

Lavinia TACHE
Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest
Bucharest, Romania
laviniatache9@gmail.com

OBJECTS RECONFIGURING THE *PRESENT* AND THE *PRESENCE*.

ROUTES OF DISPLACEMENT FOR HUMANS:

YOKO OGAWA, HAN KANG, OLGA TOKARCZUK

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Abstract: The materiality of the human body is to be understood in a complementary relation with the objects that produce an extension of life and the privation of it. *The Memory Police* (Yoko Ogawa) and *Human Acts* (Han Kang) reassemble the past through the instrumentalization of objects, thus creating life in the present. The question that arises is whether this certain present can preserve the integrity of the human. *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk suggests the body as a *locus* of conversion and tackles contemporary interests regarding plastic, for instance. These texts authored by Ogawa, Kang and Tokarczuk allow for a repositioning of the standpoint from which the consequences of subject-object relation are approached in literature, because they tap into human experience by addressing the essentiality of objects as repositories of memories. The essay attempts to analyse how objects having either a beneficial or a lethal meaning can be seen as deeply encapsulated in human existence.

Keywords: memory, object-oriented theory, subject, bodies, trauma

Three realities – objects for a decontextualized humanity

Echoing dystopian versions of worlds about the reconfiguration of humanity, both Han Kang and Yoko Ogawa explore the idea that an object may have wide-ranging interpretations. In addition, Olga Tokarczuk’s writings create fictional maps of bodies which can be thus examined as mechanisms of actions, similar to objects functioning not only as appendages to bodies but also as extensive components thereof. The

human body and the objects around it mutually shape and influence one another. Starting from the premise that by questioning the intricacy of relations between human beings and non-animate entities in literature, new ways of understanding the non-animate may be found, this paper aims to explore the network of influences between the human subject and the non-human world in such a way as to draw attention to the potency of things. More precisely, I argue that things form an internal grid of presence and absence and suggest that a close investigation into an object's identity can shed light upon the intricacies of human relationships in fictional texts. This perspective highlights the dialogue between people and objects as *fractions* of existence, considering their potential to transform the human.

In addition to their similarities regarding remembrance, the stories written Ogawa, Kang and Tokarczuk encapsulate individual narratives of trauma. Depicting an unnamed island governed by a totalitarian power comparable with George Orwell's "Thought Police," *The Memory Police* was nominated for the International Booker Prize in 2020. The story follows the changes occurring in the life of the narrator who ceaselessly tries to redefine the past with the help of the remaining things in a system bent on suppressing them. Written in 1994 in Japanese and translated into English in 2019, *The Memory Police* follows the story of a writer helping her editor, named R., to survive in a society that hunts down objects in order to erase any form of remembering the past. When authorities take by force most of the things from the island, different parts of the inhabitants' bodies also disappear. Gradually, they feel incomplete, but since R. is the one that remembers, the novelist and an old man try to protect the editor, hiding him in a secret room. The protagonist's mother was previously murdered by the Memory Police as she had the ability to remember, although no clear explanation for the expanding oblivion is given by the vigilantes.

Han Kang won the Man Booker International Prize in 2016 for the novel *The Vegetarian*. Her 2014 novel *Human Acts* reveals the atrocities surrounding a traumatic South Korean event, – the Gwangju uprising (1980), and reflects on the abuses perpetrated by the state when people started demonstrating against the martial law government. The book is divided into six chapters and an *Epilogue*. Narrated in different voices, they convey the stories of dead and tortured people. Recalling the death of Kang Dong-ho, a young boy, as well as the emotional impact this historical tragedy had on different generations, the novel illustrates the way in which absence intensifies the present moment.

Written by Olga Tokarczuk, a Polish author who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2018, *Flights* was translated into English by Jennifer Croft and won the Man Booker International Prize that year. The narrative gathers mostly European fictional itineraries and delineates the body as a map. Multiple chapters illustrate the mechanism of travel, seen both through focalising and magnifying lenses, as the body is revealed as an intrinsically constituted world. The female narrator describes her travels, bringing the meaning of evanescence in dialogue with the (im)permanence of things. Applied to the literary works of Ogawa, Kang and Tokarczuk, the phrase “routes of human’s displacement” suggests a series of multiple trajectories leading to presence.

The major theoretical frame that facilitates this perspective is the *Object Oriented* paradigm (or, as its acronym goes, *OOO*). *Object-Oriented Ontology* examines the permanently intertwining modes of existence. It proposes an intercommunicating network of human and non-human entities, as synthetized in Ian Bogost’s words:

In contemporary thought, things are usually taken either as the aggregation of ever smaller bits (scientific naturalism) or as constructions of human behavior and society (social relativism). *OOO* steers a path between the two, drawing attention to things at all scales (from atoms to alpacas, bits to blinis) and pondering their nature and relations with one another as much with ourselves (6).

Ian Bogost, an American academic, is strongly influenced by Graham Harman’s studies and conferences. In 1990 the focus on objects started to be understood in terms of a differentiated ontology. Later on, in 2018, the topic was developed in Harman’s book entitled *Object Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. Here, along with Bogost and Levi Bryant, Harman mentions the influential theoreticians that contributed to the creation of a new perspective regarding the autonomy of the non-human universe: Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett and Tristan Garcia. At the same time, Harman explains the genealogy of this orientation, starting with Aristotle and continuing with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Bruno Latour. They all emphasized the possibility of looking at the world through things instead of condoning the sovereignty of human understanding. An *Object Oriented* perspective takes into consideration that humans exist in a cyclical relation with the objects they are producing. Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to offer

an image about *presence* in fiction, by tracing the dialectics between the real referent and the speculative element.

Firstly, *presence* is accomplished through things. Set on an island, the narrative in *The Memory Police* presents the manner in which vanishing objects, together with disappearing professions, are followed by the extinction of humans as well. People construct the object, then the object disappears and human subjects follow suit. However, some things still remain because, at the end of the novel, the room *gathers* the voice of the last person alive and one can feel the presence of an already disappearing human, the protagonist. In Ogawa's book objects are reminiscent of a better past.

The Memory Police thematizes coercion and demonstrates how co-dependence formulates a type of memory that anchors the concept in a present mostly defined by absence. This idea is better understood in light of the fact that "Subjects may be said to be the outcome or achievements of objects," as Michel Serres explains (qtd. in Connor, *Thinking Things* 3). The French philosopher shows that human subjects and objects are mutually influenced and their relationship becomes one of reciprocal manifestation, similar to the motion in a "vortex," in which the object is performed symmetrically with the constitution of the subject. Michel Serres emphasizes the image of a vortex which is, more precisely, the way of interacting, because objects and humans "enter into each other's composition, such that the reciprocal constitution of subject and object is both inaugural and outgoing" (qtd. in Connor, *Thinking Things* 4). Connor quotes Serres again in another study entitled *The Book of Skin*, in the context of analysing the body: "Serres rejects the predominating metaphor of the skin as a surface, membrane or interface. The skin is an entire environment" (Connor, *The Book of Skin* 28). Moreover, Serres wrote in *Statues* that various constructions are, in fact, multiple embodiments (Serres 19). The representation of statues is at the diegetic core of *The Memory Police*, as objects induce presence. Therefore, the identity of human subjects is seen in a manner similar to that of perceiving objects, with a closer investigation of the apparatus such an identity generates, not only as a physical entity.

Secondly, presence is integrated into bodies which become objects. This is the case with Olga Tokarczuk's chapter about an amputation and the artificial leg that influences not only the physical state of the injured person, but also his mental condition. In Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, statues, a symbol of inanimate miming life, "hide" human memories and human bodies preserve a haunting feeling of the

forgotten past. *Human Acts* depicts plastic as the element that closes in the smell of dead human bodies and acts as an aseptic surface. Tokarczuk approaches the element differently in her novel, raising the problem of plastic in a section that emphasizes the enormous effect this material has on our planet. More importantly, the preservation of the body is also visible in *Flights*, through a process called *plastination*. These accounts of object-body relations are strongly linked to memory, as memory signifies a grid of circumstances that enable people and objects that have lost their identity to retrieve it.

Thirdly, *Human Acts* evinces the presence of an extrinsic object that once put into a body can then exert its domination over it. The present becomes a repository of forms and presences by the means of things that do not only carry the past, but remain in their own present, having their meaning absorbed only in relation to another object, not solely to another human. A rebalancing of the subject-object dialectics with an object-object relation can thus redefine non-human interactions. The essential link between objects and memory lies in the invisible force that these two elements possess. As Schouten states, “Memory, as an ‘activity we perform constantly without being aware of it’ is an integral part of our experiential selves, little considered until it fails us” (Schouten 272 qtd. in Owain & Garde-Hansen, *Geography and Memory* 97). Similarly, although *objects* are permanently teeming around, they seem to be truly noticeable when they stop functioning, turning, as a result, into *things* (Bill Brown 4). Therefore, the *presence* of memory and *becoming things* are actualized components of an interdependent network. The reciprocity between the human and the non-human is a scheme based on a tension created in the moment of breaking the order.

Another considerable idea about reflecting one being into the other is to be found in Ian Hodder’s archaeological research. Starting from the *Actor-Network Theory*, Hodder puts forth an *Entanglement Theory*, which claims that

The focus is on how humans are drawn or dragged along by things and their needs and entanglements. The theory starts with the ways in which humanity is *thingly*, but it does not argue that humans are only things. Rather it sees humans and things in dialectical tension; humans needing things in order to «be», but also needing not to “be” things (150).

This entanglement can be further consolidated into the action of remembrance, a process discussed in *Geography and Memory. Explorations in Identity, Place and*

Becoming. Emptying a cupboard is seen as an operation of regaining power over a lost temporal coordinate: “the process of clearing out a cupboard can bring us into closer, more intimate, contact with bundles of memories or it can open out a kind of distance between ourselves and the people or events they evoke” (41). Therefore, displacement implies a partial loss of identity, since humans constantly seek the present, trying to reconnect to a temporal dimension morphed into a manufactured coordinate.

Theoretical considerations – *Object Oriented* paradigm

In the process of understanding the newly-constituted theories of the object, a close encounter with the idea of a *non*-human form ought to be emphasized. The *non*-animate world may be an aggregate, but first and foremost it represents what cannot be fully controlled by people since things possess a certain degree of resistance. Yet the mechanisms of creating the epistemological and moreover the ontological shift can be traced in perspectives on self-creating depositories of memory. In order to operate with the significance of an object, a clarification is needed about how the object can be defined: “*object* simply means anything that cannot be reduced either downward or upward, which means anything that has a surplus beyond its constituent pieces and beneath its sum total of effects on the world” (Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology* 51). In his study, Graham Harman supplements the *Actor-Network Theory* by leaving behind the idea of action. This determined Manuel DeLanda to question whether this option functions in Harman’s typology of a new ontology. Since an event constitutes an object as well for Harman, this new perspective includes a major redefinition of the societal arrangement.

Manuel DeLanda’s notion of “flat ontology” (Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology* 54) best shows the way in which entities can be placed on the same level with the human. *Flat ontology* postulates the presence of various objects and humans in the same context of existence, which facilitates understanding the presence of objects accordingly to themselves and not in relation to humans. The image of relations still exists, but rather than illustrating a co-dependence, one can see the ways in which things influence people only when they gather information and they place it upon objects. Plastic, for instance, is found in *Human Acts* and *Flights* and we can see the way in which this material has a different existential attachment in each story. In *Flights*, plastic symbolizes an enemy to the telluric world, while in *Human Acts* it seems to have a twisted role, covering dead bodies and keeping away the smell; it is

thus decontextualized and not seen as the *thing* that remains in nature for a prolonged period.

Moreover, *flat ontology*, writes Harman, means that “any situation is best understood simply by assessing which beings are having an impact, and following them closely in all that they do instead of assuming that we already know what they are in advance” (Graham, *Object Oriented Ontology* 108). This idea is related to Bruno Latour’s description of how objects act, how they exert agency and perform an action. Latour formulates categories of objects, explaining that “An intermediary, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. (...) Mediators, on the other hand (...) transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 39). I will now apply these two notions that Bruno Latour proposes in order to find out how memory is traced through objects. A mediating object is represented by plastic in *Human Acts*, because it covers the human body and helps it maintain its own regime of being, as seen in the *Plastic* section developed below. At the same time, the statues made by the narrator’s mother in *The Memory Police* preserve the past, like a palimpsest of meaning, and can be interpreted as mediators since they are initiators of memory: a “harmonica,” “a ferry ticket” and “*ramune*” – a Japanese drink. Such mundane elements now influence the present since they can no longer mean anything for the population – they were hidden inside statues that have yet to be found by Memory Police. Further, in *Flights*, an amputated leg intervenes in the self-redefinition of a man, giving him the impression of being haunted. These examples already illustrate the dialogue between object, body and memory, as there is an interdependency of factors that lead to the understanding of the world. The *present* is established through the *presence* of things, although they need to be interpreted as absent forms because their function is understood differently by each person around. They are ways of recreating what cannot be felt anymore. This alludes to the fact that “memory is always present tense, the reverberations of the past brought to bear on, to contextualize, inform, and enrich experience in the here and now” (Morse 22).

Bill Brown defines the way in which objects that “refuse to cooperate” with people become *things* (*Thing Theory* 6). Besides the linguistic form, the significance of a *thing* cannot be completely perceived by people because it exists outside the human sphere, although never demonstrated. Things then become “totems” (Brown 5), transporters of significance, although they are broadly seen only in their static nature.

The movement of *things*, in the way of a dynamic organism, is similar to what Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter,” drawing attention to constellations of existence rather than to a single palpable entity. In this respect, Jane Bennett’s view upon nonhuman matter is the following:

I will emphasize, even overemphasize, the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces (operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts) in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought (xii).

In addition, the philosopher Levi Bryant discusses *onticology* in *The Democracy of Objects*. Claiming that “every object is a crowd” (28), Bryant takes a step back from the associative status that *Object Oriented Ontology* posited. The most important feature is that “that all objects are withdrawn such that there are no objects characterized by full presence or actuality” (Levi R. Bryant 31-32). This means that *presence* is configured only as a secondary source. It becomes imperious to mention that these theories do not exclude humans but try to reorganize the systems of living according to a logic that proposes things as autonomous and not as dependent on humans:

The point is not to subtract humans from any given situation, but to focus on the way that humans are themselves ingredients in a symbiosis rather than just privileged observers looking on from the outside. We must remember that humans themselves are objects, and that they are richer and more momentous as objects the more they are not the mere product of their time and place, but push back against whatever circumstances they face (Harman, *Immaterialism* 54-55).

Jean-François Lyotard’s study *The Inhuman* shows that humans are not the binding agent between other entities, but an entity that is yet to be redefined in communication with them. Therefore, “A human, in short, is a living organization that is not only complex but, so to speak, *replex*. It can grasp itself as a medium (as in medicine) or as an organ (as in goal-directed activity) or as an object (as in thought — I mean aesthetic as well as speculative thought)” (Lyotard 12). This view is completed with the idea that “Thought is inseparable from the phenomenological body” (23) which contradicts the way in which I interpret the foreign object – for the body, as seen in the literature discussed, interrogates the real dialogue between the soul and the materiality of flesh. Lyotard ponders the moment of solar explosion that will take human thought along

with it in an absolute erasure of human articulation. Mirroring this conception, the image at the end of *The Memory Police* becomes distorted because here, in the book, the voice – as in *the last man* narratives – explains the exact moment of extinction until the dimming moment of becoming one with the objects around the room: “My body was now included among the objects arranged on the floor. I lay there between the music box and the harmonica, my two legs protruding at odd angles, my hands crossed on my chest, my eyes lowered.” (Ogawa 274)

Disparity and *Ersatz*

In an article about the connections between Plato’s philosophy and *Flights*, Anna Bendrat (193) focuses on the chapter presenting the amputated part of the anatomist Filip Verheyen, whose left leg is replaced with a wooden limb. The story of the professor is beautifully exposed by his disciple; one night, returning to his rented place, Verheyen injured his ankle when tripping against a nail on the stairs. His disciple narrates the story, as his uncle was the doctor who amputated the leg and preserved it. After this incident, the doctor went to Amsterdam where Professor Ryusch presented the anatomization of a dead woman. The caption attached to the preserved parts exhibited for the audience asked “Why would we miss the things of this world?” (Tokarczuk 200). Accordingly, the tension between objects and memory shifts the question from “why” to “how” people experience absence. This moment awakens in Verheyen an amplified pain in the place where the lost leg should have been, leading him to wanting to touch his phantom limb without feeling the pain but only the hard materiality of the dead skin. After his death, the disciple receives the doctor’s things among which he finds the man’s letters to his lost limb: “The thing that hurts does not exist. A phantom. Phantom pain.” (Tokarczuk 210). The letters that he writes to an estranged part of his body is similar to what the reader encounters once he steps on the fictional island from *The Memory Police*. Here, after the successive disappearances of objects, the end presents the slow dismemberment of the locals. A similar idea of a split body is found in the story within the story in *The Memory Police*, about a typewriter that experiences a loss of voice: “I’ve begun to feel my body growing more distant from my soul. (...) I am reduced to pieces in no time at all” (Ogawa 166). Only a ghostly presence remains, similar to how Verheyen feels towards his leg. In this episode, Olga Tokarczuk mentions a name that belongs to a pioneer of most object-related theories, and that is Baruch Spinoza. His perspective is that rationality

emerges at the exact moment of preserving a certain form of existence that can, as a consequence, be “animate.” The memory of matter is performed through a restaged genesis of man. Ultimately, the question “If the world, like a great glass orb, falls and shatters into a million pieces – doesn’t something great, powerful and infinite remain a whole in this?” (Tokarczuk 212) seems to point toward the final chapter of *The Memory Police*, since it illustrates the fragmentation of presence into the multitude of surfaces in the atmosphere around. Likewise, this perspective informs the representation of trauma in Kang’s book:

Some memories never heal. Rather than fading with the passage of time, those memories become the only things that are left behind when all else is abraded. The world darkens, like electric bulbs going out one by one. I am aware that I am not a safe person. Is it true that human beings are fundamentally cruel? (66).

The *material-immaterial* vocabulary in regards to memory is symptomatic for the recent perspectives that approach memory not only as an archival source but as a dynamic network. Accordingly, in this section of the paper the concept of *post-memory* will enable a closer look at how trauma and past experiences operate. Marianne Hirsch writes about post-memory in relation to the Holocaust, arguing that “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up” (205). The female narrator in *The Memory Police* lives in a totalitarian state after her mother witnessed the demise of democracy. The difference is that her mother still remembers the past. She holds on to objects because those objects could take her back to a time of freedom. *Post-memory* is thence inscribed into the generations illustrating the beneficial aspect of the past and demonstrating the presence of another reality through the presence of objects. The permanence of an authoritarian present in the narrator’s life is challenged only by the *presence* of things. They seem to be free, not hiding but existing as such, so humans hide their own past simultaneously with those inanimate entities.

A similar framework is to be seen in *Human Acts*. When the protagonist sees a photo of a victim, in the *Epilogue*, the recreation of the past is not made through a correlation with one’s experience, but using an external code. This is enabled by a

photographic “object” that could trace back the past configuring present, not only in the sense of bearing the trauma, but in that it doubles the interpretation of the viewer:

Two summers on, my father brought the photo chapbook home. He'd been down to Gwangju on a condolence call, and had picked it up at the train station (...) I still remember the moment when my gaze fell upon the mutilated face of a young woman, her features slashed through with a bayonet. Soundlessly, and without fuss, some tender thing deep inside me broke. Something that, until then, I hadn't even realised was there (Kang 97-98).

The last sentence demonstrates once more the latency of the non-experienced past and broadens the gaps between various stages of remembering. In other words, the tension between memory and post-memory is similar to the distinction that Duncan Bell (204) makes between *memory* and *myth*. The latter would be the equivalent of *post-memory*, since its significance is grounded into external sources of creating the past.

Surpassing the meaning of objects. Plastic – between geological and personal memory

One of the images built around memory appears to be that of a drawer. Nevertheless, it would be closer to the truth to see memory as a dynamic process that can lead to a surfacing of trauma and recall the past and the present through mourning. Olga Tokarczuk writes how “it would appear that memory is a drawer stuffed with papers – some of them are totally useless (...). But then there are other reusable ones, testaments not to events but to whole processes” (283). The word “processes” transfigures the meaning that objects ought to be attached to in the view of *onticology* because they have a long existential cycle, most of the times unperceived. This is why interpreting the identity of an object based on its relation with humans has limited applicability when trying to understand the autonomy of *things*.

On a surface level, there are objects used within the frame of violence, while others create a positive connection to the past for the person that owns them. Bullets, for instance, appear in Kang's *Human Acts* as parts of a complete massacre (“the army had been provided with eight hundred thousand rounds that day. This was at a time when the population of the city stood at four hundred thousand. In other words, they had been given the means to drive a bullet into the body of every person

in the city twice over” (60). At the same time, an everyday object, such as a pen, may become an instrument of torture and a signifier of trauma:

The interrogation room of that summer was knitted into our muscle memory, lodged inside our bodies. With that black Monami biro. (...) Every day I examine the scar on my hand. This place where the bone was once exposed, where a milky discharge seeped from a festering wound. Every time I come across an ordinary Monami biro, the breath catches in my throat (64-7).

Furthermore, the cotton wool used in trying to bandage a wound becomes a collective emblem for sacrifice, a catalyst for healing in the present, and an element that endlessly recalls the painful past. Similarly, objects are enemies of the state in *The Police Memory*, which means that they have an ambivalent status.

In a symbolic sense, the three novels engage with the threat of disappearance. *The Memory Police* shows parental loss being exacerbated by the erasure of any object-memories. *Human Acts* cast a lyrical vision upon a painful past, remembering the ones who were killed and the ones who witnessed their deaths and are still in mourning. The major concern in *Flights* is mobility, the dialectical relationship between departure and trace, or the gap that widens from a narrative to another. This is why talking about plastic in universes of void may seem paradoxical. Following one of the suggestions of *OOO*, namely that “all objects must be given equal attention” (Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology* 9), I will now take a closer look at the importance of plastic in all three narratives, even though this aspect is not necessarily foregrounded in the texts. Plastic is a *sensual object*, as Graham Harman defines it, for “While real objects exist regardless of whether we perceive or think of them, sensual objects exist only as the correlate of our acts of consciousness.” (*Object Oriented Ontology* 55). It exists only in correlation to another *real object*, for instance, with the pills of the packed *ramune*, in *The Memory Police*. There is a transposition and an immersion, because plastic persists, but humans die, disappear, yet “regenerate” under different forms, if we think of the burial process. Steven Connor takes into account Michel Serres’ prospect upon the triadic scheme of “humanity-humility-humus” (qtd. in Connor, *Thinking Things* 5). This relation generates a cyclic perspective regarding the subjects’ life while communicating the potency of objects to overcome any other form of existence, and thus becoming entities fully in charge of their own inner and outward

structures. That is the case with plastic, which is regarded as an active agent of transformation through pollution and a suffocating element of our everyday life. And yet, there are still images of plastic in literature that do not convey an anthropocentric view upon this material as harmful. Rather, in *Human Acts* plastic is imbued in the humans' experience in moments of crisis, as we see in the massacre of Korean population back in 1980. A revealing scene is that in which cadavers must be kept away from the living humans, the dead people acting through the smell they exude. Here plastic intervenes in a redeeming manner for the rest of the communities, as they "wrapped the bodies in plastic in an effort to combat the smell" (Kang 10). Gay Hawkins casts an empathetic point of view on the relation between humanity and waste:

For separation is a relation, it is not the opposite of connection; to experience ourselves as separate from rubbish is still to be in a relation with it. This is the messiness and ambiguity that marks our relations with rubbish and exposes the fantasy of a pure and stable morality. And this is the messiness and ambiguity that makes ethical work experimental, creative, and relational (41).

In one of *Flights*' last chapters, plastic components are described as a *sui-generis* form of existence, a perpetual one that stays within the ground and the surroundings for an extend period of time: "they are long-lived, almost indestructible; their fleeting bodies won't decompose for some three hundred more years. Never before have we been faced with such an aggressive form of being." (Tokarczuk 387)

Plastic epitomizes memory in *The Memory Police* as well, because a part of the objects that are found in the mother's statues is a "plastic bag that contained several white tablets that looked like medicine" (Ogawa 210). The hidden things were kept safe and brought to life, alongside the past they actualized. Inside the plastic bag there is *ramune* and the taste of it awakens Proustian memories about childhood. After the characters find these three objects, they bring other statues carrying other objects as well. These are not described in the book, indicating that selection is a process that completes the process of remembering.

Conclusions

The redefinition of memory over the past decades has been predicated on the need to reconsider the individuality of objects. The reiterated presence of past in the present relies on a correlation between the structure of the object and the matter it activates within the human-non-human network. As shown above, objects are signifiers of a past that has to be erased in *The Memory Police*, due to the affective memories they create. Their ambivalent role is presented from two antithetic standpoints, that of the population on the island and that of the government. A similarly ambiguous presence of objects is found in *Human Acts*: pens can serve as means of destroying victims and as everyday harmless items when decontextualized from the Gwangju crisis moment. Such instances of things that influence the human occur in Olga Tokarczuk's book as well, where materiality is understood in terms of a dynamic materiality that seeps into itineraries from around the globe, which are signposted by feelings and by the possession of useful things that can change their status depending on the present they are addressed to.

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