Words are in space, yet not in space. They speak of space, and enclose it. A discourse on space implies a truth of space, and this must not derive from a location within space, but rather from a place imaginary and real - and hence 'surreal', yet concrete. And, yes - conceptual also.
-Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space

To begin with a title?

At best, titles are a meta-drama for the work itself. A kind of lens of language through which we project. At worst? An accompanying tag, existing somewhere between name, date and materials. The magnet for nervous gallery spectators; the default approach for nervous writers.

There are titles by Maud Cotter that point to the minor crisis of everyday life, that suggestively correspond with Cotter's use (and disuse) of domestic objects in her sculptural works. *Crying over spilt milk*, or *A slip of the tongue*, for instance - both titles borrowing from sayings that are commonly used to shore-up a potentially embarrassing social situation or faux pas. In a similar way to the operation of these titles, Cotter's work takes us to a point where familiarity and recognitions of polite order give way to unspoken, darker undercurrents and perversions of form.

More Than One Way Out, *Not the full story*, and *Waiting for the future* are titles that conjure a more existential and elemental drama. Less enclosed, anticipating, and elusive, these titles suggest a tentative status: the artwork existing somewhere along the road of certitude. Furthermore, these are titles that are part of each sculpture's consistency: part of its dynamic, its brain, and its vocabulary. *More Than One Way Out*, for instance: words that we might imagine emitting from the sculpture like a voice, as though inside the work itself there was an active organism, expressly seeking an exit.

Life has settled among and on top of things, as on top of objects that need neither oxygen nor food, are dead without decaying, always at hand without being immortal; on the backs of these things, as though they were the most familiar scene, culture was established.

-Ernst Bloch, Traces

To begin with an object?

If recent sculpture by Maud Cotter could be said to incorporate a range of objects and materials, then there are certain objects that suggest themselves as starting points to the work as a whole. In *A Gesture of Belief in the Built World* it is the ceramic sauceboat that acts as the formal lynchpin to the arrangement, but also the source of emissions: seeming to produce to fountain of congelated matter and to a structure of steel that resembles the overrun ruins of a Buckminster Fuller experiment.

It could be similarly said of the decorative plates in *Fallen*; one element among many in this work, arranged on the wall amid a set of three corner shelves. These plates seem to exude extraneous matter, expelling plastic filaments and toy animals that hang suspended between the wall and the floor. In both of these works, it is found objects – the sauceboat and plates – that provide the space and the setting for more organic forms and indeterminable endings to develop; as if the restraint of domestic utility were seething within these objects, always threatening to bubble over. Whether a table, crockery, or office equipment, Cotter's chosen objects are considered for the space they assume by habitual use and design. They enter into Cotter's sculptural arrangements sucking on the memory of routine domesticity and the habits of handling. And yet, these objects are never presented simply *as they are*. Appended with seemingly incompatible, foreign materials, and often quite-literally 'turned on their head' – Cotter's treatment of objects seem to draw in our recognitions, only to

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expel our recognitions in turn.

For ought we can know a priori, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally, within itself...
-David Hume, Treatise of Human Nature

The objects in Cotter's work are also chosen for their particularlity as vessels that shape, withhold and propel the transfer of formal properties, as they extend from one thing to the next in the entire sum of Cotter's sculptural arrangements. We might describe works such as *A Gesture of Belief in the Built World* with a certain formal causality: beginning with a found object, unfolding through a liquiform mass of plaster and onto a modular lattice-like structure of steel. The work is not so much the bringing together of these separate elements in a force of contradiction; the work is more a system of channels, intuitive with one another, that follow the same directional flow.

Cotter's use of objects encourages any description of these objects to be accompanied with performative verbs. In her work, we find that sauceboats *emit* and plates *exude*; cups *anticipate* liquids, and mirrors *seek* to extend their allocated space. It results in a sense of objects not as fixed entities, but capable of pro-activity and determined character. In this regard, we might return to consider the detectable 'voice' in the title of the work *More Than One Way Out*. The sculpture consists of three tables, each with legs that have been individually ornamented - some sourced from reclaimed furniture, others newly fabricated. If we allow ourselves to imagine the words of the title uttered by the inner character of sculpture itself, then we also come to assert that the sculpture has a determination of its own dual being and becoming. As Cotter herself has described of this work: 'they courteously allow themselves to look like tables, but they are walking out of what they are'.

*The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of
space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the
epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the
side-by-side, of the dispersed.*

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-Michael Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*

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To begin with a space?

A set of circumstances, perhaps. The features of the room, it's scale and dimensions.
A different country, the gallery wall, or none of the above? In recent years, Cotter has
shared the approach of many artists in working across a number of sites and locations.
While, for some, this would be a simple question of opportunity and facility, for
Cotter it suggests itself in other ways. The transfer of one space into another has
become a definitive feature of Cotter's work, almost as though the principles of travel,
mobility, and multiplicity, have absorbed themselves completely.

We might consider the transfer of space in terms of Cotter's use of objects (as already
stated), or else more explicitly in her interventions into the gallery space, which have
included discreet elements of wall painting and architectural modification.

There are also works that seem to extend space as much as they absorb it. *Waiting for
the Future* is such a work, combining an upward cascade of glass and mirrored table
surfaces, with a downward entropic slide of cups, saucers, linked with precarious

limbs of more-formless matter. *Waiting for the Future* seems to transmit space - recasting the surrounding space of the room, and yet also retrenching and swallowing space like a virus. To continue the viral metaphor further, we might consider her recent installation *Rumpus Room*, where the entire gallery space becomes contaminate, as sculptural elements track across the floor, extend from the ceiling, and connect to walls: searching out all perimeters with an assimilating touch.

Cotter's work seems to resist closure, just as it resists the reconciliations that are suggested by any clear beginnings. How is any ending appropriate, in considering work that reaches forward at every attempt to call it back? Borrowed words from another spatial fantasist will have to suffice, and the short story of *Ersilia* by Italo Calvino, seems more than sufficient in describing the pulse of Cotter's work:

He describes the fictional city of Ersilia, a city networked with coloured strings that stretch from building to building, physically mapping the relationships that exist within it. Each of these strings colour-coded according to the nature of relationship, whether based upon family, trade, authority, or agency. As these relationships develop over time, strings are added, criss-crossing one another, and increasingly becoming entangled. Eventually, there comes a point when Ersilia's inhabitants are no longer able to manoeuvre through the city effectively, with string blocking every entrance and pathway. The day comes when the inhabitants are faced with no other option than to emigrate - dismantling all of Ersilia's buildings, before beginning a journey to another location where a new city and new relationships can be built. Onwards they go, leaving Ersilia as nothing other than the "spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form."

Matt Packer, 2010