



Sex of Things – An exploration of Bill Brown's things through the lens of gender

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Abstract— Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' (2001) introduces the radical idea of the difference between 'objects' and 'things'. For Brown an object is an entity which is functional and therefore obedient and docile drawing no significant attention from the user. A thing on the other hand is a recalcitrant object who has shed its utilitarian property and specifically by becoming non-functional makes its presence felt in the user's /onlooker's consciousness. This chapter uses Brown's 'Thing Theory' (2001) as a tool to demonstrate that objects can be explored as both gendered and gender-ambivalent entities following their anthropomorphisation — a mass scale phenomenon Brown himself emphasises. This chapter argues that through the process of humanisation and subsequent internalisation objects can impact human perception of themselves in lasting and therefore powerful ways.



Keywords — anthropomorphisation, gender, objects, things, 'Thing Theory'

I. INTRODUCTION

What decade of the century didn't have its own thing about things? (2015, 12)

We want things to come before ideas, before theory, before the word (2001, 16).

Bill Brown opens his seminal essay 'Thing Theory' in the special issue of Critical Inquiry (2001) with a quote of Michel Serres, 'Le sujet nait de l'objet' (1) and goes on to ask,

is there something perverse, if not archly insistent, about complicating things with theory? Do we really need anything like thing theory the way we need narrative theory or cultural theory, queer theory or discourse theory? Why not let things alone? Let them rest ... in the balmy elsewhere beyond theory. (1)

Brown's formulation of Thing Theory epitomises an ardent appeal to appraise things based on the merit of their apparent and tangible materiality. That is not to say, that in his appraisal of 'thingness', the things in the form of physical entities are divorced from human intentionality: 'objects are materialized by (ap)perceiving subject' (5), therefore, for

Brown, they are rather ineluctably linked with one another. The key premise and the promise of 'Thing Theory' are to bring things to the forefront of the contemporary discourses and register the simultaneous process where things play a crucial role in affecting human subjects whilst being continually appropriated and re-appropriated by them. The Thing Theory conceptualises 'things, the thing, and thingness' (12) as it also reveals the evolving nature of subject-object relation over few decades, spreading over the latter half of the twentieth century, till the very recent years of the twenty-first. It is a given, that in the present climate, the evolving dynamics between humans and objects are consistently and rather speedily gaining currency, and the plenitude of contemporary thinking in dealing with the complexities of human-object association reflects that momentum. Brown draws his stock of thoughts from a range of such thinking/disciplines both traditional and modern. The two key concerns of this chapter are, firstly, to analyse in-depth, Brown's objects, in their multiple dimensions through the understanding of his theorization of 'thingness'. While doing so and being true to the actual intent of the thesis, which is to explore objects in the light of their gender quotients, this section will, examine and

excavate gender overtones embedded within objects, the lack of gender within *his* inquest of objects, and also gender ambiguity in the objects using 'thingness' as the literary-theoretical pathway. Since, the whole array of Brown's objects are borrowed from diverse schools of thoughts, most notably visual art and literature, this study will reflect on Brown's renderings of those pieces, for example, his analyses of the museal objects, collectibles and objects in ruins. The latter half of the chapter will first present a detailed analysis of the Twin towers as 'lost objects' in the manner that Brown considers them, plus attempt to examine them as 'lost objects', but within the prism of gender.

Brown observes that whilst the literary world has been invested in recognising the pivotal role of the subjects in shaping up the social, cultural, and economic scene, the role of objects has been marginalised. He comments:

the criticism of the past decade has been profoundly successful in showing how literary texts exhibits multiple modes of fashioning the identity of subjects (national subjects, gendered subjects, hybrid subjects), but the identity of objects has hardly been voiced as a question ... we might say, as has Jean Baudrillard, that the object, because it is considered 'only the alienated, accursed part of the subject' has been rendered unintelligible, 'shamed, obscene, passive'. (2003, 17)

Through this argument, Brown asserts that the literature reveals how gendered identity is one of the many defining identities that a subject carries forth, and that, it is also elemental in shaping up of his/her personality. Similarly, it is also crucial to examine objects in the light of gender, especially because (as per Brown's consideration in literature and beyond) subjects live in and through their objects. In other words, objects reflect subjects.

1.1 Thing Theory - a brief overview

One of the fundamental premises of the Thing Theory draws heavily from Heideggerian axiom of the thingness of things, an idea that resists (as the previous section of this chapter analyses in great detail) the irreducibility of things to merely functional objects. Brown takes a cue from Heidegger's interrogation of the abstractness embedded within a thing, which can at best be 'glimpsed' (2001, 4) or sensed and never thoroughly grasped - an *essential* quality, which renders objects their 'thingness'. As Heidegger points out, 'the thingness of the thing remains concealed, forgotten. The nature of the thing never comes to light, that is, it never gets a hearing' (1971, 170). To which Brown echoes,

if Thing theory sounds like an oxymoron, then, it may not be because things reside in balmy elsewhere beyond theory but because they lie both at hand and somewhere outside the theoretical field, beyond a certain limit, as a recognizable yet illegible remainder'. (2004, 5)

Brown builds his theory arguing that there are two sides to any object. On one side there is the utilitarian value of an object, that is when the object fulfils its expected functional duty, such as the transparency of a windowpane offering a clear view of what is on the other side, a drilling machine being able to drill a hole in the wall, *etc.* Inversely, Brown depicts a scenario where the objects have stopped performing their estimated duties, that is when the windowpane has accumulated dirt on its surface limiting its efficacy as a facilitator of viewing activity, or a piece of malfunctioning equipment, eventually thwarting human subjects' flow of action. Interestingly, Brown concentrates more on the latter status of the object. Rather than resigning to the pragmatism that equipment is liable at times to malfunction and cause hindrances in our lives, he rationalises this particular caprice of tools as their ability to exert power over human subjects by being noticeable. Brown contends that unimpeded functioning of tools is consistently presupposed and entities such as them, command attention only by disrupting that continuum. To Brown, 'opacity' of an object, that is the prominence of its non-functional/broken form is far more suggestive of its abstractness (thingness, realness) as opposed to its 'transparency', which is their habitual disposition when they are performing as per expectation.

II. THE CORPOREALITY FACTOR

If the dominant criticism against Heidegger's idea of *Dasein* or 'being' is the lack of actual tangible body, Brown's ideation of objects does not at all at any point overlook corporeality. The key assumption of Thing Theory is to look more closely *at the bodies of objects* and not just through them. This, therefore, justifies the intuition that an unclean/opaque windowpane is much more in attendance to be physically touched and felt than its clean/transparent counterpart. Similarly, a piece of equipment is more enigmatic and phantasmal/alluring in its defunct state, and therefore more perceptually real - a characteristic, that makes them ideal entities to be regarded as gendered. It is also to be noted that Brown employs a ceaseless assortment of objects, in his multiple theses regarding objects, as opposed to Heidegger's singular jug. Interestingly, he also includes a massive inventory, an exhibition catalogue from *Voices* with which he closes his essay, 'Thing Theory'. His taxonomy ranges from quotidian sought-after objects to the undesirable for example, the detritus. Brown places emphasis on the altering power of detritus substances left behind after a life-changing transformation. In *Other Thing* (2015) he alludes to a character in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*- 'an unidentified consciousness' (2015, 17) metamorphosed from a regular human subject into walking but a palpable apparition, more appropriately, an apparition

of a man, or an abruptly altered body after having been engulfed by the powdered glass: debris from shattered buildings in the aftermath of the 9/11. His reflection on art objects ranges from the very ancient to the modern. The fact that he opens his book *Other Things* (2015) with an objective study on the mere materiality of the Shield of Achilles proves the point. In his on-going quest for thingness, he even integrates planet earth (highlighting its complete commodification by humans) into his long list of objects. All his objects or physically touchable entities have abilities to journey on unexpected trajectories and breach the code of normal conduct, because 'the experience of object agency can't be ascribed to any one disposition' (2015, 7). My exploration of the gendered identity in Brown's objects will be based on his conceptual assumption of their ability to *become* or self-reorder - a transformative event that helps them manifest their 'thinghood' over and against their, 'objecthood': that is to say from being functional to being dysfunctional - from being merely physiological to psychological, from being determinate to amorphous.

III. BECOMING OF OBJECTS THROUGH THE SOCIAL JOURNEY - CAN BROWN'S BROKEN/DEFUNCT OBJECTS BE REGARDED AS GENDERED

Brown argues that,

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. (Brown, 2004, 4)

The key observation in the above excerpt is about accosting a sudden situation along the social journey of objects. The journey entails for the objects a fluidity of course or 'flow within the circuits' (2004, 4), through specific phases, that is when all the four phases - 'production and distribution' and 'consumption and exhibition' (4) that the objects must pass through are to be reflected upon. Each of these four junctures is a conduit that accounts for a transformation in the disposition of the objects, as each singular stage represents a departure of a particular kind. The objects get delivered from one conduit to the next, and their mobility ultimately concludes at 'exhibition'. Within a broader spectrum of the subject-object transaction, 'consumption' would logically be the terminal stop in the object journey, which represents the metamorphosis of an object into a commodity, and according to Brown's axiomatic position in 'Thing Theory', 'commodity' because of its use-value is bereft of 'thingness'. Furthermore, Brown's position on

object intelligence is fastened to Heidegger's analytic of the actual reality of objects, that does not undervalue the present-at-handness of objects, (defined as the objects as such, without their baggage of functional abilities - a quality central to the objects' transcendental potentiality), in preference to its ready-at-handness characterised by their potential to function. Therefore, for him, the journey of an object completes with its breaking down because that is when it draws the special spectatorship, because, in this final phase the object by breaching the promise of its operational efficacy gains a different allure - an opacity which invites curiosity. The object through its brokenness becomes an exhibit in the gaze of a beholder. Thus, the gaining of this opacity - the exhibitory quality becomes a potent reason as to why Brown must further the corridor of the object journey to 'exhibition'. For, at this stage, the object is not regarded just by its earlier credential of authenticity, but its immediately present, palpable, complex, and therefore hard to define vivacity on all its layers as a material being. In *Other things* (2015) he revisits his old outlook towards his object/thing duality and points out,

thingness is precipitated as a kind of misuse value. By *misuse value* I mean to name the aspects of an object - sensuous, aesthetic, semiotic — that become palpable, legible, audible when the object is experienced in whatever time it takes ... for an object to become another thing. (2015, 51)

For objects, entering the sequential journey through the social conveyor belt of production distribution, consumption and exhibition imply repetitive departures. By the same token, every departure through the various junctions of this chain of operation (production, distribution, consumption, and exhibition) also implies new emergences. In the current context, it is indicative of the arrival of an inscrutable newness in the corporeality of the same objects. Attaining this newness further ties in with the essential notions of 'becoming'. Therefore in plain terms, every departure generates a new beginning and thus a new becoming, and the idea of becoming irrevocably is entwined with the phenomenon of fluidity/mutability. Gender, at the height of its mutable form, is illustrative of this becoming potential.

Brown affirms that an 'object' whilst on its trajectory through the chain of operations to become a 'thing', that is, transmuting from being instrumental to ornamental, gains in the quality of 'misuse value'. 'Misuse value' is a specific juncture along the object trail. This is a state that can be reached or realized only when the 'sensuous', 'aesthetic' and 'semiotic' aspects of the objects so long obfuscated, come to the fore. Once they surface, their texture can be felt, making them 'palpable', their aesthetic (visual image) can be

comprehended, making them 'legible' and finally, their inner vibration can be sensed, making them 'audible'. In short, the entities from being sensible (transparent) become sensuous (opaque). Undoubtedly, as has been discussed earlier, Brown's imagining of 'thingness' is enthused by the sensuousness of the physicality of objects rather than the sensibilities of their use-value. But can sensuousness - a hugely subjective phenomenon be interpreted through gender? Or more pointedly, is 'sensuousness' a gendered experience?

Carolyn Korsmeyer regards sensuousness to be very much within the realm of the gender binary. She suggests that sensuousness, or the function of senses, in traditional philosophy, can be split between mind (intellect) and body (flesh). Her interrogation of this binary, or more appropriately the hierarchical arrangement of senses rests, therefore, on the understanding of the fundamental differences between the finer senses and the secondary senses. According to her, finer senses represent the visual and the auditory (matters of mind). Whereas the minor or the secondary senses, important though they are, denotes the bodily awareness of touch, smell, and taste (matters of flesh). In her own words, 'philosophy has traditionally privileged mind - abstract, nonphysical, intellectual - over the body - concrete, material and sensuous' (2004, 9). According to the 'ancient value culture' (9) matters of mind exemplifies masculine intellectual elitism, consigning the senses of flesh to the feminine domain. Nevertheless, can sensuousness widen its compass beyond the realms of art and philosophy? If so, can its rawness be one of the integral components of collective mourning following a loss of a massive scale? In such an event, what role would gender have to play?

Brown's analysis of the collective psychological turmoil that followed the collapse of the World Trade Centre in the year 2001 challenges and rearranges the meticulously fashioned theories concerning sensuousness established over centuries. The event embodies one of the most complex as well as an irreversible kind of transmuting or 'becoming' on multiple levels and therefore, is one of the most problematic incidents to comprehend. The life and the extraordinary demise of World Trade Centre is a textbook instance confirming Brown's charting of the course of an object through production, distribution, consumption, and exhibition and also this thesis' contention that objects within the folds of their 'opacity' of thingness, (the Twin Towers are considered as objects turned into things in this discussion), contain traces of gender. This section, however, retains the idea that their genderedness is sensitive, predisposed to be influenced and thus be altered, or even be nullified by altering situations.

IV. WHAT THE TWIN TOWERS STOOD FOR

Brown starts his analysis with a depiction of the twin towers, with a sense of incredulity, as to how the towers' absurdly monumental elevation, (therefore phallic), dwarfed the presence of the surrounding structures. Moreover, because of the advantage of heights, they served as two giant omniscient overseers monitoring the rhythm of trade in the world's centre of business. He juxtaposes the unmissable stability of their concrete presence against the virtual yet uninterruptable fluidity of the process of the trade itself.

the Towers literally and symbolically stood at the center around which other objects, literal and virtual, ceaselessly circulated. Their massive stability was the more important and impressive because they were emblems of the system of trade in which all things are fungible ... seem above all virtual with no solidity at all. (2015, 277)

It is not easy to single out just one definite attribute of the World Trade Centre that unifies the collective psyche of the New Yorkers, for the fact that the object relation (the relation between the New Yorkers and the towers) involved is extremely nuanced on many levels. However, the one unifying factor that constitutes the shared sentiment of the New Yorkers regarding the World Trade Centre, is the knowledge that they were markers like no other, and hence, attained an appendage status in the daily lives of the New Yorkers. In more elaborate terms, the intimacy resulting from the sense of identification between the Twin Towers and the New Yorkers were such that the mental images of them were carried along by the city dwellers in the mundaneness of their daily existence, as just another body part. From a psychological perspective, the boundary between the actual and the virtual was at best blurry. The intensity of this cathexis became even more telling after the towers' mutilation. Brown's analysis taps into that cathartic component of mass grief, which according to him (at least in the current context) is the 'misuse value' of the towers', which were once *useful objects* but following a life-changing event have turned to *things*. It is in the aftermath of their collapse, that is, in the vacuum of their physical absence the towers re-materialise, but into a phantasmal form - a feature necessary to be classified as 'real' and thus 'sensuous'. What emerges out of Brown's churning of the idea of the twin towers is a sense of hybridity as the fundamental identity of the towers following their annihilation. In the present context, hybridisation of the towers has taken place at the time of their transformation from being physical to transcendental and functional to ornamental. Deeper research of the afterlife of the towers will reveal whether or not the amalgam of these affects is resonant with gender.

Brown's enquiry into the mass mourning followed by the melancholy of the Americans post 9/11, is suggestive of the towers' totemic energy. To evaluate the towers' mystical power, it is necessary to examine their significance in two separate contexts. First, to study their significance before the attack took place and the weight of their absence after. Eric Darton, in his biography of the Twin Towers, observes very closely their trajectory moving further and further away from the 'earth's fecundity' (1999) charting a new vertical roadmap to commercial bounty, 'four million square feet of office space stacked a quarter mile into New York's skyline have been transformed into a thin gray ribbon of highway, stretching into space' (Darton, 1999). He identifies the priapic perspective as the essential thought behind the genesis of the Lower Manhattan skyline, the Twin Towers being the centrepiece of the entire spectacle. He further notes,

here wealth turned increasingly mobile and intangible as it wrested itself free from the earth bound limitation ... In Lower Manhattan's city of towers one gives no thought to the mythic emblems of the earth's limitless fecundity: cornucopia bursting with sheaves of grain, vegetables, and ripe, edible fruit. Instead we imagine bounties of debt, harvests of financial instruments ... our towers have transformed into urban silos, overflowing with disembodied commodities. (1999)

Most thinkers agree that the Twin Towers were the sum and substance embodying the tall orders of the ambitious American dream. The phallogocentric 'social imagination' (Darton, 1999) that permitted such a cityscape can seem facetious, but no less true. The American consciousness has wilfully traded off the sensuous appeals of mother earth's abundance with the sensibleness of economic gain. The attack on the Twin Towers can be read as the emasculation of America's potency. The mode of the attack can be understood as the physical violation of the most cherished structures, and the fire that followed the attack is virile in its destructive potential. The collapse of the towers from their vertiginous altitude to the level of 'Ground Zero' is a fall from grace which is compellingly gendered. Thus, so far, the gender resonances are easy to comprehend.

4.1. The Aftermath - what came out of the towers

However, the account gets complicated as the towers fall. Brown's observation illuminates what the towers reveal through their fall. Firstly, the towers leave behind a colossal amount of debris. But they are no ordinary debris as they are profoundly revelatory in terms of their contents. It is necessary to note that the contents, because of the loss of their utilitarian aspects are now objects turned into things. This event has succeeded in transforming their transparency or plainness of use-value into the opacity of misuse value.

Brown notes among countless other items the debris contained a huge heap of 'high-heeled shoes left lying on the streets, shed by women running for their lives' (2015, 278). This specific heap of shoes can be characterised as gendered commodities designed to cater to the female consumers in their previous lives. But what remains of their genderedness after they had been abandoned by their owners? The once useful accessories that used to contain and also enhance the beauty of female feet were turned into trash. This means, that at overwhelming moments such as this, the very useful accessories through which the subjects define their personalities, including the crucial gender expression is instinctively forgotten. In a figurative sense, these are the times, when the subjects are reborn by surviving disasters and so are their disowned belongings. Therefore, the shoes at this altered stage are still adequate to be assigned feminine adjectives, but purely by the dint of their anatomical realities. But whether they become less feminine or even gender indeterminate, without the bodily touch of women, is a complex position to commit to. The above argument allows the inference that those shoes have lost their identity as gendered objects along with their veracity of use-value ('gender' at least in this context *is* rooted in their functional value,) following the disaster. It will be interesting to note, however, if their subsequent continuation in the environment of wreckage following the disaster has further altered them on numerous other levels (like many other objects caught up in disasters), and whether it complicates even further their already problematic gender. Julian Stallabrass' meditation on the objects relegated to trash, illuminates a stage in the life of objects which is beyond the consideration of gender. His theory suggests items in debris come to possess the demeanour of children who are lost and strayed off the mainstream of life. He imagines that to be able to integrate with their fellow items in the dirt, their first job is to disintegrate. Whilst in the process of breaking down, for the very first time since their birth as commodities, they unlearn their use-value defined by their performativity, and with that, they also shed their gender. Finally, through casting off their social baggage they emerge as matter. In doing so, they are reborn or regain consciousness on an alien plane where they are too nascent and pure to be gendered. The rebirth of the shoes in the wreckage is a stark reminder of the man in DeLillo's *Falling Man* covered with glass, unrecognisable, waking up in a strange space, trying to make sense of his abruptly altered surroundings, *or* being born of the womb of the towers covered with its innards. This also implies a turn of an event can ascribe complex femininity to the towers. But the man and the shoes in their current form (the re-borns) attain an unsullied aura of innocence and honesty, tying in with Stallabrass' thinking: 'somehow, during this

process, their allure is not lost but loosed from exchange value, it takes on an apparently more genuine *aesthetic* air' (italics added) (Candlin and Guins, 2009, 408).

4.2. Objects over Subjects

Brown asserts that the mass mourning and the ensuing melancholia that followed the Twin Tower tragedy was more about the loss of the structures itself and all that was within those structures (the internal substructures and other objects) and much less about the loss of human lives:

I want to speculate that this august stability [the apparent physical stability of the towers] ... had a great deal to do with *why* the emotional response to the loss of the built space, a human artifact, almost instantly exceeded the response to the loss of human lives. In diluted Heideggerian terms, an ontic tragedy (that involved beings) soon became ontological (a tragedy about being). It was clear that America plunged into a state of mourning for the lost objects ... not really knowing what has been lost, the towers having become the emblems of something like the lost objects. (2015, 277)

Can lost objects be perceived as gendered? In that case, if the towers *are* the lost objects what is their gender position following their collapse? Freud's analytics have highly sexualised lost objects. His evaluation of the entire process of mourning and melancholia, a study dealing with object relations (1914-16) puts the fixation with cathected objects within the ambit of libidinal consciousness. Psychical identification with lost objects forms the centrality of his observation in his patients' dealing with the loss of 'loved object' (1914-16), which surmises that the 'lost object' can be regarded as gendered since gender plays a crucial role in shaping our identities. Similarly, for Lacan, as Stephen Frosh suggests, the 'lost object' is the mother's womb: 'the infant is born into an environment of loss, already cut off from something (the womb or the mother's immediate presence)' (2012, 178).

4.3. Re-materialization of the lost objects

Brown does not elaborate in detail on the gender perspective of the towers barring a few instances where he alludes to their apparent phallic architecture and at another time, on an oppositional note, he underlines the towers' intrinsic vulnerability resulting from their superlative visibility. His analysis largely focuses on their spectral presence as objects that have ceased to exist, and the efforts to resurrect them in the form of mass-produced 'high-end 9/11 collectibles' (2015, 274), which he calls '9/11 kitsch' (276). He recounts, they come in the form of, 'figurines, statues, pins, ornaments, and plates' all of which have Twin Towers enshrined on them, together with the statues of 'the fire fighters' and reproductions of 'the patriotic heart itself'

(Brown, 2015, 274). What is significant about these ornaments is that they represent the compulsive nature of the Americans' attachment to the towers which essentially authenticates the American 'self-determination' (2015, 276) embedded in consumerism. Secondly, they signify the ultimate exploit of consumerism - the commodification of grief. Through the manufactured surrogates, 'the towers became a Thing, a metaphysical presence more massive than they really ever were' (281). The importance of the little miniature collectibles is also because they uncover a disorderly spot in the consciousness of the mourners. The collectibles specially designed to replicate the towers (although in a radically dissimilar scale), help the memories of the towers to be corporealized into proper concrete physical matters even after they were gone. And because of the advantage of their handy dimensions, as opposed to the towers itself, the collectibles feel much tamer. The tameness along with the portability of the incarnates, offers the mourners a window of relief amidst the acute trauma of loss. Moreover, by acting as accessible proxies, they help create an imaginary sense of control over the objects that in truth are lost. And in so doing they endorse a false sense of denial in the minds of the mourners, thereby generating a feeling of triumph over the tragedy, however transitory.

Considering the above nostalgia, the collectibles can account for palliative hence feminine affect. On the contrary, however, they are the reminders of American creed of materialism stimulated by the principles of trade - a traditionally masculinist construct. Yet, Brown's scrutiny of 'lost objects' puts them in a gender-neutral area. His evaluation of some of the 'surviving objects', which in their previous lives belonged to the towers, the actual 'lost objects', and hence a part of them, such as a squeegee, or a 'twenty-dollar pair of handcuffs' (Brown, 2015, 280) explains this ambivalence. According to Brown's details, these ordinary objects not just escaped the crash, but were also successfully put to task to rescue the trapped survivors in the damaged towers. Their attribute as saviours should be able to reverse their ordinariness and situate them within the gender spectrum as heroes, which was the case. But Brown's treatment was not to follow the popular sentiment and exalt them with heroism but to treat them with sympathy, at par with their fellow human survivors. He underlines their versatility, yet, his interrogation of them does not point to any conclusive gender identity. He appositely recognises the mourners' 'fascination' for and 'emotional investment' in all the objects associated with the Twin Towers tragedy but 'as a kind of nonerotic fetishism that ... both marks and disavows an unendurable absence' (2015, 280).

V. CONCLUSION

The central motif of Brown's narrative of Thing Theory is to look at objects for their appearance. Thing Theory suggests that the morphology or the surface reality does not conceal the story or the affects of the objects. For him the physical contours do the storytelling if indeed they have a story to tell, because the stories are inscribed on them, saving the pain of having to scratch the surface. For example, when he focuses on Claes Oldenburg's grotesque recreation of America's iconic food the hamburger, the model's monumental scale pitted against the rubbery limpness of its texture reveals its fatigue as an overworked fetishized symbol. Brown concedes, 'if these objects are tired, of our perpetual reconstitution of them as objects of our desire ... they are tired of our longing. They are tired of us' (2004,15). Brown accepts the tradition of humanisation of objects in art because they are part and projection of humanity. I have earlier argued that the first step to gender an object is to humanise or more appropriately anthropomorphise them. Brown quotes Donald Judd critiquing Oldenburg's objects calling them 'grossly anthropomorphised' (14). He then reaffirms, 'Indeed they are teasingly mammary, ocular, phallic, facial, vaginal, scrotal' (14). Here Brown's deduction is clinical. He reads the objects barely by their sexes, leaving hardly any room for the subtleties of gender. But earlier in the thesis I have argued that anthropomorphisation of objects cannot fully occur without the participation of gender. Gender somehow inhabits the ill-defined location between biology and society. Therefore, we will forever be intrigued by the gender fluidity of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. Since, although we appreciate it is and will remain a 'male' object, will continue to perplex us with its explicit vaginal contour.

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