

# **Textualisation of the found object through rematerialisation**

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Brett Jones  
August 2014

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## ABSTRACT

My studio research proposes new uses for post-structuralist semiotics by investigating different materialisations of the found object through acts of remaking. This exegesis and the results of my studio practice argue that the 'readymade' in its historical conceptualization has been normalised as a standard method of art making and critical interpretation. By contrast, in this study, the conventional understanding of the readymade as art context dependent is repositioned in an investigation of how the found object can undergo a process of transposition through remaking and reimaging. This material and textual shifting of the conventions of the readymade questions the notion of an origin or source to which texts as objects may derive. I argue that a new materiality of the found object can be achieved through the reproductive processes of casting and photography. By critically re-evaluating this process through post-structural theory, this research offers an alternative reading of art objects utilizing technologies of reproduction. Fundamentally, my research argues for a release of the found object from the prescribed historical discourse of the readymade into textual discourses of materiality and the subject. It recognizes the implicit role of the body in the reading and writing of these various texts. By incorporating the ideas of *jouissance*, *signifiance*, the image-repertoire, *différance*, translation, and the real, the notion of the body as a palimpsest for the objects I remake is investigated as an interplay between representation and writing, form and text.

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Indebtedness to 'the inlet'.

For Ella and Marlo



## **Debris**

I am told the cellar is full of water, that the door in the floor of the large walk-in pantry is best left closed. What do I expect to see? I want to see what water beneath the floor boards looks like. I want to see how many steps are exposed as a measure of the depth; to confirm that water is beneath; to imagine the terror of being thrown in and the door closed. I imagine objects sitting on the floor of the cellar resting in sludge and debris. These objects are intractable, now part of the cellar, part of the water. The underground space filled with water holds many objects that I cannot define by purpose. Perhaps they are fragments of objects, broken pieces of indeterminate origin. These pieces captivate my attention, they provide no solutions, no attempts to be anything except discarded fragments. I search for the fragment that will give itself up, a signifier of unlimited possibilities, combinations and uncertainty.

## INTRODUCTION

The photograph reproduced below is no ordinary image, and certainly not an original. It is a meticulously hand-coloured collotype of a photograph taken around 1917. Marcel Duchamp's image—included in his *Box in a Valise* Series C (1958)—depicts his New York studio with some domestic furniture and two of the early readymades: *Bicycle Wheel*, second version, 1916 and *Trébuchet* (Trap), 1917. This hazy image with the ghosted enlarged chessboard on the wall and the unmade bed with two armchairs is disarming in its obvious reworking. For not only is it a hand-coloured multiple evincing a 1950s patina, the *Trébuchet* readymade is distinctly incongruous, clearly reading as a collaged addition. This readymade on the floor points towards the *Bicycle Wheel* with its overemphasised white legs, making the presence of the Trap as a pictorial element highly pronounced. Yet there are stranger things in this image, such as two sack-like objects on the floor, one with two legs protruding, a dishevelled bed piled with books or documents and a long piece of wood that almost dissects the picture on an angle. This remade image from a photograph depicting two readymades, one a remake the other an addition poses the obvious question: 'what is an object



Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp's Studio at 33 West 67th Street. 1917-18. Printed in 1958 in *Box in a Valise* (From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy), Series C. Collotype with pochoir coloring on tinted card

and how can we know that it is?' This hand-coloured image proves nothing except that it is a picture in its own right created by Duchamp. What it does is open up a series of questions concerning the representation of objects that function as signifiers for uncertain signifieds. In other words, this image demonstrates the impossibility of the original object, short-circuiting both the presumed indexicality of photography and the materiality of the object.

Duchamp famously transformed a commodity into art in 1913 with *Bicycle Wheel*, but it was from the late 1950s that the Duchampian readymade became properly defined as a product of language. The readymade as the everyday product, 'randomly' chosen by Duchamp for its aesthetic indifference to be transformed into art, subsequently went through various 'delays' before a critical and discursive clarity began to emerge in the late 1950s, coinciding with the third *Box in a Valise* edition (1958),<sup>1</sup> the portable museum that contained several of the readymades replicated in miniature along with reproductions of paintings, drawings and other works.

The initial gesture of the early readymades—mediated through innumerable writings—has been endowed with a certain status, claiming an art historical privilege that inflects contemporary art practice in significant ways. This research project extends on the legacy of the readymade through a reconsideration of the critical potential of the *found object*. This potential is theorised around the intertextual and

psychoanalytic ramifications of rematerialising the *found object* through casting, photography and text. It questions the legacy of the *readymade* in an attempt to recast the *found object* in a more fully textualised and open manner; to provide a different potentiality to the found object through its recognition as a textual fragment. My studio-based research eschews what has become the doxa of the readymade by reworking the found object through various material processes, moving it into another life; or what can be considered the ‘afterlife’ of the readymade.

Doxa is a normalised and accepted value or attitude that becomes continually repeated or restated. This is what has become of the readymade as it has been conventionalised through replication and repetition, literally through the remakes and editions, and figuratively through the text as it formed a ballast for so much art theory and practice since the 1960s. Semiotically, the conventionalisation of the readymade sees the signified being anchored to the signifier. That is, our immediate recognition of the historical readymade is as a series of tropes or methods of practice. This does not preclude the continuing theorisation of the readymade, but it does position such texts within a knowable and ‘readymade’ framework. My reference to the conventions of the readymade ascribes it to a series of movements—selection, contextualisation, authorisation—that are well known in advance by not only artists and theorists, and indeed much of the general public for art. Having said this, there are alternative paths to which artists working with found objects (after the readymade) have pursued. This research seeks another way of thinking and rethinking the found object that are not wholly dependent on the Duchampian formula.

There are two issues at stake here concerning the readymade art object. The first relates to how the readymade has been historicised as a kind of readymade museum practice, where the readymade affirms the role of the museum in its authorisation, thus stabilising its institutional relation. The second, naturalises the mark of the author in the decisive move to designate an everyday object as an artwork, thereby justifying and emphasising some mythical and magical ability the artist makes with their ‘selection’. The two functions here of contextualisation and authorisation work hand-in-hand to create a space for the readymade to as it were ‘settle’ (the readymade could not settle in a public domain amongst *ordinary* commodities).

My studio research poses two broad questions: How can a *rematerialisation* of the found object open up alternative paradigms that go beyond the readymade? And what roles do different theories of the Text<sup>2</sup> and the subject play in this rematerialisation? Specifically, in attempting to move beyond, while still acknowledging the conceptual field of, the readymade, this project seeks a praxis between specific theories of textuality and objects realised as castings, photographs and written texts. This approach gestures towards the post-structural readings of the readymade that commenced in the 1960s in order to propose an alternative inscription, a different emphasis on the role of language to the found object. The principle argument for this movement beyond the readymade is that in rematerialising the found object through different reproduction technologies and materialities it is no longer tied to the logic of authorising designation and contextual dependence, as a kind of ‘fathered’ historicity.

I contend that this logic of contextualisation, authorship and designation has come to limit the textual movement of the readymade.<sup>3</sup> These are limitations that I address, in order to propose a reassessment in the use and writing of the found object.

Roland Barthes, the prominent French theorist of semiotics and language, postulates that 'the Text is a methodological field... the work can be held in the hand, the Text is held in language.... the Text is experienced only in an activity of production.'<sup>4</sup> The producer of text, this Text as it is rewritten by the reader, holds the potential to dematerialise the found object beyond the historical readymade. This involves a textualisation which 'thwarts and deceives connotations', elides attempts at interpretation (especially privileged interpretations), denies the search for originality and integrates the subject into the same problems of identification and positioning. This constitutes a 'continuous subversion of writing and reading, between the sender and receiver of the text'<sup>5</sup>, thereby acting out a transgressive exchange between the objects of this study and the subject as reader/writer.

Rematerialisation in this study is in effect a textualisation or reinscription of the found object; that is, it involves an initial, paradoxical dematerialisation in order to offer alternative paths to which the found object may be remade. Words make objects as much as bronze does, which is why *intertextuality* is the tool for this operation to proceed. In this research intertextuality is applied through the weave of words, photographs and cast objects – whereby the Text (as material forms) is not a stable thing but a process of productivity, such that the objects of this study are in perpetual reconstitution.

Barthes succinctly states: 'Text practices the infinite deferment of the signified'.<sup>6</sup> The field of the signifier is one of 'deferred action', it does not confer to some 'ineffable' notion of meaning (an unnameable signified) but rather it is the perpetual play of the signifier that leads to other signifiers. Just as Barthes sets the signifier in opposition to the signified, this study is concerned with the signifier as the space of production, the space of writing, whereas the signified is where meaning is predetermined, or better *expected* as an affirmation. This movement of the signifier through disconnections, overlappings and deferments is precisely how I enact this research practice as a 'logic regulating the Text [that] is not comprehensive but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy... the Text is *radically* symbolic.'<sup>7</sup>

One such key movement is to foreground the body of the reader in the processes of the Text as played out through the post-structural notions of *signifiance* and *jouissance*. *Signifiance* breaks apart the signifying systems to which an object may be presumed to be socially situated. The Text, as theorized by Barthes, jams the imperative of communication, resulting in *signifiance*, instead of signification. 'Signifiance is not reducible to a functional method of communication between individuals'.<sup>8</sup> The subject is fully caught up in these processes of the text as Barthes notes:

Signifiance, unlike signification, cannot be reduced to communication, to

representation, to expression: it puts the (writing or reading) subject into the text, not as a projection, not even a fantasmatic one... but as a loss.<sup>9</sup>

Barthes develops the concept of *signifiance* (after Julia Kristeva) as a way by which the body of the reader actively produces the text in conjunction with the authored language. Barthes uses the term *jouissance* in relation to the processes of *signifiance* as a marker of rapture but also potentially traumatic loss, the text shaking the reader; a shudder through the body of the subject. It is the text of bliss that can displace the reader from the imaginary as a unified subject. It is also the moment of the text becoming erotic (without scenes) wherein a kind of (non-religious) ecstatic moment can occur. These conceptions are central to the working of Text and are employed as touchstones throughout this study.

Barthes theorised this new approach to language in two key essays: 'From Work to Text' (1971)<sup>10</sup> and 'The Theory of the Text' (1973)<sup>11</sup>. The ideas from these essays propel a re-thinking of the potential of the found object in art making. The signification process in everyday use is understood as referring to the *product* of meaning; that which is communicated or stated, the signified work. Barthes develops a challenge to this conventional understanding of signification. He theorises the difference between a Text and a work, questioning the conventions of reading and communication. He uses the key ideas *signifiance* and *jouissance* to break down these conventions. The processes of the Text surpass normal signification; the regular functioning of the sign in making stable meanings. The Text cannot be held in the hand or between the covers of a book, rather it exists in language. Text is the movement of the signifier as it does not settle on any determinate meaning or material. Barthes differentiates Text from 'work' in several ways that are important in my arguments for the potential of the found object to move beyond the legacy of the readymade. The post-structuralist conception of the sign<sup>12</sup> allows me to shift between different materialisations of the signifier, whether it be a casting in a particular material, a photograph or a written text. This creates a comparative system of differences that functions through transposition and intertextuality. This web of signifiers is however fraught with lapses, deferments, dislocations and traces.

Utilising a psychoanalytic framework, I also argue for a more pronounced inclusion of the *body* as it is textualised through the object cause of desire as reflected in a range materials and forms. This constitution of the subject through objects that are always partial or incomplete represents a divergence from an implied material 'completeness' of the historical readymade as transformed commodity.

The readymade is identified by its material origins, in the sense of how it is found, or its material faithfulness in replication. The clarity of its economic use value and signs of production precisely generate objects that are emphatic in their transgression of commodity status. It is this definition of the readymade that allowed the initial radical historical gesture to coalesce over time through a process that also ensured its naturalisation as art. David Joselit notes that 'The transformation of commodity into artwork is an effect of writing'.<sup>13</sup> I will argue that this transformation still privileges

a source (an origin) and the object's contextualisation, as well as the author-artist's discrete authority. Instead, I propose a return of the found object to a textual field that does not make transformation through selection as the determining process of its shift into commodity as language, or language as commodity. In other words, I place the emphasis on the found object as functioning in an 'always already' state that cannot be stabilised to an origin or moment of determination or 'selection'. I contend that the found object can be written through the perpetual movement of the signifier. This mobility dismantles any direct process of commodity transformation, in favour of a contingent textualisation of the object to the body of the subject, 'in the midst of which the subject places himself [sic] and is undone, like a spider that comes to dissolve itself in its own web'.<sup>14</sup> I argue that the readymade and artists working with its legacy have not fully explored the role of the body as a primary signifier in writing the found object. It is through rematerialising the found object that the subject negotiates this afterlife of the readymade.

One of my central arguments is to recognise that the objects being 'worked through' are derived from other forms and texts; that is, that they are pre-existent citations. The refutation of an original challenges both the completeness of the art object and the unity of the subject. In this scenario the rematerialized object—which I also refer to as the 'derived object'—is free to play in an intertextual field of dispersal, deferment, contradiction and refusal. The subject is integral and internal to this play of the derived object as a projection of bodily displacement. This subject is at once symbolic and imaginary as it is acted out in various ways; the making and remaking of objects, the photographs after the objects, and the written fragments that bookend the chapters of this exegesis.

Different voices operate in this research project in its written form through different authorial positions. As such, the indexical signifier 'I' is not solely identifiable with the pronoun of the author. The shifting of subject positions is explored in a series of short written fragments that are positioned in between the chapters. They occupy a conceptual and material space between the derived objects and the chapter writing. These fragments function as enacted moments where the text can play with the theories discussed in the chapters in a more open and independent manner. In other words, the fragments bring together the theory and the objects in a way that opens up the potential for the scriptable (writerly) text. They are the connective tissue for intertextuality to ensue as an active process within this written document. These fragments attempt to operate on the same plane as the rematerialised objects and photographs, thereby continuously reiterating the intertextual methods of this study. (The last two text fragments are positioned after the conclusion in order to suggest the continuing textual movement of the ideas contained in this study beyond its formal completion. They precipitate a weaving back through the writing, images and objects herein.) The photographs occupy a vicarious relationship as they function as objects in their own right, while seeming to resemble the derived objects. The reader must keep in mind that they are indexical signifiers commensurate to the 'I' of the writer or reader; they speak according to their context and designation.

The late writings of Roland Barthes that imbricate the subject and the text are central to my arguments for rematerialising the found object. In this process of writing (the processes of the Text), the readymade is itself displaced, dispersed amongst a network of signifiers that re-allocate the symbolic potential of the found object. Theories of the Text are of course not attributable to Barthes alone<sup>15</sup> but are associated with developments from the structuralist conception of the sign that occurred principally in France in the late 1960s and 1970s. These writers, divergent and impossible to define as a group, prompted a shift away from the metaphysics of structuralism into a reformulation of the ways that the text functions in constituting the subject through language. Drawing on the work of several of these post-structuralist writers—Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan—I argue for a different valuation of the found object in visual arts discourse.

The Duchampian readymade has been so often written and rewritten that it has become a naturalised series of ideas and readings. As Joselit notes without pejorative, ‘Duchamp studies’.<sup>16</sup> I contend that many of these theories either entertain a nostalgia for the lost object that operates in the realm of the image-repertoire or extend on other established theory to echo a doxa; the differences are at times semantic, or at least within an overly defined register. I present some of these frames of discussion in Chapter One, ‘Beyond the Readymade’, emanating from Duchamp’s practice. An important reference is the textual object as played out in Surrealism to which I address through Andre Breton’s slipper-spoon. This chapter also negotiates the problem of translation related to the textual implications of remaking an object through essays by Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida. I discuss specific examples of work by Joseph Kosuth, Sherrie Levine and Gabriel Orozco that rework the legacy of the readymade, as well as specific photographs by Constantin Brancusi and Man Ray. Extending the found object beyond the well theorised textual critiques of the readymade into processes of rematerialisation generates new dialogues around the perplexing nature of objects and their representations.

In Chapter Two, ‘Materiality’, I analyse the potential of the material signifier to activate a textual interplay that does not foreclose on signifieds or designated meanings. The scriptor and/or reader may rewrite the object on their own terms. As Roland Barthes notes, ‘the signifier belongs to everybody: it is the text in fact which works tirelessly, not the artist or consumer’.<sup>17</sup> This chapter foregrounds the material signifier in activating the processes of the Text that challenge the precepts of the readymade, instead emphasising that a play on materials through their reading and (re)writing opens up spacings of non-presence and loss. In this sense, materiality is not necessarily a presence, but rather functions as a network of signifiers that dislocate associations with form, function and materiality. This chapter explores the processes by which the rematerialised found object undergoes transposition, textualisation and transgression as it moves through different material manifestations, contexts and representations. With reference to Derrida’s ideas around *différance* and the supplement, I formulate arguments for the derived object that is in constant deferment through a play of the signifier that cannot determine a presence. *Différance* is an element of the text that ‘takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in

an economy of traces', while the supplement is the addition that undermines the text from which itself is derived; the part of the text that is extrinsic while being intrinsic.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter Three, 'Corpus', develops this textual relationship with signifiers of the body to the objects of this research. This complex relationship is informed by particular theoretical conceptions of the subject as he/she is constituted by the text, and how these ideas cathect the subject to the object. Building on Derrida's (non)concept of *différance* I argue that the object cannot be known in any complete manner, leading to the part-object. The idea of the part-object, developed by Lacan after Melanie Klein, refers to objects that 'represent only partially the function that produces them.'<sup>19</sup> I extract this idea in relation to Barthes' use of the term to realise objects in relation to the body, as they are always partially in formation, and incomplete. In doing so, I argue for a reworking of the derived object as a potent site for the play of the signifier that is always undoing the subject as it is constituted. This coalescence of denial (refusal) and remaking (writing) of the subject is conjoined with the specular image of the object; Lacan's *objet petit a* as a proxy (and ghosting) for the objects of this study. *Objet petit a* is commonly understood as the cause of desire that binds the subject against the potential 'affects' of the real; it is that surplus, the leftover, the residue that evades symbolization. *Objet petit a* is the sense that something is always missing, but never the less it is the cause of the search for this impossible object.

Chapter Three thus develops a new way of constituting the found object that is not dependent on the conceptual and art historical domain of the Duchampian readymade. Emphasising the importance of the body and the subject in the recalibration of the found object in art discourse, it demonstrates through studio research how objects and images that are continuously derived become *cinders* of the lost object. The energy that results in the search for the object cause of desire may give the subject a jolt, pierce the veil of the symbolic. This is where I situate the potential for the rematerialised objects to act out their bodily references and citations. This chapter intentionally modifies the voice of this writer and modes of address in order to augment these theoretical arguments in the language itself. This is where the fragments and the chapter writing may find their touching points.

In effect, the 'derived objects' of this study are akin to imagined fragments of the body, as part-objects of a fragmented subject. In this process the found object is reconstituted as interdependent with the constitution of the subject; the subject and the found object are concurrently dissolved and remade. This argument for the rematerialisation of the found object as a cipher for the subject aims to provide alternative points of reconstitution in the afterlife of everyday objects.

## Notes

- 1 The first edition of *Box in a Valise* was produced 1935-41.
- 2 See Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text : A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Where 'Text' appears with an uppercase 'T', it is referring to the ideas in this essay.
- 3 As an imago the readymade maintains a certain intractability akin to a photograph; perhaps it is the photographs (and their context in art history books) of the readymade to which the structuralist sign adheres, whereas the proper mobility of the readymade signifier exists in the word. That is, when I view the readymades in their physical materiality they can never match or conform to the texts written about them; in language they remain elusive and shifting, while when viewed in the museum they become structured and all too present, as if usurped by the writing about them.
- 4 Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.
- 5 Barthes, "Theory of the Text," 44.
- 6 Barthes and Heath, *Image, Music, Text*, 158.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Michael Moriarty, Roland Barthes, *Key Contemporary Thinkers* (Cambridge England: Polity Press in association with B. Blackwell, 1991), 145.
- 9 Barthes, "Theory of the Text," 38.
- 10 Barthes and Heath, *Image, Music, Text*.
- 11 Barthes, "Theory of the Text."
- 12 The linguistic sign as theorised by Ferdinand de Saussure in the 'Cours de linguistique générale' given between 1906 and 1911 consisted of the bound unit of a signifier (the material) on one side and the signified (the concept) on the other. Saussure made it clear that the relation between signifier and signified is purely arbitrary, and thus the linguistic sign has no intrinsic meaning; it is just as arbitrary as the relation between word and thing. Meaning is produced when signs connect through a system of differences, as Saussure famously announced: 'In language there are only differences without positive terms'. The Saussurean conception of the sign put faith in the production of a stable union between signifier and signified, that there are final signifieds above their signifiers. In this way meaning is (relatively) certain and the range of interpretations are limited, thus also anchoring the referent; 'the text is treated as it were the repository of an objective signification'. Thus, in Saussurean linguistics we can know the truth of an object because its presence is certain and defined. This is the classical metaphysical presumption. In this equation the subject is left outside of the frame, where they are exterior to the workings of language. Saussure is challenged by Barthes and Derrida for excluding the role of the subject in the formation of signs, and for placing the emphasis on the signified as the producer of meaning.
- 13 David Joselit, *Infinite Regress : Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 72
- 14 Barthes, "Theory of the Text," 39.
- 15 Barthes and Heath, *Image, Music, Text*, 164.
- 16 Joselit.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Jacques Derrida, Christopher Norris, and Alan Bass, *Positions*, 2nd English ed., *Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2002), 25.
- 19 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996).

## Detail

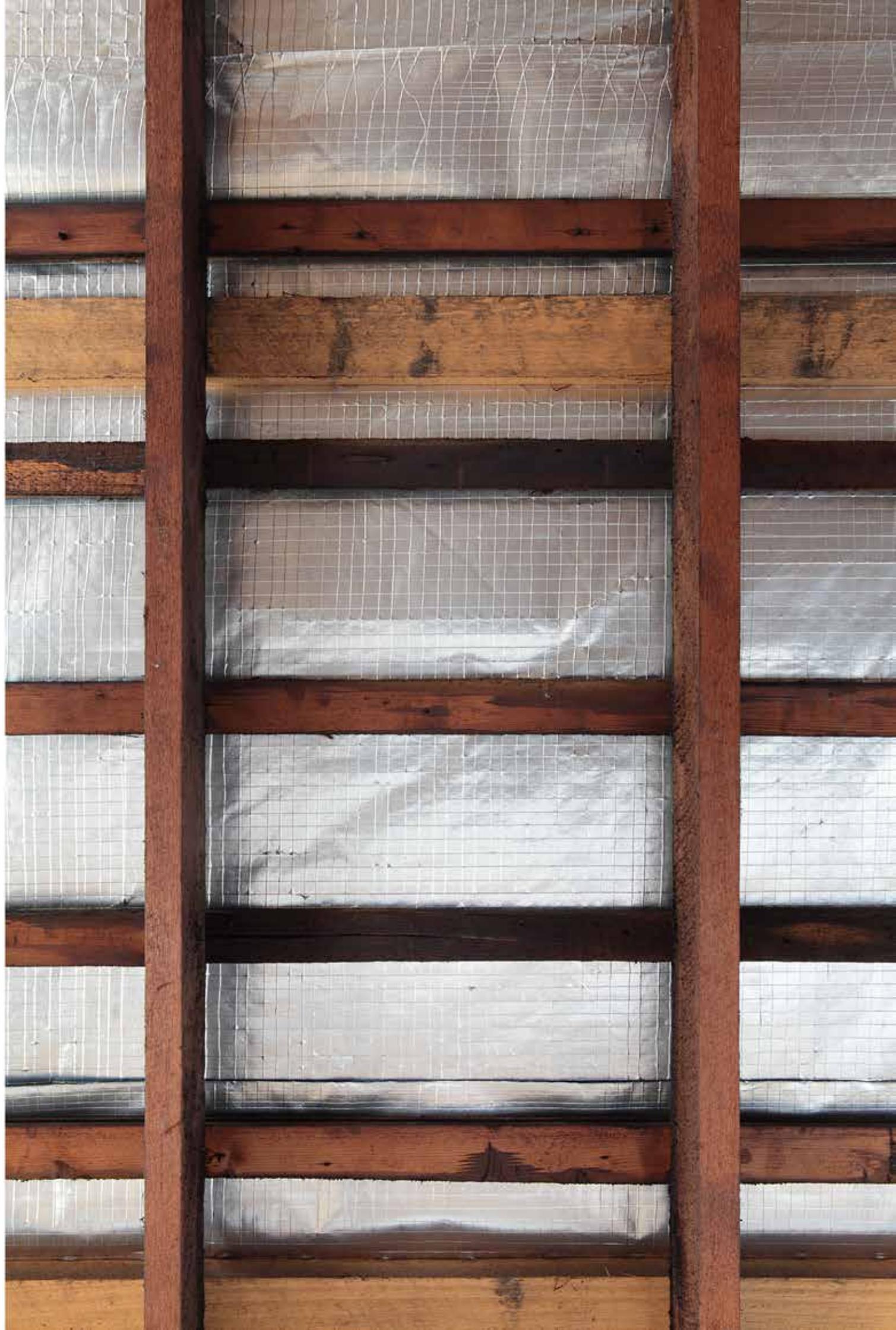
What wounds me are the forms of the relation, its images; or rather, what others call form I experience as force. The image—as the example for the obsessive—*is the thing itself*.

—Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

The affective detail is an edge; the corner where the plaster has come up against the formwork after flowing out of the plastic wrap. There is a small gap between the plaster that was wrapped in plastic, and the plaster that has escaped, leaked into the sand. This small section of plaster has some sand attached to it. It is this relation between the two small areas of the casting that ruptures my subjectivity; between the cast sand ripple and the leaked plaster, between the controlled and the mishap. This moment of discord on the corner of this casting is that moment when the image comes back in force, where the body senses a trace of the real.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 2002 ed. (London: Vintage Books, 1978), 133.



## **Earth**

The floor in this room has many undulations. The very worn floral Axminster carpet must have other layers beneath it, and probably newspapers beneath that, for it bridges the drops in the floor boards with seamless flows as though covering smooth mounds of dirt. I can feel the floor joists sitting on the damp soil, spongy where they embrace the cold earth; wood decaying back into the ground. This image of the floor sinking into the musty earth covered with layers of worn Axminster carpet while the coal fire burns and the mantle clock chimes is the mimetic fragment of possibility. It is not the missing piece that matters, but rather the space it reveals as touchable and unscreened, the point of fracture where images multiply and the text splinters. I am inside this space, touching it, smelling it, hearing it. I observe myself in it, I stand in for the image that-has-been; there are no photographic reproductions.

## CHAPTER ONE: BEYOND THE READYMADE

The readymade is not a simple concept, especially in the ways it is enmeshed in language. Moreover, the whole idea of the readymade has become more complex as artists since the 1960s have sought different ways to refute, challenge, expand and build on its legacy. Many positions and ways of reading and writing the readymade have emerged as historical repertoire and contemporary problematic—the two often working in counterpoint.<sup>1</sup> The paradox of the readymade is that it can be fixed within market and institutional structures as it simultaneously presents opportunities for rewriting and reworking.<sup>2</sup> Duchamp himself precipitated this institutionalisation with the *Boîte en Valise* (1935–41) with its replicated miniatures, described by Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon as ‘the presentation of the work as if it had arrived with its full meaning fixed and articulated at the time of the initial gesture’.<sup>3</sup>

When Duchamp remarked that a replica of the readymade could deliver ‘the same message’ and that its ‘lack of uniqueness’<sup>4</sup> is important, he was affirming his role in authorship and designation, but he did not recognise the inherent contradiction of this positioning. For if the readymade did



Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise* (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy) (Box in a valise [From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy]), 1935-41

not *become* ‘unique’ it would not have been able to enter the institution of art, to which he intended. This position provides the point of paradox whereby the initial gesture was a challenge to the modernist art of the time (and its institutions) as its transformation and act of rebellion would itself become a unique and mythologised gesture—the story of the urinal, which I will rehearse below, has become art folklore as a kind of ‘original conception’. Yet, it is also the application of this problem of ‘uniqueness’ to theoretical conceptions of the text, the copy without origins, and endless transformation to which this chapter will explore. Instead, the readymade is dispersed into a linguistic field where its authority, precedence and definition is exploded, ruptured into dispersed fragments of the text.

This chapter identifies the conceptual apparatus of the readymade as being implicit in any art practice working with found objects. Such a practice needs to negotiate and respond to these implications, namely that the object as text—or text as object—may be derived from something that has gone before, but this something is not necessarily an original. I argue that it is learning from the historical readymade where another conception of the found object may be developed; one that is both borne from specific conceptions of art practice, while eschewing and problematizing these conceptions as constraining and self-limiting (doxa).

## 1.1 The historical readymade

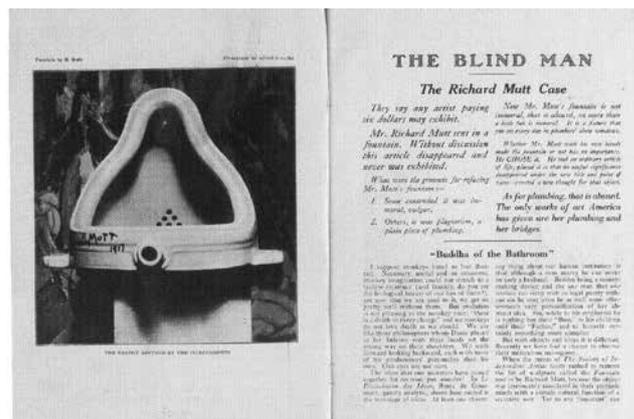
Duchamp resigned from the Society of Independent Artists without revealing himself as the author of *Fountain* (1917).<sup>5</sup> *Fountain* made its public debut in the second (and last) issue of the magazine *Blind Man* (May, 1917) in the form of a photograph by Alfred Steiglitz and several texts.<sup>6</sup> The prior rejection of *Fountain* from the first the Society of Independent Artists exhibition set the machine in motion.<sup>7</sup> *Fountain* was then not reproduced again until the Duchamp issue of *View* magazine in 1945. Duchamp first exhibited *Fountain* as a version of the 'original' copy at the Sidney Janis gallery in 1950. The third version was selected by Ulf Linde in 1963 and the most publicised version was the edition of 8 plus 2 proofs produced by Milan gallery owner Arturo Schwarz in 1964 with full authorisation from Duchamp.

Martha Buskirk notes that Schwarz was clear in *his* definition that the versions he produced on behalf of Duchamp were the closest to the 'original'. He described them as the '[f]irst full scale replicas issued under the direct supervision of Duchamp on the basis of a blueprint derived from photos of the lost original'.<sup>8</sup> Here we can see the contradiction between the intent of the art market to fix the readymade as a commodity sign, with the evasiveness of the material object itself as it moves through different versions and replications. Coupled with the various photographs of these different versions (especially that of the lost 'original') and the writing that proliferated from the 1960s around the readymade, we are confronted with the basic question: What is *Fountain* and how do we know that which *is* it? When the art market refers to replicas as original copies in an attempt to maintain the value of the commodity sign, it also paradoxically affirms the textual arbitrariness of this sign, for what is more arbitrary than capital? But it also designates a certain fixing of the object itself within an institutional framework and language that refers to an origin or source: the lost original and specific authorship (and authorisation). In this reasoning, the auratic and mythological status of the art object is returned to an object that initially sought its refusal and rejection.

Critics and writers on Duchamp continue to debate the boundaries of the Duchampian readymade. Some embrace the market-institution position of designated objects, while others wish to expand the concept of the readymade. In both cases it is the authorship of Duchamp to which is indisputable, yet the textual implications are important as some readings position the readymade within an intertextual field that refers to *another life*<sup>9</sup>, while others seek a specific art historical determination.



Alfred Steiglitz, *Fountain*, photograph of sculpture by Marcel Duchamp, 1917



Marcel Duchamp, Spread from magazine *The Blind Man*, no.2, Beatrice Wood editor and publisher in association with Marcel Duchamp and Henri-Pierre Roché, May 1917

For example Carol James insists on the former:

I think that once “readymade” becomes an art category associated with Duchamp, as his “field”, he wants to change and shift it, move the name into something else. From this point of view, anything done is ready-made... having originality or derivation, the proper or common noun is placed into question by each and every one of these “reproduced” things.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, Jean Suquet believes ‘that a readymade isn’t the reproduction of a thing made by oneself, it’s really an object removed from its context in the outer world and signed.’<sup>11</sup>

This difference between the ‘extended’ conception of the readymade as a constant reproduction and remaking challenges an art historical framing that seeks to locate the readymade as designated, authored and recontextualised; in short the transformed commodity, as Suquet makes very clear. There is a difference in conception between the liberation of the readymade as a textualised idea and one that seeks particular ownership and attribution. That is, a layered dialectic on the copy and the original counterposed to stabilisation of the signified through authorial intention and designation.

The importance of differentiating the readymade from the clutter and information excess of consumer culture compelled the readymade to acquire the stabilising status of intention and authorship; for the radical shift of the everyday object into an art object, a language had to be developed that would ensure its conceptual positioning. In other words, within the very conception of the readymade was contained its normalisation; it required a certain fixing of the signified to ensure it was not lost in the mish-mash of daily life or dismissed as just an artist’s fanciful idea. Rosalind Krauss states in ‘Notes on the Index’ that it was ‘about the physical transposition of an art object from the continuum of reality, into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection’.<sup>12</sup> The contingencies and complexities of these arguments are heightened by the obtuse and elliptical nature of Duchamp’s writings, providing much fodder for further transpositional readings. James makes this approach clear declaring that: ‘We understand how he [Duchamp] showed us that art goes on talking, not as a voice of the past but as a “virus” that modifies all subsequent messages.’<sup>13</sup>



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1964 (fifth version, after lost original of 1917), porcelain

We can read this inherent tension between the idea of the readymade as imminently reproducible text and its stabilisation through various mechanisms of the art market, authorship and institutions. One could argue that Duchamp predetermined the institutionalisation of the readymade as the term was

demarcated by him and buttressed in the affirmation of this continuous project. This project has been adopted as a system of language in its own right; which is the point to which the disagreement occurs amongst critics and writers. Barthes notes when a language becomes the doxa, the dominant rhetoric, it calcifies: it loses its potential to be mobile and transform; it becomes another official language of culture (the sociolect). Indeed, it is impossible to use the term readymade without referring to a weight of history and writing centred around Duchamp; the term readymade (as a common noun) is synonymous with the pronoun Duchamp. In terms of institutional critique via the language of the commodity, the readymade has become the very doxa to which Duchamp once rallied against, as Peter Burger notes:

Once the signed bottle dryer has been accepted as an art object that deserves a place in the museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pip and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it.<sup>14</sup>

This critique of reification and failure of the avant-garde is contested by critics such as David Joselit, Hal Foster, Rosalind E. Krauss and Benjamin Buchloh. Burger's argument is challenged as being an overly simplistic doctrine of "modernism-as-commodification" that in relation to Duchamp does not address the inscription of the fragmented subject as 'ultimately temporary and provisional, always itself falling back into materiality'.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the Duchampian readymade can be read both in relation to a critique of the institution of art that has failed through its normalisation, or as one moment in a practice that has opened up a series of conceptual problems around language and the subject. Duchamp continued to rehearse and restage in various ways these problems during his life, and artists and critics have carried on this project. This study is concerned with this latter use of the found object as a process of production and reproduction, a release of the text and a play of the signifier; a point of reference to which writing and practice may take cues.

## 1.2 The *trouvaille* and the psychoanalytical dimension

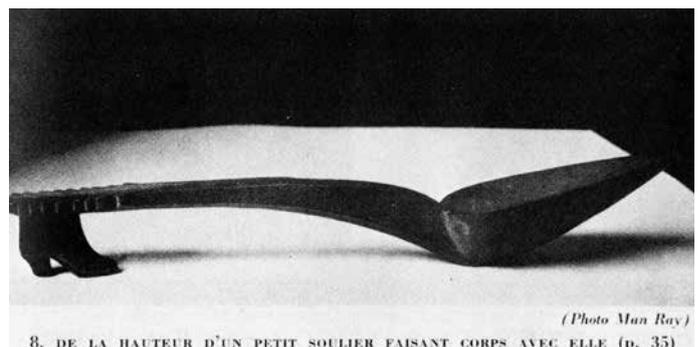
Andre Breton's notion of the *trouvaille* (the lucky discovery or find) is also at play here as the object that appears only to disappear; the object that speaks of a loss. This writing of the found object as acting out a trauma sits in distinction to Duchamp's more calculated designation of a readymade on a specific day and time. Drawing on Margaret Iversen's arguments surrounding the found object as 'a space carved out by traumatic experience' and 'the hole in the fabric of normal perception'<sup>16</sup> I argue that the found object may passage through an unlimited and undetermined movement as it echoes the unmaking and remaking of the subject, as it materially makes these transpositions. I am concerned with how the textures of labor and desire—in short the constitution of the subject—are enacted through what David Joselit calls an infinite regression<sup>17</sup> as the subject is confronted by their traumatic core. The emphasis on the psychoanalytic dimensions of the found object traces the readings of the Duchampian legacy through post-structural

semiotic theory. Yet, the found object is not the same thing as the readymade; the found object is relatively unconstrained by the burden of connotation to which the word *readymade* signifies. This research engages with another trajectory of the found object that weaves the problem of the written subject through a return to the material operations of the signifier. The rematerialised found object may cite various references and associations to these historical touchstones, but they are viewed as part of the weave that culture imbues upon itself.

Through André Breton, Surrealism's leader and spokesperson, the role of writing and text enacts a challenge to the privilege of the image. In so far as both Breton's critical and poetic writing articulate his 'visions' of Surrealism, they maintain a consistent challenge to social language, that is the symbolic. Rather, the photograph in particular shadows a temporal trace of the subconscious as it repeats the primary loss that burdens the subject. It is argued by Krauss 'that issues of surrealist heterogeneity will be resolved around the semiological function of photography' in as much as photography is 'absolutely central—definitive, one might say'<sup>18</sup> to the formally divergent practices of Surrealism. It is the photograph as having some kind of 'privileged connection to the real'<sup>19</sup> that produces a displacement at once seemingly indexed to something 'that-has-been'<sup>20</sup> and something that is always already lost—the impossible object of desire. Thus the semiological imperative of the surrealist photograph to confound the presumptions of representation is again a deferment to the role of the text (language) in our reading and writing of images. Basically, as I will argue, the photographic image is a text that figures 'something' in as much as this something is always prior, but concurrently yet to arrive; it is always a past and future trace.

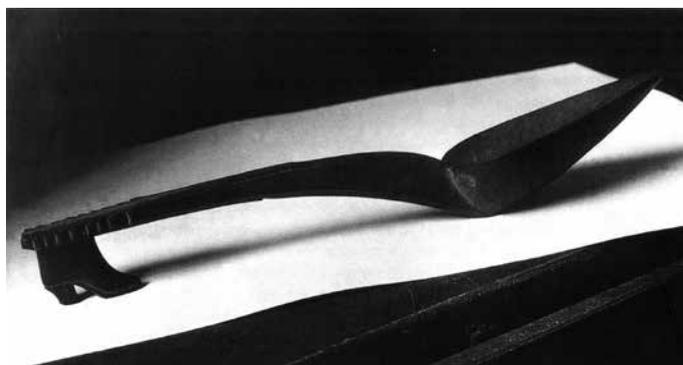
In order to outline this object that cannot exist, but presents an image of itself I will gloss Breton's well known story of the 'slipper-spoon'. This *trouvaille* or found object presented itself to Breton at a flea market in 1934 as he searched for something that would satisfy an obsession with a phrase running through his head—*cendrier Cendrillon*, or Cinderella ashtray. This spoon once taken back home began to reveal a series of signifying links as it became an object both situating desire (Jacqueline Lamba, the subject of Breton's photographically-illustrated 1937 novella *L'Amour Fou* [Mad Love]) and the loss of other objects (other lovers, the mother, the phallus: castration fear).<sup>21</sup> The point is that this little found object convulsed a kind of writing: 'physical matter as writing'.<sup>22</sup> This is in fact the surrealist link with my research: the found object induces a text that traces the contours of its very loss. In the Derridean sense it is a cinder or spacing as a dangerous supplement, or what Barthes would refer to a *jouissance* produced by the text as the subject is undone.

There are two points I wish to explicate in relation to the slipper-spoon that directly



8. DE LA HAUTEUR D'UN PETIT SOULIER FAISANT CORPS AVEC ELLE (p. 35)  
Man Ray, *Illustration for André Breton, L'Amour fou*, 1937

concern this study. The first refers to the semiotic interplay of the photograph of this found object. The photograph of the spoon taken by Man Ray appeared as *Illustration for Andre Breton in L'Amour fou*, but prior to that as another photograph titled *Slipper Spoon* (1934).<sup>23</sup> The contrast of the white paper with the dark spoon highlights the slipper shape, accentuating the duplicating repetition to which enthralled Breton as he likened it to the substitution of his objects of desire or love objects. Yet, this slipper shaped spoon functions in the imaginary as Breton binds his loss through the fantasy structure of desire. As Foster succinctly states: 'the object cannot be rediscovered because it is fantasmatic, and desire cannot be satisfied because it is defined as lack. The found object is always a substitute, always a displacement, that drives on its own search.'<sup>24</sup>



Man Ray, *Slipper Spoon*, 1937

This is exactly what the photographs of the slipper-spoon continue to perform: the substitution of the object that is lost. This is also where my project differs from the surrealist one because of their need to perform some kind of closure on the object as a way to bind the subject and secure the text, especially in surrealist sculpture and painting. Foster elaborates on Breton's attempts to find some unity and resolution in his desire, while other surrealist practices such as Giacometti's soon renounced the surrealist search. Instead, I place no such faith in an ending, however temporal, to the processes of the text as it continues to undermine its referents, whether they be the found objects and the castings there made, the photographs of these castings and the texts that circulate around both. Therefore, if the slipper-spoon was more fully recognised for its ability to release the text of *signifiance*, for the text to truly rupture the subject, the photograph would have been permanently deferred in the same way Barthes' absent Winter Garden image enunciates loss and lack through an unending (and traumatic) cause of desire.

My second point highlights the role of the text in tracing the impossibility of the object. Breton conflates the phrase *cendrier Cendrillon* (Cinderella ashtray) with the cause of desire partly signified in the shape of the found object. This object functions as the Lacanian *objet petit a*, as Foster puts it: 'the object that must be "lost" in order for the subject to be "found"'.<sup>25</sup> Yet this desire as conventionally played out in the fairy tale by Perrault is profoundly about the repetition of a lack that is embodied in the death drive; the subject protects itself against the threat of the real through the binding affects of desire. This figure of desire (*Cinderella*) is cancelled and rendered into carbon (writing) in the way Derrida traces the idea of the cinder. The voices somehow arise from the ashes in the way that Cinderella embraces both her extinction and her written trace: 'There, where cinder means the difference between what remains and what is, will she ever reach it, there?'<sup>26</sup> Just as Breton's Cinderella ashtray transforms into a slipper-spoon that produces a textual production in its remains, we are reminded that writing is the trace that immolates

its origins in the same way the photograph or the casting of the found object is a cause of this same writing as it consumes itself.

It is the surrealist photograph that has a particular relation to this study through its role in textualisation; its semiotic operation as a confounding of representation. I pursue this further through the potential of photography to offer other readings and writings that highlight the role of *objet petit a* in tracing something that 'remains from what is not, in order to recall at the delicate charred bottom of itself only non-being or non-presence'.<sup>27</sup> After Krauss (and Surrealism) I can call this process one of 'physical matter as writing' that constantly rewrites itself in its loss and non-presence.

### 1.3 Retracing the Shadow of the readymade

These problems of conception and authorship, originality and replication, and the object as cipher for the subject have been taken on by many artists since the 1960s. I will address specific works by three contemporary artists that have particular relevance to this project: Sherrie Levine, Joseph Kosuth and Gabriel Orozco. I will also introduce the problematic of the photographic images of the readymades in relation to specific works by Alfred Steiglitz, Brancusi and Man Ray. These works negotiate the Duchampian legacy in different ways. Sherrie Levine's *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)* 1991 is a casting of a urinal that is as close to Duchamp's 1917 readymade as possible in form. However, Levine's is a casting in bronze that has been highly polished. This copy of a mass-produced object that is a copy of Duchamp's initial designation, raises issues around the role of the copy in referring to a historical precedent. The shift in materiality with the associated labour and expense involved positions Levine's object in a much longer history of art production, making the process of transformation value laden and unique—in contradiction to the transformation of an ordinary object through selection and designation.

If the 'startling originality' of the readymade is due to an 'unexpected act or gesture'<sup>28</sup> in lifting an object from the everyday and designating it as art, then a copy of an everyday object in an alternative material allows for the Duchampian prerogative to be supplanted. In this process I claim that the original is transformed into a mythology. I argue that the original radical gesture in giving authority to an anonymous object is rendered less important, than the transposition through new materials of production. Levine's *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)* linguistically refers directly to a prior referent, yet its materiality and production orientates it in a new direction beyond the strictures of the readymade. The readymade as normalised strategy is itself an easily replicable gesture that is well coded in contemporary art.<sup>29</sup> Levine extends this gesture as it erases itself in the reproduction



Sherrie Levine, *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)*, 1991, Bronze

of a completely different material with a whole new set of connotations. This different act of transformation questions the doxa of masculine authorship, the masterful act of genius, the economic machinations of the art market and the implacable solidity of art history through the production of an object that at once celebrates and undermines the father figure of conceptual art. However, the relevance of this act to my project operates in the realm of the shift in the material signifier from ceramic to bronze. The reference for this transposition by Levine was the photographs of the lost 'original' by Alfred Steiglitz that were used to source as close a version as possible in which to make a mould for the lost wax cast. In referring back to the initial gesture that is inscribed as a photograph (another reproduction), then another sourced urinal (mass reproduction) a displacement occurs that reveals the extent of the arbitrariness of any original, and I would extend this further by saying the impossibility of an original.

In terms of my research practice the found object has been 'refashioned', reinscribed to be no longer dependent on the affects of recontextualisation through choosing objects of 'visual indifference'. In some ways the insistence on the mundanity of aesthetic blankness has not only come to be seen as a fallacy (all objects are aesthetically coded), but a cliché, a trope that has lost any power to startle, not to mention be radical or surprising.<sup>30</sup> The reliance of the readymade on authorial positioning has also made it somewhat of a contradiction as it is the artist that is signified prior to the object that is conceived. This research project recognises the implications of the readymade as a stylistic method with its own language and system of codes. The object is a copy but not one of ordinariness and blankness, of indifference to the author, as Duchamp would have it. In this project, the copy is valued, reinscribed with another materialisation, underscoring the potential for signifiers to proliferate.

Buskirk poses the question: 'When is a copy a replica, and under what circumstances does it become an original?'<sup>31</sup> This contradiction of seeking an original after-a-copy raises the spectre of a return to *another* original, if you like an 'original version' as claimed by Aturo Schwarz in the 1964 edition of *Fountain*. This need for the return of an original as a kind of bracing is mythology at work as the simulacrum may take the place of any real or imagined original.<sup>32</sup> Levine's *Fountain* is a copy of a urinal—literally a casting of another found urinal—and seemingly another replica of Duchamp's *Fountain*, at the same time it is deemed to be a unique object in its own right; another mythology. It can be recognised as both an original copy and a copy without an original, or simply a copy of a copy—it all depends on its contextualisation through cultural and economic codes.

This shift from one medium to another—for example my piece *Broken* (2010), a mass produced foam leisure product subject to the process of labour intensive bronze casting—performs a transformation that creates many layers of possible translation. It is in these layers where contradiction, displacement and estrangement may occur. Buskirk refers to the copy functioning 'as a wedge, contributing to the fracturing of the idea of medium in the translation from one



Brett Jones, *Broken*, 2009, bronze, acrylic paint



Brett Jones, *Broken*, 2009-13, bronze, acrylic paint, surfboard wax

material to another'.<sup>33</sup> Further, it is more than the idea of the medium that is being fractured, it is the very basis for the realisation of this copy with its ensuing textual multiplication that is dispersed, released into a more open realm of reading and writing. In this sense, though Levine's *Fountain* may have specific art historical connotations it is also able to regenerate value in its own right through a contemporary dialogue with issues surrounding masculine authority, archaic fine art technologies and mimesis as cultural reproduction and simulacra.

I contend that the copy can operate as a wedge, jamming normal signification, allowing it to move beyond its doxa of conventional signing into a realm that fragments and splinters dominant and fixable readings. In my research, the precondition of the found object is realised through a deferred or delimited set of circumstances; an object that is found to have eschewed its own history of industrial mass production. This history is transfigured through damage, weathering and rejection (a casting off) only to be reconfigured through a specific determination to become a new point of departure. The 'cast-off' object becomes free to generate new signs: second, third order signs. The object alludes through associative relations to its pre-histories and preconditions; they are inscribed in its surface, in its broken form. However, rather than designation and context, it is the processes of casting and photography that lift (pluck) the found object beyond the expectations of the readymade into a realm where the copy functions as a continuous act of translation. In my specific approach to casting, the translation process constitutes an evasive and confounding connection to the past; a moving forward that may create an illusive slide-back in reading and writing.

We can say that the process of translation negates, renders redundant any recourse to the original in the sense that the 'original' becomes a figure of language. As Paul de Man put it, "the translation belongs to the afterlife of the original, thus confirming the death of the original".<sup>34</sup> We need to be clear here that it is the translation that renders the 'original' dead because it precipitates an 'afterlife' of something that was, in a similar way that a photograph presumes something 'that-has-been'. However, if we extend this conception of the 'death of the original' into the theory of the Text without beginning or end, then it serves as a notion to figure an original that cannot be located: the original that in its theoretical conception acts as a device that produces linguistic movement and play; the copy after the copy or a perpetual regeneration.

I am in fact translating a discourse on linguistic translation into a post-structuralist semiotic perspective whereby the primacy of the signifier is established over determined and predicted signifieds, no doubt for a provisional purpose. This purpose is to recognise the visual text as one generated by language in the same way the translator (as writer) may "release in his own language that pure language...to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work."<sup>35</sup> I extend on Benjamin's recognition of the translator as 're-creator' to nominate the translator as another author in the Barthesian sense; that the translator-as-re-creator re-writes the original to the extent that the original is dead.

Paul de Man is using different language in the referential sense to outline the same theoretical conception of the arbitrariness of the signifier in the establishment of meaning; that is, the fundamental instability of language itself in determining origins. The processes of the Text that jam and displace conventional modes of signification in favour of *signifiance* and intertextuality can be inferred and interpreted here:

The process of translation, if we can call it a process, is one of change and of motion that has the appearance of life, but of life as an afterlife, because translation also reveals the death of the original.<sup>36</sup>

I could utilise this notion of the 'afterlife' in the mediums of casting and photography, but this would still be to limit the potential of the Text to some kind of original object (material or textual). Therefore, I shall adapt the 'death of the original' to the 'death of author' in order to more fully question the possibility that there ever was an original, or as Derrida would question the very existence of a transcendental signified; an original source to which meaning may be attributed in its most fixed form: god, the father, the law. Doing this undermines any recourse to an origin whether it be textual or material, symbolic or imagined.

#### **1.4 The copy without an original: derived and remade objects**

I have established that in the processes of translation the original is not so much destroyed as having its very existence called into doubt; the original as a convenient figure of language at the service of particular codes, especially within conventions of social and economic exchange.

I will now refer to the material and textual production of derived or remade objects that cannot be fixed to any particular origin. These objects as material texts are copies of copies ad infinitum. They continuously multiply and perpetuate in the hands of the reader as writer, weaving a textual web that translation will both defy and affirm. The unlocatable original can be understood as a linguistic ghost or shadow. The derived object has fragments of text weaving and cutting through it that are derived from a multitude of sources. These sources are completely unstable as they are contingent on the relation of the subject to the object. The subject as translator of texts is faced with a vicarious and particular problem: the text is untranslatable; there can be no final, complete or definitive translation. Attempts to describe and analyse this process of translation as it is now occurring will only fail in one sense, but in another perpetuate the role of the signifier, as de Man suggests:

The text about translation is itself a translation, and the untranslatability which it mentions about itself inhabits its own texture and will inhabit anybody who in turn will try to translate it, as I am now trying, and failing, to do.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of the texture as something that is transferred to the reader/writer in the act of translation can be likened to signifiers as remnants of former sources. What de Man after Benjamin calls an ‘afterlife’, I will simply call the operation of the Text; the text concerned with the displacement, rupturing and dislocation of ‘communication’. This is the text of *signifiance*, and thus I am pushing this ‘afterlife’ into a ‘before<sup>and</sup>after-life’ that inhabits the texture of the translation as mobilised and unstable; the ‘texture’ is the Text going about its work.

This conception of the impossibility of translation, or as Derrida has termed a ‘relevant translation’ is the ghosting of an imagined or symbolised original to which we can figure the shadow of the readymade. The readymade now occupies a set of established codes, a certain doxa of method. Yet, it has left a shadow, a ‘texture’ that this study inhabits. Thus, it is the very impossibility of translation that opens up the potential for writing after the shadow of the readymade. Text literally plays a central role in the re-writing of Duchamp’s work. His numerous notes (especially for the *Large Glass* in the *Green Box* of 1934) have served as cues and codes to which critics and theorists have delighted in interpreting and claiming, to the extent that Duchamp’s voice is cut and spliced, refigured in the name of other author-translators. Duchamp’s written notes provide many open signifiers to which writers such as Jean Suquet<sup>38</sup> are free to play. Though the question must be asked whether these writings are in fact attempts to find suitable signifieds and thus stabilise the sign; interpretations that attempt to decipher, to find the ‘meaning’ in Duchamp’s writing and work?

Duchamp himself was adept at playing with the text, allowing it to shift and shudder with deferral and displacement. His notes call on a range of associations especially in the realms of popular science and mathematics, connections that are adapted and manipulated with allusions to the senses, through the body of the subject and sensuous materiality. When Duchamp leaves a title for a readymade that has never been sighted, this act can only stimulate and mobilise the text indefinitely. This particular title, *Emergency in Favor of Twice* may intentionally or unintentionally through “commissioned symmetry” refer to *Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915). In the absence of an object, Thierry de Duve asks: ‘Can we imagine that intertextuality extends to the objects themselves, in which case one could perhaps try to reconstitute or guess what this lost readymade could have been?’<sup>39</sup>



Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of 1915)

De Duve hits on the point precisely when he raises the potential to ‘reconstitute’ this lost readymade—*Emergency in Favor of Twice*; to create a readymade with the text itself. This may have been Duchamp’s intention—as I write my own version—to create a title with no object: the title as readymade. This is where we explode, shatter the sign, where the readymade has no original, nor any object except the materiality of the text, of the word. But of course this notion of a title as readymade would not be possible without the physical objects that do or did exist, and the massive volume of writing that envelopes them.

## 1.5 The shadow without an object: photography as form

I have discussed the object as text, and will now consider my 'derived' object in its physical form and photographic image. A parallel in the act of translation with the process of casting reveals a certain impossibility on behalf of both: what is produced is a copy excised from its referent; the object produced (as text, photograph or casting) is not the same as that which preceded it. In the context of casting, the copy becomes a 'technique for making' that cites the readymade as an excavated (historical) notion, one that appears as a text in the conception of its derivation; a shadow of the copy itself. It is this process of mould-making and casting where the texture of the prior object inhabits this impossible space of translation. It is the act of translation as a process that can release a cast object into a textual field, as Buskirk notes:

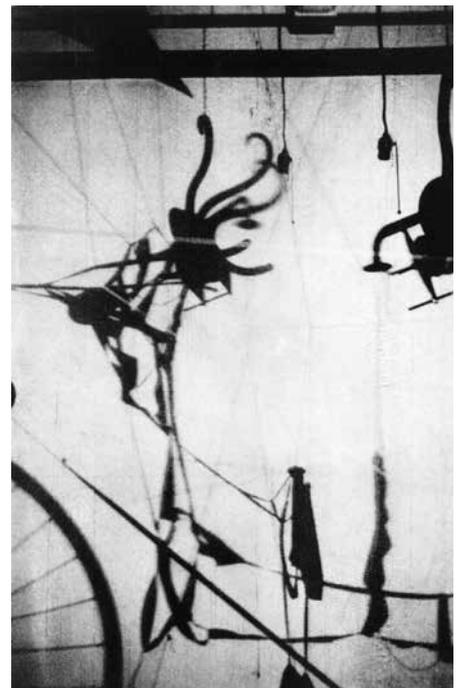
The three-dimensional mode of capturing nuances of texture and form constituted by the casting process can also be employed so that the translation itself is part of the subject of the work.<sup>40</sup>

The existence of a prior object to which the casting is derived is further distanced through a shift in materiality. This change of material that occurs in the translation transposes the derived object into a different sign system, inscribing new signifiers that multiply in the afterlife of what was before. The derived object bespeaks a contradiction in relation to a form that seems indexed to something that preceded it, in a material that eludes to another materiality; an unidentified precursor. The displacement of the derived object through rematerialisation releases the found object from the codes of the historical readymade. The apparition of the readymade may operate in the texture of the translation, but it is an apparition transposed into text, and to an extent the apparition now functions in the photographic copy.

The idea of the shadow as rematerialised object can be identified through a non-hierarchical layering: (1) the casting of a found object; (2) the photograph of the casting; and (3) the written text of the casting or photograph. The shadows are cast metaphorically and literally from, and across these three modes. The casting is a shadow of a former object—on another level the mould can be read as the positive of this shadow.

Duchamp used the metaphor of the mould as a mirror-reversal; to refer to the inside as a kind of inversion of negative space.<sup>41</sup>

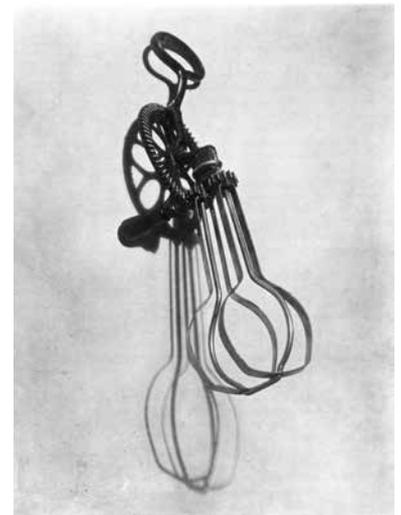
The shadow from the casting is also that of photography especially as it pertains to sculpture—and its historical references—and the technical and conceptual aspects of photography deriving from the creation of images through light and darkness (positive and negative). More specifically of concern in this regard is the role of



Marcel Duchamp, *Ombres portées* (Cast shadows), 1918, Gelatin silver print

the shadow thrown by the cast object in the photograph. This shadow operates concurrently as an object in the photograph to which a splitting may occur (the shadow as object), and the photograph itself functions as a shadow copy of another text: the physical casting. In both of these instances the photograph is understood as a text that sits on the same plane as the casting that technically preceded it. This challenges the assumption that the casting came first, instead proposing that the image of the object has many precedents textually; that its resemblance is a function of *différance*.

The third mode is the written text that is woven through the objects before, during and after production; the production of the text does not cease. The written text provides the weave to which the objects and images may continue to run on (like a loose thread), and provoke other opportunities for production and enunciation to continue. In this study the derived object has several layers of textuality that include references to the readymade, but ultimately the readymade is recast as a node amongst many; as a textual copy of a copy.



Man Ray, *L'Homme (Man)*, 1918, gelatin silver print

I have proposed three modes in which shadowing or ghosting functions in this study, all being based on textual interplay. These processes can be recognised in the early photographs of the readymades that Duchamp took in his studio with Man Ray. These photographic experiments often utilised shadows cast from the readymades, or *Readymade Shadows* as Duchamp would call them. These shadows became pictorial devices in his last painting *Tu m'* (1918).<sup>42</sup> As in Man Ray's photograph of the eggbeater (*Man*, 1917-18), the shadows of the object become part of the object as a conflation of the mythology of the readymade in returning the 'object to within itself' to form a 'double shadow'.<sup>43</sup>



Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m'*, 1918, oil and pencil on canvas, with bottle brush, three safety pins, and bolt

The paradox of the cast object throwing a shadow is extenuated through its realisation as a photograph; another type of copy that creates another object, after and after: 'a spectacularly flat respect'. In my research this flat object is not regarded as documentation, or capture but another form of a copy, another medium to which the copy may produce another version. The photographic copy can be understood as a shadow of the derived object, but not in the sense of referring to a more primary—positive, unmarked object—rather as in Man Ray's *Man*, the photographic copy returns the object within itself through 'flat respect (the Copy that is recued)'.<sup>44</sup>

This process of the object becoming a photographic representation is prominent in the work of Gabriel Orozco, a movement that can easily reverse itself. Orozco's work *Yielding Stone* (1992) exemplifies this paradox whereby the object undergoes a series of transpositions in its representation. Referring to an event—the ball of plasticine being rolled through the street—the photographs and video of this event become another object as the ball itself is continuously transformed. When the ball is then exhibited in the gallery with these traces from the street, it is both referring to the past event through the marks and debris in the plasticine, as well as its photographic and video representations. In this operation a singular representation of the work is not possible, and just as the plasticine continues to transform so does its photographic imaging.<sup>45</sup> This conundrum is most obviously played out in the titling of the photographs in books and magazines. In some cases the photograph identifies the medium as plasticine with its dimensions, in others it is the dimensions and type of photographic print. Thus we have the problem of the copy that undermines its referent; that challenges the presumption of a stable original.<sup>46</sup>



Gabriel Orozco, *Yielding Stone*, 1992, Plasticine

In Orozco's *Yielding Stone*, the photograph presents a conundrum on the material status of the work and its representation. This is where the problem of the original is clearly at play; where the referent is perpetually displaced. It is also where the found object as in Breton's *trouvaille* or my derived object may undergo fundamental shifts as it is imaged and rematerialised. This problem of the original was tackled by Brancusi in his explorations of the shadow in the photographs he took of his work.

*The Beginning of the World* (1920) depicts an egg shaped object that casts what seems to be a simultaneous shadow and reflection or what one could call a reflection of a shadow. Victor Stoichita argues that Brancusi's egg shaped shadow works in parallel to his sculpting of the marble egg; both are consciously made. It is the 'reflective split' that imbues the photograph with characteristics quite separate to the object itself and 'results in the representation being questioned'.<sup>47</sup> Not only is the pictorial illusion in the photograph questioned, but the role of the photograph as a record or document of the object is undermined. The photograph becomes a copy that takes the object into a completely new realm of representation. It is no longer mimetic. I argue that the image becomes a symbolic abstraction of the idea of the original, but it is no longer an attempt to index the referent. The idea of the original object is transformed through a process of displacement that produces the flat object of the photograph, constructing an entirely new representation that may or may not connect with that which it has a resemblance.



Constantin Brancusi, *Le Commencement du monde* (The beginning of the world), 1920, gelatin silver print

The process of splitting the representation through shadow is precisely addressed in my photographic work *Split* (2011) depicting a cast bird skull with its shadow reflected onto another surface. Man Ray stressed ‘the shadow as being important as the real thing’.<sup>48</sup> I extend this idea further by proposing that the object can be the photographic representation itself. For example, *Split* is realised prior to any form—the intent to create a reflection that transforms the object into abstraction, an object made expressly for making shadows. The realisation through photography of this idea elides any deferment to the importance of a ‘real thing’; the ‘real thing’ becomes an intentional mythology, which is why it is cast in silver yet not used as an object in its own right: a perverse play on the value of the shadow. This question of visual affinity derived from a ‘real thing’ is as a discursive trope whereby the casting displaces the object, to be transposed into a photograph, then the image of the casting is doubled into abstraction.

Where Man Ray leaves off with splitting the object with shadow (still identifying a ‘real thing’), *Split* multiplies this projection through a secondary shadow of this doubled object; the joined image is projected behind onto another surface as a kind of x-ray. The context is removed, dispersed into blackness with the plane to which the split object is reflected becoming amorphous and unfixed. The effect being the removal of the reflective surface that signifies both solid from light and the absence of light; an abolition of gravity metaphorically releases the signifiers to float, hover. The further reflection behind the originating form and its reflection generates a doubled double, a perplexity of form and light; the negative and positive are interchangeable.

Conceptual art in the late 1960s and 1970s demonstrated that the idea can exist before form; the idea as text. This included work that existed in time and space (happenings); yet to be made or never made work; or simply work that existed because the artist said so. The legal and authorial ramifications of these acts are thoroughly discussed by Martha Buskirk<sup>49</sup> in relation to the economy of artefacts and intellectual property. While taking cues from these practices, I am not attempting to elevate the role of the concept over its form in the sense of contesting the art object or engaging in institutional critique, inimical to much conceptual art from this time. Rather, I am concerned with the role of the Text in opening up spaces for the renegotiation of remade or derived objects as nodes in language. A language that is incomplete and fractured, as in the objects of production, and thus beholds the potential for the body of the subject to undergo a transpositional movement through fragments of text.

The relation of this study to historical conceptual practice figures the idea as another representation that sits on equal footing with visual forms, written language, sounds, experiences etc. The material object is one text amongst many, and need not be privileged. Joseph Kosuth articulated this as early as 1965 in his work *One and Three Chairs* where a chair, a photograph of the same chair in situ, and a printed textual definition are presented as one work. Clearly the question, ‘which one is the chair?’ is given a simple response they are all representations of a

concept to which in English we use the signifier 'chair'. We know that a photograph is 'not just a shot of a work', but Kosuth took this further to suggest that there is no originating object; rendering completely irrelevant the idea that the object may become an 'archetypal re-production of the work through the photograph'.<sup>50</sup> As proposed by Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, the photograph is simply one of many possible copies or versions of the object; the concept of the object creates the field of possible replicas before any are produced or reproduced. Kosuth argued this point through stating that this work was made in 1965 when he wrote the idea on paper but did not physically realise it until 1967 when he had the financial resources available to make it. For him the work existed prior



Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965-67, photograph, chair, photocopy

to its physical manifestation. Kosuth was attempting "to make work which didn't signify that it was art *a priori*, because of its form...the form the work took shouldn't end the questioning process, but begin it".<sup>51</sup>

In this sense photography was used to demonstrate that the idea of an object existed in language, and that it was not dependent on its form to be designated as art, which Duchamp had already proclaimed with the readymade. The use of the photograph to inscribe a specific meaning was equal to the photocopy with the linguistic definition of 'chair', or the object to which we refer the idea of chair. All became co-fluently relational to each other, determining which one was a more accurate representation became a process of semiotic questioning.

If I refer back to Duchamp's *Fountain*, one could further question the presumption that the photograph proves anything physical existed. *Fountain* was not accepted into the Salon of the Independents in New York in 1917; the only record is the famous photograph by Alfred Steiglitz published in *The Blind Man* in the same year. But what kind of record is this? Steiglitz was a successful photographic artist in his own right; whenever the image is reproduced it is clearly identified as a work by Steiglitz. This photograph is literally a copy without an original as Duchamp's readymade was destroyed. It is also a copy with a privileged designation (an index of proof), as this photograph has become the archetypal representation of Duchamp's concept: Levine used the same sized plinth and positioning for her *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)*. Steiglitz's photograph is not simply a documentary record, it is a work in its own right as an authorised copy, an alternative version of Duchamp's idea for designating a urinal as a readymade. I contend that this photograph as a sign has equal authority to any subsequent replication or remaking of *Fountain*.

Photography has a central role in conceptual practices in part due to its supposedly transparent processes of mediating an object from one material to another. Yet the faith placed in the indexicality of the photograph provides for its great

mythological<sup>52</sup>, and therefore transgressive potential. Barthes ruminated on this potential in *Camera Lucida* with the *Winter Garden* image becoming a symbolic manifestation on the impossibility of the photograph; how does a piece of paper with marks manipulated by chemicals and light approximate the flesh and blood of a loved one? The chasm is filled with our desire, our imaginings, our loss: our language. However, it is also filled with a need for the photograph to affirm reality, to confirm what is meant to be real, as Sontag notes:

A discontent with reality expresses itself forcefully and most hauntingly by the longing to reproduce this one. As if only by looking at reality in the form of an object—through the fix of the photograph—it is really real, that is, surreal.<sup>53</sup>

The function of photography that allows us to confirm our reality is not one of representation but one of a simulacra.<sup>54</sup> The photograph constructs an image that seems 'strangely similar to the original' as a kind of doubling. The 'death' of the original has long passed to be replaced with an image that is more real, 'more cheerful, more alive, more authentic'.<sup>55</sup>

The notion that signs are cyclic and self-perpetuating, that they merely reflect other signs has similarity to Derrida's 'floating signifier', and Kristeva's and Barthes' conception of *signifiance*. The doubling of signs of an unlocatable reality based on a false belief in the same reality can be adapted to the role copy of the copy. If there is no original then the question arises whether a three-dimensional material manifestation is more real or more 'original' than a photograph or a written text. As Kosuth argued with *One and Three Chairs*, the work was in text before it was physically made, or in the case of Duchamp's *Fountain* it became authenticated and recognised through the photograph by Steiglitz. The doubles of *Fountain* were redoubled to be completely dispersed as signifiers in Sherrie Levine's *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)*. My argument is that we cannot identify an original or foundational signifier within the found object. Barthes argues that the text always pre-exists in a social and cultural field, being cut through with elements, associations, remnants, fragments of other texts; that what we attribute to one author is actually a melange of a multitude of sources, all derived from other social and cultural texts. Therefore the photograph and the casting are the 'essential' signifiers of this textual interweave for they are clearly derived from something else. In the case of the photograph, the origin is presumed to be a moment of reality, while the casting is commonly referenced to a model or source. However, in both cases the material imprint of the photograph or the casting operate in much more complicated and indeterminate sign systems than as mere copies of an original, or as authentic versions. The same with the written text that is translated from one language to another, these copies trace or shadow the idea of an original, but this original is an illusive figure of language, it is the absent or false referent; in de Man's conception it is dead or in Jean Baudrillard's terminology a simulacra.<sup>56</sup>

The loss of the original is not where this research revolves, but a point from which I move forward. In the following chapters I will further my argument for a

productivity realised through rematerialisation; the processes of remaking that generate possibilities for new signifiers, other texts that relate to the constitution of the subject. As we will see, the derived object releases a productivity that goes beyond the lost original and the support of the readymade. Nevertheless, the idea of the readymade as a textual field has proven to be an important point of departure in this chapter. I have demonstrated that the readymade has become another text amongst many, displaying its contradictions in its uses and symbolism; its ability to be fixed as doxa, while in other instances allowing a continuous reading and rewriting. It is the latter with which this study is concerned, whereupon its value as a somewhat mutable sign system can be transposed backwards and forwards to the found object that is reinscribed through casting, photography and writing. In this study the readymade is de-clothed of its authorial designation and dependence on contextualisation, it is recast as the derived object that continuously undergoes processes of remaking, reimaging and rewriting. The derived object as rematerialized found object cannot be fixed in a locatable reality or to a known referent; it is purely a signifier that leads to another signifier, or a copy to another copy. The material implications of this mobilised signifier are investigated in the following chapter.

## Notes

- 1 Martha Buskirk argues that the readymade remained a precarious concept through the 1930s and 1940s, and did not start taking hold until the 1950s with the Arensberg collection that opened at the Philadelphia Museum in 1954 followed by the Lebel monograph published in 1959. In the 1960s with more museum exhibitions and the prominent replications initiated by Arturo Schwartz the readymade was perfectly positioned to be worked through the problems of language. See Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).
- 2 For example the reification argument by Berger, the structuralist models by Krauss and DeDuve, and the later post-structuralist evocations of the fragmented subject in language by Joselit and Foster.
- 3 Buskirk and Nixon, 199.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The case of *Fountain* is well documented by William Camfield 'Duchamp's Fountain: Aesthetic Object, Icon or Anti-Art?' and Thierry De Duve 'Given the Richard Mutt Case' in *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* ed. Thierry De Duve, MIT 1993.
- 6 A short text attributed to the three editors (of which Duchamp was one along with Henri-Pierre Roche and Beatrice Wood) entitled the Richard Mutt Case; a poem by the artist Charles Demuth, "For Richard Mutt"; and an article 'Buddha of the Bathroom' by Louise Norton.
- 7 Though it has been convincingly argued by Thierry De Duve that it began with the rejection of *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) from the Paris Société des Artistes Indépendants exhibition of 1912) See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism on Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 215.
- 8 Quoted in Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 70.
- 9 'Another life' is a variation on Paul de Man's term 'Afterlife'. See Paul De Man, "'Conclusions" Walter Benjamin's "the Task of the Translator",*" Yale French Studies* 69, (1985).
- 10 Discussion after paper by Carol James in Thierry de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (Halifax, N.S. Cambridge, Mass.: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design ; MIT Press, 1991), 303 - 305.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 206.
- 13 Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 279.
- 14 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 197.
- 15 David Joselit, *Infinite Regress : Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 196.
- 16 Margaret Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 49.
- 17 Joselit.
- 18 Krauss, 101.
- 19 Ibid., 113.
- 20 This is a prominent phrase employed by Roland Barthes to describe how the referent seems to stick to the image in photography. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993).
- 21 This convulsion induced by the found object circulated around the surrealist idea of 'objective chance', as a manifestation of the 'marvelous'.
- 22 Krauss, 115.
- 23 Though the photographs are taken on different angles, they appear to be taken at the same time due to the lighting and same white rectangular paper that the spoon rests, along with the black background.
- 24 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 43.
- 25 Ibid., 42.

26 Jacques Derrida and Ned Lukacher, *Cinders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 39.

27 Ibid.

28 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 64.

29 I think of Gabriel Orozco's *Working Tables* (1996 - 2005) that consist of changing groupings of objects conceived for the particular exhibition as a transposition of the studio working processes into the gallery. The use of collected found objects can also be found in Robert Rauchenberg's collections of personal affects in boxes such as *Thirty Scatole Personali* (1952).

30 For example the initial impact of Tracy Emin's *My Bed* (1998) has been normalised through repetition and restatement. Though it could be argued that the readymade still has the potential to unsettle the 'public', its gesture was thoroughly within the Duchampian legacy.

31 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 72.

32 In the work of Jean Baudrillard, the simulacrum may replace the original that never existed. This is of course the pure sign of advanced capitalism. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, *The Body in Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

33 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 65.

34 De Man: 38.

35 Walter Benjamin and others, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 80.

36 De Man: 38.

37 Ibid., 39.

38 'The waterfall, falling from who knows where—from the sky of course!—flicks the mill wheel in motion. A bottle tumbles onto a peddle. The chariot thrusts forward. The scissors open. The strings tighten. The hooks jump. The suspended weight drops at the foot of the toboggan and strikes the liquefied gas. The gas explodes miraculously, as if the barrel of a cannon, bottom on the ground and mouth open toward the sky. Fire! Propelled by the blast, a *combat marble* shoots up, attacking the horizon. But, like everything moving toward this inaccessible line, it cannot reach it. It is content to release two metal *rams* that the bachelors brandish above their heads, like musclemen, to hold up the horizon-garment of the Bride. The rams fall. The dress slips off—or at least begins to. For the combat marble communicates to the rams that it knocks down the illuminating gas's dearest childhood memory: the determination to rise. And the rams move up again, slowly but surely. And the dress is pulled back up.' (Jean Suquet, "Possible," in *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve (Halifax, N.S. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; MIT Press, 1993), 101.)

39 Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 428.

40 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 97.

41 See Craig Adcock, "Duchamp's Way: Twisting Our Memory of the Past "for the Fun of It"," in *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve (Halifax, N.S. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; MIT Press, 1993), 315.

42 There are three shadows in this painting: The Bicycle Wheel, Hat Rack and a corkscrew. The latter never appeared as a readymade or in any other work by Duchamp. Could this be the readymade that exists only in title: 'In Emergency in Favor of Twice'?

43 Victor I Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 195.

44 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994),

45 There could also be a psychoanalytic reading due to Orozco's act of making the plasticine ball the same weight as his own body. This suggests the constitution of the subject is never fully present and always susceptible to reshaping according to subject-object relation, while simultaneously being a palimpsest of the Other.

46 The 'copy with no original' is situated within Baudrillard's 'precession of simulacra' in the third stage 'where the image masks the absence of a profound reality'. Here the image pretends to be a faithful copy through an arbitrary symbolic association. Baudrillard calls this the 'order of sorcery', which implies a certain deliberate mystification, an intentional game on a non-existent referent. Baudrillard's fourth order of simulacra is where the referent is completely 'liquidated', that signs are free to float in a realm of pure simulacra. This study is testing the arbitrariness of the referent,

and its displacement but not necessarily its complete liquidation; arguing that the referent may not be what it obviously seems to be, that it could be located elsewhere, as a mythologised construction or simulation. I maintain the idea of the referent—even a false or absent one—as a play on the presumed existence and functionality of the sign, that communication has an affirmed logical outcome. In other words, the idea of the referent needs to remain in order to challenge its presumed existence and function. Baudrillard's writing has been used to describe the mass media and image saturation in contemporary culture—the proliferation of masses of copies. However, with my research I am producing single copies in various versions that engage with fine art histories of making. Whereas the photographs function in another way because they are more easily reproduced and have a history of mass production. See Baudrillard, 6-8.

- 47 Stoichita, 193.
- 48 Ibid., 194. See M. Foresta u. a., *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Manray* (New York, 1988), 77.
- 49 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*.
- 50 Stoichita, 194.
- 51 Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After : Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 180.
- 52 Roland Barthes refers to the 'myth' as the second order of signification where the signified naturalises meaning through connotation. See Roland Barthes and Annette Lavers, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 1993).
- 53 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 80.
- 54 Baudrillard would argue that we are in fact confirming our reality as more real than the real, thus making it hyperreal rather than surreal.
- 55 Baudrillard. In Baudrillard's scheme there is no possibility for an 'original', that reality has no place and no definition: 'Belief, faith in information attach themselves to this tautological proof that the system gives of itself by doubling the signs of an unlocatable reality'.
- 56 Baudrillard's describes the 'precession of simulacra... where the image masks the absence of a profound reality'. Here the image pretends to be a faithful copy through an arbitrary symbolic association. Baudrillard calls this the 'order of sorcery', which implies a certain deliberate mystification, a play on a non-existent referent. See *ibid.*, 6.

## **String**

There are doors that no longer close properly, or rather may close but the door does not line up with the latch and thus do not stay closed. But the door has not changed; it is the same proportions, it has not warped or distorted. Rather the doorframe has moved. It has moved because the walls have moved, and the walls have moved because the floor has moved due to the foundations sinking as the timber stumps have rotted out over the last century and more. But the wobbly door handle with the copper surface worn to reveal tarnished brass beneath has a piece of string (woven white and green) looped so that it can hold the door closed when attached to a screw in the scalloped architrave.

It seems a feature that most of the doors off the hallway have pieces of string keeping them closed. I know these rooms as interior photographs. They are images of transcending coldness. The two cast iron single beds remain in the cavernous bedroom but nothing else bar the cast iron fireplace with the plain painted mantle. These two beds with their old sheets and bedspreads still in place are fixed in this image as much as the fireplace (with no fire), and the very worn floral Axminster carpet. The shear curtain is disintegrating slowly and elegantly, while lathes are revealed as plaster drops from the ceiling in the left corner beside the fireplace. The plaster has been swept up and the room looks as if it should appear functional.



## **other**

There is a deferred tension in a title, an abrasion that marks the work, surrounding it with connoted meaning, yet wanting to be the work itself. If the title is to signify some possibilities for the reading of the image/object, it also creates signifiers for itself—though without the object (referent) it is simply a word with infinite signification. The tension occurs because the title wants to stand alone as a signifier with indeterminate signifieds (free range), yet its associative meaning is due to its linking with an object. The title (word) symbolically functions through our cultural and social learning of its signification; we understand its meaning through context and application. If one were to come up with a title for an object that was suitably open and indeterminate it would have to be a word like 'other'. This word is both referring to its own openness of reading, while implicitly stating its distance from the object to which it refers. It provides a name, yet also describes a difference to that which it names; it makes the tension between itself and the referent palpable.

In terms of the image-repertoire, the other is the object of our projected affection, perhaps 'love' to prove the idea of love, that the feelings are not simply a matter of perception but have a basis in reality, of engagement with an other. But this other is a projection of our desire onto an object; the object of our desire is mapped with our own meaning derived from the slightest sign. These signs may be constructed from our intention to confirm reciprocated affection, there is no proof of their intention, or their existence. This object is the other of our gaze, it awaits our affection, the constitution of its signifieds.

I want this object to betray any intention by the artist; in the same way that the title 'other' creates a tension with the object it obtusely names, I hope the viewer will write a text to which they can project onto this 'other' object. Thus this 'other' is six of one and half a dozen of...



## Broken

The human body has been against this piece of rubberised foam, imprinted itself, sublimated itself to the function of this object. Its history is inseparable from the body, its reason for being was in the service of the human body. The body is documented in this artifact, its presence is undeniable and ineffable.

The piece of boogie board becomes something else, its resemblance to its original form is displaced, denaturalized. The natural signification is broken, the expected link is opened out, dispersed into a noise of alternatives (interference).

The signifier floats as it is cast into the sea, cast into a heavy metal; at once beguiling and undermined, the signifier multiplies. This space in-between signifiers and possible signifieds where meaning breaks open, induces a perpetual *de ja vous* for all those meanings that are inconclusive, unresolved. The matter of life that is inexplicable, uneasy in its unknown, the points where we consciously move on so as to not stop to see our limitations, our lacks, our stupidities, our isolation. Yet the breaks are precisely the moments when we let the possibilities in, stopping to be affected, to allow our 'self' to be contested and pierced.

How to escape the demon of analogy? By 'feigning a spectacularly *flat* respect (this is the Copy, which is rescued)'.<sup>1</sup>

This copy undermines its metonymical meaning for its signification has little to do with a boogie board (the referent), and subsequently a feigned indexical relationship, and more to do with a break in our perception of experience through a material object (a substitution). In other words, the referent is replaced by the subject (oneself) with our limitations and imitations in the construction of identity. The broken fragment is the object cause of desire and the trace of a body.

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1 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 44.

### **Split (untenable)**

This subject is never anything but a “living contradiction”: a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall.

—Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

With the writer of bliss (and his reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak “on” such a text, you can only speak “in” it, in its fashion, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss.

—Roland Barthes<sup>2</sup>

How can one speak of this split subject? The subject that can be cut up in the text, divided and reunited as far as a practice of reading (and writing) is concerned. The subject is indeed a historical manifestation that has been before and will come after; there is no end to this subject. Barthes uses the idea of the image-repertoire as a dialectical transformation on the image of the subject and its other, a praxis that both eludes to the doxa of a naturalized language and the violence of explicit demythologization; this is the neutral. If I was searching for a text that split the subject while projecting the imaginary ‘other’ it would involve a deflection, simultaneously doubled and transformed, seemingly reproduced in form, only to be denied a privilege of materiality. Bone, silver, black glass, light, darkness, shadow; how can any kind of taxonomy be created? How can density, weight, substance be indexed to a shadow? Where is the referent?

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1 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 21.  
2 *Ibid.*, 22.

## CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALITY

In the preceding chapters I argued for a different paradigm for the found object in relation to the readymade. I emphasized a return of the found object to another linguistic state that has not been over-coded by the history of the readymade. I have applied theories of the text and the subject to processes of making and writing that are not encumbered by conventional narratives of the selected object plucked from everyday life and recontextualised through the expanded notion of the museum-institution, and the artist's authorship (whereby the commodity transformation process that the artist enacts through designation is rendered a standard method of practice). Yet, as I have also argued it is the textual play released by the readymade from the 1960s that has been most useful in questioning the premises of the readymade itself and thus the different ways it can be written, and in this context the different uses for the textualisation of found objects. This chapter will develop an argument for the rematerialised object in terms of its constantly shifting materiality, subject to constant transposition, change and deferment.

My research is concerned with the found object that has already undergone considerable degradation and weathering, its use value has been partially—at times largely—erased or displaced. This process of erasure is a form of breaking the direct links between signifier and signified as the found object is materially transformed through physical processes that simultaneously enact a textual transposition. In some of my artworks the link between prior meaning and the rematerialised object are almost completely disconnected. This is where the derived object enacts an intentional failure of communication in relation to what came before. This breaking of the communication imperative can be termed a fraying of the sign, where the signifiers no longer suggest functional links to signifieds. This chapter will theorise these movements of the signifier as played out through material transposition. I will show how the processes of material translation open up a dialogue on the contingency, flexibility and variability of meaning in found objects.

### 2.1 Signifiers of new materialities: transposition and movement

The word 'fraying' etymologically relates to a cloth becoming ragged, and also a noisy quarrel or fight, a variant form of affray. The found objects I rematerialize as derived objects show clear evidence of a fraying of their socially derived signs, both in terms of 'wear and tear', and dislocation between signifier and signified. This ongoing process of (re)production displaces meaning, negating any potential for meaning to become fixed and stabilised. That is not to say there is no meaning, rather the intention is in the choice of found objects that are rematerialized; cast in different materials and reproduced in photographic form. The objects are not chosen due to my indifference towards them, as Duchamp claimed with the readymade, rather it is their 'broken' or 'fragmented' qualities which orientates my choice. These found objects have been rejected, discarded, simply thrown away as

refuse, remnants of a previous purpose; in short they are now useless: which is why they are chosen.

This is the movement of the object as text, the object that appears only to disappear, to reappear in a variation, or in a different setting, moving from past to future with no apparent presence. In the writing of *nouveau roman*<sup>1</sup> author Alain Robbe-Grillet this constant shifting of the object without fixed place or time is commensurate to the derived objects of this project. Throughout his novel from 1957, *Jealousy*, objects are shifted in time, space, scale, materiality and train of event. The mark of the crushed centipede on the wall is one such motif that is suffused with a carnal materiality, whilst also being a self-evident textual figure subject to displacement and loss. Another is the role of windows in shifting our position and perception of these objects:

The spot begins by growing larger, one of its sides bulging to form a rounded protuberance, itself larger than the initial object. But a few fractions of an inch farther, this bulge is transformed into a series of tiny concentric crescents which diminish until they are only lines, while the other side of the spot shrinks, leaving behind it a stalk-shaped appendage which bulges in its turn for a second; then suddenly everything disappears.<sup>2</sup>

This process of appearing and disappearing is akin to the rematerialisation and dematerialisation of objects in this study. The mould is the part of the casting process that most directly plays out this movement backwards and forwards. The mould is made from the found object; an imprint is left in the negative and forms a hollow space where the found object momentarily rested. The mould seems to record this trace, but it also describes an absence, a loss. In the space of absence, the found object also loses its materiality; it becomes a void, solely mapped by a surface of silicon rubber. This surface is an interior one, with no relation to the outside form of the mould. Here we have an elusive textural imprint, without an apparent legibility.

The mould is a kind of text that operates in the linguistic realm of the 'shifter': it only makes sense in the context of what it is supposed to utter or to produce. In the Lacanian sense if the mould operates as an indexical signifier or shifter, it is split between its signifying form, and the action of production itself. The 'I' of the author is similarly split as in the textuality of the mould. When one views the split subject as the shifter at work as a mode of enunciation within a particular context—this writing under a pronoun—there is a relation to the duplicity of the mould as a site of a reproduction, while maintaining its unique 'objectness'. In other words, the mould states its purpose as a very particular and determinate one. Yet as it is the obscured internal surface that is the only reason for its existence, the enunciation is what is produced from the mould: the negative space of the mould is fundamentally split with the positive object that is produced. They can never be reconciled, though they are co-dependent.

The mould is an object that is both indeterminate and highly specific in its function. It is the object par excellence of an indexical signifier; a shifter for the enunciation of other objects. The found objects I select have been themselves produced with moulds of the industrial kind such as metal dies (the mass produced prior life of these objects is cited in the fine art mould-making and casting process). But the mould enacts a kind of displacement, if you like a 'splitting' in production. What comes out is a rematerialisation of a prior object that seems at once indexed and dislocated; the copy that moves on from prior signification. This is the possibility of the signifier to be released from its normative, conventional function and its use value. It is also the moment when the essence—if I can momentarily be excused to locate something akin to a distilled production—may reveal or precipitate a multiplication of signifiers. We have at once a moment of presence, and its immediate supersession by multiples of meaning and connotation.

When Roland Barthes identifies connotations in Cy Twombly's work, he is similarly searching for the moment when the text ruptures and releases itself into a multiplicity of fragments. A particular reading is contiguous with the found objects that populate this research practice:

A paradox: the fact, in its purity, is best defined by not being clean. Take an ordinary object: it is not its new, virgin state which best accounts for its essence, but its worn, lopsided, soiled, somewhat forsaken condition: the truth of things is best read in the cast-off.<sup>3</sup>

Although Barthes is not referring to cast objects, the relation between the *cast-off* object and the *casting* of cast-off objects is hardly opaque. Thus, if the cast-off object is recast, rematerialized in its forlorn, discarded state, there must be an attempt to add value or at least re-create or re-write value in this 'forsaken' object. The derived object receives value through its rematerialized form with its accompanying textualisation, shifting the found object into a different sign system. This act of casting as a translation process precipitates the double movement: one physical the other linguistic, both enveloping each other as remaking/rewriting.

The derived objects of this study are infiltrated with resonance, association and allusion that pivots around their rematerialised incarnations. They are derived from previous texts, intertextually woven, with whatever their context of writing may be: their site and means of display, their reproduction in photographic form, or the words that are written or spoken about them. They are also textually imbued with social, economic and art histories. As discussed in the previous chapter, they have an offset relation to the readymade. However, my found objects are significantly different from readymades in that they undergo both a material and textual translation, rather than a transformation that is solely dependent on language.<sup>4</sup>

In my project, the rematerialised found object has a more layered relation to language and meaning through its changeable materiality, and the connotations of these alternate materials. I also complicate the definition of a found object to



Brett Jones, *Slug*, 2013, lead, paper, cloth

include a found texture or space. For example a wall or ceiling area that contains a remnant or trace of something since removed can also be called a found object. This is the case with my pieces made from the negative spaces of holes in walls around the word *Slug*. In order to make these moulds from the plug holes in the walls of an old motor garage in Launceston, positives were made in silicon rubber of the cavities. The positives were then cast to produce a mould so that castings could be made in different materials. Therefore the slugs are materialised from an empty space, a cavity. In this sense the found object is a trace, an impression of something that was never a physical object. They are a manifestation of Derrida's *différance* for they can never be what they were, they are traces of traces.

With the readymade it is the moment of selection where the transformation of the commodity begins. In my conception it is the mould as the space of translation and transposition where meanings are released. For this mould can produce any number of objects in many different materials. In the piece *Slug* (2013), initially exhibited in the space where every cavity was moulded, the castings are produced as doubles in lead and pulped tissue paper. They are dropped onto a doubled piece of linen cloth, some coming to rest off the cloth on the concrete floor of the old motor garage. The scatter effect on the offset pieces of slightly disheveled linen, mixing the lightweight paper and the heavy lead slugs on the cotton weave of white cloth in contrast with the aged concrete, opposes a seemingly informal presentation with the labor-intensive process of mould making and casting. These material transitions are important to the movement of meaning as it loops back and forth to prior states and future projections, never settling in the present. The linen cloth implies the weave of the text, just as the slugs can be bundled up in the cloth and removed at any moment.

The next movement of the slugs sees the lead ones imbedded in a flat block of black resin. *Slug Oil* (2013) is a play on the drip tray found in a mechanics garage, being positioned in the centre of the space to where a car could be parked. These slugs, derived from the walls of the same space, are now embedded in a black field of resin akin to bolts or pieces of metal dropping from a car. Yet this obvious connotation belies the role of the body in engaging with loss and fragmentation as the text shakes the subject. The reflection in *Slug Oil* as viewed in a photograph taken from a particular viewing angle immerses a photograph on the wall titled *Polaroid (for R.B)* (2013). This photograph remakes *Slug Oil* as it transposes Roland Barthes' ideas around *jouissance* into a reflection of a photograph in resin made into another photograph. This is the process of translation as the materiality of the lead and resin transposes into the textual space of another image. This is the play of *signifiance* as the text continues to agitate and is further explored in the text fragment *Slug*. Thus the slugs are far from stable or settled as they continue to move into different material manifestations from empty spaces, to castings in lead and paper, to photographs and written texts, in different settings and arrangements. The slugs are now embedded in clear resin that has been flooded over the linen cloth (*Slug*, 2014); there is no rest for the signifier *slug*.



Brett Jones, installation view from 'Notes on the Index', Outward, 2013. Foreground: *Slug Oil*, 2013, lead, resin. Background: *Polaroid (for R.B.)*, 2010-13, C-Type print

I have demonstrated with *Slug* how the objects I rematerialise are found fragments, cast and reproduced in photographic and written form. They are non-specific in the sense that they are part of many texts that cannot be particularised. Barthes notes that 'the Text practices the infinite deferment of the signified'.<sup>5</sup> The derived object is inside and outside these structures because it functions in both its absence and presence; it is premised on a web of productions: a prior object that falsely suggests an origin. The origin is a figure for translation in the sense that 'translation augments and modifies the original'<sup>6</sup> into another material through the absent space of the mould. Yet the so-called (non)original, or precursor, also existed in a prior state as another material text that was molded from an other 'model'. Further, the photographic text proposes its absence again, in a kind of 'flat death', as another supplement. The centre is accordingly lost, or disappears. We have the affects of the Derridean *supplement*; the object never had an absence or a presence, only an affect, a virulence.

This constant agitation of the text is witnessed through its various modes of playing out as a kind of performative in the sense that the objects project a certain texture in their translation. My piece *Broken* occurs in writing, as studio photography, in exhibition, as a photograph of the exhibition, as a text about the exhibition, as another casting, as a casting that is modified or altered, as photographs of the modified casting and so on. This object, nominally referred to as *Broken*, is a signifier that operates within a textual field that cannot be delimited to a singular version or a stable copy; in the same way that Duchamp's *Fountain* has no fixed and definable origin.

For instance, the version of *Broken* exhibited in the *Lilt* exhibition in 2013 responded to the textual signifiers within the space, especially the wall to which it leaned. A photograph depicts this derived object, *Broken*, casually sitting on a concrete floor leaning against a wall. On the yellowish-cream wall there is an area of raw concrete where a plumbing fixture has been removed leaving pipe holes in the wall, and a series of drip stains that derive from a horizontal plane suggesting the former location of a sink. The drip stains direct one's attention down to the cast object in its bright pink and blue colouring. Of particular note is a solidified puddle of wax on the floor in which the casting rests. The milky coloured wax gives off a coconut smell; presumably melted surfboard wax, but it is impossible to know this from a photograph. This photograph also titled *Broken*, is not simply a document of an object, it is a material object in its own right derived from the performance of another derived object: the casting *Broken*.

There is another photograph of *Broken* without any context, a studio photograph depicting it orientated up the opposite way. Yet the orientation in the *Lilt* exhibition seems to link it to a prior system of use value as a bodyboard. There is no right way up, just as it is misleading to say that it *is* a piece of bodyboard or that a piece of bodyboard was the 'original'. It is the movement of the broken signs—the dislocation of meaning—from a former life as it undergoes a process of constant remaking. As Barthes notes, the signifieds are in constant deferment, which is to say



Brett Jones, installation view from 'Lilt', Outward, 2013. *Broken*, 2009-13, bronze, acrylic paint, surfboard wax

that a definable or specific interpretation is illusory. I can only offer propositions in the same manner in which the reader may do; mine are not privileged, nor exceptional.

This *Broken* object undergoes various transpositions between different systems of meaning as it is remade, reconfigured, re-presented, reimaged and rewritten. The reference in the title to the breaking of its prior meaning should not go unremarked. This 'breaking' also alludes to Duchamp's work *In advance of the Broken Arm* (1915). Thomas Dean Tucker appropriately notes how in Duchamp's work 'one is confronted by an everyday familiar item broken and made useless as an object by the intervention of language'.<sup>7</sup> The 'differential mark, cut off from its alleged 'production' or 'origin',<sup>8</sup> weaves a web of intertextuality. In this sense the derived object functions as a linguistic sign in a weave that invariably includes the ghost of the readymade.

This ghost is also evident in my piece *Eight to Nine* (2013).

Upon a casting of a single bed mattress in Hydrostone plaster lie nine cast objects in differing sizes and materials, including bronze, plaster, resin, silicon rubber and wax. The objects are all indeterminate fragments of manmade detritus except for one. This other object is a casting of a rock. The mattress textually and literally acts as a bed for the objects. These objects are provisional and subject to be swapped, modified or removed. The mattress may be constant, but it too shifts as different objects are placed upon it. The mattress is the substrate or 'bed' as the glass is to *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23). Herein the nine cast objects that 'lie' on top cite the nine malic molds of the *Large Glass*, and as Duchamp decided to increase them from eight to nine, so the title is sourced. Much has been written about the metaphorical movement of the various machine-figurative-like components of the *Large Glass* as textual release and movement. However graphically the work remains static. Whereas *Eight to Nine* utilizes the idea of the bed as a platform for play as the objects can come and go in different, materials, forms and arrangements. In this way the piece is never complete or fixed, it remains open to continual transformation materially and textually. And as with Orozco's *Yielding Stone*, the photographs that bare resemblance to the object are different material representations as the objects continue to change. The transpositional aspects of the objects are drawn out, given voice as their representations are multiplied in various material forms.



Marcel Duchamp, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even) or The Large Glass, 1915 - 1923.

## 2.2 Derived/Deferred/Différent Objects

There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split in *itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection. The image, the



Brett Jones, *Eight to Nine*, 2012-13, Hydrostone plaster, bronze, resin, wax, silicon



Brett Jones, *Eight to Nine* (detail), 2012-13, Hydrostone plaster, bronze, resin, wax, silicon

double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference.

—Jacques Derrida<sup>9</sup>

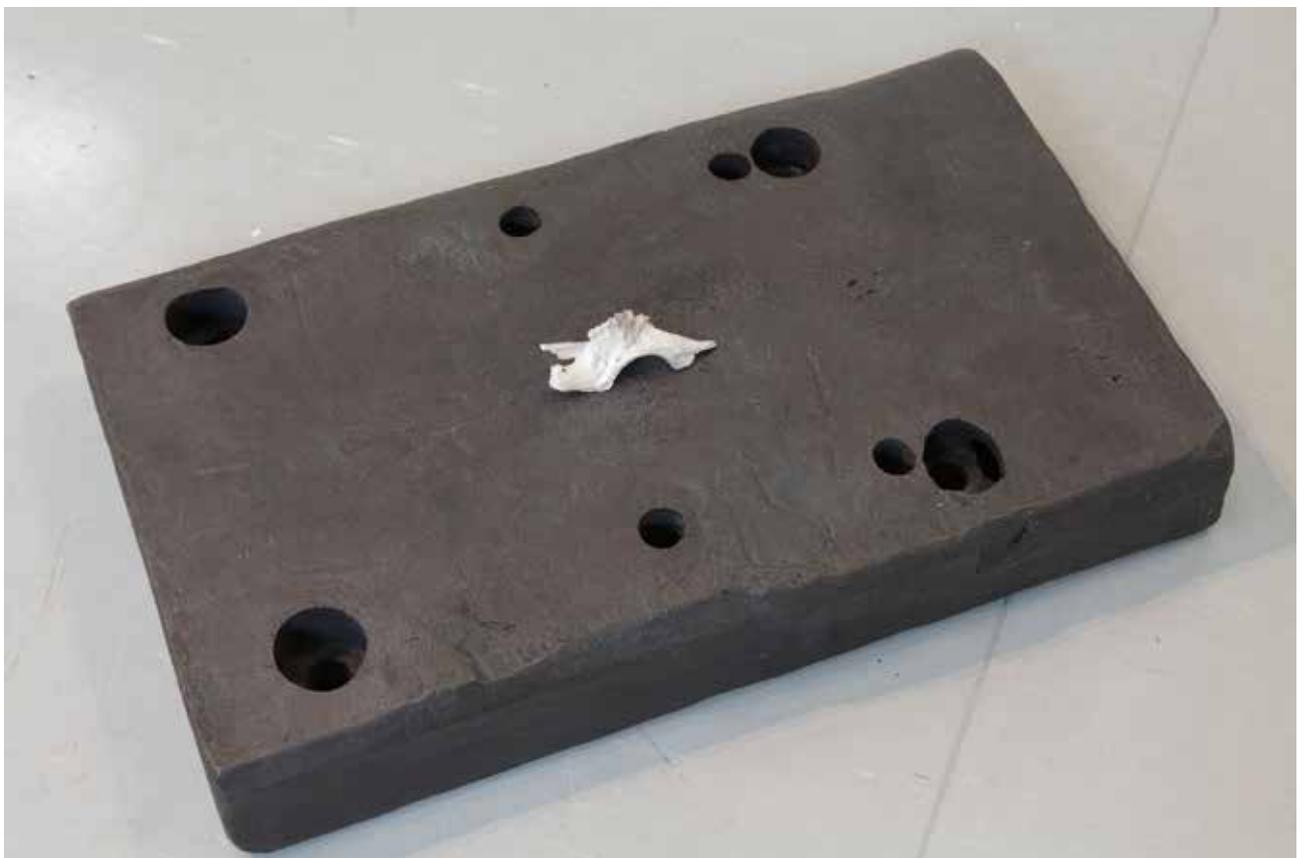
I conceive in two counter ways the notion that the derived objects of this study can be signed to a previous life. The first suggests that on the level of signification the derived object had a prior existence through functional systems of meaning. It previously operated within knowable and recognizable sign systems, it had no origin, it simply existed as a functional object. The second conception identifies the derived art object as having no prior existence in the sense that the translation causes a rupture in the sign that cannot be returned to any prior state; the translation generates an object that has been transposed into a new sign system. In this sense, I assert that casting as a material and linguistic translation negates and refuses whatever may have come before. At the same time, the photographic object has little relation to what it purports to represent; a copy no matter how faithful is not the same object as that which preceded it.

I have situated the derived or rematerialised object of this study as a copy that can no longer be located to a specific origin, thus going beyond the readymade to cite it as a ghosting or trace. It is important to touch on Derrida's (non)concept of *différance* in this regard as the objects of this study also occupy a linguistic space. I have developed the term 'derived objects' as a way of stating that these objects are connected to material and textual processes of transposition. With regard to its etymology, the word 'derive' passes from the Latin *derivare* (a stream of water) into Old French *deriver* (learned borrowing) around 1385. The sense of it being the origin of a trace of a word is first recorded in 1559 as 'derivation'. It is important to note that the meaning of derive and derivation linguistically function as traces; to derive is to refer to another signifier, another word. This other word and its meaning creates an unlimited series of differences. The 'derived object' is a signifier in the material sense; as graphic and as object that must continue to move and displace itself.

As explained previously, the derived objects of this study are understood as deferred objects: in the Derridean sense, as *différent* objects. The traces of difference within the derived objects I am working through initiate an impossibility of presence. There is no definable origin in these objects; they are textually derived through traces of effects past and future as I have also discussed in relation to the mould. Their presence is unsupportable for they are 'incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic motifs in the concept of *structure*'.<sup>10</sup> They function—in terms of an unstructured process—as derived and deferred texts in relation to traces of other texts, in *différance*, confounding the object in its derived but transformed materiality. In short, I am arguing that the shifting materiality that occurs through the objects of this study generates a deferral of the signifier as the material cannot settle with a particular form as a unified representation. The text cannot coalesce around a stable presence as objects change materials, arrangements, combinations and settings. Thus in my piece *Spout and Vessel* (2013) a cast lead tap spout sits atop



Brett Jones, *Spout and Vessel*, 2013, wax, lead



Brett Jones, *Vessel and Silver*, 2013, bronze, silver

a casting in white wax. This slab of wax cast from a found piece of solid industrial plastic creates a kind of bed in a similar way to *Eight to Nine* (2012-13). Yet, this vessel is the fragment of a whole that can never be complete. It is a reconstruction and rematerialisation in the false image of something that has been: a *différent* object. The vessel with its *fixing* holes signifying a former industrial use is also a cipher for the Lacanian subject with many holes. Wax is a vicarious substance, especially its role in lost wax casting, and thus another version *Vessel and Silver* (2013) finds the vessel cast in bronze with a piece of animal bone cast in silver sitting atop. This movement of the vessel from industrial plastic through the shifter of the mould, through wax, bronze, the flat image of the photograph and this writing enunciates translation as a textual process that in de Man's sense results in the death of the original. These reproductions as traces, marks of other texts operate in the realm of the material signifier. These traces accumulate and disperse with suggestions of other histories, reconstructed memories, subject situations and alternate representations.

Derrida's (non) concept of *différance* was developed in relation to the linguistic in its spoken and written form. However, I have argued how it can be applied to the objects of this study. In summary, this application can occur in two ways. The first understands the linguistic conventions of sign production, acknowledging that all language functions within systems of difference. This fundamental semiotic approach locates the object within the field of language, suggesting that textually the object exists before its material manifestation. This can be called its future traces. The second approach invokes a more specific semiosis of materiality in the play of signifiers in relation to an object. This second approach is a physical and textual production of meaning that refers to the first in terms of prior traces, but in the context of material objects, it constantly defers their presence. This is of course a linguistic movement, yet one that I apply to these objects with their unlocatable materiality, a materiality that is always referring to the trace of another materiality.

### **2.3 Material textuality and the mobile signifier**

I have considered how the derived object as a material signifier can defer its relation to a stable presence through the play of *différance*. As I have discussed there is no stable signified, and therefore the referent is somewhere else, as a trace or not to be found; no referent can be recalled or relied upon. I have argued that this conception of the derived object as being a copy of a copy cannot settle on a signified; it cannot create a stabilised sign, and therefore the referent is no longer of primary concern. Instead it is the 'force of the supplement', the movement of *signifiance*, the strange machinations of *différance* that allow the text to fragment, to fissure and tremble.

We read a material through what it *is* not, in its difference to another material, the trace of this other material is embedded in the material of representation. This notion of the trace also functions as an extra or addition, to which Derrida calls 'the supplementary'. The supplement is that addition to the material object that

undermines the unity and completion of itself. For instance, the supplement may be the trace of the readymade that lingers in any practice working with found objects. The trace can also be in a material from a former life, an imagined material or a projected future materiality.

This is the case in point for my piece *Somewhat* (2012). The title *Somewhat* has been chosen as a deferral of naming; the title as a name supplementary to the object, one that plays on the absence or traces of other materialities. In a sense it is this idea of the 'dangerous supplement' that renders the material signifiers unstable, for the object cannot settle into its representation; the object cannot be just what it *is*. Or rather it is *not* what it *is*. Derrida calls 'the example' a kind of supplement for the other. My example is this object cast from tissue paper. A derived object that suggests something more rigid and solid; its form is solid, blocky, utilitarian. Yet it is suspended in the air by very fine nylon thread and subject to movement from airflow in the space. There is a *différance* of materiality occurring here whereby the object is cast in lightweight tissue paper, yet its form suggests it is derived from something solid and heavy. This difference is further attenuated by the seemingly rigid satin finish of the paper that acts as a trace of its other life as a dense piece of industrially moulded plastic. Again the mould takes on this double movement from the industrial to the artisanal. The mould enacts the trace of this other material life through picking up the surface sheen of the piece of industrial plastic and translating it into the surface of the tissue paper. Thus the mould is not only translating the texture and form of this other object, it is also transposing this trace of surface sheen that is more subtle, and particularly affective to qualities of light and photographic imaging. It is perplexing as to what the object *is* or what it *is* derived from; it is a fragment of something that cannot be determined, especially since it has been rematerialised in this other material.

A photograph 'is dangerous from the moment... representation claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself'.<sup>11</sup> A photograph of *Somewhat* makes transparent this conflation of the sign with the representation of the object through the very problem of the impossibility of an origin. This problem of the origin occurs in two ways. The first ascribes the object to a continuous process of copies through casting and photography, the second in its fragmented form and uncertain material source. The photograph that seems to depict *Somewhat* is not the thing. But if this photograph is something else, then where is this thing? How can we locate it? Herein, lies my argument; that we cannot locate this thing as it continues to transpose through material representations. It constitutes itself as a trace as it contains the traces of the other.

Photography raises this problem of presence so effectively through the non-presence of the object that is depicted. Therefore, the photograph of a casting creates a double, mutually cancelling effacement of the referent. This object, *Somewhat*, is a photograph that refers to a three-dimensional form in as much as the words I write. Yet, as with Robert Gober's casting in bronze of a black piece of Styrofoam found on the beach (*Untitled* 2000-2001) this object undergoes a series



Brett Jones, *Somewhat*, 2012, Tenguchu tissue paper



Brett Jones, Installation view from 'CHI PYs', Conical, 2012. *Somewhat*, 2012, Tenguchu tissue paper

of transpositions as it is presented in different contexts, combinations and in photographic imaging. Gober has exhibited this work in isolation and combined with other objects including laminated pieces of wood and a toilet plunger made in terracotta and wood, yet it is a photograph of the white bronze on the textured irregular concrete floor that so affectively questions the materiality of what the reader views. Moreover, in the pages of the book I read the image on paper with a large white border that clearly signs the object as elsewhere. But *where* is elsewhere? Or is this flat image *it*? There, but what is it?



Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 2000-2001, bronze and paint

The deferment of the material signifier as a lost object creates an uncertainty of how to place the object that refutes any claim to a completed object. Which is why after Gober, I cast a heavy piece of plastic into very light paper and suspended it, while Gober's is a very heavy bronze casting painted white that sits on the floor. This dialogue is with the image and the text rather than Gober, in the sense that I am concerned with the idea of Gober's work as a cipher for something lost or discarded. My interest lies in what an object could be that has no presence, in the same way that the photographs and writing around Duchamp's readymades are of more import than their actual physical form. As Gober notes the piece was 'a lesson in verisimilitude'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the appearance of the 'real', still grants the casting a privileged status over a photograph of it. Instead, after Derrida, I emphasise a continuing material and textual production that eschews presence.<sup>13</sup>



Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1999-2001, bronze, terra-cotta, oak, paint

Derrida makes this problem of presence very clear when he says 'immediacy is derived' through an 'infinite chain' that multiplies 'supplementary mediations [producing] the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception'.<sup>14</sup> Thus our relationship to the presence of experience is in a constant state of immediate deferral or delay.<sup>15</sup> The objects of this study are concerned with these 'spacings' of deferment and displacement, where writing is 'that dangerous supplement' in our understanding of presence, and thus the false unity and stability of the subject is exposed.

## 2.4 Material displacement by the photograph

Since photography raises the problem of presence so effectively, I now wish to return to the readymade in its photographic form to address my argument concerning the vicarious nature of the photograph as a dangerous supplement, or deferment of material representation. The recognised 'origins' of Duchamp's early

readymades are based on a series of studio photographs taken between 1915 and 1918 by Duchamp and Man Ray. These photographs construct the conceptual, historical and mythological import of the readymade. They are often cited as proving the origins of the readymades through this historical documentation. This highlights the problem I have addressed in the photography of sculpture; the photograph as index serving the 'realness' of the spatio-physical object. This issue was taken up by Brancusi and Man Ray and thoroughly addressed by conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth in the 1960s and Sherrie Levine in the 1970s. I have also discussed the issue in relation to Gabriel Orozco's *Yielding Stone* and Robert Gober's casting of the block of found Styrofoam (*Untitled*, 2000-2001). Yet the photograph is often still regarded as a secondary imprint of the object; a mimetic representation. And this is where its duplicitous and supplementary character lies. For if the photograph is taken to be a representation of the real thing, then it necessarily undermines and challenges the existence of this real thing. Photography can translate the real object, but in Paul de Man's sense, this translation results in its death, or as Derrida would term its *différance*. The very existence of the original is thus undermined by photography, which is itself a mass reproduction medium.

The photograph is encoded with traces before it is taken. In this sense the photograph of the sculptural object can exist before the sculpture itself as an imagined future; the 'institution of the trace'. The photograph is always an imagined image on the mind's eye; photographic pictorial conventions are ingrained in our consciousness as cultural marks or citations. In this way an 'original' photograph is not possible, and yet its representation is privileged as authentic, notably in Duchamp's photographs of the 'first' readymades. So the photograph occupies this contradictory space of portending to prove an original—a presence of something—while itself being a non-original duplicated by-product. Additionally this presence of something 'that-has-been' is already in the past, 'flat death' as Barthes would say. So the photograph cannot prove presence, while the past it proves is a matter of a certain death and remaking. In the context of this study the photograph is not directly interpreted as an index. In many ways it is semiotically more akin to an icon and even a symbol. How would we read Duchamp's photographs without the written texts surrounding the readymades? And thus I argue the photograph is also a text that interweaves the sculptural object before and after its production.

Many of the found objects I work with are the detritus of mass production, discarded fragments excised from use and exchange value. This has been highlighted in pieces such as *Broken* (2009), *Spout with Vessel* (2013) and *Somewhat* (2012), but there are other instances in my research that address the deleted or remnant from the built environment, as discussed with *Slug*. Other such examples include the piece *Know* (2012), a casting in tissue paper of a section of roof area at West Space, and *Inside-out* (2013) a casting of an area of wall in Hydrostone plaster at Outward. Both of these pieces cast a surface where a plumbing fixture had been removed, leaving the pipes and cavities. Both present a photograph of the same area as a supplement to the casting of the actual building surface. The displacement is evident in the location of the castings onto a flat surface, one a stainless steel



Brett Jones, *Inside-out*, 2013, Hydrostone plaster



Brett Jones, *Know*, 2012, Tenguchu tissue paper, stainless steel

table the other the concrete floor. While the piece *Know* was concentrated as a relation to the ceiling area above the casting, *Inside-out* saw the work positioned up the other end of the space with the photograph at the same height to the area of wall it cited. Yet the photograph of the ceiling<sup>16</sup> area is not the same as the area cast. Upon close inspection one may have noted the casting is of a different area to that of the photograph. This slight shift plays on the reliability of the photograph in portending to represent the object of the casting. This sets up a slippage between the three representations that cite each other, undermining a stable hierarchy of what came first, eschewing the idea of the origin and deferring the referent.

In this chapter I have argued that the rematerialised found object enacts a deferred and shifting relation to any determinate presence as the processes of rematerialisation and textual play render it always elsewhere. This creates layers of displaced meaning as a movement into past and future that does not allow a 'settling' that has come to determine the recognisable contextual and presentation framework of the readymade. The processes of rematerialisation function in tandem with those of textualisation to generate a discursive field of displacement and movement. In other words, the processes involved with the making of objects in different materials allows a liberation of the form that can keep meaning open and uncertain. These processes are heightened and exemplified through photographic imaging and writing. The conception of the derived object that I investigate is one complicated by contradictions and slippages sustained by no given material origin. This elusiveness of a source, coupled with the ciphers of the body of the subject in its perpetual loss, will be developed in the next chapter.

## Notes

- 1 An approach to the novel that rose to prominence in France in the 1950s whereby the objects of the story are described in detail, often supplanting the need for fleshing out the characters. The emphasis on the visceral nature of materials and our bodily relation to them accords with the derived objects of this study.
- 2 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy and in the Labyrinth (Two Novels)* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 95-96.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms : Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 122.
- 4 In the case of the pure readymade there is no change in materials, it is the text surrounding the object that changes it; its movement into language as an idea. Whereas the rematerialised found object is not dependent on language to change it, to transform it from commodity into art. The readymade is therefore completely dependent on processes of designation that entail contextualisation and authorisation within recognised institutional frameworks. Without these frameworks it is simply another commodity. The rematerialised found object is not dependent on its prior life as a commodity in order to define a point or moment of transformation. This is doubly the case with the found objects I choose as they have already become cast-offs from the commodity world; they no longer have use or exchange value.
- 5 Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).
- 6 Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald, *The Ear of the Other : Otobiography, Transference, Translation : Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).
- 7 Thomas Deane Tucker, *Derridada : Duchamp as Readymade Deconstruction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 46.
- 8 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 318.
- 9 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 36.
- 10 Derrida, Norris, and Bass, *Positions*, 27.
- 11 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.
- 12 Robert Gober, Theodora Vischer, *Robert Gober: Sculptures and Installations, 1979-2007*, 1st ed. (Basel/Göttingen: Schaulager/Steidl, 2007), 422.
- 13 Gober enhances this emphasis on presence through making: 'I ended up having three people spend three months creating new waxes to be cast. Each small sphere of the Styrofoam material had to be created by hand and joined and sculpted'. (ibid.)
- 14 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 157.
- 15 Duchamp often used the word 'delay' instead of 'work' or 'artwork'. He viewed his production as one perpetually in 'delay'.
- 16 Brian O'Doherty argues that Duchamp 'invented' the ceiling as a space for art in his '1,200 bags of coal' installation/exhibition design for the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition, at the Galerie des Beaux-arts, Paris. See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube : The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

## **Intermittance**

Two thirds of the image is obscured by the dark curtains, vertically, leaving a gap to which can be seen painted timber cupboard doors hanging off their bent hinges, partly open but not revealing their insides. Except for one cavity missing its door to reveal a solid round large object of indeterminate identification. The row of draws above the lower cupboards are also askew, slightly open due to the impossibility of closure, and along with the cupboard doors showing signs of surface abrasion and collision. The small area of concrete floor visible may have had its surface removed or simply worn back. It is also littered with small pieces of debris possibly from the doors. The area above the lower cabinet where the small sign is located, is largely shrouded in darkness, except for the shine of the stainless steel sink, which displays similar impacts to the cupboard doors though less damaged due to its robust materiality. A row of cupboards sits on the wall above the kitchen benchtop, seemingly unaffected by the damage wrought beneath.



## Eight to Nine

The fragment, pure in its own right, untainted, untinted, unprocessed; simply placed as is, or combined as is. A collection of fragments uncontained; a temporary grouping of objects clustered according to aesthetic determinants: distance, size, proportion, angle, bulkiness, texture, shape, light, tone. A collection of fragments on a bed, a surface, a platform without centre, without hierarchy of meaning and reading; material signifiers inconclusive, dislocated, confounded—the purely interstitial object: the dream of the paradox. The object that is read through its whole tactility, through colours without tints, without concealment (as though untainted by meaning). Textures and surfaces that render an insistence of their rawness, on a decentred and uninterrupted textuality. Fabricated objects that are ‘precise, mobile, and empty’ in their conventional signification; illusive signifiers that vacillate and shimmer (as in a mirage), or the ‘interstice without specific edges’.<sup>1</sup>

Duchamp insists on tufted...The surface of a mattress pulled together with knotted thread might be said to be tufted. Capitonne is specific to the kind of buttoned padding used in upholster furniture...<sup>2</sup>

We can relate Lacan’s ‘points de capiton’ where the subject finds anchor points, fixings of identification contrary to the affects of splitting and the real.

Nine malic moulds scattered on a bed of plaster. Duchamp referred to the negative of the photograph as a mould. In this conception the mould is an apparition, the object of an appearance.

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1 Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 17.  
2 Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp : A L'infinif* (115 p.: ill. ;). Note 41 by Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk



## Slug

There is a photograph titled *Adobe* (2013) by Simon Horsburgh depicting an indeterminate flat surface where a protrusion occurs: a lug in the same material. A photograph though without scale, proportion, identification; a detached referent, an indexical displacement. *Adobe* refers to a brick made of sun-dried clay, or perhaps an allusion to a process of digital manipulation; either way a Lacanian 'point de capiton', something to hold the stuffing of the subject in place; a recognisable signified—the context of the lug that is used to locate two parts is pertinent here (as in two parts of a mould). But the signifier slips, the caption, the title mobilises and the subject is no longer anchored—possibly pulled along by the hair (*Lugga*: Swedish, *Lugge*: Norwegian), dragged like a rap of cloth through the mud. The ear that is pulled; that *lugge* of refusal (Scottish, 1495) to adhere the caption to the image; the sign to the referent.

This image, *Adobe*, had an immediate place in language; the idea of the lug etymologically and phonetically form an association with 'slug'. The image generated this arbitrary signifier that in turn provided a turn on which a prior thinking around casting holes in walls of a space was released. In this scenario, the title is also completely arbitrary, and of no value to the writing of lug. Or slug. Lug in one sense means to pull something with effort, to move something heavy, while *sluggard* from middle-English is a lazy or idle person (Swedish: *Slugga*, a heavy, slow person), later being the noun for the slow moving snail like animal (1704).

The original conceptualisation of *Slug* was derived from another of its meanings as a piece of lead fired from a gun; to which the snail like animal is related in form. The textual association is with the holes in the walls of the space from plugs since removed, where the cavities remain; scars, traces of former uses. One of these uses being a Sports Power repair and storage facility, to which (so the story goes) a target of thick straw and cannite on the rear upstairs wall was used to fire shots for the sighting of rifles. Irrespective of accuracy (and validity of the story), another weave in the textual web was created. Along these chains of associative meaning, the word slug is also a boxing term, and a baseball term: both to hit hard, a hard blow. These definitions also refer to the impact of the bullet into a surface (a wall, flesh), while constructing an incongruous relation between the slow moving animal and the speed of a bullet.

Returning to the notion of the tissue of the text, and the linguistic body, the imaging of slugs being removed, excised, cut from flesh prompted the thinking of a representation of absence turned into positive. In other words, the negative spaces of the cavities made into moulds to which forms would be cast. The conception of a linguistic scar tissue as filling the void; the symbolic plugging the holes of the impossible encounter (the real), acting as ciphers of moments of jouissance; where the act of a projection occurs with cast objects (slugs) in lead and paper. The fragility of Tengucho Japanese tissue paper and the heavy malleability of lead, both mutable and unstable, transformable; transpositions of text moving through a weave of

permutations, associations and (material) potentialities.

Hence the conundrum for the reader as writer; where does the text begin or end? Where is the referent to which the reader may find ballast (a common use for lead), an affirmation of a subject? There is no beginning or end to this text, nor the texts discussed: akin to the meaning of slug as the piece of lead that was once used to space the lines of type in the letterpress, the slug of these words is apparent in its absence (leading: in typography) and presence as the object made from the negative of the mould (and the scars in the walls). The text formed these objects long before their material realisation, and the text continues to reshape and transpose them according to what is read and written. Only fleeting points de capiton for the text of *signifiante*.

## CHAPTER THREE: CORPUS

Such a word is floating, never pigeonholed, always atopic (escaping any topic), at once remainder and supplement, a signifier taking up the place of every signified.

—Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

The text is understood as a network of signs—as Barthes notes, a spider’s web—that coalesce to make meaning in a given time and place. Yet meaning is necessarily shifting and evolving, it is not stable. Some changes in signification may take years to evolve, such as a road sign. Others such as speech can change meaning in the very next word spoken. Post-structuralist theories of textuality are intrinsic to this study as the production of texts encompasses all modes of practice herein, including these words and the rematerialised objects of production. In this sense, the texts I produce are not mine alone, and they are never produced or finished, but are constantly being written and rewritten depending on their context and who is reading them. My role is to release these material texts, to give them a voice and a substance, but they have their own particular bodily relation to the reader. It is this conjunction of text, materiality and the body that will be the focus of this chapter.

The body to which I refer is both the plurality of bodies and the individuated body of the reader. The body that Barthes enunciates throughout the *Pleasure of the Text* is a metaphor for the text, but not as a single body, as he counterposes the body of social structures akin to Kristeva’s *phenotext* in contradistinction to the erotic body of the text with its ‘explosions of language that can produce *jouissance*’.<sup>2</sup> The latter is also Kristeva’s *genotext* as language challenges the cultural determinations of the symbolic. Barthes identifies this split between the language of culture and the erotic text (of the body) when he summarily notes, ‘my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do’.<sup>3</sup>

It is the individual body of the reader that necessarily coalesces the cultural body into a subject that I refer. This individual body of the reader is equally affected by its pulsations and rhythms as visceral matter as it is the vicissitudes inscribed by culture through social difference (gender<sup>4</sup>, class, race, religion, sexuality, and so on). Barthes neatly sums up this bodily exchange when he states that:

I control the contradictory interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (non-cultural) bliss [*jouissance*], and that I write myself as a subject at present out of place, arriving too soon or too late.<sup>5</sup>

My reference to the body of the reader recognises that he or she creates meaning through their body as an individual, as mediated by a range of complex processes that are both political and personal; ‘for the body is experienced largely through the languages with which we render to ourselves and to others our bodily sensations, and this language is highly socially differentiated’.<sup>6</sup> It is the role of the body in

writing pleasure and its beyond that I am concerned. This is the potential for the textualised object to rupture language in the form of a *jouissance* encountered by the subject as a trace of the real.

In the previous chapter I discussed the relationship between materiality and language, how materials and their processes generate different meanings that continue to move and agitate. I argued that the objects of this study do not have a stable presence, textually or materially, that they constitute a process of production as enunciation. This chapter will address the role of subject as a textual and bodily encounter with the rematerialised objects of this study. Post-structuralist concepts that centralise the body in language such as Kristeva's *phenotext* and *genotext*, as respectively the language of culture and the language of the body will be applied to argue that the derived object is in fact a lost object, an impossible object; an object cause of desire (the Lacanian *objet petit a*). This argument will extend on the previous contention of the derived object as being perpetually deferred, a trace, a play of the signifier. Bringing the role of the subject into this process will draw the different arguments together to examine how the rematerialised found object has a very different emphasis and underpinning to the readymade.

### **3.1 The textualised body: *the semiotic, genotext and signifiante***

In the *Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes differentiates between two forms of repetition. Endoxal repetition involves a repetition of content, of the signified being repeated to argue a point or a certain position, to push a value or a truth. In contrast, the repetition of the signifier is equated with the body and its rhythms and pulsations. The signifier, in this reasoning, acts as a trace of the body through utterance and production. It is the affirmation of 'the material as a value in its own right'<sup>7</sup> to which the repetition of the signifier is ascribed. The body is both a material object and a textual field in this context, and most importantly provides a means of writing that is not premised on the sociolect—the doxa of a social language. This conception is important to this study as the body of the reader is a textual site that maps meaning onto the rematerialised object; this is a process of bodily displacement through language. These operations of language can be theorised around Kristeva's *semiotic* and *symbolic*, and *phenotext* and *genotext*.

Kristeva identifies intertextuality as having much to do with the desires of the split subject: 'The subject is split between the conscious and the unconscious, reason and desire, the rational and the irrational, the social and the pre-social, the communicable and the incommunicable'.<sup>8</sup> Kristeva refers to *the semiotic* as that of the anti-social, anti-rational language of instinctual and sexual drives, in contrast to *the symbolic* which involves a socially signifying language based on reason, communication and unity. The *semiotic* must necessarily emerge out of the *symbolic* and in response to it. The *semiotic* is manifested within the *symbolic*, yet it is the potential of the *semiotic* to undermine and resist recuperation wherein its potential to startle, surprise and pierce operates. Kristeva's theorizing of the *semiotic*

is more specific than the use of the word semiotics to describe the general study of sign systems. She adopts psychoanalytical theory, extending on Lacan's work on the imaginary and the symbolic, and Freud's study on the 'primary processes' and the pre-symbolic stage of the *infans*.

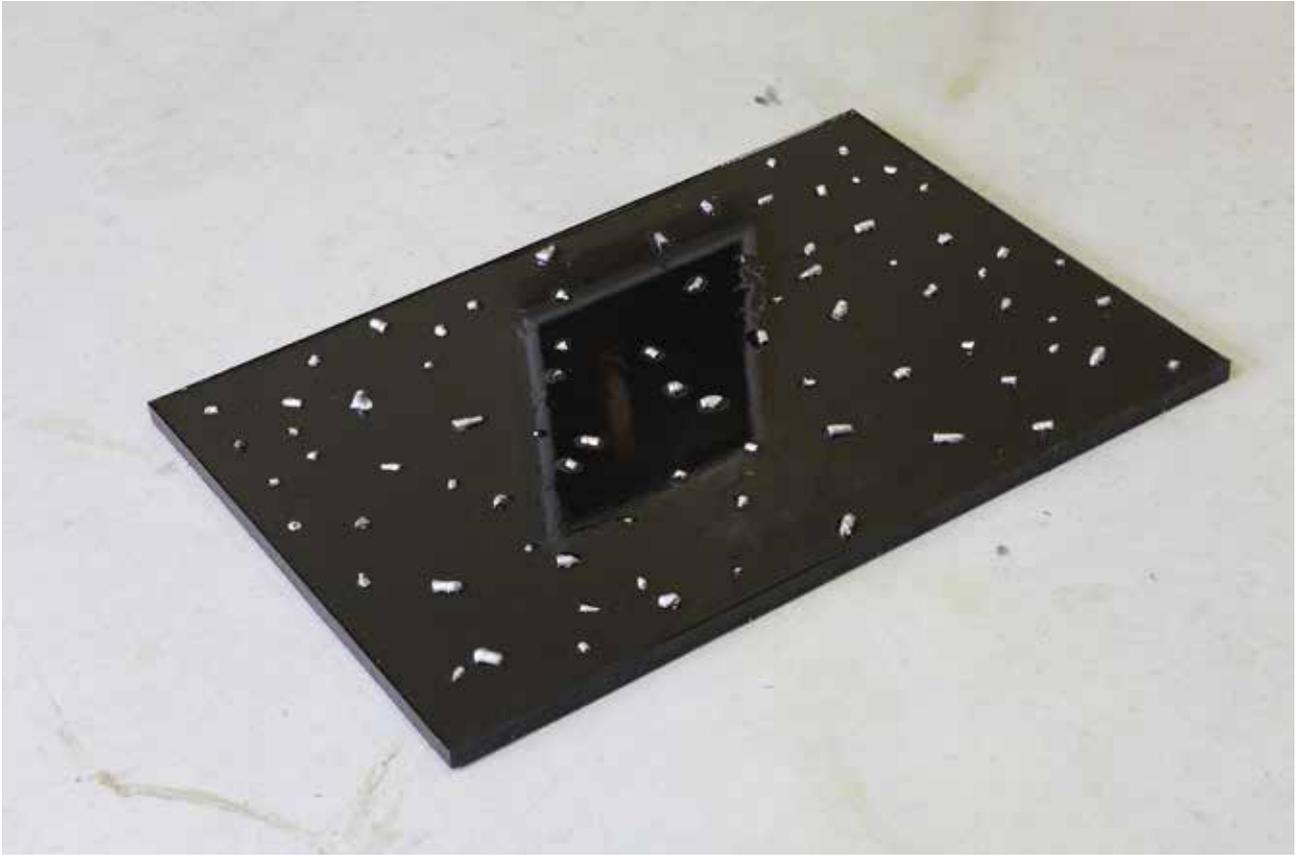
The *semiotic* exists within all signifying systems as a remnant of the pre-linguistic infant stage, the unmanageable and unpredictable element that may present itself unexpectedly. Whereas the *thetic-thesis* of the logical *symbolic* text presents a singular voice and unified subject, the semiotic operates with multiple voices and a fragmented subject. Building on this conception of the split subject in language, Kristeva develops two terms that allow the movement of text to be counterposed and interdependent: *phenotext* and *genotext*. The *phenotext* relates to the symbolic in that it is bound up with language in its logical communication based form. It defines a singular unified subject within a structure of the sign. Whereas the *genotext* is aligned with the semiotic whereby it stems from the pulsions and drive energy of the subject in the process of enunciation and the movement of the signifier. It is heterogenous, emanating from the unconscious.

I refer to my work *Slug* (2013) as a process of writing, this time in relation to the body as a 'space where significations germinate from within language and in its very materiality'.<sup>9</sup> The slug excised from the body of the subject, the space 'where significations germinate', the gap filled with the 'materiality of language' results in the production of text. This cavity made into a positive is akin to writing and rewriting, to the rematerialisation of the body through language and all the texts around *Slug*.<sup>10</sup> This 'body' to which I refer can be recognised as a slippage between the body of the subject as reader/writer and the body of the derived object as production. This is where the slippage ultimately occurs in *Slug*: the casting is the production of an absence, of the rematerialisation of an object that did not exist literally or figuratively. In other words, the slugs that are cast serve to reproduce nothing; they rematerialize only emptiness. It is in fact the emptiness, the nothingness of the gap whereupon we find the play of the signifier going about its mischievous and disruptive work. The *semiotic-genotext* materialises a text that is both figured through the body and marks its absence; like the uppercase 'T' incised into a soft material to be cast as *Thus* (2012). It disseminates a writing derived from the cavities of materiality as an incised moment of loss in the split subject. The rematerialized spaces in *Slug* form an absence that allows the reader-writer to inscribe this loss through language and thus fill it temporarily with the object cause of desire—*objet petit a*. It is this perpetual and repeating loss whence the material object continues to necessarily work the processes of the Text, and the processes of the Text work the constitution of the subject.

Through the concept of the *semiotic-genotext* I contend that the subject may write their bodily relation to the derived objects of this study; that the subject may interpret their own materiality in relation to other materialities. In the Barthesian sense the body of the writer/reader operates as a metaphor for the text. Though the processes of the text may affect the body in physical ways, I am concerned with



Brett Jones, *Slug*, 2014, lead, paper, resin, cloth



Brett Jones, *Slug Oil*, 2013, lead, resin

the body as a textual translation of materiality. As in Derrida's *cinder*, it is the body in its naming of not being there, that makes for its material otherness and thus the subject's desire.

Another kind of absence functions in Rachel Whiteread casts of the spaces beneath and above mattresses. In Whiteread's work the casting becomes an object quite distinct to the mattress, yet indicating its imprint. Whiteread is concerned with the traces of histories in these objects and their corporeal relationship to the human body, as she remarks in relation to *Untitled (Amber Mattress)*, 1992: 'it always gave me a shock, as if someone was just sitting there, or was slumped up against the wall'.<sup>11</sup> This idea of a metaphor of the body functions as an obvious connotation with an imprint of a mattress surface. In my own piece *Eight to Nine* (2013) I cast the mattress as a fully moulded form that implicates the body of the reader not as a metaphor for the object, but rather as an object that may cause desire in its production or imaginary use. However, this rigid and hard object indicates a certain ambivalence of its sensual associations as it plays with the combinatory signifier of its naming and function. It may be a copy of a mattress, but also a bed for the resting of cast detritus; a base as a pedestal for the forsaken, discarded. But these objects that lie (or rest) on top are equally shifting and combinatory, making any settling on a signified evasive and inconclusive. There is no rest for the signifier as it agitates the text for the reader, who may project a certain possibility of lying or not lying with the objects scattered upon it. It is this movement of the text back and forth without giving up a stable presence where the subject cannot find succour, where *signifiante* does its work.



Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Amber Mattress)*, 1992

The rematerialized body in translation is in fact the material signifier running or mobilising its processes of *signifiante* through the Text. *Signifiante* is a production of the *genotext* in operation whereby conventional signification is undermined and fragmented through a loss of the subject; the dissolution of a singular unified voice. *Signifiante* identifies the process by which the body is translated into a textualised field with the rematerialized object. I apply this theory of language as an important tool to present a more layered and complex case for the found object that is rematerialised.

### 3.2 The material signifier and the subject

It is the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems.

—Roland Barthes<sup>12</sup>

This project develops a production of objects and texts that may initiate each other, coalesce concurrently or take place solely in written form. Objects are always

textualised irrespective of whether they have been made or not; in the Derridean sense they contain marks indicating a past and a future. The written word has been a means of prefiguring a material presence at least since Duchamp's extensive notes for the *Large Glass*, becoming a standard mode of practice with conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s such as with Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965-7). Extending on the notion of object as text (art as idea) through dematerialised conceptual practices I contend that the derived object occupies a continual process of production as does the subject. This position recognises the transpositional relations of the subject and object as completely mobile and deconstructive. It locates the role of the subject as a writer of the object within the constitution of the object itself, resulting in a rematerialisation that is affective on object and subject alike. This argument differs from conventional practices around the readymade that generate a separation in the textual field of the subject and the object, whereby the object as text is anterior to reader-writer. I argue that the subject and the object are written concurrently through text as a material production. In this never-ending process the subject is *on-the-line*, their image-repertoire is fractured and the insistence of a core is undermined through duplication and copying. In all of this it is the fragment that emerges as the only possible trace of the processes of the material text and the subject's body. This material text is always foreshadowed.

This process of fragmentation, of the subject losing unity, can be realised as a 'figuration of the text', rather than the text 'representing' something. In this reasoning the text assumes a split body, a multiple body that confers upon the subject a certain *jouissance*; a displacement of the subject's own body into the object as text. The text of *jouissance* is unstable, and therefore not able to recount pleasure; it cannot be pinned down—like a dead specimen—or have its contours defined—again, the outline of the body in chalk. Instead the text of *jouissance* causes the body to shiver, to palpitate, shudder at the thought from nowhere, as the signifiers cannot be located in relation to anything; the body as a fluid site of writing and rewriting: as Barthes notes, 'all these movements attest to a figure of the text, necessary to the bliss [*jouissance*] of reading.'<sup>13</sup>

Take the word 'alas' from the Latin *lassus* weary, which forms the basis of lassitude: lack of energy, weariness, weakness. It is also a shifter, a movement from one signifier to another: let, allow. This word *Alas* as the title for a derived object, a photograph and a piece of writing may connote a certain resignation, weariness on the unstoppable energy of language. *Alas* (2012) is an object made from composite parts, an object formed through various past histories, an object figured through the body. Whence this object, the object of these words, seems to function as a process, a process of language that provides an illusion of stability—the concreteness of material form. Yet, this object called *Alas* is also a photograph of something that resembles it. I have no assurance of a beginning, an origin, and in not having this sense of an anchor point I am free to write, the reader is free to write. The production, the enunciation as a process of unfolding proposes the object of attention; the normative functions of language bind us in the symbolic. Thus, if I am to describe this object in its physical materiality I can simply sum it up in one short paragraph:

A small vertical curved form approximately 12 cm tall and 4 cm in diameter stands with what appears to be human hair flowing out through a hole in the top and another the base. The black hair rises about 20 cm from the solid blackish brown object to which traces of a burnt gold colour signifies bronze, presumably a casting of a found object (due to the texture and irregularity of the form). The hair is thick but wispy, with what looks like gold wire laced through it; being mostly obscured by the hair, it may in part be acting as a support device.

There is no *signifiance* here, it is simply the *phenotext*, the sociolect functioning in its lisible form, without connotation. The text is anchored, at the service of a language so familiar, so normalised we read its mattness as a straightforward description. Yet if it was slightly altered to introduce possibilities for writing (*écriture*) and subsequently for the *genotext* to peep through, the Text may take a turn, generate movement:

A burnt blackish brown form curved form approximately 12 cm tall and 4 cm in diameter stands, curving inwards slightly at either end. Human hair flows out through a hole in the top and the base. The rich black hair rises above in wispy clumps with fine gold wire woven through it; a black flame with flickering light. The solid bronze form gives ballast to the dishevelled organic matter that signifies the body (perhaps after death). Can this be some kind of memento mori?

Through association and connotation, this writer pries open the signifiers, writes his own reading (connotations), while leaving enough space for the reader to further speculate and continue the writing. This paragraph is still firmly anchored in the expectancy of the symbolic, but what it is attempting to demonstrate is the role of the signifier in generating movement, in mobilising the text. Yet this movement is limited to conventional symbols, syntax and grammar: in short a socially prescribed language; second order meaning. A text that truly turns back on itself (reverses), stranding the reader in spaces of uncertainty would be the text that recognises and accentuates the fragmented subject. This fundamentally alienated subject would receive no succour, no comfort or affirmation in such a text. This is the operation of *jouissance* where the *semiotic* may puncture the reader; where Kristeva argues for the radical potential of poetic language. It is this incident where the subject confronts the brute materiality of their own body; as in Barthes' punctum it can occur as a deferred loss, one that may be written though an object cause of desire.<sup>14</sup> It can also be a trauma precipitated by the real.

Hal Foster, citing Freud via Lacan, develops a thesis around the deferred traumatic event as a marker of the effect of avant-garde actions on subsequent practices.<sup>15</sup> This deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) registers the earlier actual event through a recoding, and thus it functions as a delayed traumatic experience (trauma can only operate after the event). I am concerned with a transposition of the deferred *event* into semiotic theorisation of the deferred or derived *object*; an object in both the

textual and material sense. This notion of the object transgresses a stable presence as it moves through language and material forms continuously.

### 3.3 The role of the image-repertoire in writing the object and the body

What we are seeking to establish in various ways is a theory of the materialist subject.

—Roland Barthes<sup>16</sup>

Barthes is talking about the ways the Text can affect the reader through pleasure and potentially *jouissance*, for the subject to recognise the illusions to which he or she surrounds themselves, to acknowledge the ‘schism in the subject’ and the multiplicity inherent in any notion of a subject. He is especially concerned with ‘this body of bliss [*jouissance*]’ for all its biographical, historical, sociological and neurotic processes.<sup>17</sup> The subject adrift attempts to locate itself through the processes of the imaginary as a series of images to provide a sense of unity and thus pleasure. However, the subject is constantly in the wake of a potential *jouissance*, the unfolding of the Text, to turn back with a shudder, an unexpected transgression of pleasure into a moment where the body is distorted, displaced by language.

Kristeva theorises this as the return to the *semiotic chora*, whereby the pulsations, rhythms, pre-logical aspects of the subject’s state prior to language pierce through the symbolic, being the social structures governed by language, logic and communication.<sup>18</sup> This is the Text that is radical in its potential to disrupt and rupture the conventions of communication and meaning making. This process can function with all texts including objects. For instance, my piece *Scuttle* (2013) is a casting of a broken thong hanging off a cast wedge-type object. This suspended moment where the black severed thong precariously perches on the white descent is acted out in the tension between the fractured subject and that of the dismembered derived object. The figured thong that slides down the solid block is the possibility of *jouissance*. The language of the body clinging to the symbolic is also played through the title as *scuttle* is both a verb of movement as in to scamper or scurry, and the action of intentionally sinking a ship. But as a noun it is a container to hold coal and the opening in a ship’s deck. This is one of the words with the mark of *différance* as it plays with the movement between containment and puncturing. Read through the psychoanalytic idea of *jouissance*, it is the text that fractures the subject. *Scuttle* is concerned with this encounter of the vessel with the hole or wound; the body that is ruptured, pierced.

The movement of the text in *Scuttle* thus functions on several levels as it implicates the body in the writing of the cast severed object that taps into the subconscious fear of slipping; of the falling subject in a constant state of undoing, into the disused mine shaft. In this sense I am arguing for the movement of these cast objects into another material that refers to the body of the subject. Just as the objects undergo this shifting of materiality, they concurrently generate a textualised subject that is manifest in the material choice and combination of these derived objects; for example the transposition of a rubber thong into bronze. This piece *Scuttle* brings



Brett Jones, Installation view from 'Species of Spaces' 2009. Foreground: *Intractable*, 2009, Hydrostone plaster, steel. Background: *Flag*, 2009, rice paper, tissue paper

together my arguments for a material movement that cannot leave the body of the reader intact. It is playing out this very *scuttling* of the unified subject through language and material form; a fragmentation of the subject's body.

Therefore, the body of the Text is split into fetish objects, into erotic sites.<sup>19</sup> Hence the potential for the Text of *jouissance*, the chance that the subject may evince their non-resolution, and that desire does not have a representation (a determinate object). Instead many objects or parts of objects may move in and out of the body of the Text; it is at once amorphous, lucid (like a jellyfish) and porous (like cast plaster). This body is not singular. It is formed momentarily as the divergent and differentiated texts coalesce, before drifting apart again like scattered slugs. The body has no stability, no centre; the text of enunciation has no single attribution: the subject's textual body is not particular; 'then perhaps the subject returns not as an illusion, but as a fiction.'<sup>20</sup> The representation of pleasure, as in the coding of pleasure, has no need for attachment to an object; the subject's body is itself a textual field, permeated by multiple and mutable 'I's (I search for a self that may be suitable—in that moment—to write an object of desire. But the object does not sit still, stay seated long enough to be fixed on the plate.) This Text is indeed figurative for it postulates desire but never attaches itself, never gives itself up (or gives itself over).

It is the moment beyond the object, after the object where the idea of *différance* or the trace holds the import of *jouissance*; the erotic site as incontestable in its absence, its 'unlocatableness'. The erotic site is thus the Text of *jouissance* to which Barthes may liken the material contrast between skin and cloth; 'It is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance'<sup>21</sup> or as a material production of the body; 'The brush can slide, twist, lift off, the stroke being made... it has the carnal lubricated flexibility of the hand'.<sup>22</sup> Yet the figured body may not always be warm and active, it may be a remnant cold and stiff. Thus my work *Whenever (objet a)* (2012) is derived from a flipper used for swimming. This blackened and battered, weathered and transformed object with a thick clump of black human hair is positioned in the space, that in another signifying system may be occupied by a foot. The black hair fills this cavity protruding through the front hole where toes could peep and looping around the back where a heel may be held. What concerns this writer is the veiled absence of the body from this object, not the literal flesh and blood body, but the imagined body of the subject as an encounter of the individual's will to separate their body, and thus appropriate its suffering and pleasure.<sup>23</sup> The body acts as a type of transference whereby the reader may encounter a body that is not theirs, but at the same time it is embraced. The image-repertoire functions in this process of transference as a seemingly discrete (individual) rendering of the reader. This rematerialised object enacts a displacement of the reader's physical body in exchange for a textual one. The reader as writer may register a moment of *jouissance* with this encounter. You may 'analyse' this text or simply absorb it into your body, like holes in a vessel.

The image-repertoire may in kind respond to these questions through the processes of the encounter: the Text weaves its likenings (likelihoods) for the subject. Whenever



Brett Jones, *Whenever (objet a)*, 2012, bronze, human hair



Brett Jones, *Whenever (Lady Cheryl)*, 2012, bronze, resin, Tyvec, rope

the subject attempts to write, this object moves into another copy, another degree of flat respect in its figuring. The movement of the body through and around this object opens the gaps for the Text to vibrate and splinter; to reverse the conventions to which the *symbolic* would like to hold forth. Instead the *genotext* tries to break through. This is the role of the image-repertoire; to give the reader the space (or perhaps better, a reason) to write their own body onto the body of the Other as a fiction.

In this sense the cast object is the symbolic Other, but it is also the imaginary other. The bronze casting of the found flipper with human hair is titled *Whenever (objet a)* to be distinguished from another object utilising a cast flipper *Whenever (Lady Cheryl)* both 2012. The big Other (A) is the absolute otherness of society, the irreducible alterity of the symbolic order; societal desires as channelled through language. The small other (a) concerned with here is the object of desire as constituted by the ego. It is the imaginary part-object formed through desire; the object of fantasy that is lack itself. It is this constant searching for this missing object of desire (*objet a*) to which this production of derived objects addresses through the processes of the Text. The piece *Thus* (2011) consists of two parts: a cast bottle cast in lead and a white resin chunk of something nestled into the neck of the bottle. But the two parts have come to rest temporarily, for they can just as easily be separated, moved into another combination or different materials. The skull like chunk of white resin has a 'T' inscribed into it. For this writer it is this 'T' where the movement emanates. Its visceral implanting in the found fragment becomes a metaphor for the transgression of the Text into *and* by the body. This letter is the signifier to which my body may shudder in that fold of language that is *jouissance*.

The object cause of desire functions within language, the symbolic order through societal desires; 'we are condemned to speak our desire through the language and desire of others'.<sup>24</sup> Yet, it is the imaginary as it operates through the image-repertoire, in relation to *objet a*, where this thusly named (*Whenever*) seems to float, adrift. This object can never be attained, it is the object-cause of desire: '*Objet petit a* is any object which sets desires in motion, especially the partial objects which define the drives'.<sup>25</sup> We then return to the figurative as it weaves our construction of desire for an object that is not an object but the missing object, the impossible object, the unattainable object; and this produces our image-repertoire: the procession of images that fuels our desire to form a complete image of the subject. But as in *Spout and Vessel* (2013) and *Vessel and Silver* (2013), the subject is punctured by holes.

This study is a production of images that is formed both in the imaginary and the symbolic; the idea of the image, its cause, and its production textually and materially all depend on the symbolic, but draw on the imaginary as part-objects of the *semiotic*; our pre-linguistic pulsations and drives as elucidated by Kristeva. Yet, the image-repertoire can lead nowhere, it can only produce an otherness of the displaced subject. This is the real, and the object of this confounding pursuit may be absence, the void itself, or rather the textual affects and traces of sensing this missing encounter.



Brett Jones, *Thus*, 2011, lead, resin



Brett Jones, *Yield*, 2009-12, bronze, resin

### 3.4 The real: *Jouissance* and the missing encounter

The real is the impact with the obstacle... The real is distinguished.... by its separation from the field of the pleasure principle... by the fact that its economy admits something... which is precisely the impossible.

—Jacques Lacan<sup>26</sup>

The piece entitled *Yield* (2009-12) enacts the textual movement through materiality that I discussed in the previous chapter. There are several objects from the same mould in different materials—bronze, lead, polyurethane. There is a photograph entitled *Yield* of two of these objects and there is another photograph of this photograph with one of these objects substituted in the same setting. *Yield* is also a photograph of a hole in the ground, a disused mine shaft. And then there is the writing around *Yield* that refers to these objects and their representations. They are all translations of objects of other objects, of texts from other texts. And thus I intend to draw in the relationship between the copy and the real. This loss of an original is the real peeping through as the missing encounter; a *jouissance* that displaces the subject and the object.

This idea of *Yield* attempts to trace the contours of the real, to find, or better throw-up some scraps that may allude to the processes of *jouissance*, to the devices by which the symbolic may elucidate the real. Insofar as the real cannot be located, fully symbolised or found, it is the process of the Text that circle the real to which I am concerned. It is the shadowing of this non-presence, the peering through the veil, the imagining through language of a form that alongside the afore-mentioned representations may provide some cues for interpreting the real. And that is all we can do: attempt an incomplete, problematic and schematic manifestation of the real that inevitably will be an expression of the symbolic. For the real defies the symbolic, defies the text, defies language, as Bruce Fink states: ‘The real is essentially that which resists symbolization and thus resists the dialectization characteristic of the symbolic order, in which one thing can be substituted for another.’<sup>27</sup> The real is that undecipherable ‘hard kernel’ (Freud) at the centre of the subconscious. As Lacan succinctly notes, the real is ‘that which resists symbolization absolutely’.<sup>28</sup>

The problem of the lost original in relation to the readymade and furthered as the deferred presence of the material object, is now elaborated by this function of the real to render a different way of thinking the rematerialised object. I argue now that that in rematerialising this found object it becomes an *objet cause of desire*, again not an object with presence but a cause, a reason for desire to envelope the subject in a precarious play of the Text. This is the play of the signifier again, but this time the subject may gain a sense of what is at stake through their own body. These moments of glimpsing the real as a trace may be found in particular instances of materiality in the derived objects of this study. For example the cutting of the bronze rope into the soft silicon; the organic material tension of the looped black hair against the cavity of the blackened bronze flipper; the lead spout pointing to the

viewer on the yellowy white wax vessel; the holes in the wall and the ceiling made into plaster or tissue paper; the many holes puncturing the wax or bronze vessel; the lead slugs immersed in the reflective black resin; the surrounding vegetation of the black hole in the ground; the 'T' inscribed in the white resin skull like form; or the other skull like form that sits on the parquetry floor in the photograph in lead and bronze, or resin and lead. All these material relations are situations where the missing encounter may leave a mark on the body of this subject.

It is the attempt to hit the real that can move the subject from the cause of this trauma into the symbolic by producing signifiers that will circumscribe the effects (affects) of the real. It is the production of signifiers that can mitigate these effects that introduce a cut into the real, and thereby allows interpretation through symbolization. Therefore these words, the text, the images and objects entitled *Yield*, all are symbolizations that attempt to provide a glimpse of the real, while binding the subject in the symbolic through *objet petit a*. The loss in *Yield* is readily apparent; the absence of the body and its brute physicality operate as cinders, signifiers, traces from the scraps in interpreting the real. These signifiers for the body of loss function on multiple levels, and may be outlined as a series of textual enunciations:

1. *A photograph of a hole in the ground.* This black rectangular hole, proportional to the human body, is surrounded by natural vegetation. But it is not the image per se that is of importance, it is that sense of being alone in a remote landscape and toppling into a hole to which the bottom is unfathomable. In other words, this photograph is a cipher of the unknown moment of non-comprehension of the body if I were to inadvertently fall into this hole; this moment may constitute the real, and of course it can only be imagined through symbolization. Thus we have a kind of signpost with this image, one that points towards the real but has nothing to do with the real, rather one that mobilises text in a fantasy of what the real could be. In the Lacanian sense, fantasy sustains the desire of the subject, and is a way of defending oneself against the intrusion of the real into everyday experience. In this context, 'the subject takes the traumatic event upon him/herself and assumes responsibility for that *jouissance*.'<sup>29</sup>

2. *A cast form in three different materials.* These three castings in lead, bronze and polyurethane offer the reader a specific relation in time and space. This experience becomes an image, a reconstruction through language. I confront two of these derived objects on the parquetry floor, the third is marked in the other two. But this other object could be in any material; it is a *différance* marked in a remnant of presence. The physical intensive production of these objects has shifted into a textual production; their making is transposed into language, now they occupy a multiplicity of versions as concurrently written (past and future).

3. *A photograph of two objects.* The same form in two different materials depicted on a parquetry timber floor. Their scale appears to be that of a child's ball. It is theorised by Barthes that something that-has-been<sup>30</sup> for the photograph to exist, yet

simultaneously identifying the object of the image as irredeemably lost, moreover that the photograph has the impossible task of revealing an essence of the subject. The materiality of these forms is displaced; the weight, the texture, the smell, density, the movement around the object, its thingness: in short the visceral relation to the body is not present. Yet, it is this loss in excess of pleasure, that also reminds us of our inherent loss as a subject; that our body reads the loss, in Lacanian terms, as alienation and separation (the imaginary into the symbolic). The photograph accords with the sense that something is always lost, beyond the realm of culture and language, beyond imagination and rational thought.

4. *A photograph of a photograph of similar objects.* This photograph depicts a framed photograph of two objects positioned against a wall on the floor with two of the same forms located in the same positions in front. Yet one of the forms is in a different material though in the same position, as though it has transformed with the click of the camera. This 'double take' inflects a conundrum as I write this photograph after an image to which I now only experience through the idea of the image. The subject has an affect of a displacement as they reconcile standing in front of this photograph of the objects with two similar objects in front, as they realise it by looking and thinking it through another representation. In other words, that whole scenario becomes this text and the fiction of the image; its absence and loss result in a fragmentation (disorientation) of the subject position. The possibility of a certain *jouissance* ensues.

5. *A piece of writing with the heading Yield.* A text to be voiced, presented in time and space, but also as words on the page. This text both prefigures and post dates the images and objects that accompany it. It is an enactment through the text, through writing that interprets the real as a fiction; for there is no other way which the subject can identify their relation to the real except as a construct of the text. This text weaves a web of ideas and references, circling the object that cannot be found; it is a performance staged to touch an absence, to defer the ultimate intractability of the real, and therefore to provide the subject with an imaginary and symbolic unity. It keeps the subject from toppling into the abyss.

Alas there is a constant deferment of the referent in this procession of signifiers. We cannot locate the real, for as much as we cannot determine a suitable, knowable signified. I return to Derrida's notion of *différance* as 'a thought which wishes to yield to the imminence of what is coming or about to come'.<sup>31</sup> But this 'coming' can never arrive as the present is perpetually deferred through the very process of signifiers that never settle, and thus the subject is constantly in formation and production—as are the objects of this study. This textual relation between the fragmented subject, whereby the gap produces the potential for *jouissance* and the real, finds the only possible redemption in the writing of the Text itself, and this text is constantly being written and rewritten forcing the subject to perpetually avoid the real through a search for the other or *objet petit a*. As such, this project could be understood as a search for *objet a* in an attempt to both trace and avoid the real.

## Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 129.
- 2 Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge England: Polity Press in association with B. Blackwell, 1991), 190.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 17.
- 4 Kristeva has questioned the different presumptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine through her focus on the socio-symbolic order in essays such as “Women’s Time” and “Stabat Mater”. She highlights sexual difference as a conception that is not constraining, but rather productive and freeing for women and their sexuality. I certainly acknowledge the different roles that gender can play through the individual encounter with the textual and material object.
- 5 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 62-63.
- 6 Moriarty, 194.
- 7 Ibid., 191.
- 8 Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2000), 47.
- 9 Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 182.
- 10 These include the different presentations of the physical works, its documentation and photographic remaking, and its written or spoken word forms.
- 11 Charlotte Mullins, *Rachel Whiteread*, Modern Artists (London: Tate, 2004), 35.
- 12 Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 3-4.
- 13 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 63.
- 14 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993).
- 15 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993). Chapter 3.
- 16 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 61.
- 17 Ibid., 62.
- 18 The *semiotic chora* is a concept Kristeva derives from Plato’s *Timaeus* to denote processes of language that refer back to the pre-language phase of the infant, The chora is drawn from the idea of the womb, but expanded to include bodily pulsions and rhythms that puncture the symbolic (social language). Kristeva make sit clear that these pulsions are applicable to all who have come from the mothers womb, and are thus not gender specific. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Chapter 1.2.
- 19 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 56.
- 20 Ibid., 62.
- 21 Ibid., 10.
- 22 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 86.
- 23 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 89.
- 24 Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005)., 70
- 25 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996)., 125
- 26 Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 167.
- 27 Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject : Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 92.
- 28 Lacan, Jacques in *The Seminar. Book 1. Freud’s Pares on Technique 1953-54*, New York: Norton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 66 in Evans, 159.
- 29 Homer, 89.
- 30 Barthes, *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography*.
- 31 Jacques Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Endinburgh University Press, 2000), 534.

## Still

The lounge room is warm. I return to the coal heater, still burning, but needing more briquettes. The standard lamp sheds a subdued light through its yellowed cloth shade. The shadows on the ceiling blend with the cracks and paint discolouration. I sit in the armchair with the clear vinyl over the headrest. There are turned pillars below the armrests, I run my hand along them feeling the lathe blade carve the concentric curves smooth around my finger tips. I place my feet on the small rectangular ottoman, it is also covered in vinyl. I can see myself sitting there in the photograph, watching the briquettes glow as I prepare the stamps to go into the album, my hands shaking as I slowly locate them on the page. Later in age I will give up with the glassine hinges, instead using the gum on the back of new stamps. I will stop bothering with the used ones—though still soaking them off their envelopes to place them in small cardboard boxes. The new mint condition corner or gutter blocks fill the albums now.

The familiar tick of the wooden mantel clock locates this space, chiming once on the half hour, and the number of the hour otherwise. The fire occasionally crackles, and besides the clock there is no other sound; though my electrical synapses have a constant buzz—I know this electrostatic sound well. The carriage clock makes no sound, for it has not been wound for a long time, yet in its diminutive size there are the absent voices, the texts of objects and spaces. The house is very still, the images shudder.



## Scuttle

A section has been excised from the sole of a thong, severing it in half. This sliced out section of about 4 cm would completely dismember the thong were it not for the straps that connect the two halves together. This gap, the missing piece of the thong is the element that cannot be filled. It is neither bronze nor rubber.

The white wedge object protrudes from the wall, its chalky texture conflates its physicality with the wall surface; a shift made congruent through a shadow that meshes the two surfaces. This shadow from the top point of the wedge as it is positioned against the wall creates another triangle shape that flows down the wall into what can only be called a distortion in the sense that something has been stretched (not unlike those fairground mirrors that stretch and distort the human body). Yet this shadow breaks into a kind of doubled shadow; two tones of shadow offset. At this point the gap in the cast thong is pronounced as a separation of both object and shadow, so much so that the shadow when momentarily taken in isolation becomes an independent object; an object that is itself situated in this gap between indexicality and an excised symbolic real.

Just as *jouissance* is constituted by a lack, a lack that cannot be accumulated, the gap in the shadow is that 'leftover of the Real which holes the Symbolic (in conjunction with the Imaginary).'<sup>1</sup> This shadow gap, or the *real* hole in the Other functions in confounding ways—as the enjoyment of the lack that is impossible to enjoy as the lack is *no-thing*. This is Lacanian *jouissance* circumscribing the pain beyond pleasure to which Barthes seeks in the Text that ruptures the reader, the Text that causes a shudder and displacement of the subject. That moment where the text can dismember the subject is not one that can be recuperated, described as such or imaged photographically. But if there is a sense of its future trace and possibility, it is that part of the shadow that is not the shadow; a *cinder*.

This shadow with the disfigured space where a gap appears (also the toe hole in *Whenever*, 2013), the rubber of the mould that makes the piece to be joined to the body an imprint made from rubber doubled or duplicated as the model inverts into mould. The text that may scuttle the *real* object is the workings of *objet petit a*; marking the void. That precarious space where the subject is reminded of their 'always already' lost unity. That remainder, the scrap that is a trace of the real, always inciting the subject to a return; a perpetual search for the object cause of desire.

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1 Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, Short Circuits (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 185.



## Sand

No trees anywhere, but lots of green grass, and a sand coloured headrest. The shape of the headrest is quite specific; slight concave curved across the top, a convex curve vertically across the front; quite generic yet very specific. The requisite chrome rods elevate the headrest off the grass giving it a composure commonly reserved for old sepia photographs of ancestors. But there is no 'that-has-been' noeme in this image, nothing to authenticate a past reality.

It exists on an angle to the viewer, the footpath is running away at about 20 degrees revealing a curb and a small area of recently laid black bitumen in the left hand corner. The headrest is situated also on a slight angle in relation to the footpath, closer to 30 degrees from the edge of the image, enabling its left side to give a good sense of its form, as in an isometric drawing. The angle of view is also important; the footpath recedes obliquely to the ground; the eyelevel is close to the ground, possibly about 2 feet above. Thus the headrest has a kind of stature, not the same as ones' mother in the photograph, yet an object *into* and unto itself. Sitting in the foreground, close to, but not protruding above the horizon line its sand, buffed-slightly-shinny-worn colour elopes with the sea of regulation cut grass behind.

Some timber skeletons of houses in framing stages sit blurred on the horizon. They rise a little beneath the horizon line suggesting that they may be on the downside of a gentle slope to which the headrest sits on the upside. But the important thing is they are hazy; a haze of heat, or the blur of being out of focus, or the fade of my memory. Sand coloured sticks in various structural configurations. The sky is blue, but a subdued blue of an autumn afternoon, allowing the curb and the headrest to cast their shadows.

Then a device was invented, a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become, the corset of my imaginary essence.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993).



## Thus

The subject, doubled (or *imagining himself* to be doubled), some time manages to sign his image-system.

—Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

Two parts don't make a whole, they randomly come together, and just as soon may part. Their incongruity borne of a mutual alterity, each a displaced copy of an other, a feigned concurrence. Yet (when is 'yet' ever 'here?'), there is a fit that seems 'natural', appropriate in a formally functional kind of way; the manner in which parts on a machine always signify their role via their relationship with adjoining parts.

The two parts here have an unnatural fit, they are a nominal fit, an imagined doubling without reflection. Then, are they not copies? They are copies without originals, copies that have been signed into a different image-system, and thus doubled at the service of his notion that a pairing (signifier and signified) need not be duplication or replication.

Somehow doubling and duplication have become confused, but rather he thinks confounded. For there is little value in making signs so metonymically predictable, that after all is what we expect from conventional signification. Confounding the functionality of the sign, allowing it to double itself into an unverifiable copy, and then to pair with another copy enacts a secondary alignment that could be read as a metaphor for a subjective mythology; a textual trope devised to incite the reader to write the text.

Yet (again), I fear the writer of this text has been forewarned and thus already doubled. How to calibrate the semiotic process when it has been made transparent? The writer is self-conscious now and doubled as *he* is himself. A doubled text is a paring on behalf of the writer, an unlikely relation to two parts, but not a replication or a copy.

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Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 105.



## CONCLUSION

In this exegesis I have argued for a different way of conceiving the found object beyond the historical conventions of the readymade. This alternative path or afterlife of the found object is developed through processes of rematerialisation and textualisation. I have identified that the ramifications of translation occurring through rematerialisation are different to those of transformation that involve the readymade. These differences are played out in my conception of the 'derived object' as a text that is perpetually in movement forwards and backwards towards a past and a future, in *différance* to a stable presence. I have described this movement of the Text through the concept of *signifiance*, and how it may precipitate *jouissance*. This is the moment where the text displaces the subject, and where the derived objects of this study can be understood as part-objects. This textual rupture reveals the fragmented subject as a writer of the derived object. The subject witnessing their own separation may be the mark of the missing encounter; the real. I contend that the rematerialised object has this potential to expose the subject to this possibility of sensing the mark of the real as a moment of *jouissance*. This possibility is circumscribed by the imaginary and the symbolic, yet it is in the gaps as the text unfolds where these moments may occur. Therefore a textualisation of the materialised object is enacted through a series of displacements that concurrently expose the impossibility of a unified subject.

In proposing the radical rewriting of the found object through these inherent problems of constituting the subject, I am inscribing it through rematerialisation with a reserve of potentiality as it negotiates more complex and layered (woven) relations with the subject. This reserve of energy can be understood in the Lacanian sense as a 'remainder or remnant left behind by the introduction of the symbolic in the real'.<sup>1</sup> I refer to Derrida's (non)concept of *différance* as the traces of difference, of neither presence nor absence that constitute the subject. Continuing on with the problem of the deferred object, I have argued that the cast found objects in this study are analogous to *objet petit a*. They are a cause of desire that cannot be attained, always on the edge of becoming something else: another signifier. They do not rest as they are never fully constituted (part objects), and therefore reflect back the fragmented subject to which they depend. In this way they are always a remnant of something (*the thing*) that can undo the subject, expose the illusion of the unified subject. This problematic is played out through processes of material identification and retraction that are substantiated in the Materiality and Corpus chapters.

This practice-led research seeks a subject relation to the derived object that is based upon the impossibility of the object, yet a constant drive to fill that loss; to outline the deferred object. The pleasure is wrapped up in a shudder of the Text as it goes about its transgressions, transpositions and deferments. In other words, it is the very processes of the Text as they are acted out through *signifiance* and *jouissance* where the rewriting of the found object is to be traced. The reading subject as co-author, collaborator, scriptor holds an oscillating and shifting role; an unstable

space inherent in writing their subjectivity as they produce the terms of the derived object. The derived object provides no succour, no resolution, no affirmation or rest for the subject that must continue to write, rewrite and be written over.

This reasoning is different to the readymade as the defined object of designation that collects a series of recognised methods under its banner. Whereas the readymade is a product of language that is underpinned by that initial moment of selection, I argue that in rematerialising found objects their ability to be transposed into other textualities is more comprehensive and differential. This allows the derived object to constantly undermine itself as it never has a complete signifier in the form of a final materiality, a complete text or photographic image. I articulate this thesis of textualisation of the found object in relation to the readymade as a citation, in order to move beyond the readymade into a discussion of the problem of presence and the loss of the original. But the loss of the original is not enough. For these derived objects are more than lost. Their claims against an original is shifted into the psychoanalytic realm of the incomplete subject and the impossible encounter. In developing a relationship between the sliding object and the split subject, I contend that the objects as texts to which I work do not have a source or identifiable presence. And thus this process is commensurate to the subject that is always in a state of making and unmaking. This argument conceptualises the problematic relationship of the readymade, as it becomes stabilised by the systems to which it initially sought to undo or challenge. It also reiterates the mythology of the avant-garde as it sought to control the conditions of its reception only to have these strategies recuperated as standard methods of practices (as indeed all avant-garde strategies have become).<sup>2</sup>

I propose a different liberation of the found object, one that occurs through various processes of rematerialisation. This is indeed a liberation rather than a transformation as the rematerialised found object has no need to identify its moment of selection, it has no need to proclaim its institutional contextualisation. Instead, it reveals its own displacement, its own incompleteness—both materially and textually. In doing so it engages the subject as the writer and rewriter of what this impossible object could be. This play of the signifier, the institution of the trace, the jamming of communication all circle around this deferment of the referent. The derived object has this latitude of play through constant changes and combinations that the readymade through its reliance on a found or designated materiality cannot achieve. The mould is the indexical shifter of this play, and thus the processes of casting have been reformulated in this study as opening up opportunities that are more developed than the conventions of casting identical multiples in the same material (the history of fine art multiples). The mould is that element in material production that allows intertextuality to still be a rich source for the re-evaluation of found objects in contemporary art practice.

In reinvigorating post-structuralist theories of the text and the subject I hope I have reopened a space, reconstituting a set of different movements for the found object as I simultaneously demonstrate the potential to put these ideas into practice. The

object as text can realise a potential through writing and making that establishes the bodily relation of the object to subject as one of material vicissitudes. The 'derived objects' of this study are the object cause of desire as they weave their way through the subject.

**Notes**

- 1 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 125.
- 2 This process is particularly apparent in Surrealism where Breton struggles with a textual conception of Surrealism that is undone by other inherent forces. Ultimately some of Surrealist artists, such as Giacometti, abandon the struggle with the psychoanalytic subject in favour of a more pictorial and representation-based approach to object/imaging making.

## Yield

Some practice...a process of thought, speech and text...an enunciation...a production (including various fragments)...

I shall begin with a word: Yield. An enigmatic word, a word of movement and transposition. The verb being derived from Old English *yeilden* to pay, repay, produce, surrender. The noun before 1121 from *gielidan* a payment, cognate to Gothic *gild* tax. The sense of the action of yielding or producing, production, occurs in Middle English around 1450.

This word with its self contained opposites; to surrender, to pay or repay, to be taxed, co-existing with a production, a payment, a dividend. The first an identification with loss, losing, giving something up or away. The second with productivity, a surplus, a benefit, a gain.

The word contains an inherent tension, a contradiction of meaning, of signifieds. The instability, the mutability of this signifier—the word yield—provides an opportunity for what Derrida calls *différance*; for a play of signifiers leading to no stable signified—the spoken and written form of the word may not differentiate between something given or something given up (not unlike a Potlatch). This word plays on a deferral of meanings, for a certain textuality to ensue.

A certain yield is at stake, on the line so to speak.

So Barthes may add to the text:

Chance had produced that rare moment in which the whole *symbolic* accumulates and forces the body to yield.<sup>1</sup>

A subject speaks:

To float is subtracted from the yield; I can rephrase that (somewhat): a floating object gives itself up in order to be reproduced (*reinstated*) in its opposite. It is the emptiness, the negative space that produces the reconstruction. Why is my desire so intense for the yield of a negative space? The cavity, the gap, the blackness is there to be completed; transgressed into weight, density, solidity. The possibility afforded by the negative space recreating a desire for completion, the body *demanding* affirmation. The bliss realised in this scenario of rapture as completion, expenditure, is immediately understood as emptiness; the void is the realization of its inverse: the precedent to that which may be momentarily reproduced only to be annulled. The moment of loss, where that which is created is an erasure, a cancellation is in fact where bliss finds its temporary site; *jouissance*: the negation of the material body at the moment of its realization. My body seeks the gratification of fulfillment (the yield), yet it is the annulment, the retraction of this fulfillment where the implacable uselessness of the body, the hopelessness of the body provides the window of *jouissance*, a fleeting suggestion of what the real might be; where the body embraces its

emptiness as a foreshadow of death. The mine shaft, the water well, the void.

As you may note this enunciation functions as a Text—in the Barthesian sense—that is playing on both the notion of loss as in surrendering, and a gain as in a completion, the reward of *jouissance*; the scriptable (the writerly). Though, reward is not so straight forward as *jouisannce* is at once a loss and a gain, for the subject to gain this moment of *jouissance*, they experience this moment through loss. Yet, the subject is already split, thus *jouissance* is enacting a double, or duplication of this split. The subject is doubly divided. The text continues to evade.

In Lacan's conception, it is the encounter with 'the real' that eludes us. The real being the void, the abyss that we attempt to fill, an excess that can never be completed, absorbed into the symbolic. Barthes claims the 'that-has-been' of the photograph is what adheres the referent to the surface of the print. Yet, the representation is not the encounter itself: the tuché. The encounter has already transposed into image and text.

Trauma borrowed from the Greek is a physical or psychic wound. The Latin equivalent is punctum and adopted by Barthes as an aspect of a photograph that pierces, wounds the viewer. This moment of the wound, is the encounter with the real, where we experience the displacement of the subject as multiple self's. Where one can observe one's body peering into the hole, teetering on the edge, at the same instant that this is physically occurring. This is the moment of trauma, the confrontation between an external stimulus and the subject 's inability to understand these excitations; a glimpse of the real.

Lets go back to the text. To make a note on translation:

The binary of floating and sinking acts as a play on yield as an act of giving up or one of gain. A dangerous surplus Derrida may say, for where is the specific meaning of this text, the reconisable signifieds? Where is the certainty of intent, a relevant translation.

Hence the problem: How can this image be rewritten by the reader when a kind of explication has already been provided. So the image on the screen, these words (chains of signs), my voice (the grain of the voice), this context (perversely expectant); the risk of translation, the risk of writing.

The photograph *Yield* suggests a particular writing of a physical encounter. The abyss, the black space, the void, there is a visceral reaction: the subject's body is multiple. The language of terror, that fundamental instinct, the signifiers of fear are inside and outside of rationality. This is the body denying its futility; it can see itself as an image of precariousness, alterity, uselessness in the face of physical experience, yet the signifiers are readable as a displaced image, rather than an unfettered actuality. The subject must make reason through language (the symbolic), yet pierced by the semiotic chora (Kristeva), haunted by the real. What is the bodily relation to this hole in the ground? How does the body figure proximity, depth, mass, darkness?

The doxa of recognisable, readable signs provide some security. The gap, the fissure, the break in the symbolic is what terrifies .

I (a subject) can see my body peering into the hole, on the edge of the abyss. I can sense that moment of loosing balance—when the image is taken, where fear is transformed, into text, this writing, these spoken words, this photograph. The bodily reading of this encounter is reconstituted as a flat image; how can this encounter with the real have anything to do with this image? The image now exists for itself, it has been set free from the subject, the signifiers are free to do their own work. The relation is now with the body of the reader, this subject has moved on.

And so the problem is recast as one of a material reading through the so-called indexicality of photography.

One cast in white hollow polyurethane the other in solid lead. They sit facing each other, slightly elevated as irregular forms. But how can I know they are facing each other? What determines that this is how they should be seen? Why cannot they be viewed from multiple directions? I refer to their other copy: the photograph. I privilege this *other* copy over my physical spatial engagement with these objects. I recognise these objects through this photograph—for the time being or as I write these words—because I can locate the relation between these objects as copies that have been again copied with affirmation, the noeme of photography. But I am perplexed—self-consciously—by my desire to fix them with a photographic copy to which could be one of an infinite number of angles, lighting, positioning, framing, colour balance, contrast and setting. Similarly, as I chose a discarded object to cast for its ambivalent qualities, I am again afforded the choice of an image that will provide a particular and singular copy amongst many possibilities. So I choose one that can act as a satisfactory copy, a relevant translation, one that can be separated from what it is copying, to exist as an object in its own right; another copy without an original.

One cast in bronze the other in solid lead. They sit facing each other, slightly elevated as irregular forms. But how can I know they are facing each other? What determines that this is how they should be read? The materiality of the signifier mobilises the text; *signifiance* privileges the disruptive aspects of language, the possibility of *jouissance*; a yield not without its debt. The photographic print, the pixels on the screen, the bronze object, the lead object, the polyurethane object, these words on paper, these verbal enunciations, phonemes, syntax, grammar; all signifiers on the run, agitating, yielding a subject that—is in affect—a weave of fragments. A subject written, rewritten, and overwritten with text, constantly forming only to be erased... (again)



### **Alas (again)**

the erect surface curved evenly upward whence a shape makes for an idea, a discourse not without a repertoire of words so versed there are minor variations expected, the I of the text has no passage here, there is substance and matter, the skin, blood and bone absent to return upon a text, a surface that weeps like a feathered smudge, a production always desiring the Other as the voice of skin, cadence, and gesture for tension taught and trained communication is a mishap, of intention without announcement, or at least the semiotic returns furthermore the caress pronounces, slipping, upright, entangled, all afloat, a drift of hair gold black bronze traces the skin if only for want of the imago far in the distance becoming past, indexed to the instrument defining the seam, finger tips scribe, brush, proclaim—the assertiveness of language to be ruptured, pierced, penetrated; lightly and without effort—an eruption without violence (no war of language, no self defence), hair is not a brush, the sweep, the jawline, the chin is painted in air, the thought diminished, not written, but loose or lost rather to the motion of the scribe running blind without provocation necessary words tumble as lilted rejoinders too skittish, transparent, long though a strand is picked and placed, joined with gold and bronze, where does it reach enflamed, no air it flares up, not I, only the object cast off copy, the text circles not so lightly—though foreshadowed to float on a sublimation, a *jouissance* that runs ahead again and again to the words already spoken, written, dreamed—and for want the text may not end



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# Notes on the index

1. In regards to casting and photography we presume indexicality as the primary mode of signification, especially in sculpture multiples, as well as with photography in its pursuit of depicting an intractable relation to reality.<sup>1</sup> Both casting and photography enact a representation that is perceived as cathected to the referent (the object). Yet this is performed in two quite distinct ways; one through a three dimensional imprint from a mold taken from a model or so called 'original', the other through the transference of light onto paper or screen surface to create a two dimensional image—'flat death' as Barthes would term the photograph in relation to images of the human subject. Rosalind E. Krauss in her account of 1970's conceptual practices drawing on Duchamp through the lens of semiotic and psychoanalytic concepts fails to sufficiently complicate and deconstruct the presumption of indexicality, especially in relation to photography. But also in cast objects as highlighted in her discussion of the work by Duchamp *With my Tongue in my Cheek* (1959) where the cheek cast in plaster is taken as an index while the line drawing on paper is described as functioning iconically. Given *Notes on the Index*<sup>2</sup> was written in 1976 we benefit from the ways Krauss isolates conceptual practices within an indexical model, thus affording future critique on the ways artists have dealt with the 'crisis or representation' and the irreparable fissure of the Saussurean sign.

2. Much conceptual art from the 1970s entrusted the photograph to fix what was otherwise unfixable through its temporal nature (happenings, performance), site-specific context (limited or non-accessibility) or simply as the best medium to document an activity otherwise undocumentable (time based process work). In effect much of this work was made with photography as having an equivalency to an experiential or physical manifestation. In other words, the referent and its image were conflated, joined at the hip in order to prove the event or object existed while transposing this event or object into the photographic 'work'. They became inseparable and in some cases the photograph elided any physical object or event that may have preceded it. This is the departure point from which this series of notes emanate on the unreliability and subsequent rupture of the indexical sign, lightly scripting the objects and images in this project that appropriates Krauss' essay title. One such image is coded through the traces of objects left by stains. *Stain in three parts* (2013) directly addresses the function of the indexical sign that presumes something that has been. In this wall work, the stains suggest objects since removed. Yet the absent objects are understood as textual traces in the Derridean sense, it is the past and future trace. As a text these marks are thoroughly inscribed by other events and future textual transpositions. The physical presence of the stains is written by what is not there, and it is 'that-which-is-not-there' to which these objects and texts circle.

3. It is this question on the function of photography as a document or record to which we are in part concerned. More specifically it is the relation between the photograph and that other indexical practice of casting where the two dissolve into each other in a confusion of origins and referents; where the writing and the accompanying visual forms may engage in a textual play (text is the primary vehicle to explore this play). Barthes and Kristeva refer to significance as the mobility of the signifier that cannot be fixed to a signified; the possibility that meaning is confounded, communication is jammed. This fracturing of the sign that emerged as fundamental to post-structuralist theories of the late 1960s was directly adopted by much conceptual art in the 1970s and the accompanying art theory. Krauss makes a point of the 'pervasiveness of the photograph as a means of representation'<sup>3</sup> in the 1970s as central to an indexical model that deconstructs the conventional sign into a trace, yet a trace that figures a presence. For Krauss the index sustains the existence of what otherwise would dissipate, evaporate or be incidental to discursive models of art theory. The argument I outline here lies in a more problematic textualisation of the object beyond the indexical model. *Inside-out* (2013) operates as three visual texts: a section of wall, a photograph of the section of wall, a casting of the section of wall. These texts unfold as the reader negotiates the space of their placement and material relations. Yet, the confluence of these representations that bear some likeness is not a line from 'a' to 'b' to 'c'. The displacement of the casting from the wall surface via a mold enunciates a trace that is produced by the whole symbolic order of citations and quotes; it is not a simple matter of making a casting of a section of wall. The sink that has been removed to reveal three plumbing holes and stains on the wall releases various possible references; the staining that occurs on the opposite wall runs around another plumbing fixture; the *Spout and Vessel* that sits below the cast wall area recalls Duchamp and the myth of the Argo; the black tray of *Slug Oil* is associated with the liquid stains having solidified, and so the text weaves its web. The point is that *Inside-out* cannot figure its presence any more than the text can confirm an origin; the traces are linguistic ghosts.

4. Instead of the trace as an indexical mark that figures a presence, we may detach the trace from its function of signification and determinant of presence. I propose a model that identifies only to eschew the reliance of meaning making on any trace that presumes an origin or prior state, whether it be an event or object. This modelling touches upon aspects of Derrida's writing on différance and trace, notions that are themselves furthered in Foucault's *La Cendre* (translated as *Cinders*). It is the cinder as a trace that can be anything but itself to which the presumption of indexicality is pulled apart. In other words the cinder is 'a remainder without remainder' or 'something which is not'. Derrida dispenses with the alignment of the trace with the indexical sign, taking the trace well beyond any presence into the notion of the cinder:

but that is just what he calls the trace, this effacement. I have the impression now that the best paradigm for the trace, for him, is not, as some have believed, and he as well, perhaps, the trail of the hunt, the fraying, the furrow in the sand, the wake in the sea, the love of the step for its imprint, but the cinder<sup>4</sup>

The semiological understanding of the index that functions as the sign adhering to its referent, the signifier as conflated with the signified, as the naturalised (given) sign is imploded by Derrida in these few lines. For no longer can a footprint be so simple in its meaning of someone having passed; the trace or cinder, as it has become, is no longer causally or physically linked to a 'real' object or event. The index is shifted from the spatial and temporal world into the evasiveness of the word, into a concept that has no origin, that immolates at the origin. The referent is textual.

5. The material object can be understood as a textual productivity, that is a trace, a ghosting, a gap. In this Derridean logic there is no existence of the object beyond its role as signifier of the signifier, its presence is non-presence as it is constantly deferred. It casts back to a past while moving into the future; as a difference the object, in its trace, occupies a (non)place of movement and différance. Therefore the signifier of the object in its textual syntagmatic chain is an element that is always in referral to another element that is not present. This element is the trace of other traces to which it differs. This difference is also the possibility of the forms created from negative spaces cast in another material and imbedded in a black field. *Slug Oil* (2013) is occupied with this movement of the trace, the displacement of the referent as signifiers are 'constituted on the basis of a trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system'<sup>5</sup>. The object is a productivity that occurs through the transformation and difference to another text. Therefore it is the textualisation of the object that leaves its trace rather than its material or physical presence. This is an important distinction as it identifies the motility and deferral of the signifier; this argument makes the very notion of an indexical trace an impossibility.

6. We can say that the process of translation negates, renders redundant any recourse to the original in the sense that the 'original' becomes a figure of language. As Paul de Man notes 'the translation belongs to the afterlife of the original, thus confirming the death of the original.'<sup>6</sup> We need to be clear here that it is the translation that renders the 'original' dead because it precipitates an 'afterlife' of something that *was*, in a similar way that a photograph presumes something 'that-has-been'. However, if we extend this conception of the 'death of the original' into the theory of the Text without beginning or end, then the death of the original serves as a notion in which to figure an original that never existed, though not to deny a precursor: the original that in its theoretical conceptions acts as a device that produces linguistic movement and play; the copy after the copy.

7. Duchamp precipitated a semiotic play with the meaning of words that extends to the mold and the casting, developing a distinction between "apparition" and "appearance" as inside-outside. Notably in the 'Nine Malic Molds' of *The Large Glass* (1915-23), but also in the enigmatic *Objet-Dard* (1951) he twisted meanings inside out and allowed objects to be liberated from referential function so as to be (re)written by the viewer. *Objet-Dard* part of the armature used to support the casting of the figure in *Etant donné* (1946-66), specifically her breast and rib area, is both a play on the negative/positive reversals and inside-out transpositions of the casting and the mold, as well as the text—the title plays on the 'd'art' with the masculine 'dart'; Adam's dart to Eve. As such *Spout and Vessel* (2013) is another trace that alludes to other events and objects, a fragment translated from the imprint of the mold, eschewing the vessel to which it is transported. The vessel is imaginary yet its trace is a pivotal linguistic movement. The vessel may be an amphora, an object that claims an origin, yet as in the reconstruction of the Argo we know that the original never existed:

The translation is a fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment—so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly—and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel, or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there never has been one.<sup>7</sup>

8. *Objet petit a*: the other as object cause of desire; alias a return (always a return) not without delay; a chimerical return.

The object cause of desire wrapped, presented, folded out (inside out): the mold.

Alas  
Lask  
Lasse  
Lassie  
Lassia  
Lassus  
Lassitude

Ashes of etymologies slip through our grasp, trickle through the gaps between our fingers, our voice; tiring as a silent vociferation. Yet as graphic marks on paper another energy restores them, a replenishment with a certain possibility to shimmer in différance, in the deferral of the referent.

9. We know much about the textual play of the absent *Winter Garden* photograph. We know that this photograph for Barthes provides the hinge to which ruminations on personal trauma projected as the photographic punctum may emanate. But we also know that this photograph is a linguistic construction, one woven from imaginary indexical marks and traces:

Barthes's liminal curtains cover his text and its invisible photograph... It is constructed and rhaphosized, or sewn together, from the fragments of woven grammar or texts.<sup>8</sup>

There is one colour image in *Camera Lucida*.<sup>9</sup> It is an image on the front page by Daniel Boudinet titled *Polaroid*, depicting light coming through bluish green curtains. It is the only image in *Camera Lucida* without the human subject. It is the fragment to which a translation breaks open; where the traces of the subject appear as a convulsion. *Polaroid (for R.B)* (2010-13) was made before the Daniel Boudinet photograph was sighted (the Boudinet image is not printed in the current English translation of *Camera Lucida*). It occurred as a translation from what was written about it, thereby treating the image as a text to which another text would emerge. This transposition of text into image undergoes reversals and duplications as the origin has no place or prior position. *Polaroid (for R.B)* is a visual text as the fragment of woven fragments to which the index frays.

10. *A figure of the text*, necessary to the bliss of reading': the body of the text 'split into fetish objects, into erotic sites'.<sup>10</sup> Hence the potential of the text for bliss (jouissance), the chance that the subject may be undone, that desire does not have a representation, a determinate object. Instead many objects, or parts of objects may move in and out of the body of text; the porous and amorphous textual body. This text can be said to have no body. Rather this body of text is formed momentarily as the divergent and differentiated texts coalesce, before drifting apart. The body of this text is drifting amongst other bodies, absorbing, meshing, conflating only to separate, disband, defuse. The body has no stability, no centre; the text of production, of enunciation has no singular attribution—the subject's textual body is not particular. Alas the representation of pleasure (as in the coding of pleasure) has no need for attachment to an object; the subject's body itself a textual field, permeated and perforated by multiple and mutable "I"s. He searches for a self that may be suitable (in that moment) to write an object cause of desire: "cinders there are". But his object does not sit still, stay seated long enough to be fixed on the plate. The object disperses, enacts a transfiguration as it becomes something else. This text may be read as figurative for it postulates desire but never attaches itself, never gives itself up (or gives itself over). This text can contrive to shiver, to shudder in the moment of voice, of enunciation as the subject reads (physically) a jouissance, when the object of desire leaves its trace; "of the others, cinder there is". Alas at the moment beyond the object, after the object where the idea of the disappearance holds the import of jouissance; the erotic site incontestable in its unlocatableness. The erotic site is thus the cinders of the text of jouissance, for the text in its apparition creates the affect (*objet a*) to which no indexed object could ever perform.

11. The mold is a kind of text that operates in the linguistic realm of the 'shifter': it only makes sense in the context of what it is supposed to utter, to produce. In the Lacanian sense if the mold operates as an indexical signifier (shifter), it is split between its stated function (to reproduce something) and its action of production (enunciation). The 'I' of the indexed author is similarly split as in the textuality of the mold. When one views the split subject as the shifter at work (enunciation) within a particular context (this writing under a pronoun), there is a relation to the duplicity of the mold as a site of a reproduction, while maintaining its unique 'objectness'. In other words, the mold states its purpose as a very particular and determinate one. Yet as it is the obscured internal surface that is the only reason for its existence, the enunciation is what is produced from the mold: the negative space of the mold is fundamentally split with the positive object that is produced. They can never be reconciled, though they are co-dependent.

We therefore have in the mold an object that is both indeterminate and highly specific in its function. It is an object that is produced to facilitate a constant production (enunciation). It is the object par excellence as an indexical signifier; a shifter for the enunciation of other objects.

12. The cast object must be recognised as thoroughly textual. It is derived from previous texts, it is contiguous (intertextually woven) with whatever its context of writing may be: its site and means of display, its reproduction in photographic form, the words that are written or spoken about it, etc. It is also textually imbued with social, economic and art histories. As a fragment that is found and then cast, reproduced in photographic form and written and spoken about, this object is non-specific in the sense that it is part of many texts that cannot be particularised. It is a supplement in the Derridean sense because it is the product of a larger discourse, of systems of language to which it is both part and separate to, as Derrida notes: 'Its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness'.<sup>12</sup> It is inside and outside these structures because it functions in both its absence and presence; it is premised on a web of productions: a prior object that falsely suggest an origin, the origin that is translated ("translation augments and modifies the original"<sup>13</sup>) into another material through the absent space of the mold. Yet the so-called original also existed in a prior state (another material text) that was molded. Further, the photographic text proposes its absence again ('flat death') as another supplement. To what? And so the centre is lost, or rather there never was a centre. We have the affects of the supplement, it never had an absence or a presence, only an affect, a virulence.

13. If the cast object is textually and physically incomplete then the photograph of the same object is doubly incomplete; it is a fragment of a fragment. Yet the photograph attempts to sign the imaginary object—as in Kristeva's semiotic—as complete, the flat plane of death presumes that the stillness of death provides an end to signification, for the signified to be stabilised. In this conception, the only death that occurs is the fantasy that the text can resolve itself upon death; the fantasy of death as the imaginary piercing the symbolic with the ideal of a transgressive nothingness, the void before and beyond language. The semiotic chora would have this ideal state where the subject and its other are indistinguishable, the imaginary persists—after the advent of the symbolic—through language, to conjure a space outside language so as to fantasise the possibility of a complete subject (without fragmentation); the symbolic return to the semiotic. Such an impossibility is made all the more urgent by the tacit realisation that flat death and physiological death cannot complete anything let alone resolve the incomplete subject. The subject is doomed to an infinity of incompleteness, and thus the fantasy of death is the imaginary peeping through the cloak of the symbolic. Death here functions as the drive that allows the subject to sustain its illusory sense of completeness, to disavow the real.

14. Alas there is a constant deferral of the referent in this procession of signifiers; we cannot locate the real for as much as we cannot determine a suitable, knowable signified. I return to Derrida's notion of différance as 'a thought which wishes to yield to the imminence of what is coming or about to come'.<sup>14</sup> But this 'coming' can never arrive as the present is perpetually deferred through the very process of signifiers that never settle, and thus the subject is constantly in formation and production as are these objects and images. The binary of floating and sinking acts as a play on yield as an act of giving up or one of gain. *Yield* (2011-13), the photograph of the mine-shaft and the lead object seek this gap, the deferral of the present. A dangerous surplus Derrida may say, for where is the specific meaning of this text, the locatable signifieds? Where is the certainty of intent, a relevant translation? This textual relation between the fragmented subject whereby the gap produces the potential for jouissance and the real, finds the only possible redemption in the writing of the Text itself, and this text is constantly being written and rewritten forcing the subject to perpetually avoid the real through a search for the other. This could be understood as a search for *objet petit a* in an attempt to both trace and avoid the real; in the same way the index may be considered an impossible definition of an object.

## Notes on the Index: notes on materiality

1. *Slug Oil* (2013): Lead slugs cast from molds made from the plug holes in the walls at Outward. Slugs imbedded in pigmented epoxy resin. *Slug Oil* occupies the central floor area at Outward that was re-concreted. It reflects the ceiling and the walls, but it also reflects *Polaroid for (R.B)* as though it is immersed in oil; how would R.B read the evasiveness of the photographic image in oil? The 'black oil' metaphorically runs down the walls of *Stain in three parts*. It may flow from the spout of *Spout and Vessel* (a leaky one).
2. *Polaroid for (R.B)* (2010-2013): The signifiers of the Polaroid photograph removed—contextual size, white frame of particular proportions—to open the potential of a rudimentary analogue technology into the digital realm. This transposition draws attention to the technical limitations of the Polaroid yet enhances its evocative and subtractive potential (less detail and information that is counter to the obsession with clarity and sharpness; faith that the photograph is closest to the referent through the most advanced 'capturing' technology). The intent was to imagine an image based on words and then to make that image guided by this language: the text that is turned into image.
3. *Stain in three parts* (2013): The stains accumulate over many years running behind the industrial sink in a workshop: the citation referred to as *Inside-out*. *Stain in three parts* is located in the rear, lower ceiling section of Outward, opposite *Spout and Vessel* (which sits below the deferred referent of *Inside-out*). The spout of *Spout and Vessel* points towards the central stain of *Stain in three parts*. The stains run from three horizontal fixtures since removed to run around three oval bathroom fixtures since removed. The stains being a range of substances from art pigments, ink and acrylic art mediums to shellac, Prepsol, and melted surf board wax mix and react as they chase down the wall to form pools on the floor.
4. *Yield* (2010-13): Upon entering Outward with a glance to the very rear a silver grey object sits in an open doorway that leads to another door into a bathroom. This small space in between the rear gallery space and the bathroom is where the lead object rests. The object even upon close inspection is indeterminate in its signification. Yet it is the close inspection of this object that reveals its partner image on the wall of the alcove—a view directly down a disused goldmine. This photograph confronts the viewer in the small space between bathroom and gallery, the openings and textures simultaneously confine and release.
5. *Spout and Vessel* (2013): An industrial indeterminate object cast in modelling wax sits on the floor below the traces of a former plumbing fixture—referring to *Inside-out*. The cast lead spout stands atop pointing towards *Stain in three parts*. The first version of Duchamp's *Objet Dard* (1951) was in plaster with a lead strip inserted into the length of it. The subsequent edition was in bronze with a painted lead strip. The vessel is the fragment of the whole that can never be complete. It is a reconstruction and rematerialisation in the false image of something that has been. Wax is a vicarious substance, especially its role in lost wax casting.
6. *Inside-out* (2012-13): The first text for this project was the mold made from a section of wall where a plumbing fixture was formerly mounted (above *Spout and Vessel*). From this area of wall the web emanated, not as a centre but as a moment of diffusion and release. The photograph of this section of wall is placed at the same height but located in the front area of Outward. It points to its Other in the rear of the space. Offset lying on the floor below is a casting of this section of wall. The thickness of the Hydrostone plaster makes it an object to which the other displaced referents cannot but form tenuous connections. This shift—to the side, down the gallery, in another material, in a photograph—all highlight the problem of the referent, the mold, the casting, the photograph, the text as textual displacements; inside-out.

Brett Jones works with ideas around the copy and the original. Using various reproduction mediums including casting, photography, video and sound he is concerned with the deferment of the signified. This involves a perpetual process of transposition as objects, images and texts generate displacements in an intertextual field.

He co-founded West Space in 1993 where he was centrally involved until 2008. He has exhibited in various non-profit spaces since 1991, received several government grants, generated and managed more than 20 projects including several international projects, published articles and presented papers at international conferences. He is currently undertaking a PhD at Monash University.

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# Notes on the index

12 - 26 October 2013

Outward, Launceston, Tasmania

[www.outwardproject.com](http://www.outwardproject.com)



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>But not forgetting its historical uses such as plaster death masks, busts, copies of famous sculptures, children's feet, and contemporaneously in architectural mouldings.

<sup>2</sup>Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 196-219.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Derrida and Ned Lukacher, *Cinders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Derrida, Christopher Norris, and Alan Bass, *Positions*, 2nd English ed., Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (London: Continuum, 2002), 26.

<sup>7</sup>Paul De Man, "Conclusions" Walter Benjamin's "the Task of the Translator," *Yale French Studies* 69, (1985): 38.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>9</sup>Beryl Schlossman, "The Descent of Orpheus: On Reading Barthes and Proust," in *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 149.

<sup>10</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>11</sup>Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 56.

<sup>12</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup>Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

<sup>14</sup>Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 534.