side of the eye) meet up just before the eye of the second needle. In fact the longer section forms a loop before it meets up and engages the free end of the thread. Where the spring actually meets the thread is at the top end of this loop; otherwise it simply passes through the gap between threads. From the eye of the second needle to the eye of the third there is only a single, straight thread.

Surely with all the needles and thread some sewing is nearby. Equally surely nothing here is sewn up. Phrases occur – 'drop a stitch' or a 'stitch in time'. And

the stitch and hole hang together. This *Sleep* has few stitches and fewer dreams. This *Sleep* is full of holes. These rusty needles, this frayed thread, this broken spring – this is all that remains to shuffle off.

The Object

We have been invited this evening, in the midst of this exhibition about the object, to bring the work of art to the place of the analyst. What is this place? We cannot discuss this without specifying the object with which the exhibition is concerned. It is the object of psychoanalysis, the objet a. And art is also concerned with this object.

Freud told us that the object is the object that is lost (the mother's breast). Lacan pushes this a little further – the object is constituted as lost. You never had it; you lost it with the entry into language. It remains outside of the signifying chain and subjects of language relate to it in many different ways.

Now the role of the object *a* is important in analysis. The object is in play in analysis in more than one way. During an analysis the patient has two quite different relations to the object *a*. There is a time when the patient searches for meanings but only travels through a series of circuits around something that remains inaccessible. The patient describes a circuit around the object *a*. Sooner or later she will realize that meaning can't ever be sewn up. It is then that the analyst, hitherto the subject-supposed-to-know the meaning, takes it upon himself to occupy the place of the object *a*. This leads to something quite different for the patient.

How does the patient change his/her relation to the object a? In the first place the analyst as subject-supposed-to-know interprets but interpretations aren't unequivocal. They don't yield meaning; rather their ultimate aim is to produce irreducible signifiers, signifiers as 'non-sense'. As signifieds yield to signifiers, the chains of signifiers begin to circle around an empty space. This empty space is the space of the non-signifying object.

The analyst occupies the place of the object a when the question of emptiness changes into the question of consistency. Seen from the signifying angle there is a gap; seen from the angle of the object there is a texture. Lacan refers to the object a as semblant of being. Indeed the analyst plays as semblant of being. Only then can the patient identify with the emptiness that is to say, can she be momentarily 'free' of the signifying chain and 'its imposition of meaning'.[1]

We have been invited to put the work of art at the place the analyst takes up in the second phase of analysis. Which is to say that we are invited to think of art as giving us the possibility of this moment of 'freedom'. But why confine the proposition to the work of art? What about the spectator? If s/he starts at the place of the patient, surely s/he ends up at the place of the analyst with the

identification with the object. Lacan formalized what has been said here about the analyst and the object in *Seminar XVII*[2] where he laid out the structures of the social bond through the idea of the four discourses of which the discourse of the analyst is one.[3] I think this is a productive framework with which to analyse art provided we do not subordinate one to the other. I hope in this discussion we will respect the singularity of works of art just as the analyst respects the singularity of patients.

1 See Parveen Adams, 'Out of the Blue', in C. Gill, ed., *Time and Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

2 Jacques Lacan, *L'Envers de la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991).

3 See 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst', in Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image* (London and New York: Routlege, 1996).

Parveen Adams, 'A Little Object', *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research: In the Place of an Object*, ed. Sharon Kivland and Marc du Ry (2000) 9–11.

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh
All Things Being Equal//2005

To situate sculpture between two mutually exclusive discursive conventions, or between two equally intolerable governing conditions, has been one of the motivating principles of Isa Genzken's sculpture from the very beginning. It is hard to trace the prohibitions, geopolitical or gendered. that posed the most obdurate barriers Genzken would have to scale when starting to sculpt in the mid 1970s, against all odds. After all, sculpture had not been made in Germany by women (no Barbara Hepworth, let alone an Eva Hesse, to draw upon). And if any influence from pre-war sculpture carried over into post-war practice, it was that of Hans Arp. Worse yet, if pre-war Constructivism turned into cold-war constructivism, it was the kind of sculpture that decorated the new corporate office towers of Frankfurt and Dusseldorf – what Joseph Beuys once called, inimitably and untranslatably, *Stahl-und-Eisbein Skulptur* (steel-and-pig's-knuckle-sculpture).

So Genzken situated herself (as did Blinky Palermo, whom she encountered at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf in 1973) between Beuys on the one hand and

Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly on the other, to confront the massive onslaught of Minimalism. It seems that only artistic dialogue and aesthetic reception are capable of synthesizing profoundly incompatible epistemes, as is evident once again – to cite a more recent example – in the fusion of Beuys and Warhol in Thomas Hirschhorn's current work, whose idiom of chaos sculpture Genzken would seem to have anticipated in certain ways.

In her almost herculean ambition to bridge the chasm that separated the absence of sculpture in Germany from the affluence of sculpture in American Minimalism, Genzken emerged as one of the most serious artists after the famed generation of Palermo, Polke and Richter. Undoubtedly, the strain to be accepted by that generation drove her sculptural projects into considerable dimensions. One of her ambitions was a programmatically anti-masculinist idiom of sculpture. Its extraordinary fusion of stereometrical and biomorphic forms resulted from Genzken's radical decision in 1975 to deploy computer design to create the extremely elongated curves first of her *Ellipsoids* (1976–82) and later of her *Hyperbolos* (1979–83), mathematically exact sinuosities that seemed suddenly to stand the techno-scientistic Minimalist boxes on their male blockheads. Genzken produced these complex ellipsoids and mathematically polymorph models of stereometry by computer twenty years before Richard Serra discovered Frank Gehry's tool kit. Unfortunately these wooden hulls rarely crossed the Atlantic (her 1992 retrospective at the University of Chicago's Renaissance Society having remained exceptional in every regard).

It must have taken no less of a herculean hysteria to actually assemble and enunciate a vocabulary of feminist sculpture in the land of the Masters – a task that Genzken performed with a dogged and eventually triumphant obstinacy that associates her with her admired fellow Hanseatic elder Hanne Darboven. Yet, typically, just when Genzken had fully formed that vocabulary in her wooden hybrids – ranging from paeans to the utopian promises of luminously coloured biomorphic abstraction and proto-utilitarian mechanomorphic devices for submarine and extraterrestrial locomotion – she abruptly cancelled all continuity and abandoned the holistic splendour of her immaculate conceptions in favour of an aesthetic of rupture, rubble and architectural fragments (at the very moment her work – included in 1982's Documenta 7 – had finally become widely visible).

This sudden inversion signalled yet another schism, or a double reversal, in Genzken's sculpture. First of all, her new work now negated the Constructivists' confidence in an alliance of sculptural and techno-scientistic rationality that American Minimalism had proudly presented as salvaged. In acts of almost programmatic disidentification, Genzken now severed all ties with American-type abstraction, its colours and its morphologies. Negating her sculpture's

perfectly executed stereometrical forms, she opted in favour of an aesthetic of dispersal and dissemination (of monochrome grey matter such as cement and concrete) and of architectural fractures. These were the very principles and materials she now rediscovered as having governed atopian objects and spaces from Kurt Schwitters to Beuys.

Genzken's return to the local idioms was prompted furthermore by the fact that her once-utopian models had reached the size and scale of public space and the condition of simultaneous collective perception that all serious sculpture in the twentieth century had aimed for. Probing the credibility of her commitment to such utopian aspirations under the conditions of post-war Germany, Genzken now reverted to the melancholy of ruined interiors and fractured bunker shards. Not only negating any notion of an innate sculptural dynamic toward architecture and collective public experience in the present, her ruinous refusals assaulted the governing codes and prevailing conditions of German reconstruction architecture in all its misery.

Her early forays into photography were equally astonishing and even less recognized. Having been engaged at the academy in dialogues with the soon-to-be-prominent members of Bernd and Hilla Becher's class-in particular, Candida Höfer and Thomas Struth – Genzken produced *Hi-Fi* (1979), an extraordinary series of photographs that presaged her future deployment of endless accumulations of mass-cultural imagery in collage books as an integral complement to her sculptural disarticulation of the terror of the daily object-world. In this series Genzken traced the most seductive – i.e. rigorous – designs of what was then-contemporary Japanese stereo equipment (in manifest opposition to the Becher school's fixation on architecture) as a visual regime in which all avant-garde aspirations for the transformation of everyday life now lay entombed.

In a second series (from 1980), strangely complementary to the first in its focus on aurality, Genzken photographed the cars of friends in large-scale colour close-ups. The metonymies of the car, strangely echoing and displacing both constructivist metonymies of the hand and surrealist metonymies of the foot, not only demarcated Genzken's departure from her preoccupation with sinuous organic forms in her sculpture but also responded to the increasingly reactionary resuscitation of photographic portraiture by her peers. Shifting the portrait genre to the physiognomic (and criminological) bodily detail of utter singularity, Genzken's photographs pointed simultaneously to the infinite differentiation of subjectivity and to the determinism inherent in the mythical claim that subjectivity could in fact still be recorded in a photographic portrait.

In her most recent work, Genzken confronts one of the prime calamities of sculpture in the present: a terror that emerges from both the universal equivalence and exchangeability of all objects and materials and the simultaneous

impossibility of imbuing any transgressive definition of sculpture with priorities or criteria of selection, of choice, let alone judgement (be it artisanal skills, choice of objects or materials, or the analytical intelligence to identify the specific structure of a contextualized readymade). To have the self succumb to the totalitarian order of objects brings the sculptor to the brink of psychosis, and Genzken's new work seems to inhabit that position. However, since total submission to the terror of consumption is indeed the governing stratum of collective object-relations, that psychotic state may well become the only position and practice the sculptor of the future can articulate.

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'All Things Being Equal', *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 3 (November 2005) 223–4.

Howard Singerman
Counting: Sherrie Levine's Pairs and Posses//2010

[...] Sherrie Levine's installations in the 1990s – furniture and tricycles and urinals repeated, as Donald Judd famously put it, 'one thing after the other' – also make palpable Minimalism's connection to the readymade and the serially produced industrial object. Situating Minimalism in the realm of the commodity, Levine places it in relation not only to Surrealism but to Pop. Indeed, her sculptures reunite the terms of the readymade that were split between Pop and Minimalism, in which the former took on the commodity's polish and its allure, and the latter its industrial repetition and materials. Whatever their gloss, after all, Levine's objects are industrial objects: whether sculptures or photographs, repetition is part of their systematic, it belongs to them as their media. But her commodity objects have also always been desirable – they evince the good life promises of Pop and the shininess of Minimalism rather than the shopworn, outdated qualities of Duchamp's readymades, which have over the years come to seem strange and singular objects. Cast in polished bronze rather than porcelain and left unsigned, Levine's *Fountains*, to take an obvious example, are both cleaner and freer than Duchamp's. Hers operate even more clearly than his at the conjunction of Freud's fetish and Marx's, situated as they are between the erotics of replacement and the delirium of economic relations hidden in the desire for the object: that is what her mirror-polished bronze does – there is after all a relationship between the *glance* at the nose, Freud's famous description of the fetish, and the shine of the object.

That is, Levine's repetitions implicate not only the industrial assembly line and its likenesses, but desire and its assembly line of substitutions. Desire, too, promises one thing after another, or is the promise of one thing – a first thing, perhaps, a mother or a breast, but not necessarily – replaced by the promise of another, something near it or someone that will stand in its place, until it too is substituted for. Desire, say the psychoanalysts, is the desire for something else. This is the erotic possibility of the commodity object that Levine repeats, figured not only in its repetition and its endlessness, but also in, or on, its surfaces. Against the depths of being and meaning – the terms of metaphor, or the one-on-one of Oedipal struggle – desire glides along the surface, surfaces of skin or chrome or, as here, polished bronze. One can find the conjunction of Eros and surface in the writings of any number of theorists important to postmodernism, from Roland Barthes to Deleuze and Guattari. Here, let me borrow Susan Sontag's straightforward American dismissal of the penetrating, violating 'hermeneutics of art' in favour of an 'erotics of art', a critical method that would match an 'art whose surface is so unified and clear, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be...just what it is'. Levine's works are indeed unified and clear, but they complicate Sontag's equation: her urinal after Duchamp is 'just what it is' – but it is also just what it is not, and so like something else. Hers is the erotic promise not of presence and identity, but of difference, without Oedipal origins or families. Or it could be read that way, and yet objects, precisely as they are fetishized – and whether with Marx or Freud – tend to get sticky and singular: the very embodiment of desire. One thing after another, that is, gets easily stuck at two – 'it's perfect for me' – and Levine herself has trouble accounting for this; hence the question she posed to a seminar at the Getty Research Institute: 'Is a pair a repetition?' [...]

Howard Singerman, extract from 'Counting: Sherrie Levine's Pairs and Posses', in *Sherrie Levine: Pairs and Posses* (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange/Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2010) 13–19 [footnotes not included].

Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong
Waste Not//2009

[...] After she moved into the residence in Banshang Lane, Xiangyuan [mother of Song Dong] soon filled the rooms and the surrounding area (including an underground shelter constructed during the Cultural Revolution) with disused objects. The abandoned toys, clothes and shoes of her grandchildren, which were alarmingly abundant compared to her own meagre possessions sixty years ago, were carefully put away, supposedly for grandchildren and great-grandchildren yet to come. Pointing at a stuffed animal or a pair of plastic sandals in the Waste Not installation, she could tell precisely who its owner was and what was special about it. When the family decided to rebuild part of the unit to make it bigger, she salvaged anything she considered reusable, including tiles, boards, window frames and even nails. Deep down she must have known that there was little chance for anyone in her family to reuse these things: her children now lived in their own homes; Song Dong and his wife Yin Xiuzhen were becoming renowned international artists; and there was no need for herself and [her husband] Shiping to relive the difficulties of the 60s and 70s. But somehow she still could not bear to throw anything away, as if in doing so she would betray her own life.

This tendency finally became uncontrollable after Shiping's sudden death in 2002: Xiangyuan now literally buried herself with things she had salvaged. Living alone in a three-bedroom apartment provided by her children near the Nationalities Park, she found solace only when she was surrounded by things from the past. It was as if she were using these objects to build a cocoon for herself, finding warmth in it and the reasons for her survival. Some of these things made her smile; others brought back sharp pain - the hundreds of unopened boxes of medicine were constant reminders of her failed effort to save Shiping's life. It was only at this moment in her life that she really understood what she had been saving. As she wrote in her memoir: 'All these many items are not merely specimens, rather they are lives that were lived. The months and years have left us with so many remnants, but those months and years have also taken many things with them. The reason I've tried, by every means possible, to hold on to these things is so as to extend their lives.' [...]

Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong, extract from text for the installation *Waste Not* (2009).

Gérard Wajcman
The Game of the Object//2010

[…] Contemporary art is a big problem for Freud, parents, and art history. What are we to think if, deaf and indifferent to his daddy and mommy's prohibitions, the artist begins to 'play with dead things'? If he relapses into childhood and plays poo-poo? If he puts it on the table and joyfully puts his hands in it? If he goes into theatre acting to play with things, with others, with himself? What happens if art becomes a game? If art is no longer the art of substituting? If it deserts the high spheres where it is used to floating, to bring the body noisily back on stage, with all its weight, with its restlessness, its moods, its matter? What happens if art no longer rises to the Heaven of what is essential? If it is no longer a venture of cultural deodorizing? If it smells, spurts, leaks, stains? If the art scene becomes a stage for our impulses? What happens if suddenly art stops sublimating? – Freud scratches his head, parents panic, art history holds its nose, and confronted with this messy child's room that contemporary art seems to be, everyone asks, somewhat aggressively: what on earth is under, above, ap'art?[1]

Of course, one might consider that only a few artists are concerned with these little games. One might say that it is true of Mike Kelley, obviously, and probably of Paul McCarthy, and perhaps of a few others. Nonetheless I don't think 'playing with dead things' is an exclusively Californian story. The exhibition at the Villa Arson, Nice ['Not to Play with Dead Things', 2010] certainly doesn't think so, in the way that it places the most varied artists on the same plane as Mike Kelley. In fact, I have the intuition that the issue of 'dead things' extends extremely far, that it deals with the presence of things and of bodies in art, that in this sense it is neither incidental nor local, but that it is a burning question at the heart of contemporary art.

The fact is, the reference to Mike Kelley is to a text about childhood. He talks about objects. Not just any objects – children's objects, security blankets, what psychology has termed 'transitional objects', and other fetishes. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott theorized the transitional object; in short, he invented the 'security blanket'. It is a special object, which interests mostly ex-babies, which means quite a few people. An object to keep anguish at bay, it deals with absence, the absence of the mother. A mother is an unpredictable being who comes and goes as she pleases. This ballet of appearances and disappearances, devoid of rules, this intermittence, appears to the child to be an intermittence of the heart, delivering him up to the whims of an almighty, goddess-like mother. This 'traumatizes' the child. The mother is never as real as when she is missing. Every baby knows that.

But it's just like with everything else: nothing is more real than what is missing. Everyone knows that. And that is when the object enters the scene. A thing outside the body that serves as buffer, which buffers the gap, the absence, the mothers' intermittence. It's a sort of small pocket mother. From the beat-up teddy bear to the half-washed diaper, from the twiddled piece of wool to the babbling baby's voice, all objects are suitable for consoling oneself. The object fills a gap, it becomes a stopper. A presence, a piece of material that the child holds on to, sucks, smells, that it holds against itself, that fills the body, that holds the body. The object is a substitute for absence, it supplements the absence. Seen in this light, it affords us the intuition that the transitional object is probably the matrix of all other objects. After all, for us too, the abundance of commodities is a line-up of transitional objects for incomplete subjects, full of desire or anguish. [...]

1 From 'Mais où est donc passé Ornic'art?', an untranslatable sentence taught to French schoolchildren as a grammatical mnemonic device to learn all the conjunctions: mais, où, et, donc, or, ni, car. The literal translation would be: 'Where on earth is Ornicar?' [translator]

Gérard Wajcman, extract from 'The Game of the Object', in *Not to Play with Dead Things* (Nice: Villa Arson/Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2010) 77–8

There is an inbuilt
'instruction' for the material –

ACID

– to go on a kind of rampage,
obliterating the material –

NYLON

– in unprecedented and
wholly uncontrollable ways

Gustav Metzger, '1959–61: From Painting to Spraying with Acid', undated

EVENT, OBJECT, PERFORMANCE

John Latham
Report of a Surveyor//1984

[...] In 1954 a resolution to the polymorphic nature of the respective media of expression occurred with a means of representation that is anterior to distinctions between science and art and which transposes the frameworks determined formerly in terms of Object and spatially-based component matter into *one including framework*. This including framework is introduced by way of two constructs defining the dimensionality necessary to it and interpreted as even struck or *Event Structure*.

Prior to 1954 the trajectory of art had amounted to a public enquiry where new statements were new art idioms or styles. The direction it took had been a step by step progression from highly representational idioms such as were summarized by Delacroix with his skill in representing any imaginable form in any imaginable spatial circumstance. The departure represented for example by Manet and then by Impressionsist painting developed into the enquiry that led eventually in 1951 to the solemn exhibit of a blank canvas as a Work (Robert Rauschenberg).

Writers on the art of this particular period were not to see the conjunction at zero action to align with similar conclusions in philosophy and physics. Nor is a text known where the Rauschenberg resolution, to return to former mode art objects in the traditional context, compared to this particular development, although from 1962 to the end of the sixties the New York Museum of Modern Art hung examples of both these resolutions alongside one another.

Artists have responded to the new state of understanding, during the sixties and seventies through conceptualization, and the dematerialization of the art object, as documented for example by Lippard.

This dematerialization, however, has presented the marketplace with serious difficulties and some devaluation of this form of currency. It has also caused inconvenience to authorities having to account both verbally and financially for the activity of artists.

As far as the writer is concerned, the movement Art as Concept originated at this point, represented in the diagrams by a horizontal line separating the divided state from the even struck. By the time it became public in the late sixties, conceptual art had come and gone, its problems resolved and forwarded.

Artists are now divided between those who conform to a former, manageable conflux of marketed activity, and those for whom the markets are an irrelevance (that is to say, not a determining factor in what constitutes art). Art institutions, including colleges, museums and dealer rings, appear to act in concert to maintain

the former conveniences, however, and decisions concerning artists and their livelihood are taken behind closed doors.

The criterion which fits history is independent of such authoritarian machismo. One cannot put clocks back. Art is a means of arriving at inclusiveness whether the convenience of the authorities is suited or not. Reinforcement by art-like media of the logic of Objects, and of literalness and commerce, can be disregarded. (This finds its natural level of interest through markets, as before, but must not be confused with the always innovatory trajectory.) Artists recognize the confusion, while the public and its authorities incline to react to pre-empt what seems about to happen – its resolution. There are now two clear strands of the historical trajectory, one of which aims to reassert an Object-based logic and another which trusts and manifests the Time and event-base.

A time-based classical tradition has yet to be documented. It belongs for example to calligraphy of the East and comes into view in the West in the sixteenth century to begin to specify what has later been called *Zeitgeist*. A feature of the difference between the two traditions is in the idea of sources of action. A general rule of the transition from space-based to time-based logic is that art is a contingency of the (historical and localized physical) contexts in which it appears. Taking the idea of art as an attempt to represent the universal and the omnipresent, art work will always be surprising. In the context of public affairs the element of surprise will be generated from the difference of premise within the medium of expression, the art medium being likely to express a general, perhaps an overview within which the local exigent circumstance is seen in the wider context. Let the real advances within the trajectory of the last twenty years be given public acknowledgement and the propositions here will need no apology. The reality is that since the convergence of language and art within the one frame of reference the public has been misled; art has been misplaced and the circuitry has authorized reinterpretation by younger artists of former artists' positions, rather than the new ground premises which many individual artists intuitively recognize. [...]

John Latham, extract from *Report of a Surveyor* (London: Tate Gallery/Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1984) 34–5.

Jimmie Durham
Object//1964

It must have been an odd object to begin with.
Now the ghosts of its uses
Whisper around my head, tickle the tips
Of my fingers. Weeds
Reclaim with quick silence the beams, pillars,
Doorways. Places change, and a small object
Stands defiant in its placelessness.
Durable because it contains intensely meanings
Which it can no longer pour out.

Jimmie Durham, 'Object' (1964), in Jimmie Durham, *A Certain Lack of Coherence* (London: Kala Press, 1993) 58.

Kenneth Snelson
Model for Atomic Forms//1966

[...] Until spin [-pairing of electrons] was discovered and incorporated into the 'exclusion principle', it was thought that *s* electrons were simply two point-charges which moved along the same orbit. But now, *s* electrons, because their antiparallel spin fields were shown to alter each other's courses slightly, are regarded as occupying separate orbits.

Looking at the second completed shell of the atom where there are a total of eight electrons, two subshells are shown. One of the subshells designated as the 2*s* subshell includes two *s* electrons which form a spherical configuration as in the first shell while the remaining six electrons occupy p orbitals and form the 2*p* subshell. These *p* orbitals in the conventional models are not spherically symmetrical charge-clouds, but reflect the elliptical *p* orbital form described by Arnold Sommerfeld, and as a configuration they are shown as penetrating the inner shells and extending outward from the nucleus along *x*, *y*, *z* axes of the atom. Due to this, these models have been questioned because they give no explanation as to how the p electrons can move in and out through

the first and second shell *s* electron spheres without interfering with the stability of the system.

This problem becomes more complex with conventional models representing the third and fourth shells of an atom. In the third shell another spherical s subshell is formed plus another subshell of six *p* electrons with their penetrating charge-clouds. Added to this, however, is a third subshell of ten electrons which also penetrates the inner shells. This is the *d* subshell or *d* orbitals. And in the fourth shell, all of the configurations of the third shell are repeated, but this shell further includes another subshell with fourteen penetrating electrons occupying orbitals.

In any effort to define a workable system or model showing electron trajectories or wave-paths for a many-electron atom, we are therefore confronted with a dilemma in topology as to how a plurality of matter-waves can occupy stationary states and still avoid destructive interference; or in terms of particles, how large numbers of electrons moving about the nucleus can avoid random perturbations.

The problem with present atomic models is a mechanical one, for electrons or any charged particles attract or repel one another by producing and exchanging packets of energy, one to the other. If, however, this were to actually happen at random between electrons of different energies as indicated by present atomic models, the entire conception of stable energy levels would be inexplicable and spectroscopy would not show the sharp and limited lines which are the fingerprints of the different kinds of atoms. The difficulty is further intensified in the heavier atoms because, with the increase of nuclear charge, the kinetic energies of the inner electrons become very great, and there is no way to explain how the outer electrons, with comparatively small kinetic energies, can repeatedly penetrate the inner shells without actually being removed from the atom by internal collisions.

According to the teachings of the present invention (*Model for Atomic Forms*, 1966) a new model of the atom can be constructed to fill the requirements of the quantum theory by giving a structural and spatial meaning to all four quantum numbers needed for describing the energy state of each electron.

Also, the new model of the present invention presents a logical solution to the interference problem of interpenetrating charge-clouds by providing the orbit of each electron with its own domain of spatial occupancy.

In addition, the individual orbits of each subshell as represented in the new model spatially define the magnetic fields which result from the orbital motion of the electron and from the inherent spin of the particle electron and in this way present a structural explanation of the m and s quantum numbers. [...]

Kenneth Snelson, extract from *Model for Atomic Forms* (1966) [on the artist's multimedia work *Portrait of an Atom*], in *Kenneth Snelson* (Hannover: Kunstverein Hannover, 1971) 64.

Richard Serra
Essay on Sculpture//1967–75

TO ROLL
TO CREASE
TO FOLD
TO STORE
TO BEND
TO SHORTEN
TO TWIST
TO TWINE
TO DAPPLE
TO DAPPLE
TO CRUMPLE
TO SHAVE
TO TEAR
TO CHIP
TO SPLIT
TO CUT
TO SEVER
TO DROP
TO REMOVE
TO SIMPLIFY
TO DIFFER
TO DISARRANGE
TO SHAVE
TO OPEN
TO MIX
TO SPLASH
TO KNOT
TO SPILL
TO DROOP
TO FLOW
TO SWIRL
TO ROTATE
TO SMEAR
TO FLOOD
TO FIRE

TO HOOK
TO SUSPEND
TO SPREAD
TO HANG
OF TENSION
OF GRAVITY
OF ENTROPY
OF NATURE
OF GROUPING
OF LAYERING
OF FELTING
TO COLLECT
TO GRASP
TO TIGHTEN
TO BUNDLE
TO HEAP
TO GATHER
TO ARRANGE
TO REPAIR
TO DISCARD
TO PAIR
TO DISTRIBUTE
TO SURFEIT
TO SCATTER
TO COMPLEMENT
TO ENCLOSE
TO SURROUND
TO ENCIRCLE
TO HIDE
TO COVER
TO WRAP
TO DIG
TO TIE
TO BIND
TO WEAVE

TO MARK
TO EXPAND
TO DILUTE
TO LIGHT
TO REVISE
TO MODULATE
TO DISTIL
OF WAVES
OF ELECTROMAGNETIC
OF INERTIA
OF IONIZATION
OF POLARIZATION
OF REFRACTION
OF SIMULTANEITY
OF TIDES
OF REFLECTION
OF EQUILIBRIUM
OF SYMMETRY
OF FRICTION
TO STRETCH
TO BOUNCE
TO ERASE
TO SPRAY
TO SYSTEMATIZE
TO REFER
TO FORCE
OF MAPPING
OF LOCATION
OF CONTEXT
OF TIME
TO TALK
OF PHOTOSYNTHESIS
OF CARBONIZATION '67–'68

TO IMPRESS
TO INLAY
TO LIFT
TO CURVE
TO SUPPORT
TO JOIN
TO MATCH
TO LAMINATE
TO BOND
TO HINGE
SERRA
TO CONTINUE

Richard Serra, *Essay on Sculpture* [a continued variation on the work *Verb List*, 1967–68], in *Essaying Essays: Alternative Forms of Exposition*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Out of London Press, 1975) 373.

Jack Burnham
Systems Aesthetics//1968

[...] The post-formalist sensibility naturally responds to stimuli both within and outside the proposed art format. To this extent some of it does begin to resemble 'theatre', as imputed by Michael Fried. More likely though, the label of *theatricality* is a red herring disguising the real nature of the shift in priorities. In respect to Fried's argument, the theatre was never a purist medium, but a conglomerate of arts. In itself this never prevented the theatre from achieving 'high art'. For clearer reading, rather than maintaining Fried's adjectives, *theatrical* or *literalist* art, or the phrase used until now in this essay, *post-formalist aesthetic*, the term *systems aesthetic* seems to encompass the present situation more fully.

The systems approach goes beyond a concern with staged environments and happenings; it deals in a revolutionary fashion with the larger problem of boundary concepts. In systems perspective there are no contrived confines such as the theatre proscenium or picture frame. Conceptual focus rather than material limits define the system. Thus any situation, either in or outside the context of art, may be designed and judged as a system. In as much as a system may contain people, ideas, messages, atmospheric conditions, power sources and so on, a system is, to quote the systems biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a 'complex of components in interaction',[1] comprised of material, energy and information in various degrees of organization. In evaluating systems the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structure, input, output and related activity inside and outside the system. Where the object almost always has a fixed shape and boundaries, the consistency of a system may be altered in time and space, its behaviour determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control.

In his book *The New Vision*, Moholy-Nagy described fabricating a set of enamel on metal paintings. These were executed by telephoning precise instructions to a manufacturer. An elaboration of this was projected recently by the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Jan van der Marck, in a tentative exhibition, 'Art by Telephone'. In this instance the recorded conversation between artist and manufacturer was to *become part of the displayed work of art*. For systems, information, in whatever form conveyed, becomes a viable aesthetic consideration.

Fifteen years ago Victor Vasarely suggested mass art as a legitimate function of industrial society. For angry critics there existed the fear of undermining art's fetish aura, of shattering the mystique of craft and private creation. If some forays have been made into serially produced art, these remain on the periphery of the industrial system. Yet the entire phenomenon of reproducing an art object *ad infinitum* is absurd; rather than making quality available to a large number of people, it signals the end of concrete objects embodying visual metaphor. Such demythification is the Kantian Imperative applied aesthetically. On the other hand, a system aesthetic is literal in that all phases of the life cycle of a system are relevant. There is no end product that is primarily visual, nor does such an aesthetic rely on a 'visual' syntax. It resists functioning as an applied aesthetic, but is revealed in the principles underlying the progressive reorganization of the natural environment.

Various postures implicit in formalist art were consistently attacked in the later writings of Ad Reinhardt. His black paintings were hardly rhetorical devices (nor were his writings) masking Zen obscurities; rather they were the means of discarding formalist mannerism and all the latent illusionism connected with post-realistic art. His own contribution he described as

> The one work for the fine artist, the one painting, is the painting of the one-sized canvas ... The single theme, one formal device, one colour-monochrome, one linear division in each direction, one symmetry, one texture, one freehand brushing, one rhythm, one working everything into dissolution and one indivisibility, each painting into one overall uniformity and non-irregularity.[2]

Even before the emergence of the anti-formalist 'specific object' there appeared an oblique type of criticism, resisting emotive and literary associations. Pioneered between 1962 and 1965 in the writings of Donald Judd, it resembles what a computer programmer would call an entity's *list structure*, or all the enumerated properties needed *physically* to rebuild an object. Earlier the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserted the impossibility of *conceptually* reconstructing an object from such a procedure. Modified to include a number of perceptual

insights not included in a 'list structure', such a technique has been used to real advantage by the anti-novelist, Alain Robbe-Grillet. A web of sensorial descriptions is spun around the central images of a plot. The point is not to internalize scrutiny in the Freudian sense, but to infer the essence of a situation through detailed examination of surface effects. Similar attitudes were adopted by Judd for the purpose of critical examination. More than simply an art object's list structure, Judd included phenomenal qualities which would never have shown up in a fabricator's plans but which proved necessary for the 'seeing' of the object. This cleared the air of much criticism centred on meaning and private intention.

It would be misleading to interpret Judd's concept of 'specific objects' as the embodiment of a systems aesthetic. Rather, object art has become a stage towards further rationalization of the aesthetic process in general – both by reducing the iconic content of art objects and by Judd's candidness about their conceptual origins. However, even in 1965 he gave indications of looking beyond these finite limits:

> A few of the more general aspects may persist, such as the work's being like an object or even being specific, but other characteristics are bound to develop. Since its range is wide, three-dimensional work will probably divide into a number of forms. At any rate, it will be larger than painting and much larger than sculpture, which, compared to painting, is fairly particular ... Because the nature of three dimensions isn't set, given beforehand, something credible can be made, almost anything.[3] [...]

1 [footnote 6 in source] Ludwig von Bertelanffy, *Robots, Men and Minds* (New York: George Braziller, 1967) 69.

2 [7] Anonymous, 'Ad Reinhardt, Painter, is Dead. Reduced Colour to Bare Minimum', *The New York Times* (1 September 1967) 33.

3 [8] Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', *Arts Yearbook*, no. 8 (1965) 78.

Jack Burnham, extract from 'Systems Aesthetics', *Artforum* (September 1968) 32.

Sophie Calle
The Birthday Ceremony//1980–93

On my birthday I always worry that people will forget me. In 1980, to relieve myself of this anxiety, I decided that every year, if possible on 9 October, I would invite to dinner the exact number of people corresponding to my age, including a stranger chosen by one of my guests. I did not use the presents received on these occasions. I kept them as tokens of affection. In 1993, at the age of forty, I put an end to this ritual. [...]

1993

Two self-portraits by Cindy Sherman, signed, dated 1980/1992 and inscribed *To Sophie, with love on your 40th Birthday! Cindy*. Book by Leni Riefenstahl: *A Memoir* (St Martin's Press). Work by Jon Kessler (pagoda on springs in a box) with the message: *40 Happy Birthday SOPHIE! Oct 9th, 1993 Jon*. Box of pearls with a message written on the inside: *For Sophie Calle, my friend, 9 October 1993, New York City, with love, Alan K. Dear Sophie, Pearls can be a bed, they can be a necklace, they can be lost. Aren't they beautiful? Happy Birthday*. Bar of soap with the word *Folly* carved on one side and *Wisdom* on the other. Work by Serena Carone (sculpture in plaster, electric lights, silk, velvet, religious medals, chicken bone and *octubre mil noveciento noventa y tres. Santa Virgen de las Suplicas complidas*). Work by Christian Boltanski (iron box dated 3/8/72 containing hair). Work by Greg Shephard (metal wire, pacifier and chain links). Keyring on chain with fob in the form of a red shark. Magnum of champagne, Louis Roederer, Reirns. Work by Jean-Michel Othoniel (match-striking strip), entitled: *L'Anniversare*. Framed photograph of the staff of the Grand Théâtre, Nîmes, inscribed: *Yves à Sophie Oct 93*. Work by Yves Klein (gold leaf, pink pigment and blue pigment on paper). Bottle of Bertolli olive oil. Tube of Rembrandt toothpaste. Set of eight dessert plates made by Jean-Michel Othoniel. Candle representing a black cat in front of a grave. Silver candlestick and forty white, blue and pink candles, tied together with a red ribbon. Cardboard wallet. Plastic cat's nose with whiskers. Set of Tarot cards. Metal boat wrapped in tin foil, with a message in the bottom: *Happy Birthday to Sophe. 40. Dick*. Pornographic photograph on yellowed paper, inscribed: *Sophie, Certain photographs imply that there is no actual reason that the various objects therein contained cannot exist within different autonomous perspectives. This has been the mandate of Renassiance [sic] painting and continues fascinate the photographer who, in fact, remains welded to a single focal length. FAUXTOGRALPH* (signed) *Ralph Gibson*. Blank notebook 'Made in China' Book:

Collected Stories of Paul Bowles (Black Sparrow Press). Book by Scott Bradfield: *The History of Luminous Motion* (Vintage), inscribed: *Dearest Sophie, Wishing you the best in your 40th! I can't believe you are 40! With affection, Pat xx.* Two books by Olivier Boissière: *Jean Nouvel* (Studio paperbacks) and *L'Inist dans l'oeuvre de Jean Nouvel* (Editions Demi-Cercle). Book by Luc Santé: *Evidence (Noonday)*, inscribed: *Pour Sophie, avec admiration et meilleurs voeux pour ...* Calvin Klein lace bodysuit with a postcard inscribed: *To Sophie, love, Bette, 10.9.93.* Bracelet made of hair, in an envelope inscribed: *For brilliant Sophie, much love, Jennifer.* Promise of a gift from Lewis Baltz. Painting dating from the end of the fifteenth century, entitled *Luc de Montfort.*

Sophie Calle, extract [introduction and list of the contents of the 1993 vitrine] from 'The Birthday Ceremony' in *Sophie Calle: M'as-tu Vue?/Did You See Me?* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou/ Munich: Prestel, 2003) n.p.

Phyllida Barlow
The Sneeze of Louise//1996

Whilst looking at Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* (1989–95) and *The Red Rooms* (1994) in the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Tate Gallery, London, I thought about the devices artists have used during this century to frame and contain disparate things so as to bring unlikely, opposing or contrasting objects together as a unified experience – devices such as boxes, cages and, of course, the ubiquitous vitrine.

I recalled Marcel Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy* (1921). As a small, neat object it is easy to remember. Its disparate collection of things is unified by a small, portable cage. The ring on the top is just big enough for a finger to go through, suggesting a container for the lightest of animals – small birds to be transported to and from market. It is therefore a portable object which, as such, clearly shows the signs of wear and tear.

It contains a collection of white marble cubes, apparently trapped. Though marble is a dense, heavy material the cubes masquerade perfectly as cubes of sugar. Protruding into the cubes are two objects: a thermometer and a cuttle bone. The thermometer is an instrument which measures and records the changes in body temperature, registering sickness or health, but here, as it nestles and probes into the cool deceitful cubes of marble sugar, what change is expected

to be detected? Perhaps a rapid rise in temperature would cause an explosion and the small cage and its contents would fragment into a powder of sugary marble dust, laced with beads of mercury, ground cuttle bone, tangled wire and shards of glass.

Is this an object held in time, poised to explode? The thermometer waits in anticipation for any change which indicates the impending explosion. What is the role of the cuttle bone? What is a cuttle bone – something found washed up on seashores, or an object for pet birds to sharpen their beaks on? It is, in fact, the central bone of the cuttlefish, a squid-like animal which ejects black ink when alarmed. Like the thermometer, this residual object also indicates anticipation, but in its case it is the anticipation of fear, and the volatile consequences of that fear, an eruption of black ink. Gradually this small, portable cage object becomes more and more like an ambiguous instrument with a sexuality which its title begins to reveal. More particularly, it reveals its absence of sex, its hoping for sex.

The sneeze, sometimes referred to as the next best thing to an orgasm, is the anticipated event and the disparate contents of the cage, in their different ways, mark time in anticipation of this longed for, desired event. At the moment when the thermometer registers a change as the cool marble sugar cubes become hot and the cuttle bone recalls its former status as the rigid inner bone of the warning, ink-squirting fleshy squid, the prolonged anticipation will be released in the craved for orgasmic explosion of the sneeze. Louise Bourgeois knew Marcel Duchamp and thought he was an unhappy man because '… all his life he felt he could not have made a woman sexually happy'.[1] Perhaps this adds to the significance of this object's potent sexuality, for, as Louise Bourgeois said in an interview with Christiane Meyer-Thoss, '… the sexual, and the absence of sex, is everything.'[2]

Duchamp's object is an object of measurement. It's in suspense, held in time, unfolding itself continuously at the same moment, a constant reminder of the longed for and the about to be. Its tension is borne out of its implications of an unfulfilled sexual longing told by its disguising and playful symbols. 'All symbolic acts are pleasurable', said Louise Bourgeois. 'People will not admit that.') Though these symbols are playful, what they symbolize is painful: the fearful experience of sexual longing when it is reciprocated by a dreaded and awesome sexual unfulfilment. I can recall *Why Not Sneeze* as an image. It is easy to remember. The work of Bourgeois that reminded me of *Why Not Sneeze* I cannot recall as an image, and I find it difficult to remember. It demands that you are there with it.

The work I am referring to is Louise Bourgeois' *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* (1989–93). This work reveals itself as you approach it and walk around it. And it is as an unfolding space and as an unfolding object that it arouses response. These unfolding qualities are time-based and seem to refute image for a physically sensual experience which is to do with time, place and an all-pervading atmosphere

of fear. It is the element of time which enables me to compare *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* with Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze*. In both works I experience a suspension of time through objects which act as instruments of measurement.

With *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* the space unfolds as you walk around the sculpture. This is emphasized in the contrast between the predatory and watchful, but unseeing, gaze of the carved breast-like granite eyes and the ever watchful and all-seeing gaze of the mirrors, which seem to record, hold and trap every movement beyond their immediate environment. As you walk around this sculpture you can experience an opposite. As you look at or, more appropriately, watch the back of the black granite eyes, the front is revealed through the mirrors. This is a sculpture with eyes at the back of its head. As objects of continuous revelation the mirrors are instruments of surveillance which do not keep secrets, harsh devices of stark objectivity which capture, in real time, the presence of the viewer who becomes ensnared and trapped in the *Cell*'s interior space.

The mirrors are the gaze, the sight of the sightless granite. They are the instruments which register change. They monitor your changing movements and the unchanging movements of the objects they stand guard over within, just as the thermometer anticipates change in *Why Not Sneeze*. The boundary or container for this sculpture – the derelict structure of salvaged window frames from a disbanded factory or office – acts as a grid. Grids imply systems of order, means for measuring. As Bourgeois has said: 'With grids everything has a place, everything is welcome.'[4] Like the well-used container case of *Why Not Sneeze*, this worn and weathered container has recorded on it its passage through time. Both have time ingrained within them, and because of this they convey a sense of resignation. They can wait forever. [...]

1 'Louise Bourgeois – In a Strange Way Things are Getting Better and Better', interview with Francesco Bonami, *Flash Art* (January/February 1994) 39.

2 Louise Bourgeois, 'Self-expression is Sacred and Fatal', statements (no. 45), in Christine Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall* (Zurich: Amman Verlag, 1992) 189

3 Ibid. (no. 70) 200.

4 *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective 1947–1984* (Paris: Galerie Maeght LeLong, 1985) 27.

Phyllida Barlow, 'The Sneeze of Louise', *Museum of Modern Art Papers*, no. 1, ed. Ian Cole (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996) 4–6.

David Toop
Sounding the Object//2012

[...] Researching in the sound archives of the BBC in 1971 I came across a recording of a live beetle mouth harp from Papua New Guinea (this unique artefact had already been released on a BBC record compiled by John Peel so I knew it existed but to find the 'original' was exciting). No details of the instrument were appended to the recording but a photograph found elsewhere shows the performer holding a beetle close to his mouth. This creature is balanced on a blade of grass, the overtones of its buzzing modulated by the varying cavity of the player's opening and closing mouth. Although the technique is comparable to a more conventional mouth harp, the technology is radically different. Normally in New Guinea, mouth harps [*susaps*] were made from short lengths of bamboo. The bamboo was shaped to form a point, then split on one side to form a thin tongue. Held against the mouth, this tongue can then be hammered rapidly with the knuckle of the thumb, which is in turn attached to a string. A complex thought process is evident from this shaping of available material and the devising of two separate ways to generate sound through physical action, and yet the economy of the live beetle instrument is impressive. There is no instrument, only contingency, a moment of (admittedly unequal) partnership between two living organisms.

In the same year I formulated the concept of Bi(s)onics: the science of (sound) systems based on living things. This encompassed Bionics – the science of systems based on living things; sonics or sound; and bi (two). So, a combining of two areas of study.[1]

The *Wasp Flute*, made in 1973, was an instrument built according to these principles and clearly influenced by the live beetle mouth harp along with other unusual instruments that could be viewed in collections such as the Horniman Museum, London, and the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Although the *Wasp Flute* was built and, in theory, would have worked as intended there was no real desire to entrap wasps, bees or any other buzzing insects in its attached container. The thinking was less about an actualized music than a question about the boundaries of technology. If a musical instrument becomes a sound source rather than a machine for delivering a particular system of musical theory (as was often the case in the twentieth century) then where are its boundaries? Can it be described as an object (and therefore archived and exhibited as object) or is it a cluster of events whose material presence is only one point on the time base? Of course there was also the irony that the instrument was silent, a condition shared with the extraordinary instruments displayed in museum collections. [...]

1 [footnote 2 in source] The word bionics was coined by Major Jack E. Steele of the Aerospace Division of the US Air Force in 1960 and launched at a congress in Dayton, Ohio, 13–15 September 1960. See Lucien Gerardin, *Bionics* (London, 1968).

David Toop, extract from 'Sounding the Object: A Timebase Archive', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, vol 10, no. 1 (2012).

Rosalind Krauss
Eva Hesse: Reliefs (1964–65)//2006

In June 1964, Eva Hesse left the United States for a fifteen-month sojourn in Germany. The invitation of a wealthy industrialist to her then-husband, the artist Tom Doyle, prompted the trip, and both were offered studios in an abandoned textile factory in Kettwig. This trip would prove to be transformative for Hesse, for it marks the occasion of her first experiments with relief sculpture, her first radical break from the two-dimensionality of the picture plane into a space where object, sculpture and drawing were to mix ineluctably. During this period, Hesse produced fourteen reliefs, all brightly coloured, all deploying both readymade and found objects that protrude from the picture plane, and all related to a group of approximately sixty mechano-morphic drawings. For many years these works were relatively unknown, most likely because Hesse left many of the reliefs in Germany when she returned to the States, and because their wild palette was not in keeping with the vogue for greys and whites that were to dominate Minimalism. However, recent scholarship has paid renewed attention to these works, seeing them not as juvenilia but as a full-fledged passage within Hesse's overall career.

The first relief was the extraordinary and iconic *Ringaround Arosie*. From the rough collage and scuffed grey surface, a build-up of *papier-maché* on Masonite, rise two circles, one smaller circle above a larger one. The circles are comprised of tightly wound electrical wire that has been covered with cloth. Rimmed in red that blushes to pink, the two circles appear as breasts, a snowman, a stoplight, an on/off switch, all out of whack. The larger, lower circle culminates in a nipple that sticks out from the surface by nearly three inches. Between the gradation of colour from red to pink, the industrial feel of the wire leading up to the tip, and then the remarkably lifelike nature of the nipple itself, *Ringaround Arosie* has a tendency to be oddly disconcerting and embarrassing. The intense viscerality of the piece is far from self-evident, however, as the work is neither exclusively a

breast nor a circle. Rather, the image/object seems to vacillate wildly between a variety of identities – haptic/optic, menacing/hilarious, sexual/geometric, intensely colourful/monochromatic.

What gets started in *Ringaround Arosie* is much elaborated in *Oomamaboomba*. The incipient abstraction is full blown as the yellow boomerang shape implies motion and contains orifices. Its circles are eyes, its black-and-white strips teeth and hair, as well as being absolutely none of these things. Hesse again deploys the tight wrapping of cord, this time around a metal armature that swings up and away from the canvas, only to re-secure itself, as if its job is to attach the canvas to itself. (Hesse expands this gesture in *Hang Up*, 1966). Both the palette, with its gaudy Floridaesque play of hot pink and lemon yellow, and the vowel-filled openness of the title suggest a kind of slap-happy playfulness.

This slightly slaptstick quality comes from the confluence between the clearly inanimate and industrial nature of the materials and the intensely biomorphic nature of the shapes and organic quality of movement and colour in the works. The porosity of body and machine in these reliefs demonstrates a wonderfully humorous elaboration of Duchamp's interest in the mechanics of desire and the relays established by the readymades between bodies and objects. Hesse had been exposed to Duchamp's work early in her career, notably while a student at Yale, where the important relief *Tu M'* was on view. Certainly, the use of readymade materials was intellectually available to Hesse at any juncture of her career. Yet it remains interesting that she first began to do so in a factory environment in which industrial detritus littered the studio. During this period, she saw (among many exhibitions) an important exhibition of works by Duchamp held in Bern in October 1964. Although it is circumstantial, it seems likely that this exhibition helped to job Hesse's fertile creativity.

However indebted Hesse's reliefs may be to Duchamp, they possess an ineffable uniqueness of their own, particularly in their mode of psychic address. On the one hand, they play out a Kleinian notion of the part object, as they toy with the boundaries between inside and outside (the push-pull of *Oomamaboomba*), and, on the other, they stage the dispersal of emotional effects across body parts that are neither fully real nor entirely fantasy (*Ringaround Arosie*). Repetition functions as a source of pleasure in these works as well. In *Eighter from Decatur*, thick sunflower-yellow cord is nailed to the Masonite ground in a radiating pattern. The radial is doubled by the pinkish claw-arms that emanate from yet another breast-nonbreast. As if the title weren't funny enough, the contraption moves, a merry-go-round of sex, a clock that can't tell time, a sundial of the body, they subsequently produce yet another bodily effect through vision – dizziness, hilarity, vague nausea, laughter, desire. From the breast to the eye and back again, Hesse's reliefs offer us the adult version of

Freud's famous *fort-da* game, in which a little boy throws and retrieves a toy endlessly in order to overcome the loss of his father. Here, instead of mastery, we have its promise and its ever-present retreat. As Hesse once wrote in her diary, 'Endless repetition can be considered erotic.'

Rosalind Krauss, 'Eva Hesse', in *Part Object Part Sculpture*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2006) n.p. [footnotes not included].

Hélio Oiticica
Fundamental Bases for a Definition of the *Parangolé*//1964

The discovery of what I call *Parangolé* marks a crucial point and defines a specific position in the theoretical development of my entire experience of colour-structure in space, principally in reference to a new definition of what would be, in this same experience, the 'plastic object', or rather, the work. It is not a case – as the name *Parangolé*, derived from folklore slang,[1] could lead one to suppose – of implying a fusion of my work and folklore, or identifications of this nature, transposed or otherwise, completely superficial and useless (see elsewhere the theory of the name, and how I found it).

The word here assumes the same character as, for example, *Merz* and its derivatives (*Merzbau*, etc.) had for Kurt Schwitters. For him they were the definitions of a specific experimental position, fundamental to the theoretical and existential comprehension of his entire work.

Specificity in my case is also quite marked, arising from the creation of what I call *Penetrables*, *Nuclei* and *Bolides*, which assumes a position within contemporary art defined in correlation with those experiments. I do not want objective apprehension here to be taken from the materials out of which the work is constituted: e.g. pieces of plastic, cloths, belts, screens, ropes, etc., or from the connection with objects which the works resemble: e.g. tents, banners, etc.

The link with the 'appearance' of already existing things is there, but it is not fundamental in the genesis of the idea, although it could be, perhaps from another point of view: that of the 'why' of this relationship, observed during the realization of the work, of its formation. What matters here, at the moment, is the 'how' intention of this formation of the work, of the first specific 'intention' of it. Even though I use prefabricated objects in the works (e.g. glass vessels), I do

not seek the poetics of these objects as the goals of this transposition, but use them as elements which only matter as an entirety, the entirety of the work. It would be what I call the 'foundation of the object', occurring here in its pure spatial formation, in its time, in its speficic meaning as a work. The glass vessel contains the colour powder, for instance, but what matters for the perception of the work is the total phenomenon which, in the first place, occurs directly, not in 'parts'. It is not the 'object' vessel and the 'object' pigment-colour, but the 'work'; no longer the objects as they were previously known, but a relation which transforms what was known into new knowledge and what still remains to be learnt, a dimension we would call the unknown, the remnant which remains open to the imagination which recreates itself upon the work. Actually, the theoretical objects 'glass vessel' or 'pigment colour' themselves already previously possessed this unknown side, so much so that, in the 'objective foundation of the work', the possibility arose, here in the specificity of the work, of revealing this hitherto unknown side of these objects. What emerges in the continuous spectator-work contact will therefore be conditioned by the character of the work, in itself unconditioned. Hence, there is a conditioned-unconditioned relationship in the continuous apprehension of the work. This relationship could constitute itself into a 'trans-objectivity', and the work into an ideal, 'trans-object'. This is not the place to develop the theory in detail, but only to seek to propose a generalized definition of this point-of-view.

The *Parangolé* would thus be, before anything else, an exploration of the basic structural constitution of the world of objects, the search for the roots of the objective birth of the work, the direct perceptive moulding of it. Hence my interest in popular constructive primitivism, which occurs in urban, suburban, rural, etc. landscapes, works which reveal a primitive constructive nucleus, but a defined spatial sense, a totality. There is a basic difference, here, for example, from the Cubists' discovery of African art as a rich expressive source, etc. For the Cubists it was the discovery of a cultural totality, of a defined spatial sense. It was the first, decisive attempt at taking the figure apart in Western art, at an expressive dynamization of the traditional picture, of sculpture, etc. The *Parangolé* places itself, as it were, at the opposite pole from Cubism: it does not take the entire object, finished, complete, but seeks the object's structure, the constructive principles of this structure, the objective foundation so to speak, not the dynamization or dismantling of the object. I will not develop this argument either in detail here; I only want to point it out; art criticism should take up the matter from its point of view.

In this search for an objective foundation, for a new space and a new time in the work in environmental space, this constructive sense of the *Parangolé* aspires to an 'environmental art' par excellence, which may or may not arrive at a

characteristic architecture. It is, as it were, a hierarchy of orders in the experimental formation of the *Nuclei*, *Penetrables* and *Bolides*, all of them, however, being directed towards the creation of an environmental world where this structure of the work can develop and weave its original pattern. The spectator's participation is also, here, of the same 'environmental' kind. It is a search for 'environmental wholes' which would be created and explored in all their orders, from the infinitely small to the architectural, urban space, etc. These orders are not established 'a priori', but create themselves according to creative necessity as it is born. Therefore the use of prefabricated or other elements in these works matters only as a detail of significant wholes, and the choice of these elements addresses the immediate necessity of each work. The resemblance of these works to already existing objects or concepts – e.g. banners, tents, capes, etc. – is, however, of another order. There is, as it were, a convergence of the work and these objects, or better, an apparent similarity once the work is finished, or it already takes on, from the start, this appearance. This convergence occurs, of course, 'a priori': the banner is an ultra-spatial object or element par excellence; there exist in it, implicit in its objective structure, elements which would be the same as those needed, for example, to express a certain spatial order of the colour-structure, given by the object itself, and by the act of its being carried by the spectator. The work having assumed, thus, the form of a banner, it did not wish to configure it or transpose what already exists to a new vision, to a new plane, but to appropriate its objective-constituent elements upon embodying itself, upon forming itself in its realization. The 'tent', also, is erected according to the environmental relation, which here requires a 'path of the spectator', an unveiling of its structure by the spectator's direct bodily action. This relationship is thus contingent, inevitable, and perfectly coherent within the dialectics of the *Parangolé*.

The 'discovery' of *Parangolé* elements in the landscape of the urban or rural world is also part of 'establishing perceptive-structural relations' between what grows in the structural grid of the *Parangolé* (representing here the general character of colour-structure in environmental space), and what is 'found' in the spatial environmental world. In the architecture of the 'favela', for example, there is implicitly a *Parangolé* character. The structural organicity of its constituent elements and the internal circulation and external dismemberment of these constructions mean that there are no abrupt transitions from 'room' to 'living room' or 'kitchen', only the essential, which defines each part connecting to the other in a continuity.

The same thing occurs in another way with those 'shacks' used on construction sites. Likewise with all these popular cubbyholes and constructions, generally improvised, which we see everyday, also fairs, beggars' homes, popular decorations of traditional, religious and carnival feasts, and so on. One could call all these

relations 'imaginative-structural', being ultra-elastic in their possibilities, and in the pluri-dimensional relation between 'perception' and 'productive imagination' (Kant) which derives from them, inseparable and feeding off one another.

All these matters remain to be theorized critically. There is another point which emerges too: the occurrence of a true return, through the concept of *Parangolé*, to a mythical, primordial structure of art, which always existed, of course, though with greater or lesser definition. If this factor was obscured from Renaissance art onwards, it has tended increasingly to emerge again in the art of our century. An approximation to dance elements, mythic par excellence, or the creation of special places, and so on, implicit in the *Parangolé*, still needs to be clarified. There is, as it were, a 'desire for a new myth', furnished here by these elements of art; they make an interference in the spectator's behaviour: a continuous and far-reaching interference, which could implicate the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology and history. This is another of the points to be developed critically in detail, within a denser theoretical study. The philosophical point of view is already implicit in these definitions; there remains, perhaps, the search for a definition of an 'ontology of the work', a profound analysis of the genesis of the work as such.

1 [*Parangolé*: slang, meaning an animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people.]

Hélio Oiticica, 'Bases fundamentails para uma definição do Parangolé' (November 1964), published by the artist for the exhibition 'Opinião', Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (12 August–12 September 1965); translated for the Walker Art Center edition of *Hélio Oiticica*, ed Guy Brett, Catherine David, Chris Dercon, Luciano Figueirado, Lygia Pape (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1992) 85–8.

Tom Marioni
Museum of Conceptual Art (1970)//2003

In 1970, working under the pseudonym Allan Fish, I made an exhibition in the Oakland Museum called *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. This was a social artwork. I am the author of this idea. In the 1990s the idea of social interaction in an art context became an art movement.

I invited sixteen friends to the museum on a Monday when it was normally closed. Since I didn't want to subject my friends to being performers, the public

was not invited. I told the curator, George Neubert, to get the beer and to be there. Everybody showed up, and we drank and had a good time. The debris was left on exhibit as a record of the event. Basically, the show consisted of the evidence of the act. It was an important work for me, because it defined Action rather than Object as art. And drinking beer was one of the things I learned in art school.

Earlier that year, in March, I had started my own museum as an excuse for a party. I was still curator of the Richmond Art Center, but I wanted to do more radical things than I could do at Richmond. I rented a large room 93 at 86 Third Street, south of Market Street in San Francisco. The Museum of Conceptual Art began at the start of a new decade, 1970, and continued until 1984. All the things that happened there in the first few years were actions by sculptors. I even did a show called 'Actions by Sculptors for the Home Audience'. It was made for KQED-TV, a PBS station, in 1974.

There were very few painters in the conceptual era; painting was not part of the avant-garde anymore. You evolve from painting to sculpture; that's how I saw it in the seventies. My museum was for action art, actions by sculptors, and site-specific installations. The first publicly announced show was called 'Sound Sculpture As'. Maybe it was the first sound art show anywhere. A movement called sound art came into being later, but it did not exist in 1970. Sound was used by the Fluxus artists in the 1960s, but their sound performances were concerts. Fluxus was an irreverent international group, like the Dada artists of the twenties, with more poets and musicians than visual artists. John Cage influenced Fluxus. He was a composer, and what he did was music, not sound art, because his intent was music. Music has an organization based on a time signature. If somebody hammers a nail into a piece of wood, and if it's in a music context, it could be music. But if it's done by a sculptor to demonstrate the physics or materiality of sound, then it's sound art. In sound art, the sound is a sculpture material.

I invited nine sculptors to make sound works for my show, which took place on 10 April 1970. Each artist produced sounds by manipulating a material. Terry Fox hit a bowl of water against the floor and made a sound like *bong*. Paul Kos trained eight boom microphones at two twenty-five-pound blocks of ice. People listened, trying to hear the inaudible sound of the ice melting. Mel Henderson fired a thirty-calibre rifle in the room, which had about a hundred people in it. Jim Melchert, who was out of town, gave instructions to one of his students, Jim Pomeroy, to perform his work. Pomeroy went to Breen's Bar and telephoned my space. He had been instructed to let the phone ring fifteen times, then hang up, then put another nickel in and do it again for fifteen rings. The room was filled with people listening to the telephone ring thirty times. That was a good piece.

My alter ego, Allan Fish was one of the nine artists in the show. Again, as in Richmond, the artist sent instructions for the curator to perform the work. I was

announcing all the artists' performances as they occurred, and I announced I would be performing Allan Fish's piece for him. I climbed to the top of a step ladder and, with my back to the audience, peed into a big galvanized tub. As the water level went up, the sound level went down. It demonstrated a principle of physics. Since my back was to the audience, it was clear that this was not about exposing myself. It was funny and shocking, but mostly funny. The audience was laughing and applauding. I was famous in San Francisco for my *Piss Piece* for about twenty years, but it's faded from memories now. Someone told me that Francis Coppola said he could never fill a bucket with water without thinking of my *Piss Piece*. [...]

Tom Marioni, extract from *Beer, Art and Philosophy* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2003) 93–6.

Alina Szapocznikow
My Work Has Its Roots ...// 1972

I was educated as a classical sculptor

My work has its roots in sculpture. For years I threw myself into studying problems of balance, volume, space, shadow and light. All in order to arrive at what I am today: nothing, other than a sculptor who has experienced the failure of a thwarted vocation. I took stock of the awareness of our time. I used my knowledge of the craft, my intuition and my intelligence, to note with inreased clarity the poverty of my methods in comparison to modern techniques. I have been conquered by the hero-miracle of our age, the machine. To it belong beauty, revelations, testimonies, the recording of history. To it belong, in the end, truthful dreams and public demand.

As for me, I produce awkward objects. This absurd and convulsive mania proves the existence of an unknown, secret gland, necessary for life. Yes, this mania can be reduced to a single gesture within the reach of us all. But this gesture is sufficient unto itself, it is the confirmation of our human presence.

My gesture is addressed to the human body, 'that complete erogenous zone', to its most vague and ephemeral sensations. I want to exalt the ephemeral in the folds of our body, in the traces of our passage.

Through casts of the body I try to fix the fleeting moments of life, its paradoxes and absurdity, in transparent polyester. My work is difficult, as sensation that is felt in a very immediate and diffuse way is often resistant to identification. Often everything is all mixed up, the situation is ambiguous, and limits are erased.

Despite everything, I persist in trying to fix in resin the traces of our body: of all the manifestations of the ephemeral the human body is the most vulnerable, the only source of all joy, all suffering, and all truth, because of its essential nudity, as inevitable as it is inadmissible on any conscious level. [...]

Nothing is definitive in my work, if not the immediate pleasure of touching and palpating the distinct material of mud as children do on a riverbank. [...]

Alina Szapocznikow, from typed and handwritten statement (Malakoff, Paris, March 1972), in *Alina Szapocznikow: Awkward Objects* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2011) 13.

Marc Camille Chaimowicz
Table Tableau//1974–76

A partially drawn curtain in the corner of the space reveals a dressing table and a chair. The artist enters, sits in the chair, and leans motionless on the table top with his head in his arms and gazes at his reflection in a mirror on the facing wall. His back, marked by a long diagonal scar, is to the audience who sees his face, made up in various colours, only as the reflection in the mirror. Objects are scattered on the table top: lighted candles, a bundle of letters tied with a ribbon, a vase of flowers, a half-consumed drink, an ashtray with cigarette butts, and an assortment of trinkets. Flowers decorate the wall, and a vase of gladioli and a fox fur lie by the figure's feet. The piece is accompanied by the soundtrack of a violin solo whose composition was based on a story told to the composer, Conal Shields, by the artist. The performance is concluded by the artist's exit from the space.

Marc Camille Chaimowicz, description of the performance *Table Tableau*, duration approx. 15 min. (London, Turin, Bologna, Rome, 1974–76), in *Marc Chaimowicz: Past Imperfect* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Gallery, 1983) 12.

Lygia Clark
The Relational Object//1980

The *relational object* (*objeto relacional*) has no specific nature in itself. As its name indicates, it is in the relationship established with the fantasy of the subject that it is defined. The same object may express different meanings for different subjects at different moments. It is the object of the aggressive and passionate affective charge of the subject, in the sense that the subject lends meaning to it; it loses the condition of a simple object in order to be impregnated, a being lived as a living part of the subject. The bodily sensation propitiated by the object is the starting point for phantasmatic production. The *relational object* has physical specificities. Formally it has no analogy with the body (it is not illustrative), but it creates relationships with it by means of the texture, weight, size, temperature, sound and movement (the motion of the diverse material used): 'It creates forms whose textures and continuous metamorphoses engender corollary rhythms to the sensual rhythms that we experience in life.' At the moment when the subject manipulates it, creating relationships of fullness and emptiness, by means of masses that flow in an unending process, the identity, with its psychological nucleus, is unleashed in the processual identity of shaping itself. I will cite some interesting examples by friends of mine who have experienced the *relational objects*.

B., a female writer, came to my house, very tired. She began by taking the 'light-heavy pillow', putting it on her leg, feeling it like a hot and living animal on her knees. She took the 'light pillows', squeezed them with her hands, and passing them over her body, had a sensation of euphoria, as if the little balls were living cells swarming over her body. When leaving my house, she had the feeling that she was part of a harmonious whole and at the same time she sensed her individuality. It seemed to her that she could have a clear communication with anyone. The balls had massaged her inside as if other people were feeling her. The sensation of well-being and euphoria lasted for a week.

V, an analyst, passed the 'big mattress' over his body, feeling greatly relaxed. At the end, he said, 'My body is a dense and total mass.' Then he manipulated the 'heavy pillows', which gave him a very unpleasant sensation of heaviness, being fenced in, blocked, wanting to break free. He made this clear, using the term 'spidering' (mother spider) and locating these perceptions in his pre-birth history: he had been in his mother's womb for ten months.

The Relational Object in a Therapeutic Context

For two years I have been conducting experiences in the use of *relational objects* for therapeutic ends. At the beginning I used them applying Edward Sapir's method, which I encountered in Paris: relaxation based on verbal induction; one session a week. I gradually abandoned induction, beginning to use only my own materials, increasing the number of sessions to three a week and an hour in length. The process becomes therapeutic through the regularity of the sessions, which allows the progressive elaboration of the phantasmatic production provoked by the potentialities of the *relational objects*. In manipulating the *relational object*, the subject lives out a pre-verbal image. The *relational object* directly touches the subject's psychological nucleus. The touch of the body is appropriated by the subject's psychological nucleus for the formation of the ego, a touch which is digested, metabolized and transformed into a symbolic equation. The *relational object* becomes a target for the 'acting out' of the subject who manipulates it.

The subject concretely experiences her aggressive or loving experiences in relation to the object. For example, if she destroys the *relational object* during the 'acting out', she understands that, even when it is destroyed, the mediator is present in order to deny this destruction. In the contrary case, the subject may destroy the mediating 'internalized object', maintaining the *relational object* in her hands as a guarantee that she hasn't lost the vital substance. Through this the subject captures a measurement of the real, focusing on the destruction as belonging to the world of her fantasy. Thus, simultaneously the object unstitches (de-compensates) and stitches (compensates). The process goes from the psychological nucleus to the periphery, creating a membrane. The texts that follow refer to therapeutic practice with the *relational objects*.

Structuring of the Self

Structuring of the self was my first systematizing of therapeutic method with the *relational objects*.

The person lies down, lightly dressed, on a large plastic mattress filled with polystyrene balls, covered by a loose sheet. With her weight the person makes impressions in the mattress in which the body can become comfortable. I massage the head for a long while and then I compress it with my hands. I take the whole body in my hands, I softly but firmly touch the joints in a way which gives many people the sensation of 'gluing' or 'soldering' sections of the body. For others the touch has the power of 'closing' the 'holes' of the body or 'moving them' to other areas. I work the whole body with the 'light pillows', rubbing the soles of the feet for a long time, and the palms of the hands. I put a stone wrapped in a soft textured bag (like the bags used to sell vegetables) in the hands of the

subject. For all the people who go through this process, the little stone is fundamental. It is experienced as a concrete object, which is not the subject nor the mediator that applies it. It is outside of the relationship, acquiring the status of a 'proof of reality'. In all of my experience there has only been one exception to this rule: a 'borderline' case who experienced the stone within his phantasmatic production as excrement. I pass the 'plastic bags filled with water' over the body, then the 'plastic bags filled with air', then blowing hot air through a tube over the whole surface of the body. I place the 'light pillows' around the head, I press the mattress around the body in order to 'shape it', I also place the 'heavy pillows' around the waist, between the legs, suppressing all the emptinesses of the body. In the place in which a 'hole' (*manque*) was discovered, I insert my hands, pressing them down, possibly substituting them with 'light-heavy pillows'. I cover the body with a woollen blanket, I sit on the floor behind the subject's head, very close to her, I let the silence settle in, or the subject verbally expresses all her fears, all her sensations, even perhaps living out her 'primitive agonies' (see D.W. Winnicott). I place my hand like a shell on the person's face, on her belly, or on another place, depending on the fissures which the person shows. In some cases the removal of my hands from the body is felt as a fragmentation, as the loss of a part of the body. An example from a witness to this experience: 'When you take your hands away from my body, I feel that a part of my body goes away and what is left of it doesn't have the structure to carry on alone.' At the end I calmly remove the blanket, the pillows, I take the subject by the head, turning it this way and that way. For some of them I pass the 'big mattress' over their body. I ask the person to stretch out for a while. Sitting down, I take hold of the whole surface of her back. At the end I give out one or more 'plastic bags filled with air' for the person to manipulate them or perhaps burst them. I massage the person's head during this manipulation, creating conditions favourable for her to go on to the 'acting out'. When the subject bursts the bag, she is experiencing 'ambivalence' in relation to the object. In destruction the 'relational object' is a receptacle for the receiving of the attacks of the subject, not as an even partial object (see Melanie Klein), but still within indifferentiation: the two bodies as communicating vessels, a continent in which the child does not differentiate between what it is and what the object is. Then I get the subject to fill up another plastic bag to replace the bag which has been destroyed. A process of 'reparation', which guarantees a stable identification to the beneficial object ('good object') reinforcing the ego and taking away its culpability. The process takes place at the same time as the appearance of the global object, through the return of the wholeness of the love object which had been the target of the subject's aggressive attacks. This moment thus has a structuring role. The 'structuring of the self' takes place in a pre-verbal space. During this phase of the work, silence is totally respected and the word comes in

afterwards, if the person wishes verbally to express images or sensations experienced, or even in the next session if she has noticed modifications in her real behaviour. The 'structuring of the self' consists in massive maternalization: to establish between the mediated and the subject, in a real and a symbolic manner, a relationship analogous to that which existed between a 'good mother' and her child. The action has a reparative effect – it brings the subject the real satisfactions which had been frustrated by her mother. It is a question of understanding the subject's fundamental needs and responding to them by means of the contact with the body and not classical analytic interpretation. [...]

Lygia Clark, extract from 'Objeto Relacional' (Rio de Janeiro, 1980); translated from Portuguese in *Lygia Clark* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997) 319–22.

A.M. Fine
Fluxtheatre Answers//1980

Props:
A modest-sized table, preferably covered by a large black cloth.
A large gong, preferably, or a similar substitute like a pot-lid, centrally suspended in a visibly *square* frame.
A symphonic 'triangle', suspended.
One wooden chopstick.
One wet-mop.
Also: One water glass, and a pitcher of water.

One pocketwatch.

Performers: Two (Speaker and Mopper).

Instructions: Table with props except mop, centre proscenium along with Speaker.

Speaker instructs audience to think up mentally questions to the ten answers he will give them, without any permitted 'verbalization' on the part of any of the audience. Sufficient time between each 'answer' must be allowed for the audience

mentally to form their questions. The Speaker may perform the ten answers, in any order he or she may prefer.

Answers

(1) 'She wore five rings to the opera; two space ships and three dinasaurs: That is why the restaurant boomed.'

(2) 'No.'

(3) The Speaker silently, and slowly, lifts the empty glass with one hand, the water jug with the other, and carefully pours about a glass full of water onto the stage, leaving the glass dry and empty: Performer No. 2 comes out from the wings with the mop, and carefully, but not dramatically, wipes up the water, and returns the same direction he came from, to the wings, with the mop.

(4) 'Arithmetic equals five times two point six equals thirteen million.'

(5) 'Leap-Year.'

(6) The Speaker picks up the wooden chopstick, breaks it, and replaces the two pieces on the table.

(7) The Speaker looks at his watch and announces the hour, minute and second; then the date; and then says: 'Cosmic Soup.'

(8) 'While they were on the moon, one of them sneezed.'

(9) The suspended triangle is lifted from the table, along with the square framed 'gong', (if it is that small), and struck once against the gong – and allowed to resonate until finished, and then quietly replaced on the table.

(10) Any of the preceding nine may be chosen as the tenth answer, or, if preferred, the Speaker may obviously comb his or her hair instead.

At the end, the offstage Mopper, without mop, should join the Speaker for bows.

A.M. Fine, 'Fluxtheatre Answers', in *Scenarios: Scripts to Perform*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Assembling Press, 1980) 119–20.

Chrissie Iles
Cleaning the Mirror: Marina Abramovic//1995

[...] Objects had appeared previously in Marina Abramovic and Ulay's work as symbols of transformation. Following their sojourn in the Australian desert they displayed gold nuggets found there on a red handkerchief. In some of the *Nightsea Crossing* performances objects were placed on the table as a focus for the artists' concentration. A small clay elephant which they had made, bound Gulliver-like by pins to the table, served as a metaphor for the wild mind. A live snake expressed a sensitivity to the vibrations of the silence within the piece, and a small white semi-opaque crystal suggested an alchemical representation of transformation.

The first work Abramovic made after her split with Ulay had occurred was *The Lovers*, a conjunction of two dark red vases in the same proportions as the bodies of the artists, lying on the floor. Joined at the top, they seemed ripe to be prised apart. The tension created by the sense of suffocation which results from their mouths being glued together presented an image of resistance to inevitable separation. The object recalls the symbiotic performance *Breathing In – Breathing Out* of 1977, in which both artists, kneeling face to face and pressing their mouths together with noses blocked, breathed in and out for seventeen minutes. Its lying position evokes Abramovic's final crumpling at the end of *Freeing the Body*.

'Sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing'.[1] Abramovic's objects have a stillness, but they do not read easily as sculpture, since they operate like tools waiting to be used. Most sculpture relies on anthropomorphism to strike a bond between artist and public. Here the public and the object have equal status, and the work is not considered to be complete until the public have physically engaged with it. The physical experience predominates over the optical.

Like the metronomes in *Spaces*, the objects contain a double meaning, one real and one metaphorical. The public takes the place of the artist. This can be seen clearly by comparing *Wounded Geode* to Abramovic's and Ulay's earlier *Nightsea Crossing* performance. In *Wounded Geode* the viewer takes the position the artists adopted in *Nightsea Crossing*. But there are important differences. The table is smaller and the object on it much larger. This grounds the piece in the object rather than in the process of sitting. The crystal is no longer a small object on a large table aiding concentration, it is a large object in its own right, almost like a (wounded) body. Its size seems to have been deliberately chosen to make concentration easier.

When Abramovic talks about the disappearance of objects, she is not

necessarily speaking literally. The Dalai Lama talks about the perceptual disappearance of objects, using the reflection of the face in a mirror as an analogy. The clay mirrors have the imprint of a face pressed into each surface. Here physical contact is taken into the structure of the objects themselves. Abramovic wanted the traces of people's bodies to be visible in the *Dragon* pieces where they had worn away the patina. The clay mirrors show a single action in time, like Yves Klein's body imprints. They are metaphors for a particular state of mind, halfway towards transformation. They have a ghostly appearance, almost like death masks and, like Klein, they respect only the centre part of the body, the essence: in this case the face. The clay mirrors become residues of an ephemeral action.

Another word for enlightenment is conjunction. Conjunction can also mean the marriage of the elements in an alchemical sense in order to achieve a cosmic balance. In alchemy the earth was understood as a body, and the sealed alchemical vessels which represented the earth in microcosm were often shaped like male or female sexual organs, to suggest fertility.

Abramovic is now beginning a new body of work which she calls *power objects*. These function in a different way from the *transitional objects*. Whilst they all have the same purpose, each power object also has a specific function. They operate on a mental rather than a physical level, somewhere between human and non-human use.

This exhibition includes the first of the new power objects. Two wax figures joined by a piece of tourmaline are hidden and bound by bandages soaked in blood. This mummified symbol of conjunction has a strong fertility aspect. It is also another mirror, and a talisman of suffering. It is as though the entire arc of drama and pain expressed so eloquently in the performances Biography and Delusional has been distilled into this single tight, bloody bundle. Its hidden conjoined wax figures create another metaphor for the artist's own body. Where *The Lovers*' conjoined vases suggested an opening out, here the two bodies have been intensely compacted together, trapped and finally brought under control, like a genie captured in a bottle.

The fetish can function as a substitute for the body of the mother. In *Rhythm 0*, Abramovic's passive body itself became a kind of fetish object, onto which desire, hatred and fear were projected represented in the classic triad of mother, madonna and whore. The wax double figure in Abramovic's first power object is reminiscent of the moment in *Delusional*, where the artist appears naked and impassive, impaled on a pole like a blow-up sex doll or mannequin.

The *power object* also contains another, alchemical meaning. The hidden crystal is buried at the centre of the object, as crystals are hidden in the earth. The crystal, exposed in so many of Abramovic's transitional objects, is now buried once again. The mummy is like a vessel, or body, inside which a secret transformation

is taking place. Concealment appears for the first time since her earliest painting *Still Life* (1965), in which three draperies cover an unknown emptiness waiting to be discovered. Through a new rawness, hitherto expressed only in her early and recent performances, the power object's removal of our physical contact with her work leads us back into the immateriality of her earliest projects. [...]

1 [footnote 18 in source] Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981).

Chrissie Iles, extract from 'Cleaning the Mirror', in *Marina Abramovic: Objects, Performances, Video, Sound* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1995) 32–40.

Paulo Herkenhoff
One *One Minute Sculpture*//2005

As an art critic, this is what I would like to think about during each second of experiencing *Spinoza* as a lesson of anatomy:

1 *Spinoza*. 'Hold your breath and think of Spinoza' (Wurm). That's all. I hold my breath for one minute and think. This is a *One Minute Sculpture* of Erwin Wurm.
2 *Name*. 'Its name is connected with the person [Baruch Spinoza] who said "free will does not exist"' (Wurm).
3 *Date*. Spinoza was born in 1632 and *Spinoza* 366 years later in 1998.
4 *Corpus*. *Spinoza* is one of approximately 150 *One Minute Sculptures*.
5 *Concept*. 'The *One Minute Sculptures* are sculptures which can last only for a very short period of time' (Wurm).
6 *Measures*. *Spinoza* is a disparity. Its interior measures more than its exterior. The difference is between (a) its visible part, which is the skin of the performer (the skin in a body measures 1,6-1,8 square metre – Bagot, et al.); and (b) its invisible part, which is the lungs (the combined total surface area of their air sacs is about 93 square metres, nearly 50 times the total surface area of the skin – Encarta). In general, each of those two internal parts of *Spinoza* is 25 to 30 cm (10 to 12 inches) long, roughly conical, unequal in form and function.
7 *Materials*. *Spinoza*'s materials are the body, air, imagination and time.
8 *Body*. 'I was never interested in the body, only in the psychological subject, in

the individual. I use it as any other material' (Wurm).

9 *Weight*. The weight of *Spinoza* is the person's body + the inhaled air's [The atomic weight of oxygen is 15.9994; at atmospheric pressure, the element boils at minus 182.96° C (minus 297.33° F), melts at minus 218.4° C (minus 361.1 ° F), and has a density of 1.429 gram/litre at 0° C (32° F). The tidal volume – amount of air taken by *Spinoza* – is equal to about 0.5 litres (about 1 pint)]. In *Spinoza*, the lungs can hold about ten times this volume if filled to capacity. This maximum amount, called the vital capacity, is generally about 4.8 litres (about 1.3 gallons) in an adult male, but varies from one individual to the next. Athletes, for example, can have a vital capacity in *Spinoza* of as much as 5.7 litres (1.5 gallons). However, time is weightless.

10 *Air*. The material of *Spinoza* is 4.5 billion years old, the time needed for the evolution of the present mixture of gases in the air.

11 *Spirituality*. *Spinoza* belongs to the *History of the Soul*, seen as *Pneuma*, which has ancient affinity with air in motion. Jung asserts that this word (*pneuma*) took meaning of 'spirit' chiefly under the influence of Christianity. Even in the account of the miracle at Pentecost the pneuma still has the double meaning of 'wind and spirit' (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*).

12 *The formless* (Bataille). The shapes in Spinoza are the external (for the body) and internal (the performer's lungs – for the air). 'The apparent formless is becoming much more important, like the interior of the individual: but the formless is about form and there is a very specific shape – in *Spinoza* it is the way one has to sit and to hold the breath in the lungs' (Wurm). However, the 300 million to 400 million alveoli contained in each of the elastic and spongy lungs continuously move and thus impede the shaping of the gaseous mass in *Spinoza*.

13 *Smoking*. Warning: The Surgeon General warns that smoking may harm your capacity to perform *Spinoza*.

14 *Colour*. The body material determines colour inside *Spinoza*. It would be pink if performed by a baby or a child, grey if by an older person and even darker, like the lungs of an adult smoking, living in cities or industrial areas.

15 *Plosiveness*. The action of *Spinoza* has phonetics effects, since it interrupts the flow of air, necessary to the physical articulation of speech sound. In linguistics, Articulatory Phonetics describes speech sounds genetically, the ways by which the vocal organs modify the air stream in the mouth, nose and throat in order to produce a sound. *Spinoza* may interfere with that. Articulator organs (lips, jaws, tongue, or vocal chords) move to modify the surge of air from the lungs. *Spinoza*'s action consists of stopping the air completely (plosive), disturbing the speech, and setting free the interior territory of thinking.

16 *Air depravation*. The accumulation of harmful substances to the atmosphere,

the so-called air pollution, causes damage to art, either to the functioning mechanism of *Spinoza* or to the marble *David* of Michelangelo.

17 *Air deprivation.* If one overdoes *Spinoza*, like for five minutes with no interruption, the brain will be deprived of oxygen; it may be permanently damaged. If *Spinoza* is slightly longer, the brain being without oxygen usually results in death.

18 *Poison. Spinoza* is a breathing machine. In aerobic respiration, body cells use oxygen to metabolize glucose, forming carbon dioxide as a waste product that is exhaled. This internal chemical waste is dangerous because if it accumulates in the body, it can poison living tissue. Carbon dioxide is a product of the chemical reactions living things use to release energy. Because body cells are constantly using up oxygen and producing carbon dioxide, the lungs work continuously. I breath therefore I think, I think therefore I poison. If breathing relates to production of carbon dioxide, therefore *Spinoza* is a factory of poison. Some artists, like Erwin Wurm (carbon dioxide), Sigmar Polke (red Saturn pigment), Katie van Scherpenberg (*vert gris*) and Mark Dion (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, and others), deal with poison in their work. The dialogue of art with death, here beyond metaphors, is towards an impulse of life.

19 *The minute. Spinoza*, as a *One Minute Sculpture*, should last precisely one minute, which is formed by 60 seconds. A second is 'the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between two hyperfine levels F=4, mf=o and F=3, mf=o of the ground state 2 s 1/2 of the atom of celsium-133 undisturbed by external fields (*The Thirteenth General Conference of Weights and Measures*, 1967). The *One Minute Sculptures* are sixty times all this, yet its main task is the conversion of metrological precision into a poetic visual territory.

20 *Event.* Every performance of *Spinoza* is an 'event', as it is tied to a time dimension. An event is defined by A.N. Whiteread as that portion of time – e.g. One Minute – through which a specific character of place – e.g. the body in *Spinoza* – is discerned – e.g. breathing (in *The Concept of Nature*).

21 *Precision.* In order to correspond ontologically to their established time, the *One Minute Sculptures* should last precisely one minute. *Spinoza* is situated somewhere between duration and the most accurate reference clocks, which 'are quantum mechanical instruments, their uniformity in measuring time is assured by the constancy of atomic structures; their rates are determined through the selection of specific atoms for resonance and through the control of environmental conditions' (J.T. Fraser, *Of Time, Passion and Knowledge*). However, the artist says, 'One minute is just a synonym for short. It could also be 10 seconds or 2 minutes.'

22 *Duration*. For Spinoza, 'duration is the indefinite continuation of existing' (*Ethics*, Part II); eternity would not be in the field of duration. Duration is a certain quantity of existence. Time is the measure of the quantity, and existences, for Spinoza, have their being in time, while essences are outside of time. (*Encarta*). Deleuze speaks of the elasticity of Spinoza's concept here. Wurm's *Spinoza* understands itself in the domain of duration, whereas Brancusi's *Endless Column* is aimed at eternity.

23 *Immanence*. *Spinoza* deals with immanent time, as it avoids defining any metaphysical connotations to experience. *Spinoza*'s immanence finds support in Lygia Clark's words: 'We are a space/time totality. In the immanent act we do not perceive of a temporal limit. Past, present and future become mixed' (*Do Ato, Livro-obra*, 1983).

24 *Precariousness*. The *One Minute Sculptures*, however, seem to move beyond duration. They are built with precariousness, as Dubuffet's *Petites Statues de la Vie Precaire*, or Clark's time dimension. 'We propose the precarious as a new concept of existence against all the static crystallization in the duration' (Lygia Clark, *We Reject*, 1966).

25 *Rhythm*. The clash of rhythms in *Spinoza* is related to the interruption of breathing and the continuity of all other organic processes. The adult performer of *Spinoza* is normally renouncing to breath at the rhythm of 14 to 20 times per minute. Therefore, *Spinoza* introduces antagonistic experiences of stillness and movement within biological time.

26 *Sculpture of Time and Space*. Constantin Brancusi (*Endless Column*), Marcel Duchamp (*Three Stoppages*), Cildo Meireles (*Fontes*), Felix Gonzalez-Torres (*Untitled. Perfect Lovers*), Lawrence Weiner (*TWO MINUTES OF SPRAY PAINT DIRECTLY UPON THE FLOOR FROM A STANDARD AEROSOL SPRAY CAN*), Erwin Wurm (*One Minute Sculptures*).

27 *Drawing*. The *One Minute Sculptures* are exercises of transience: the line of the drawing flows. Nothing retains its course. It is economic and precise. It seems to have been drawn softly in one minute to frame the sculpture within a precise territory of time.

28 *Photography*. *Spinoza* is time retained.

29 *In-deterrence*. *Spinoza* is about the impossibility to detain free will. While photography is about the detention of time (like capturing the performance of *Spinoza*), yet it is impossible voluntarily to stop breathing permanently, because breathing, like the heartbeat, is an involuntary activity controlled by nerve centres in the brain stem, the lower part of the brain. The poetic incoherence is that *Spinoza* is bound by nature to a time limit.

30 *Video*. Is *Spinoza*'s time elapsed.

31 *Sculpture*. 'My basic idea', says Wurm, 'was to make an artwork which also

can be realized by the public without my physical presence. All my *One Minute Sculptures* can be realized in different time and geographical levels and in different conditions. It is something like the music score. Every part shows another aspect, be it drawing or photography, with me or without me in the picture.'

32 *Performance. Spinoza* belongs to the family of performance sculptures of Gilbert and George, Peter Weibel in Valie Export's *Communication Action* (*Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit*, 1968), Roman Signer, Andreas Slominski, Martin Walde, among others' living sculptures. [...]

Paulo Herkenhoff, extract from 'One *One Minute Sculpture* by Erwin Wurm', in *Erwin Wurm: Fat Survival*, ed. Peter Weibel (Graz: Neue Galerie/Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002) n.p.

Aura Satz
Déjà vu – Gregor Schneider: *Die Familie Schneider* (2004)//2009

In a small East London street, you are invited to walk into one of two identical buildings, while your viewing partner is in the other house. You have exactly ten minutes each. As you timidly explore this stifling building, you encounter the members of this disturbingly dysfunctional family. They stand trapped in the timeless repetition of a minimal gesture: washing the dishes, masturbating in the shower, hiding inside a black bin-bag. They are all self-contained, self-absorbed, withdrawn. The mother caresses the plate with an absent gaze and, should you try and interfere, ask a question, Look at her, touch her, she shrinks back, turns-away, removes herself. You cannot exist but as voyeur. The format of so much contemporary live art is interaction with the audience, a unique feeling of the here-and-now of liveness, its irreproducibility, its distinct mode of accosting and inflicting itself upon the viewer: I am the present, look at me, I'll stare straight back. Here however, there is a strange play on the repeat performance, the *déjà vu* not only of the performer's daily routine, but also of the understudy, the next performer's reinterpretation or reincarnation of the same role. For when you enter the second house you are presented with a second viewing, indistinguishable from the first. The performers are identical twins, and you are now in the knowledge that your unique event is in fact occurring simultaneously right next door. Their double-life suddenly sucks you into your

possible double-life, colliding in an overwhelming sense of the uncanny, the familiar defamiliarized. Their performative withdrawal, autistic almost, excludes you, yet draws you in. You watch, waiting for something to happen. Nothing changes, so you move on at your own pace, probing the next performer with your inquisitive gaze, trying to enter the picture without becoming it, trying to see without being seen. Or maybe this time round try a different tactic, try to be seen, ask a question, move closer, only to be sharply withdrawn and shut out from their space – they stare away, or tighten the bin-bag grasp – an invisible wall wedges its way through between you and them.

Schneider states that 'For a long time now … I have wanted to show a dead person in a museum … in a natural way and just for a few hours.' While drawing up a legal document that might one day permit someone to donate their body to this artistic purpose Schneider has been substituting his own body by 'lying on the ground without moving – not sleeping – for hours on end. Very, very difftcult'.[1] Is a cadaver the ultimate equivalent of the bare minimum of activity? This insignificant level of performativity does something to the space, to the performer, to the viewer. It magically transforms nothing, or very little, into something. The very act of looking and being looked at becomes the central event. This minimal performance sucks you in and spews you out, but theoretically you could also ignore it. You are the one who is alive, who moves, who acts, while 'it' takes place oblivious of you, ignoring you whilst desperately seeking your attention. It offers itself like some kind of dead object to be gawped at, the scene of an accident or a crime, invisibly taped off, a tableau in which every detail might be a clue to its past or future narrative, an untouchable realm which, if entered and tampered with, might irreversibly change the course of past and future events. No, your role is simply to watch, you are contracted to provide a gaze which justifies this scene, brings it to life, although, of course, it holds its breath, remaining still and silent, barely alive in this coffin of a house.

1 [footnote 2 in source] Gregor Schneider quoted in Ossian Ward, 'Profile', *Art Review* (October 2004) 104. Schneider has himself featured in his 'non'-performances, hiding in a bin bag for seven hours at a time, in a piece evocatively entitled 'The Biggest Wank'. See also Gregor Schneider, *Die Familie Schneider* (London: Artangel/Göttingen: Steidl, 2004).

Aura Satz, extract from 'Tableaux Vivants: Inside the Statue', in *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*, ed. Aura Satz and Jon Wood (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009) 158–60.

Richard Hore
Andy Holden: *Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time*//2011

I write this caught between spitting and swallowing the unfinished ideas of a queer little god. My jaw aches with the mastication of loss, but that loss can be chewed means that loss cannot be ultimate. YOU CAN'T CHEW NOTHING (everything is chewable). His death has made me salivate. I hope someone has found the scattered notebook that was put to the winds on Dalston Junction, February 2nd 2011. Muddied, bloodied and torn, I hope some wandering soul has found and eaten up the words, which with a fast, loose scrawling hand were penned in infectious joy. I hope that those with no appetite let them loose again as I haven't eaten for some months now. Conversations had, feel scratched across my skin by the Harrow, exquisite with languid, sticky possibilities but ultimately unreadable (cf. inedible) obfuscated by their author's untimely departure. Just a glass of lemonade left through the melancholy ether.

I sit beneath a table like a drooling dog, waiting for morsels of meat/bread/petit-pois. I would do near anything for something substantial again – a three-course meal not stopped short at the aperitif. The waiter with all his damnable etiquette has entered and driven me again from my place. My stomach growls and subsequently the moon shifts somewhat out of orbit. I would need the sun to quench my thirst now and, to satiate my hunger, suck on the orgy of frozen tight that hangs like apples in the sky. To feast on a dining table laid with the blinking stars of an edible universe our plates piled high with the most glorious tasting concepts to eat through the night and back again – if I regurgitate my food do I get my time spent eating back again?

The object, in phenomenological space, is created from the inside out; neural space constitutes it from the outside in, but the two collide and the object is lost to itself; we have only our mind to know our mind. NO. We will eat our minds, they will taste both wonderful and foul, on the tip of my tongue … tip of my tongue … tip of my tongue … these words feel sour then chewed a little more burst into myriad taste and texture. Only when we chew the Object can we know it entirely – even the elements strive to take a mouthful 'Nibble, nibble, gnaw, who is nibbling at my little house?… The wind, the wind, the heaven-born wind.'

Georges Bataille was wrong; *PRIMUM RUMINARE. / Secundum Vivere* (if at all).

Richard Hore (also known as Teufel-INK), extract from *Andy Holden: Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time* (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 2011) 63–4.

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Gruppe Geflecht was a Munich-based group formed between 1965–68. Its members included Lothar Fischer, Heimrad Prem, Hans Matthäus Bachmayer, Reinhold Heller, Florian Köhler, Heino Naujoks, Helmut Rieger, Helmut Sturm and HP (Hans Peter) Zimmer.

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'This exciting collection is a pleasure to read from beginning to end. Here readers will discover texts that offer a thoughtful interrogation of the possibilities, status and stakes of the object-world we inhabit. Wide-ranging in scope, these writings tackle the psychic, social and physical means by which objects and subjects find, address, impel and produce both themselves and each other, in complex and illuminating ways. This is a welcome introduction to, and provocative rethinking of the object, in all its many formal and theoretical formations – from immaterial concept to obdurate and material "thing".'
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THE OBJECT

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THE OBJECT is this thing that refuses to go away. Virtual reality, conceptual art and numerous philosophical and psychological traditions have sought to de-thingify the world, but the object, in its many forms, persists. This anthology surveys some of the many twists and turns in the object-subject relationship, from 'thingness', everyday and useful objects to lost, performative and non-objects. This wide-ranging selection of 20th- and 21st-century texts brings the object to the fore as a prism through which to re-read contemporary art and understand its recent past.

The Object is one of a series documenting major themes and ideas in contemporary art

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