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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on an object-oriented approach to creative writing and relates object characters in short fiction to aspects of Martin Heidegger's tool analysis and Graham Harman's OOO: Object-Oriented Ontology. By briefly referring to certain contemporary short fiction examples, and through a longer exegetical approach to some of my own object-centred work, this article encourages short fiction writers and creative writing tutors to start seeing objects as potential creative stimuli for more object-centred texts, as tools which rebel against their users and against other objects, and as extensions towards form and language. By not exclusively modelling objects on humanness, but on qualities deriving from their own thingness as well – an object's expressive appearance, function and less explicit qualities – object characters are offered more space in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context.

KEYWORDS

Objects, creative writing, short fiction, experimental writing.

Investigating the possibilities of object animation in the context of short fiction becomes a fascinating way to reflect our contemporary world through creative writing, especially in post-Coronavirus times where objects, due to social distancing, have gained deeper connections to our lives. As short fiction writers and creative writing tutors, not only can we write about objects but we can also write through them, guided by their shape, function and less noticeable qualities. "Art is not the production of knowledge about things," Graham Harman, the founder of OOO: Object-Oriented Ontology, states. Art "creates new things-in-themselves" (2018: 105) and this is what this practice-based creative writing article intends to investigate further, by combining anthropomorphism (a common tool used for object animation) with less human-centred techniques.

In order to start shaping such an object-oriented approach to creative writing, I am drawing on aspects of Martin Heidegger's tool analysis (analyzed in Being and Time, original publication in 1927) and Harman's OOO (first published in Tool-Being in 2002), as I am interested in looking at how an object can become a tool to be used in more unusual ways in a short fiction – by withdrawing from common subject-object relations and mere functionality (the object solely defined by the way it is being used, for instance, or simply enhancing the depiction of a human character). Most importantly, I am interested in how an object's appearance or function can also be reflected in the form and language of a short fiction (through mixed-media hybridities appearing on the page, neologisms, the use of specific fonts and other textual-visual experimentations). The relatively recent short fiction anthology As Told by Things (first edition in 2018), for example, which includes short stories and flash fiction by several writers, has a clear aim to present stories from the perspective of objects. However, sometimes it feels like several of these objects are simply talking like human characters, without reflecting the complexity of their thingness onto language, something which an object-oriented approach to creative writing explores further.

Consequently, this article uses aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO as the means to creatively shape less traditional versions of the non-human in short fiction, rather than present or encourage the inhuman or dehumanizing. Although the philosophy of the tool analysis has been connected to a variety of fields (e.g. Design, Architecture, Art, Politics, Technology), it has not been extensively linked to creative writing and object-related short fiction. And even if writers have been anthropomorphizing objects in their works for centuries, bringing to mind the it-narratives of the 18th century (animals and objects narrating their life stories) or the object-packed novels of Charles Dickens (e.g. the animation of furniture in Great Expectations), this article helps to contextualise writing practice further, by combining creative writing with philosophical concepts and by suggesting techniques which can trigger further research in the field of object animation. It is worth mentioning, at this point, that I am not going into detail in relation to Heidegger's and Harman's philosophy, since the aim of this article is to use parts of the investigated concepts to suggest an object-oriented creative writing methodology in the context of short fiction. I am also briefly referring to certain contemporary short fiction examples and, more extensively, to my own object-centred work, in order to project a mosaic of creative writing techniques which are not solely limited to an object-related content but to the impact of such focus on form and language as well. The short fiction examples by other writers which are presented, here, are used in relation to the investigated philosophical concepts rather than in relation to how objects are being used by creative writers in general or how they have been used over time.

Most short fiction writers approach objects thematically or in relation to a human character, by often transforming objects into human-like beings, while creative writing tutors tend to use objects as props for inspiration in creative writing workshops, or as characters which have their own (but still human-like) point of view and way of speech. However, as Francis Ponge, the French poet of the everyday object, strongly supports in the prose poem 'The Carnation': "The guarantee of the need for expression reside[s] in the object's habitual mutism. Both a guarantee of that need for expression and guarantee of the opposition to language, to standard expressions" (2008: 39). Similarly, Lydia Davis in the short fiction 'The Language of Things in the House' implies a need to approach lifeless characters through an object language which derives from the thingness of the objects themselves, e.g. from their form, sound and material: "the different language sounds are created by these objects in the following way: hard consonants are created by hard objects striking hard surfaces. Vowels are created with

hollow spaces, such as the inside of the butter tub" (2015: 222).

Although starting from a Formalist approach to art and literature, an object-centred approach to creative writing is not detached from the world outside a text and the interconnections that arise in the process. As Nicholas DiBenedetto states in the online article Francis Ponge: Things, Doodads, and Whatchamacallits: "It is through the examination of these unremarkable objects that he [Ponge] was able to find the remarkability in life, the interconnectedness of the objects that form the landscapes around people" (2016). Completely eliminating anthropomorphism would also be a paradox since, as Barbara Johnson suggests in Persons and Things: "to eliminate anthropomorphism would in essence be to eliminate language itself: what other species use it?" (2010: 32). However, as Steven Shaviro states in the essay 'Consequences of Panpsychism' in The Nonhuman Turn – expanding from a reference to the famous 1974 article by Thomas Nagel 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' – "the bat's thinking is inaccessible to us; [so] we should not anthropomorphize the bat's experience by modelling it on our own" (2015:25). Even if a bat is a living creature, it still remains nonhuman, so the above idea can be applied to inanimate objects as well, since creative writers can choose not to exclusively model objects on their own experience. By negotiating anthropomorphism, therefore, and by combining it with an object's thingly qualities, creative writers can draw new paths in the way they animate objects in their works.

Starting from the core of Heidegger's tool analysis in Being and Time, which is part of a vast philosophical journey in the everydayness of human existence and the world of Dasein (being there, being in the world), Heidegger presents objects as tools to be used towards a specific human activity, as equipment and mostly as mediums which are invisible to us during this process of usability and service: "Entities only gain significance from their full context, since a knife is not the same thing in a kitchen, a theatrical drama or the hand of a criminal" (1962: 97). Heidegger considers objects as ready-to-hand towards a use-related activity and unready-to-hand when they seem to resist, when they do not work properly. And when they are present-at-hand, removed from their practicality, they seem to withdraw, forcing us to gawk at them and to somehow try and make sense of them. It seems that we do not consciously notice an object unless something happens and this object/tool is no longer available for its conventional use, unless it rebels against its use/user by malfunctioning or breaking, thus inviting us to look at it more closely. Although Heidegger partly dismisses gawking in relation to objects: "the less we stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, . . . the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment" (1962: 98), choosing to look at objects more closely guides us towards the different ways these objects could be depicted once detached from their conventional uses in everyday life. A Heideggerian possibility towards a mysterious different use is also stressed by Jonathan Hale in the talk 'Coping without Noticing?: Buildings as Tool-Beings' (2013): "So, while the hammer I am wielding right now might not do the immediate job particularly well, once I have it in hand, so to speak, a whole series of other uses begin to become available." Through the tool analysis, therefore, Heidegger offers to objects certain limitations (by presenting them as equipment and by linking them to a human user) but also implies an object independence (when the object/tool resists or breaks, for instance). It could be argued, here, that Nicholson Baker's very short novel The Mezzanine (first published in 1988) also implies such an object empowerment through the broken object/tool, thematically at least, since the breaking of one of the protagonist's laces just before lunch break (following the other lace's breaking, the day before) becomes the catalyst of the narration: Howie, a young office worker, begins an extensive stream of consciousness filled with detailed descriptions of everyday objects, as well as memories and philosophical thoughts related to them.

Harman, through the weird realism of OOO, starting from Heidegger's tool analysis, expands such an object empowerment further by also focusing on an object-object interaction in a shared metaphorical world. In this world, objects have qualities detached from their relations with human beings and they are "liberated from common sense's somnambulant gaze" (Fisher 2008), while touching without touching (something which OOO calls a 'vicarious causation'). Harman considers such a silent power of objects, in 'Technology, Objects and Things in Heidegger,' a "withdrawn depth of being" (2010: 22) and this opens the way towards more radical object animations in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, since an object character can also become "whatever cannot be reduced to either of the two basic kinds of knowledge: what something

is made of, and what it does" (2018: 257). As Meg Pokrass writes in the flash fiction 'The Difference' in the collection The Dog Looks Happy Upside Down (2016) there are "so many ways to be a tool" (55), so objects can become tools to be used differently and more independently in a creative writing context if we, as creative writers (and as human beings), follow Harman's thought and "stop being anxious about what an object means for us, the way in which it is supposedly constructed and constituted by our minds, and [rather] consider the object itself, alluring in its partial opacity" (Fisher 2008). Harman could be right by challenging Heidegger in 'The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger's Fourfold' and by stating that "to 'withdraw' must mean to withdraw from all references not just from the explicit conscious awareness of humans" (2018), since such a holistic withdrawal could allow the creative writer to reinvent the object in focus and experiment with form and language further. Timothy Morton's An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry is an informative study belonging to OOO, which further emphasizes the endless possibilities of choosing to apply OOO on the creation of poetry, so why not on creative writing and short fiction? By focusing, among others, on the way objects interact and translate each other in OOO, it could be claimed that Morton's study also implies the need to challenge anthropomorphism as the sole technique to animate objects in our creative texts: "all entities whatsoever constantly translate other objects into their own terms. . . . My back maps out a small backpomorphic slice of this tree that I'm leaning on. The strings of the wind harp stringpomorphize the wind" (2012: 207).
Arguably, some guiding questions arise when a creative writer chooses to follow more object-oriented paths: Should we, as short fiction writers and tutors, encourage ourselves and our students to exclusively apply human qualities to objects, as it happens in most texts, or could these objects also magnify qualities they already have? Is what can animate and empower objects in more innovative ways something coming from within themselves, often hidden from us? "What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself?" Heidegger asks in 'The Thing' in Poetry, Language, Thought (1975: 167). Consequently, creative writing, like any art, allows us to deconstruct and reconstruct an object in a variety of ways, whereas short fiction itself, as Mary Louise suggests in the essay 'The Short Story' in The New Short Story Theories, becomes the right space "to introduce new (and possibly stigmatized) subject matters into the literary arena" (May 1994: 104). As already mentioned, it is evident that in contemporary short fiction – excluding children's literature, which focuses on the animation of the lifeless more extensively – objects have been mostly used as enhancements of human characters and settings, as reflections of human feelings or as tools of fantasy, so maybe now is the time to encourage creative writers to allow objects to have more space in a creative text and, why not, to turn them into more widely used protagonists. Objects are immensely connected to our lives, nowadays, occupying more and more space in our societies (consumerism, social media), in our minds (through disorders like objectophilia: romantic and sexual attraction to inanimate objects) and in our technologies (mobile phones, gadgets, artificial intelligence), so opening up more space for the nonhuman in our texts becomes a form of reaction to contemporary reality. The cult classic 'The Real Doll' by A. M. Homes, for instance, included in the collection The Safety of Objects (first published in 1990), is a representative example of a short fiction which offers more space to the inanimate, with haunting implications. Homes presents a teenager's bizarre, and often disturbing, erotic relationship with his sister's Barbie doll. However, the animation of the object moves a step further: the doll talks back to the human character, in several moments in the text, even if its speech sounds solely human-like as if everything is in the boy's head.

Consequently, applying aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO to a short fiction context could function in three ways: a) preserving an object character's tool-like identity in a short fiction and observing it, magnifying it, stretching it as far as possible, while reflecting characteristics of this use-related identity in form and language; b) starting to separate an object from its common use and from a human user/character and experimenting with new ways of rebellious existence; c) completely detaching objects from common sense and presenting a mysterious object-object interaction in a withdrawn metaphorical world.

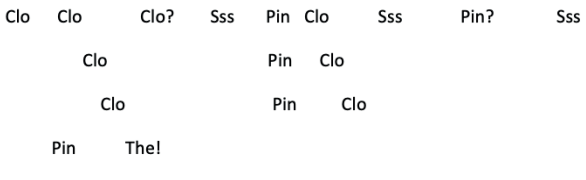
Jose Saramago, for example, significantly empowers the object in the short fiction 'The Chair,' which is included in the collection The Lives of Things (originally published in Portuguese in 1978). This work allegorically presents the departure of the Portuguese dictator Salazar in 1968, after the breaking of his deckchair and the brain haemorrhage that followed, and projects a detailed presentation of a subject-object protagonist through a narration

moving in and out of a chair's wood. The object protagonist in this text constantly hovers between life and death, skin and wood, man and chair: "The good leg and damaged leg of the chair have already slid forward, all sense of balance gone. The real fall is clearly imminent" (17). That leg appears both wooden and human, and even if Salazar is connected to it, a human character is never really the focus of the narration. The object is offered more agency and mirrors the human character's loss of control. The breaking/broken object, as in Heidegger's tool analysis, paradoxically becomes a powerful object which drastically affects the fate of the human character. Moreover, the cinematic techniques Saramago uses offer movement and expansion to the object in focus (through the use of rewind and close-up techniques) and give the impression of an object elasticity to the reader, as if the chair's material moves and stretches between the duality of inside and outside, softness and concreteness, rise and fall: "So let the chair go back to an upright position and recommence its fall . . . Behold Anobium, now in close up, with his coleopteran face, eaten away in its turn by the wind and the hot sun, which, as we all know, burn out the open galleries in the leg of the chair that has just broken" (8).

Aimee Bender's short fiction 'Quiet Please' in The Girl in the Flammable Skirt (first published in 1998) also becomes a useful example of contemporary short fiction to reflect aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and, especially, how a short fiction writer can present a silent but still powerful object. In contrast to Saramago's 'The Chair' which zooms into the object, Bender's 'Quiet Please' zooms out, but with a purpose. The silent couch character Bender presents withdraws from conventional use and domesticity. This becomes the beginning of new object use possibilities, even if the object is not animated as a concrete character with its own speech but mostly as a silent presence in the text which, nevertheless, moves the plot further on. The couch, which is located in the back room of a public library, keeps its traditional function as an object of relaxation but also extends it, by becoming a place of exaggerated sexuality. Shocked by her father's death, silently and suddenly sneaking into her life in the form of "a phone call from her weeping mother" (58), the librarian returns to work willing to transform the library's back room and the couch into a sexual hub: "It is quiet in the rest of the library. . . . She grips a pillow in her fists and he breathes behind her, hot air down her back" (57). Bender says nothing about the couch, its legs, shape, colour or size, thus strengthening the object through its actual invisibility, as if the couch is simply a tool destined for a specific use and activity, although, ironically, the reader feels that it is a lot more than that. When a secondary character, the muscleman, starts to lift the librarian (who is on the couch) in front of the library guests, a surreal act is created which facilitates the main character's final realization and possible acceptance of her father's death. Through the muscleman, the couch becomes more visible, gawked at, both librarian and couch now stand in front of the public rather than in the privacy of the back room: "Stand up he [the muscleman] says to her [the librarian] in a low voice, muffled from underneath the couch, stand up and I'll balance you, I can do it even if you're standing"(63). The couch, although initially invisible and passive, is offered a new form of existence. It is offered movement, indirect speech, as well as the ability to lead the human character towards an epiphany in relation to her father's death, by becoming the means through which the librarian reaches another allegorical object: the mural with the Fairies on the ceiling. Once high enough, thanks to the muscleman and the couch, the librarian draws "a big wide dancing smile" (63) to one of the fairies as if tragically enforcing happiness onto her own face: "[one of the fairies] clearly dancing against her will, dragged along with the circle, her mouth wide open and screaming" (64). It could be claimed, here, that Bender's 'Quiet Please' shows that a more minimalistic writerly approach towards objects, following the object invisibility Heidegger's tool analysis also describes, could still have a strong impact on the reader, since through the silence of the objects used the reader dives into the subconscious of the human character.

Moving to my own object-centred work – the result of a strong fascination I have always had with objects, since childhood – an object character's use in both conventional and unconventional ways, with the implication of an object-object interaction, is something I have explored in my re-edited short fiction 'Red, Blue, Green and Other Clothespins' (first version published in the Cypriot Greek dialect, oanagnostis.gr, summer 2018). In this short fiction, the clothespins in focus preserve and magnify their identity as objects to hang clothes with, as ready-to-hand tools used for a specific human activity: the drying of clothes. Returning to the way an object's common use can be reflected in form and language, I chose to present the routine function of

the clothespins not only verbally but also visually, through the image of syllables and letters hanging on the page like windblown clothes on a clothesline. This visuality became a form of language for these objects and, although reflecting anthropomorphism due to the actual use of human speech, also distanced itself from stereotypical speech through a deconstruction of the word 'clothespins' on the white page:



In order to enhance the empowerment and independence of these clothespins, I removed the presence of a human character in the text, like Saramago annihilates the power of a human character in 'The Chair.' In contrast to Heidegger's view of objects as equipment, I chose to turn them into more distinguishable individual characters and for this reason I experimented with their different colours and the way these colours could symbolically affect their language (for example, the red clothespin suffers from anger management issues, the blue one constantly has the blues, and so on). In other words, I destabilized Heidegger's idea that all objects/tools are part of a context in which they belong and reflect an "openness towards the world as a context or setting in which we can meaningfully deploy certain skills"(Kaufer and Chemero 2015: 62) and chose to offer more freedom to the objects in focus. Moreover, these fictional clothespins, even if they preserve their conventional function by comically embracing it through their rhythmical daily conversations: "Ah! What a lovely, dotted towel! It fearlessly wipes everything out," also rebel against their functional identity: "Stains? Life's too short to be spotless. Stain yourselves for a change, stain yourselves." In the last paragraph of the text, they also reflect the possibility of escaping from their use-related context and becoming something else, other existences, or other objects, as Harman's OOO also implies.

> [they are] dreaming that they have become leaves, the leaves of that Fig tree, that they are no longer clothespins, grumpy and plain, that they come from exotic Pin trees, that they occasionally live like birds, birds on strings, colourful, free, parrot-like, . . . that they are not stuck on clothes and clotheslines, that they are not squeezed in baskets, that they do not get burnt by Sun every day . . .

And following the principle of OOO that objects touch each other without touching ('vicarious causation'), these clothespins never directly touch each other but relate in invisible ways, through the visuals and object-object dialogue I used in this text, rather than through a tactile, anthropomorphic movement applied on the objects in focus: "For Harman, when objects make contact, they touch without touching. Objects do not touch each other directly. They relate indirectly while the radical alterity of each object remains intact, untouched" (Mickey 2016). Such an object-object interaction is nicely implied in Eva Marie Ginsburg's 'The Kettle,' a flash fiction included in the anthology Flash Fiction Forward, where a kettle ridiculed by a group of pots rebels not only against its user but also against other objects. The human character as a strong presence is absent in this text as well, as if these objects simply exist in their own object world: "And then there was the matter of its whistle, the way it screamed when it boiled and got louder and louder until the man came to turn it off – as though the kettle believed the man existed to serve it, and not the other way round" (2006: 167). Ginsburg's fictional objects touch without touching, while also affecting each other, in negative ways: "They [the pots] ridiculed it [the kettle] with rattles and bumps. . . . They scoffed and they tittered, and sometimes, next to it on the stove, they gleefully splattered the kettle with grease" (166-167). In an interview to Lucy Kimbell, Harman states: "My biggest objection to Heidegger is that he does not let objects do this [kick back] to each other as well. It's always a question for him of how objects kick back against humans," so it could be argued, here, that Ginsburg's flash fiction also projects the possibility of that object-object rebellious interaction echoed through OOO, where objects are not only sharing a metaphorical world but they also influence one another. Ginsburg's flash fiction marginalizes the presence of the human character in order to offer more space to objects as protagonists: the human character becomes more passive, almost inexistent, and the object more active. This switch of roles in the text is what makes these object characters credible enough to the reader, since the reader takes this object world for granted from the very beginning of the narration, without feeling the need to question how or why this object world works.

Returning to the kicking back identity of objects

against their users, rather than against each other, my unpublished short fiction 'DELETE' appears to be a useful example to analyze further. The object protagonist in this work, a keyboard, remains the medium through which the human character, the writer, conventionally uses his laptop and writes but, at the same time, becomes an active voice of judgement towards a writer who seems to ignore the keyboard's presence. The reason the keyboard reacts against its user is its tendency to be noticed and not to be treated as an invisible tool. Its power as a short fiction protagonist becomes even more emphasized through its ability to 'feel' the intentions of the human character rather than simply his actions; its ability to not only experience a literal touch but also the intention of a touch: "**I know your feelings bbbetter than anyone, definitely better than the screen. I feel your iiiiintention, I see possibility in your shaky fingers, even if some words are never written**." The keyboard, unable to speak exactly as humans do, and ignored by its user, reveals its rebellious identity through typo mistakes, different fonts and repeated letters, as well as through an indirect reaction against fixed expressions of human language, for example, when it states "**maybe this will catch your finger**" rather than **"maybe this will catch your eye.**" When the keyboard types "**Write it through me**," it echoes Heidegger's idea of objects as invisible mediums of use but, at the same time, reveals this fictional object's tendency to be touched, to be looked at, to be felt. Something which is never fulfilled, as the symbolic 'death' of the object in the end (its destruction by its own user) also mirrors the death of inspiration. However, the keyboard protagonist's effort to type the word 'help' at the end of the text, despite its darkness, also implies something positive and empowering. It becomes laughter and, therefore, a moment of Phoenix-like regeneration for the object in focus: "The keyboard knew something was wrong. It tried to type the word 'help' many times. Its shocked buttons simply exhaled **he he.** It is believed, until this very day, that the mutilated to death keyboard was a brave one. It died laughing."

As Harman suggests in Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things, an object "is more than an appearance, because it is many different appearances at once to many different creatures. Beyond that, it is even more than all of these appearances put together because it might harbor qualities that no current observers are equipped to detect" (2005: 17). What 'DELETE' shows, therefore, is that a keyboard, when creatively explored in a short fiction, can obtain a form of existence which is not restricted to human perception or subject-object relations. Even if this keyboard protagonist still reflects anthropomorphic characteristics, by using language or gesture, it is allowed to transform language, it 'speaks' boldly, and in bold, and rebels against its common use, while also expressing a form of object sexuality: "**Can you rub my O button? They say that along with the Q they are the most erogenous buttons**." The keyboard also interacts with other objects in the text, e.g. the screen, affecting their **deathtiny** (a neologism from the word 'destiny' to ironically stress the fact that objects are lifeless): "The keyboard witnessed this from a distance, **I think we are next…** it typed on the screen. The screen turned black; it was used to accepting its fate. When it turned to white again, all spaces had disappeared. Scriptio Continua spread itself on all saved Word documents."

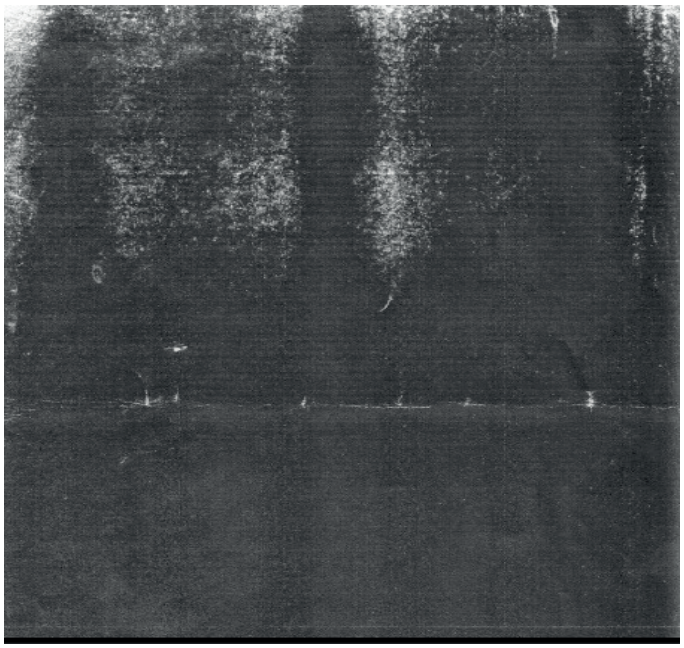
In one more short fiction, 'Sofia' (a revised version of this short fiction was published in Greek in In-betweens [Οι Ενδιάμεσοι], 2022), I chose to focus on a sofa and the impact this object could have on the life of a mother. This sofa character falls off a balcony and accidentally kills a young man. By doing that the object can no longer be seen as something simply connected to daily routine and relaxation, just like Bender's couch is no longer a regular couch in 'Quiet Please.' The broken and blood-stained sofa is not ready-to-hand but rather a tool detached from its practicality and, therefore, present-at-hand (following Heidegger's tool analysis terminology again), an object with new possibilities of use. And by being present-at-hand a process of defamiliarization begins. In the first version of this short fiction, this sofa character turns into a new object, a murderous object and thus, into a body which the victim's mother now habitually abuses but also talks to in order to exorcize the tragedy of her son's loss: "She would kick it on Mondays, and she would tear it on Tuesdays, and she would remove its sponges on Wednesday mornings, and she would stitch its cuts on Wednesday nights." The repetition of 'would' has been used here to show that this sofa-related routine has transformed into an obsession, an 'objession' to be exact, a term I like to use when describing the obsessions human characters have with objects (or vice versa). When the sofa actually speaks in this text (robotically, in italics and with hyphens alluding to fabric stitches) and says "Cursed---cursed---be---maker---of--

-heavy---lethal---sofas"– a sentence alluding to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the monster's famous words "Cursed, cursed creator" (1992:132) – the object rebels both against its use and against its maker. Most importantly, though, it indirectly rebels against syntax and sentence structure: "Miss---body------miss---------back----------miss---------television----------." The object's 'faulty' language springs out of its conventional use and origin but also leads the object to a new, partly autonomous, identity. An autonomy which becomes an introduction to how an object character can be animated further by a short fiction writer, not solely modelled on a human body or human language but also using qualities it already has within itself: "'I hope your mother never feels such pain' / Have---no---mother / 'I hope your maker never cries this much' / Just---result---of---mass---production."

The tendency towards an object's powerful withdrawal, which Heidegger implies through the tool analysis and which Harman's OOO expands further (by treating subjects and objects as equally important) is something I explored in the first version of one more short fiction, 'Model D235467' (a revised version of this short fiction was published in Greek in In-betweens [Οι Ενδιάμεσοι], 2022). By using the technique of inversion again – making human characters more passive and object characters more active – I limited the presence of the human user/character to a visual photocopy of his face:

This way I presented a multi-functional office photocopier which kicks back and starts to work on its own, struggling to find a language to communicate the tragedy of the human character's suicide attempt. By photocopying faulty and ink-flooded A4 sheets, extended from the machine to the reader through visual writing, this photocopier protagonist tries to exorcize the trauma it has witnessed and invent its own object language.

It could be argued that this happens through what Maggie Ann Bowers calls a "vocabulary of 'otherness'"(2004: 65), a phrase used to comment on magical realism as a narrative mode for the marginalized, for the ones that are denied power. Objects, as a marginalized group in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, can employ such a strange "vocabulary of 'otherness'" in order to be heard; an otherness springing out of an object's marginalization in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, on the one hand, as well as an otherness in relation to the way an object can express itself differently from a human character in a creative text:

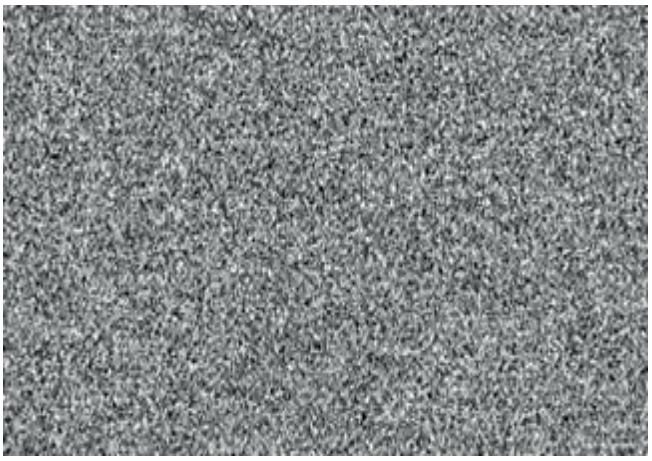


Real photocopy interrupting photocopier's interior monologue : www.texturefabrik.com

In this short fiction, the otherness of the object – once again, its difference from the way a human character would speak on the page – is expressed through visuals integrated in the narration, as the photocopy above shows. This seems to invite the reader to imagine what's hidden below the black ink; what's hidden inside the object. This is still, as Heidegger indicates in the tool analysis, an expression of serviceability, the photocopier is still a tool intended towards a repeated task in an office context but, now, the machine's function

and ink-flooded photocopies also reflect the dark and mysterious esotericism of the object in focus: "Why can't they give me a break? Keep my unusual copies for a change; exhibit them high up on a wall where I can see them, in a nice frame. They are not faulty ones. Why do they always want to fix things? They are not faulty! They are…me." The object protagonist's direct speech also rebels against a photocopier's copying nature, something which often becomes a mechanism of irony through an actual repetition in words: "Don't worry, Hector. I won't copy a word. You'll still be the best employee of the month, with a 30% sales increase. Nobody will find out one morning you hit your head so hard on me, we almost broke into pieces. . . . Don't worry, Hector. I won't copy a word. I won't copy a word. I won't copy a word." Following Harman's reference to Jose Ortega and the comment that "every non-human object can also be called an 'I'; in the sense of having a definite inwardness that can never fully be grasped" (2018: 70), I used a long first-person interior monologue, here, as a way to reveal not only the object's use-related qualities but also a less explicit, more mysterious, identity.

Such a textual-visual depiction of an object's otherness (and therefore, a form of object autonomy) occurs in other short fictions I have written, for example in my recently re-edited text 'The Brief Happiness of a Charming Murder' (first version published in Greek in Cauldron [Καζάνι], 2015) where a woman struggling with depression drowns her TV in the bathtub. This TV character (called Toshi by the narrator) initially belongs to a living room environment, just like most TVs, but also reflects the darkness of both subject and object, extended to the reader through an object language which combines TV screen images, humorous (often misspelt) captions and other textual-visual experimentations:



> You know…Toshi cried.
>
> Not in the way we humans cowardly cry, but in a surrealistically brave way, releasing small, round, noisy bubbles.

Toshi is animated through both words and images, since a TV's common function somehow demands a certain amount of visuality integrated in the narration. The other, the marginalized, the commonly believed to be lifeless and passive, reacts and forms its own hybrid language in order to confess not only its own secrets but also the secrets of its owner. In this way Toshi becomes a more independent object character: "**Can you believe she tried to kill me? To drown me so cruelly as if I where…were human?**" Most importantly, though, this TV character combines anthropomorphism with characteristics of its own thingness. It cries like a human being but it cries through the visuality of its lost signal rather than through human-like tears.

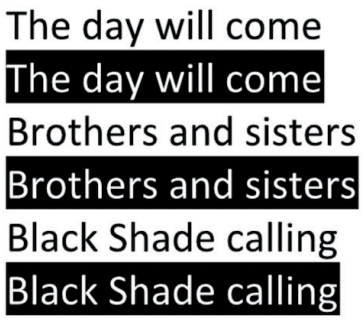
Returning to how Harman's OOO can inspire a short fiction writer to animate objects in more complex or less ordinary ways, I Want My Head Back (originally published in Greek, Mikrokyklos Publishing, 2016) is a helpful example to analyze further, especially in relation to a creative writing approach which intermixes human-like and thing-like qualities. This combination of very short texts presents an object metaphorical wasteland where no human is around: "A dusty seabed sailed in a swamp of rusty machine parts, a broken lamp composed music with a mouse, an old safe hosted in its guts the nest of a bird and towards the end of this short journey, a torn purse branded Miu Miu echoed meow meow." In this shared object world, a mutilated Barbie doll, half-sunk in rubbish, rebels against its own Barbie context: "What I just said sounded deep. I know, totally out of my character." This Heideggerian broken tool, by becoming completely detached from its practicality, becomes present-at-hand with new possibilities of existence, extending to both its mutilated body parts and the language of the text. The Barbie doll's relationship with its scattered body parts, and with other objects, is not a tactile one. These lifeless existences never literally touch, as Harman's OOO suggests, but still connect:

> I guess this coke can right next to me feels what I feel. Maybe that's how that guttered washing machine next to my isolated, smiling head feels too. I wish extreme weather conditions could

> push my head in there and wash filth away, wash that permanent smile, releasing me from tormenting thoughts, thoughts I shouldn't have since, firstly, I no longer have a head and, secondly, I no longer have a head. I want my head back.

Although the anthropomorphism of a Barbie doll is, inevitably, part of a doll's identity, this object protagonist no longer has a head. Its human-like body is deconstructed and its thingness is also reflected in the language of the text: a superficial Barbie language (functioning as the doll's alter ego) ironically interrupts the doll's darkly philosophical monologue. This interruption by the doll's alter ego occurs through the use of frivolous Barbie-like slogans, presented to the reader through girly fonts: Glitters! / Ken, is THAT you? In I Want My Head Back, consequently, visual writing, this time through the use of specific typography/font, becomes one more technique to emphasize the contrast between a regular Barbie doll and a Barbie with existential depth, as well as the object (Font) within the object (Barbie doll). In the end of this text, another object, a bulldozer, deliberately not connected to a human user as if it functions on its own, squashes the objects of this wasteland, including all hands and legs of the Barbie doll: "Today, the bulldozer distances itself. Without arms, without legs, without a head, what's left is only the trunk. Luckily, the trunk of a body and the trunk of a tree is the same word. And when the trunk's left, a tree's still a tree." As Harman suggests in Towards Speculative Realism "objects contest each other, seduce each other, empower or annihilate each other . . . it is possible that gravel and tar, cloth and magnesium wage war against one another, compress one another into submission, command respect from one another" (2010: 21). Moving a step further, objects not only co-exist or annihilate each other in I Want My Head Back but also objectify language itself. Even human feelings are explained through an object-oriented lens: "Lust is a pair of scissors. Love is a brush. Sorrow is waterproof red lipstick." So, maybe it is not a matter of whether an object prevails over a subject, not a matter of existential priority but rather, as Harman's OOO also echoes, a matter of equality between subjects and objects. When Harman asks us in Kimbell's interview to "look for the soul of the thing," this soul is not an eternal soul, or a soul which only belongs to humans, but a soul which could be both permanent and temporary: [barbie doll] "You're asking me how I can see without a head. Well, there's only one way left, with the eyes of the soul. What do you mean I have no soul?"

An extinguishing force of objects towards human characters, even towards each other, is something I also explored in my short fiction 'Electra' (first published in Litro, spring 2021), where a reading lamp with a black shade becomes a mirroring of contemporary terrorism: "Zze [the lamp] just needed to gather some more voltage. Zzer switch would do all the work. Zzer followers would cheer. All cables would transmit zzer act of sacrifice." While editing this short fiction, and in order to find less anthropomorphic ways to animate the object in focus, the pronoun 'she' was replaced by 'zze' (a pronoun which may bring to mind the gender-neutral pronoun 'ze' but which actually encloses the 'zz' sound of electricity). The lamp-terrorist in 'Electra' not only rebels against the world (and against commonly used pronouns) but also against zzer own mother, something which I used in the text as an allusion to the Neo-Freudian psychological syndrome Electra complex. This dark identity of the reading lamp was also reflected in the rebellious language spoken by the object, a repetitive visual mixture of light and darkness, reflecting the lamp's on-off function (included in the first draft of this short fiction but not in its published version):



And now approaching the end of the exegesis of some of my own object-centred work, 'Bat,' a recently re-edited short fiction, originally published in Greek (Cauldron [Καζάνι], 2015) becomes the right place to end things, as it partly enwraps what has been analyzed so far. In this short fiction, the object character once again escapes its conventional function and becomes a tool to be used differently, while the narration gradually annihilates the presence of the human character in the text. When the bat (object), through the technique of a footnote narration, turns into a bat (subject/mammal) and abandons the human character, a pun seems to be the only narratively available tool to try to break the human character's 'objession': "The bat, deep inside,

even deeper than wood itself, knows . . . it will never be able to fill that void inside him. So, without more hesitation, also facilitated by this short footnote, the bat temporarily turns itself into a bat and flies off the page." The actual ending, a later addition, visually presents a handwritten postcard from Mykonos island, sent to the human character by the bat. This detail expresses an extension of the bat's identity to language, by turning the postcard which is integrated in the text into a speaking mechanism for the up to this moment silent object. The reason this new ending was later added was to emphasize the object's autonomy, as its first version ended with the bat still attached to the hand and body of a human user/character. This new ending, through its exaggeration, frees the object by turning it into an anthropomorphized character but, once again, a character also animated through its own thingness. Even if this wooden bat escapes from the human character and the text (like a flying bat) and now 'writes' a postcard, the bat's expression is restricted to a non-flexible, wood-like language, a language full of clichéd opinions and disturbing stereotypes, thus also echoing the hardness of the object's material (wood). And following Harman's OOO again, maybe an object (postcard) translating another object (bat):

Dear Demosthenes,
Just a quick hello from crazy Mykonos, a land of contradictions! I know we haven't been in touch but, in a nutshell, I want you to know that I still care about you, no matter what. I have a dream. I'm planning to stay in Mykonos and be used as a boat paddle for the canoes of rich vacationers. My boss is an Irishman, he's ok, all Irish people are drunks and eat potatoes but my boss eats Greek salad all day, just like every Greek. At first glance, any feminine-looking man is gay here and real men are strong and do all the work.

Anyway, we have all fallen on hard times, I hope you're well.

Take care! Greetings from the island!

Your B.

P.S: I met a former librarian the other day. She wanted to use me as an alternative exercise tool in her Pilates workshop. I kindly refused. All librarians are women who wear glasses, tie a high bun and have a frown on their face…

In conclusion, by drawing on aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO, this article has introduced an object-oriented approach to creative writing which aims to explore less conventional object animations in short fiction, both thematically and linguistically, and to encourage short fiction writers and creative writing tutors to experiment with objects more, by combining anthropomorphism with an object's own thingly qualities. Since this is not a philosophical article but part of a practice-based creative writing research which uses philosophical concepts to propose an object-centred approach to short fiction, it is important to acknowledge, at this point, that an object ontology as a philosophical truth is still being developed. Applying aspects of it on creative writing, therefore, still seems to demand the preservation of certain human-like qualities in order not to disengage, confuse or alienate the reader. In the New York Times article 'A Storyteller's Shoptalk' (1981), Raymond Carver states the following: "It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language." Arguably, expanding Carver's words a step further, the language devised for objects can also become extended and infused with linguistically and visually unusual details. "Humanity sat at the centre of philosophical thinking for too long" Ian Bogost, an OOO thinker, claims in the summary description of Alien Phenomenology (2012). Paraphrasing Bogost, such an object-oriented approach suggests that humanity sat, indeed, at the centre of creative writing for too long; a challenging statement which could act as a steppingstone towards more independent and more powerful object characters in contemporary short fiction. Something which could also inspire us to start seeing objects as new tools, while creatively expanding those moments when something lifeless affects our lives, not always in our own way, but also "in its own little way" (Davis 2015: 33).

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