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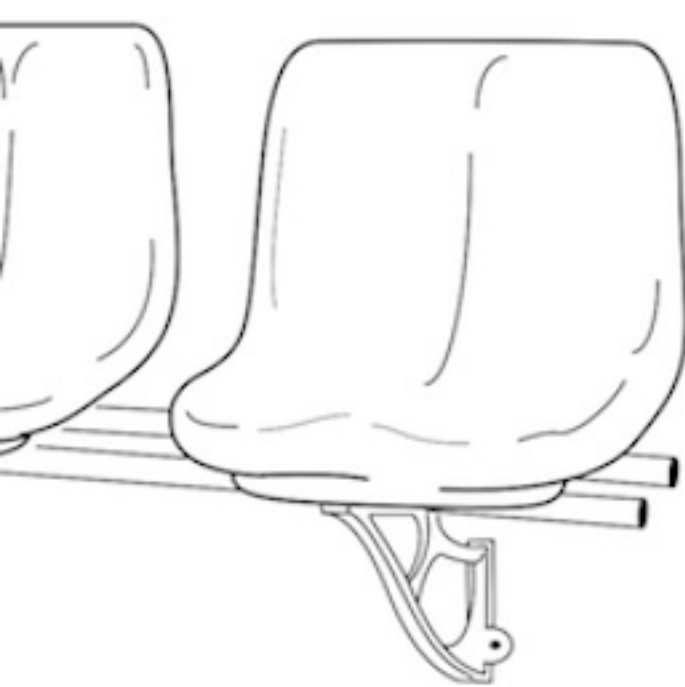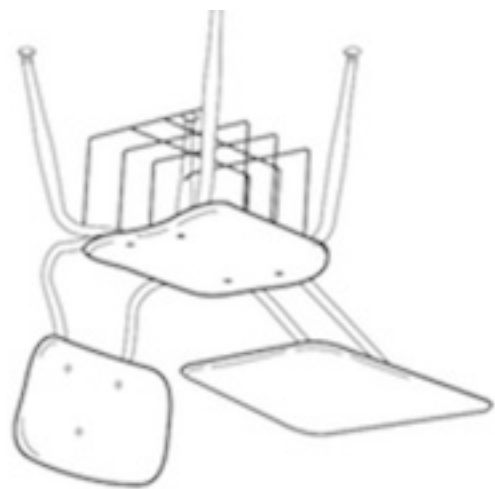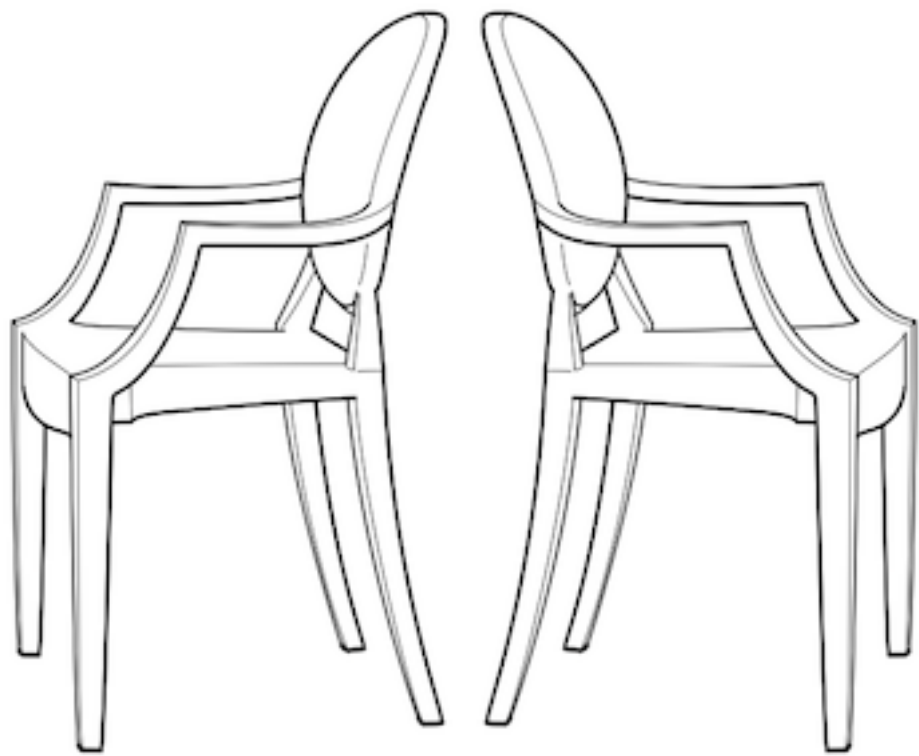
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Far from gradually erasing strangeness, intimacy heightens it. The more we know them, the stranger they become. Intimacy itself is strange. As the passenger side-view mirror on your car reads, "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*

Preface

Modern science and technology have allowed human beings to analyze, assess and, all too often, exploit objects of every shape, size and variety. Whether it be the overwhelmingly huge ice shelves of Antarctica, the unthinkably small quarks and quanta that make up the building blocks of matter, or the coffee cups, seagulls, and parking meters we encounter every day, human beings "zoom in" on every object they encounter, attempting to extract meaning from a veiled and chaotic reality. But these close encounters with objects have the reverse effect; rather than making the world a source of comfort for our anxieties, objects become more bizarre than we could have ever imagined. As the epigraph says, "The more we know them, the stranger they become." As the infinite depth and frightening power of objects becomes fully realized, human subjectivity loses hold of its position at the center of thought.

While Kant's argument that, "There are objects that exist in space and time outside of me," has been referred to as the "Copernican Revolution," it has only been in recent years with the emergence of object-oriented philosophies that Copernicus's displacement of humans at the center of the universe has been truly complete. Object-oriented ontology, or OOO for short, argues that all objects, big and small, animate and inanimate, real and imaginary, have their own particular subjectivity, albeit unlike our own, based on the unique way each exists in the world and interacts with the objects it comes into contact with. Because of the abstract nature of the claims OOO makes, the task falls to the humanities to imagine and account for the implications of a world in which the subjectivity of all objects is equally real, even if all objects are not equally real. This issue of the St. John's Humanities Review explores the role of subjectivity in a world that we now know is characterized by an inexhaustible multiplicity of subjective objects.

The opening article in this issue, "Strange Realism: On Behalf of Objects," is by Graham Harman, philosopher and founder of object-oriented philosophy. Originally presented as a lecture in Berlin, Germany in April 2012 as part of a month-long attempt to recreate the now-famed original Speculative Realism workshop held at Goldsmiths College in London. In the article, Harman outlines his object-oriented philosophy by first defending his claim that the realness of objects should be considered on a case-by-case basis. He goes on to consider, by way of Heidegger's tool-analysis, the inexhaustability of an object's reality to other object's, not just sentient beings. Harman then proposes that all objects interact vicariously, or indirectly, and closes with a brief critique and analysis of Levi Bryant's *onticology*.

Our second essay, "Objects in Drag: The Mannequin's Queer Objecthood" by Katie Connell, seeks to engage object-oriented philosophy with Judith Butler's queer theory by way of their common marginalization by privileged subjects. She claims objects are radically queer and recent developments in OOO have promoted a similar dismantling of heteronormative subjectivity called for by queer theory. Threaded into her argument, Connell provides an analysis of the mannequin's role in culture, positioning the mannequin as a fascinating object in the eyes of both queer theory and object-oriented ontology.

The next article, "No True Substitute for the Infinite: Indefinite Space and Infinite Time in Alfred Jarry's *The Supermale*" by Phillip Grayson, looks to one of the absurd science fiction novels by *fin de siecle* French writer Alfred Jarry to explicate how the limits of subjecthood can be experimented with within Henri Bergson's conception of *dureé*. Grayson considers the ways in which Jarry, through his writing, is able to extend the self's limits indefinitely, but not infinitely.

Following Grayson's piece, Daniel Sander's essay "Reality Bytes: The Aesthetic of *eXistenZ*" positions the world-making and reality-structuring rela-tion of objects and worlds in David Cronenburg's film *eXistenZ,* as well as in Zeno's paradox of motion and Schopenhauer's porcupine dilemma. In doing so, Sander considers the representational possibilities of spacetime and rela-tions as presented in object-oriented ontology and Nietzschean perspectivism.

The next article, "Hoarding Orientations: Jane Bennett, Wilfred R. Bion, and *Mansfield Park*" by Emilia Halton-Hernandez, engages Bion's psychoanalytical approach to material substitution with Bennett's speculative realist under-standing of human-object relations in an effort to understand the nature of hoarding tendencies. She then examines how these theoretical developments allow for a new understanding of the portrayal of Fanny Price in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*.

Acknowledgements

Strange Realism: On Behalf of Objects

Graham Harman, American University of Cairo

This article was originally a lecture given at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, on April 11, 2012. The occasion was Armen Avanessian's recreation of the original 2007 London Speculative Realism workshop, but in serial order. My fellow original Speculative Realism members Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Quentin Meillassoux also gave lectures within the same general period, with the addition of Marin Hägglund, who led off the series.

To many people, realism simply means scientific realism: there is an objective world outside the mind, and with the use of proper scientific methods we can obtain increasingly accurate information about that world. In so doing, we will destroy numerous gullible fetishes and ideological illusions, annihilating phantoms and generally decreasing the total amount of mysteriousness and spookiness in the world. According to this view, enlightenment consists of two basic gestures: first, it decreases the number of entities in the world by reducing them to more basic particles, fields, or underlying structures; second, it decreases the amount of mystery in whatever entities are left, by replacing them with increasingly exact descriptions of their properties. In this respect the natural sciences remain the genuine hero of enlightenment, and philosophers ought to do nothing more than supplement the work of the hard sciences. Having long ceased to be the handmaid of theology, philosophy eagerly becomes the handmaid of something else.

Thomas Metzinger in *The Ego Tunnel* proposes that neurophysiology can solve all the problems of philosophy, though he offers the consolation that philosophers will still be able to sit on ethics panels to decide about what these scientists propose to do next.[1] Now, I have nothing against ethics panels and nothing against neurophysiology. But what Metzinger proposes is a drastic limitation of philosophy's mission, and I will try to show that it is unjustified. Somewhere, Daniel Dennett expresses pity for philosophers, since as soon as they discover something,

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1   Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. (New York: Basic Books, 2009.)

the sciences come along and find a way to do it more accurately and systematically. But it seems to me that this claim is a double-edged sword, analogous to pitying explorers such as Marquette and Lafayette: after all, they merely toured marshland, drew rough maps, before McDonald's, Starbucks, and insurance companies came along and took advantage of the terrain more rationally. This metaphor is no more unfair to the hard sciences than Dennett's converse claim is unfair to philosophy. More generally, if the world has been split in half by the famous modern dualism of human and world, philosophy is allowed to talk only about the "human" side of the equation; as for the non-human world, the sciences have been given a monopoly, and they are no longer even leaving the "human" side alone— see Metzinger's claim, by no means rare, that neurophysiology will eventually offer a complete explanation of human reality. Philosophy will be left with only the most enfeebled subject matter. A more positive view of philosophy's mission is defended by the Polish philosopher Kazimierz Twardowski, who wrote in 1894 as follows:

> metaphysics must be definable as the science of objects in general, taking this word in the sense here proposed. And this is indeed the case. The particular sciences, too, deal with nothing else but the objects of our presentations, their changes, their properties, as well as the laws according to which objects affect each other. Only, the particular sciences always deal with a more or less limited group of objects, a group which is formed by the natural context or a certain purpose. The natural sciences, in the widest sense of the word, for example, are concerned with the peculiarities of those objects which one calls inorganic and organic bodies; psychology investigates the properties and laws characteristic of mental phenomena, of mental objects. [But] metaphysics is a science which considers all objects, physical - organic and inorganic - as well as mental, real as well as non-real, existing objects as well as non-existing objects; investigates those laws which objects in general obey, not just a certain group of objects.[2]

For Twardowski, and in a different sense for me and a handful of colleagues in Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), metaphysics is the study of objects of every kind. Given that philosophy and generality always go hand in hand, could anyone possibly be dismayed by the existence of a general theory of objects? Yes, of course they could. In fact, many people are quite annoyed by the call for an object-oriented philosophy, whether because they dismiss it as a "folk philosophy" which assumes that just because everyday experience encounters objects that they must exist in the outer world as well, or because they oppose the very existence of objects in an outer world in the first place. But I have names for both of these strategies, and this is a good moment to introduce those names.

1. Undermining and Overmining

One strategy tries to show that medium- and large-sized objects are not real, but simply illusions generated by medium-sized human experience. Shoes, tables, express trains, and mountain ranges exist only for humans, and therefore they have no reality apart from humans. What is real is something deeper, smaller, more fundamental than these mid-sized and large-sized objects. This *undermining* of

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2   Kasimir Twardowski, *On the Content and Object of Presentations: A Psychological Investigation*, trans. R. Grossmann. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.)

objects, as I call it, began already among the pre-Socratic thinkers, who are regarded as both the first philosophers and first natural scientists in the Western world. Aristotle noticed that they can be separated into two distinct types. One group of pre-Socratics tried to reduce all entities to some more basic physical element— such as water, air, fire, or a fourfold combination of elements mixed by love and hate. Others reduced the world to number, and still others to the uncuttable tiny particles known in Greek as atoms. This is the same path taken not only by the natural sciences, but also by an exaggerated and aggressive form of philosophical science-worship that is often called "scientism." After decades of being confined to the school of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, scientism is now rearing its head in continental thought for the first time. According to scientism, objects are ridiculous fictions that must be annihilated. You are an idiot not only if you believe in the Easter Bunny, but even if you believe in the existence of tables and chairs. Indeed, on this view the world turns out to be filled mostly with idiots, except for an elite crew of initiates into epistemology and neurophysiology. Never mind that even Metzinger, one of their contemporary heroes, admits that minimally sufficient neural correlates have been identified for *virtually none* of the properties of consciousness, and that we are therefore asked to adopt a sort of blind faith in this purportedly ultra-rationalistic enterprise.

But there was also a second group of pre-Socratics. Instead of reducing all entities in the cosmos to basic elements, tiny particles, or numbers, the second group reduces the world to a boundless, indeterminate lump known in Greek as the *apeiron*. The world is a kind of indefinite blob from which all distinct entities emerge and into which they eventually pass away. While this theory may sound both quaint and wild, it has become increasingly popular in continental philosophy in recent years, as in the rumbling *il y a* of Levinas that only consciousness breaks into pieces, the so-called "whatever" of Jean-Luc Nancy that takes on definite form only when two things inter-relate, or even the "pre-individual" domain of Gilbert Simondon.[3] In all these cases, objects are undermined by showing that all determinate objects are produced from a prior zone of indeterminacy.

Not all undermining is bad; it is one important component in the progress of human knowledge. If we show that the morning star and evening star are both the planet Venus, we have justifiably undermined those two appearances by showing that they are really just one thing. We may be justified in reducing a complex childhood phobia to a single traumatic experience or even a chemical imbalance. It may or may not be true that the Oracle of Delphi gained her prophetic power solely from volcanic fumes entering her temple from a crack in the earth, as the new theory has it. We can only salute James Clerk Maxwell for finding a common root for electricity and magnetism, and as far as I can tell, Glashow, Weinberg, and Salam fully deserve their Nobel Prizes for their work that culminated in the electroweak unification. The point being that undermining is a technique of human thought that is often quite justified. What we must reject is the notion that all mid- and large-sized entities must be incinerated and turned into tiny little particles which alone can be granted reality. Undermining must be used on a case-by-case basis, just as it always has been, and cannot

3   Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001.); Jean-Luc Nancy, "Corpus," in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.); Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*. (Grenoble, France: 2005.)

become a radical program for the destruction of all beings. The weakness of undermining is its bias in favor of the small: as if the tiny always explained the large, or as if string theory even *in principle* might explain plate tectonics, zoology, or literary criticism. Stated differently, undermining and its "smallism" cannot explain what is often called *emergence*.[4] In the simplest possible terms, emergence means that composite entities have properties not contained in their component pieces. It is sometimes mistakenly explained as saying that "no one could have predicted" what would result from putting certain basic elements together. This is the wrong way to put it, since the result of combinations quite often is predictable— quantum chemistry can predict the behavior of larger molecules, and we can easily predict that any 95-year-old opponent or pardoned murderer running against President Obama this fall will face catastrophic defeat. So too we can often predict quite well which of our friends will get along or fail to get along with each other. The question is not one of *predictability*, much less *deducibility*, but of whether the compound reality has qualities not found in the elements of which it is composed. We can remove any number of atoms from your body, and within certain vague limits it will still be the same body. The body as a whole can have retroactive effects on its organs, as when nervous stress leads to heart problems not caused directly by the heart itself. The body can also generate new parts, at least at the level of cells, which are no longer generated once the body as a whole is dead. Above all, the body has capabilities that would obviously not be present if all the cells or organs of the body were widely scattered across the universe, or simply disconnected from one another through some sort of accident or medical emergency.

The undermining dogma handles these topics in brutal fashion, claiming that "objects" are just a sloppy intellectual shorthand to deal with medium-sized or large-sized things, and that the real action always unfolds only in Tinyworld, or at least in some basement level of mathematical structure. Nietzsche told us about philosophizing with a hammer, but this is philosophizing with a meat axe. Any philosophy that exists only from a desire to smash things into pieces is skipping all the difficult parts of philosophy, thereby farming out the difficult work to its big brother neuroscience and perhaps to fundamental physics as well. The world exists at many different scales, not just in the dark basement of your uncle's grim mansion. There is no reason to undermine chairs, tables, horses, melons, lightning, and songs, even if all these things emerge from some sort of physical underpinning. The fact that something is made of pieces does not mean that nothing exists but the pieces.

But all of this is only one way of reducing objects. In addition to reducing them downward, it is also possible to reduce them *upward*, in a maneuver that I have called "overmining," by analogy with the genuine English word undermining. Whereas undermining tells us that most objects are too shallow to be real, and need to be undercut by smashing them into tinier or more basic pieces, overmining claims that objects are too *deep* to be real. If underminers accuse objects of being gullible fetishes because they are made of tinier things, overminers call them gullible fetishes for precisely the opposite reason— namely, because it is supposedly naïve and traditionalistic to believe in a "real" world outside human access. According to this view, either reality is nothing more than

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4   Sam Coleman, "Mind Under Matter," pp. 83-108 in *Mind That Abides*, D. Skrbina (Ed.) (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2009.); David Chalmers, "Strong and Weak Emergence," pp. 244-256, in *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, P. Clayton & P. Davies (Eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.)

how it appears to the human subject (that's called idealism) or we cannot know whether it is more than our access to it (that's called correlationism).[5] Or perhaps inanimate objects are allowed into the picture along with humans, but those objects are defined as being nothing over and above their effects on or perceptions of other things (as for Latour and Whitehead, two of my favorite thinkers of the past century). Or perhaps it is said that reality is made of events rather than things, of verbs rather than nouns. If reality is not constructed by consciousness, then perhaps it is constructed by language or power, and those who believe in things-in-themselves are merely naïve dupes.

The problem with overmining is that it cannot explain change, since it requires that things be entirely expressed in the world here and now, with no portion of the things lying outside their interactions with other things. For if I am nothing more than my current relations to all other things, if I am nothing more than a sleekly executed product of language or power, then how could I ever become anything else than I already am? The same question holds for all other entities in the cosmos. There must be something in the things that is not "exhaustively deployed" in the world, to use Xavier Zubíri's phrase.[6] And this is precisely why Aristotle (the most underrated and abused of great philosophers today) found it necessary to introduce the concept of potentiality.[7] His rivals, the so-called Megarians, were great overminers— even to the point of saying that no one is a house builder unless they are actively building a house at this very moment. Nothing mysterious is hiding behind the immanence of the world, and therefore a sleeping house builder is no better than a person who is awake but knows nothing about building at all. This leads Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* to require potentiality as a currently unactualized surplus in the things that allows them to become something other than what they are right now. Though I happen to disagree with the concept of potentiality for other reasons, the basic insight is urgent. There is no way to explain change if everything is defined purely by its relations to other things, because then everything will be exhausted by its current state, even if some philosophers sense the problem here and arbitrarily posit a "drive" or "conatus" or "appetite" in the things that moves them forward. But this is really no better than Molière's *vis dormitiva*: "objects change by means of a changing faculty," which tells us nothing at all.[8] It should be emphasized that overmining, like undermining, is not always wrong, and is an important piece of the toolkit in the advance of human knowledge. It seems justified to deny that there is really such a thing as "witchcraft," and that numerous unrelated phenomena are being falsely ascribed to a non-existent underlying reality. Foucault may be right that there is no such thing as "madness" taken as a unified phenomenon. Edward Said is surely right to deny that there is any such essence as the "Oriental." There is no problem with the overmining strategy in individual cases, but like undermining it needs to be fought for on a case-by-case basis, and not used as part of a sweeping dismissal of realities, essences, and other structures lying beneath whatever is immediately given.

But another important point should be noted, which is that undermining and overmining almost never appear alone. They nearly always come as a pair, even if one of the two is dominant in any given philosophy. For example, most overmining philosophies are eager to avoid outright

5   Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. R. Brassier. (London: Continuum, 2008.)
6   Xavier Zubíri, *On Essence*, trans. A.R. Caponigri. (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1980.)
7   Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. Sachs. (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 1999.)
8   Molière, *The Imaginary Invalid*, trans. H. van Laun. (New York: Dover, 2004.)

idealism. This is why they usually posit some sort of indeterminate excess beyond relationality, as if to thwart those who would (correctly) accuse them of overmining. It is a bit of a surprise, for instance, when Slavoj Žižek says in one passage that "the true meaning of materialism is that the world in itself does not exist" and then in a nearby passage insists that "we are not idealists."[9] Or when admirers of Fichte claim that his *Abstoss* is enough to rescue him from the idealistic consequences of the I positing the not-I, or when the hyper-relationist Bruno Latour asserts that there must be a single inarticulate "plasma" lying beneath all the determinate relational networks of actors, and that this plasma must be the explanation for all change.[10]

The same holds in reverse for the underminers. In pre-Socratic times, Parmenides holds simply that "being is, and non-being is not" so that only the unified empire of being truly exists. But then he must still account for the fact that we *seem* to experience a multitude of entities, and for this reason he also grants the existence of the world of opinion. In this way, mid-sized objects are destroyed yet again: for they are too specific or particular to count as being itself, but also too deep to be needed to explain the world of opinion, which is filled with flickering, transient shadows rather than solid enduring things. Scientistic philosophy tries to reduce the world to a layer too tiny and remote for humans to experience in everyday life, yet —behold!— we are supposed to have direct access to the *properties* of these things through mathematics, which is worshipped by scientism as a form of direct access to the real. Or consider the historically great philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who overmines objects by reducing them upwards to the product of pure space and time and the categories, but also undermines them by reducing them downwards to the things-in-themselves, which according to Kant might not even be plural (since plurality is one of the categories of the understanding). These two extreme forms of reduction, the downward and the upward, bolster and support one another. Each would prefer to defend its opposite extreme rather than make any concessions to the intermediate level of individual objects. All philosophies are in league to persecute, ridicule, and destroy individual things; all agree that really existing tables, chairs, shoes, and mountains are ludicrous figments of the folk intellect. But to defend the philosophical worth and dignity of individual things is precisely what I aim to do. And given that all other existing philosophies amounts to some manner of undermining or overmining objects, I hold that to defend the intermediate zone of individual things is the least likely and most refreshing thing we can do in philosophy today.

2. In Defense of Objects

Once the philosophical merit of objects is established, there is a natural wish to remind people of the concreteness of the world. In stylistic terms, this often leads object-oriented philosophers to recite long lists of objects in their writings. Ian Bogost playfully terms these lists "Latour

9   Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, p. 97. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004.)
10   J.G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath & J. Lachs. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982.)

Litanies," not because Bruno Latour invented them, but simply because he is so skilled at them: it is hard to forget his triumphant litany of "Golden mountains, phlogiston, unicorns, bald kings of France, chimeras, spontaneous generation, black holes, cats on mats, and other black swans and white ravens… Hamlet, Popeye, and Ramses II."[11] More recently, the emerging French philosopher Tristan Garcia uses the same technique frequently, as when he speaks of "a cutting of acacia, a gene, a computer-generated image, a transplantable hand, a musical sample… or a trademarked name."[12] Some enemies of object-oriented philosophy pretend to feel nothing but contempt for these lists (though most readers and listeners love them) and complain that they do not constitute "an argument." *Of course* they are not an "argument," but one must remember that arguments are only a small portion of thought and language. Nonetheless, the use of such lists in my books has led some critics to make the preposterous charge that I am advocating a "realism about everything," and that a realism about everything is not a realism at all. The problem with this charge is that the realism I advocate is by no means a realism about everything. The accusation displays ignorance as to the difference between the positions of Meinong, the early Latour, and Garcia (which allow anything to exist as long as certain minimal conditions are met) and my own position, which draws a rather frosty distinction between two kinds of objects: the real and the sensual, which will be explained shortly. Some critics have complained that the distinction between real and sensual objects is merely "metaphysical," and that what is needed instead are "criteria" to distinguish between real and unreal objects. But note that this claim *is already a metaphysics*— one in which the world is made up of nothing but images, and "criteria" demanded simply so that we can distinguish between good scientific images and bad "folk" images. This position does not avoid metaphysics, but is simply a much weaker metaphysics than the one I will defend, since it misses both kinds of objects that any philosophy must account for if it wishes to avoid the undermining and overmining dogmas.

Franz Brentano emerged to prominence with his revival of the medieval term "intentionality," which means that every mental act has an object.[13] To perceive is to perceive something, to love or hate is to love or hate something, to judge is to judge about something. For various reasons this idea has become slippery over time, and "intentionality" is often used incorrectly to mean that in consciousness we point at a real object outside the mind. But Brentano tells us clearly that he is speaking about *immanent* objectivity, or objects inside rather than outside the mind. This leaves some ambiguity as to the relation between inner and outer, and in 1894 Brentano's Polish student Twardowski (whom we quoted earlier) tried to handle the problem by doubling the world into an *object* outside the mind and a *content* inside the mind. This double model deeply bothered another student of Brentano, Edmund Husserl, who is known to us today as the founder of phenomenology. Husserl's complains about one implication of Twardowski's theory in particular. Since Twardowski distinguishes so cleanly between object and content, it follows that the real Berlin and the Berlin

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11   Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.)

12   Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, trans. M.A. Ohm & J. Cogburn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.)

13   Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. Rancurello, D. Terrell, and L. McAlister. (New York : Routledge, 1995.)

we speak about would be two separate things, and this would seem to render knowledge of the real Berlin impossible.[14] Husserl's solution to this problem is to say that *neither* the object nor the content are outside the mind, for it would be nonsense to speak of a real city that would not, at least potentially, be the object of some conscious perception.

There is no object outside the mind. With this decision, Husserl takes the path of idealism. But if Husserl is an idealist, then why does he so often *feel* like a realist, with all his descriptions of blackbirds, mailboxes, battles of centaurs and friends named Hans? The reason is that if Husserl is an idealist, he is nonetheless an object-oriented idealist. The point is easy enough to explain. For British Empricism (and apparently even for Brentano) the object in the mind is not really an object, but a so-called "bundle of qualities." We never actually see a fish, but only encounter various qualities such as bright color, slippery texture, rapid movement, and waving tail that always seem to go together, and thus through habit I begin to associate all these isolated qualities together in a single total bundle called "fish." But this is precisely what Husserl denies. Instead of simply *denying* Twardowski's distinction between concept and object, Husserl implodes both of them into the immanent sphere of mental access. For Husserl, a fish is not just a bundle of qualities. Why not? Because I can view the fish from different angles and distances, in joyful and depressive moods, in sunlight and in shadow, and it remains the same fish all along. I never see the whole fish, but only *Abschattungen* of the fish: "adumbrations" as we say in English, or *donations par ésquisses* among the French. There is a perpetual tension between the fish and its qualities at any given moment. Phenomenological analysis consists precisely in the labor of stripping away the inessential qualities and trying to gain direct insight into the *essential* ones.

This discovery of the tension between phenomenal objects and their qualities may be the most important thing Edmund Husserl ever taught us. Husserl calls these objects "intentional objects." I prefer to call them "sensual" objects, partly because there has been confusion over whether intentionality refers to objects inside or outside the mind, partly because the term "intentional object" has a boring and sterile ring, and partly because the metaphor of sensuality does a better job of suggesting the sort of direct, immediate contact we have with such objects. Although Husserl loves to repeat the slogans "to the things themselves," what he means is "to the *phenomena* themselves," not "to the *noumena* themselves," which is what Kant meant by the *Ding an sich*. Husserl's objects never withdraw from human contact. Quite the contrary. The mailbox in front of me is not "hidden" behind its many different faces. Instead, the mailbox is always there in front of me from the start, but simply encrusted with distracting accidental properties that swirl along the surface without changing the identity of the underlying thing. We should also add that anything can be a sensual object, including those objects that do not correspond with anything outside the mind. Sensual objects can certainly include Popeye, unicorns, square circles, wild opium fantasies, hallucinations, unhinged paranoid conspiracy theories, and the belief in various entities that scientism views with contempt— such as phlogiston, angels, or alchemical salts. Contrary to what Wikipedia said for nearly a year, my position is not that all objects are *equally real*. Instead, my point is that all sensual

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14 "Intentional Objects," in Edmund Husserl, *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, trans. D. Willard. (Dordrecht: Kluwer,

objects are equally *unreal*, but that philosophy needs to account for them in some way nonetheless. When scientistic philosophy claims that the world is filled with images and simply needs criteria to distinguish between good scientific images and bad "folk" images, the proper response is that both of these are still *images*, and that reality is not made of images. Stated differently, so-called scientistic realism turns out to be a form of idealism. For it thinks that reality is commensurable with a multitude of images in the mind, with some of them meritoriously scientific and the others mere superstitions worthy of utter and instant annihilation. This is what some people call enlightenment, though it is really just a way of confusing realism with *materialism*. Rather than taking seriously the fact that reality must always exceed our grasp of it, materialism assumes that it *already knows* what reality is, and simply wants to use this knowledge to discredit its opponents.[15] Yet if the unicorn I imagine is not real, it is also not nothing, and thus we have to speak of being in two distinct senses— the sensual and the real. Though Deleuze, in praising the thought of Duns Scotus, has made "the univocity of being" a popular idea in recent philosophy, it is necessary to insist instead on the duovocity of being: the real and the sensual.[16]

Let's consider, by contrast, what genuine realism requires. Though I have told the story of Heidegger's tool-analysis often enough before, I will try to do it again here at sufficient length for those who have not heard these ideas before, but also with sufficient compactness for those who have heard it already.[17] I hold that the most important philosophical book of the twentieth century is Heidegger's *Being and Time*.[18] The most fascinating moment in this book is surely the so-called tool-analysis. Husserl tried to secure a phenomenal field for philosophy, untouched by the invisible entities of science such as sound waves, atoms, the nervous system, and electromagnetic radiation. Philosophy for Husserl is supposed to focus exclusively on things as they appear to us: on *phenomena*, and thus philosophy becomes phenomenology. Despite being the star pupil of phenomenology, Heidegger began to notice from the relatively early date of 1919 that for the most part we *do not deal* with things as phenomena in consciousness.[19] The chair and floor on which we rest, the atmospheric oxygen we breathe, the bodily organs that keep us alive through their continued functioning, the grammatical structure of a mother tongue mastered years ago, the S-Bahn and U-Bahn systems of Berlin, the basic political stability outside this lecture hall that will allow us to leave tonight without significant fear— all of these things are *not* usually phenomena in consciousness. For the most part, they remain unnoticed in the background as we deal consciously with the particularities of everyday experience. For the most part, we notice things only when they break. When the hammer shatters in our hands, when the bus fails to arrive on time, when our physical body fails us and requires hospital treatment, this is usually when we consciously notice them. Here we have the famous Hedeggerian duality between tools and broken tools, which explains a surprising amount of his philosophical career, for all its tens of thousands of pages.

Perhaps the most common interpretation of this tool-analysis is to read it as the claim that

15   Bruno Latour, "Can We Get Our Materialism Back, Please?", *Isis*, Vol. 98 (2007), pp. 138-142.
16   Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.)
17   Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. (Chicago: Open Court, 2002.)
18   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962.)
19   Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler. (London: Continuum, 2008.)

praxis comes before theory, so that all conscious awareness emerging from a pre-theoretical back-ground of everyday "coping," as the commentator Hubert Dreyfus puts it.[20] But such a reading misses the real importance of the tool-analysis. For when it comes to the essentials, we note that theory and practice are exactly the same. When I look at a tree, dog, or hotel, or when I invent theories about fish behavior or about volcanoes and earthquakes, I am oversimplifying the reality of these things, always failing to grasp exhaustively the full reality of these entities. Trapped in a human mind and body, in a given historical era, amidst the limitations of available scientific instruments, we can never do justice to the full reality of the things. This is often known as "finitude," and despite Meillassoux's arguments against it, I hold that this Kantian finitude is inescapable. What should be obvious is that *praxis* cannot escape finitude any more than theory does. Not only do theoretical and practi-cal consciousness fail to exhaust the reality of chairs, trees, dogs, and chemicals, the *practical use* of these things does as well. Unconsciously sitting in a chair does not use up all the features of a chair; my unconscious reliance on the public transportation system of Berlin is no more intimate a relationship with that system than are the explicit diagrams of the U-Bahn drawn up by politicians and engineers. Stated differently, theory and praxis stand on the same side of the fence, and in no way make up a basic philosophical dualism. Simply by *relating* to the things, we distort or caricature or translate those things, even if our relation is implicit rather than explicit.

But here we must push things another step further. For it is not only humans and a few smart animals who produce distortions of reality: the same thing happens in the sphere of inani-mate beings as well. When I look at a chair, make theories about chairs, produce chairs in factories, or simply *use* chairs, I fail to exhaust their full reality. But the same happens when a lizard walks across the chair, when a hat is sitting on it, when raindrops strike it, or when a fire begins to burn the chair. In all these cases, objects fail to exhaust each other's reality. It is much like the democratic in-teractions between all human and nonhuman things in the world of Alfred North Whitehead, but in this case the relations between things are blockaded, embargoed, or obstructed.[21] Things descend into dark private vacuums from which they emerge only with the greatest difficulty. These are *real* objects, as opposed to the sensual ones. The sensual objects we find in Husserl's phenomenology never hide or withdraw in the least, since they are always with us from the start. When I encounter a fox walking through central Berlin, as happened a few days ago near the Hamburger Bahnhof, the fox as sensual object does not withdraw from my access to it. Instead, I saw the fox from different angles and distances, first in shock and then in fascination, and with a specific color of fur that could easily be varied through each season of the year without the fox becoming a different fox. The sen-sual fox was encrusted with superfluous, inessential perceptual detail at any given moment, but was not "hidden" from me in any way. Phenomenology simply asks me to subtract any extrinsic detail from the appearance of the fox so as to arrive at its essence.

But there is probably also something like a *real* fox there, or probably is— assuming I am not hallucinating, losing my mind, or misidentifying a dog as a fox. This real fox *does* hide, withdrawing

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20   Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Division 1. (Cam-bridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.)
21   Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. (New York: Free Press, 1979.)

into concealment. Any appearance of this fox to another sentient creature, or any encounter with it by an inanimate object, never makes direct contact with the fox, since the fox cannot be adequately translated into any relation that something might have with it. Precisely *this* is the center of my philosophical position, which is why we speak of "strange realism" or sometimes "weird realism." Realism in philosophy usually does not just mean that there is a real world outside the human mind, but also that there are specific scientific methods which adequately capture that reality, and which should also be used to ridicule and annihilate any human conceptions that *do not* correspond to this reality. By contrast, I say that realism means exactly the opposite. This is why realism is often confused with materialism: what supposedly exists outside the mind is hard material reality, and everything else is mere fantasy or ideology worthy of incineration. Moreover, the materialist generally believes himself to be already in possession of the knowledge of what material reality is, and thus as empowered to strip-mine or bulldoze the world, leaving behind a moonscape of subatomic particles, brain cells, and a few mathematical equations, all of it observed with a forced, Spock-like coldness.

By contrast, genuine realism entails that reality is so real that no knowledge does justice to it. While this principle may sound unusual to modern rationalist ears, it is not especially new, since the very meaning of the Ancient Greek *philosophia* (or love of wisdom) is that humans cannot obtain wisdom but can only hope to pursue it. In this sense, any claim to exchange reality for some form of adequate knowledge, whether mathematical or any other sort, is strictly speaking unphilosophical, since it amounts to a claim that the elusive wisdom is already possessed. No thing can ever be replaced by knowledge about that thing. Until we find a better name, let's call this principle "the executant principle," since to see a thing is not the same as *to be* that thing, to execute the reality of that thing.[22] To give an example, imagine a paranoid scenario in which some entity had godlike knowledge of the city of Berlin, with mastery of each detail of its infrastructure, history, government, and the movements and exact thoughts of each person and animal in the city. Notice that this perfect knowledge of Berlin would still not be the same thing as Berlin itself. The same holds for more specific entities. If we have something approaching perfect knowledge of quantum electrodynamics (or so claims Richard Feynman in the introduction to his book), this knowledge is still not the same thing as quantum electrodynamics itself.[23]

One of them unfolds in a human mind, while the other presumably occurs even if all humans are extinct or not yet born. Those philosophers who believe in absolute knowledge will admit this principle, yet they never seem to provide an explanation of the difference between things and perfect knowledge of those things. What they will tell you, for example, is that things and knowledge of those things share a common "structure." That sounds plausible enough, but then they also need to explain the "unstructural" part that the things and the knowledge *do not* share in common. Inevitably this leads them to the brink of a timeworn traditional theory that they never want to endorse openly: namely, they want to say that the knowledge of a tree shares the same structure

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22   "An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface," in José Ortega y Gasset, *Phenomenology and Art*, trans. P. Silver. (New York: Norton, 1969.)
23   Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.)

as a tree itself, but that the tree itself is somehow embodied in *matter* whereas the thought is not. So, they lead us back to a traditional theory of form embedded in matter. And what, exactly, is this unstructural matter that differs from the form of the tree? Here, I have never heard even an attempt at an explanation.[24]

Strange realism has the immediate implication that causality becomes a philosophical problem. If objects withdraw into private vacuums, how do they make contact at all, as they evidently do? It is not good enough to say that objects make "partial" contact with each other, as if fire touched 28% of the qualities of cotton while burning it, or my use of a hammer deployed 73% of the hammer while unconsciously using it, but only 12% while consciously staring at it. The reason this does not work is because objects by definition are *units*, and therefore you either touch them or you do not. If you touch 73% of the qualities of a hammer, then you are really touching qualities or pieces of the hammer, not the hammer itself. The only possible conclusion is that direct contact between real objects is never possible at all. Their contact can only be indirect, or "vicarious" as I call it.[25]

3. Indirect Causation

The history of indirect causation is worth repeating here. One conservative group of early Islamic theologians was known as the Ash'arites, based in Basra in southern Iraq. This school held that not only was God the only creator, as all monotheists naturally believe, but that God was the only causal agent at all. The view is known as occasionalism, and though it had a prominent status in medieval Islam (where it was combatted by the more rationalist and pro-Greek current of al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes) there seem to have been no medieval Christian or European defenders of the idea. Occasionalism entered Christian Europe only in the 1600's, through Descartes and his successors. If the human mind and human body are two different types of substance, then how can I move my arm? The answer is that God is the mediator who allows me to move it. In Descartes' case there is evidence of a mind-body problem but not of a body-body problem, and Descartes even suggests that the physical world is some sort of unified lump, thereby usefully pushing God out of the picture as concerns science— since physical objects seem capable of direct body-body interaction without a mediator. In the post-Cartesian philosopher Nicolas Malebranche, the old Arab philosophical problem of body-body relations finally enters European philosophy in explicit form. Granted, this occasionalism is usually ridiculed even by philosophy undergraduates in Western countries, where appeal to God as a philosophical trump card is no longer well received in the way it was in earlier centuries.

Yet we cannot fail to notice that David Hume and Immanuel Kant are still very well-received in Western universities, and Hume and Kant do very much the same thing as the occasionalists, though in upside-down form. Occasionalists say roughly this: "causal relations between beings are

24   Quentin Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign," trans. R. Mackay. Unpublished manuscript quoted with Meillassoux's permission. Pirate version leaked online (and already widely quoted) is available at http://oursecretblog.com/txt/QMpaperApr12.pdf
25   Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," *Collapse II* (2007), pp. 171-205.

impossible, with one exception: *God* can make these relations happen, because God is so power-ful and almighty." But Hume and Kant say roughly as follows, in surprisingly similar fashion: "causal relations between beings are unverifiable, with one exception: *the human mind* can make these relations evident, because the human mind is so central and almighty." Hume turns cause and effect into a question of habit and customary conjunction, while Kant turns it into a category of the human mind, something that may or may not exist outside the mind. In both cases, causality is ruled either impossible or unverifiable, but then granted as a monopoly to a single, all-powerful super-entity. In short, the real problem with occasionalism is not that it makes use of God, while enlightened Western intellectuals are obliged to make fun of God whenever possible and therefore we cannot use God in a philosophical context. Instead, the real problem with occasionalism is that a causal *monopoly* is granted to one kind of entity that is never really explained or justified except as shielded by the cloak of piety. Yet a similar misstep is made by Hume and Kant, who grant a causal monopoly to *humans*, one explained and justified except as shielded by the cloak of epistemology. That is to say, "we have direct access to human experience but not to anything else," forgetting of course that we have no direct access to human experience in general, but only to our own. It is to forget as well that we need not have *direct* access to things in order to infer that they are present. The first philosopher I know of to *secularize* the problem of indirect causation is Bruno Latour. For Latour, any interaction between two objects (or "actors," as he calls them) must be mediated by a third. His best example, in the 1999 book *Pandora's Hope*, is that neutrons initially had no link with politics, at least not in France, until Frédéric Joliot made that link in a failed effort to convince the French govern-ment to invest in an atomic bomb project. Through this effort, Joliot forged a link between politics and neutrons; for Latour, the same holds for the link between any two entities.

The problem with Latour's theory, I have argued, is that it simply pushes the problem back one step further.[26] Given that Joliot links politics with neutrons, the question is if politics cannot link directly with neutrons, how can Joliot link directly with either? Latour's response is somewhat disappointing in metaphysical terms, even if interesting in practical terms— essentially, Latour takes the pragmatist line that we keep on asking about connections until it is no longer interesting and then we can simply stop. If you are studying French military policy in the 1930's, then it is interesting to talk about the politics-neutrons connection but not about the connection between Joliot and neutrons. But this in turn becomes interesting if you are studying the use of instruments by French physicists in the 1930's, and so forth. But the connection between Joliot and his own eyeball does not become interesting unless you are studying the nervous system, and so forth. The problem with this approach is that it explains a lot about how researchers choose to bracket the essential from the inessential from their research, but tells us nothing about metaphysics. If Objects A and B can-not relate directly but must be mediated by Object C, then as long as all objects are playing by the same rules, it follows that Objects A and C must be mediated by a new object, and Objects B and C must also be mediated by a new object, and so on to infinity. There will be an infinity of mediators between any two objects, and what should bother us here is not the infinity per se (there are cases where infinite regress is justified) but the fact that the mediation can never get started at all. There

26   Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. (Melbourne: re.press, 2009.)

is no way Joliot can form the link between politics and neutrons if he cannot touch either of them in the first place. What leads Latour to this problem is precisely the fact that he has a flat ontology, meaning that he holds that being is meant univocally, in a single sense. The only possible solution to the problem is that being is meant not in one sense or many— but in exactly *two* senses. Two real objects cannot touch except by means of a *sensual* object, and two sensual objects make no contact except insofar as both are encountered simultaneously by a *real* one. There is never contact between two objects of the same kind, but only between two objects of opposite kinds.

4. On Levi Bryant's "Onticology"

Instead of going further into the mechanics of how real and sensual objects relate to one another, we should take a brief look at an alternative version of object-oriented ontology, that of Levi Bryant, which he calls "onticology."[27] There are perhaps three main differences between Bryant's position and my own: his rejection of vicarious causation, his view that real objects do not have qualities, and his avoidance of any distinction between sensual objects and sensual qualities.

As for the first point, Bryant has stated on his blog that he sees no particular problem with how objects can relate to one another.[28] The puzzling thing, however, is that Bryant does agree that objects never fully exhaust each other, but can only translate one another. If I say "we never have exhaustive knowledge of a tree," then Bryant agrees; if I say raindrops never fully make contact with the total reality of a window when striking it, then Bryant also agrees. Yet he then disagrees that there is any problem with two objects interrelating. But since Bryant concedes that objects can only produce translations of each other, it is hard to understand how he can think that the *initial* contact between things is direct and unproblematic. In other words, how can it be the case that there is no problem with my relating to a chair by sitting in it, but then a major problem with producing an accurate translation of it in praxis or in knowledge? What Bryant fails to recognize is that translation is also a *starting point*, not just a result. We do not start out with a perfect, noise-free relation between things and *only then* botch it with a distorted translation. The same problem is found at the beginning as at the end, and hence vicarious causation is the inevitable result of any object-oriented philosophy that takes objects seriously.[29]

The second disagreement is that Bryant dislikes it when I talk of real objects having "qualities." For him, objects have a "virtual proper being" that then has numerous "local manifestations." This virtual proper being sounds like a reflection of Bryant's Deleuzean background, which is so different from my own Heideggerian background, and in part this disagreement might simply reflect

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27   Levi R. Bryant, "The Ontic Principle: Outline of an Object-Oriented Ontology," pp. 261-278, in Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, (Eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. (Melbourne: re.press, 2011.)
28   Levi R. Bryant, "Bennett: MOO (Materialist-Oriented Ontology)," post at Bryant's *Larval Subjects* blog, May 5, 2012. http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/05/05/bennett-moo-materialist-oriented-ontology/
29   See "First OOO Lecture in Russia," pp. 159-179 in Graham Harman, *Bells and Whistles: More Speculative Realism*. (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2013.)

our different educational trajectories. What differentiates Bryant from most Deleuzeans, and what keeps him firmly fixed on the object-oriented side of the fence (at least as of April 2012), is his careful insistence that the virtual is *many* rather than one, a point that in Deleuze is frankly either insufficiently clear or altogether missing.[30]

For Bryant, unlike most Deleuezeans, the virtual is definitely and explicitly plural in character. Nonetheless, Bryant does not want the virtual proper being of a tree or a person to have any specific qualities. Why not? Because, as he has told me in person, he is concerned that if an object is tied to specific real qualities, then it will never be able to change. If you or I as people are defined by specific real qualities, then no real "becoming" can ever take place— we can either dress up in accidental qualities as if in masks and costumes, while remaining the same person underneath as we were when five years old, or else we can only change by entering into *combinations* with other things. Bryant complains that this sounds too much like atomism, a point I find true but irrelevant, since this is hardly what is most emblematic of atomism. But in a wider sense, Bryant is correct that this is our bigger disagreement. For me, real objects must in fact have qualities, and cannot just be virtual trajectories across many years' worth of different, shifting qualities. For this reason, I do in fact hold that we change as people either by putting on masks and costumes that hide the fact that deep down nothing has changed, *or* by entering into combination with new things that make us something different from what we were. Or rather, both of these things happen at different times during a human life. We might go through a country music phase, or a phase in which we pretend to others and even ourselves that we are rakish womanizers when really we are nothing of the sort. But on the other hand we also go through experiences, probably rarely, that turn us fundamentally into new people by making us enter into something else through an irreversible combination. If the usual alternative is that we either have no fixed identity but are in a constant flux of becoming, or that we remain as an unchanging soul from conception to death, I would suggest instead that we change on a *finite* number of occasions, so that I am no longer the same person as at age five, but may be the same person I was last year or the year before. Transformations in life would be real, but rare. Garcia touches on this theme in *Form and Object* in his important discussion of the ages of life, which for him are marked not just by "rites of passages" (for Garcia, such rites are merely celebrations and change nothing) but by "initiation rituals" (which do change what one was before). Perhaps Garcia's model tracks the physical ages of life too closely, and is not tied closely enough to major transformative life events that can occur at any moment, but his notion of an "initiation ritual" is a good one. In this sense it is Bryant's model, paradoxically, that may give too much credence to personal identity across time, since his virtual proper being can generate all sorts of local manifestations across the years, but it never seems to go through a decisive initiation ritual that turns it into something else. Nonetheless, this remains in my opinion the most substantive philosophical dispute between me and Bryant, and our discussions on this point may yield abundant fruits in the future.

I am less optimistic about Bryant's third main difference from my position: his failure to distinguish between sensual objects and sensual qualities. For him, when an object takes on specific

30   Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2011.) Page 101.

configurations in particular circumstances, it has a "local manifestation." But what is the local manifestation of an apple, for instance? Is my view from the west side of the apple the same local manifestation as your view from the east, or are they different? In other words, Bryant is unclear as to whether a local manifestation means *all the specific relational details* with which it is inserted into the world, or (as for Husserl) is there a relatively durable object-nucleus in the world that can be seen from numerous different perspectives by different observers while remaining the same thing? The danger here is that Bryant relapses into a pre-Husserlian model in which the object is simply a bundle of qualities. This would be little surprise, since I have yet to meet anyone of a Deleuzean background who has any interest in doing justice to the breakthroughs of phenomenology; they always focus instead on the negative points of the school, which are certainly there to be found. Not only does Bryant's silence on the sensual objects/sensual qualities distinction overlook the great clarifications phenomenology has made of human experience. More than this, by failing to include sensual objects in his system, he gives up the only tool we have for explaining the mechanisms of vicarious causation. Though he prefers to avoid this concept, he cannot avoid it without falling into the previously mentioned incoherence in which there is no problem *sitting* in a chair adequately but a great deal of difficulty sitting in a chair *adequately*. In other words, in Bryant's theory direct contact is magically present at dawn but magically forbidden at dusk.

5. Conclusion

I have tried to explain the basic principles of object-oriented philosophy in the form that I defend it. If you feel yourself resisting, then it is useful to determine why. Can you resist the object-oriented position without undermining all objects, reducing them downward to tinier particles or indeterminate, pre-individual lumps and ignoring the fact that higher-level entities have properties that have some independence of their components? Can you resist the philosophy of objects without reducing objects upward into mere appearances, effects, or events, mocking the supposed naiveté of real objects, the only surplus able to explain change in the cosmos beyond its current state? Can you resist vicarious causation without collapsing trees into the knowledge of trees, thereby creating an insane metaphysics in which to think something is immediately to create it? If not, then object-oriented philosophy is the only game in town.

Reality Bytes: The Aesthetic of eXistenZ

Daniel Sander

1. A HUDDLING OF PORCUPINES

In approaching so-called object-oriented ontologies (OOO) and the field of speculative realism from which they emerge, I am reminded of two paradoxes that recur throughout discussions that have taken place amongst Jane Bennett, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Steven Shaviro (and Quentin Meillassoux, too, though he will not be subject of mine here). These are Zeno's paradoxes of motion and Arthur Schopenhauer's porcupine dilemma.

My middle school science teacher was fond of presenting Zeno's dichotomy paradox in terms of getting to the library, "How can you ever get to the library if you must first go halfway to the library?" and so on. More generally, these paradoxes concern relationships between the objects of space and time. From a Bergsonian perspective, a path traversed in extension/matter/space is infinitely divisible by degree and can never provide a full account of movement, which is indivisible, durational, and of a different kind of movement than trajectory. As Bergson relays, "Zeno's error, in all his reasoning is due just to this fact, that he leaves real duration on one side and considers only its objective track in space" (258n2). Harman, in response to Shaviro, cites this dualism as "a more basic rift than that between the supposed philosophies of stasis and becoming" ('Response to Shaviro,' 294), situating Whitehead and Latour as occasionalist philosophers against Deleuze, Bergson, Simondon, DeLanda, and Grant. Significantly, though, Whitehead falls less on one side of this dualism than he objectivizes (spatializes) and ontologizes it as such, replacing Bergson's matter and memory with his own actual entities and eternal objects. As Harman later quotes Whitehead, "continuity concerns what is potential [eternal objects]; whereas actuality is incurably atomic [actual entities]" ('Response to Shaviro,' 298). Harman posits this dualistic ontology against Shaviro's reading of Whitehead's as a dual-aspect ontology, which, for Harman, is a house of mirrors between public and private prehensions. Against this, Harman posits his own infinite regress of objects, of which spaces (between a real object and its sensual qualities), times (black noise between an intentional/sensual object and its sensual qualities), and relations (sensual qualities) number. Morton's approach is related but places space-times as internal to a rift in all objects between their essence and appearance. What both Harman and Morton (and

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OOO more generally) provide is "a way to think the ontological reasons for the validity of Einsteinian spacetime, which ripples from objects depending on their mass" (Morton 214).

If Zeno's paradoxes allow us to think the relative space-times of objects, then Schopenhauer's porcupine dilemma allows us to think relations. I think I probably first encountered it in a self-help book I found on a street in Berkeley, California, but here is how it appears in the philosopher's own work:

> One cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together quite closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent themselves from being frozen. But they soon felt the effect of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another. Thus the need for society which springs from the emptiness and monotony of men's lives, drives them together; but their many unpleasant and repulsive qualities and insufferable drawbacks once more drive them apart (651-2).

This paradox concerns relationships between the objects of the individual and of the society in which she finds herself, with the individual conceived as a self-identified empty integer prior to the social. For Harman and Morton et al, following a similar directionality, the problem is then to account for how objects enter into social relation, whilst for Deleuze, Bergson, Simondon, DeLanda, and Grant, "becoming is what is primarily real, and discrete individual entities are derivative of this more primal flux or flow" ('Response to Shaviro,' 295). Overall, relations are broadly construed in terms of all of the following: the aesthetic, appearance, causality, metaphor, nonlocality, the play and game of signifiers, prehension, space, time, and translation.

I begin with these paradoxes, as I think they are good examples of some of the central concerns in discussions of OOO — space-times and relations — and especially of an attention to nonhuman actors (tortoises, arrows, porcupines). But I also begin with them as paradoxes as such, that is to say, of what Morton addresses as "a *dialetheia*, double truthed: both true and false at the same time" (210). Whilst I am perhaps overextending the term here, what I mean to suggest is that they suggest a way to think of individual entities and becoming and objects and relations as not necessarily the negations, or ontological prioritizations, of each other. This, I think, is not only what Shaviro is trying to think through Whitehead, but also what Bennett is trying to think through Deleuze and Guattari (this is also, perhaps, what Jean-Luc Nancy is trying to think through, Schopenhauer's porcupines dilemma being one way in which to think his spacing of being-with). She says, "the project, then, would be to make both objects and relations the periodic focus of theoretical attention, even if it is impossible to articulate fully the "vague" or "vagabond" essence of any system or any things, and even if it is impossible to give equal attention to both at once" (Bennett 227). Similarly, I want to work toward an anti-essential deployment of those aspects of OOO with which I have an affinity — its flatness, its critique of correlationism, and its emphasis on aesthetics, coexistence, and hope. In terms of the above paradoxes, this would be to think the Einsteinian, aesthetic space-times of objects as not prior to the social.

2. A HEAP OF FRAGMENTS

To this end, part of the problem of the project might be how coherence, the social, the whole is conceived. For Harman, in response to Derrida, "the only way to prevent the universe from turning into a holistic blend-o-rama in which everything melts into a perfectly interrelated lump is to concede from the start that there are individual, self-identical sectors or entities in the cosmos, and that this self-identity (however transient) requires that things be irreducible to their relations" ('The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer,' 198). This irreducibility moves in three ways, not to be arithmetically undermined in terms of an object's physical subcomponents, not to be geometrically overmined in terms of the consciousness of another object, and not to float in a middle object (Latour's plasma, for example, or even space-time itself.) Morton has a particular contempt for such middle objects insofar as the appeal and privilege of fluidity as more real than other things re-centers the human body. Whilst Bennett takes this point, rather than dispose of the liquid optic, she suggests "a good tack might be to stretch and strain those modes to make room for the outlooks, rhythms, and trajectories of a greater number of actants, to, that is, get a better sense of the "operating system" upon which we humans rely" (229). Another response, one I return to later, might be to not invalidate the appeal of fluidity whilst also not stretching and straining it either. Instead, it becomes important to understand its ubiquity as indicative of a certain information-influenced mechanics, a state "defined as a relation of speed determining the level of connection loosely binding a multitude of simple bodies or machines," a space "characterized by a loose relation between molecules or components which allows them the capacity to deviate and spontaneously produce turbulent phenomena" (Terranova 108). Such fluid space requires the control of Burroughsian soft machines.

Yet, I think there is another way in which things, whilst remaining irreducible to (their relations with) other things, nevertheless, do lump together; one that has certain resonances with the way in which Sianne Ngai engages Fredric Jameson. Shaviro suggests that Harman's ontology is aligned with a modernist aesthetic of the sublime, to which Harman responds, "in what sense is the whole of aesthetic modernism governed by the sublime? Is this true of Gertrude Stein?" ('Response to Shaviro,' 302). Ngai's answer is negative, but not unrelated, as she argues Stein's aesthetic is governed by what she calls the *stuplime*. In developing this neologism, Ngai pays particular attention to Jameson's use of the phrase *heaps of fragments*. Whilst Jameson's wariness of "'heaps of fragments' as examples of an *incapacity* to organize discrete elements into a coherent form" (289) runs counter to Harman's perfectly interrelated lump, both deemphasize "the ways in which parts might be made to cohere or agglutinate" (288). A heap of fragments is not undermined by its physical subcomponents (the fragments), nor is it overmined by the heap itself (which is what Jameson is arguing; that is, the heap *would* overmine the fragments *if* he saw the heaping as cohering), nor is the heap itself a preexistent object in which the fragments float (even as Ngai does emphasize the liquidity that Morton critiques). Rather, for Stein, heaps of fragments do cohere, but do not reduce, insofar as "coherence operates as a vast combinatory, in which new 'consistencies' are produced through the 'mixing' of others" (290). Certainly, this configuration could align itself with those alliances of philosophies of process with which Harman and Morton take issue — whether construed in terms of individual entities and becoming or in terms of objects and relations — but my point here is that,

like the porcupines, the heap of fragments might just as well illustrate not the ontological priority of one over the over but their simultaneity. Moreover, and as such, any holism approached by such a heap of fragments would not necessarily also be a totality, but only a provisional combination.

This is to say, too, then, that a different kind of novelty is at work. As Harman remarks of Whitehead, "no new *qualities* can ever be produced for Whitehead, for all his reputation as a philosopher of novelty: what is produced in his view is simply new constellations of actual entities, prehended according to pre-existing eternal objects" ('Response to Shaviro,' 298). Whilst it is not entirely clear to me why new constellations (or in Stein's language, "mixings") do not constitute novelty for Harman, I suppose it is because this makes relations agents of change. Yet, he also says, "an object needs to form a *new* connection in order to change, and this entails that an object must disengage from its current state and somehow make contact with something with which it was not previously in direct contact" ('Response to Shaviro,' 300). But if a non-relational actuality contains "reserves for change insofar as it is withheld from relations" ('Response to Shaviro,' 299), then the emphasis here must be on the ability of an object to disengage, to perform a digital switching between connections. Again, though, like Ngai on Jameson, this emphasis masks the ways in which new connections might be additive and accumulate rather than mutually excluded through the object. Nevertheless, this kind of novelty, the kind proposed by Stein and the porcupines, too, resists Harman's undermining and overmining. Bennet draws this out in her gloss on William Connolly's protean connectionism, "in contrast to both methodological individualism [undermining] and organic wholism [overmining], connectionism figures relations as 'typically loose, incomplete, and themselves susceptible to potential change'" (227).

Neitzchean perspectivism might be another model that neither undermines nor overmines the object whilst at the same time making it contingent rather than autonomous. This model, too, raises the questions of appearance, materialism, and realism. OOO is realist insofar as it advocates for a mind-independent reality; however, at least in Morton's version, it is a realism without materialism. More, within this immaterial real, appearance is aesthetic, deceptive, relational, and past. Nietzsche, similarly, though in many respects a naturalist, might not be described as a materialist, as, for him, "the antithesis of this phenomenal world is not 'the true world,' but the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations' (307). (Elizabeth Grosz has taken a similar position in a paper entitled "Matter, Life, and Other Variations; or, Why I Am Not a Materialist." Significantly, from this perspective, Latour's plasma is less a middle object in which other objects float than it is the unformatted as such.) That is, in replacing the material with unformatted chaos, Nietzsche, rejects both essence, *the true world*, and its bifurcation from appearance. Rather, there are only different kinds of phenomenal, or interpretive, worlds and different kinds of subjects (including those that are human and nonhuman). To this model, Nietzsche gives the name perspectivism "by virtue of which every centre of force — and not only man — construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own force" (339). Morton presents and subsequently rejects a related option to this model of "there are no substances, and it's all 'appearance for' or aesthetics all the way down" (213). He rejects this because "if reality were aesthetic all the way down, then we would *know* it was 'just' an illusion and its power to beguile us would disappear" (213). However, similar to

the way in which Jameson rushes to argue that a heap of fragments does not cohere and Harman rushes to argue (at least in a way that I have suggested) that it does, Morton, in this dismissal, both elides knowing and experience and presumes an equality of illusion. That is, whilst I might *know* that what I see is an illusion (insofar as it is not objectivity as such but my perspectival interpretation of sensation), I might not experience it as such. I might continue to be beguiled by it, and I might be beguiled by the way in which my illusioning of the world confronts another, different illusioning of the world. Seen this way, "the world [. . .] does not exist as a world 'in-itself;' it is essentially a world of relationships; [. . .] its being is essentially different from every point" (Nietzsche 306). (Here, again, Nancy's project is resonant, "every position is also dis-position, and, considering the appearance that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance" (12). We could also think here the Lucretian axiom that "nothing from nothing ever yet was born" (*Of the Nature of Things*)). This is a relativism and a constructivism in the sense that Latour uses those terms in defining a sociology of associations, as against the absolutism of natural sciences (undermining) and the fundamentalism of the social sciences (overmining). In a footnote, Latour provides a quotation from Deleuze's work on Leibniz that is resonant with perspectivism, "relativism is not the relativity of truth but the truth of relation" (95). That such a relativism is constructed means that nonhuman entities are a part of it.

Perspectivism is an indirect or representational realism such that whilst there is a real outside world that impresses itself upon us, our knowledge of it is necessarily mediated (by our senses, by the ideas we derive from these, etc.), and this is the case for all objects in the world. Any speculation is limited by my perspective, with the possibility of attaining something more "objective" only through the palimpsest of other perspectives. Harman's language above, in particular his derisive employment of "constellations," allows us to think of something like perspectivism in terms of relative Einsteinian space-time. Whilst "for Harman, a black hole is the quintessential object precisely because nothing escapes from it," another reading might consider the black hole as the self-imploded death of the object that Morton describes as the collapse of appearance into essence (Morton 217). The life of the object, then, would more readily align with the Stein's amassing, Whitehead's constellations, and the bringing into orbit of one world through the perspective of another. For, the striving of a body "continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement ('union') with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power" (Nietzsche 340). Nancy makes reference explicitly to the celestial in his account of just such an arrangement of bodies, which arises from the spreading out of bodily mass in the weighing of bodies against one another ('Corpus').

3. A GAME OF PLAYERS

Like my early second hand knowledge of the paradoxes with which I began, I want to consider a movie that now seems prescient. Not simply in that its title shares the subject of ontology, but also in that it concerns the making of worlds within the world that makes some provocative suggestions about this world. The movie is David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999), the alternative spelling

containing the Hungarian word for god (*isten*). I want to consider one scene in particular, drawing out some of the movie's broader themes in doing so, that specifically addresses the character of god. The scene triangulates characters Allegra Geller (game designer for Antenna Research), Ted Pikul (a security guard who accompanies Geller after an assassination attempt), and Gas (a gas station attendant). The scene takes place at a generically named Country Gas Station. This naming, together with the characters unpatterned clothes and the general muted colour scheme of the movie of blues, browns, and greys, is, as Mark Fisher has described, "part of the flat affect, the strange tonelessness, which governs most of the film" (70). Allegra and Ted have sought out Gas so that Ted might receive illicitly a bio-port through which to play her game, an installation process that is likened to anal sex, not least of all in the verbal and visual comparisons between bio-ports and anuses. Gas, a fan of Allegra's, describes one of her previous games called *ArtGod*, a naming that collapses two definitions of the word, as being and making, thusly: "'Thou, the player of the game, art God.' Very spiritual. Funny, too. God, the artist. The mechanic." Later, as Gas is about to use a stud-finder to brand where on Ted's lower back to install the bio-port, Ted warily says "Oh, God," to which Gas replies, "God, the mechanic." As it is Gas himself who is characterized as a mechanic, then godliness resides in his mechanical granting of the ability to play a/the game. The emphasis here being not on Gas's playing God, but on god-ing (world-making) as playing. Once Ted is able to do so, we are thrown into just such a kaleidoscopic house of mirrors as Harman ascribes to relational ontologies: Once bio-ported into the game (*eXistenZ*), part of the game is to bio-port into another game. And then toward the end of the movie, the outside of the game (and hence, too, of the game within a game) is revealed to be the inside of another game (*tranCendenZ*), though even this is immediately reversed, as Allegra and Ted then assassinate *tranCendenZ*'s designer and his assistant. Throughout the different games there is also a group of characters who are identified as Realist resistance fighters opposed to the deformation of reality, such that, at the film's end, Allegra and Ted could either be identified as defending reality or playing another game, the last line of the movie asking, "Hey, tell me the truth. Are we still in the game?"

This confusion suggests that reality is not only something that gets played, but also something that plays you. Moreover, in reassembling reality as surreality, its validity becomes less of a question than the validity of subjectivity. Let me unpack this statement a bit. Whilst I initially suggested that perspectivism was a kind of realism, from the perspective of OOO, there is a way in which it is not. Harman makes this point in his response to Shaviro through Whitehead, "the supposed private reality of an entity apart from its prehensions turns out to be made only of a previous set of prehensions. In other words, *reality never appears* at any point in the chain" (297, emphasis added). We see this precise configuration in eXistenZ, the supposed private reality of a player apart from a game turns out to be made only of a previous game. Within such a configuration, how are we then to understand something like the word *truth* in the question posed at the end of the movie, "Hey, tell me the *truth*. Are we still in the game?" From the perspective of a pregiven subject or object (that is, then, from the perspective of OOO), this is a sort of undecidable, unspecifiable trick question arising from Morton's rift, which he compares to Lacanian pretense. But from the perspective of perspectivism, against the essence of the subject/object, the truth is in the relativism of always being

related (playing a game), "it is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject," where subject is understood as "what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view" (Deleuze 21). This, I think, then, is the significance of the above configuration of God the artist, the mechanic. The movie proffers the suggestion that we think the mechanic in its adjectival form through its depiction of game urges, "certain trigger phrases or actions that move the gameplay down a predetermined pathway" (Fisher 71), the absence of which results in game loops. Whilst, for the most part, the movie foregrounds the actions of its white protagonists against a background of labourers classed and raced otherwise, these game loops and urges co-implicate such a foreground and background into the flatness of a mechanized world, such that it is the subjectivity (point of view) of the player that is revealed to be a simulation rather than the game itself. I follow Brian Massumi here in his understanding of two modes of the simulacrum according to Deleuze and Guattari. Helpfully, these two modes replace distinctions "between the model and the copy, or the real and the imaginary" ('Realer than Real'). Within an "abstract grid of miraculated identites that are in practice only a bundle of normalized and basically reproductive functions," the simulation corresponding to reality (negative becoming) normativizes, regularizes, and reproduces the white able-human-bodiedness of the movie's pro-tagonists ('Realer than Real'). With this in mind, then, the appeals to a anthropocentric reality in the form of anthropomorphic bio-ports, game pods, and umbilical cords that connect the two can be thought as safeguarding portals that softly control, modulate, navigate points of view on fluid varia-tion (mechanization). Revelation of the realer than real (not only the title of Massumi's text but also how the game *eXistenZ* is described in the movie) of mechanization comes in the form of mutant creatures and game characters, who confront us "with the possibility that agency can genuinely be interrupted by the 'inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton'" (Fisher 72). These creatures and characters confront us with the other mode of simulation that corresponds to art (positive becom-ing), "not to be human, but to be human plus" ('Realer than Real').

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By way of conclusion, I want to use the terms of my title to work through the ways in which I have related the above thoughts. For OOO, the bite of reality is the rejection of absolute knowledge in the upholding of Kantian finitude. This is a position against the cultural attitude de-picted in the movie on which my title puns, "the jaded speech of [. . .] Generation X, who came of age [. . .] smear[ing] everything into the same cynical pulp: 'A real world? . . . Whatever'" ('On Interface,' 104). Instead, reality is not whatever, but the un(cor)relatedness, not only for humans but for all of being, of phenomena (appearance/for-itself) and noumena (essence/in-itself). For OOO, this makes primary Zeno's *objective* track in space before duration and Schopenhauer's porcupines before their huddling. In order to think them together simultaneously, however, that is, in order to think something like a huddling of porcupines, a heap of fragments, a game of players, or, in order to think the consequence of Einsteinian relativity not as the becoming black hole of every object, but the becoming constellation of every object, a different framework, or form of navigation, is needed. For such a framework, as I identify in Nietzschean perspectivism, the bite of reality is the byte of reality, a packet of information, a point of view on variation, a simulation that distributes

either limitatively (reality) or not (art). *eXistenZ* configures reality in just this way. Consider Allegra's following description of *eXistenZ*, not, though, as just a piece of dialogue from a movie about video games, but as an ontological claim: "The beauty [aesthetic] of *eXistenZ* [existence] is that it changes [varies] every time you play [perceive] it. It adapts to the individuals who are actually playing it. The result is that you have to play the game to find out why you're playing the game." Whilst for OOO the aesthetic is the lie to the truth of the object, here, the aesthetic constitutes truth as such where truth is understood as the construction of truth. Like Latour's panorama, objectivity does not disappear in a world of subjective appearances/interpretations, rather it is artificially (virtually) assembled from the partiality of perspective ("you have to play the game to find out why you're playing the game"). This, then, is what we have in common: that the overlapping of our efforts to play (do, make) co-constitutes the world (game, reality); that what ontologically exists is not material insofar as matter is self in-forming (mechanized), nor is it real insofar as the real is non-relational; rather it is realer than real, beyond reality, sur-real in the sense that all the entities that comprise reality, compose reality. This is a form of relationism that is not formally total, for entities are neither disconnected entirely (the claustrophobia of holes) nor connected entirely (the clusterphobia of wholes) but partially con-nected, the stars of one constellation neither implying all constellations nor losing their pointedness in the common shape that they trace.

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Hoarding Orientations: Jane Bennett, Wilfred R. Bion and *Mansfield Park*

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Jane Bennett takes an interest in hoarding in "The Power of the Hoard," because "it is one site where the call of things seems particularly insistent" (267). The recent turn in philosophy towards a speculative realist understanding of material culture has seen a rise in the critical attention paid to the human relationship with the inanimate world. Bennett's work on vibrant matter and assemblages has sought to explore the ways in which things call out to us. I am interested in the way Bennett perceives certain people, like the compulsive hoarder, to be "preternaturally attuned to the call of things" (241). I will argue that although Bennett provides a way of thinking about human-object relations which enables us to go beyond a wholly subject-centric perspective, her views on hoarding as a site in which to access thing-power are problematic when in relation to the pathological hoarder. I will briefly look at psychoanalyst and object-relations theorist Wilfred R. Bion's notions of psychic impoverishment and material substitution to suggest that Bennett's theories apply better to the material practices of the collector, artist or connoisseur. Taking into consideration speculative realist and psychoanalytic understandings of the links between the subject and the object, I will explore the representation of human-object relations in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park.* I will focus primarily on Fanny Price and her attachment to her gifts and possessions, stressing the importance of ownership in these relations. Indeed, Fanny Price is by no means a hoarder or miser, yet the nature of her material attachments might be better elucidated through an understanding of the more extreme forms of compulsive hoarding. Finally I will interrogate the narrator's presentation of these attachments, and think about the way in which the writer, Austen, might tap into the call of things through her own descriptive prose.

Perspectives on Hoarding

The DSM-5 diagnoses compulsive hoarding as a "persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of the value others may attribute to

these possessions" (DSM5.org). With regards to the famous Collyer brother's case of extreme hoarding in 1940s Harlem, Scott Herring argues that the brothers were "unwittingly pivotal in constructing a paradigm shift in hoarding as a curious abnormality—a shift that helped make chronic the gradual psychopathology of gross disorganization" (Herring, Collyer, 162).[1] Indeed, prior to the twentieth century hoarding was defined as simply the "accumulation and hiding of money", with George Eliot's Silas Marner being a literary example of such condition (162). The hoarder of contemporary description appears to be the direct product of our modern society, in which commodities are produced inexpensively and en masse, ready for accumulation and decay. Bennett describes the hoarding condition as the hysterical symptom of a hyper-consumptive society, a manifestation of late capitalism (Bennett 249). Despite the scattered portraits of literary characters that display hoarder-like symptoms in the nineteenth century—Nikolai Gogol's Plyuskin of *Dead Souls* or Dickens's Krook from *Bleak House*—the collector, miser, and fetishist remained the most visible models of material consumption 'types' prior to the twentieth century.

It is important to bear in mind that the hoard is a multifarious thing, and though there may be universal causes and symptoms of hoarding, the hoards themselves are often unique to their hoarders. For example, a hoard might consist of accumulated books and DVD's that threaten to dominate a living space, to the obsessive hoarding of newspapers, or to the more extreme stockpiling of rotting food and decaying objects that cannot be parted with.

Hoarding has frequently been connected to anti-social behaviour, obsessive compulsive disorders and schizophrenia, though recent studies have sought to weaken these links (Steketee 18). The majority of studies into hoarding and unusual material attachments have understood the hoarder to be suffering from a mental illness, often prompted by unresolved bereavement or loss in which an attachment to people is replaced with an attachment to things. Bennett recognises that hoarding is often a coping response to human mortality, nonetheless, she seeks to go beyond the psychopathological framework in which the condition is commonly conceived (Bennett 253). Bennett postulates a clear manifesto in "The Power of the Hoard"—in her analysis of hoarders, she wants to "meet the people, the hoarders, not as bearers of mental illness but as differently-abled bodies that might have special sensory access to the call of things" (244). She usefully situates the hoarder within a continuum of human material attachment levels. The hoarder lies at the extreme end, with the chronically disorganised, packrat, archivist, collector, connoisseur, and owner preceding it. It is important to situate the practices of hoarding as not so far removed from what are considered 'normative' material attachments, as the boundaries between normal and abnormal become blurred when considering the hoarding condition. In our attachment to keepsakes, souvenirs, our mobile phones or favourite shoes, we all share some of the "hoarding orientation" (Steketee 18).

Like Bennett, Gail Steketee and Randy Frost's extensive anthropological studies of hoarders suggests that hoarding "may stem from an extraordinary ability. For hoarders, every object is rich with detail… In this way, the physical world of hoarders is different and much more expansive than

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1   Homer and Langley Collyer were two American brothers who became notorious for their compulsive hoarding, obsessively collecting books and furniture. In March 1947, both were found dead in their home surrounded by over 140 tons of collected items that they had amassed over several decades (Wikipedia).

the rest of us" (15). Bennett also suggests that the hoarder may enjoy an "extreme perception," sharing a kind of aesthetic sensibility that has more in common with the artist than the ordinary person (Bennett 246).

Alluding to Spinoza's concept of 'conatus', the theory of the motion and inertia of objects, Bennett suggests that one of the reasons why hoarders take comfort in inanimate objects is their relative slowness of decay. Taking one hoarder she comes across in A&E's TV series *Hoarders*, she describes her attachment to stones as a kind of "inorganic sympathy," evidence for the "comparative advantage over human flesh when it comes to endurance, patience, waiting it out" (252). This immortal object becomes like a prosthetic arm to the hoarder, not merely a tool but a vital member, forming part of the larger organism of the hoard and hoarder, explaining the difficulty experienced by hoarders to discard their possessions (255). That the hoard becomes a kind of exteriorised organism for the hoarder is important in thinking about space and location and its relation to collecting. Hoarder's houses and rooms are often described as cocoons, contained with objects so that they come to be 'containing', both physically and psychologically, of the human inhabitant. As I will later analyse in relation to Fanny Price, the way in which objects change and characterise the physical space of a room is as significant as the desire to collect in the first place.

I welcome both Bennett and Steketee/Frost's reorientation of compulsive hoarding as a place in which to explore 'thing-power,' and as a condition which should not simply be reduced to a therapeutic reduction of the subject-object relation. Bennett seeks to ignore the pathological dimension of hoarding in order to "put the things in the foreground and the people in the background" (244). Nonetheless, I would like to turn to Bion's *Learning from Experience,* where his notions of material attachment problematize Bennett's assertion that the hoarder and artist share an aesthetic sensibility. I will argue that extreme hoarding is inextricably bound to a pathology that is not attuned to the animacy or vibrancy of the material. I think Bennett's understanding of hoarders is instead more helpful for thinking about the collector or connoisseur whose preoccupation with the material is in a greater degree aesthetic. Though Bennett accedes that the "often wholly non-discriminatory quality of the hoarder's collection jars with the idea of artistry" (261), I think Bion's theories provide a deeper understanding of why the compulsive hoarder is not engaging with material in the same way as the artist or connoisseur.

Bion proposes that attachments that privilege things over humans emanates from traumatic early object-relations (in the psychoanalytic sense) between the infant and the mother. Bion is not specifically writing about the hoarder. Instead, he is describing the origins of excessive material attachment that stems from early infantile anxieties. In their study of a hoarder, 'Irene', Steketee and Frost try to refute Erich Fromm's claims that hoarders prefer the company of objects more than that of people (Steketee 18). They write that "Irene, however, defied this categorization. She had a wide circle of friends… With Irene as a model, the classic definition of hoarding as a socially isolating syndrome appeared to be flawed" (18). Nonetheless, Irene's refusal to cull her hoard resulted in her husband leaving her and social services threatening to take away her children—material attachments which were evidently obliterating and taking precedence over her personal relations. Bion traces the development of an infant's relations to human and nonhuman object in his understanding of

material and personal attachments. He describes how from very early on the baby projects onto its mother all its anxieties and feelings, conveying nonverbally to the mother panic and anxiety. Ideally, the mother then hands back love and a sense of containment to the infant. However, if the mother is absent or emotionally unavailable, the baby rather than feeling the mother's absence, feels a malignant presence that cannot be understood. From this early experience of feeling misunderstood, the mother destroys the infant's sense of self. The infant then turns away from the mother, to inanimate objects (Bion 10). Bion explains how this material dependence arises from a state that "originates in a need to be rid of the emotional complications of awareness of life, and a relationship with live objects…he feels able only to establish the counterpart of a relationship in which such sustenance can be had as inanimate objects can provide" (10-12). This "produces a mental state in which the patient greedily pursues every form of material comfort; he is at once insatiable and implacable in his pursuit of satiation" (10). This accounts for the compulsive and never-ending desire to acquire more and more despite the hoarder's best intentions. The hoarder's impulse to accumulate, which is what characterises the condition, is therefore greatly different from the desire to collect or fetishize an object. The hoarder therefore attaches his or herself to objects for reasons which are far removed from the impulses of Bennett and Steketee's models. We must then question their assertion that hoarders are particularly sensitive to the physical, aesthetic properties of an object, such as noticing the colour and curve of a bottle cap in such a way as a 'normal' person might not notice (Bennett 245). According to Bion, the desire to accumulate derives not from supersensory perception, but psychic deprivation. This might also affect the way in which the person relates to himself and others: "The attempt to evade the experience of contact with live objects by destroying alpha-function leaves the personality unable to have a relationship with any aspect of itself that does not resemble an automaton" (Bion 13).[2] We might see the passive and insentient Lady Bertram as suffering from this predicament.

Taking into consideration Bion's insights, I find Bennett's theories of material attachment in relation to hoarders to be more applicable to that of the collector or artist, rather than the accumulator, where the call of things is clearer and less bound by pathological impulses. In her study, Bennett is looking to access the vibrant materiality of the inanimate world, to try to "enunciate the nonlinguistic expressivity of things" (267). That the world of the hoarder is one site in which such vibrancy and thing-power can be heard particularly strongly, I take contention with. I think it is precisely the pathological elements of the compulsive hoarder that drown out any access to the things themselves or to the ontological status of the object. Bion's notion that the vibrancy or vitality of both animate and inanimate objects are deadened in a particular state of mind suggests that the extreme hoarder who might accumulate trash and detritus, seeks somehow deadened objects, devoid of vitality. Bion writes, "Attacks on alpha-function, stimulated by hate or envy, destroy the possibility of the patient's conscious contact either with himself or another as live objects. Accordingly we hear of inanimate objects, and even of places, when we would normally expect to hear of people…This state contrasts with animism in that live objects are endowed with qualities of death" (9).

In Caitlin DeSilvey's studies into decaying objects she has analysed how the disintegration

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2   For Bion, the term alpha-function here means the perceptual link to the emotional experience of another mind.

of what we call "'human' unravels into what we call 'other'" through its own agentic properties (325). She observes how these "other-than-human agencies participate in telling stories about particular places" that are different to the stories ascribed to them by humans (318). Perhaps approaching such a hoard from a perspective more similar to DeSilvey's would enable us to identify the agentic qualities of the hoarded object in another, more object-oriented sense. The location and situation of the hoarded object would then become a crucial consideration. In Martin Hampton's short film on hoarders, *Possessed* (2008), the final hoarder he follows is living in a slowly mouldering apartment filled with what we would consider to be trash—broken objects, rotting magazines and clothes, all cloaked in dust and dirt. In many ways, his apartment is just one stage from DeSilvey's derelict Montana homestead, but instead, there is a human subject that is also an actant. Such a hoard might lend itself well to DeSilvey's approach.

The problematic entanglement involved in the subject-object relation is a recurring issue both in psychoanalysis and speculative realist philosophy. Though speculative realism has enabled us to see the object's independence from human access, how do we regard the position of the subject to the object in this case? Bennett desires to "meet hoarders not as bearers of mental illness but as differently abled bodies that might have special sensory access to the call of things" (Bennett Lecture). However, I think Bion has complicated this separation, that the thing might be studied entirely separate from the hoarder, when it is in fact the things themselves that are assembled and forced into a space by the compulsive hoarder for reasons that are not primarily sensual or aesthetic but defensive and pathologically self-preservative of ego integrity. In Barbette Barbel Tischleder's studies of objects in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, boundaries between normal and abnormal object relations are explored in a similar way that emphasises the entanglement of both parties. The short story "exemplifies how the intimate relationship of the protagonist to her material environment becomes increasingly obsessive—intimacy becomes an expression of mental disorder rather than refined sensibility" (Tischleder 41). It is with an awareness of both Bion's and Bennett's notions of human-object relations that I would like to approach matters of material attachment in *Mansfield Park*. I think to fully understand the nature of human-thing relations, both the subject and object must be fully considered and given attention. For Fanny, material culture acts as a catalyst for desire, anxiety and personal memory.

Fanny's Objects

Fanny Price is singular amongst Austen's protagonists in the way that objects define and move her. However, she is neither superficial nor covetous in her material relations. Fanny's appreciation of things is not the mark of a social-climber or a woman who desires tasteless luxury, like *Sense and Sensibility*'s Robert Ferras or *Northanger Abbey*'s General Tilney (Haggart). Moreover, Fanny is described as enjoying routine, her lack of spontaneity and constancy the core elements of her character. To Fanny, Edmund remarks: "I told them that you were of all human creatures the one over whom habit had most power and novelty least" (Austen 240). Such characteristics might suggest that Fanny possesses elements of the obsessional and repetitious, common characteristics of the collector.

Edmund observes the strength of her material attachment when discussing Fanny's ties to

Henry Crawford: "before he can get your heart for his own use, he has to unfasten it from all the holds upon things animate and inanimate, which so many years growth have confirmed, and which are considerably tightened for the moment by the very idea of separation" (236) To reiterate, Fanny is by no means a compulsive hoarder. She does, however, have a singular attachment to her collections and gifts, displaying something of an orientation towards material attachment that I have just interrogated through the more extreme example of the hoarder. Steketee and Frost write that the sentiments felt by the hoarder for their possessions "are really not that different from what most of us feel about keepsakes or souvenirs—the abnormality lies not in the nature of the attachments, but in their intensity and extremely broad scope" (Steketee 21). Despite some similarities though, with an understanding of Bion's insights I will show the ways in which Fanny's bonds with the material are markedly different from that of the compulsive hoarder that often seeks deadened objects.

One of Fanny's most significant attachments is to the half-finished note she receives from Edmund. "She seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing to her, as a treasure beyond all her hopes, and reading with the tenderest emotions these words, "My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept"—locked it up with the chain, as the dearest part of the gift" (Austen 182). Fanny imbues the 'scrap' with intense meaning. To Fanny:

> the hand-writing itself, independent of any thing it may convey, is a blessedness…Never were such characters cut by any other human being, as Edmund's commonest hand-writing gave! This specimen, written in haste as it was, had not a fault; and there was a felicity in the flow of the first four words, and in the arrangement of "My very dear Fanny," which she could have looked at forever. (182)

Of this passage, Claudia Johnson writes perceptively of the sharpness in difference between the narrator's low estimation of the scrap of paper as just something left behind by Edmund to which he ascribes no value, and Fanny's intense attachment to it, "locking it away with the hoarder's euphoria of possession and terror of loss" (220). At other points in the novel, letters for Fanny are not valued for what they communicate in their content, but what they represent as the letter in itself. At Portsmouth, for Fanny "a letter from one belonging to the set where her heart lived, written with affection, and some degree of elegance, was thoroughly acceptable" (Austen 267). And when she receives an unsatisfactory letter from Edmund, she laments the arrival of letters as undesired things: "I certainly never will wish for a letter again," was Fanny's secret declaration, as she finished this. "What do they bring but disappointment and sorrow?" (287). Here the symbol and the thing symbolised become one and undifferentiated, but both are alive and infused with human longing and desire. The way in which Austen describes Fanny's close appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of the letter seems to parallel some of Bennett's thinking. Fanny, like Bennett's notion of a hoarder seems "to notice *too* much about their things, are struck *too* hard by them" (Bennett 245). Instead of reading the letter, Fanny "could have looked at [it] forever," the arrangement of the words on the page exerting almost agentic powers in their ability to transfix her (Austen 182).

Fanny's aesthetic sensitivity is also extended to her appreciation of nature in the novel. On various occasions, she is overcome with feeling for the beauty of her natural surroundings. "Here's harmony!" she exclaims, "Here's repose", when looking upon the estate's gardens at night (80). In this

respect, Fanny is shown to stand apart from others like Mary Crawford in her engagement with the natural world. Mary is said to have "none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women" (58). Her appreciation of clothing is also noted. After Fanny's arrival in Portsmouth, where she is upset and disappointed by her family's reception she embraces William, and "anxious not to appear unhappy, she soon recovered herself: and wiping away her tears, was able to notice and admire all the striking parts of his dress—listening with reviving spirits to his cheerful hopes" (261). As I will expand on later, it is important to note that the attention paid by Fanny to the aesthetic qualities of the material world are uncommon in the novel, and yet when they do occur, they are particularly meaningful.

The role of Fanny's gifts in the novel is important in revealing the nature of her attachment to things, in particular, the necklace that the Crawford's bestow upon her. Mary Crawford is once again juxtaposed with Fanny in her lack of care for objects. When offering Fanny a necklace, she tells her: "You see what a collection I have," said she, "more by half than I ever use or think of. I do not offer them as new. I offer nothing but an old necklace" (177). Whereas Fanny, in three consecutive chapters in the novel, agonises over her decision to accept and wear such a gift that might compromise her true feelings. Prior to this, Fanny is also greatly moved by the amber cross that William gives her. The extent to which the cross torments her is described in the following passage:

> the almost solitary ornament in her possession, a very pretty amber cross which William had brought her from Sicily, was the greatest distress of all, for she had nothing but a ribbon to fasten it to; and though she had worn it in that manner once, would it be allowable at such a time, in the midst of all the rich ornaments which she supposed all the other young ladies would appear in? And yet not to wear it! William had wanted to buy her a gold chain too, but the purchase had been beyond his means, and therefore not to wear the cross might be mortifying him. These were anxious considerations; enough to sober her spirits even under the prospect of a ball given principally for her gratification. (174)

The cascading sense of anxiety about the gifted object that this passage conveys is demonstrative of how she feels about most of her possessions in the Mansfield estate. Questions of debt and ownership are hugely important to Fanny when in relation to objects that she is given. Throughout the span of the novel, Fanny is almost wholly dependent upon the Bertram's for her upkeep and livelihood. Both Fanny's spaces, the white attic and the East room, and the things she keeps in them are given to her by other people. It is only with her purchase of the silver knife and book subscription in Portsmouth that she exercises a greater power over her acquisition and choice of possessions. When Mary Crawford gives her necklace to Fanny, she ensures that Fanny is aware of the intentions behind the gift: ""You must think of somebody else too when you wear that necklace," replied Miss Crawford. "You must think of Henry, for it was his choice in the first place. He gave it to me, and with the necklace I make over to you all the duty of remembering the original giver" (177). Fanny takes such associations to heart, and is unable to feel at ease wearing the necklace that has come to bear so much meaning. Similarly, Fanny's table on which she rests various netting-boxes and work-boxes creates anxiety because of their having been given to her by Tom: "she grew bewildered as to the amount of the debt which all these kind remembrances produces" (107). Therefore, the things in Fanny's possession are not just tokens, but active generators of feeling and enforcers of

relations.

In contrast to the compliance demanded of the necklace and boxes, the chain Edmund gives her is ardently approved of because of the person with whom it is associated with: "this is the very thing, precisely what I wished for! this is the only ornament I have ever had a desire to possess. It will exactly suit my cross. They must and shall be worn together" (179). Fanny, desiring to possess Edmund, is equally as happy to possess his things. The importance ascribed to Fanny's need for the ownership of her things is also shown in her delight at becoming an independent owner of books in Portsmouth: "She became a subscriber—amazed at being any thing in *propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chuser of books!" (270). As with any material attachment, a sense of ownership or agency in one's collecting is crucial to the satisfaction gained from such attachments. In Steketee and Frost's studies of Irene, she was acutely aware of others contaminating or interfering with her hoard. "Irene often spoke of having a place that was truly hers and things no one else could touch…She had several such safe havens in her home where no one, including her children was allowed. Her bedroom was one of them. Here she collected her most cherished possessions and kept them solely to herself" (Steketee 26). For Fanny "as her value for the comforts of it increased, she added to her possessions, and spent more of her time there; and having nothing to oppose her, had so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into it, that it was now generally admitted to be hers" (Austen 106). The possessive adjectives that so often recur in relation to the hoarder and their hoard also applies to Fanny—that it becomes her East room and that she can maintain an apartness from the rest of the house is crucial to its significance for Fanny, paralleling some of Irene's sentiments. Issues of ownership are so important to Fanny because of her way of associating people with things. For Fanny, Johnson writes, "things that are not merely *reminders* of friends but *friends* themselves to Fanny." Indeed, the East room provides Fanny with a refuge when things are "unpleasant down below" and "she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it.—Every thing was a friend, or bore her thoughts to a friend" (106). Visits by other members of the Mansfield Estate to the East room are presented as almost uncomfortable intrusions into her space. For example, Sir Thomas's visits are described as anxiety inducing events for Fanny: "she was growing very comfortable, when suddenly the sound of a step in regular approach was heard; a heavy step, an unusual step in that part of the house: it was her uncle's; she knew it as well as his voice; she had trembled at it as often, and began to tremble again…The terror of his former occasional visits to that room seemed all renewed" (211). That Fanny's attachment to things is characterised by her imbuing objects with the meaning of her real life relations is an important part of her bonds with the inanimate. Unlike Bion's model, where the desire to accumulate the material results not from an association with vibrant matter, but an escape from the animate and living, Fanny's material attachments involve precisely a recognition of their animacy and agency. As Johnson writes, "the power things can have is made disturbingly clear in Fanny's case" (223).

The significance of location, space and boundaries are also hugely important to understanding the nature of collecting and accumulation for both Fanny and the hoarder. In Susan Stewart's studies of the collection, she identifies the ways in which the collected item is dependent

upon the box, the cabinet or shelf which houses it. She writes that "for the environment to be an extension of the self, it is necessary not to act upon and transform it, but to declare its essential emptiness by filling it" (Stewart 157). Fanny's "favourite box in the east room which held all her smaller treasures" (Austen 179) and the East room itself provides the boundaries of space that can be filled by things, extensions of the self that can physically occupy a place. When moved to Portsmouth Fanny acutely feels the change in space and physical comforts from her East room and attic back in Mansfield: "In space, light, furniture, and prospect, there was nothing alike in the two apartments; and she often heaved a sigh at the remembrance of all her books and boxes" (270). She is "struck beyond her imagination" in the "confined and scantily-furnished chamber she was to share with Susan" (263). The only way in which to somehow remedy her situation is by filling the room with books, and she becomes a subscriber. Such desire is not simply for the pleasure of reading and knowledge, which she does derive satisfaction from, but also a desire that stems from a more material desire to collect: "the remembrance of the said books grew so potent and stimulative, that Fanny found it impossible not to try for books again" (270).

The material world which Fanny inhabits in Portsmouth is described in striking detail compared to the rest of the novel's much more minimalist style. In the next section I will look at the ways in which Austen's descriptive prose represents the material and the 'call of things.' I will argue that it is in the power of the artist, the writer, to best enunciate the call of things and bring to life the vibrant materialism that Bennett seeks to engage with. The life of the object in literature is able to take on an animacy and agency that cannot be found to the same extent through studies of the hoarder.

Austen's Material Imaginary and the Call of Things

Literature allows us to see the way in which people's lives are moved by the dynamics of objects. Drawing on Bill Brown's work on the object in literature, Babette Barbel Tischleder has devised the useful term *material imaginary* to define the ways in which "literary texts invite us to imagine physical objects in active roles that enable and shape people's actions, social relations, self-fashioning, emotional state, and moral or cultural orientations, as well as the texts' own narrative and aesthetic expressions" (18). Narrative fiction grants us an access to the material world that is made animate through description. I think that Austen's *Mansfield Park* has an awareness of matter as active and possessing a vitality of its own that acquire an animacy from her particular style of describing objects and their role in exposing the internal, emotional life of the character.

Austen is well-known for her minimal descriptions of the material world in which her characters exist. Although I have spent a good part of this essay highlighting the ways in which Austen draws attention to Fanny's material attachments, these moments are uncommon punctuations in the narrative. It is precisely her lack of detail that makes such moments of material clarity so significant. Indeed, critics like George Henry Lewes and the Duke of Wellington criticised her for a lack of attention to visual details in her writing. Nikolaus Pevsner argued that "she is without exception vague, when it comes to describing buildings" (Berglund 130). Johnson proposes that Austen often uses objects to make a moral point: "when objects are made to stand out with specificity in Austen's

novels, something is wrong. In the simplest cases, particular things become prominent because they are noticed by a character who is a snob, a bore, or worse" (222). One example that illustrates this point is the case of the silver knife in Portsmouth and the lack of scruples it exposes in Mrs Price, to Fanny's horror. But more importantly in my eyes, the way in which Austen evokes the material world in Portsmouth demonstrates how she is attuned to the kind of vibrancy of matter that Bennett seeks to engage with. In the squalor and dirt of the Price's kitchen, the material is brought alive:

> She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust; and her eyes could only wander from the walls marked by her father's head, to the table cut and knotched by her brothers, where stood the tea-board never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands that had first produced it. (Austen 298)

The bread and butter here seem to exert their own agentic qualities, and here matter is an active and potent aspect of the material imaginary of the text. Such descriptions suggest that it is the writer, Austen, who displays the aesthetic sensibility that is more attuned to the call of things than the ordinary person. Perhaps this is an obvious observation of the power of the writer to bring the inanimate world alive through language, but I think Austen's *Mansfield Park* demonstrates the author's particular talent at making clear the power of things both to Fanny's emotional state but also in their aesthetic presentation in the prose. Austen does not populate her worlds with an accumulation of objects that deadens their meaning or makes them withdraw into the background, instead, her minimalist approach forces the objects into the foreground of the prose and narrative plot.

In literature, the distances between subject and object, inanimate and animate can be collapsed precisely because of the imaginary nature of the medium. The power of metaphor to intertwine the subject and object is very important, and Bennett recognises this when she says "poetry is a better way of accessing thing power than philosophy," citing a passage in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* of Shem the hoarder's hoard as an example (265). (Shem's excessive accumulation of waste also resembles Bion's model where quantity over quality is sought in their material accumulation as a form of substitution). For Patrick Moran and John Bishop, Joyce's modernist prose evokes a language of "hoarded waste," where form mimics content: "any one section of [the text is] a chaotic trash heap of mnemonic bric-a-brac, scraps, trivia, personal memories, and particles of information" (Moran 295). Whilst Austen's style is further steeped in realism, there are moments, like the kitchen scene at Portsmouth and in showing Fanny's attachment to the scrap of paper that she draws us closer to accessing the agentic properties of the object.

Conclusion

Much can be gained through a study of subject-object relations that takes into consideration both a speculative realist and psychoanalytic approach. Rather that privileging one approach over the other, or rejecting one for the elucidation of the other, I think a greater understanding can be garnered by examining the complex set of object-subject relations that are involved. Both Fanny

Price and Irene the hoarder allow us to better comprehend the nuanced and multiplex forms of material attachment that humans are capable of. Moreover, psychoanalysis and psychological insight enables us to think more about which 'sites' we might look at when intending to access the vibrant world of materialism that Bennett has revealed. For Bennett, her interest in accessing the call of things is primarily for political and environmental reasons: "it is my conviction that to really understand social practices it is necessary to acknowledge the non-human components that are always at work inside them. I am looking for a road that leads toward more sustainable consumption practice" (269). For such an endeavour, I can understand why Bennett seeks certain real life 'sites' of capitalist consumption, like hoarding, to find such paths. Other phenomena that she suggests exploring are the ""fetish" objects of museum curators and art lovers…lucky charms…the web-marketer's sensitivity to the call form the data of web-page hits" (268). I think a study of thing-power in relation to museum culture would prove illuminating and fruitful, more so than the compulsive hoarder for the reasons I have argued in this paper. Nonetheless, I am not engaged with such a political task, and I think that literature provides the most convincing method for engaging with the vibrant materialism that Bennett talks about. Here I am echoing a slew of critics and writers, namely Mary Jacobus, who makes the case for the lyric poem as the most effective medium for accessing the world of objects in her book (63). Yet I think a novel like *Mansfield Park*, thanks to Austen's delicate sensitivity to the power of things and her ability to animate them in a way that is not reductive or anthropomorphic, serves to show how the novelist can not only represent but also produce non-human agency.

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No True Substitute for the Infinite: Indefinite Space and Infinite Time in Alfred Jarry's *The Supermale*

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Alfred Jarry's 1902 novel *The Supermale* [*Le Surmâle*] tells the story of André Marcueil and his various attempts to escape the limitations of his physical body and the subjectivity it imposes on him. Coming into a realization of his selfhood at the time of the fitting for his first suit at age 12, Marcueil spends the rest of his life seeking to overcome its strictures. To this end he attempts at first to exhaust his body and overcome it through physical exertion, only to see it grow stronger and more imposing. Realizing the futility of attempting to wear his body down, he instead seeks to extend its capabilities beyond all limitations, competing in a ten-thousand mile bicycle race against a train and setting the "record" for most consecutive completions of "the act of love" (3). These attempts too, however, fail to free him from his body, resulting finally in his death, and revealing that while his bodily capabilities may be indefinite, they cannot be truly infinite. Even the promise of extending some part of himself, his gamete or spermatozoon, into the future holds no hope, for Marcueil is impotent. It is only through a reconsideration of the events of the novel based on the philosopher Henri Bergson's notions of time that Marcueil's efforts are revealed to be not only futile but also wholly unnecessary. By drawing a clear distinction between the spatial and physical aspect of reality, which is necessarily divisible, definite, and determined -- and which defines Marcueil's subjectivity in such crippling ways -- and the realm of real time, in which the past, present, and future coexist simultaneously in a pure mixture of heterogeneous features that create the possibility for real freedom, Bergson's *durée* provides Marcueil with the opportunity to truly transcend his limited and limiting subjectivity.

André Marcueil is introduced to us as someone who "embodied so absolutely the average man that his very ordinariness became extraordinary," and

yet his body is an endless source of anxiety for him, driving him to attempt to surpass it, and the limitations it places on his notion of his own subject-hood. The second chapter of the book locates the origins of this anxiety in young André's first trip to the tailor, there to receive his adult suit. As was customary at the time (the novel was published in 1902), young boys and girls alike wore dresses, and André "could not quite understand why men—who are little boys over twelve—could no longer have their clothes made by a dressmaker" (21). André is twelve at the outset of the novel, and distinctly naïve on the subject of human bodies. The novel tells us that "Except when he was being born, André Marcueil had at first had no contact with women" being fed with goat's milk rather than breastfeeding, and beyond that, before visiting the tailor "he had never seen his penis" (21). The discovery of his body on the occasion of his first suit fitting, timed to coincide with his first communion, exposes André to the fact that he is a singular individual. In the terms of the novel, he realizes his own subjectivity, and this realization is not met happily.

André's reaction to the exposure of his body and with it his selfhood is to try to overcome his own uniqueness. During the suit-fitting, the tailor summons André's mother and whispers to her that "something, below the belt, was making an unsightly bulge," their whispering causing André to perceive that he has some kind of "deformity" (22). He vows to himself to "correct this deformity," and soon "To be built like everyone else when he was grown up became an obsession with him" (22). In an effort to do this, to overcome his genitals and with them his adulthood, to overcome, essentially, his sudden self-awareness, he sets out to exhaust himself beyond all sexual desire. These efforts, though, only serve to reinforce his uniqueness. In trying to combat his body, André is attempting to deny the fact that he is simply a single human being contained within it, and yet the more he works to battle his body into submission, to destroy it, really, the more it asserts itself. The novel tells us that "For five years he took bromides and various other preparations and tried to exhaust himself by physical exercise, with the sole result of making himself exceedingly strong" (23). So it is that André, throughout his adolescence, struggles with notions of selfhood, clearly locating his subjectivity within his body in general and his genitals in particular, and finding it impossible to overcome.

By the time we meet the adult André Marcueil, so ordinary as to be extraordinary, it would seem that perhaps he has overcome the "deformity" that defined his youth (not just his penis, but his body as a demarcation of singular individuality as well). The reality, though, is that Marcueil has simply devised a new form of combat against the physicality that contains and restrains him. As an adult, André both camouflages his physical uniqueness and seeks to surpass all human limitations with his body. He seems to have decided that if he cannot overcome his subjectivity through the obliteration of the body, he can overcome it by making that subjectivity itself limitless. Outwardly, "no monster of 'human freak' hunted by a Barnum would have shown greater ingenuity in mingling with the crowd than André Marcueil" (24), while in the meantime he demonstrates an insatiable desire to become the supermale of the title.

The first example of Marcueil's superhuman abilities and his attempts to go beyond all human limits comes to the reader in the novel's famed fifth chapter: "The Ten-Thousand-Mile Race" ["La course des dix mille milles"]. The race is a promotional event, set to launch Perpetual Motion Food, an alcohol and strychnine mixture invented by an American named William Elson. To test the

abilities of the product, Elson had arranged a 10,000-mile race between a team of cyclists on a specially designed five-man bicycle and an experimental high-speed train. Ultimately, Elson's team does outrace the train, but they themselves are only the second entity to complete the circuit and finish the race. Secretly, Marcueil has been racing alongside them, pulling away at the end to claim a more meaningful victory for himself.

As Marcueil speeds to the finish line, demonstrating to himself (and not incidentally, to Ellen Elson, William's daughter) that he is capable of overcoming the limitations that pertain to normal men. Even in this moment, though, Marcueil continues to be defined by, and thus limited by, his body. Describing the race, one of Elson's cyclists reports on the figure that he seems completing the race ahead of him and his team: "the swelling of his extensor muscles had torn his shorts over his thighs! […] The muscles of his calves were palpitating like two alabaster hearts" (70). As miraculous as this performance is, for Marcueil it is only a prelude, serving as a seduction of sorts to lure Ellen Elson into helping him accomplish his true goal: proving that intercourse can be performed indefinitely.

With his selfhood centered around his genitals, it is natural that Marcueil would turn to sex in his attempts to negate that selfhood by transcending its limitations. The novel opens with the line that turns out to be the driving idea in Marcueil's life: "The act of love is of no importance, since it can be performed indefinitely" (3). It ends, aptly, with Marcueil's demonstration that he can have sex, at least, seemingly indefinitely. Marcueil claims early in the novel that the record for the most continuously repeated instances of sex belongs to "'That Indian 'so celebrated by Theophrastus, Pliny and Theneaeus' [inner quotation Jarry's] who […] did it in one Day threescore Times and ten, and More'" (15). With this "record" as his goal (and haunted by that final phrase "and More"), Marcueil half-heartedly disguises himself as an American Indian (the Indian so celebrated by Theophrastus was East Indian) and sets about sleeping with Ellen Elson as many times as possible, all while being observed and examined by Marcueil's friend, the physician Dr. Bathybius.

Under Dr. Bathybius's observation, Marcueil and Elson do indeed surpass the record reported by Theophrastus and others, most notably among them Rabelais, the fabulist Jarry often claimed as his favorite writer (Brotchie 10). By the end of their session, Marcueil and Elson have pushed past "what had previously been considered the limits of human forces… /82/ wrote Bathybius" (104). Subsequently, after they are "through with the betting to please…Mr Theophrastus"(111) Ellen engages Marcueil again. "The Indian [Marcueil] experienced ecstasy several times, sometimes passive like a man, sometimes like a woman…" an experience that "to be sure, was what Theophrastus had meant by: 'And more'" (114).

By experiencing ecstasy both like a man and like a woman, Marcueil feels that he has truly superseded "the Indian so celebrated by Theophrastus." The feeling of subjectivity that had originated in the discovery of his own masculine body as he was being fitted for his first adult male suit is somewhat overcome when Marcueil experiences himself as "like a woman." Earlier he had mused with Ellen what Theophrastus had meant with the phrase appended to the Indian's record "and More," asking, "'What does that mean? It's like the fleeting shadow of that race… And more, that's something that is no longer fixed, it recedes beyond the infinite, it's the graspable, a phantom…'"

[italics Jarry's] (99). Shortly after this, however, André Marcueil dies.

Marcueil had observed earlier, looking down on what he believes to be the dead body of Ellen Elson, that his own premises had been flawed. Quoting himself he begins: "'The act of love is of no importance, since it can be performed indefinitely.' /Indefinitely… /Yet there was an end. /An end to the Woman. /And end to Love" (124). Marcueil has sought the infinite, but he has sought it in the indefinite. Just as he had earlier sought to subdue his body through exertion, only to see it grow more and more formidable as he did, his pursuit of the limitations of the body, the Indian's record, and the meaninglessness of anything indefinitely repeatable, also come to naught with the realization that even "endlessly" repeatable acts must end, that the indefinite is no true substitute for the infinite, and that his subjectivity still remains bound up in a physical body that soon, inevitably, will die.

And yet, if Marcueil had arranged for Dr. Bathybius to observe his exploits in the hope of proving that the act of love could be repeated indefinitely, and that this repetition could offer evidence of the possibility of transcending the self, Dr. Bathybius' observations are crucial to understanding the success of the performance. The notes of the Dr.'s observations are presented in Chapter 8, "The Ovum" ["L'ovule"] and described as a "strange, scientifico-lyrico-philosophical elucubration" and titled "GOD IS INFINITELY SMALL" (92-93). In this treatise, Bathybius leaves behind his role as a physician and scientist and begins speculating on the nature of God, Man, and mortality.

Bathybius locates the nexus of these ideas, as he observes, examines, and administers to Marcueil (in the disguise of "the Indian"), in the sex cells, or gametes. Bathybius might as well be speaking directly about Marcueil's quest for transcendence when he writes in his notes, speaking of the God that "man has created," "He is greater than all dimensions, without being beyond dimension; neither immaterial nor infinite. *He is only indefinite*" [emphasis added] (93). Just as Marcueil's quest for transcendence is bound for failure due to its basis in actions that are "only indefinite," Bathybius dismisses this notion of God as well.

Instead, he decides that "We know now that there is another God who did really create man, who resides in the living center of every man, and is man's immortal soul" (93). He locates this God, reiterating once more that it is "infinitely small" in the half-cells of the body, the gametes. "We know that there are two parts in man," he writes, "one apparent and perishable, the sum of the organs we call the body," and noting that this somatic portion of each individual also includes even the "'small vibration' resulting therefrom, which is called thought, or the 'immortal' soul" (94). Having dismissed both the body and the mind (and with them any concept of a soul), Bathybius goes on to explain: "The other, nonperishable and microscopic part, which has been transmitted from generation to generation since the beginning of the world, is the germ" (94). It is within this transmission that Bathybius locates man's immortality. The gamete can and very often does live on beyond the death of the "perishable" portion of the body.

Bathybius, realizing through his observation of Marcueil that the indefinite is insufficient and seeking out the truly infinite instead, moves us one step closer to realizing Marcueil's goal of genuinely transcending the limitations of the self. His solution, the ovum and spermatozoon, the physical portions of the body capable of living on after the rest has died, cannot function as a true

source of transcendence. Indeed, it cannot even function as such for Marcueil himself.

We see this when Dr. Bathybius announces the results of Marcueil's experience to the small crowd of acquaintances that have gathered. A senator present comments that "'Depopulation is now but an empty word'" (109). The crowd then exclaims together "'Our country can count on a hundred more defenders every day'" before Bathybius points out that "'this number can be multiplied to almost any extent by artificial insemination'" (109-110). This promise of immortality as Bathybius has just defined it cannot sate Marcueil's quest to escape his own subjectivity. In response to the clamor surrounding his reproductive abilities, Marcueil, still disguised as the Indian "gestured with a tranquil motion of his head:/ 'No'" (110). Bathybius infinitely small God can succor Marcueil no more than his boyhood exercise regimen or endlessly repeated sex acts. Bathybius' hypothesis that the sex cells are the source of transcendence touches on the truth, but as Marcueil's impotence proves, it is insufficient. They may be indications of the function that truly grants this transcendence in the novel, the presence of the future in each present moment, but they are not its entirety. To find that, we need to turn to the work of Henri Bergson.

Bergson was Jarry's teacher at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris in 1891, just a few years before rising to prominence as one of the most famous and influential philosophers in France. Jarry studies with Bergson for two years and transcribes his lectures almost verbatim. Bergson was one of the few teachers Jarry liked at the school, and while he would mock others in the farces that grew into *Ubu Roi*, of Bergson he said his lectures were "precious above all others" (qtd in Brotchie 29). Alastair Brotchie, in his definitive biography of Jarry, notes that Bergson's influence would persist throughout Jarry's short life. One of the key elements of this influence was to "provide the philosophical underpinning for the young Jarry's initial formulation of Pataphysics," Jarry's personal aesthetic philosophy (29). Key among the philosophical ideas of Bergson that Jarry incorporated into his work, especially evident in *The Supermale*, is his concept of time.

Bergson, like Jarry, was deeply interested in time, and his concept of *durée* is crucial to understanding *The Supermale*. *Durée*, put as simply as possible, is the idea that:

> what I call 'my present' has one foot in my past and another in my future. In my past, first, because 'the moment in which I am speaking is already far from me'; in my future, next, because this moment is impending over the future: it is to the future that I am tending, and could I fix this indivisible present, this infinitesimal element of the curve of time, it is the direction of the future that it would indicate. The psychical state, then, that I call my present,' must be both a perception of the immediate past and a determination of the immediate future. (*Matter and Memory* 127)

Crucially, Bergson finds within this durational present an open field of possibility. *Durée*, he writes "when restored to its original purity, will appear as a wholly qualitative multiplicity, an absolute heterogeneity of elements which pass over into one another" (*Time and Free Will* 229). This has tremendous implications when applied to Marcueil's pursuit of freedom from the subjectivity imposed on him by his body.

While Marcueil's attempts to escape the limitations of subjectivity through exercise and the flaunting of human limitations, even through reproduction, prove futile, Bergson's durée provides the possibility of hope. As Brotchie notes, "For Bergson, freedom could reside only in duration:

free will could exist only if causality and determinism were done away with" (32). This is exactly the thing that Marcueil has been searching for since that day at the tailor when he became so acutely aware that he existed as an individual, bound within his own body and limited by it. His attempts to exhaust his body, to defeat it physically, only served to make it stronger, reinforcing its existence and his confinement within it. Subsequent attempts to overcome his bodily limitations, and with them the limitations of subjectivity itself, took him to superhuman levels of accomplishment, but even these could only ever be "only indefinite," never partaking of the truly infinite because they could never transcend the reality of death. Dr. Bathybius observes that death itself can be overcome, after a fashion, through the progression of the sex cells into the future beyond the death of the body, but even this modulated form of immortality cannot apply to Marcueil, who is impotent. Bergson's philosophy, however, elucidates the flaws in Bathybius' reasoning, and by translating the ideas espoused in "GOD IS INFINITELY SMALL" from the realm of space to the realm of time, offers Marcueil not only the possibility of, but indeed the persistent reality of freedom.

Brotchie notes that Bergson "believed that the confusing of time and space had given rise to most of the problems of philosophy" (31) and this is the issue at play in Bathybius' treatise. Bathybius correctly intuits the presence of the future in the present, but he imagines it spatially, physically, as the existence of the next generation physically present in the gametes of the current one. This cannot overcome the limitations of subjectivity for Marcueil, nor for anyone else, because, being spatial, it is fixed, determined, and divisible. Divisibility itself, for Bergson, is not only a quality of space, it is in fact *only* possible in a spatial realm, while time, real time, is the heterogeneous flux of true freedom (Brotchie 31). Time is necessarily indivisible, stretching back infinitely into to the past and infinitely into the future, far beyond the realms of the merely indefinite.

Understanding *The Supermale* in this way reveals the tragedy of André Marcueil, bound up in his own physicality and incapable of seeing any real way of escaping. Conceiving of reality in spatial terms traps him in a fixed and restrictive subjectivity. All attempts at overcoming the oppressiveness he finds there are doomed to failure because he pursues them through the same spatial framework which simply cannot create room for either infinity or for freedom. Jarry locates this tragedy in the failure of his characters to realize the possibilities inherent in real time, with its unpredictable, unfixed, and authentically limitless nature. This limitlessness defines the heart of Jarry's aesthetic philosophy, which he called "pataphysics" and which revels in exactly the freedoms that Bergson finds in his *durée* and provides *The Supermale* with the kind of freedom that the Supermale, André Marcueil, could never find for himself.

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Objects in Drag:
The Mannequin's Queer Objecthood

Katie N. Connell

"As a young person, I suffered for a long time, and I suspect many people have, from being told, explicitly or implicitly, that what I 'am' is a copy, an imitation, a derivative example, a shadow of the real."

Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination"

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My friend has a comedic bit that she performs whenever passing by a group of mannequins in a storefront window. She has become quite good at briefly glancing at the figurines and suddenly striking the exact same pose as one of them. The precision of her mimesis and the stillness in which she is able to render her body is both parts impressive and eerie. In these instances I am first forced to consider the question: who is mimicking whom? Mannequins resemble us: they wear our clothes, mock our movements and present us with confusingly familiar bodies. On a dark night, the rigidity and the plasticity which 'fixes' them might be the only characteristic that prevents me from believing that that they *are* in fact human. But they are not, of course. Mannequins are objects. This overly simple distinction between the human and the mannequin, however, strikes me as deprecating in the wake of recent writings in object theory which attempt to liberate 'things' from humanist traditions in philosophy that have demoted objects to a form of being subordinate to humans. But objects do have *ways of being* independent of human use and understanding.

The shutting out of objects from discourse resonates strongly with the elimination and exclusion of the queer subject that Judith Butler has prominently written about. Within Western philosophy the queer subject has not been considered as autonomous or "real" (Butler 312), a systematic inconsideration that has produced limiting and normative branches of ontological study. Lost and alone in the sinister space outside of the 'heterosexual matrix,' the queer subject looks in all directions to see themselves surrounded by objects, the other refused and ignored mode of being. Both queer theory and object-oriented ontology (OOO) present relatively new reconsiderations of 'the subject' and its precarious position in critical discourse. Given this link, it is necessary to look for points of intersection

between the two. Few scholars are specifically employing object-oriented methodologies to explore queerness. Michael O'Rourke's pioneering contributions to this subject are worth noting, particularly his 2011 article in *Speculations* entitled "'Girls Welcome!!!' Speculative Realism, Object Oriented Ontology and Queer Theory." What O'Rourke does in this piece is demonstrate how OOO and queer theory can co-exist harmoniously. O'Rourke acknowledges the white, male dominance of the OOO discipline and calls for queer interventions. As a queer scholar who is interested in OOO, I don't think the two have to be at odds with one another. In fact, I see Graham Harman's 'third table' as speaking articulately to an ontological system complex enough to encompass queerness. This paper argues that objects are radically queer and hopes to promote OOO as a queer system of thought. I will use the case study of the mannequin to talk about being queer from an object-oriented perspective. The mannequin presents us with an example in which an object performs humanness. Queerness will be discussed as a blurring of categories through an engagement with Judith Butler's "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." Butler is interested in dissolving binary gender categories which produce the dominance of 'heterosexuality.' Objects such as the mannequin queer and reverse the human supremacy over objects which Ian Bogost problematizes in his book *Alien Phenomenology or What It's Like to Be A Thing*. Per Michael O'Rourke's recommendation ("Queering Speculative Realism"), Hélène Cixous' "Fiction and its Phantoms" will provide a feminist reimagining of Freud's theory of the uncanny to frame the mannequin's performance. The mannequin is an object in human drag, a performance which destabilizes traditional methods of interpreting 'things.'

Judith Butler and Ian Bogost are both interested in rethinking questions of hegemony. Objects, we understand, have experienced an "exclusion from ontology" similar to that of the queer subject who is invisible in the traditions of Western philosophy; and "is not even produced within this discourse as a prohibited object" (Butler 312). Here, Butler's word choice of 'object' to talk about a queer mode of existence is particularly exciting for the subject of this paper. This inadequacy of discourse to discuss objects, as they also lie outside of it, is similarly brought up by Graham Harman in "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism." Butler wants to take an ontological approach to gender, arguing that "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes...the normalizing categories of oppressive structures" (308). Bogost sees *things* as also oppressed within the practises of anthropocentric philosophy, particularly "the tradition of human access that seeps from the rot of Kant" and has led to the prickly problem of correlationism (4). Correlationism, a term coined by Quentin Meillasoux and revised by Harman, is a way of thinking in which Kant's relation between thought and world is privileged (Harman185). The result of correlationism, concisely articulated by Bogost, is that "being exists only as a correlate between mind and world. If things exist, they do so only *for us*" (4). Much as Harman problematizes anthropocentric philosophy, Judith Butler rejects heteronormativity as the ontological measuring stick. Butler's mandate of 'undoing gender' is actually quite similar to Levi Bryant's flat ontology in that both methods seek to destabilize the assumption that objects and gender are secondary to the authority of a human original.

In queer theory as well as OOO, the singularity proposed by the signifier/signified

relationship must be opened up to "embrace the multifarious complexity of being among all things" (Bogost 5). Butler argues that being queer is not derivative of a heterosexual original, while Bogost argues that objects are not derivative of humans. In Butler's philosophy "compulsive heterosexuality," like anthropocentrism, "sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real" (312). Butler proposes that the divisions between gender and sex are socially constructed and we can understand the divide between object and human body or sentient and insentient being in the same way. To Butler, gender is a performance, a "kind of imitation for which there is no original, in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (313). Butler gives the example of drag queens and kings, performances which challenge the assumption of heterosexuality as original by queering identity categories. We might understand the approach of the "flat ontology" advocated by Bogost as a similar method of collapsing categories. Flat ontologies, a concept that OOO scholar Levi Bryant draws from Manuel De Landa, "grant all objects the same ontological status...the term *object* enjoys a wide berth: corporeal and incorporeal entities count, whether they be material objects, abstractions, objects of intention, or anything else whatsoever" (qtd. in Bogost 12). This flat ontology echoes strongly with Butler's ideas of gender performance which entails "the denial of the *priority* of the subject" (313).

The problem therein, exists in this idea of 'derivativeness' which I will soon connect to the mannequin. For now, we must consider the object as two things: first, the object is queer insofar as it can act from its position outside of discourse to challenge binary constructs. In Butler's line of thinking the queer subject's "exclusion from ontology [can] become a rallying point for [its] resistance" (312). This is a resistance founded from a position of exclusion that OOO mobilizes for objects. Harman describes object-oriented philosophy as "a *weird* realism in which real individual objects resist all forms of causal or cognitive mastery" (Harman188). Second, by using OOO to reposition objects within critical theory, we can apply Butler's strategies of performing gender to the object. Butler writes that "drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are theatricalized worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation" (313). The mannequin is a rare instance in which an object is in human drag; a drag moreover that undermines the idea that "our [human] existence is special as existence" (Bogost 8) and upsets the oppressive divisions between 'animate' and 'inanimate' that are forged by anthropocentrism.

Through the lens of OOOs we must understand the mannequin to have a life in and of itself, separate from our identification of it as a replica of humanness, an inferior image of the real thing. Instead, as I've previously introduced, the mannequin, as an object, *performs humanness*. This performance exposes the qualities, appearances and behaviours generally associated with humanness to be simulated or similarly performed rather than something essential to being. Nicole Parrot's *Mannequins* is, to date, the most extensive cultural and material history of the mannequin. Parrot begins her history by advising that the mannequin must "be read resisting any temptation to anthropomorphic misinterpretation" (28). It is a critical point, as with OOO, the mannequin exists on many planes outside of human use and understanding. Still, part of the mannequin's uniqueness as an object is obviously the resemblance it bears to the human body. One of the historical functions of

the mannequin has been to display clothing. Parrot writes that "a dress cut to cling to every curve of the body, falls at its best on the mannequin" (16). More bluntly, not only do mannequins wear human clothing but they wear our clothing better than we do. We might link this to Butler's ideas regarding drag which is so convincing in its "imitative parody of 'heterosexuality'" that it upsets the idea of a 'heterosexual original' (313). Butler writes that drag queens enact "the parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames... [bringing] into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original" (314). In the mannequin's parody of humanness, it makes fully present the illusory claim to originality that humans embody through anthropocentric traditions. OOO recognizes the queer voice of the mannequin, suggesting that things, like the queer subject, exist in multiplicity, in many different contexts at once. Kenneth Gross elaborates upon this in his book *The Dream of the Moving Statue*. Gross claims that the binary distinction between the inanimate and the animate is a cultural fiction much like heterosexuality. As an exercise, Gross argues that the statue is not stationary but in motion, a longstanding mythological imagining but one with interesting theoretical implications. Gross suggests that in the form of the statue "images of animation and petrification circulate around each other... they collide and parody each other" (9). The rethinking of the statue as actually in motion "seems in general to convey the idea of a made, constructed image becoming autonomous but also alien" (9). This idea of the 'autonomy' of an object that is necessarily 'alien' from human understanding rings pleasantly with Ian Bogost's presentation of an 'alien phenomenology.' We can draw significant parallels with queer alienation as well. Here I might clarify the purpose for this paper. I do not want to render the mannequin as a legitimately animate object, which is Gross' project with the statue. Instead, in the traditions of Bogost and Butler, I would like to do away with the binary distinctions between 'animate' and 'inanimate' or 'valid' and 'invalid' which, as we delve further into the world of the mannequin, we will see that its performance effectively queers and destabilizes.

If we are to engage with gender theory we cannot skirt around the topic of the mannequin's genitals, which appear similar to the human genitals but are also decidedly not. Parrot refers to the genitals of the mannequin as "mounds" (21). I like this term, as it is synonymously linked with the word 'assemblage' which in its many Deleuzian-Guattarian connotations promises a more rhizomatic model for both objects and gender. Parrot writes that, for the mannequin, "the function of clothing stretches upwards from the pubis. The mannequin with its eroded mound or member is ironical; it defies the body for which it is a substitute. Dolls, androids and statues are imitations; a mannequin is a fake" (21). I would like to take up Parrot's distinction between "substitute" and "fake." The idea of the 'substitute' implies that the only purpose of the mannequin is to stand in for humans. Though I am acknowledging that part of the mannequin's queer performance is to imitate human bodies, this characterization of a "fake" aligns the mannequin with Butler's discussion of lesbian experience as a "shadow of the real" (312).

Parrot writes of Pierre Imans significance in the 1920's as arguably the most prominent manufacturer of mannequins. Imans developed a particularly popular model to display dance costumes called 'The Splits' which looks exactly as the name suggests but between the horizontally spread legs there exists a flat stretch of plastic rather than female genitals (Parrot 22). Parrot explains

that Imans' model was interchangeable and "could be adjusted to fit onto a torso," perhaps ones already owned by the shopkeeper (22). Mannequins are realistic material "substitutes" for humans except for one important thing: "without their clothes they would be akin to the plaster statues in the artist's studio, if they did not suddenly reveal the inhuman condition of the mannequin, whether it is truncated or not: its sexual organs" (Parrot 20). The flat, plastic expanse that occupies the space in between a mannequins' legs exists as a visual allegory for the "flat ontology" implying that the sexuality of the mannequin can exist on many planes simultaneously. The mannequin appears gendered, but its sex is ambiguous, existing outside of human categories of sex: it is queer sex of objects.

Further to the mannequin's biological strangeness is its ability to act as a woman's impassive double. Moreover, the mannequin *appears* to be exactly representative of the female body but since it is a material object, will perpetually frustrate this comparison, similar the drag queen or king's execution of masculinity or femininity. Parrot comments on the mannequin's historical performance of womanhood:

> In the fifties, the mannequin idealized plump women with generous curves, excluding those who, fifteen years later, by the sheer accident of their morphology, would probably be wearing Twiggy's miniskirts...At every period in history, women of all ages have searched the mannequin's body in vain for the stigma of the thousand flaws and scars etched on their own bodies by heredity and time. Not only does a mannequin not wear panties; she also has no varicose veins. (21)

Here, the drag of the mannequin is made apparent. It is a powerful drag, enacted by an object, that muddles the 'correlationism' between gender and biology. Queerly straddling the existence of the human and the existence of the material, the mannequin's drag is able to depict cultural norms of womanhood to be fake and the idea of an 'original' woman to be inherently plastic. If sex is revealed to be fake or manufactured, then there exists the implicit suggestion that it can be manufactured differently. In its materiality, the mannequin renders singular, essential visions of womanhood as natural to be unattainable, a similar accomplishment to that of the drag queen. Parrot returns to the example of Pierre Imans in 1922 whose "workshops perfected a substance that was resistant, lighter and more supple than wax, and that was a perfect imitation of the texture of the skin" (67). The mannequin's drag of the human body is so convincing, that it acts out the "discontinuity between sex, gender and desire" (Butler 317). This zone of 'discontinuity,' deserves our attention as it can be directly related to Harman's advocacy for a turn from "a constantly relational ontology [that] would only lead to a perpetual ratification of the status quo" (Harman 194). This status quo, for Butler, is heteronormativity and for Harman, is anthropocentrism. Objects in drag disrupt both; interjecting dissonant notes into the "human-world duet" (Harman 193). Interestingly enough, however, is that those who search mannequins for biological markers of time are effectively considering the mannequin on the same plane as themselves, leading us gracefully to Levi Bryant's flat ontology via Judith Butler. 'Object' and 'human' are revealed to be as categorically arbitrary as 'woman' and 'man'. Parrot beautifully explicates that in the mannequin "we have an object that surpasses its status and its meaning, and is the dangerous rival of its ancestors to the point of sublimating them, as if the body needed the mannequin to accede to the full flowering of its powers of evocation and force of persuasion" (22). The idea that the humans require objects to authenticate themselves is a radical

reversal that moves towards the idea of the OOO. Parrot provides a useful story told to her by a friend about "an old law banning shopkeepers from exhibiting nude mannequins. By chance, in an old district he had come across three mannequins wrapped up in newspaper and was told about the law by the owner of the shop" (32). What can we say about this impulse to care about an object so strongly that we must legislate it as if it is a human being lounging naked in the street? The exposed "mound" is so unsettling that it calls into question not only the conditions in which we consider ourselves sexed beings but the conditions with which we consider ourselves human at all.

For Parrot, the mannequin is a part of a performance which occurs in storefront windows that conflates the theatre and the city populated by human shoppers. In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard has also noted comparison between the "magical...yet frustrating" nature of the store window and the "theatre of objects" it contains (42). What Baudrillard fails to note about the theatre of objects is what productions exactly are being staged. Certainly Baudrillard is onto something, but we might interpret his theatrical analogy as a drag show of objects for which shoppers are the mesmerized audience. According to Gross, the mannequin "present[s] a body or a pose arrested in time, arresting time itself" (15). This power to "arrest time itself" is not dissimilar to the experience of watching actors in a theatrical production and Gross does compare the statue to a "tableau *vivant*" (15). The link between the "theatre of objects" and Butler's writing on drag is a powerful one. Drag has a power to reverse the conventions of homosexuality as copy of heterosexuality, to open up a possibility for "homosexuality [as] origin, and heterosexuality the copy" (313). In the mannequin's power to freeze time, to present the terms of being human within the context of the immobile object begs the question: could the object be origin and human be the copy, the drag? Just as Butler's queer performance disturbs the authority of the "heterosexual matrix," the mannequin's performance disturbs the 'anthropocentric matrix' (310). We should relate the anxiety and discomfort created by the human-object performance of the mannequin to the experience of the uncanny. In "Fiction and Its Phantoms," Hélène Cixous enacts a feminist re-reading of Freud's essay on the uncanny. Michael O'Rourke has found this particular paper useful to bridge the connection between objects and queerness ("Queering Speculative Realism"). Freud's uncanny, or "unheimliche, the Disquieting Strangeness" is contingent on a kind of encounter with one's "double" or "hesitating shadow" (Cixous 525). Surely, the uncanny is an experience produced in heterosexual subjects who watch drag queens emulate and parody their behaviour. I am tying the effect of the mannequin's uncanny presentation to Butler's definition of queer performance or drag as possessing the empowering quality of being both "disquieting" and "strange" (Cixous 525). The mannequin's appearance as object and human is fundamentally uncanny, a brushing up of real life with the fantastic: a queer experience which is also an objective of OOO. Bogost writes that the OOO approach confronts "the weird, murky mists of the really real" an excellent phrasing which characterizes reality as queer (8). The mannequin as an object stands directly opposed to kindred beings but in its realism also emulates them very effectively. Though this may seem like a contradiction, it is not, as within both queer theory or OOO, "things can *be* many and various, specific and concrete, while their *being* remains identical" (Bogost 12). Bogost is, of course, referring to the flat ontology, an appropriately queer solution which allows for a radical equality amongst all objects while simultaneously acknowledging

their unique and individual autonomies. Bryant explains the flat ontology as "first and foremost the refusal to treat one strata of reality as the really real over and against all over" (*Larval Subjects*). The prioritizing of normative sex and gender categories emerges as a link here. In Bryant's work, flat ontologies refuse to dissolve or reduce objects, and this includes sex and gender, opening up for infinite possibilities for both.

Butler can be read as considering gender and sex on the flat ontology, opening up these categories to a multiplicity of being that is also autonomous. Of the mannequin's appearance as both human and object, Parrot writes, "such a contradictory contrivance was able to create an illusion. And it is perpetuated daily by the magic of the shop window that separates millions of eyes from a handful of symbols which, exceptionally, have a human gaze" (31). I will return to the human gaze of the mannequin later on, but what is important here is the illusion created by the mannequin, its uncanny performance that is facilitated by the storefront window. Instead of 'illusion,' I suggest a better term to describe the performance of the mannequin is 'allusion,' as it incorporates a key part of Harman's object-oriented philosophy. In Harman's understanding, "the objects of object-oriented philosophy are mortal, ever changing, built from swarms of subcomponents, and accessible only through oblique allusion" (Harman 188). As with objects, the power of drag comes from its "allure" its parody of a kind of knowable, certain sexuality. Like Harman's discussion of Heidegger's broken hammer which reveals the "inscrutable reality of hammer-being lying behind the accessible theoretical, practical, or perceptual qualities of the hammer," drag 'breaks' gender illuminating it as similarly inaccessible (Harman 187). Harman's "allure" is wonderfully queer. The uncanny in fiction can easily relate to the uncanny production staged by mannequins in the shop window, Cixous writes:

> What unfolds without fail before the reader's eyes is a kind of puppet theatre in which real dolls or fake dolls, real and simulated life, are manipulated by a sovereign but capricious stage-setter. The net is tightly stretched, bowed, and tangled; the scenes are centred and dispersed; narratives are begun and left in suspension. (525)

This "net" is a similar image to Butler's "heterosexual matrix" which according to Cixous the mannequin is able to "tangle" or queer. The mannequin successfully queers conventional ways of considering the object. Through its muddling of binaries, the mannequin suggests that we might consider gender and sexuality in a flat ontology as well. Let me expand upon this. Bogost notes that "objects recede interminably into themselves...human perception becomes just one among many ways that objects relate" (9). The statue, or in our case mannequin, similarly "tend[s] to retreat into stone" having more to its existence than its mimesis of human life (Gross 134). OOO and queer theory, like the uncanny, are directed by ambivalence, a queer premise which eschews the divisive authority of categories. The queer subject is queer because they occupy on multiple planes of being simultaneously, much like the object in OOO. We should once again consider Harman's descriptions of objects in *The Third Table*. Objects are constantly emerging and withdrawing from us, and though we are "hunters of objects," they can "never be caught" (*The Third Table* 10). Phrases like these describe a queer way of existing in world that Harman's philosophy empowers, allowing uncertainty and multiplicity to rule over the ontological comfort of binaries whether they apply to anthropocentrism or to gender. The mannequin, like the uncanny text, "is approached by the reader with a sense of

distrust and fascination" and "always emerges as a step ahead" (Cixous 526). To think of this object as ahead is an object-oriented driven acknowledgement that reverses the human supremacy over things. With recent developments in storefront mannequin design such as Almax's EyeSee and United Arrows MarionetteBot, mannequins are cognitively a step ahead as well. The EyeSee is fitted with cameras "in one eye [which] feeds data into demographic-profiling software to determine the age, gender, and race of passersbys" (Roberts). Similarly the MarionetteBot, is kinetically designed to "enable it to move in tandem with the motions of the person standing right in front of it" (Tapia). In these modern, computerized instances that Bogost would no doubt find interesting, the mannequin reveals more layers of existence to its objecthood. Furthermore, its active emulation of human behaviour amplifies the uncanniness of its performance as object and the uncertainty with which humans understand our bodies.

Part of the mannequins particular ability to provoke an experience of the uncanny is its associations with the corpse. Parrot comments that the mannequin elicits "profound uneasiness" and thus "the works —books, paintings, films — it has inspired also had no other choice," but to pick up on this characteristic of discomfort. I have already covered that this "uneasiness" is an effect of the mannequins' human drag (24). The performance enacted by the mannequin, however, necessitates reading this performance as not only of a living human but a cadaver as well. Parrot characterizes the process of designing the mannequin as "morbid care, which right from the first sketch attempts to go beyond the functional, that makes the creation of the mannequin the act that determines its presence" (27). The mannequin's embodiment of death is only *part* of its multifaceted existence but we might mobilize these connotations towards our reading of its queer objecthood. According to Kenneth Gross, the mannequin and, in fact, "all statues take on the look of a *boîte noire*, a black box concealing not a soul, not a god or a demon, but a corpse" (21). Gross' depiction of the statue as corpse is, however, a depiction of a fundamentally queer icon or a metamorphosis of the human body into the realm of the object. Gross' depiction of the mannequin as a *boîte noire* is of something that embodies a "our being's entanglement with alien, apparently inhuman processes or substances, our bondage to a lifelessness" (21). The image of the corpse as "the dead body...[is] the form in which we first confront our troubled awareness of things outside us" a concept which gets us closer to considering ourselves within a flat ontology (21). Death is, of course, a major part of human existence known only to us via "allusion" (Harman, "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer" 188). The mannequin, in its associations with the corpse, forces us to confront our relationship to the world as transient and thus consider other relationships from which we are absent such as those between the world and things, or things and things. Objects, Bogost understands, have been discursively ostracized as well. Gross characterizes that statue's presence is created by "see[ing] in the statue...a once-living thing whose life has been interrupted" (Gross 15). Gross' idea of the statue as an interrupted life, but also having the uncanny power to exist as an interruption, echoes Butler's claim that the queer subject is understood as "disruption, error, confusion" and in this position can gather "the rallying points for a certain resistance to classification and to identity as such" (Butler 310). We might then see the mannequin's stillness as a accrual of energy towards this resistance, rather than a necessary death. Gross expands upon this defence of the statue in writing:

> The dead body, the realm of the inanimate, is thus not simply concealed but reappropriated, even repatriated in the statue. If that statue is a corpse, it is also a corpus of knowledge; the idol gives birth to our ideas, our words, our very breath, even as it reminds us of their catastrophic origin. (22)

This is another instance in which the object performing as human calls into question the anthropocentric nature of origins. The mannequin, like the statue, is "the corpse come back to life; but is also the living body clothed, painted, bejewelled, masked, caught in an attitude, whether by design or surprise; it is the living body absorbing bits of inanimate matter in the form of artificial limbs, metallic pins, or false teeth" (Gross 23). This fear of 'the other,' that is so often produced by the mannequin is congruent with the fear of the queer subject. Although the mannequin is 'lifeless,' the fear issuing from its convincing 'lifelike performance' is that it will somehow mobilize and "undo the living...destroy their rituals" (116). Does this not echo with the systematic fear of the queer subject, that they threateningly encroach on the comfort of heterosexuality? The mannequin's embodiment of death is part of its queer performance, which closes "the gap between the human world of the sign and the world of inanimate objects...it brings the dead signifier to life" (127).

　　　　Finally, I would like to move from the realm of the theoretical into an aspect of the mannequins' cultural history that promotes female essentialism. Parrot explicates that the mannequin has in all historical moments been created to make visible a collective fantasy of the image of woman. The 'theatre' of the storefront window, has facilitated a gaze on a female body that is immediately objectified because, well, she is an object. O'Rourke has begun to gather research on OOF or 'object-oriented feminism' ("'Girls Welcome'" 298) but this field requires much more material. In *Mannequins*, Parrot writes that, "we project on any body, whether alive or inanimate, the panoply of our fantasies...despite the biological chasm between a living being and the inert matter of which a doll is made, the difference is, in fact, merely anecdotal" (27). Parrot's book also reveals that almost all mannequin manufacturers have been male. This means that mannequins, in their existence as objects, have been bound to exist not only for just humans, but specifically for human men. What might we say to this objectification of objects? Though OOO converges with queer theory quite happily, we might stress the need here for a feminist OOO that pays special attention to deconstructing not only anthropocentrism but masculinist anthropocentrism. Parrot gives the interesting case study of mannequins in America following the Second World War:

> Their hair, conveniently moulded in plaster, was piled high as if to compensate for the difficult times...Almost all the models of the period were blond. It is difficult to know whether this was a nostalgia for pre-war American blondes or an ambiguous attraction for Aryan beauty. Or perhaps it was the need to escape to a more luminous world, the world of 'The Eternal Homecoming' and its heroes, Madeleine Sologne and Jean Marais. (159)

This is just one instance of many in which the mannequin has been designed to reiterate a singular cultural idea about the 'essence' of womanhood and femininity. This presents us with a problem, as the queer subject or object refuses any singular essence. To counter the constraints under which the female mannequins' body has been designed, she has a human gaze and a unique ability to

look back that is especially empowered in an example such as the EyeSee or the MarionetteBot. The mannequin is objectified as *human* but escapes this objectification as she gains her power from her objecthood, in the planes that she exists elsewhere that cannot be penetrated by humans. As an object the mannequin is queer and this perceived essentialism becomes another kind of drag, a joke for those who cannot understand she will not accept her 'derivative' position; parodying humans rather than aspiring to be like them.

Bogost describes his object-filled life in New Mexico as a "Žižekian daydream," and I would like to conclude this paper by proposing one of my own. Mannequins are made of plastic, a substance that will outlive human beings for many, many eons. Objects, in this case, conquer and transcend all human social constructs, including time. What a queer image: all the plastic mannequins in the world, roaming its surface without us. Performing our distant memory but also having relationships of interaction that supersede human existence. I have introduced at least speculatively, an example in which we can strive to connect two queer systems of thought. The mannequin has been historically considered within the realm of the "grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable" (Butler 312). I have begun to consider the mannequin within the approach of object oriented ontologies which seek to get outside the singular and "nameable" (312) and into the unchartered plurality of being queer. We should recognize its human appearance as only something that a mannequin performs. What is of interest for further study is to find other objects with a presence that challenges the supremacy that humans exert over objects. With these cases, we can substantiate the OOO and assist its relatability by linking it to other radical systems of thought,while still advocating for autonomy of the object.

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Ecology and the Humanities: Two Crises with One Cause

Seth Auster-Rosen

The ecological catastrophe that is already upon us is linked inextricably with the mounting crisis in the humanities. One disenchanted anthropocentric view of reality fuels them both.[1] In this way they are both involved in what Actor-Network theorist Bruno Latour would call a "network" of "actants," what Object-Oriented Ontologist Timothy Morton would call a "meshwork" of "hyperobjects," and what New Story cosmologists Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker might call a "phase" in the "universe story." The latter's book, *Journey of the Universe*, is an attempt to spin modern scientific discoveries into a "New Story" (Thomas Berry's term, see below), digestible across cultures and religions to help "address the daunting ecological and social issues of our time" (Swimme and Tucker, dust jacket). In this paper I will look at *Journey* alongside recent ontological projects aimed at revitalizing (or re-enchanting) the humanities and beyond. At the end, speaking from my perspective within the humanities subfield of Buddhist Studies, I offer a suggestion for addressing the crisis in the humanities that would help equip us to deal comprehensively with the global ecological one.

Our collective, worldwide ecological crisis is giving the lie to transcendental dualities and to an 'intelligently designed' Creationist universe. The problem with the transcendental-subjective sphere now becoming obvious is that, as Morton can ironically quip, "Synthetic judgments *a priori are made inside an object*, not in some transcendental sphere of pure freedom" (17, emphasis added). Perhaps even more importantly, the vital materialist Jane Bennett, speaking from within the discipline of political science, can highlight a related immanence-rooted flaw in Kant's ethics "by pointing out that the Kantian imperative to treat

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1   Of her book *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, Jane Bennett writes, "The idea was that moments of sensuous enchantment with the every day world—with nature but also with commodities and other cultural products—might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviors." (Bennett xii)

humanity always as an end-in-itself and never merely as a means does not have a stellar record of success in preventing human suffering or promoting human well-being." As a prescription she adds, "it is important to raise the question of its actual, historical efficacy in order to open up space for forms of ethical practice that do not rely upon the image of an intrinsically hierarchical order of things" (12). Ethics do not come down from some transcendental 'beyond;' they emerge by negotiating real-life relations. And a human-dominated world without a strong, inter-personally emergent ethics is a world headed for certain destruction.

Bennett ultimately calls for what Manuel De Landa has termed a "flat ontology," in which objects are approached without assuming the radical priority that Modern thinkers like Kant gave to humans.[2] Levi Bryant has gone so far as to call it a "democracy of objects," a phrase which resonates with the Passionist theologian Thomas Berry's cosmological "New Story" statement that, "The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects."[3] The opposite, a hierarchical ontology that one founder of the Speculative Realist ontological movement terms "correlationism," begins with "disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (Meillassoux 5). In other words, the correlationist subjectivity necessarily precedes objecthood, giving unchecked ontological priority to subjects (i.e., humans). But this problem has until recently gone unnoticed because "correlationism is not so much explicitly argued for as it is always already preassumed by both sides in any post-Kantian philosophical debate" (Shaviro 6-7). It has been too much a cornerstone of the modern Enlightenment project to be challenged—until now, when it is becoming obvious that that project as such is failing us. A flat ontology, on the other hand, is characterized by what Bruno Latour calls "irreduction," which claims, "nothing is, by itself, reducible or irreducible to anything else" (Latour 1988, 158). According to these new ontologists, to reduce the vitality of material objects to the presence of (human) subjects is to commit the great anthropocentric fallacy of the modern period.

Swimme and Tucker begin their New Story at the macro-scale: "We know that the observable universe emerged 13.7 billion years ago, and we now live on a planet orbiting our Sun, one of the trillions of stars in one of the billions of galaxies in an unfolding universe that is profoundly creative and interconnected" (2).[4] To use the adjective "creative" to describe this unfolding process might strike the reader as anthropocentric, or Creationist at worst. We generally associate creativity with some form of intelligence, be it human or supernatural, and so it could be conceived that here

2   "…while an ontology based on relations between general types and particular instances is hierarchical, each level representing a different ontological category (organism, species, genera), an approach in terms of interacting parts and emergent wholes leads to a flat ontology, one made exclusively of unique, singular individuals, differing in spatio-temporal scale but not in ontological status." (Manuel De Landa, Intensive Science & Virtual Philosophy, 47; quoted in http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/flat-ontology-2/)

3   This is a motif that recurs throughout Berry's ouvre in various forms. See for instance Simme and Berry, 1992; Berry 1999; http://www.thomasberry.org

4   Tucker has acknowledged that since the publishing of the book scientific estimates have changed the universe's age to 13.8 billions years old. (Tucker, personal communication) Rather than being problematic for the book, such an acknowledgement serves as an epistemological support: this is a cosmological storytelling process that allows for deep changes so long as those changes are dictated by actual observation. Any cosmos story that would demand stagnated details would do no justice to the process of garnering those details, much less to the unfolding process of the universe it describes.

the authors are imputing some form of divine intelligence onto the physical universe. But it would seem that in fact their project is far subtler than this, and that in a certain sense they are doing the opposite. Indeed, Bennett asserts that, "Maybe it is worth running the risk of anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divination of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism" (120). Rather than grafting anthropomorphic characteristics like 'intelligence' onto the universe, the authors invoke the notion of 'creativity' in order to throw into question the very intelligence and creativity that we habitually attribute to humanity alone. So the notion of creativity— and those of intentionality and agency as well—is challenged, broadened, and thereby more deeply nuanced. In his book *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* Manuel De Landa concurs: "When put together, these forms of spontaneous structural generation suggest that inorganic matter is much more variable and creative than we ever imagined. And this insight into matter's inherent creativity needs to be fully incorporated into our new materialist philosophies" (quoted in Bennett 7). For De Landa, this means not only that we need to rethink the ontological status of inorganic matter, but that doing so is bound to send repercussive waves through the privileged ontological status we habitually grant to humanity.

The other adjective that the *Journey* authors use to describe the "unfolding universe" is equally important: "interconnected." In the words of Berry, a mentor of the *Journey* authors, "Each atomic particle is in communion with every other atom in the vast web of the universe" (11). To think of the universe as a "vast web" emphasizes this deep sense of interconnection, and the word "communion" does the same anthropomorphizing work as the previous quote. With a characteristic sense of wonder, the *Journey* authors note another key discovery of modern cosmological science at the end of the same chapter: "There's something amazing about a universe whose overall journey depends, in critical moments, upon the transformations taking place in the microcosm. We can begin to contemplate an idea that is remarkable: perhaps the nature of the universe as a whole is shaped by the creativity of its parts" (Swimme and Tucker 15). The contemplation of this idea might in fact be offensive to Creationists, as several of the world's major religions posit the opposite process of cosmogonical structuring. For them, an omniscient, omnipotent godhead with absolute ontological priority creates an inferior immanent world that is not only subject to His plans, but is usually subject to His occasional intercession in miraculous acts of grace (that is, the transcendent entering paradoxically into the immanent). Indeed, the early modern conception of a clockmaker who merely winds up the universe's inner works is only a slight dampening of this cosmogonical worldview. Thus to claim that the whole is in fact shaped by the "communion" of its most minuscule parts reduces the importance of the godhead at least, and would seem to eliminate His viability at most.

In his book *Speculative Grace*, the Latourian theologian Adam S. Miller seeks a middle path through the cosmogonical science we can observe and the creation stories of intelligent design we have believed for millennia. For him, the essence of religious conviction is in *seeing the transcendent in the immanent*, and structures like a (male) Creator-God are inessential mythologies to that end. He recognizes both that humans have a deep and vibrant need to feel the presence of the holy in the world, and that humanity and its knowledge are currently in a period of profound change. Regarding the paternalistic and unsupported notion of a godhead, Miller writes that, "Grace…is understood

as stemming from God's being an excessive, enabling, and absolute exception to the rest of reality" (45). The key notion Miller wants to emphasize here is *reality*, which excludes the godhead but *not* the presence of grace. Thus, "[p]orted into a non-theistic, object-oriented metaphysics" such as that presented in *Journey*, "grace gets operationalized as *objects at work*" (45). The "interconnected" universe "shaped by the creativity of its parts" that Swimme and Tucker describe is one where grace, in a Christian sense, is not necessarily lacking. Rather, it is a universe where grace is *de-centered*, and this notion of de-centering proves to be one of the most powerful epistemological discoveries of the 20th century. For it gives way to the ontological notion of a multicentered universe.

The issue of centering has been crucial throughout human history for conceiving of emplacement, agency and identity. On this important topic, the *Journey* authors remark that, "The five-hundred year enterprise of modern Western science has also been concerned with identifying the center of the universe, and this effort has led to a series of 'de-centerings,'" the greatest of which is arguably Copernicus's insight of heliocentrism; a de-centering so profound that when Aristarchus of Samos posited it over two thousand years ago, the suggestion was rejected out of hand (Swimme and Tucker 20).[5] It is for good reason, then, that Timothy Morton, the author of *Hyperobjects*, identifies these de-centerings as "humiliations" after Sigmund Freud. This term is rich for its simultaneous negative connotation—we have found out again and again that we are less central to the universal scheme than we had thought, which is humiliating—as well as its leaning toward *humility*, a liberating sense that one commonly gets when pondering the cosmos and a virtue emphasized by every religious tradition from Islam to Christianity to Buddhism to Indigenous religions around the world.[6] The global ecological crisis on Earth we are currently in the grips of, and which is generated by the behavior of humans causes, is yet another decentering.

The new models of history that modern science has bestowed upon us, including "Big History" and the related concept of "deep time," force us to rethink even the anthropocentric temporality in which we have located ourselves. Part and parcel to Morton's notion that the end of the world "might already have taken place" is that we reconsider how we think about cosmic, local, and human centers (16). The paradox that the world is already over speaks to our *conception* of the world as we have known it and as we are forced to know it going forward, based upon our new knowledge of the ecological catastrophe.

The authors of *Journey* proffer an important piece of information gleaned by 20th century astrophysics, a "humiliation" that may be one of the keys to a newly emerging field of metaphysics: "For what we have come to realize is that there is not one center, but millions. Each supercluster of galaxies is at the center of the expansion of the universe. We live in a multicentered universe and are only now awakening to the discovery" (Swimme and Tucker 21). This "awakening" is perhaps what happened to Jane Bennett on a sunny morning on Cold Spring Lane: "When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was

5   Brian Swimme, who narrates the film version of Journey, highlights the importance of this fact, which serves as a major reason that the film itself takes place on the island of Samos.
6   One such example is the story of Coyote's fatal lack of humility, which the Salish people of the North American Northwest tell during their annual Winter Dance celebration. See John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ecology and Religion, pp. 136-138.

in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me" (5). The assemblage that Bennett describes—including the five objects, the street, the weather, and herself—has no center. She explains the way that the objects intermittently directed her attention to one another without there being a central point of focus, and the rest of her book is a disquisition from various angles on why the human "subject" does not constitute the center of a scene perceived by that human. Bennett's testimony is meant in part to show that the notion of a multicentered universe is as local and immediate as it is micro- and macrocosmic.

But further supporting the project of the Journey authors, Bennett frames her moment of discovery according to the aspiration of one of her ontological forerunners, saying, "I achieved, for a moment, what Thoreau had made his life's goal: to be able, as Thomas Dumm puts it, 'to be surprised by what we see'" (5). Whether it is awakening to a profoundly de-centering cosmological discovery or being surprised and drawn into community by completely mundane "debris" in a city gutter, the "humiliating" realization that we live in a universe with innumerable centers (neither one, nor an absence of center) must necessarily shift the way that we interact with our deeply embodied world. While we can still claim uniqueness, we cannot claim ontological superiority as human beings or Earthlings based upon centrality in either time or space.

Swimme and Tucker attribute the development of complex biological forms to "the power of adaptation and of memory," and then identify these agential powers as the precise functions of DNA (57). They add, "One way to think about the nature of life's memory is by using the insight of Pythagoras. Pythagoras's central conviction was that the essence of the universe is not water or air or fire or anything concrete like that [as opposed to other pre-Socratic philosophers]. The essence or the universe is number; the heart of the universe is revealed in pattern" (58). This Pythagorean insight is at once crucial to the modern understanding of the universe and tremendously dangerous for it. If we fast-forward two thousand years, we find that, largely inspired by Pythagoras, Sir Isaac Newton contrived to reduce the entire observable universe to a set of mathematical and physical laws. Working from such a deterministic, mechanistic model would then allow such thinkers as Immanuel Kant to remove the purest patterning—reason—from the brain, from the body, and even from the immanent world. According to such a radically disconnected model, "Matter was passive and moved according to deterministic laws that could be discovered by human reason. [The moderns] imagined that these laws were established at the beginning of time by a deity who then let his world machine run forward. They called this a Clockwork universe" (Swimme and Tucker 98). The inherent nature of matter was inertia, and it was thus subject to the force and domination of rational-agential—i.e., human or deific—impetus.

Bennett isolates a collection of rich quotes from Kant that further illustrate the above point: "In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant famously insisted that matter as such can have no 'spontaneity:' 'We cannot even think of living matter as possible. (The concept of it involves a contradiction, since the essential character of matter is lifelessness, inertia)'; we must not 'endow matter, as mere matter, with a property [viz. the property of life . . .] that conflicts with its nature'" (65). The point Kant makes clear is that there is a radical and unbridgeable gap between living things and mere matter, and the gap tilts to a clear hierarchy. But this leaves Kant with the problem of the fact that life is never found *except for*

in matter, and to this he applies the *Bildungstrieb*, or "formative drive." This "teleological" force, which Kant borrowed from the medical scientist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and was picked up in some form or another by such vitalists as Hans Driesch and Henri Bergson, is contrived less to confirm a fact and more to diminish the cognitive dissonance bound to result from an ontological bias toward the organic, which Manuel De Landa calls "organic chauvinism" (103).[7] Where the chauvinistic principle cannot be proven, it is covered up.

In their chapter titled "The Beginning of the Universe," the authors of *Journey* track the changes in matter-energy in the first minutes of the Big Bang, or what they call the "great flaring forth." One key moment in this process of development was the bonding of protons and neutrons to create stable complex elements without which the universe "would have taken the form of disconnected particles…trillions upon trillions of these tiny particles, each one completely independent of the others" (Swimme and Tucker 8). But that is of course not how things went. Rather, "Amidst such bonding and dissolution, the universe moves toward increasingly complex communities. These simple nuclei were the very first of the complex communities among the elementary particles."[8] Like their earlier use of the word "creative" to describe the universe, the authors now take on and expand the concept of "community." Whereas we normally only use this word to speak about colonies of humans and possibly some other animals, the authors apply it to groups of elementary particles. But the major question is, why shouldn't they? If the atomic particles floating about in the early universe were able to develop more complex self-organized configurations, in what way is that fundamentally different from the ability of humans to develop more complex self-organized configurations? Even if we call the former "atomic nuclei" (*atom* being an ancient Greek term meaning "indivisible," and thus now—in its English usage—an ever-deepening misnomer) and the latter "society," the process organizing both assemblages bears an essential and not coincidental resemblance.

In *A Thousand Years*, De Landa is primarily interested in flows of energy. When we think of the phrase 'European history' we tend to think of human beings behaving in certain ways, developing technologies, going to war with one another, dressing up, painting, building, eating, dying of plague, worshipping, colonizing other lands, and enslaving or exterminating other peoples. De Landa's take on European history immediately shows our anthropocentric bias because his book is divided into three sections: one on geology, one on biology, and one on linguistics. His argument is that these are three important levels on which Europe changed over the last thousand years, and they are fundamentally linked in creating a single story. The energy flows that allow for the "mineralization" of the human "exoskeleton" have everything to do with the ability of humans to capture and process solar energy; in anthropocentric terms, the agricultural revolution led to thriving urban centers. As Bennett explains, "In the long and slow time of evolution, then, mineral material appears as the mover and shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded capacity

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7   See Bennett 2010, 65ff.
8   The Oxford English Dictionary defines "community" as: "1) A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common; 2) A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals; 3) A group of interdependent organisms of different species growing or living together in a specified habitat." Even the third definition, less biased toward sentient beings than the first two, applies only to organisms.

for self-directed action, appear as its product" (11). If we choose to think this way about the history of the land mass we call Europe, then the application of the term "community" begins to break down. In De Landa's picture, human groups begin to look more like microparticles self-organizing into more complex assemblages as they did in the first minutes of the "great flaring forth." But the *Journey* authors do not thereby render the term "community" obsolete: rather, they metamorphose its meaning just as De Landa's valid mode of storytelling metamorphoses our notion of "European history."

The last third of *Journey* charts the development and possible future of humans on Earth. Once they and their unique "symbolic consciousness" arrive on the scene, they become and remain the book's central focus (Swimme and Tucker 86ff) The question I would ask of Swimme and Tucker is why in their book the cosmological process seems to *arrive* at human symbolic consciousness, as though this were the culmination of the vast geological, biological, and even cosmological evolution they chart? This strongly linear trajectory tracks dangerously close to the correlationist determinism the Speculative Realists chiefly focus on overturning. In *A Thousand Years*, De Landa is more successful in this sense, looking only at the last millennium of European history. Following Berry, Swimme and Tucker take up the aim of telling a "New Story" of the universe's unfolding that incorporates the most up-to-date scientific findings, while not reducing it to them. It is ideally a rigorously proven story palpable for religious groups of all kinds to absorb into new, progressive and realistic, yet spiritually vibrant, cosmologies. As activists, their goals are ultimately ecological and social by extension, bespeaking the self-evident vitality of the natural world (and humanity as a facet of it) to the largest collective communities in the human world—religious groups. Berry's insight that "the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects" is a good mission statement. Unfortunately, the structure of their story does not move all the way beyond the anthropocentrism they identify—correctly—as humanity's greatest current problem. For this the new ontologists have much to offer.

In his short masterwork *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour analyzes the interaction between a natural scientist, Robert Boyle, and a philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. The two go about dividing up the respective territories of the Natural and the Social, not to mention the Divine, sometimes tensely. This process of division or "purification" was not unique to Boyle and Hobbes in their time, and it continues down to the present day. For instance, does human consciousness belong to the continent of psychology or of neuroscience? Does it arise from and dissipate into the grey matter of the brain, or is it a phenomenon that transcends its material basis? Or perhaps (though less importantly, since few scholars take outmoded religious claims very seriously anymore), is it evidence of a soul in communion with God? In an increasingly disenchanted 'secular' age where 'humanism' cynically indicates structures of brute domination, the humanities are put in the service of the sciences, which are themselves put in the service of technological development. This is done in order to bring about even more of the Natural, the Social, and the Divine under human control. The private capitalists at the end of this chain are as insatiable—which is to say, as deeply dissatisfied with their own 'progress'—as they are unfathomably wealthy and politically powerful. We might ask, "How can a person be happy when his or her happiness is so clearly based upon the continuous unbalancing of ecosystems, destroying of ancient structures, and causing of blatant misery to countless beings

just like themselves?" It stands to reason itself, the preeminent Modern tool, that their minds must be deeply misguided—clouded, you might say—by an ignorance of what actually constitutes human happiness. While this may seem obvious, even self-evident, it is where we must start.

So the question remains, what do we in the humanities have to offer to those with all the money and political power, who like the hungry ghosts (Skt. *preta*) of Buddhist mythology cannot be satisfied no matter how much they have? What new vision of humanity can we offer them? And to remain pragmatic, how do we engage the sciences without betraying our intuitions that we know cannot be reduced away by them? This is where, I believe, my humanities subfield of Buddhist Studies becomes important. Various forms of Buddhism, or 'Buddhisms' as they are often called, have for over two thousand years developed techniques of introspection that are teleological (indeed soteriological) without being tethered to a transcendent deity or a solipsistic nihilism. As David McMahan acknowledges in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, many thinkers of the last century, both Asian and Western, have noted the resonances between Buddhist self-observational techniques and modern scientific method. However, McMahan very rightly points out that one of the main reasons Buddhist meditation cannot be considered a science is because its results are not "publicly verifiable, as scientific experiments must be" (210).[9] But then, neither are most of the greatest insights gained within the humanities, which have been a cornerstone of modernity. This also holds true for Whiteheadian panpsychism, a key player in the recent interdisciplinary movement in ontology: "Few advocates of panpsychism would expect that the doctrine could literally be verified by a scientific experiment…for panpsychism makes an ontological claim rather than a necessarily empirical one" (Shaviro 88). Around the 2nd century CE, over half a millennium after the inception of Buddhism, the Prasangika-Madhayamaka school progenitor Nāgārjuna took the radical step of recognizing not only the selflessness of sentient beings, but of all phenomena. The correlative emphasis within his new Mahāyāna school was a revolutionary emphasis on compassion for all sentient beings. Could we now be in a historical moment where the confluences of modern science, a variety Buddhisms, and a movement in 'democratic' materialist ontologies cause a new Enlightenment in which not just selflessness but *sentience* is recognized of all phenomena? Might this be exactly what our global ecological crisis requires?

It seems possible to practice a highly systematic first-person exploration of the mind without necessarily having to accept regionally-specific religious claims wholesale and uncritically.[10] The resources—albeit adopted from foreign cultures—now exist for us in the humanities to utilize in all seriousness, whatever name we choose to give them.[11] But such 'mindfulness' techniques, already being taken up by massive business interests like Google, the Harvard Business School, and General Motors, should never be divorced from a deep study of ethics and the profoundest goals of human

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9   *NB*: McMahan does not, however, dismiss Buddhist meditation as an *object* of science.

10   This is in no way to denigrate or undermine the importance of the religious claims made in various Buddhisms. As Todd Lewis has repeatedly noted, these usually region-specific beliefs and practices tend to be inextricable from any particular manifestation of Buddhism. See Lewis 1989, 1993, 2000.

11   The emerging field of neurophenomenology appears to be a sympathetic but more scientifically-minded approach to these resources. See in particular the work of Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson, e.g. Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1992; Maturana and Varela 1992; Thompson 2014

life.[12] This is where such practices become firmly identified with the humanities, as opposed to the natural sciences, though they open up new avenues of collaboration with, and influence upon, the latter. The humanities are today faced with methods and theorization two-and-a-half millennia in the making that they have never had access to before; meanwhile, ecological devastation gallops ever faster toward our collective doom. Thinkers like Latour, Bennett, Morton, and Swimme and Tucker have identified a single source of our problems in the humanities and in the environment, and we now know it has come from the Western Enlightenment. To survive the destructiveness of modern society, to develop an ecological ethics to live by, and to remain genuinely relevant, we in the humanities should now turn to a systematic exploration of our own embodied minds.

12   See Sykes Wylie 2015.

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Interview: Some Differences Between Object-Oriented Philosophy and Onticology

Levi Bryant

Kevin MacDonnell: *While in graduate school and in the early stages of your career, your research and scholarship was primarily focused on the the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In what major ways did their work shape your own and allow you to break off into your own unique strand of philosophy?*

Levi Bryant: Although I am not an orthodox Deleuzian, Deleuze, along with a handful of other thinkers such as Spinoza, Lacan, Luhmann, and Badiou, haunts everything that I think. At the level of ontology, Deleuze's accounts of individuation, entities as processes, and immanence are always lurking in the background. In Deleuze, individuation refers not to the way in which we distinguish one entity from another, but rather to the ongoing processes by which entities come to be as the entities that they are. Entities always emerge in a field of relations to other entities, taking on the form and qualities they have as a result of their interactions with that field. For example, the wine grape has the qualities it has because of how it develops in relation to the unique properties of the soil in which it grows, other plants in the region, the local atmosphere, insect and microbial life, and so on. Transplant a grape vine to another part of the world and it will have different properties. This investigation of the morphogenetic relation between field and entity is, I think, the central theme of my work. It's what motivates my distinction between virtual proper being and local manifestation, and is what I explore throughout Onto-Cartography. The outcome of this, of course, is that entities must be conceived as processes, as ongoing activities, rather than fixed things that just sit there until acted upon by something else. Entities must engage in acts of perpetual "entification." These are operations by which entities continue to exist across and throughout time. Entropy or disintegration always threatens. It is through operations or activities that entities continue to exist.

At a more abstract level, Deleuze presented a way of approaching the natural

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world, as well as the sciences. At the time I was doing my doctoral work, Anglo-American Continental philosophy was dominated by four tendencies: a profound anxiety with respect to science and mathematics, a tendency to approach being in terms of what it is for us or how it presents itself to us as in the case of phenomenology, a tendency to subordinate beings to the signifier or text as can be seen in so much post-modern and post-structuralist thought, and, above all, a focus on philosophical figures and texts, rather than the world and problems. With respect to this last tendency, it was as if Anglo-American Continental philosophy departments conceived of philosophy as commentary on philosophers. Nothing could be said without attaching it to, and filtering it through, the proper name of a philosophical figure. This, of course, is a highly Oedipal way of doing philosophy.

Although Deleuze wrote profound commentaries on a variety of philosophers, he also showed a way of doing philosophy not subordinated to commentary and proper names. Real conceptual invention took place in his work. Rather than maintaining fidelity to a thinker and practicing a sort of philosophical partisan orthodoxy, he instead drew elements from various thinkers, using them as raw materials to forge new concepts to respond to problems posed by the world and existence, and also forged original concepts of his own. I've striven to do philosophy in this way as well. Nothing is more dreary than a "philosophical" discussion about how to properly interpret philosophy. Philoso-

phy, I think, is only of value if it responds to the world outside of philosophy.

With respect to the other three tendencies, Deleuze taught me a way of appreciating the sciences that nonetheless avoided the erasure of philosophy in the name of science. Deleuze followed Bergson in seeing part of the project of philosophy as that of providing science with the metaphysics and concepts proper to science. In this way, he maintained a space unique to philosophy while nonetheless taking the sciences seriously. In this regard, I think philosophy always requires its others outside of philosophy to take place. When philosophy seeks to isolate itself as a discipline, it has a tendency to become nothing but a reflection on its own history and philosophical texts. Through an encounter with its others, philosophy acquires the possibility of conceptual invention. It is not by mistake that so many philosophers in the history of philosophy had primary fields of investigation outside of philosophy. For example, Descartes with his work in Physics and Mathematics, or Leibniz with his work in Diplomacy, History, Mathematics, and Engineering. Philosophy requires something other than philosophy to provoke problems that in term lead to conceptual invention. This is why philosophy so often takes place primarily in departments outside of philosophy, such as Media Studies, Literary Theory, Women's Studies, Science and Technology Studies, etc. In all of these areas, the theorist has an object that is other than theory that demands conceptual invention.

KM: *Graham Harman has claimed that the major division between his version of object-oriented ontology and your 'onticology' lies in your dismissal of vicarious (or indirect) causation, your position that real objects do not have qualities, and your avoidance of any distinction between sensual objects and sensual qualities. Do you agree with Harman's distinctions and/or where do you position your 'onticology' in relation to Harman's OOO?*

LB: Harman was an encounter for me, leading me to attend to an entire world, the world of things, and the differences that make, and also giving me the courage to attempt philosophical work of my own rather than remaining at the level of interminable commentary on other thinkers. I have never been able to determine whether our philosophical differences are genuine, or whether they are merely the result of different linguistic articulations. As Deleuze somewhere says, philosophers always misunderstand one another.

Harman argues that real objects never touch nor relate to one another, but rather are "vacuum sealed" and forever behind firewalls. I confess that this is not a thesis I really understand. He seems to argue that real objects never touch one another, yet only encounter one another in the interior of their sensual objects. However, it seems to me that this amounts to saying that they relate without relating, in which case I'm led to think that they do relate. His argument seems driven by the argument that one real object never encounters the entirety of another object. Yet I have difficulty

understanding why this is relevant to the issue of causation and relation. Suppose we take the following diagram:
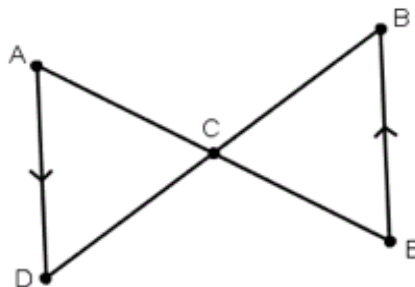
Triangles ACD and BCE are distinct entities, yet nonetheless relate at point C. Clearly they are not relating directly at all points, but why should that lead us to conclude that there's no real relation between them or that they don't touch? This is something I don't understand.

For my part, objects are entities that are divided or split between their virtual proper being and their local manifestations. When Harman says that I hold that objects don't have qualities—and this isn't really an accurate description of my position—he's referring to the dimension of virtual proper being in the ontology of the ontology I propose. The virtual proper being of an object is composed of its powers or potentials. Objects, I argue, are, in their innermost core, defined by their powers; what Spinoza called "affects." Powers are not specific qualities,

but are capacities to produce qualities and actions. Take the example of color. As lighting conditions change, you'll notice that the color shades of an object change as well. My dog's red ball is not uniformly red, but is all sorts of different shades of red. As it sits in the shadows, it is a deep red that is almost the color of brick. When it sits in the sunlight, it is a radiant, bright red. When the lights are turned out, it becomes different shades of black or grey. These different colors are what I refer to as "local manifestations." We can observe something similar with the properties of iron with respect to temperature. Under warm conditions, iron becomes malleable and if we heat it even more, it becomes liquid. Under very cold conditions, it becomes highly brittle and liable to shatter. These are all local manifestations of iron.

Returning to the example of color, we can imagine people arguing about which color is the true color of the ball. Here they would say that when the lights are turned out, the ball's color has been veiled or hidden in much the same way that a chair is still in a room even though no one can see it because it's behind closed doors and curtains. My hypothesis is rather different. No one of these colors (qualities) is the true color of the ball because color is an event that happens to an object under certain conditions as a result of interacting with different wavelengths of light. In this regard, my onticology could be called "interactivism." Qualities are produced in objects in two ways: through the interaction of an object with the world about it, or through internal activities

taking place in the object. In the case of color, it is the interaction with the qualities of the ball's surface with wavelengths of light. The ball really is grey when the lights are turned out because it is not interacting with wavelengths of light that produce shades of redness. In the case of iron, the interaction is with temperatures. This observation leads me to say that the being of an object is not its qualities (local manifestations), but rather its powers or what it can do. The ball isn't defined by its color because, in fact, it can be many different colors depending on circumstances. Rather, it's defined by its power to produce colors. Powers are always much broader than any specific qualities the object might have. And, of course, it goes without saying that objects can gain and lose powers as a result of encounters with other entities. When repeatedly bent, iron can weaken because the crystals that compose it have been reconfigured.

It is my hope that interactivism might contribute to leading us to a more ecological sensibility. Here I define ecology not as the investigation of natural ecosystems, but rather to the investigation of relations and interactions between entities and the differences (local manifestations) these interactions produce. I'm interested in what entities do under specific circumstances. In this sense, I suppose that the ontology I propose moves in the opposite direction of Harman's. Where Harman's ontology of withdrawal focuses on the severance of beings from their relations, I'm interested in what happens when entities interact with one another. One lesson I hope to

draw is that we never know what an object can do because, as a result of powers or capacities being broader than specific qualities, it can always produce surprising qualities and actions as a result of how it interacts with other beings under new circumstances.

In the passage of the article Harman wrote for this issue of the Humanities Review outlining the differences between the ontologies we propose, Harman raises another criticism. He writes:

> For him, when an object takes on specific configurations in particular circumstances, it has a "local manifestation." But what is the local manifestation of an apple, for instance? Is my view from the west side of the apple the same local manifestation as your view from the east, or are they different?

I find this question peculiar because as I conceive it, a local manifestation is not a local manifestation for or to anyone. A local manifestation is not a view of an object, but rather is an event that takes place within an object. For example, the manner in which an elephant encounters an apple in a tree from the west is not a local manifestation of the apple. Indeed, this is a local manifestation of the elephant (i.e., the elephant's experience is the result of all sorts of neurological operations taking place within it in interaction with the environment). The apple is what it is regardless of whether it's encountered by another entity from east, west, north, south, above, or below. Rather, a local manifestation of the apple would be something like the qualitative changes that take place as a result of biochemical processes the apple undergoes in interaction with its environment as it ripens. The softness of a very ripe apple is not a manifestation to anyone else. It would be there regardless of whether or not any other being regarded the apple. Rather, it is a qualitative feature of the object itself resulting from the becoming it has undergone.

Despite our differences, Harman's work has been a tremendous impetus for my thought. While I don't share his distinction between real and sensual qualities and objects, nor his theory of vicarious causation, I do nonetheless hold that objects can be severed from their relations. This thesis that relations are not internal to objects is what led me to interactivism and, paradoxically, a more ecological style of thinking. Additionally, I credit Harman's thought with having functioned as a catalyst for the reawakening of Continental thought. For a long time there was a sense that Continental thought was at a standstill, that it had stagnated. Harman's thought has played a key role in reigniting debates and conceptual invention, turning the field of theory away from endless commentary and returning instead to philosophical problems and questions.

KM: In the Introduction to The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism written by Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman, and yourself, you claim that one of the few positions agreed upon by all speculative realists is that you have all "certainly rejected the traditional focus on textual critique." With that in mind, where do you see literary scholarship fitting in within speculative realism, if anywhere? Can literary scholars examine texts through a speculative realist framework?

LB: I've struggled quite a bit with this question. Before getting to that, I think it's first important to emphasize that I don't reject the importance of textual critique, nor do I reject forms of inquiry that investigate how we semiotically and discursively construct reality. What I've sought in my own work is a synthetic approach that is capable of investigating phenomenological experience, discursive constructions, and material contributions. When, for example, we're analyzing the functioning of ethnic categories and social types (e.g., delinquents, the mad, middle class, normal, etc.), because these are not the result of biology, but are discursively constructed. Likewise, we can understand nothing about money without robust concepts of the sign and signifier. Since *The Democracy of Objects*, my work has sought a framework capable of exploring how the domains of sign, lived experience, and materiality are entangled with one another. If I've emphasized the material, then this is because outside of thinkers such as Latour and Stengers, it's received relatively short shrift in Continental thought.

In my most recent work I've taken to referring to objects as machines. This is first because the term "object" seems to denote stasis in the minds of many and evoke epistemological discussion of the relation between subject and object. I've hoped the term "machine" would be foreign enough to suspend these habits of thought. It's not that questions of epistemology are important—there's an entire machine-oriented epistemology—but rather that I hoped to draw attention to the agency of things. Second, I hoped to draw attention to the processual, operational nature of beings. As we discussed earlier, I wish to draw attention to the activities of things or how they interact. All beings, I argue, are machines regardless of whether or not they are produced by humans.

In this spirit, I think there are a couple of different ways onticology or machine-oriented ontology might approach literature. First, it's worth noting that novels, poems, paintings, films, buildings, works of philosophy, articles, and so on are all machines. As Deleuze and Guattari put it at the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus*, a book is a tiny little machine. Within this framework, we could attempt to develop an entire literary mechanology. Machines are beings that operate on flows, producing an output in the form of qualities, activities, and products. At the most general level of literary ontology, a literary mechanology would first seek to determine what a literary machine is and how it differs from other textual machines (philosophical works, scientific articles, newspapers, etc). In what way do literary machines operate and how do these operations differ from those of other textual machines? What are the flows upon which these machines operate (readers)? What do these machines produce in operating upon their flows? A machine-oriented literary criticism could then investigate novels as specific types of machines, exploring what they do and how they act on the world and language.

From another vantage, every work of

literature proposes a fantastic ontology or theory of what is and of how beings relate to one another. Criticism could explore these ontologies, these systems of machines proposed by the novel, unfolding their internal logic. These fantastic ontologies, in their turn, could shed light on our own world, functioning as machines that allow us to discern our own assumptions and forms of *doxa*, helping us to enter into the phenomenological worlds of other humans and animals, and also proposing unheard of possibilities for how we might live and relate to one another. With respect to the last of these, we get a curious inversion of fiction and reality, where the fiction takes on the power or the capacity to give birth to new realities, as in those cases where science fiction inspires scientists to create unheard of technologies, or where the novel allows people to imagine new social forms that they then strive to enact.

KM: Ian Bogost has argued that a flat ontology can pose a challenge to feminism because of its inability to capture the effect of discursive practices on human experience. How do human politics or identity politics work within a flat ontology when these discursive practices (especially feminist politics) are focused almost exclusively on discourse?

LB: This is not a view I share. As I understand it and have articulated it, flat ontology is first a rejection of transcendence or the thesis that there is anything outside of nature (God, Platonic forms, the subject, etc). As such, flat ontology is, depending on what we mean by the term, a naturalism; though of a very curious sort. There is within flat ontology, no magic or action at a distance. Second, the flat ontology I've proposed argues that no being is more or less a being than any other being. Although Harman does not endorse flat ontology, there is something about this proposal that is close to his critiques of undermining and overmining. One undermines entities when they treat them as unreal effects of some more fundamental entity. For example, this occurs in some variants of atomism. The aggregate entity in these forms of atomism has no reality of its own. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher undermines the being of social systems when she says that "society does not exist; there are only individuals and families." Here the being and reality of institutions and social systems is erased. Thus undermining consists in the erasure of an emergent whole in favor of parts. By contrast, entities are undermined when the parts are treated as having no reality, but are instead thoroughly subordinated to the whole. Here Althusser seems to fall into the operation of overmining when he treats the subject as an illusion of social structure, granting it no agency of its own. A flat ontology, by contrast, aims to honor the reality of both wholes and parts, recognizing the agency of each.

It is often thought that flat ontology is the thesis that all entities are equal. This confuses an ontological thesis with a normative and political thesis. Clearly within being there are all sorts of inequalities and different degrees of power. Corporations can overdetermine the lives of

thousands in a town as in the case of Flint, Michigan, where the people were dominated by the whims of the automobile companies. Both the corporation and the individual citizens are beings, but there is a tremendous inequality in power here.

If we adopt a flat ontology, then we're led to the conclusion that signs and signifiers are no less real beings than roads, planets, people, atoms, factories, and stars. Like all beings, signs and signifiers will thus be machines that exercise power within the world. In this regard, post-structuralist variants of feminism, queer theory, disability theory, race theory, post-colonial theory, and so on are right to investigate and critique the various ways in which social relations and identities are discursively constructed. Through these modes of critique, we are able to discern how the properties attributed to various identities are not properties of biology, but are the result of subjectivizing practices that form people and social relations through a variety of techniques. In the spirit of Foucault and Latour, a machine-oriented ontology or onticology would only add that discursive power is not the only form that power takes, but that material features of machines such as those found in the configuration of roads, architecture, geography, and so on also exercise power. Far from limiting critical techniques, onticology strives to multiply strategies of intervention in the name of building new, more equitable, more sustainable, and more satisfying forms of life.