

GRAHAM HARMAN

THE CURRENT STATE OF SPECULATIVE REALISM

1. CORRELATIONISM

Elsewhere I have told the history of Speculative Realism, and will not repeat it here.¹ Though some prefer the lower-case phrase “speculative realism,” I deliberately use capital letters, since Speculative Realism is a proper name. It originally referred to an assembly of four philosophers for an April 2007 workshop in London: Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Quentin Meillassoux, and the author of this article. So much for the history of the movement.

Any discussion of Speculative Realism needs to begin by avoiding the intermittent and pointless debate over whether Speculative Realism “really exists.” This question comes five years too late to be meaningful, and generally takes the form of a put-down rather than a bona fide question. Speculative Realism is now the topic of a thriving book series at a major university press, and the subject of at least one forthcoming monograph.² It is embedded in the editorial policy of several philosophy journals. It has become a *terme d’art* in architecture, archaeology, geography, the visual arts, and even history. It has crossed national boundaries with ease, and is surely the central theme of discussion in the growing continental philosophy blogosphere. Speculative Realism is the topic of several postdoctoral fellowships offered in the United States this year. It has been the subject of semester-long classes at universities as well as graduate theses in Paris. Though there are still tough tests ahead concerning the breadth and durability of Speculative Realism, it has long since passed the “existence” test to a far greater degree than most of its critics.

This article is meant as a rapid geographic survey of the basic intellectual differences among the Speculative Realists as of late 2012. This is not the place for detailed conceptual engagement with these authors, which I have done elsewhere and will continue to do. Also, for reasons of space I will confine myself to the original 2007 group along with the object-oriented ontology strand to which I belong. No slight is intended to those left unanalyzed here (Steven Shaviro comes to mind, among others).

¹ For the fullest version of the story to have reached print so far, see of Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 77–80.

² Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: An Introduction* (Network Education Press, forthcoming 2013).

In a recent online interview, *Speculations* founder Paul Ennis remarks as follow: “Continental realism is the fringe of the fringe. It might be popular for now, but we can already see a sort of knuckling down by the antirealists...the backlash. Most of them find the whole anti-correlationism thing silly and I don’t think continental realism is actually a threat to the dominance of antirealism...”³ What Ennis neglects to mention is that the continental “antirealists” would never even have called themselves antirealists until quite recently. The fact that we speak of continental antirealism at all is due partly to the counter-models of Speculative Realism and Manuel DeLanda, and partly to Lee Braver’s triumphalistic antirealist book *A Thing of This World*.⁴ The year 2002 witnessed the publication of my book *Tool-Being* and DeLanda’s *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, both of them candid statements of realism.⁵ This was something new in the continental tradition. While analytic philosophy has always been attentive to the realism vs. anti-realism debate, in continental circles the mere act of proposing such a debate was treated as a sort of vulgar gaffe. Realism vs. anti-realism had been defined as a “pseudo-problem,” especially in the phenomenological school that set the agenda for nearly a century’s worth of continental philosophy. It was said for example that there is no idealism in Husserl, since intentionality is “always already outside itself” in aiming at intentional objects. More recently there has been the emergence of “Derrida was a realist” claimants such as John Caputo and Michael Marder, who make their case not by challenging previous readings of Derrida, but simply by bending the meaning of the term “realism” to signify what Derrida was doing all along.⁶

In short, we now have a rather lively realism vs. antirealism debate in continental philosophy that simply did not exist ten years ago. The reason that

³ Paul Ennis interviewed by Liam Jones, *Figure/Ground*, November 12, 2012: <http://figureground.ca/interviews/paul-ennis/>

⁴ Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

⁵ See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002.); Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002).

⁶ See John D. Caputo, “For Love of Things Themselves: Derrida’s Hyper-realism,” 2001: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/01.3/caputo.shtml>; Michael Marder, *The Event of the Thing: Derrida’s Post-Deconstructive Realism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

debate did not exist was because continental philosophy was in fact *correlationist*, just as Meillassoux holds.⁷ In his 2002 book, DeLanda praised “[those] philosophers who grant reality full autonomy from the human mind, disregarding the difference between the observable and the unobservable, and the anthropocentrism this distinction implies. These philosophers are said to have a *realist* ontology.”⁸ With some rare and ineffectual exceptions (the wonderful Xavier Zubiri comes to mind⁹), no one in the continental tradition was declaring realism *devoid of ironic etymological tricks* prior to 2002. These earlier continental philosophers generally held that realism was a pseudo-problem, since we cannot think of humans without world or world without humans, but only of a primal correlation or rapport between the two. I had already used the term “philosophies of access” to describe this phenomenon, but Meillassoux’s “correlationism” is catchier and more to the point. Correlationism is the doctrine that we can only speak of the human/world interplay, not of human or world in their own right.

As Ennis mentions, there are now some who call the critique of correlationism “silly,” as I heard with my own ears at perfectly good events in Germany and Sweden during 2012. That is exactly the word that is being used: much like “idiosyncratic” in the 1980’s/1990’s, “silly” is today’s term of choice for continental philosophers who want to dismiss without argument something that they happen to dislike. But Meillassoux’s critique of correlationism makes a rather lucid metaphysical claim. It says that much continental philosophy is neither realist nor idealist, but *correlationist*. That is to say, it adopts an intermediate position in which we cannot say that the world either exists or fails to exist outside human thought. Instead, all we can talk about is the correlation of world and thought in their inseparability. This claim by Meillassoux can only be right or wrong, not “silly.” And if Meillassoux is wrong to say that most continental philosophers are correlationists, then they must be either realists or idealists, and it is their duty to state which of these positions they prefer.

To summarize, it is impossible for continental philosophers simply to dodge the critique of correlationism made by Speculative Realism. Even if

⁷ Quentin Meillassoux introduces the term “correlationism” on page 5 of *After Finitude*, trans. R. Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

⁸ Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, (Lodon: Continuum, 2002), 4.

⁹ Xavier Zubiri, *On Essence*, trans. A.R. Caponigri (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1980).

you reject a realist position, you cannot treat it as a poorly formulated cliché, as Husserl and Heidegger and most of their descendants unfortunately did. Instead, you have to adopt either a correlationist position or an outright idealist one. The shared basis of Speculative Realist philosophies is a rejection of all correlationist positions, and that rejection has had palpable impact on the landscape of continental philosophy. The question is not, “What has Speculative Realism accomplished?” but rather, “What will Speculative Realism still accomplish?” And here we reach a different and more interesting topic: the ongoing duel between various forms of Speculative Realism.

2. DIFFERING FORMS OF ANTI-CORRELATIONISM

During the 2007 Speculative Realism workshop at Goldsmiths, I noted that the four participants could be grouped up in differing teams of two vs. two or three vs. one, depending on which points of disagreement were viewed as most important.¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek makes an exaggerated version of the same point when he describes Speculative Realism as a Greimasian “semiotic square” formed from the axes of science/anti-science and religion/anti-religion. But the latter axis is possible only due to Žižek’s incorrect portrayal of me as a “religious” philosopher.¹¹ In fact, all we can really be sure of is a twofold cut that should not be described *à la* Žižek as science/anti-science, but as what I would call epistemist/anti-epistemist. To explain the meaning of “epistemism,” we must briefly consider Meillassoux’s April 2012 Berlin lecture.¹² Despite my disagreement with most of the content of that lecture, I agree completely with Meillassoux’s claim that the key division places him and Brassier on one side of the fence and me and Grant on the other.

In the aforementioned Berlin lecture, Meillassoux clarifies an ambiguity in the term “correlationism.” In *After Finitude*, the term was sometimes used to refer solely to a skeptical position that cannot be sure about what might exist outside thought, as in the philosophy of Kant. But at other times, “correlationism” was broadened to include outright idealism. This ambiguity is clarified in the Berlin lecture, which draws a new distinction in terminology. The

¹⁰ See pp. 368-369 of Ray Brassier et al., “Speculative Realism,” *Collapse III*, 2007: 306-449.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 640.

¹² Quentin Meillassoux, “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign,” trans. R. Mackay, April 20, 2012, forthcoming.

new and wider term is now “the Era of Correlation,” which begins with Berkeley and allows nothing to exist outside the subjective realm.

But this Era of Correlation occurs in two (actually three) forms in Meillassoux’s new model of the history of philosophy. First, there is correlationism in the strict sense, a basically skeptical position that finds it impossible to escape from thought so as to make contact with something that is not already affected by our mode of thinking. In this sense both Hume and Kant presumably count as correlationists, as would Husserl, Heidegger, and various postmodernists. But second, there is also what Meillassoux now calls “subjectalism,” a type of philosophy that encompasses both “idealism” and “vitalism,” which according to Meillassoux have an “essential relatedness and [an] original anti-materialist complicity.” For Meillassoux, an exemplar of the idealists is Hegel, and good examples of the vitalist pole would be Nietzsche and Deleuze. While the idealists and vitalists may seem to be radically opposed—since the first give privilege to human thought while the latter abolish such privilege—both are supposedly alike insofar as they “absolutize the subject.” They make the entire universe purely subjective, and thereby eliminate the “dead matter” that true materialists must recognize in the world alongside the thought that tries to know this dead matter. At this point, Meillassoux redraws the alliances within Speculative Realism. His preferred ally is Brassier, despite his open surprise that Brassier can see anything of merit in François Laruelle. Meanwhile, Grant and I are assigned to the “subjectalist” camp. Concerning my own position, Meillassoux writes:

Harman, in particular, develops a very original and paradoxical subjectalism, since he hypostatizes the relation we have with things that, according to him, withdraw continually from the contact that we can make with them. To make of our subjective relation to things that withdraw from their (full) contact with us, the universal relation of things to things—this is a typically subjectalist gesture, carried out in a new and brilliant form, but which still belongs to what I have called the “Era of Correlation.”¹³

There is no space here to push back at length, which I plan to do in a forthcoming book.¹⁴ But first, Meil-

¹³ Ibid. Using the capitalized phrase “Era of Correlation” rather than Robin Mackay’s “era of Correlation,” which accurately mirrors what Meillassoux does in the French original, but which strikes me as more confusing for the English reader than Era of Correlation.

¹⁴ Graham Harman, *On Epistemism: Continental Mathematics and Scientism* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities

press, forthcoming).
¹⁵ “Panpsychism” would have been a more effective choice than “vitalism,” since life is a different theme from psyche altogether. But I have made this terminological conflation myself in the past.

lassoux is wrong to claim that I project human psychism onto the world as a whole. Indeed, he already knows my argument better than this. The argument is that all relation is a form of translation, so that inanimate objects fail to exhaust each other during collision just as human perception or knowledge of those objects fails to know them. Real objects do not encounter each other directly, but only encounter *sensual* objects, or images of real objects. All contact between real objects is indirect, mediated by sensual reality, and this holds for raindrops and stones no less than for humans. We need to view this “sensual” realm in the most ultra-primitive terms. Meillassoux complains that this leaves only a “difference of degree” between sand grains and humans. Yet it is unclear why this is *prima facie* more absurd than Meillassoux’s own theory of contingent and groundless jumps from matter, to life, to thought, to the justice of a virtual God.

But the real problem is that Meillassoux simply equivocates when he says that both idealism and vitalism “absolutize the subject.”¹⁵ For it is one thing to say (like an idealist) that the thing-in-itself is just a special case of the thing-for-thought and that there cannot be anything inaccessible to the subject. But it is quite another to say (like a “vitalist”) that everything is a subject. For even if we postulate that a rock is a perceiving entity, it would not follow that its existence consists entirely in perceiving. Indeed, this is ruled out from the very first step of my philosophy, which states that *nothing* is ever exhausted by its relations. If I were nothing more than my perceptions, intentions, and relations in this moment, there is no way that these relations could ever change. For Meillassoux to claim that both idealism and vitalism “absolutize the subject” is analogous to accusing both flags and nations of “flagism”—since flags are entirely flags, while all nations have flags. The analogy to the “materialist” position would thus amount to insisting that many nations give up their flags; such flagless nations would then be analogous to the “dead matter” of Meillassoux’s materialism. Only in this way could the “absolutizing of flags” be prevented. The object-oriented position, by contrast, is that even if all nations have flags, nations are nonetheless more than their flags, and the same would hold for flagless nations. In short, there is no such thing as a unified “subjectalism” that unifies idealism and vitalism any more than there is a “flagism” that unifies flag and

Press, forthcoming).

¹⁵ “Panpsychism” would have been a more effective choice than “vitalism,” since life is a different theme from psyche altogether. But I have made this terminological conflation myself in the past.

nations under a single class of entities. The fact that “subjectalism” allows Meillassoux a convenient way of pigeonholing me and Grant as non-materialists does not entail that anything like subjectalism exists.

Of the other criticisms Meillassoux makes of my position in Berlin, there is another that is easy to address quickly. He writes:

Harman designates with the position “philosophies of access” philosophies that base themselves upon the relation between humans and things, and which consider that we have access only to this access, not to things themselves. But Harman, to my mind, does not escape from this “access,” since on the contrary he hypostatizes it for the things themselves: there is no longer any chance of our escaping from access, since from now on, it is everywhere.¹⁶

What Meillassoux fails to note is that my phrase “philosophies of access” is simply an abbreviation of the longer phrase “philosophies of *human* access.” In other words, Meillassoux and I simply disagree as to what is harmful about Kant’s legacy. On the one hand, Kant proclaims finitude: there are things-in-themselves that can be thought but not directly known. For Meillassoux this is a sin against reason, and his entire career is passionately devoted to fighting it. For me, this finitude is inevitable. The problem, as I see it, is that Kant made it a special *human* finitude rather than a global one pertaining to all entities. If we discuss the collision of two rocks, then it is we who are discussing it, and therefore it is really a discussion about our own conditions of access to the rocks rather than about the rocks themselves. This Kantian anthropocentrism is one that does not bother Meillassoux in the least. Indeed, his embrace of the correlational circle (“we can’t think the thing outside thought without turning it into a thought”), as though it were an argument of impassable rigor, shows that his rejection of Kantian finitude does not entail a rejection of Kant’s privileging of the human-world relation over all others. That is the real impasse between me and Meillassoux, and thus he is wrong to blame me for inconsistently adopting two opposed principles (finitude and the passage beyond finitude) when I simply do not accept the second. If I were writing a short treatise with a Meillassouxian flavor, I would not call it *After Finitude* (which I take to be impossible) but something like *After the Correlational Circle*—not in Meillassoux’s sense that we need to pass beyond the circle through crafty argumentation, but simply in the sense that the correlational circle was never a good argument in the first place.

¹⁶ Meillassoux, “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition.”

This brings us to the theme of “epistemism.” The reason that Meillassoux and Brassier are very close indeed is that both are epistemists. I have coined this phrase to describe the mathematism and scientism that are now so widespread in continental philosophy (originally thanks to Žižek and Badiou). Mathematism deems itself capable of deducing eternal truths, as Meillassoux claims to be able to do at the start of his Berlin lecture (and he means it literally, despite the scare quotes around “eternal truths”). Scientism, forever burned and bitten and aroused by the surprises of scientific theory change, is forced to proceed in more indirect fashion. A scientism like Brassier’s knows it can never reach a final scientific theory, and thus it proceeds in self-negating fashion along a kind of *via dolorosa*, destroying all the “folk images” it encounters while hoping to approach the “scientific images” that are only a *telos* and can never be attained. What Meillassoux and Brassier share in common is the idea that reason *ought* to be able to attain the direct presence of the thing. Meillassoux, much like Descartes, is sure he can do this given sufficient time for reflection and careful self-critique. Brassier, a more turbulent intellectual persona, holds that the best we can do is continually strip away our gullible delusions by way of an asymptotic approach.

Yet despite their shared claim to be ardent realists, both Meillassoux and Brassier have surprisingly weak models of reality-in-itself apart from humans. Meillassoux’s things-in-themselves exist “in themselves” only because they are able to outlast the human lifespan. But insofar as a human thinker is present, his things-in-themselves are fully commensurable with the thinker’s adequate mathematization of them. Meillassoux gives no clear explanation as to why a mathematized artillery shell in knowledge would not itself become an artillery shell. Presumably he has some theory of how the mathematized primary qualities of a thing “inhere” in “dead matter,” but we have not yet seen such a theory from him. Meillassoux seems to see no problem with fully translating a thing into knowledge of that thing, identifying its primary qualities with the mathematizable ones. As for Brassier, the ultimate reality for him (as for his model Wilfrid Sellars) is made up of “scientific images.” But note that these are still *images*, which means that in principle someone might witness them directly. Our sense of the in-itself needs to be much stronger than this, as Socrates already held: by preferring *philosophia* over *sophia*, love of wisdom over wisdom, Socrates already drew a strict line of separation between reality and any knowledge of it. In this respect, epistemism cuts against the grain of the mission of philosophy.

Let's now turn briefly to Iain Hamilton Grant. In Berlin, Meillassoux defined realist philosophies as those that ensure that human thought can *attain* the real. I have argued above that this is the exact opposite of realism, since it makes the real fully translatable into something else (such as knowledge), though the real is precisely that which can never be perfectly translated. On this question, Grant appears to be solidly on my side, since he treats thoughts as “phenomenal products” of a dynamic nature rather than as privileged ontological royalty able to copy the world without transforming it.¹⁷ In my 2009 lecture in Bristol, I criticized Grant's position (along with the much older philosophy of Giordano Bruno) for leading us back to a philosophy of the One in which individual objects are treated as temporary obstructions of a unified dynamic matter from which all things emerge.¹⁸ Grant responded in *The Speculative Turn*, counter-arguing that Bruno's One is still a substance whereas Grant's concept is of nature as a dynamic process, and therefore that he cannot be identified with Bruno.¹⁹ I counter that the difference between Grant's process and Bruno's substance is less important than their shared reluctance to grant autonomous power to individual entities. For both thinkers, reality is something like a pre-Socratic *apeiron* from which individuals temporarily arise and into which they eventually descend. Grant goes so far as to describe particular objects, throughout his book on Schelling, as “retardations” of a more primal productive force. I regard this position as untenable, since there is no evident reason why a unified productive force would ever meet with retardations or obstructions so as to generate objects, just as there is no good reason why the pre-Socratic *apeiron* would ever generate individual entities. Philosophies that begin with a One have always had problems accounting for a Many, and Grant's case is no different. He certainly deserves credit for avoiding epistemism in his starting point, but an ontology of the real must deal primarily with objects, with *individuals*, and not with disembodied productive forces and becomings.

For these reasons, I think that object-oriented philosophy must ultimately prevail in the struggles over the legacy of Speculative Realism, however strong epistemism looks at the moment due to

¹⁷ Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006).

¹⁸ Graham Harman, “On the Undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 21-40.

¹⁹ Iain Hamilton Grant, “Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman,” in *The Speculative Turn*, 41-46.

the obvious preference of Badiou and Žižek for epistemist versions of Speculative Realism. I hold instead that Grant and I are on the right side of this particular struggle, but hold further that Grant's attempt to subordinate objects to the productive forces that generate them is an unacceptable method of undermining objects.

3. DIFFERING FORMS OF OBJECT-ORIENTED ONTOLOGY

My first use of the term “object-oriented philosophy” was in the late 1990's, before there was any such thing as Speculative Realism, and long before I had heard of Brassier, Grant, or Meillassoux. The wider umbrella term “Object-Oriented Ontology” (OOO) was coined by Levi Bryant in 2009, and has always seemed to me like a good term for describing a range of object-oriented positions that differ in various ways from my own. The first OOO group consisted of me, Bryant, and Ian Bogost; the initially skeptical Timothy Morton joined us wholeheartedly in 2010. OOO is the most visible brand of Speculative Realism in the blogosphere, and hence has been subjected to more of the characteristic attacks of that medium than other brands of Speculative Realism. But OOO has also been the most productive wing of Speculative Realism in traditional academic media such as books and articles, refuting the strange claim that the movement is primarily internet-based. Although OOO has had impact on fields such as architecture, archaeology, and the visual arts, I will focus here on philosophical disagreements between its chief practitioners. Those practitioners include not only Bogost, Bryant, Morton, and me, but also the newborn French *Heldentenor* Tristan Garcia.

Since it is Bryant and Garcia who have articulated contrasts between their positions and my own in the greatest detail, I will focus on the two of them here. The primary objection of Bogost so far seems to be what he describes as the bookish character of my philosophy (and Bruno Latour's), with too little experiment in the fabrication of objects other than books.²⁰ Bogost himself is an outstanding fabricator of non-traditional objects (primarily videogames), and I do like the notion of philosophers making unexpected things. At present, I simply do not have any good ideas for making such alternative objects, and am generally less inclined than Bogost to see books as unimaginative products of the ivory tower. Yet his point is well taken, given the potential for major changes in intellectual media over the next few decades.

²⁰ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

As for Morton, he retains a certain sympathy for deconstruction that I am unable to share. But more important in philosophical terms is his view that OOO's distinction between real and sensual objects (which Bryant instead calls "virtual proper being" and "local manifestations") implies a breach of the law of non-contradiction that we must boldly embrace.²¹ The primary sources of this view are the Australian analytic philosopher Graham Priest and the ancient Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna (one of Priest's own heroes as well).²² For now I will say only that I am more skeptical than Morton about abandoning non-contradiction, and will reserve my thoughts on this issue for a riper moment.

As for Bryant, there seem to be two primary differences between us from which all the others follow.²³ The first is his rejection of vicarious or indirect causation, and the second is his avoidance of the fourfold structure that is characteristic of my own position. Both of these points can only be sketched briefly here. Concerning the need for indirect causation, so central to my own position, Bryant often blogs in the following spirit: "My theory of relations differs from Harman's. I have no problem with direct relations, they [are] just detachable."²⁴ The problem for Bryant in proclaiming such a view is that he is also enthusiastically in favor of the idea that all relations between objects are necessarily *translations*. When humans view apples or when raindrops strike forests, these relations do not exhaust their relata; there is always a depth to apples, forests, raindrops, and humans that is not fully deployed in the relation. This is a core feature of OOO (but not of Latour or Whitehead) and Bryant accepts it. What Bryant seems not to get is that translation is not just a result, but also a starting point. It is not just that raindrops *directly* encounter forests and *only then* translate them for some reason. This would be ontologically pointless. Instead, objects only encounter each other as translations from the very start, and to encounter the translation of an object means not to encounter the object itself. The only way Bryant's position becomes coherent is if he defends a common watered-down alternative,

²¹ Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2013).

²² Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²³ Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2011).

²⁴ This comes from comment #6 by Bryant on his own blog post "The Strange Ontology of Incorporeal Machines: Writing," *Larval Subjects* October 18, 2012: <http://larval-subjects.wordpress.com/2012/10/18/the-strange-ontology-of-incorporeal-machines-writing/>

widely popular in the blogosphere, that "relations are direct but partial." In other words, the human and the apple would make *direct* contact, but with only a partial number of qualities of the apple visible to the human. But in the first place I have never heard Bryant defend such a "direct but partial" model; and in the second place it does not work, as I have argued elsewhere and will argue all the more forcefully in my coming books, given the surprising durability of this "Object-Oriented Lite" alternative to full-blown withdrawal. There is no such thing as "direct but partial" contact with an object, for the simple reason that an object is a unit as Husserl says, and not a bundle as Hume says. I am not saying that Bryant has defended such a direct-but-partial view (I am not aware that he ever has), only that he is driven towards such a position by the tension between his acceptance of translation and his non-acceptance of vicarious causation.

The second main difference between Bryant's system and mine is his refusal of my fourfold structure, that results in a twofold division in the cosmos of real vs. sensual and objects vs. qualities. For Bryant, objects are defined by their "virtual proper being." He insists that this virtual proper being cannot have "qualities," because then it would have a fixed identity and never be able to change. So on the level of the real, Bryant gives us objects (defined in Deleuzian fashion by their "powers") but not qualities. The reverse is true on the level of "local manifestations." Here, Bryant ignores the lessons of Husserl by not recognizing a sensual world of apples and mailboxes that nonetheless endure as the same through various relational permutations. Instead, Bryant's position implies that a mailbox seen from the front is actually a different local manifestation than the same mailbox seen from the left side. Fair enough, but then no place is left for Husserl's intentional objects, and Bryant is left to defend a twofold model of the world: (1) virtual proper beings that have powers but no qualities, and (2) local manifestations that have fixed qualities and no powers. Despite Bryant's great interest as a philosopher, I find this model unappealing on both levels. On the "deep" level of virtual proper beings, it does not explain how one virtual proper being differs from another except in terms of "capacities," and to think in terms of capacities is to relationize objects to an unacceptable degree. Things are not different because they affect other things differently; rather, they affect other things differently because they are already different from each other. And on the "surface" level of local manifestations, I find Bryant too Humean in his view that the sensual

realm is always completely determinate in its status. After all, ducks, earthworms, and waterfalls are not a series of overdetermined images saturated with meticulous detail, so that Duck 1, Duck 2, Duck 3, etc. are all slightly different manifestations and are only unified retroactively as the “same” object by way of their family resemblances. Here Bryant is too much of an empiricist, and like most Deleuze-inspired authors he does not give Husserl his due.

With time running short we must speak more briefly of Tristan Garcia, whose marvelous 2011 book *Forme et objet* established him as a significant figure in the debates to come.²⁵ Garcia begins with an extremely flat ontology, even flatter than that of the famously “inflationary” thinker Alexius Meinong. Anything is a thing, no-matter-what. While my own position emerged from phenomenology and Garcia’s from Hegel, Wittgenstein, and the Frankfurt School, there are surprising convergences between our respective positions. We agree that things descend infinitely downward but not infinitely upward, and that the relationship of container and contained is of tremendous importance. The main difference is that I retain a classical notion of the in-itself, while for Garcia the thing is precisely what is *never* in-itself, but is rather *the difference* between its components and its environment. In my view this is an excessive concession to relationist, anti-object-oriented positions. It makes things hypersensitive to their environment in two directions, as if the tiniest rumblings in the atoms of a hammer could change that hammer, and as if distant planetary movements could change that hammer as well. A fuller debate between me and Garcia will appear in Spring 2013 in the Australian journal *Parrhesia*.

This has been a quick pencil sketch of the state of Speculative Realism at the end of 2012. So much has changed since that April 2007 workshop at Goldsmiths, and it is likely that more surprises are in store during the coming five years. We can expect refined positions from already visible authors, the unexpected emergence of new authors, and the use of Speculative Realism in a wider range of fields outside philosophy. The question is not whether Speculative Realism exists, but whether anything better will arise to stop it.

²⁵ Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2011).

EILEEN A. JOY WEIRD READING¹

for Michael Witmore

Experience of being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself...What is heralded and refused under the name of literature cannot be identified with any other discourse.

—Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*

SOMETHING LIKE THE WEATHER

It may seem strange to open an essay on the possibilities of Speculative Realist (SR) literary reading modes with a quotation from Derrida, whose status as one of the architects of the “linguistic turn” within the humanities supposedly makes him an enemy (or at least, an often convenient whipping post) of the new realists. Such is the odd flavor of this essay, which, situated outside of philosophy proper, seeks a more anti-disciplinary and even autistic relational field—that is to say, an amodal, synaesthetic, fluid, and diffusely intentional model for discerning relations among thinkers and objects.² Unlike Graham Harman (although very much influenced by him), who opened his essay “Vicarious Causation” by saying his theory of causation “is not some autistic moonbeam entering the window of an asylum,” but rather a “launching pad for a rigorous post-Heideggerian philosophy,”³ I am hoping to follow just such moonbeams into many-chambered asylums. My thinking is hopefully rigorous, but also unreasonable.

This issue of *Speculations* was designed to bring together multiple voices to address the *question*, from a wide variety of disciplinary angles, of the definition and practice of Speculative Realism—a

¹ This essay is a mutation, or meltdown, of Eileen A. Joy, “Notes Toward a Speculative Realist Literary Criticism,” *Svenska Twitteruniversitet* [Swedish Twitter University], December 20, 2011: <http://svtwuni.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/eileen-a-joy-stuo9/>. My thanks to Marcus Nilsson for inviting me to give that lecture, and to the interlocutors there who helped me to refine my thinking, especially Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Robert Jackson, John Russell and Karl Steel.

² My thinking on autistic modes of thought within the positive register of neurodiversity is inspired by Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), and also by Steven Shaviro, “Value Experience,” *The Pinocchio Theory*, September 30, 2012: <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1086>

³ Graham Harman, “On Vicarious Causation,” *Collapse II* (March 2007): 171.