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Whales, Legs, Harpoons, and Other Things: Methodological Fetishism and the Human-Object
Relationship in *Moby-Dick*

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by

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Introduction: Methodological Fetishism and the Relationship between Humans and Objects in *Moby-Dick*

Objects and humans inform the existence of each other; they are inextricably linked in meaning. Normally we would understand object and human to be on two different sides of an object-subject dialectic. In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, however, subject and object are presented not as opposites, but as equals and partners. Objects are given history; objects are given full chapters; objects are given agency. Human lives are thrown away; humans become part object, and animals become strangely human. Engaging in a brief analysis of *Moby-Dick*, Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things* points out that Melville's work anticipates the modern shift away from finding secure meaning in objects while also presaging the shift towards objects "as the source of phenomenological fascination" (127). Melville's objects debunk the assumption of attached meaning and serve as a springboard for the transcendent, truth-seeking meditations of his narrator. Melville's objects can also be studied as objects, through Brown's use of methodological fetishism, to see what they accomplish on their own. Brown defines methodological fetishism as "what Appadurai calls the effort to 'follow the things themselves'" (*Things* 7). This approach means to look at the objects themselves, not as created and invested with meaning by humans, but as beings in their own right, quasi-objects having the quality of "thingness." This approach ignores common questions of "the subject, the image, the word" to focus on questions that have been lost by fetishizing the former; for example, questions "about the subject-object relation in particular temporal and spatial contexts" (7). Brown stipulates that this approach grants objects "their potency—[shows] how they organize our private and public affections" (7). Using Brown's methodology and beginning with his brief analysis of Melville, this work aims to expand the study of objects in *Moby-Dick* by focusing on the objects

themselves, by examining the breakdown of the subject-object dialectic through the idea of the thing, and by demonstrating how objects and humans in the novel exist as quasi-objects. This work also aims to depart from Brown and other recent critics by exploring the relationship between persons and things and how the nature of that relationship changes during the novel.

Objects establish a central role in *Moby-Dick* right away. In an early scene, Ishmael does not know what Queequeg's shawl is. He compares it to "a large door mat" and "finally abandons it as a mystery" (qtd. in Brown 127). To Brown, this early scene "establishes one part of the novel's nondialectical relay between opacity and legibility, the extremes of which—from the mystery of the ethnological artifact to the allegorical potency of the doubloon or the whale—never admit shared meaning" (127). The novel both evacuates objects of their meaning and instills allegorical meaning into them. The objects, from door mat shawl to doubloon, never "admit shared meaning," or are never connected explicitly. Immediately, Brown demonstrates that objects do not exist solely as objects, nor as allegorical items, and consequently, from the first ambiguous item to the allegorical whale, these objects are all somehow connected.

Objects are ubiquitous in the novel. Brown describes the novel as "replete with things," but he only begins his analysis of them (126). Through validating the existence of the thing, Brown allows for the line between humans and objects to blur. Ahab becomes more object-like, the whale becomes more subject-like, objects become metonymic, and objects give rise to grand musings that in turn become solidified concrete chapters. If objects can both embody concepts and be evacuated of their thingness, then how do we differentiate between human and objects? We cannot. In *Moby-Dick*, persons and things are quasi-objects that indicate the permeability of the human-object divide. Beginning with current criticism and Brown, we can read *Moby-Dick*

as a novel where humans and objects are no longer separate entities, but quasi-human and quasi-object.

In the last few years, critics have interpreted *Moby-Dick* from a political and global standpoint; in this work, I will engage their approaches while keeping a focus on objects in the novel. Christopher Taylor examines American imperialism and the way the metonymic nature of Ahab's severed leg is used to subvert his crew. Using Taylor's argument, I aim to build upon his reading of the novel by focusing on the material object of the leg as well as other objects. These different objects become mediators that convey a connection between humans and objects. T. Walter Herbert, in his article "Awakening a Global Spirituality: The Opera *Moby-Dick* as a Meditative Quest," discusses how the opera *Moby-Dick* by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer provides a new reading of *Moby-Dick*, one in which the spirituality of the Christian West confronts the spiritualities of Polynesia. The opera provides a different reading of the novel—how Melville's work examines the exchange between the two ideas of spirituality. As Herbert has done, I will be examining how the intersection of categories informs interpretation of the novel. However, I will differ from Herbert, in that I will avoid the abstract world of spirituality and the like and maintain a focus on the material world. I also aim to step away from the typical reading through the perspective of the main characters and to join critic Donald Pease in considering this novel as a novel about the crew (and their surrounding objects). Donald Pease's "C.L.R. James's *Moby-Dick*: The Narrative Testimony of the Non-Survivor" reinterprets the novel as a narrative from the point of view of the crew. Pease examines the way in which James discards the typical Americanist reading of the novel that favors the frame narrative of Ishmael's liberal point of view and Ahab's totalitarianism in order to subjugate the crew. According to Pease, James reimagines the way the crew's story is told—he argues that Melville

wanted to make the crew central to his story, but was afraid of criticism. Pease posits that through reading the narrative from the crew's perspective, "James opened up a narrative space through which he undermined the state's axioms and norms" (35-36). Like Pease and James, I will be examining how the accepted norms of human and object, human and thing are blurred, and how the relationship between human and object is not one of subjugation, but one of communication and equivalence. Just as James has done, I will be examining the novel from a different interpretive perspective than the Americanist canon by focusing on objects, the unspoken "crew" of the novel. This interpretation of the novel, informed by Bill Brown's methodological fetishism, opens up a new "narrative space" through which humans and things are indistinguishable via their social interactions, how they become quasi-objects, and how the quasi-object crew suffers under Ahab's tyrannical subjugation.

Methodology: Brown's Thing Theory

In the following section, I will be laying out the ideas of Bill Brown, Bruno Latour, and Karl Marx in order to set up an expanded reading of *Moby-Dick* using the concept of methodological fetishism.

To Bill Brown, humans recognize the subjective perception of objects, but simultaneously fail in their attempt to accumulate meaning through the objective, in their attempt to define their lives or give themselves meaning through the concrete objects. When referring to the subjective perception of objects, I mean the quality of thingness, which is more about the subject-object relations than just about the object. Brown's methodology focuses on the novel form because of how it "reinvests the subject/object dialectic with its temporal dimension" (16). It is necessary to use the novel form to investigate the dialectic because of its length and scope.

He is interested in how the subject/object opposition is affected over time in narrative fiction, not in a singular instance, and thus does not choose poetry to analyze, although he begins with the modernist poet William Carlos Williams's ideas about the object. Williams is given as the modern poet who was known for his "willingness to be satisfied with mere things" (1). "Williams meant to evacuate objects of their insides and to arrest their doubleness, their vertiginous capacity to be both things and signs (symbols, metonyms, or metaphors) of something else" (11). Brown processes Marx and his commodity fetishism, and then moves beyond both Williams and Marx to a place where things are neither void of meaning, instilled with meaning, or merely fetishized. In his argument, he is focusing on the advent of modern, industrial society, and the changing ideas about things during that time.

Brown must first separate himself from Marx. In his first chapter, Brown describes how he is thinking differently than Marx—that there is a "productive antinomy" in Marx's example of the table. Brown acknowledges Marx's understanding of the table as a commodity and then builds upon the "antinomy" he describes. To Brown, the table has meaning beyond its existence as a commodity. To Marx, the table exists only as a commodity.

Marx's table is the example Marx provides in order to define commodity fetishism. Humans create the table from natural wood through labor. Once the table is connected to the capitalist system (monetary exchange), it no longer retains the original value or meaning that produced it (wood, labor). It is a commodity. The table is only valued in relation to other things (i.e. chair, stool, counter); it becomes something transcendent. "Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx/Engels Internet Archive). However, Marx's notion of commodity fetishism negates the doubleness of a subjective table and creates an objective table separate from the social relations

used to create the table. Brown argues that an object has something beyond what Marx qualifies as commodity fetishism. That, depending on context, objects can be evacuated of or instilled with meaning. Brown employs Mark Twain's story *The Prince and the Pauper* to demonstrate this idea. He highlights the two meanings instilled by different people on the king's official seal. To the real prince (now a pauper) and the people, the seal is the thing that indicates the true king. To the imposter prince, the great seal is just a nutcracker. In Twain's story, different groups instill different meanings into the object. The seal is not simply valued through its relationship to other commodities.

According to Brown, even though a commodity's social life depends upon its abstraction, it still retains some of its object nature. Additionally, the fetishism of commodities eradicates the doubleness of the commodity described by Marx and comes from the assumption that value is in objects regardless of their relation to human history (Brown 28). Therefore, fetishism of a commodity creates the object out of the subjective, instilling the object with intrinsic value. The commodities are not only valued in relation to other commodities, but also retain their value in relation to humans. Brown argues that Marx fails to properly deal with the table, which stubbornly retains its physicality as a table. The table contains all of the relations that created it, but it also maintains its objectness (28). The thingness of commodities exists at the same time as their objectivity and depending on context, may be evacuated of or instilled with meaning. To further explore this idea, Brown analyzes the opposition between human and object.

Brown takes aim at the opposition between human and object and uses a slightly different understanding of fetishism to argue that the ontological distinction between human and object does not make sense (29). This fetishism he says, is "not the fetishism he [Marx] theorizes, but the more pedestrian not to say less powerful, fetishism through which objects captivate us,

fascinate us, compel us to have a relation to them, which seems to have little do with their relation to other commodities” (29). The fetishism Brown is talking about is the obsession, the fetishistic way in which humans approach objects. This is not a social relation between objects, nor one between humans, but a relation between human and object, which renders the ontological distinction between them senseless (29). Brown then cements his argument by saying that there is an underlying sense of humanism under *Capital*, that the exchange of objects would not make sense without humans—that “recognition that a human fascination with objects subtends the resplendent success of the commodity form” (30). Therefore, we fetishize the object and give it meaning where there is simply an object, but this commodity object/subject form would not make sense without the *human* element; the relationship of humans and objects blurs the distinction between the two. Objects do not get their value from social authority or their creation (in the sense of Marx), but from the recognition of the object and the use of it, just like the Great Seal in *The Prince and the Pauper*. “Thus Twain’s point...may be, rather, that identity depends less on authorized value and function, more on recognition and use” (38). Objects have their own value, helping to define human identity, but are likewise defined through their recognition and use by humans.

Object and subject are inextricably related. The subject not only produces the object, but the object produces the subject. “*The Prince and the Pauper* addresses not only the subject’s production of the object (seal or nutcracker), but also the object’s production of the subject (prince or pauper)” (39). Brown makes a distinction between the object and the “thingness” of the object. Objects themselves can be inalienable, and the thingness of the object can have value. The “thing” is the subjective nature of the object. The nature of an object is different from that object—therefore, thingness is the essence of the object, the ideas and history attached to the

object, and can be much more. Thus, the thingness of the seal is that it represents the king. Later, Brown uses Lacan to help define thingness, or thing. “The Thing thus names the unknowable, unimaginable no-thing within both physical and physical exteriority; the vase is “an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called the Thing...” (171).

The thingness of an object can be recognized by looking at it from different perspectives. Like the prince and the pauper seeing different meanings in the use of the great seal, one can see value in an object, or taking multiple human views together, see the change in perception of the object. Objects retain subjective meaning, depending on the point of view from which they are seen and used (or, their relation with humans). In chapter two of his book, Brown carries us through a discussion of William James and his ideas on the perception and understanding of things. James believed “that habit grounds our apperception of objects,” but also, according to Brown “pointed to other irregularities that disclose a different sense of things, the sensation of their properties” (75). In this chapter on the nature of things, it is important to think about the difference between object and thing, to gain a “sense of things,” and here Brown is pointing out that we must also perceive a “sensation of their properties.” Brown adds a relatable example: “...when for instance you look at a landscape with your head upside down or when you turn a painting bottom upward...” (75), one sees things in a different light, objects take on a different sensation. There are different ways that we access objects, and ultimately this shows that there are infinite ways to access the physicality of the object. These different ways demonstrate the subjectivity of humans’ perception of the physical—that depending upon how one approaches it, it will take on different meaning.

One cannot recognize one's own subjective perceptions without the object. Brown's introduction to *Things* lends many views on the idea of thingness, objects, and subjects. He begins with a statement by Michel Serres: "Le sujet naît de l'objet.—" (1), or the object gives birth to the subject. Humans strive to find the meaning that is present in objects by viewing them from different perspectives. Just because we cannot see a conclusive meaning, we know that thingness is there. We understand that the thingness exists when objects stop working as they are supposed to. "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..." (4). The thingness is there, and it "really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation." In *Moby-Dick*, we must look at those relationships, closely and far away; we must see things as things, and not objects, but rather—the thing that lingers in the room "even after the subject and the object have done their thing." We must examine how, through the rise of the thing in the novel, the human-object dialectic is decimated, and how the existence of the quasi-object is affirmed. The thing arises where objects cease to function as they are expected to, giving rise to Brown's "relay between opacity and legibility." Returning to Williams's idea of the "ideas in things," Brown demonstrates how there are "no ideas but in things," but also "no ideas in things."

Brown asks that if we just look at the object as an object, can we simply discard theory and subjectivity, and look at the object as such? No, he says "For even the most coarse and commonsensical things, mere things, perpetually pose a problem because of the specific unspecificity that things denotes" (3) The idea of the thing presents a problem because of the "unspecificity" that the word thing represents. The object is significant, but is not congruous to

the thing. He explains "...although the *object* was asked to join philosophy's dance, things may still lurk in the shadows of the ballroom and continue to lurk there after the subject and object have done their things, long after the party is over" (3). The thing is that which lurks, even after the subject and object of played their part; it is both specific and unspecific, there and intangible, unreachable, but recognizable. The thingness is there and it indicates something beyond just the object itself. Brown describes what functions the thing holds: "The word designates the concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday...It functions to overcome the loss of other words or as a place holder for some future specifying operation...It designates an amorphous characteristic or a frankly irresolvable enigma...*things* is a word that tends...to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable..." (5). Thingness accepts its otherness, it encompasses object-subject relations, it is both nameable and unnameable. "...*the thing seems to name the object, just as it is, even as it names some thing else.*" (5). Thingness therefore, is mainly the idea encompassing the object-subject relationship, the essence that remains after discussion of the subject and object, it is amorphous and ambiguous, but most importantly, it exists.

Brown concludes *A Sense of Things* with the idea that objects themselves are "mutable" and change, just as humans do. "They too have lives (and deaths) of their own" (183). He says they cannot be depended upon in the "midst of the human flux" for this very reason. Despite humans seeking some permanence or meaning in objects, they are as fickle as we are. Throughout his book, Brown attempts to show how modernity's ideas do not quite capture the entire concept of subject and object, commodity and thing. Brown describes modernity as "...proscribing objects from attaining the status of things, proscribing any value but that of use or exchange, secularizing the object's animation by restricting it to *commodity* fetishism alone" (185). He argues that not only do objects contain more than identity as commodities, but the

dialectic between subject and object is created by human perception. “Within the illogic of projection and introjection, the animate and the inanimate, like the subject and object, become indistinct. And this lack of distinction can be cast as an elaborate obstruction of that modernity which insists on an ontological distinction, arbitrary and artificial, between inanimate objects and human subjects” (187). Brown may be referencing Bruno Latour in saying “Neither the paradigm of Williams’s aesthetic modernism (where ideas are embodied only in things) nor the paradigm of Husserl’s philosophical modernism (where things are embodied only as ideas) explains how *The American Scene* anticipates modernism that knows we have never been modern, that we have not and cannot sustain that ontological divide” (187).

Bruno Latour delves deeper into the idea of the ontological divide in his work *We Have Never Been Modern*, published in 1991. In his work, Latour argues that we must rethink the subject-object dialectic and the idea of “human” as opposing the things that surround it. He proposes a different view of the human. “If instead of attaching it to one constitutional pole [subject-object] or the other, we move it closer to the middle, it becomes the mediator and even the intersection of the two” (137). Brown works with these two poles, considering the movement of subject and object, and how the idea of human or object is fluid, and how human is a mediator of object and subject. Latour posits that we should place human in the middle of the object subject pole and actually focus on the vertical axis, “sliding it along the vertical dimension that defines the modern world” (137). If Melville was writing at a time when science’s advancements were hurtling humans into a new modern era, pitching human in with machine, with medicine, with objects, then *Moby-Dick* represents this modern world that attempts to separate the two ideas. Latour says that we must redistribute the value and sanctity of Nature, Society, God, and human. He suggests, “It is true that by redistributing the action among all these mediators, we

lose the reduced form of humanity, but we gain another form, which has to be called irreducible” (138). We must not attempt to distribute the humanities and science into different categories, nor attempt the same thing with objects and humans, medicine and humans. He claims “Humanism can maintain itself only by sharing itself with all these mandatees. Human nature is the set of its delegates and its representatives, its figures and its messengers. That symmetrical universal is worth at least as much as the moderns’ doubly asymmetrical one” (138). We must consider humanism as the set of connections, things, object, and relations between them. “Nature and Society are not two distinct poles, but one and the same production of successive states of societies-natures, of collectives” (139). Latour completes his point about modernism by saying “We have been modern. Very well. We can no longer be modern in the same way” (142). Our modernism must take on this new view of humanism. Latour suggest that we acknowledge and define a “Parliament of Things,” in which objects, things, humans, nature, and society all stand on equal footing. “There are no more naked truths, but there are no more naked citizens, either. The mediators have the whole space to themselves” (144). All of the members of this parliament may be analyzing different things, but they would be discussing the “same thing...a quasi-object they have all created, the object-discourse-nature-society whose new properties astound us all and whose network extends from my refrigerator to the Antarctic by way of chemistry, law, the State, the economy, and satellites” (144). Latour argues in favor of this new modernism, but doing away with the dualism of the subject-object dialectic and viewing things as a collection of subject-object-nature-discourse-society. By combining Brown’s arguments of objects and their thingness and Latour’s conception of the new modernism and applying these concepts to *Moby-Dick*, then Ishmael’s transcendent journey surrounded by objects begins to distinguish itself as more than a mere symbolic representation, temporal narrative, or inquisition into the nature of

man and beast. The humans onboard the *Pequod* form a collective with the objects surrounding them. Ishmael's narrative placing them together forms the "Parliament of Things" that Latour calls for. In this Parliament of Things, the citizens Latour is referring to are from Plato's Republic, where they choose a representative to speak for them. The continuity of the collective is changed; the mediators are emphasized. The connections and interpretations, involving subjective and objective are acknowledged. "Societies are present, but with the objects that have been serving as their ballast from time immemorial" (144).¹ The lives of the humans on the *Pequod* are defined in conjunction with the objects surrounding them. They are tools in the quest to kill Moby-Dick. Ishmael's narrative and the human characters serve as mediators to convey the connections and interpretations. The societies and relationships formed, and the objects and humans that form them are as valuable as the tools that Ahab employs and then destroys at the end of the novel.

The human-object relations formed are central to the idea of methodological fetishism. To Brown, methodological fetishism is a "condition for thought, new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects" (7). Brown sees methodological fetishism as different from thinking about things, but as a useful method for thinking about objects and their relations to the subjective—about the ideas around things (if not the things themselves). In *Moby-Dick*, inanimate objects constitute human subjects; they move them, threaten them, facilitate them, and threaten their relationship to other objects in the novel. By looking up close at objects in the novel through methodological fetishism, the social relationship between humans and objects emerges and the human-object dialectic is disintegrated to form a collective of quasi-objects.

Despite not being able to discern meaning in objects, objects generate meaning. Brown and Latour's focus on the dissolution of the subject/object dialectic and its meaning for humans and objects gives rise to my argument. Melville's novel, by employing objects as vehicles for meditation, simultaneously negates objects of meaning and instills objects with meaning. From the very first, when Ishmael confuses Queequeg's shawl for a doormat, to the bitter end where Ishmael barely escapes being sucked down into the vortex of the sinking ship, objects play an important role in the novel.

Objects function in several ways in *Moby-Dick*. The modernist detachment from the idea that all objects are instilled with a certain meaning is relevant in Ishmael's encounter with the "doormat." Objects in the novel do not retain specific significance, nor do humans. From Ahab to Queequeg, the humans in the novel range from object-like to allegorical. Taken as a whole, the novel is filled with objects that serve as the beginnings for Ishmael's constant questioning of the world around him. Each object in turn produces another musing. To simply look at the objects as beginnings of meditations is to only see half of the picture. The humans in the novel are informed by the objects, they are built by the objects, they are destroyed by the objects, and they have inextricable connections to the objects. The same is true in the reverse for objects. Human is bound to human, object to object, and human to object. Humans and objects are the "mediator[s]" and the "intersection" of object and human.

Through current and past criticism of *Moby-Dick*, the structure of this paper will be based on an inspection of the humans and objects within the novel. Through investigation of objects and humans, different relationships and meaning arise in Ishmael's quest for the ineffable. Common interpretations of the novel point to the white whale as that indefinable thing towards which man and meaning strive, or truth. Yet, through Brown, we can see that same ineffable as

thingness, as relationship between human and object. As relationships and meaning become evident through this reading of the novel, the ontological dialectic between human and object breaks down, placing humans and objects into a reciprocal relationship.

In order to perform a reading of *Moby-Dick* through Brown and Latour, I will first examine the book as a physical object and how it gives rise to relationships, the search for truth, and thingness; I will then move into reading *Moby-Dick*, Ahab and other humans as quasi-objects and how they create relationships with other objects, or quasi-objects; then I will demonstrate how physical objects are quasi-objects; finally, I will look at the relationships between all of these quasi-objects and establish how they approach a destruction of categories and the essence of truth by becoming the mediators and members of Latour's Parliament of Things.

The Book

The physical book itself can be considered an object and a place to launch a discussion on the nature of human and object relationships. As an object, it is cumbersome, spanning one hundred and thirty-five chapters, complete with etymology, extracts, and epilogue. In chapter one hundred and four, Ishmael states "To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it" (Melville 497). Melville has certainly produced a mighty book with a mighty theme, and here he presents a metacognitive view of his work as a whole. To succeed as it has, or to become "mighty," it must have a mighty theme. It cannot be a small book on the nature of something insignificant. Through his work, Melville demonstrates that size of the work is a factor when considering the mightiness of the book. Along with being a physical object (book),

the narrative becomes a commentary on the nature of literature. Literature cannot be produced in a short selection, but must be refined, worked on, added to; above all, it must consider the “great” and “mighty” topics in life. To begin his tome on literature, whales, and all things included therein, Melville lays out the etymology of the word “whale.”

Melville analyzes the linguistic history and usage of the word “whale.” He also creates a different character, that of the “Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School” who “loved to dust his old grammars; [because] it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality” (xxxvii). The objects of the books in the old grammar school remind this Usher of his mortality. Here again, Melville is using the object to consider the subjective mortality of the Usher. The dust on the grammars reminds the Usher that every object or being has a life of its own. When the grammar books are being used, they are no longer dusty, but eventually will run their course of use and begin to gather dust in a corner or find their way into the trash. Melville is not only giving the book a metaphoric life of its own, but he is giving the human subject (the usher) an object-quality (that of an old and mortal book). He creates the character to generate the finding of the etymology extracts, and creates the grammars to perpetuate the usher’s meditation on mortality. If a man is only as mortal as a book, then a book is only as mortal as a man. The book itself lives and breathes; the book itself dies. The linguistic nature of the etymology explores the construction of language as a way to communicate subjective meaning. The etymology also demonstrates that what we know as *whale*, others know as some other word—that words and objects are as fleeting as mortal life. The etymology of the whale is a study of the word *whale*, but it also only exists within the book as long as the book’s relationship with humans continues.

After the etymology section, an “Extracts” section is included. This section provides various extracts of writings about whales throughout history. The narrator claims these extracts

are “Supplied by a Sub-Sub Librarian,” and due to the lack of qualification on the part of the librarian, are “solely valuable or entertaining, as affording a glancing bird’s eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations...” (xxxix) The reader cannot consider these extracts an extensive study, but may be amused by it. Certainly the prose prior to the extracts is entertaining, as the narrator pities the sub-sub librarians of the world. “So fare thee well, poor devil of a Sub-Sub, whose commentator I am. Thou belongest to that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this world will ever warm...Give it up, Sub-Subs!” (xxxix). Once again, the beginning of the section serves as a meditation of things beyond the extracts following. Some of these extracts inform the narrative. “My God! Mr. Chase, what is the matter?” I answered, we have been stove by a whale” (xlvii). Others reference classic works of literature. “Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,/Tho’ stiff with hoops and armed with ribs of whale” (xliv). By tying in examples from history, Melville gives the book substance; he sets it within a line of works that mention whales. It is not simply a work separate from the rest of human history. These extracts serve to locate the book on a historical time-continuum and in part to bring meaning and longevity to the book.

The extracts also endow whale ships with meaning. “It is impossible to meet a whale-ship on the ocean without being struck by her mere appearance. The vessel under short sail...has a totally different air from those engaged in a regular voyage” (1). The extracts also equalize literature selection, metaphor, historical figures (Owen Chase), and fictional characters. They are all the same in words on the page, captured as physical or objective representatives of a “mighty” idea.

Paul Douglas Waddell and Frank Shuffleton perform readings of *Moby-Dick* that focus on the etymology and extracts. These readings are not quite the same as Brown’s methodological

fetishism, but, when taken together, affirm Brown's vision. Additionally, J.A. Ward's vision demonstrates succinctly how object and meaning are inextricably related and how Ishmael's search for the ineffable truth approaches the absolute destruction of those categories, but cannot fully reach it due to the quasi-nature of objects and humans. This quasi-nature of objects and humans assumes a slight difference between the two, but also proves that the relationship and cooperation of the two are necessary in order to produce meaning.

Paul Douglas Waddell addresses the sections of etymology and extracts in his engagement with ancient atomic theory. He presents the book as a collection of irreducible physical pieces, or atoms. "The beginning of the novel prepares readers for Ahab's atomism. *Moby-Dick* begins with an etymology that deconstructs the word *whale* and presents it as an irreducible linguistic concept. In the following pages, a series of extracts, all of which deal with whales, creates a kind of atomic chain that leads to the irreducibly brief sentence, 'Call me Ishmael'" (62). Waddell posits that the two beginning sections are reducing the word whale and the character of Ahab into irreducible pieces, just atoms moving in a chain of previous atoms. (62). The etymology and extracts provide parts to the whole, just as Ishmael and Ahab do. Just as a collection of atoms can come together to make meaning in "human," so can *Moby-Dick's* collection of parts come together to make the objects within the book a story.

The extracts are not simply just pieces to a whole, however. Frank Shuffelton provides an in-depth reading of the extracts, suggesting meaning and a connection to the narrative for each one of them. He contends "'Etymology' and 'Extracts,' on the one hand, point to the historical and imaginative background of Ishmael's developing consciousness... On the other hand, these two sections tease us into thought, provoking us into an attentive, reactive, and questioning reading of Ishmael's narrative" (528). The extracts provide a background into Ishmael's thought

process. They also engage the reader into a relationship with the narrative. Not only are the extracts a starting point for Ishmael's narrative, but they incorporate the reader into the narrative and work of scholarship that Ishmael is presenting.

Shuffelton posits that the extracts "prepare the reader for the central problem of *Moby-Dick*, the problem of evolving consciousness in a nonhuman world" (536). Ishmael, as a narrator, is developing his consciousness in an essentially nonhuman world. Shuffelton points out that we should be aware that the extracts do not provide a history of whales, but yet a "*Human* history, be it noted, for the extracts are promised not as a natural history of the whale but as a record of human perceptions of him..." (529). According to Shuffelton, the relationship between humans and objects (or those of the extracts) is established. Thus, one of the central conflicts of the novel is how Ishmael's consciousness develops in a world replete with nonhuman objects. Shuffelton addresses this by saying the nonhuman element establishes the reciprocity of the novel, that each informs the other. "Just as in the seemingly purposeless course of history material discoveries lead to symbolic, spiritual, and imaginative openings and thus give history human significance, so in the narrative reduction of history the representation of selected literal facts makes possible the imaginative expansion upon them..." (536). The literal and symbolic inform, expand, and extract from each other. Humans may develop human history, but it is born through literal fact. The human is the symbolic element that factors in through interpretation. Melville's extracts are a reduction of the human in order to lead the reader out of his "constricted sense of the possibilities of the world" (536). Just as the novel itself is an expansion of interpretation on objects and information, the extracts provide a reduction to fact and object in order to free the reader from binding symbolic interpretation.

By combining Waddell and Shuffleton, we can see how the etymology and extracts not only demonstrate the necessity for human relationship to bring them to life, but can be both irreducible and meaningful, or quasi-objects. Through the use of methodological fetishism and Brown's idea of the ineffable thing, I will build upon these authors by focusing not simply on the relationship between humans and objects, but how the objects give rise to meaning themselves when they simply act as physical objects. Brown's ineffable is slightly different than what Waddell, Shuffleton, and in the next section, Ward, are saying—the thing and the inability to know it. Objects, such as the book, are tools for human perception to grasp at absolute truth, which can never be known. To truly know the thing, the object itself would have to negate all other associations and meanings, and the human relation to that object would dissipate.

J.A. Ward interprets other physical parts of the novel differently. He takes the factual chapters of cetology (the objects of the book) and claims that Melville was attempting to achieve “a tighter unity between exposition and narration, a closer relationship between digression and theme” (166). Focusing on the overall structure of the novel, Ward supplies an argument as to why the chapters containing factual information about whales play an important role in the novel. “Melville constantly attempted to arrive at an understanding of spiritual reality through an understanding of physical reality” (167). Like Shuffleton, Ward is pointing out how Melville's tactics explore meaning as stemming from the object in order to free the reader from having to interpret the meaning in a certain way. Ward posits that “Never before in Melville's fiction had there been such a complete union between physical object and spiritual truth; with the whale as object, as the central force and symbol in the universe from the point of view of both Ahab and Ishmael, it was possible for Melville to explore the physical dimensions and spiritual implications...” (167). The whale-object is the center of his narrative. The digressions into

information about the whale only support the exploration of truth. Ward's interpretation tightens the relationship between object and meaning, between object and human meditation. If the book is an object itself, a collection of narrative and exposition, the pieces fit together to present a picture of an object-meaning relationship. According to Ward, Melville was attempting to tighten the relationship between the two, to demonstrate that each cannot exist without the other.

Objects, according to Ward, compel the narrative. "The whale is the common denominator, both object of exposition and object of quest" (168). The cetological chapters serve to inform an ignorant public, support dramatic events, and keeps the metaphysical anchored in reality. With his descriptions, Melville "makes the whale a familiar object, comprehensible to the reader" (170). More importantly, the "cetological chapters give the illusion of objectivity and the effect of a wide view of life" (170). Ward describes how Melville was "in accordance with the best of Romantic thought and literature in paying strict attention to 'the matter' of the whale, in using what is 'concrete,' familiar,' and 'usual' as a substratum, to which he added implications that make the whale spiritually meaningful yet physically, even scientifically, credible" (171). In approaching the whale in multiple different logical and scientific ways, Melville can use the object as a springboard for greater metaphysical meditations.

If the whale is the springboard, then Melville goes to every length to examine it. "All human means are used to examine the whale...the examination of the whale leads to an examination of all humanity and the entire universe" (172). It is only through objects that man can reach the metaphysical, and even then, it is impossible. "*Moby-Dick* is, among other things, clearly about a failed hunt for the ineffable" (Abeles 245). The hunt for the "inscrutable thing" is the central drive of the novel. Through object and significance, Melville and Ahab hunt for the ineffable. All objects and meanings are related. "...any element, regardless of what it may be,

bears an essential relationship with everything else because it is physically or spiritually a part of reality” (Ward 172). Each object, or thing, is related to the others, because it is part of reality. The ineffable thing remains ever elusive—just out of grasp, but within sight. Beginning with objects, such as the physical book and exploring possible ideas, Ishmael demonstrates that despite the knowledge of imminent failure, philosophers must strive to reach the inscrutable, authors the ineffable through the object. Ward posits that Melville understands that knowledge does not stop at the object. “In Melville’s quest for the absolute truth, no knowledge is adequate that stops at what the scientist considers the discernible limits of an object. To Melville’s metaphysically oriented mind, all things are limitless. To know one thing completely is to know all” (173). Melville attempts to work through an object (the whale) and to get at the endless relationships that stem from the whale in an attempt to gain knowledge of truth.

Ward and Brown approach the text in similar and slightly different ways. Ward argues that the physical object gives rise to the spiritual understanding and that Melville is attempting to tighten the relationship between object and meaning. He posits that objects compel the narrative and that the whale is a springboard for understanding the metaphysical. Brown would agree with Ward’s reading in that objects are tools to reach the ineffable, but he would argue that the relationship between object and meaning would have to be abolished in order to truly know the thing. This is impossible because each gives rise to the other. The categories of humans and objects would need to be abolished completely before we arrive at the ineffable thing. Brown views the objects in a slightly different light—not as leading to spiritual meaning, but as creating subject-object relationships in the space provided, as creating a potency of their own in relation to other quasi-objects—how meaning is created through the human relationship to the object (and not vice-versa).

Melville also ridicules those who would employ “oversubjectivism” to distort reality and dreamily float through life in a subjective reality (Ward 178). The book criticizes those who would use the book to distort reality and create meaning. “In ‘The Mast-Head’ Ishmael ridicules the subjectivism of transcendentalism...The youthful ‘Pantheist,’ who allows his dreams to give him a false picture of reality, mistakes the appearance of things for the truth of things” (Melville 179). One can err on the side of “oversubjectivism” just as much as one can err with viewing objects as concrete objects never to be explored. The thing is ever present—not superficial, and not overly symbolic, the thing remains just out of Melville’s grasp. “Melville’s symbolism finds significant meaning in the appearance of things. Thus, the Spirit Spout, Fedallah, Queequeg’s coffin, and the whale-boat line are concrete items whose symbolic meanings are organically developed from their apparent nature” (Ward 182). The nature of things is to remain elusive, despite an examination of their surfaces and symbolic meaning. Ward differs slightly from Brown here because he believes that symbolic meanings develop organically from the nature of the objects. Brown’s methodological fetishism would study how meaning is developed by the human relationship to the object. Despite being slightly different, both are trying to understand the nature of the thing, the meaning, the truth. In Brown’s interpretation, that thing could not exist without humans instilling meaning in the object; the humans need to be the mediator between object and meaning. Therefore, humans both create a necessary search for truth, but negate that truth at the same time and create an impossible paradox of the search for something that only exists by their own involvement. Ishmael’s experience with the vortex that is left by the sinking ship at the end of the novel demonstrates humans’ annihilating search for the truth.

Ward writes that “In dealing with the problem of the true meaning of things as opposed to their illusory appearances, the two antipodal means of knowledge are insufficient...It is one of

the functions of the whaling chapters to indicate that an understanding of surfaces, especially the surface of the inscrutable whale, is a feeble knowledge, if not a positively wrong one” (182). In addition to the cetological chapters adding a sort of balance to the metaphysical and grounding the text in reality, they also demonstrate to the reader that to regard the whale just by his surface is to make a gross misinterpretation of things. Ward states that success eludes the scientist and the poet alike in their search for meaning. “He can begin to establish a network of relationships that relates all things and makes every fact significant, but the over-all pattern can be discerned but dimly, for all things can ultimately lead only to the center and therefore to the inscrutability of Moby Dick” (183). All things lead to Ishmael and the vortex; once he reaches the brink of the vortex, he is closest to finding the meaning, the thingness of Moby-Dick, the meaning of it all, yet he is kept from the brink because that knowledge is impossible for an object-like creature (man) to gain. It is only by driving to the extremes that man and object come close to gaining an understanding of the inscrutable truth; but to discover one end of the spectrum, be it object or subject, is to merge or separate the thingness with/from the form of the object and thus pull meaning and objectiveness into the void/vortex. Pip, when he jumps into the sea, keeps the “finite” of his body, but “drowned the infinite of his soul” (Halverson, 446). When Ishmael reaches the vortex, “it had subsided to a creamy pool” (Melville 624). He cannot see into the vortex any more than the *Pequod* can, for the inscrutable truth draws and destroys all. Melville ends chapter 96 with a fitting meditation. “But even Solomon, he says, ‘the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain’ (i.e. even while living) ‘in the congregation of the dead.’... There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness” (465). The man who wanders into the lack of understanding will remain dead, or object-like. Given Pip’s loss of his “infinite soul,” his mind remains gone. Even if some men, like Ishmael, can dive to the depths,

they must have begun higher than others. “And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar” (465). Ishmael begins at the masthead, and therefore can remain higher than the vortex. Pip never keeps a lookout, and thus, must descend deeper. A vortex at sea level represents the lowest altitude, the deepest depth, and if Ishmael travels there, he will remain dead, finite and infinite parts.

Encompassing science, symbolism, psychology, and more, *Moby-Dick* refuses to identify as one genre or the other. Betsy Hilbert addresses the use of the nonfiction in the novel. She builds on Ward’s arguments and describes how multiple new critics argue that the nonfiction material is essential to the book’s construction (825). “This work assaults our concept of genre; it confuses our easy categories” (827). Weighing in on the discussion of objects and their meanings, Hilbert compares the book to a whale. “To approach this work solely as ‘fiction,’ even ‘fiction with realistic elements,’ is to ignore Melville’s clear signal that literature, like life, is a devious thing; like Queequeg’s captured whale, it is inclined to roll over any minute and present a different side, requiring of the reader a different stance” (828). Melville’s story is rife with “devious things,” things that constantly roll over and present another side. Hilbert corroborates the idea that ambiguity is key and that the search for the truth can yield different results. “The ambiguous balance between information and fiction gives Melville’s whale book much of its power and is, at the same time, a key to its theme, for the book is an exercise in exploring the ways truths can be told” (829). The book defies classification, as it denies critics an explanation for why it is constructed as it is. The tangential nature suits Melville’s purpose in searching for

higher truth—he leaves form and object open for interpretation, just like Ishmael is experiencing the sea around him. Surrounded by the deep unknown, what can one do but grasp onto the physical objects one can explore? The objects are the vehicle to the unknown, the whales the vehicle to truth.

Object and meaning are inextricably related, as shown in viewing the book as an object in relation to the meanings within it. Through Ward, we see that meaning is derived from the objects within the novel. Reading the novel through Brown, we instead argue that the human relationship is necessary for these meanings to arise. Hilbert provides us with an articulation of exactly what this reading of the novel is trying to do—to confuse our easy categories, to show the devious nature of the thing, to examine the ways in which the truth appears. Thus, our categories confounded, our search for truth informed by object/human relationships, and the ever present thing, we understand that the book and the humans and objects contained therein are merely quasi-objects and assume a relationship and cooperation in order to produce meaning. Through that understanding of humans and objects as quasi-objects, we can examine the objects in the novel as producers of meaning and relationships. The objects are not merely significant because of their relationship to humans, but because of their relation to other quasi-objects as well. Thus, the quasi-objects produce meaning and collections of relationships beyond the symbolic, they demonstrate the existence of the ineffable thing, and they give rise to and destroy the quasi-object of “human.”

Ahab

The categories of object and human should be broken down beginning with the most important “human” onboard the *Pequod*. Ahab can be read as a quasi-object, or as Waddell

posits, a collection of irreducible pieces, or atoms. He is both object and human, or quasi-object; he is a collection of things.

Melville's Captain Ahab is a mystery until chapter twenty-eight, when he appears, legend-like on the quarter-deck. Ishmael describes his appearance, including the scar that seems to run from his face to his feet and the "barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood" (Melville 135). Prior to his appearance, Ishmael had heard a few stories about Ahab, one coming from Captain Peleg when he first signs the papers to ship on the *Pequod*, and one from Elijah, in the chapter entitled "The Prophet." Captain Peleg told Ishmael how Ahab had lost his leg; then, after Ishmael has returned with Queequeg to the ship to have him sign the shipping papers, they encounter Elijah. Elijah asks "Anything down there about your souls?" (100). While Captain Peleg's story is concrete and straightforward, Elijah presents something much more inscrutable: their souls, as if Ahab and the *Pequod* were the vehicle of men's destiny. Ishmael is unnerved by this encounter, but he chalks it up to Elijah being "a humbug." (103).

In the beginning, Captain Ahab's character in the novel is felt only as a presence, he is more mystery than man, more story than flesh. Twenty-eight chapters elapse before he is physically present in the novel, and then Ishmael admits "So powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me, and the livid brand which streaked it..." (135). Ahab's aspect affects Ishmael, due to the stories he has heard. An old Manxman aboard the ship tells the crew that when Ahab is readied for burial, "whoever should do that last office for the dead, would find a birth-mark on him from crown to sole" (135). Ishmael says "Nevertheless, the old sea-traditions, [and] the immemorial credulities" invested the Manxman with a certain power for others to never call into question his words. Stories give the Manxman his credibility and Ahab his fierce aspect.

Ahab has become more than just a man, he has become beyond man, an idea to fear, a legendary and somewhat insane foe of Moby-Dick, the whale.

Yet, along with being more than just a man, he can be reduced to the ancient idea of atomism. Paul Douglas Waddell argues that Ahab represents the atomism described by Democritus and Leucippus, disregarding Epicurean atomism in favor of its predecessors who did not allow for human agency. Epicurus believed that sometimes atoms inexplicably swerve, therefore “permitting human agency” (Waddell 62). Waddell posits that by saying “ye cannot swerve me,” Ahab is rejecting Epicurus’s version of atomism. “Since [Democritus and Leucippus] thought that everything is composed of the same basic material, they also thought that unique physical appearances were ultimately superficial illusions. In fact, they believed that the ideas of *self* and *other* were inherently fallacious notions” (62). Ahab is all that the stories about him demonstrate, but he is also simply an object made of atoms without self-definition or agency. “By their [Democritus and Leucippus] way of thinking, there is fundamentally no difference between a white whale and a dogged sea captain” (62). Here Waddell reduces the captain to the level of the whale, or irreducible atoms. Waddell’s argument parallels Bruno Latour’s in destroying modernity’s ontological distinction between subject and object. There are only quasi-objects and quasi-subjects, and they are all simply made out of atoms after all. Ahab’s character is in a constant struggle to define himself beyond simple atoms. The stories that surround him give him a larger than life presence, but how much of that is Ahab? “After Ahab loses his leg, irreducibility becomes one of his chief concerns: he cannot know how many more parts of himself he can lose and still be Ahab...” (62). Are the parts of him he has lost still as much a bit of Ahab as are the ones still attached to his body? Is he now part of Moby-Dick because his leg resides within the whale’s belly? Does he become part of the ocean in the end,

reduced to just his fleshy bits, forever a part of the whale and the water? Given Waddell and Latour's arguments, the answer to these questions would be that he was never distinct all along; he was simply a quasi-object, made of irreducible atoms that come and go like everything else. If Ahab is a quasi-object that is created from atoms that "strike one another, determining the course of everything in the universe" (Waddell 62), then he can also become part of the *Pequod*.

As soon as he steps on deck, Ahab places his bone leg in an auger hole. These holes were "Upon each side of the *Pequod*'s quarter deck, and pretty close to the mizzen shrouds...bored about half an inch or so, into the plank" (Melville 135). These holes serve to steady Ahab and to allow him to pivot and gain a view of the surroundings. For many days, Ahab just watches. Ishmael describes him like another one of the masts on the ship. "...he seemed as unnecessary there as another mast" (136). Ahab simultaneously becomes part of the ship and mast-like. Placing his leg in the auger holes connects him with the *Pequod* in a physical way. Ishmael sees him like a mast because he does not speak for the first cold months of the *Pequod*'s voyage, Ahab was silent or inside his cabin. Here Ahab the legend or Ahab the topic becomes also Ahab the mast. He has incorporated his human qualities and his legend into the ship as a mast. He creates a parliament of things that blurs the line between human and object.

The characterization of the ship incorporates both human and object elements along with Ahab himself. The *Pequod* is described in vivid detail. "Long seasoned and weather-stained in the typhoons and calms of all four oceans, her old hull's complexion was darkened like a French grenadier's, who has alike fought in Egypt and Siberia. Her venerable bows looked bearded" (77). The reader gains not only a physical description of the ship, but a history of her as well. She is given the quality of "venerable," and deemed to appear as if bearded. Not satisfied with any description, giving the ship the reverence it is due, Ishmael continues. "Her masts—cut

somewhere on the coast of Japan, where her original ones were lost overboard in a gale—her masts stood stiffly up like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne. Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled, like the pilgrim-worshipped flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled” (77). The three kings of Cologne are the three wise men from the bible who visited Jesus on the night of his birth. Here they are reduced by Melville, only represented by their stiff spines and nothing more, broken down to their object parts only to be built up into the *Pequod*. The Archbishop of Canterbury, or Thomas Becket that Melville refers to, was assassinated in the Cathedral at Canterbury by four of King Henry II’s knights. Becket was later sainted, and pilgrims flocked to the spot. Melville presents the flag-stone as worn and wrinkled, passed over by multiple human feet and hands for centuries. He is reaching far into history to characterize the ship, comparing it at once to human-objects (spines) and human-affected objects (flag-stones). The *Pequod* is not simply relegated to the part of humanity that deals in Christian ideals however. “She was appareled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies” (78). The *Pequod* is both Christian and cannibal, much like her crew, much like the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. She is the “mediator,” encapsulating all that is the humanity demonstrated in the novel, the horror and the beauty. She is proud, demonstrating her trophies with no thought for the somber business of death she practices. “All round, her unpanelled, open bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the sperm whale, inserted there for pins, to fasten her old hempen thews and tendons to. Those thews ran not through base blocks of land wood, but deftly travelled over sheaves of sea-ivory” (78). The *Pequod* is *human*. She has tendons and a jawbone, teeth and a “hereditary foe.” “Scorning a turnstile wheel at her reverend helm, she sported there a tiller; and

that tiller was in one mass, curiously carved from the long narrow lower jaw of her hereditary foe" (78). She is both alive and dead, human and object, animal and person. "The helmsman who steered by that tiller in a tempest, felt like the Tartar, when he holds back his fiery steed by clutching its jaw. A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that" (78).

The *Pequod* is many things, including an extension of Ahab himself. As the *Pequod* sails at night, try pots burning, it parallels Ahab's unquenchable lust for vengeance. Ishmael describes the ship at night as a bark plunging into unending darkness: "...then the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (463). The *Pequod* is a physical extension of Ahab's leg through the auger holes in the quarter-deck. The ship, along with its captain, embody a full collection of the subject-object dialectic, falling somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. They represent what Latour would call the mediator, demonstrating the inextricable nature of human and object. The *Pequod* is even referred to as a thing. Within its description, it is consistently anthropomorphized and given human qualities, such as "noble" and "melancholy," somehow noble, but also a "cannibal." The *Pequod* has been designed with the pieces of her victims decorating her body. The human must be recognized in all of this—the human will to hunt and kill whales, and the human desire and ambition to decorate one's ship in such a way. *Moby-Dick* is as much about the objects put in place to fulfill the human will as it is the human will.

The defining characteristic of Ahab as a character is his desire for revenge against Moby-Dick. He a monomaniac that will eventually destroy his crew and ship along with himself. The *Pequod* becomes an extension of him and his will to destroy the whale. The other sailors are

hopeless to stop him, as he himself states “They think me mad—Starbuck does; but I’m demoniac, I am madness maddened!...Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents’ beds, unerringly I rush!” (183). He is insane and knows he is beyond their opinions, beyond mere madness; there is nothing that will stop him. He can only accomplish one thing, and that is his revenge. He becomes an instrument of destruction and nothing more. All that was left of his humanity he forgets in the quest for Moby-Dick. The closer he gets to death, the more like an object he becomes. Eventually, he will become an object like all men must; in death, as corpses, we are but objects with one *thingness*, and that is the memory of our lives. Yet, in death we cease to create more meanings, more stories; we are an object with a story, and that is all. Ishmael survives to tell the tale of Ahab, but Ahab’s corpse is forever lost to the sea. Like the sailors in the beginning of the novel whose lives had been memorialized by cenotaphs, Ahab is memorialized by the telling of *Moby-Dick*. His story is told by Ishmael, and like Twain’s argument for things being defined by their recognition and use, Ahab is defined by his recognition within the story and the telling of that story by Ishmael.

Ahab’s leg, one of his most defining and recognized features, functions as synecdoche for Ahab. Christopher Taylor, in “The Limbs of Empire: Ahab, Santa Anna, and *Moby-Dick*” posits that through synecdoche, Ahab’s leg becomes the larger-than-Ahab metaphor that unites the crew behind his vengeful purpose. Through use of the object in relation to humans, Taylor invokes the idea of methodological fetishism—how objects relate to humans; how objects inform and destroy humans; how humans relate to objects. Brown posits that methodological fetishism examines how objects facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects. Taylor’s arguments weave into this idea—the leg facilitates Ahab’s domain over his subjects, while simultaneously threatening it. Examining the methodology of how the object is fetishized both literalizes the

object and unpacks how the object gives birth to the subject. Offering a historicist reading of *Moby-Dick*, Taylor describes how this parallels P.T. Barnum's use of Santa Anna's prosthetic leg to generate belief in an imperialist ideology. "*Moby-Dick* reads the figurative career of Santa Anna's prosthesis to reconstruct the politics and political effects of the figures through which the social world of the American 1848 was constituted, thought, and reshaped" (31). Taylor claims that *Moby-Dick* "...inscribes the process of deliteralization and figuration to which Santa Anna's prosthesis was subject" (30). Through deliteralization of his prosthesis, Ahab gains the communal support of his crew, leading them blindly to their destruction.

Taylor constructs his argument logically, first presenting how Santa Anna "...established a perverse synecdoche between his leg and his person, assigning his lost part the affective status of a fully dead body" (33). He then explains how industry as well as a prosthesis would provide freedom for citizens, concluding with "militarism and territorial expansion could regenerate subjects whose autonomy seemed at risk—particularly neo-Jeffersonian, Jacksonian workers threatened by the possibility of becoming what Karl Marx called the 'inanimate limbs' of urban industry" (35). To counter this risk, Taylor points to a play by George Stratton in which he "...exhibits an image of Mexico as a non-constricting space where workers could work honestly, autonomously, and for themselves" (36). This freedom and glory, presented by both Santa Anna and Ahab's leg, create an unconscious popular legitimacy to imperialism and Ahab's quest (37).

Objects, especially in Barnum's museums, took on narratives, or "'narratives of acquisition,' emphasiz[ing] 'where [the object] had come from, how it had arrived, and how much it had cost'" (39). Taylor describes how viewers would have been encouraged to "participate in the imperial appropriation of the limb (and the land) by imaginatively and narratively reenacting its history of acquisition" (39). The same process is effective for Ahab—

he tells the story of the loss of his limb, and encourages his ship's crew to participate in the appropriation of his vengeance. "Ahab's loss stands in for the grievances of his crew in general, and then—as we can see through the reparation Ahab demands, the sublime Thing of the white whale—this loss is inflated to metaphysical dimensions. It is through these figurative operations that Ahab's crew willfully turns from whaling to revenge..." (43). The part, or the leg, is now standing in for Ahab's and his crew's grievances. The crew unites behind Ahab and agrees to the bloody quest. "With his literally split body, Ahab performs this hegemonic articulation, transforming his lost leg and his visible prosthesis into a synecdochal object capable of mediating between his own particular injury and the general grievances of the crew" (45). Here, the piece of Ahab, or his leg, creates a metaphor of his loss so powerful that his crew of men is willing to forego their concerns of safety and pursue Moby-Dick to the ends of the earth. The object has produced the subject—the narrative of loss and desire for vengeance.

Chris Taylor's arguments employ the methodological fetishism that Bill Brown introduces. The fetishism of Ahab's leg disavows the production of the leg (until later chapters, when Ishmael turns his focus to the literal production of the leg, which may change the subjective narrative thus far attached to it) and focuses on the subject-object relation of the leg as a whalebone and as a metaphor for Ahab's loss. As stated, the leg gives Ahab a larger-than-life status as mysterious and haunted prior to the crew glimpsing him for the first time. Oftentimes, Ishmael can identify Ahab pacing about on the deck by the sound of his false leg, which lends a particular horror and tortured aspect to his pacings. The leg constitutes Ahab; according to Taylor, without it he would have little power over the crew. He would hold little imaginative sway over Ishmael. The leg is Ahab. Brown states that the object gives birth to the subject, and

Ahab's leg is a fitting example. Focusing on how the inanimate object constitutes the human subject is part of Brown's idea of methodological fetishism.

Methodological fetishism also looks at how inanimate objects move and threaten human subjects. Ahab's leg drives him to his vengeance through the memory of his loss. The leg threatens him mentally and physically. At the beginning of the voyage he is recovering from a grave injury, in which the leg shattered and nearly pierced his groin. "...he had been found one night lying prone upon the ground, and insensible; by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin..." (Melville 505). The leg threatens to kill him, not only literally, but by putting him at a disadvantage on whale hunts as well.

At the point where the ship's carpenter constructs a new leg for Ahab, the power of Ahab's prosthesis begins to wane. The narrative takes a decidedly downward turn after this, beginning with Ahab threatening Starbuck's life. "Ahab seized a loaded musket from the rack...and pointing it towards Starbuck, exclaimed: "there is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod" (Melville 517). After losing his leg, Ahab feels his grasp on the ship's crew loosening, and must threaten Starbuck in order to keep it. In the following chapter, Queequeg barely manages to survive a grave sickness, and in the chapters following Queequeg's near death, Ishmael meditates upon Ahab's bloody vengeance and the blacksmith who would have been better off dead prior to the voyage. Once the power of the narrative of Ahab's leg weakens, so does his power over the crew, and their power over the events that occur. Brown states that methodological fetishism disavows the production that creates an object and focuses instead on the object-subject relation. Here, in chapter 108, Ishmael is specifically focusing on that creation, and thus, if Taylor and Brown are to be understood

together, marks the beginning of the breakdown of subject-object relationship. Until this point, methodological fetishism has provided a view of the balance between quasi-objects and how they interact within the story. Now, however, because the quasi-object is breaking down and the distinction between subject and object is attempting to assert itself, the existence of the quasi-objects becomes imperiled.

The production of the new leg negates the fetishization and power of the object. Due to Ishmael's focus on the production of the object, the reader is forced to understand the production and along with that production, Ahab's weakness. He is no longer standing on a barbaric leg, but must wait for a new one to be created. The lack of the leg has power over Ahab, and as a result, he loses power over his crew. Waiting for this new leg, Ahab muses that he will create a new "man" out of objects, disturbing the relationship of subjects and objects. Here he aims to instill meaning into objects in order to create a weakness-free man, yet that is impossible because it denies the subject-object relationship necessary for quasi-objects, or humans and objects, to exist.

Ahab claims he will order a "complete man." (Melville 512). "Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modeled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to 'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see—shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards" (Melville 512). Ahab, through detailing his complete man, gives rise to a monster of Frankensteinian proportions, yet a man with no heart, and no need to see outwards. Here, objects are giving birth to the subject, Ahab's ideal man, and threatening the idea of human—breaking down the subject-object relation. Ahab's man would be pieced together out of physical parts—brass, skylight, and roots. The creation moment is there in

his desire to create a “man,” but without the disintegrating relationship of objects and subjects on board, the man cannot exist, nor being anything close to human. Here we begin to see the relationship between person and thing change from Brown’s idea of methodological fetishism. Here, the subject is producing the object, and we are left with a “man” that is not a man, but an object, not a quasi-object, but an object instilled with meaning from a person, something separate from the subject or object. Something with “no heart at all,” and a skylight to “illuminate inwards.” This object of Ahab’s man is departing from Brown because he is created from the subject, from an idea, and he looks inwards instead of outwards. He has no connection to the subject, but only to himself. A creature such as this lacks the mediators of other quasi-objects and cannot exist. Likewise, Ahab’s crew is sailing towards destruction. Ahab’s desire to create the object-man speaks not only to his objects’ (leg, ship, harpoon) failing hold on the crew, but to his own loss of human identity, or humanity.

Stephen Ausband claims that through his loss of humanity, Ahab becomes a machine. Ausband’s argument elucidates the breakdown of the object-human relationship in moving Ahab away from the definition of human. Ausband cites several places in the text where Ahab is referred to with machinist language. “In his monomaniacal quest for revenge, Ahab assumes the driving purposefulness of a machine. He loses much of his humanity, his identity with the other, merely human souls who sail with him” (200). Ausband agrees that to Ishmael, Ahab seems something above human (200). He argues that the lightning bolt used in his initial description “...burned away much that was alive and human in him, leaving him ‘branded’ by the scar and by the missing leg” (201). Ausband reads the mechanical ideal man that Ahab describes as a perfect reconstruction for Ahab to be able to kill the whale. “...he tried to reconstruct himself—not as the vulnerable man or tree this time but as a metallic demi-god, a bronze (in other places

iron or steel) slayer of monsters” (201). The carpenter enters into Ausband’s argument as a person who lacks any trace of humanity. “If there is a single spark of humanity in the carpenter, he keeps it hidden. He paints oars and extracts teeth with the same lack of emotion” (202). Only an inhuman man could create a mechanistic ideal man, and here Ahab makes his order of the carpenter, who will create the object that replenishes Ahab’s humanness, but not his humanity.

Like Taylor, Ausband offers another interpretation as to why Ahab holds power over the crew, and that is because he has created the perfect machine in them. They are willing to do his bidding. “The old man’s power holds in check all the natural inclinations of the crew. They are his entirely. Metaphorically, his machinery has overcome their organic nature...” (209). The crew becomes part of his mechanical structure. As he was welded into the *Pequod*, so Ahab’s crew becomes part of his great machine. “On the third and final day of the chase the crew members function like a single mechanical man, of which Ahab is the head. ‘You are not other men,’ he tells them, ‘but my arms and legs’” (210). The men, except Starbuck, who is kept in check by the machine debilitating “magnet” at his brain (210) and his “habit of obedience” (Halverson 443), perform Ahab’s bidding with no question. Even Tashtego, who “...with no regard for his own death and no notice of his fellows, acts with the singular purposefulness of a machine” (Ausband 211). As the ship goes down, Tashtego is still nailing the flag to the main mast, catching a bird in the process.

Ausband concludes his remarks with a comment on the dualistic nature of Ahab’s character. “... Ahab’s isolation is due to something worse than mere misanthropy; it is due to misophusism (if I may coin a word that seems to me needed and appropriate): hatred of the natural...a man waging relentless, mindless war on the essence of life” (211). Ahab destroys all that is around him, including his own body and soul. All of subjective nature—life, humanity,

animals, and crew members, are destroyed by Ahab's heartless pursuit of the whale. His character's fetishism of the whale—instituting it with human characteristics, creates the final vortex into machine-objectivity of the humanity around him. Throughout the novel, Ishmael narrates the balance of human thought and life with the objects around them. It is not until the final fourth of the novel that Ahab begins completing his task, crushing the subjects and objects around him.

Ahab's destruction of the crew begins with destruction of navigational tools. Several are lost before the *Pequod's* final days. The first object to be destroyed is the quadrant. Ahab cries "Curse thee, thou fain toy; and cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him, as these old eyes are even now scorched with thy light, O sun!" (Melville 544). Ahab destroys the quadrant because he sees it as useless. He sees it as a toy that points at the heavens. The "live vividness" of the quadrant burns Ahab, and he must destroy any attempt to reach to heaven or above the object-world the men are living in. "Thus I trample on thee, thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high; thus I split and destroy thee!" (544). Ahab crushes the paltry thing and no longer has a tool that can point heavenward. Starbuck witnesses this outburst and remarks that all that will remain of Ahab if he continues to burn in this way is "one little heap of ashes!" Ahab will end up like Starbuck's prediction—no more than a reduction to object parts, a body sunken into the sea.

The second navigational object to go is the compass. "...last night's thunder turned our compasses—that's all" (562). Ahab, upon finding out that the compass is exactly reversed, speaks to his vanquished quadrant foe "Thou poor, proud heaven-gazer and sun's pilot! yesterday I wrecked thee, and to-day the compasses would feign have wrecked me. So, so. But Ahab is lord over the level loadstone yet" (563). Ahab claims his superiority over the objects.

With the crew watching, he creates another compass, and “in his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride” (564).

After the compass faults, the log-line and life-buoy are both lost. The log is lost because Ahab insisted it still be used. “Snap! the overstrained line sagged down in one long festoon; the tugging log was gone” (566). In much the same way, the life buoy is lost. This time, the object drags a human subject down with it. “. . .it slowly filled, and the parched wood also filled at its every pore; and the studded iron-bound cask followed the sailor to the bottom, as if to yield him his pillow, though in sooth but a hard one” (570). These objects are now beginning to destroy the men. Without the proper navigational tools, Ahab will not be able to steer the ship. Ahab’s quest as machinistic not only destroys subjects, but objects as well. The affirmation of separate object and subject categories causes the evacuation of all quasi-objects and the obliteration of these objects portends the eventual annihilation of all. Ultimately, the dual sight of subject-like and object-like is vanquished. As Tashtego nails a flag to the main mast, a bird is caught by the wing and “. . .the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards. . .went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it” (624). The vortex that Ishmael escapes swallows up subject-like thing and object-like thing alike—it becomes a vacuum that equates all. “So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool” (625). Ishmael’s duality must live on. Clinging to Queequeg’s coffin-life buoy, he is saved from the same fate of the objects and subjects caught in Ahab’s path.

Ahab creates and destroys relationships with other objects and humans. He is quasi-object, part whalebone and part man. His leg becomes a synecdoche to assist him in subordinating the crew. Towards the end of the voyage, Ahab begins to destroy objects and humans, or the quasi-objects that surround him. He detests the natural. He begins by destroying the navigational tools and ends by destroying the crew of quasi-objects, or his subjects. By affirming the distinction between subject and object, Ahab destroys all quasi-objects. Ishmael is the only quasi-object to survive, but even then, he is brought perilously close to the vortex where the divide between human and object is completely negated and all is destroyed. Objects and subjects cannot exist on a dialectic, nor can they exist without any distinction. Just as Ahab's ideal man is more object than man, Ahab is more man than object. Both are quasi-objects and must both acknowledge their existence as such while affirming the differences between them. The distinctions of "human" and "object" cannot exist, but due to the ineffable, or possible evacuation of all meaning, must remain permeable.

Moby-Dick

The character of the whale is another than can be read as a quasi-object. He is human-like in that he has agency and life, but he is also object-like, able to be rendered to his profitable bits. Within his blubber is contained the thing, the demonstration of the permeability of the distinction between human and object. Moby-Dick is the attainment of the ultimate truth, yet he is a whale.

Moby-Dick from his very first mention, much like Ahab, is given an almost mythic history. Ishmael first learns of Ahab's accident and the whale when Captain Peleg discusses them both upon meeting Ishmael. Peleg tells the story of Ahab losing his leg, describing how the leg was not just taken by any sperm whale, but "...it was devoured, chewed up, crunched by the

monstrousest parmacetty that ever chipped a boat!—ah, ah!” (80). Peleg gives Moby-Dick particular qualities in this description. The whale has the ability to chew, to crunch, to devour, in what sounds like a vicious animalistic way. It also is the “monstrousest parmacetty,” which means the whale is more ferocious than other whales. There is something different about this whale. Very quickly the reader learns of the tales surrounding Moby-Dick. Ishmael and the crew of the *Pequod* hear various accounts of the white whale on their voyages. Moby-Dick only exists, like Ahab, in the story, until the last fatal chapters when he appears to meet and destroy his adversary completely.

All sorts of human qualities are instilled in the stories of Moby-Dick. He is said to seek out certain people, such as Radney, the mate of the *Town-Ho*. Starbuck challenges this view of Moby-Dick as a terrible, intelligent creature when Captain Ahab first makes the men swear to hunt the whale. “Vengeance on a dumb brute!” cried Starbuck, “that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous” (178). Starbuck is saying that to invest oneself in vengeance on a *thing* seems blasphemous. Moby-Dick is nothing but a whale, but he is given the agency of a human-like god. He has such power that many whale ships will not even lower for him. With the human-like agency that Ahab and others give him, he is more than an object. He is both human and object—having agency and being a “dumb thing.” He is also neither, as he has come to signify all that is evil to Ahab. He is the representation of the relationship between subject and object. The idea of Moby-Dick at times supersedes the object of Moby-Dick, as most whale men will not even give chase to him. He illustrates methodological fetishism through his actions. He acts as though he is specifically after Ahab, but this is simply the significance that humans instill in him. He is also indefinable—different stories of him reach Ahab’s ear, yet he cannot be pinned down; he cannot

be caught or destroyed. He at once negates the idea of the ineffable and embodies it, as the idea of the thing is strongest in him—he exists beyond the boundaries of object and subject. He is human in his actions, in his vengeance, just like his hunter. Through his human-like celebrity, Moby Dick becomes a mediator between human and animal, or subject and object, rational being and dumb brute. Other whales are hunted, tried out, and collected, but none even approach the status of thing or mediator like Moby Dick. Moby Dick is representative of the thingness that arises from objects. Seen from the perspective of a quasi-object, he creates relationships with other objects—the squid, the spirit-spout, the other ships from which he has taken humans. Moby-Dick is the object that binds all of the characters together—objects and human alike.

Not only do Ahab and Moby-Dick demonstrate the quasi-object nature of things and humans, but they create relationships between humans and things, they become mediators between the categories of human and thing, they begin a parliament of things, they destroy and give birth to things, they interact across the disintegrating divide between them, and create and destroy each other. Humans and animals can be read as quasi-objects, but now to turn to physical objects and examine the breakdown of the dialectic there.

Harpoons

To whalers, harpoons are important instruments and necessary for the catching of whales. For the purpose of this analysis, harpoons are integral in the “Parliament of Things” that defines the existence of the *Pequod's* crew and that of the whaling industry. Not only would whale hunters not exist without harpoons, but the harpoons are also the literal attachment to the whalers' prey. Harpoons throughout the novel retain their significance based on human perception and their physicality. The first harpoons that Ishmael encounters are in the Spouter-

Inn. "Mixed with these [other weapons] were rusty old whaling lances and harpoons all broken and deformed. Some were storied weapons" (14). Some of these weapons had more of a thingness to them, more of a story, more value because of their history. The next harpoon Ishmael encounters is Queequeg's, which he uses as a sleeping partner, a shaving razor ("...he takes the harpoon from the bed corner, slips out the long wooden stock, unsheathes the head, whets it a little on his boot, and striding up to the bit of mirror against the wall, begins a vigorous scraping, or rather harpooning of his cheeks" (31)), and a fork ("...reaching over the table with it, to the imminent jeopardy of many heads, and grappling the beefsteaks towards him.") The harpoon, as Brown points out in his treatment of *The Prince and the Pauper Twain*, is defined by its recognition and use. Ishmael says that instead of becoming a king, Queequeg chose to enter Christendom and learn from it, so that he may become a better king upon returning to his people. His harpoon stood in place of his royalty, "...that barbed iron was in lieu of a scepter now" (62). To Queequeg, his harpoon is an all-purpose tool. To Ishmael, astounded by his newest companion, it is a thing to be learned about.

Later in the story, when Ahab makes the men take an oath to hunt and kill Moby-Dick, the harpooners' tools are used as chalices. Ahab has them turn over the metal parts of their harpoons and drink from the cup they find there to swear to hunt down Moby-Dick. "Stab me not with that keen steel! Cant them; cant them over! know ye not the goblet end?" (181). Even the harpooners, deeply intimate with their weapons, like Queequeg, had not known the ends of their weapons could be turned into cups. Ahab adds another element, distinguishing these cups as "murderous chalices," recognizing the deadly purpose of the harpoon and the use for which they are now employed. These harpoons complete the pact with Ahab and seal their fate, causing death to the throwers as well as the whales they dispatch. "Bestow them, ye who are now made

parties to this indissoluble league. Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye harpooners! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow—Death to Moby Dick!” (181). By drinking the contents of the cup, the harpooners and their witnesses bind themselves inevitably to Ahab's purpose and to each other. It is neither the money nor the killing of whales that holds them there, but the idea that they are in an “indissoluble league.” The objects of the harpoons have taken on another significance, fastening each of these men to their terrible fates.

The harpoons not only connect them to Ahab's purpose but to each other, and to the exchange of value in their economic system. The men are compelled to make use of the harpoons in order to make money for themselves and their families. Despite the threatening and dangerous nature of the tool, it is a necessary implement in the everyday life of a whaler. The harpoon facilitates the scene in which Ahab commits his crew to the hunt for Moby Dick. The harpoon begins the hunt for the whale; the harpoon solidifies the crewmembers' relationship with each other and their literal connection to each whale they catch. The harpoon is never a concrete object, but a quasi-object, defined by its use. The harpoon creates relationships between the men and becomes more than an object, its thingness arises. As a cup, razor, companion, or relationship builder, the harpoon plays a central role in dictating relationships in *Moby-Dick*.

Cenotaphs

Another object that expands beyond its object-nature to become a quasi-object is the cenotaph in the whale men's church. Not simply a tablet or stone, the object of the cenotaph contains the memories of the men that have died at sea. These men have transcended their object-like form (the body) and reside simply in the form of an idea memorialized by the

cenotaphs in the beginning of the novel. Ishmael enters a chapel and notices the plaques on the wall. “Sacred/To the Memory/of/JOHN TALBOT,/Who, at the age of eighteen, was lost overboard,/Near the Isle of Desolation, off Patagonia,/November 1st, 1836./THIS TABLET/Is erected to his Memory/BY HIS SISTER” (40). These tablets have been placed in the chapel in memory of the deceased. The tablets take the physical place of the sailors’ bodies, the families having nothing else to mourn. Despite these objects taking the place of the sailors’ bodies, the tablets give rise only to the memory, from the memory of the grieving families. Ishmael thinks “...I feel sure that here before me were assembled those, in whose unhealing hearts the sight of those bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed afresh” (41). In death, the quasi-object nature of the human is the strongest. The grieving family, craving a physical body to mourn, places the tablet in the chapel. Therein, the object-like nature of the human becomes apparent. The memory of the human is not enough, but there must be an object to take his place. They erect the cenotaph to the sailor’s memory, but if there were a body, the memorial to the sailor would be on his gravestone. Humans have a necessity to see the physical form as deceased in order to begin grieving and accept death of the object-form of another human. The idea of this man (John Talbot) as deceased is not enough; they must place an object in the chapel denoting the death of the object-like John Talbot. The only way to accept death is in a concrete form, just as Ishmael’s happiness resides in objects. Ishmael, even though he does not know the families, recognizes that these tablets are not merely stone objects. “Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say—here, *here* lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions!” (41). These tablets represent the subjective despair of the families who cannot point to a place where their

beloved lies. The tablets themselves embody and contain that despair. They are both object-replacements for the deceased and the embodiment of the despair of the living. These object tablets are both object-like and human-like. “What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here” (41). Without a proper grave, the dead humans are without a Christian burial, and may as well be memorialized in a Hindu cave rather than a Christian chapel. The “lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith” indicates that those without graves may as well belong to any faith, for without a concrete grave, they can never belong to a single faith.

Ishmael considers the nature of grief over a dead loved one. He wonders why we cannot be comforted “...for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings” (42). We cannot be comforted by the thought of “unspeakable bliss,” and we immediately seek to “hush the dead” because we seek the closure but also the grief. The more we grieve, the more meaning the person’s life had. Also, inherent in the object-tablets is the idea that the men may still be alive. Without a body, there can be no definitive object state, just a stand-in tablet. None of the families would like to hear that “knocking on a tomb,” or to see their loved ones return, but all retain that hope by erecting a tablet “in memory” of the men. They desire both the body of the deceased, as deceased, and the guarantee that the deceased will *not* return to life, so that the family can begin grieving. A body will give this guarantee; an object-tablet leaves too much possibility.

Ishmael concludes his meditation upon cenotaphs with a demonstration that humans never die because we have souls. “Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact

take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot” (42). The soul of the human, the *thingness* of the human, or that which lingers after the body and ideas have left, cannot be split, cannot be reduced to ashes or objects. This soul is akin to the memory of the human—the soul and the memory are always present and cannot be destroyed, except by time and forgetfulness. The soul, or the thingness, here demonstrates the shaky divide between human and object. The cenotaphs memorialize the soul of the man; if that something extra did not exist, the tablet would be a piece of stone with no significance. Ishmael may be slightly mistaken here, because in the land of the living, without a concrete object to place hold for one’s soul or memory, the deceased will slowly fade away, no memory of him her existing. However, with human relationships to those objects (or the grieving families in the church), the memory of the deceased will survive. The meaning instilled upon the cenotaphs depends on the person gazing at them. To the families they mean one thing, and to Ishmael, create a launching point for a metaphysical contemplation of death and our corporeal selves. These cenotaphs, or objects in place of humans maintain their relationship with humans while still being objects and available for human interpretation. Thus, given Brown’s focus on human and object relationships, neither object nor human would exist without that relationship being present. The human and the cenotaph become mediators in the parliament of things (souls, tablets, humans), and the cenotaphs denote a possibility and destruction of the human and the soul. The thingness present is on both sides—in the humans and in the object, thus leading to the permeability of the distinction between tablet and human.

Queequeg's Coffin

Another object that demonstrates thingness and the human to object relationships is Queequeg's coffin. Louis Leiter, in his article "Queequeg's Coffin," posits that the coffin has several symbolic meanings. "The coffin is a work of prophecy, the complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of truth. It is death buoying up life. It is the entire cycle of man's existence. It is Pisces (Moby Dick) and hints at the malevolence of God (Noah's flood). It is cosmic. It contains elements of Prometheus who created man and animated him with fire" (Leiter 253).

At the end of the novel, Ishmael's life is spared, ironically, by Queequeg's coffin. The coffin had been turned into a lifebuoy, and was the only thing afloat that Ishmael could grab a hold on. "...[A]nd now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main" (625). The coffin had been constructed for Queequeg when he was sick. Queequeg then decided not to die, and the coffin replaced the life buoy that the *Pequod* lost in the days before the final chase. The coffin saves Ishmael, and becomes the physical body that represents the memory of him. If not for this coffin (an object which generally houses the object-like part of humans), Ishmael would have become just another memory presented by the cenotaphs in the chapel (or worse, due to his lack of connections there, he would not be placed there at all). The coffin lifts Ishmael, and ensures that Ishmael's memory is accompanied by a physical body. The coffin delivers the story of the ill-fated *Pequod*, for without Ishmael, the story would have sunk like the ship. The object of the coffin saves the object of Ishmael's body, and the memories of the other sailors on the voyage. He also witnesses their sinking, and thus the

story adds a sort of closure that a tablet in a church would not be able to provide. The sharks leave Ishmael alone, as if the weight of his story was deterrent enough.

The object of the coffin is not just used as a coffin and a life buoy, but Queequeg also uses it as a travel trunk. "With a wild whimsiness, he now used his coffin for a sea-chest; and emptying into it his canvas bag of clothes, set them in order there. Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body" (524).

Queequeg's coffin becomes like the stone, right whale bones, and mountain regions that had hitherto been carved upon by sailors. He spends many hours in investing this coffin with meaning as a sea-chest. In the end, the coffin is the most meaningful object, for it bares the story of the ship and sailors with Ishmael. Yet, the coffin is still a coffin. It is an object that floats, yet the ideas contained therein are of the utmost importance. The coffin is also established as a double for Queequeg's body. The coffin not only saves Ishmael and the *Pequod's* story, but it contains copies of the tattooing on Queequeg's body. The grotesque figures and drawings contain the mystery of Queequeg's life, and are a copy of his physical body.

Ishmael's body also serves as a representation of a story. Ishmael narrates the story of the *Pequod* in the novel, but his own body is also covered in tattoos, the skin being the most permanent way to record a piece of information for a sailor. In the chapter named "A Bower in the Arsacides," Ishmael encounters a whale skeleton that he would like to take the measurements of. "The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics" (102). The objective measurements of the whale are captured in ink upon Ishmael's arm. On the body is where the story is the most secure.

“But as I was crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing—at least, what untattooed parts might remain—I did not trouble myself with the odd inches...” (102). Ishmael himself is a living object—a book of remembrances. He is the only secure place in and on which to record the story and measurements. In order for anything he writes to endure, it must be written on his body (tellingly, he does not write his own will on his body). The ink on his body captures the story, whereas the ink when he signs the ship’s papers seals his fate. As another human covered in ink, including his face, Queequeg’s tattoos also play a role in the telling of the story.

Queequeg’s mark is his binding signature, and that comes from a mark on his arm. However, even separate publishers take different views of what Queequeg’s mark should look like. When Queequeg signs the ship’s papers to ship out on the *Pequod*, his mark looks something like an X. Queequeg’s mark is designated differently in different editions of the book. In this edition, “Quohog, his □ mark.” (98). The mark is more like that which would mark the end of a treasure map. In the Explanatory Notes the Penguin edition states: “*Quohog, his X mark*: John Bryant states that South Sea islanders typically reproduced a portion of their facial tattoos as a signature. Here Queequeg reproduces a ‘queer round figure’ tattooed on his arm. In any event, typographical necessity rendered Queequeg’s mark as an X” (639). In another edition published by Signet in 1998, the mark looks more like an infinity sign. Queequeg’s signature is binding, yet the exact nature of the mark is unknown. “Typographical necessity” of the publisher created the first X mark, but why the infinity sign later? The “queer round figure” from Queequeg’s arm was coming from the only “secure” place to write for Queequeg—tattooed on his body, but even then, the human body is shifting and subjective. The body is difficult to pin down; whether it is through tattoos, through the skeleton, or through measurements taken of a

whale, the body itself is an object and a human. It cannot be a concrete object, nor can it be completely human. Like the objects of the cenotaphs and his coffin, Queequeg's body is available for interpretation. His body is the object and his character the human. It is not until he creates a relationship with Ishmael that he gains meaning, as Ishmael is the only survivor to tell the tale of the ill-fated ship.

Queequeg's coffin is a quasi-object, as well as Ishmael and Queequeg's bodies. The coffin takes the place of Queequeg, inscribed with his tattoos and his story. It becomes the mediator between Queequeg's body, his story, Ishmael, Ishmael's life, the categories of Ishmael and Queequeg as humans, and the rest of the *Pequod's* crew. The thingness of Queequeg's coffin is evident in its refusal to remain object-like and its appropriation of a decidedly human element. Queequeg's humanness is not only mediated by the coffin, but by his idol, Yojo, as well.

Yojo

Queequeg's small idol can be blamed for the entire mess. It is Yojo that decides Ishmael should choose the ship, and it is Yojo, the "insignificant bit of black wood" that Ishmael first throws off his Christian upbringing. Ishmael describes the idol as "a curious little deformed image with a hunch on its back, and exactly the color of a three days' old Congo baby...it glistened a good deal like polished ebony..." (24). Immediately Ishmael gives the idol human characteristics. Queequeg offers the idol a bit of biscuit. "But the little devil did not seem to fancy such dry sort of fare at all; he never moved his lips" (25). Queequeg invests Yojo with religious power, and Ishmael varies on how he interprets the idol. At first he believes it to be another preserved human, like Queequeg's shrunken heads, but when he finds out it is just wood, he still describes it as having fancies. Later, when invited to worship the idol with Queequeg,

Ishmael agrees to it. “Do you suppose now, Ishmael that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood?” (58). He finds his god uninterested in the significance of objects. Considering Brown and Latour’s perspective on the object-subject divide, Ishmael’s statement amounts to an existential questioning of God’s investment in the objects he has created. If Ishmael’s Presbyterian God is uninterested in object-idols, then by default, he is also uninterested in the actions of humans—especially the idol worship being engaged in by Ishmael. The insignificant bit of black wood represents all objects—including the book that Melville is crafting. What could these insignificant pages mean to a magnanimous god? By demonstrating the lack of value god places on the object of Yojo, Ishmael is also demonstrating that each human is also as insignificant as that bit of black wood. Likewise, the lives of the crewmembers aboard the *Pequod* are as significant as the objects they work with. Melville presents the view that even if he is writing to achieve some grand view, it matters little in the view of Providence. “And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. It came in as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive performances” (7). Ishmael’s story is but a performance, a superficial presentation on the stage, a work to be considered, but in the end, still a work of art, an object, and absent of truth. Yojo is more than an insignificant piece of wood. By demonstrating that God cares not for objects or humans alike, Ishmael begins to hint at the connection and similarity of the two.

People as Furniture

Objects do not need to be created out of inanimate material. Objects can also be from humans—living ones, further blurring the line between the two. Queequeg’s culture employs

humans as objects of use. Queequeg can be considered the “mediator” that Bruno Latour speaks of. He exists neither as human or object, but as the mediator between human and object. He represents the collective of human cultures and objects around him that creates what we should come to think of as the new human, the new modern. To him, Western objects of Ishmael’s world are evacuated of their meaning. Ironically, Queequeg’s culture is seen as primitive; yet Queequeg is the character that inhabits a more “modern” relationship with objects. To Ishmael, objects like a wheelbarrow have an intended use, but Queequeg understands that this is not the case. Ishmael’s encounter with him influences Ishmael’s own thinking and makes him more accepting and understanding of Queequeg’s differences. Queequeg’s presence and general goodness debunks Ishmael’s assumptions about other cultures and provides a better understanding of what is natural or true and what it means to be human.

Queequeg shows Ishmael the denial of concrete meaning in things, but he also engages in the opposite, mediating the object-like nature of humans. Queequeg’s culture uses humans as furniture, blurring the line between object and human. Upon first boarding the *Pequod*, Queequeg tries to sit down on a sleeping man and smoke his tomahawk pipe. Ishmael implores him to move because the man will not be able to breathe very well. Queequeg then explains his logic by talking about his culture. “...Queequeg gave me to understand that, in his land, owing to the absence of settees and sofas of all sorts, the king, chiefs, and great people generally, were in the custom of fattening some of the lower orders for ottomans; and to furnish a house comfortably in that respect, you had only to buy up eight or ten lazy fellows, and lay them round in the piers and alcoves” (109). Queequeg goes on to explain that it is quite convenient to go on an excursion and call on your attendant to make himself into a settee under a tree. Humans, in this instance, are used as objects. Queequeg’s culture is the most different from the Quaker

Nantucket shown in the novel, and Ishmael is constantly learning things from him. The way Queequeg interprets humans and objects, including human life, is different from Ishmael. Queequeg is not the savage that Ishmael first believes him to be; in fact, Queequeg is more civilized than the Christians he sets out to study. “But, alas! the practices of whalers soon convinced him [Queequeg] that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father’s heathens” (62). It is not culture, geographical location, or lack of kindness that causes Queequeg’s major difference—it is his recognition and use of humans as objects. Queequeg has a power over the dialectic—to turn the idea of human into furniture, and later, when he becomes severely ill, to decide not to die. “In a word, it was Queequeg’s conceit, that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort” (523). Nothing can kill Queequeg except for some “unintelligent destroyer” of some sort. Only objects can destroy Queequeg; while he has mastery over his life and the idea of his life, he will live. Ultimately, he is destroyed by Moby-Dick, who in Ahab’s mind has gained the human agency for vengeance, but in Queequeg’s mind, because he thinks differently from the rest of them, is simply an unintelligent destroyer.

Queequeg also tells to Ishmael the tales of the case of the mistaken coconut water and the wheelbarrow. Queequeg understands why people laugh at him when he lashes a wheelbarrow to his chest. He did not understand how to use the object, and its functional use did not make sense to him. How would we know the use of something if no one had told us? Queequeg tells an anecdote that a sea captain came to his island and used the sacred coconut water used for anointing to wash his hands. “what you tink now—Didn’t our people laugh?” (67). Objects in the novel are constantly being renegotiated and used according to one’s needs. Queequeg’s

embalmed human heads (full size) are used as curious trinkets for sale, again demonstrating Queequeg's different culture and that objects have transferrable meaning (he sells out of all but one, which he gives to a barber for a block). The mixed company of New Bedford buys up the embalmed heads and the savagery involved in killing another human being and embalming his head is forgotten. Queequeg is engaging in capitalism of the grandest kind—a fetishized object that turns the people involved with making the product into objects. The production of the head literally takes a person—yet another object created from the human.

If Queequeg can control when he lives or dies except by outside influence, and is also engaging in commodity fetishism of human heads, he the key to the transferable nature of the object in the novel. He is also the point upon which all free-flowing object-human relations circulate and the boundaries between the two are manipulated. No other character in the novel can view objects, humans, and life in the different ways that Queequeg does. He does appear immediately in the novel and plays the savior when his coffin becomes Ishmael's lifeboat (after he decides not to die, except by outside object).

His coffin being turned into the lifeboat is yet another example of objects changing meaning and use throughout the story. Queequeg's paganism seems to be more useful because of its interpretation of objects than Christianity's push to establish Moby-Dick as a god and Fedallah and his crew as the devil. Queequeg's paganism has no such opposition, and it is in the denial of the existence of this opposition that rests the message—if there is no good and no evil, there is only useful and not useful. Objects and humans can be used however you need them to be used, regardless of their original meaning or intent. Their thingness arrives from recognition and use, and while Ishmael is discomfited and estranged by Queequeg's use of humans as

furniture and his sale of human heads, Queequeg creates a life born of both cultures and ultimately more powerful than the Christian fatality of Ishmael and crew.

Tryworks

Given that humans and objects engage in countless relationships that dissolve the object-human dialectic in favor of subjective meaning, it is dangerous for Ishmael to construct a binary opposition. Not having experienced as many religions as Queequeg, Ishmael, despite rejecting Christianity, occasionally engages with the idea of good and evil as separate things at the ends of a spectrum. But the Christian dialectic of good and evil is dangerous. Ishmael's Christian faith leads him to interpret the try works of the ship as a symbol of hell. However, by traveling back and forth between this opposition, Ishmael puts himself and the crew in danger. His Christianity makes it more difficult for him to see more than a simple binary opposition like Queequeg can. When Ishmael views the try works, he sees an image of hell, not a system of relationships between humans and pots, humans and whales, whales and pots, oil and profit. Ishmael, in his meditative way, deems the pots the "tophet." Ishmael first encounters these objects when he and Queequeg stay at the Try Pots inn. The pots hang outside the inn in the form of a wooden decoration. "Two enormous wooden pots painted black, and suspended by asses' ears, swung from the cross-tress of an old top-mast, planted in front of an old doorway. The horns of the cross-trees were sawed off on the other side, so that this old top-mast looked not a little like gallows" (72). These try pots are the last in a line of ominous signs for Ishmael. He asks "Are these last throwing out oblique hints touching Tophet?" (73). Later, when the try pots are described on the ship, they too are referred to as something like hell. As the *Pequod's* try pots boil from the fire beneath them, the ship itself "...steadfastly shot her red hell further and further

into the blackness of the sea and the night..." (463). Ishmael goes from daydreaming atop the masthead to imagining the *Pequod* a burning hell. In fact, the night that the try pots are first fired up, Ishmael is at the helm, steering the ship. He accidentally falls asleep and inverts the tiller—almost capsizing the ship. He implores the reader to "Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man!" (464). The constant back and forth between heaven and hell, daydream and nightmare, almost causes a disaster. Ishmael dwells on the bad omens, but then advises his readers not to. He inverts the peace of sleep to capture the horror of hell. He literally almost inverts the ship, catching it in the back and forth between good and evil.

The tryworks constitute Ishmael's vision of hell, but also his ability to gather meaning from objects. With his first encounter, he likened the Try Pots inn as a hint at hell; during the trying out of the whale, Ishmael only sees the burning quest for meaning and the hell and inversion that stems from it. By consuming the whale, the try pots also consume Ishmael. His relationship with the murdered whale now complete, he breaks with the whale to consider the consuming fire under the pots. He argues that one cannot look too long into the face of the fire, or one cannot stare at knowledge or truth directly, or one will become inverted—human/object, object/human. Instead of the whale being distilled into oil that night, it could have been the men being drowned and becoming nothing more than objects in the ocean because of Ishmael's mistake at the helm. When one stares too long into the face of meaning, or the fire of true hell, the balance of relationships between objects and meaning is lost and both sides (human and object) are destroyed. Ishmael almost destroys the crew both crew and ship through his mesmerization with ultimate truth and the concept of hell. Coming close to such truth of meaning, to the thingness, is destructive to object and human because all must exist in relation with each other.

The rejection of a binary system and the idea of Queequeg as a mediator of quasi-objects lead us to look closer at the relationships between those quasi-objects. Humans and objects are joined both literally and figuratively in the novel. They create and destroy each other, they encapsulate each other, they define each other in a system of relationships necessary to both sustain their existence and fulfill the whalers' quest for profit.

A Squeeze of the Hand

Not only do humans in the novel enjoy relationships as connected by objects, but they are also physically connected to each other through touch. Nowhere does Ishmael grasp physical objects tighter than in the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand." Ishmael's character is an idealistic dreamer. He is constantly daydreaming and seeing the beauty in everyday things—like taking the watch on the masthead. In the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand," Ishmael uses globules of spermaceti to launch into a metaphysical discussion of the connectedness of men and happiness. The spermaceti is placed in a tub, and to ensure that it does not solidify, the sailors have to squeeze out the globules in the liquid. "...as I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues...I lived as in a musky meadow...I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever" (Melville 456). Ishmael uses the objects of the globules to release the tension and worry he had been feeling about their connection under oath to hunt the white whale. Instead he meditates upon a different connection. "I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for gentle globules" (456). Not only do the globules give birth to an "insanity" in Ishmael, but they are mistaken for his co-laborers' hands. The globules connect these men in meaning, in their bitter oath to catch the whale and in their

happiness at working with this sweet-smelling material. “Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally...” (456). The men are equated with the globules, and the globules give rise to happiness. Object-like, the men and the globules are on par with each other. “Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness” (456). The men here are interchangeable with each other—squeezing “into each other.” The have become completely quasi-objects in essence, the only thing keeping them corporeal are the globules in their hands. In addition to placing human and object at a similar place on the object-human spectrum, the globules also embody Ishmael’s new theory of happiness. “I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally” (456). Happiness must not be placed in the ideal or the fancy, but in objects—the wife, the table, the saddle. Once Ishmael realizes this, he is ready to squeeze forever. Also of interest in this passage is that “wife” and “heart” are equated with “table” and “saddle.” What one would normally think of as humans and objects are here placed equally with each other. They are all members of the parliament of things—the place or quasi-objects in which other quasi-objects find meaning and happiness. Ishmael’s happiness being object-dependent inextricably links objects with humans and vice versa.

The relationship between quasi-objects is dependent on the existence of both human-like and object-like things. Each cannot exist without the other; each creates and destroys the other.

Quasi-objects in *Moby-Dick* exchange places with one another; they trade places, they mix with each other.

Conclusion

In the hunt for that ineffable thing, whether it be whale, truth, or thingness itself, the relationships between humans and objects demonstrate that the divide between them is a construct that disintegrates under scrutiny. Objects inform the existence of humans and vice versa. Humans could not exist without objects, just as objects, like the novel *Moby-Dick*, could not exist without humans. Upon examination, the categories of “human” and “object” break down, but do not totally collapse; instead, they become quasi-objects, dependent on the undeniable existence of the thing. Characters like the transcendental Ishmael and the vengeful part-object Ahab help to create this story replete with things. The lives of the crew aboard the *Pequod* are inextricably bound with the things around them. Near the end of the novel, when this relationship changes, both human and thing are endangered. In *Moby-Dick*, “the object gives birth to the subject,” but each must exist as non-categorical, yet as stubbornly retaining categories. Once these categories are obliterated, the things themselves cease to exist. As Latour would say—the mediators take precedent, the only truth mediation. When reading the novel, we must disavow both the subject-discourse reading and the object-based reading. Yet, to focus solely on the objects is also to miss the complete picture. What is worth examining is the system that both subjects and objects exist within and how that system is fluid but ever present. To view *Moby-Dick* simply through the lens of its characters or objects is to miss the principle actors—like Ahab, we must search for the ineffable thing and its articulation. Thingness helps us recognize the permeability between persons and objects. Using methodological fetishism as a

way to access the story, we gain an entirely new view of the novel. From musty shawls, to storied harpoons, from cenotaphs to whale bone legs, objects help to tell the tale of the *Pequod's* tragic demise. If thus far we have focused on the subject-discourse point of view, what other views are we denying? Ahab's mechanical man who looks inward at his mechanical contraptions—what sort of categorical structures will he muddle? The connection in the system is the ever-present thing—that which eludes us, but which always reminds us of its deep, menacing presence.

Notes

¹ Latour has another piece in a collection of essays called *Things*. Bill Brown summarizes Latour's point in this essay, called "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." He states "Latour has argued that modernity artificially made an ontological distinction between inanimate objects and human subjects, whereas in fact the world is full of "quasi-objects" and "quasi-subjects" (12). According to Brown, in this essay, Latour "interrupts the trajectory of Heidegger's famous essay on "The Thing" to ask if it isn't the othering of people that the thingness of things discloses (pp. 151-73)" (12). Because the thingness of things exists, it alienates the sense of people, as well as making them interchangeable with objects. Brown adds that Theodor Adorno "understood the alterity of things as an essentially ethical fact...his point is that accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such" (12). If we accept this otherness of things, then we accept there is an otherness as it is.

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