

The Recentness of Things

Bill Brown

Art has the habit of appearing in object form. The habit has been difficult to bring into sharp focus, though, no matter how aggressively art itself seems to summon us to do so. For all the scrutiny devoted to *Las Meninas* (1656) as a representation of representation (in the line of thinking that Michel Foucault established in *The Order of Things* [1966]), too little attention has been paid to the back side of the painting—that is, the image of the back side, the segmented stretcher supporting the monumental stretched canvas (the unevenness of its edges clearly visible), leaning against the large easel. Diego Velázquez does not expose this back side in a small gesture; it is a full-length drama. It is a drama that means to assert painting as a material act, and to assert the fact of the object form of painting, of the material support of the image, of the bulk of the production and the product. This is certainly not the point of the painting tout court, but it is a point *in* the painting, and an especially poignant point in our age of digital reproducibility when (as in André Malraux's photographically mediated *musée imaginaire*) physical detail suffers the homogenization perpetrated by the image. As though in anticipation of his masterpiece's ubiquitous reproduction, Velázquez bids his audience to remember: paintings have size and shape and weight.¹

A few centuries later (in 1966), Frank Stella also insisted on the object form of painterly production: "It really is an object. Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever he's doing. He's making a thing."² But in the 1960s such "objectness" came under attack on two fronts. One front was commanded by conceptual artists (such as Sol LeWitt, Robert Barry, and Lawrence Weiner) who were proclaiming that the artist's idea (expressed in words, directions, or diagrams) rendered the object itself superfluous. "Such a trend," Lucy Lippard and John Chandler wrote, "appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete."³ On the other front, in an essay that quickly came to structure much

of the critical conversation, Michael Fried posited objecthood as the phenomenon against which art, to be art, had to define itself: "modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood"; from such a perspective, objecthood as such was taken to be "antithetical to art."⁴

Neither front retarded the steady advance of the object, its increasing preponderance on the art scene in and beyond New York. And of course conceptual art was responding to its own sense of that preponderance—"during the early sixties when I began to think about art, the formulation was really 'art=object,'" Mel Bochner explained.⁵ And Fried was responding to Donald Judd's "Specific Objects," which had described a fundamental rupture perceived across a variety of art practices; he named more than forty artists who were producing work meant to be recognizable neither as painting nor as sculpture (but simply as the object it was) precisely because, in Judd's understanding, the vitality of those forms had been exhausted.⁶ "If changes in art are compared backwards," Judd wrote (with silent reference to the paradigm established by Clement Greenberg), "there always seems to be a reduction, since only old attributes are counted and these are always fewer. But obviously new things are more, such as Claes Oldenburg's techniques and materials."⁷ There were lots more by the end of the decade. Not only minimalism and pop but also, say, Fluxus and the earthwork artists made it clear that art had only just begun to recognize the potency of objectness, objecthood, specific objectivity.

At the beginning of our current century, a new interest in objects, materiality, and things has surfaced across the humanities and social sciences. As one historian has quipped, "Things are back. After the turn to discourse and signs in the late twentieth century, there is a new fascination with the material stuff of life."⁸ But that fascination can hardly hope to keep pace with the work going on between and beyond the disciplines—in the arts. Art now openly luxuriates in its object form and in the forms of objects, registered by the extensive use of assemblage, reconstellation, refabrication, and installation to rethink and rework

the objects of daily life: to stage some character of things as things that have yet to be grasped—indeed, to stage not the “material stuff of life” so much as the life of the stuff itself. Tara Donovan amasses vast numbers of everyday utensils (toothpicks, straws, Scotch tape, paper plates, buttons, rubber bands, etc.) and confects them into sublime objects, geomorphic or biomorphic, where the serial sameness of mass production gets dislodged into some other dialectic of quantity and quality. Styrofoam cups, gathered up and then suspended by nets from the gallery ceiling, become at once an eerie cloudscape and a hovering cellular organism, both beautiful and daunting. Sarah Sze constellates immense and obsessively intricate object ecosystems with a heterogeneous array of household products: Q-tips, tea bags, paper towels, fans, thread, lightbulbs, clamps, water bottles, twist ties, dried beans, ladders, house plants, pencils, desk lamps, sponges, plastic cutlery, duct tape, pens, and so on. The movement within the assemblages (which sprawl both horizontally and vertically) and the play of shadow and light and air seem to signal the vitality of some other network (outside the regimes of consumption and domesticity) through which these bits and pieces attain a quietly pulsating coherence only in relation to each other. While Theaster Gates refabricates the refuse from a construction site (fragments of lath and plywood) into monumental thrones, Danh Vo distributes fragments of a replicated monument (the Statue of Liberty) as isolated works.⁹ And the practice of painting seems no less drawn by the materialist experiment. Marie Krane Bergman, having made a career of painting nearly monochromatic large canvases (composed in fact of thousands of distinct, individuated marks of imperceptibly different hues of acrylic), has released paint from the canvas support, conducting “pours” that are subsequently scraped off of a flat surface and hung on a nail, turning painting into the “matter-movement” of paint that continues to alter its shape, however slightly, as it hangs.¹⁰ She now drips paint down hundreds of strings that are hung from the ceiling to form broad columns; the work thus assumes three-dimensionality while never not asserting itself as painting.

Things may be back in fields that range from political science to literary studies, cultural anthropology to sociology, but you cannot simply say that they’re back in the arts because, at least for some commentators (Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Lacan), art has always been the province where things (or the Thing or the thingness

of things) might become apprehensible. Indeed, it was the contention of Levinas in 1947 that the task of art is a matter of “extracting the thing from the perspective of the world”: presenting things in their “real nakedness,” uncovering “things in themselves.”¹¹ He thus assigned to art the role of overcoming the epistemological limits established by Immanuel Kant (that is, the role of evading the spatiotemporal grid and causal logic that determine human perception) but not, it may seem, without specifying art’s function in the context of a degraded twentieth century. He imagined that the “common intention” of “modern painting and poetry” was “to present reality as it is in itself, after the world has come to an end” (*EE*, 50). But “the end of the world” did not mean for him the destruction perpetrated by two wars; it meant, rather, the “destruction of representation,” of “realism,” and of the “continuity of the universe” (*EE*, 50). Indeed, even if Levinas could glimpse such an end (and thus the emergence of Being), it was, rather, the world’s persistence (exacerbated by two wars) that proved to be an intractable problem: that’s why the thing must be *extracted* from the world. And that’s why moments of modernism, like so much of today’s recent art, can be understood as provocations: aesthetic events meant to release things—or thingness—from the fetters of modernity.

Extracting things from the world is a matter of extracting the thingness of objects from the abstracting routine of daily life; of dramatizing some other thing about an object that is irreducible to its manifest form. It is a matter of disrupting common sense, of irritating the structure of phenomenology, where the object’s only job is to present itself to consciousness. Thingness—some other thing about the object, which is less or more than that object—irrupts in a subject/object relation, in which an inanimate object can assume the subject position. (To use a crude example: from the perspective of the magnet, the thing about the little boy’s red-and-blue toy truck is simply the ferromagnetic alloy in the steel; its material cathexis ignores the object form of the toy.) The *recentness of things* captions the recognition that art (which has always had the habit of appearing in object form) more straightforwardly assumes the task of dramatizing an object/thing dialectic. Making something “credible” (to borrow Judd’s term) can no longer resign itself to the object form; credibility lies in disclosing specific things about objects, some thing more or less than the object form as such.¹²

Like other fields, philosophy has now begun to chart the new world of things, which means, for philosophy, working to shake off the Kantian hangover, to escape

the subject, to release itself from the epistemological cul-de-sac and what Hannah Arendt called the “shackles of finitude.”¹³ Quentin Meillassoux points very simply, in *After Finitude*, to the perplexity that science provokes by making statements about events that are “anterior to any human form of the relation to the world.”¹⁴ For on the one hand, according to the Kantian tradition, we can only ever apprehend “the correlation between thinking and being”; the act of thinking cannot be adequately separated from its content; we can only engage what is given to thought; we can say nothing about things in themselves. And yet, on the other, science repeatedly thinks what is independent of thought. The “fundamental point,” Meillassoux insists, is that “science deploys a process whereby we are able to know what may be while we are not”—a process of rationalizing and mathematizing questions and answers about what occurs before and beyond humanity (*AF*, 114–15). Although there is always an obvious Kantian rejoinder—our knowledge of the before and beyond remains *our* knowledge, accessed and shaped through *our* math and *our* physics—the interest lies in the fact that philosophy is willing to indulge in realism, no matter how speculative, and to pursue ontology (the study of what is and how it is) and not just epistemology (the study of how we know what we know).¹⁵

Through an altogether different engagement with science—through the anthropology and sociology of science, and what has come to be called science studies—Bruno Latour has not only drawn attention to objects but also insists that only an “extraordinary form of radical realism” can begin to assuage that “catastrophe from which we are only now beginning to extricate ourselves,” the catastrophe named Kant, which was only exacerbated when “society” took the place of the transcendental ego.¹⁶ In Latour’s effort not just to grant objects their manifest reality but also to demonstrate their role as participants in sociality, he has repeatedly specified that his aim is not to grant things subjectivity “but to avoid using the subject-object distinction at all in order to talk about the folding of humans and nonhumans” within one or another actor-network (*PH*, 194).¹⁷ He has experimented by discarding modern distinctions to the point where, most recently, he advocated abandoning the term *human* precisely on behalf of assessing what geologists now call the Anthropocene era and on behalf of imagining some new relationship to Gaia.¹⁸

Latour has repeatedly argued that “sociologists have a lot to learn from artists” when it comes to recasting “solid objects” into “the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense” (*RS*,

82).¹⁹ Most simply, he has defined modernity itself as the project that established different “ontological zones,” radically distinguishing—despite their ongoing interdependence, their de facto imbrication—the human from the nonhuman.²⁰ This is why I have maintained that “modernism, when struggling to integrate the animate and the inanimate, humans and things, always knew that we have never been modern.”²¹ Whether you consider the constructivist effort to overcome the “rupture between things and people” by “dynamiz[ing]” the thing into something “connected like a co-worker with human practice,” or you confront the material objects that act and speak on their own in the Circe episode of *Ulysses* (1922), or you linger in front of Meret Oppenheim’s *Le déjeuner en fourrure* (her cup, saucer, and spoon in fur, 1936), you experience modernism’s persistent effort to blur (or expunge) the lines of modernity’s ontological map.²² This is one reason why Levinas could understand modern art as the effort to disclose things in themselves.

Latour means to conduct a counterrevolution (to Kant’s “Copernican revolution”) that has political, specifically democratic results, with democracy newly conceived by “adding a series of new voices to the discussion, voices that have been inaudible up to now”: “the voices of nonhumans.”²³ But it is from the object’s point of view (if you will) that Graham Harman has objected to Latour’s “flat ontology,” in which all human subjects and nonhuman objects have been recast as actants, and thus the relations among them taking precedence over any discrete entity; “The more we define a thing by its relations, the more we strip it of autonomous reality.”²⁴ What remains elided in such a scheme is what you could call the object’s relation to itself (a relation *within* rather than a relation *between*), indeed the tension (at times quite a classical tension) between the object and its properties. For Harman, the real object (as opposed to its qualities, notes, accidents, relations, moments, and so on) always withdraws, both from humans and from other objects. While Latour considers an object to be “nothing more than its sum total of perturbations of other entities,” Harman focuses on the “mysterious residue in the things hiding behind their relations with other things” (*PN*, 158), the residue that amounts to the intrinsic object itself, which always “stands apart” (*PN*, 208). Harman’s universe, “filled with a single genre of reality known as objects,” is necessarily characterized by its own ontological flattening, between what we commonsensically call the real and the imaginary (including centaurs, literary characters, and concepts).²⁵

But object studies has been willing to assert that “flat ontology is an ideal.”²⁶ It would seem as

though, insofar as it inhabits that ideal (in the realm of metaphysics), the project can make little purchase on the inanimate object world, the artifactual, or the nonhuman, the specificity of which has been theorized (ontologically) out of existence, if only on behalf of declaring, quite rightly, that so-called inanimate objects have no less being than so-called human subjects. (Moreover, it is easy to state the obvious—that flat ontology is flat, and it is ontological, only for human subjects.) And yet throughout this body of work there are insights, descriptions, and vocabularies that help to make sense of the recentness of things in art. You can think of Sze’s object ecologies as exemplifying what Ian Bogost calls “the stuff of being [that] constantly shuffles and rearranges itself, reorienting physically and metaphysically as it jostles up against material, relations, and concepts.”²⁷ Bogost has posited *unit* as a substitute for both *object* and *thing*, and the “unit operation” (a phrase from engineering) as his focus of attention (*AP*, 22–29); that purview would prove productive in thinking through the work of Zimoun—the kinetic installations in which the simplest of objects (filler wire, cotton balls, pieces of cardboard) have been attached to DC motors and arranged in a grid or a line; the objects repetitively oscillate or bounce or jiggle as a series of units that become one overarching unit within the unit of the room. Typically considered sound art (or sound architecture), Zimoun’s project amplifies what Harman calls the “black noise of muffled objects hovering at the fringes of our attention” (*GM*, 183), the sound itself becoming object-like.²⁸

Whatever generative convergence there may be between philosophy and art under the sign of the *object*, it will have been adumbrated by the work of Gaston Bachelard, whose thinking continues to shape Western thought. By introducing the concept of *la coupure épistémologique*, he provided Louis Althusser, Foucault, and Alexandre Koyré with the means of characterizing eventful change. By casting science as “projective” (rather than “objective”) within his historical epistemology (established in *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*, 1934), by attending to “the empirical and emotional ambiguity that normally accompanies research on the frontiers of science,” he paved the way for what became science studies, enabling Latour (for one) to see multiple participants (material and conceptual, human and nonhuman) at work in the production of facts.²⁹ But when it came to understanding *matter*, Bachelard drifted from the scientific fields and preferred to think with literature, as he did in his five great books on the

elements, written (1938–43) while he continued to write about science. He preferred literature because he recognized that literature helped him to adopt a “material psychoanalysis.”³⁰ More to the point, Bachelard’s work *The New Scientific Spirit* provided André Breton with the substance (he already had the spirit, along with the phrase) to articulate a “Crisis of the Object” as registered by both scientific and artistic revolutions. Published in *Cahiers d’art* in 1936, Breton’s essay appeared as a complement to the exhibit at the Galerie Charles Ratton (in Paris) of surrealist objects (1936), which included pieces by surrealists (Jean Arp, Alexander Calder, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Oppenheim, Alberto Giacometti, and Yves Tanguy, among others) and fellow travelers (Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, among others), along with mathematical models from the 1870s and “primitive objects.”

In “Dream Kitsch” (1925), Walter Benjamin had insisted that the surrealists were “less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things.”³¹ Lecturing in Brussels under the title “What Is Surrealism?” in 1934, Breton came to make a comparable point, charting a history of the movement whose initial stages “seemed only to involve poetic language,” whose spirit then “spread like wildfire,” and whose future could not be predicted. But he asked his audience (and the readers of the subsequent pamphlet) “to notice that in its most recent phase a *fundamental crisis of the ‘object’* is in the process of occurring”: “It is essentially to the object that the ever more lucid eyes of Surrealism have focused during these last few years.”³² *L’objet*, then, named a problem and a possibility. It named a battleground. “Common sense,” Breton went on to argue two years later, “cannot prevent the world of concrete objects, upon which it founds its hateful regime, from remaining inadequately guarded” against the attack from poets, artists, and scholars who mean to disrupt “the generally limiting factor of the object’s manifest existence.” Within that disruption, “the same object, however complete it may seem, reverts to an infinite series of *latent possibilities* which . . . entail its transformation.”³³ The artistic attack on the concrete object does not discover the real object that stands apart; rather, disclosing its latent possibilities, the attack discloses the thing—other things about the object, extracted from the regimes of daily life and common sense.³⁴

On the one hand, Zimoun’s work evokes the minimalist tradition (Carl Andre’s grid) in the simplicity of the stacked wooden or (more often) cardboard boxes, or the lines of evenly spaced wire. On the other, the animation of (or within) the objects

evokes instead the surrealist ambition of divulging some secret life of things within or beyond their manifest forms. The incessantly tapping cotton balls, the jiggling wires, the jumping polysiloxane hoses—these are at once mesmerizing and vaguely threatening, as though the jittering objects were confused, frantic insects: wasps incessantly tapping at the corner of the window to find some egress, moths unable to dislodge themselves from the attraction of the lightbulb, flies beating their wings to release themselves from the adhesive paper. (By titling one work *Swarm*, Zimoun emphasizes the biomorphic dimensions of his work.)³⁵ But in *100 prepared dc-motors, chains in wooden type cases* (2008), the incessant circular flopping of the vitalized chains seems to have been conjured by the opportunity to dance—the kind of opportunity once provided by surrealist film, a film like Man Ray's *Emak-Bakia* (1926), his *cinépoème* that integrates rayography, stop-frame animation, reverse motion, and double exposure, along with narrative fragments. In one of those fragments, a well-dressed man is dropped off at a house and walks in with his valise, which turns out to contain collars. He starts to rip them up, one by one, then rips off his own collar and tosses it away. The film cuts to an animated object portrait: a single collar, balanced on its back, which then begins to twirl and twirl against a black background; it does so until it begins to dissolve in double exposure, then into dancing bars of light. In the abrupt juxtaposition of the two scenes there lies a secret: much as the man longs to free himself of his collar, so too that collar longed for its freedom—to be some other thing beyond the realm of the human, some thing irreducible to the sartorial object. The *recentness of things* lies not least in art's willingness and ability to achieve such effects by playing with objects outside the cinematic frame, sharing some sense of their latent possibilities.

In "The Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), best known for dismissing minimalism as Good Design, Greenberg recognized that only three-dimensional work had assumed the burden of irritating the "borderline between art and non-art" because "even an unpainted canvas now stated itself as a picture."³⁶ He realized, though, that "almost anything" had become readable as art, "including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper" (R, 253). He didn't realize and couldn't predict that art, fully sustaining itself as art, would sharpen its focus on a very different borderline: between the object and the thing.

1. Although it is safe to say that the materiality of painting has been effectively elided within the discipline of art history, this too is changing. See Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). And note that the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, sponsored a symposium called "Materiality and Art History" (March 16, 2013).
2. Frank Stella, in response to Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Art News* 65, no. 5, September 1966, 58–59. Reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
3. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12 (February 1968): 31.
4. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 151, 153.
5. "Art-Idea + the Object: Talking with Mel Bochner, 18 April 1972," reprinted in Ellen Johnson, *Modern Art and the Object* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 209.
6. In his introduction to the republication of the essay in the eponymously titled collection, *Art and Objecthood*, he explains that the essay's "chief motivation in the first place had to do with my experience of literalist [his term for *minimalist*] works and exhibitions during the previous several years, in particular my recurrent sense, especially in gallery shows devoted to one or another artist, of literalism's singular effectiveness as *mise-en-scène* ([Robert] Morris and Carl Andre were masters at this) . . . [I] was as though their installations infallibly offered their audience a kind of heightened perceptual experience, and I wanted to understand the nature of that surfeit, and therefore to my mind essential inartistic (I should have said unmodernist) effect." "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," 40.
7. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005), 189.
8. Frank Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics," *Journal of British Studies* 48 (April 2009): 283.
9. For further thoughts on contemporary art's attention to the object world, see Bill Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2010), 183–217; Brown, "Redemptive Reification (Theater Gates, Gathering)," in *Theater Gates: My Labor is My Protest*, ed. Honey Luard (London: White Cube, 2012), n.p.; and Brown, "Anarchéologie (Object Worlds and Other Things, circa Now)," *The Way of the Shovel*, ed. Dieter Rolestrate (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013).
10. The phrase is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 407.
11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence & Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 46 (hereafter cited in text as *EE*).
12. See Judd, "Specific Objects," 184.
13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 265.
14. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 112 (hereafter cited in text as *AF*).
15. For an appreciation of the continental case, see, for instance, Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011).
16. "Instead of a mythical Mind giving shape to reality, carving it, cutting it, ordering it, it was now the prejudices, categories, and paradigms of a group of people living together that determined the representations of every one of those people." Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays in the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–6 (hereafter cited in text as *PH*).
17. For the precise way in which he is using the term *network*, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) (hereafter cited in text as *RS*); on the agency of objects, see pp. 63–86.
18. Bruno Latour, "Waiting for Gaia. Composing the common world through arts and politics," accessed February 2, 2012, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_o.pdf. This was Latour's lecture at the French Institute, London, November 2011. In a previous lecture at the University of Mainz (October 2011), "Is It Possible to Get Our Materialism Back? An Inquiry into the Various Idealisms of Matter," he also addressed Gaia.
19. It is important to note that Latour has curated art exhibitions and edited exhibition catalogs. See, for instance, Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).
20. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 11.
21. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in "Things," ed. Bill Brown, special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 12. More precisely, you might want to say that it is the *avant-garde* (as opposed to modernism) that accomplishes this work.
22. Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)" (1925), trans. Christina Kiaer, *October* 81 (Winter 1997): 3.
23. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 69. He goes on to argue, in the subsequent sentence: "To limit the discussion to humans, their interests, their subjectivities, and their rights, will appear as strange a few years from now as having denied the right to vote of slaves, poor people, or women." In what remains Latour's most "literary" experiment, he grants a voice to a designed but abandoned transit system in *Aramis or The Love of Technology* (1991), trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
24. Graham Harman, *Bruno Latour: Prince of Networks* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 208, 159 (hereafter cited as *PN*). Harman had confronted much the same problem in Alfred North Whitehead, who "ends up devouring" the "integrity of individual objects" within a "total system of relations." Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 233.
25. Graham Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 154 (hereafter cited in text as *GM*); *PN*, 215. Despite Harman's metaphysical realism, his account of the object, defined by its elusiveness, can begin to sound like Lacan's account of the Thing: "This is what objects are for guerilla metaphysics: inscrutable holes of withdrawn energy that somehow still emit fragrance or radio signals by way of the notes that ought to have collapsed entirely into their dark and unified cores, but have not done so" (*Guerilla Metaphysics*, 184).
26. Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 19 (hereafter cited in text as *AP*).
27. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 27.
28. Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics*, 183.
29. Gaston Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 99. See Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1979; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986)—the references throughout to *Le nouvel esprit scientifique* (1934) and *Le matérialisme rationnel* (1953), and especially the section titled "The Phenomenotechnique" (63–72). (Latour has retreated from the strong constructivist position ["From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 151–74], but the emphasis on participants remains consistent.) Particularly evocative of the sort of description that Latour would give to specific objects, see Bachelard's account of the lightbulb as an abstract-concrete object. Bachelard, *Le rationalisme appliqué* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), 108–10.
30. Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay On the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Kenneth Haltman (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 2002), 31.
31. Walter Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch," trans. Howard Eiland, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.
32. André Breton, "What Is Surrealism?," in *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writing by André Breton*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 184.
33. André Breton, "The Crisis of the Object," in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 275, 279. Breton published *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in 1928 (Gallimard); that text was incorporated into the subsequent edition of the book, which appeared in 1965 (Gallimard).
34. This is a highly abbreviated version of an account of Breton I provide in *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). In the same years (1934–36) when Breton was lecturing on the object, Martin Heidegger was lecturing on the thing, the lectures belated published as *Die Frage nach dem Ding* (The Question of the Thing) (Tübingen: Niemeyer, Germany, 1962).
35. For a very different project that generates some of the same effects, see Theo Jansen's *Standbeests*, large, "winged" kinetic sculptures (constructed of wood and plastic bottles, for instance) that scuttle along the beach.
36. Clement Greenberg, "The Recentness of Sculpture," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 252 (hereafter cited in text as *R*). The problem with minimalism (as opposed to the sculpture of Anthony Caro) also lay in the fact that its provocation amounted to a merely phenomenal surprise, a "one-time surprise" (254), as opposed to the kind of aesthetic surprise that endures.