

**Thing Theory and Methodology**, Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November, 5-6.30pm

Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1, (2001)

Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public', (2005)

'As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things. We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.' (Brown, p.4-5)

'What habits have prevented us – prevented you- from thinking about objects, let alone things? Or, more precisely, perhaps: what habits have prevented you from sharing your thoughts? In one of his neglected, slightly mad manifestos, Jean Baudrillard sanely declares that "we have always lived off the splendour of the subject and the poverty of the object." "It is the subject," he goes on to write, "that makes history, it's the subject that totalizes the world," whereas the object "is shamed, obscene, passive." The object has been intelligible only as the "alienated, accursed part of the subject"—the "individual subject or collective subject, the subject of consciousness or the unconscious." "The fate of the object," to Baudrillard's knowledge, "has been claimed by no one." And, yet, the very grandiosity of Baudrillard's claim about *the* object (and the "potency of the object") threatens the subject no more than it threatens (by absorbing) both objects and things.' (Brown, p.7-8)

\*\*\*\*\*

'It's clear that each object – each issue – generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. In other words, objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political".' (Latour, p.5)