

Fucked-up Objects

by Marie de Bruggerolle

My seven-year-long research on the “post-performance future”¹ led me to question the legacy of performativity—from performance’s origins to its dematerialization—on the visual arts. Performance is a practice that produces remains and “dead things,” and *per-furniture* (from the French *per-fournir*, which means to give a shape or accomplish a form, from which the English word “furniture” is derived) helped me resolve the question of objects in post-performance as hybrids of junk and commodities. In this essay, my intent is to consider performance’s exformation, analyzing relevant objects in art history and the relations between them.² My understanding of exformation, in the context of post-performance issues, is as a process that doesn’t elaborate forms “from scratch,” or reuse of matter, or extrusion as opposed to cutting, modeling, erecting (regular sculptural gestures), but as dealing with what is not there. This could be what we don’t want to look at, what we cannot comprehend with our human senses: the exterior. But here it is more the junkyard of art, the nonvisible “contemporary slave” worker, and the negative space or taste.³ The ugly potato, the stinky toy, the uncanny shoes, the bad handmade piece of firewood, the deflated balloon.



- I Brandon Lattu, *THIGHS*, 2019.
Courtesy: Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles.
Photo: Lee Thompson
- II Brandon Lattu, *Archimedean Solid*, 2019.
Courtesy: Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles.
Photo: Lee Thompson
- III Anna Wittenberg, *The Drunk (character study)*,
2019. Courtesy: the artist
- IV Anna Wittenberg, *The Drunk (still from
Squarefoot)* (still), 2019. Courtesy: the artist
- V Anna Wittenberg, *Untitled*, 2019.
Courtesy: the artist
- VI Olivia Mole, Big, *Um, Object*, 2019 *CBARET*“
What-Not Speak Easy installation view at
LAXART, Los Angeles, 2019.
Courtesy the artist. Photo: Olivia Mole
- VII Olivia Mole, *Bambi Holes* (detail), 2018-2019.
Courtesy the artist. Photo: Olivia Mole
- VIII Luca Bosani, *Sculptural shoes 01*, 2017.
Courtesy: the artist
- IX Luca Bosani, *Sculptural shoes 01 performing their
own destruction*, 2017-2019. Courtesy: the artist
- X Jordan Derrien, *Coffeinum*, 2018.
Courtesy: the artist
- XI Isabelle Plat, *Je vous invite dans la veste de
mon ami (I invite you into my friend's jacket)*, 2018
*Se mettre dans la peau de l'autre (To enter into
someone else's personal place)* installation
view at Galerie Eric Mouchet, Paris, 2019.
Private Collection. © Mathias Lucas.
Courtesy: Galerie Eric Mouchet.

From “hyper object” to “object-oriented philosophy” to “object-oriented ontology” and more recently “exformation,” it seems that philosophy is using—or trying to use—the art field to punctuate its theories regarding exteriority. From “readiness to hand” to the readymade and today’s post-überization objects (objects produced by delegating subtasks), artists have been deconstructing the relation between the “use” and the “function” of things. If everything is a possible art object, isn’t it because of its dysfunctionality?

An object is something thrown at us. An object is not a thing. A thing exists even if we don’t care about it, whereas an object exists if I consider it. An object requires a subject. Marcel Duchamp said: “It is the viewers who make the paintings.” Roland Barthes, in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1967), opens the gate to the reader: the author is dead, long live the reader!

Today, November 9, 2019—coinciding with the celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall—with OOO (object-oriented ontology) objects and hyper-object theory, it seems that the object remains at the core of our human problematics, or the post-human question of what is real, in the context of artificial intelligence and the hybridization of human and machines, the phantasm of an “I, robot” world.

What is it that we don’t want to look at anymore?

I am writing this text as we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Those who were born after 1989 might not feel the same as those who know what it was to be behind the Iron Curtain—no matter which side. Today, as Brexit seems a matter of days away and Fascism a matter of months, I’m wondering: What is fucked up in the story?

“I am OOO” (out of office), said the editor who is helping me with the revision of this article: thus a person as well as an object can be OOO.

The system of objects forms small circles of spheres. From intimate to private, these globes seem to create a good shape to represent our spaces. Not only site and geography but the *hic et nunc* of performativity: a position act, situated at the overlap of two circles, social and ideological, to create a next ensemble: a set. As an art form, it can be critical.

If object-oriented philosophy appeared in 1999 with Graham Harman, distinguished professor of philosophy at SCI-Arc, Los Angeles, it is Levy Bryant, a professor of philosophy at Collin College, Texas, who transformed it into object-oriented ontology in 2009. From OOP(s) to OOO. From slippage to an open mouth: wonder. Thirty years after the wall’s fall.

This way of rethinking the “object” takes as a starting point Martin Heidegger’s two main concerns: presence at hand (visible) and readiness at hand (invisible). It is based on an interpretation of objects as tools (Heidegger excluded humans and non-object entities in this construction). Harman’s project—and consequently Timothy Morton’s hyperobject—embraces objects that are not reduced to things. Harman with his “everything” opens and Morton with global warming as hyperobject. These are beyond visibility—for Harman “withdrawn.” The OOO’s objects question the interaction of things outside a human point of view. The project is to go beyond Immanuel Kant’s finitude, to think things that humans (subjects) cannot master or know. But they remain in the context of ontology apart from theology, as opposed to speculative realism thinkers who include in the term “speculative” the question of transcendence, which reopens the question of absolute knowledge (God).

My reflection on fucked-up objects started two years ago, probably during a studio visit with Los Angeles-based artist Brandon Lattu. We discussed functionality and readymades, and when I asked him, “What are you working on?” he answered, “A big potato.”

At the time he was focused on postmoder-

- 1 Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (stills), 1968
- 2 Harmony Korine, *Gummo* (still), 1997
- 3 Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane* (stills), 1949
- 4 Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (stills), 1982
- 5 Andrés Muschietti, *It: Chapter Two* (still), 2019
- 6 Franklin J. Schaffner, *Planet of the Apes* (still), 1968

nity, from the legacy of the “black square” to the impact of screen time on art production. So, hearing “big potato” surprised me. And indeed, he made it! *Potato* (2019). It took time to find the right material, carving different types of foams, seeking the right shapes to represent the potato’s curves. One sketch looked quite like a belly button. This fragment of skin reminded me of Akhenaton and Nefertiti’s inverted body canons. And indeed, the work deals with the distortion of canonical sources, the next step in art in the post-medium era.

Lattu’s previous works include letters from a newly invented typeface, Prism Gothic, produced through designing a relatively conventional sans-serif and then extruding its depth to a degree that the letters are at the edge of legibility. Extrusion is a computer interface procedure that changes our way of representing three-dimensional works. Instead of projecting the representation, we elaborate the whole face of an object, which exists virtually. What is at stake is the question of the depth of the surface. Indeed, how and what determines the thickness of matter that will be used to form the piece? *THIGHS* (2019) is a three-dimensional sculpture with a flat back. It stands as a word that we read vertically, like a poster. If uttered with dysphonia we can hear “thugh” or “thing.”

Using postindustrial and postproduction modes, Lattu extends our capacity for thinking about what is not visible. Indeed, one part of *Potato* resides inside—hung on a wall—and one part outside, in the street. On the opposite wall of Lattu’s solo 2019 exhibition *Brandon Lattu: Full to Bursting* at Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, stood a silver rhombicosidodecahedron. *Archimedean Solid* (2019) is a form with sixty faces: a series of rhomboids that are truncated pyramids. This complex polysphere creates a tension between the square building as a frame and the uncanny aspect of the ugly potato. The existence of the piece is conditioned to a third object, which is a photographic montage. The image is a testimony to a possible outside, which itself is a “photographic component.” It reverses the idea of an external power structure and creates a ridiculous assumption: there might be, out of view, a giant potato that is the actual shape of the metastructure. Doesn’t string theory, with its universe of eleven dimensions, look like a crumpled paper tissue?

What is the object of this century? This is an ongoing question for me. The readymade was arguably the object of the twentieth century (in art), but what is the object of the twenty-first century? From extrusion to exformation, the fucked-up object (FUO) concept problematizes the process of making objects with machines (and making them visible) at the junction of readymade to postproduction, and oneself. I opened this discussion regarding the readymade as it echoes the readiness to hand (*Zuhandenheit*) of Martin Heidegger’s tool-object. A readymade, like Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), destroyed the functionality of both things: the wheel and the stool. It gave them another use, which can be symbolic, as it became an object to think with. It is about realizing that any object can be “art.” It comes from the artist’s gaze toward this object, and then we are linked to post-Cartesian-Kantian subjectivity, at first glance.

What interests me now is when a thing becomes an object, and when we start to notice its existence. Dysfunction might be the point. I’m here aligned with what Harman expresses about Kant’s “tools”: we notice them when they don’t produce what they are supposed to, for example when my chair collapses and can’t be used anymore to sit. “Objects are deeper than practice and theory,” says Harman.⁴ Art objects that don’t follow the rules, conventions, and fashions have deeper meaning, as they are never totally exhausted by practice and theory. They are beyond objecthood in their critical status, as they are not applied decoration, surface, or pleasant colorful ornament.

They are subjects of an ongoing relationship that is not absolute, but *hic et nunc*.



I

II

And the art object performs the function of deepness and operativity. It can be nothing, or a thing, but in this relation, it is an object thrown at me.

Let's think about what falls on my head, or sometimes makes me slip.

THE CLINAMEN PRINCIPLE

1 Fifty-two years ago, a black square appeared on a cinema screen. A strange, perfect object fucked up the calm and quiet peace of pre-human beings. This was in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968). In the same movie, we discover that an object originated this tragedy: Hal 9000, the fucked-up computer. Since the first-century BCE didactic poem *De rerum natura* by Lucretius, who was the first to name this deviation principle (known as Clinamen), we know that the universe is falling, constantly. And as the French choreographer and dancer Emmanuelle Huynh affirms, each footstep, when we walk, is a successful attempt to not fall. What falls from the sky in the beginning of the story is a black rectangle, a peculiar square, which creates a big change, if not a big bang: the origin of violence. What's wrong with us?



2 The chair-wrestling scene of Harmony Korine's film *Gummo* (1997) is a piece of true anthology. Lacking a plot, the action of fighting chairs took place in such a way that the director knew it would be fucked up, out of his hands, and work in this way. This suspension of history is a thread in many contemporary artworks, maybe a remnant of Berthold Brecht's epic theater as described by Walter Benjamin in "What Is Epic Theatre?" (1939). Another Brecht, George, invented the "event principle" in 1959, in response to or dialogue with the happenings of his friend Allan Kaprow. The *event* is the most open proposal: without a script, it proposes open forms that can be visible or invisible. It doesn't radically change the function of the objects that it uses, but proposes a next move, a mobile way of being.



3 The objects that I am thinking about can be lost, invisible, and still very efficient. Not to mention the little "a" object, which once fell from the Dada name. It can be a lost country (Romania for Tristan Tzara, an artist whose name literally means "sad in my country") or a lost transitional object. Rosebud in Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane* (1949) is the former snow sled of the main protagonist that explains his dysfunctional behavior.



Mike Kelley worked a lot with transitional stuffed objects. His *Estral Star* series (1989), made of stuffed handmade animals (sock monkeys), is one among many. In an interview with Julie Sylvester, he declared:

"MK: I have a problem with the terms 'high' and 'low'—I prefer 'allowable' and 'repressed' as they refer to usage—that is, whether or not a power structure allows discussion—rather than to absolutes. The museum drains meaning out of things. It's inevitable. But somewhere in there failure is the indicator of success.

JS: Failure of what?

MK: The failure of the object to meet the expectations of the viewer, or at least the immediate expectations of the viewer. That there's enough of a problem for the viewer to raise a question or a problem. I don't want my objects to read as being 'right.'"⁵

We might say that dysfunction in art is a successful quality.

4 In his essay "Playing with Dead Things" (1993), Kelley reminds us of what makes certain objects uncanny. He addresses the question of scale, and how mannequins, especially wax models, present this effect of distorted similitude.⁶ Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* emphasizes the question of humanity through the look as a way to feel and memorize. The "last" replicant, Roy Batty (played by Rutger Hauer), killed on the rooftop, pronounces these



last words: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off





III

the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.” In the same film, one famous scene shows a group of automats collected by one of the replicants. The original title of Philip K. Dick’s novel was *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, first published in 1966. In France, it was issued in 1976 in a collection called *Chute libre* (Free Fall) by publisher Champs Libre. This is all about humanity and things. What distinctions still separate us? Feelings, memory.



IV

Will near-future sensors have memories? They have already integrated human sensations. Anna Wittenberg’s *The Drunk* (2019) is a disarticulated body made of firewood blocks. As a character in her film *Squarefoot* (2019), he accomplishes his function in being not as efficient as a normative human being; he succeeds as a dysfunctional automaton. This quality is based on his matter: firewood. It is a residue of a tree, and itself creates remains: charcoal. Wittenberg’s black drawings like *Minotaur* (2019) are fucked-up Walt Disney characters, which actually fuck in this specific drawing. (A whole lot of contemporary art would not exist if not for CalArts’s fucked-up legacy of Walt Disney’s studio apprentices; indeed, the former Chouinard school was supposed to train animation cartooners.) Mike Kelley came to Los Angeles from Detroit to become a cartoonist. Most of his work emerged from the grotesque. Olivia Mole was a former studio animation worker, and her *Bambi Holes* (2018-2019) is a dysfunctional character who invites us to share a moment in its fantasy world via VR goggles. One rule is to not watch beyond a certain point, which of course we do, activating the spell of the fairy tale. As a consequence, the dream world starts to collapse. Some images have glitches, like this Bambi with a cut in its leg. In Mole’s installation *Big, Um, Object* (2019) the artist hides in a wooden box while cutting holes in the wall and throwing things at us. A beer can, water splitting, vapor from an e-cigarette are residue materials exformed to become objects, literally by her act. Her Ermite spot is also the bolt hole of the contemporary ghost worker.



V



VI



VII

TOTEM AND TABOO: SACRIFICED OBJECTS:
THE CHÜD RITUAL AND
THE LOST TRANSITIONAL OBJECT
The replicants are problems because they develop sociopathic behavior. This is the reason they are destroyed. To prove that you are not a replicant, you must first show that your pupils are moving according to your supposed emotional state. But what happens when you have an eye prosthesis? The second verification is memories. Which drives us back to the lost object.
In *IT, Chapter 2* (2019) one way to win against the evil clown is to re-collect all the lost objects that caused the first trauma. They must be used in the Chüd—an old Amerindian ritual that at first seems not to work because the only way to win against evil is as a group; Pennywise cannot take the shape of more than one human fear at a time. So we can say that polyforms kill the evil. Like in the medieval ordeal of walking barefoot on hot coals: if you burn, you’re guilty. It might be what happened to Luca Bosani’s shoes. His series of *Sculptural Shoes* (2017) exemplify perfectly the dysfunctional FUO. Their form, inspired by pointy Mexican boots, are a typical phallic object: the longer, the better. Curved at the end, they express a hooked attitude, like clown shoes. Their status is polysemic and ambivalent (shoes and sculptures). As sculptures (before and during the performance), as staged objects (during the practice), and at rest (after), they fail. They are typical post-performance objects: polymorphic, per-forming themselves, un-functional as deviations from their original function. As the artist puts it: “Because they were fucked-up, I decided to destroy them. Or better, they requested to be destroyed. They became the subject that acted out its own destruction.”

5



VIII



IX



THE WORLD AS A FLAT BALLOON:
CONTEMPORARY ESCHATOLOGY

Über and remains are quite an anagram in French (“rebut”). If *übersicht* is not possible anymore, the un-sublime or de-sublimation is the impossible man’s overview. Shit might be the first matter for gold equivalency since Nixon’s dollar bill volatility in 1970. Tala Madani’s animated video *Manual Man* (2019), exhibited in her 2019 show *Shit Moms* at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, is an epiphany of the real. Deflation seems to be the figure that sustained modernity, up to the flatness of Paul McCarthy’s *Tree* (2014) in Paris, following *Complex Shit* (2008) in Bern.⁸ Jordan Derrien’s *Coffeinum* (2018), a deflated Pilates ball, is a sign of this extravagant expenditure at work. The dysfunctional chairs of Charlie Hamish Jeffery, which are fucked-up easels, introduce an insidious doubt toward growth. Literally they become flowerpots, or entangled wooden legs. “Error as tool” says the poster above *Descent (chair)* (2012).

Chairs have a supposed function of increasing efficiency at work. The invisible worker might be the object of the twenty-first century. Exformed from the desk or studio, abstracted from his or her work, divided into micro tasks, the one-minute, two-cents slave is the live object. What space to share, then? The sensible is the privilege of the one who owns space and time. Is intimacy the counterpart of the extime “wholeness”—or for Jacques Lacan a part of an object that is dealing with interiority but escapes representation? “Wholeness”? If everything can be considered a deep surface, Isabelle Plat’s complex outfits might be a good example. Her *Costume/cabane du partageur singulier* (2019) is a sculpture made from a deconstructed man’s costume and a stool. Golden inside, it welcomes us to use it as a shell. The junk empty skin is reused from its ornamental mimesis to be a sculpture “at work.” We are the invisible workers, inside. Fetishism, which passes from sculpture to economy and becomes exemplary as a commodification of life, is a paradigm useful for thinking about loss, lack, and frivolity of value.

To sum up, it seems that we are (and the 2008 subprime crisis would be an example) in an era that is suffering the consequences of the loss of linkage between market value and substance (the real), because either the raw material or the work is no longer visible in the structure of the object traded, and what is bought is no longer a useful object but serves to create lack (programmed obsolescence). It appears that the “true” experience is now more difficult: Is the experience that comes from or implies a subjectivation, an emergence of being, what you call “freedom”?

At the end of Franklin J. Schaffner *Planet of the Apes* (1968), the hero Ulysse discovers an odd object: a broken, fallen, half-swamped Statue of Liberty. This fucked-up object makes him realize that he is on Earth.

While finishing this text, Hong Kong’s protest is announcing a “last chance” to China. I’m wondering if the most F.U.O. these days isn’t democracy.

MARIE DE BRUGEROLLE is a curator, writer, and inventor of Post-Performance Future, a concept and method questioning the legacy of performativity on the visual arts. She develops ongoing researches about objects and the polysphere, at the crossroads of archaeology and futurology. She has worked extensively on the question of reenactment, including restaging final works by Guy de Cointet, *Five Sisters*, LACMA, Los Angeles and MoMA, New York (2012), and *Bridegroom Suites* at the M Museum Leuven (2017). Recent collaborations include *I Was a Male Yvonne de Carlo*, MUSAC, Léon (2011), an exhibition on political satire she organized with the artist Dora García, and *ALL THAT FALLS*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2014), which she co-curated with the writer and psychoanalyst Gérard Wajcman. Other recent curatorial projects include *LA EXISTANCIAL*, LACE, Los Angeles (2013), *RIDEAUX/blinds*, Institut d’art contemporain, Villeurbanne, France (2015), *SPACEY FOREVER Los Angeles (a mini series)* (2018), *SALON DISCRET*, MNAM, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017), and *CBARET’ What Not/Speakeasy*, LAXART, Santa Monica (2019).



X



XI



6

- 1 Marie de Brugerolle, “Post-Performance Future,” *Mousse* 63 (April–May 2018): 266.
- 2 Literally, exformation comes from cybernetics. In information theory, exformation is the invisible part that gives sense to information. Agnieszka Kurant was the first to use it in the field of art, in her video *Cutaways* (2013). See my essay cited in the preceding note, p. 268. In an unpublished interview with this author in 2015, Kurant explained: “The actors who worked on these important films but never made it to the final cut were also necessary for these films to be made since nobody knew at the beginning who and what was going to be cut out. I got interested in the value and meaning of exformation—the negative of information.”
- 3 In his *L’exforme: Art, idéologie et rejet* (2017), Nicolas Bourriaud uses the term in a more strict consideration of remains. My understanding of exformation includes the unheard voices, the dysfunctional entities.
- 4 Lecture on Clement Greenberg, Martin Heidegger, Marshall McLuhan, and the Arts at Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, Oregon, January 22, 2013.
- 5 “Talking Failure,” *Parkett* no. 31 (1992): 103.
- 6 Mike Kelley, “Playing with Dead Things” (1993), in *The Uncanny*, catalogue published as part of the Sonsbeek 93, Arnhem, 1993.
- 7 Conversation with the author, November 2019.
- 8 *Complex Shit* flew away due to strong winds, causing damages in the area, was an accident and was not intended.