BEATNIK BROTHERS? BETWEEN GRAHAM HARMAN AND THE DELEUZO-WHITEHEADIAN AXIS

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a surge of interest among Deleuzian and post-Deleuzian theorists in the metaphysical writings of Alfred North Whitehead. To many, there is a natural affinity between Deleuze and Whitehead, one that is continuous with a line of other thinkers—from Spinoza and Bruno to Bergson, Peirce, James, Simondon, Tarde, Serres, Stengers, and Latour—who are unified by an interest in process, affectivity, and a dynamic and relational ontology.[1] Responding to this interest, Graham Harman has argued that these thinkers are falsely allied in a "beatnik brotherhood" of "process philosophers" or "philosophers of immanence."[2] At heart, he counters, their philosophies are radically different.

This article examines what is at stake in this debate between Harman and the Deleuzo-Whiteheadians. Examining a series of recent writings by Harman, I will show that Harman overdraws the differences between Whitehead and Deleuze in order to privilege the radical distinction between objects and relations that is at the heart of his own object-oriented ontology (OOO). I will examine some affinities and differences between Harman's account of objects and Whitehead's account of actual occasions, and suggest that the two are not as far apart as Harman makes them appear. The key difference between them, and therefore the central stake in the debate between object-oriented and process-relational ontologies, concerns their respective understandings of temporality.

In comparing Harman's object-oriented ontology with the process-relational metaphysics of Whitehead (and, by extension, Deleuze), this article intends to contribute to a debate that has transpired in what has been called the "speculative realist blogosphere" since at least 2009. This is the debate over the relative virtues of realist ontologies that focus, alternately, on "object-oriented" or "process-relational" accounts of phenomena. The object-oriented strand of speculative realism has had a particularly welcome impact in reviving an interest in

speculative metaphysics and ontology along the youthful edges of academic, and primarily Continental, philosophy. But debate among speculative realists is notorious and ongoing. My own participation in this debate goes back to my 2009 review of Graham Harman's book *Prince of Networks*, which, to my surprise, elicited online exchanges involving numerous blogging philosophers, including Harman, Levi Bryant, Steven Shaviro, Peter Gratton, Christopher Vitale, Ian Bogost, Tim Morton, Ben Woodard, and others.[3] Among the more visible print manifestations of this "objects-processes debate" was an exchange between Shaviro and Harman that appeared in the widely cited anthology, *The Speculative Turn*.[4] My discussion of Harman will not be exhaustive here. It will rely primarily on three writings: his 2011 "Response to Shaviro," his account of "objects" in the 2011 book *The Quadruple Object*, and his 2010 book *Circus Philosophicus*.[5] I will show that a more processual temporality, and the ontological liveliness that comes along with it, appears at some points in Harman's writings, and that there may thus be room for a rapprochement, but that Harman's focus on the objects-relations debate as the central marker of one's ontological position militates against such a rapprochement.[6]

THE BEATNIK BROTHERHOOD

Any argument on behalf of a process-relational or immanence-based metaphysics that includes both Whitehead and Deleuze should respond to Graham Harman's critique of the very idea of the "beatnik brotherhood" that would include "Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, William James, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Serres, Gilbert Simondon, Gabriel Tarde, Etienne Souriau, and [Bruno] Latour's own friend Isabelle Stengers." Harman writes:

> When this emerging "School X" is promoted under such misleading titles as "process philosophy" or "philosophy of immanence", the result is a false sense of beatnik brotherhood. For in fact, there is a major family quarrel underway on this list over a highly classical problem: the isolation and interbleeding of individual things. On one side are figures like Bergson and Deleuze, for whom a generalized becoming precedes any crystallization into specific entities. On the other side we find authors such as Whitehead and Latour, for whom entities are so highly definite that they vanish instantly with the slightest change in their properties. For the first group, substance is too determinate to be real; for the second, it is too indeterminate to be real.[7]

Elsewhere, Harman has reiterated his view that Whitehead and Latour are not process philosophers at all, despite the common truism that Whitehead is the process philosopher *par excellence*, because both are "philosophers of actual individuals," whereas Deleuze, Bergson, Simondon, and Manuel DeLanda are "the opposite."[8]

This argument has been taken to task by Steven Shaviro in "The Actual Volcano." There, Shaviro relates what most Whiteheadian philosophers already believe: that Whitehead's ontology, while it features "actual entities" or "actual occasions" as its individual bits of reality, is a dynamic one of processual becoming. Actual occasions are not mere "clusters of relations," as Harman puts it in his response, as if relations were bits of granola that stick to each other on one's breakfast spoon.[9] Rather, they are uniquely individual and vectoral, or directional, relational events. Their individuality is fully encompassed in their relating or, in Whitehead's terms, in their prehending and concrescing. An actual entity, as Whitehead puts it, is "nothing but the unity to be ascribed to a particular instance of concrescence."[10] Actual entities, in Whitehead's metaphysics, are a way to account for process, which Whitehead sees as atomic in its structure, a kind of percolation of vectoral bubbles rather than a smoothly flowing stream. Both the atomic and the streaming or continual models of process, however—both the Whiteheadian and the Peircian or Jamesian (to overgeneralize only a little)—in their essence, describe not substances but forms of activity.

The relational dynamism and continuity between those actual occasions is what makes them what they are. To take this away from them and claim, as Harman does, that "the real point" for Whitehead and Latour is that "all such process is produced by the work of individual entities—a claim that would merely be nonsense for Deleuze, Bergson, Simondon, DeLanda, and Grant," is to take away what makes these philosophers' ontologies

coherent and viable, leaving only a single axis in place.[11] This is the axis that differentiates between discrete, "concrete individuals" (the term is Harman's),[12] and collectives or some sort of non-individualized processes or flows. Whitehead's individuals are a gathering of a collectivity into a one, which then contributes to what will constitute a further gathering; as he put it, "The many become one, and are increased by one."[13] The act of gathering may be individual, but it is an act. Similarly, for Deleuze, the act of differenciation (or actualization of the virtual) is an *act* that is unique and non-repeating, never exactly the same kind of differenciation as another.

It would seem, then, that Harman is attempting to drive a wedge here between two fractions within the "beatnik brotherhood" by emphasizing the atomism of some and the relationism, or continualism, of others, at the expense of the remainder of their respective philosophies. This divergence is consistent with Harman's own project, which emphasizes the atomic nature of objects and places the difference between objects and relations at the center of metaphysics. It is his account of objects that gives Harman's philosophy its name of "object-oriented ontology," and on the basis of this account and its difference from others that this philosophy aims to distinguish itself as uniquely poised to account for the reality of those central players, objects.

UNDERMINERS, OVERMINERS, AND THE MINER IN THE MIDDLE

This distinguishing occurs by way of a centering exercise whereby Harman's objects are granted their proper status in the universe, while other philosophers' accounts of things err by deviating either in one direction from the center or in another. Harman distinguishes his ontology from that of the "underminers" and "overminers" of objects. The underminers are those who claim that objects consist of, and are reducible to, something more basic that is a "deeper" and more significant reality than the objects. The overminers are those who reduce objects "upward" by claiming that they are nothing more than "palpable qualities, effects on other things, […] images in the mind," or some other such more real substance or phenomenon.[14] (Harman has also recently written about those who "play the double game of doing both at once," which he calls "duomining."[15])

Most of the "beatnik brotherhood" of process-relationalists would fit into one (or more) of three places in Harman's scheme. The first is the "half-hearted monism" of "underminers" like Bruno, Simondon, and DeLanda, who speak of a "heterogeneous yet continuous" plane of virtuality. To the extent that they speak of the "pre-individuals" or "seeds of individual things" as distinct from one another, according to Harman, we have nothing different from an object-oriented ontology except for the "assertion" that the objects are "both connected and unconnected at the same time."[16] This last assumption, as we will see, is something that could also be used to characterize Harman's ontology. Yet one could reply that this assertion is a productive one: if objects are both connected and unconnected, then it becomes important to specify how they are connected and how they remain distinct. Harman does this differently from the others, but, in principle, all do it in one way or another.

Secondly, the beatnik brothers might be "fluxist" underminers; and again, to the extent that they present the world as a multitude of different fluxes, nothing, for Harman, is gained over an object-oriented ontology. Then it becomes a simple matter of preferring the label "object" over the label "flux," with Harman preferring the first and others favoring some variation of the second. There is a difference, however, which is that for Harman the real objects are infinitely withdrawn. I will come to the implications of this claim shortly.

Or, thirdly, they could be "overminers" of the "relationist" type, a category that includes "Whitehead, Latour, and some of the American pragmatists." For these philosophers, "a thing's existence consists solely in its relation with other things. An object is exhausted by its presence for another, with no intrinsic reality held cryptically in reserve."[17] To this position, Harman replies that "if the entire world were exhausted by its current givenness, there is no reason why anything would alter." Analogously, if everything is exhausted by and in its relations, then there is no distinct thing left over—no house, for instance, only a "mob of house-perceptions"; no me, just "a manifold of *perceptions* of me, each unconnected with the rest."[18] This point about the exhaustion of an object by its relations is one that we will need to unpack more carefully.

Before we accept Harman's marking of this boundary between atomist and non-atomist philosophies as the definitive criterion for distinguishing among ontologies, we need to inquire into how Harman's objects and relations differ from others' entities and the things those entities do.

HARMAN'S OBJECTS: WHERE IS THE REAL TORNADO?

An object, for Harman, is something that is not reducible to its parts or to its relations. It is "anything that has a unified reality that is autonomous from its wider context and also from its own pieces."[19] Objects, however, come in two kinds: *real* objects and *sensual* objects. Real objects are things that, however they may be presented to others, always withdraw from presence-to-others. Such an object, he writes, "is a dark crystal veiled in a private vacuum: irreducible to its own pieces, and equally irreducible to its outward relations with other things."[20] Harman's examples of real objects range from himself and a variety of animals and living organisms to hammers, armies, stadiums, flags, songs, celebrations, droplets of water, neutrons, football teams, and the European Union.

Sensual objects, on the other hand, share with real objects the properties of being autonomous (though how they are autonomous from their relations is not exactly clear to me) and irreducible to any bundle of traits (though whether they are irreducible to the entire ensemble of all their traits I am also not sure), and an internal polarization between "two different kinds of qualities": "purely accidental sensual qualities" and the "more crucial real features" that subsist beneath them.[21] So the defining difference between real and sensual objects appears to be that the first kind are real, because they withdraw from relation, while the second kind are not, because they do not withdraw: they "always inhabit experience" but "are not hidden behind their qualities."[22]

There are for Harman, then, only two kinds of objects in the universe: "the real object that withdraws *from all experience*, and the sensual object that exists *only in experience*."[23] By this definition, there is no object that withdraws from *some* experience and exists in *some* experience. Yet this is the kind of object that process-relational philosophers like Whitehead and Deleuze tend to insist on, because for them entities are always in the midst of withdrawal *from* and of becoming, or coming into existence, *for* and *to*. They are always in the midst of relational maneuvers, felt movements.

Harman's duality leaves open the question of how we would determine whether an object is a real or a sensual object. If the real object withdraws from us and the sensual one does not, then it would seem that only the sensual object is accessible to us, which means that all *real* objects will remain spectral and speculative for us. But if we cannot know whether something is real or sensual *because any reality of an object is inaccessible to us*, then the ontological assertion of there being precisely these two kinds of objects becomes unverifiable, something we can only evaluate based on whether or not it creates an intellectually satisfying and coherent model. This is fair enough, as far as metaphysics goes. So let us pursue the thought: if an object always withdraws from *all* relations, we ought to ask what is left over once relations have ceased, whether temporarily or for good. What is it that has withdrawn from all relations? What is the irreducible core or essence of that object, and does that essence remain the same for *every* relation the object enters into, or does it change across and between different, consecutive or simultaneous, relations?

For Harman, it is clear that the object's essence remains the same for as long as that object remains the same object. Real objects, Harman asserts, "cannot touch." "Their reality consists *solely* in *being what they are*, not in some sort of *impact* on other things."[24] The reality of an object, in other words, is what it is *apart* from and *external* to all its relations, now or at anytime, with all other objects. The relations an object has with other objects are not realities of that object; they are distinct from it. The reality of a tornado, for instance, is *other* than the way it appears on our television screens and in our weather and topological models and after-the-event accounts by its observers and survivors. Those are all sensual objects that emerge in the relations between the tornado-as-it-really-is and other real objects. But the real tornado is also something other than the way it sweeps things up in its wake—people, houses, butterflies, rivers, cars—rushing through towns and villages, spreading

fear and frantic activity, and ultimately exhausting itself in the air currents into which it gets dispersed over the course of its demise. Those, too, are sensual objects, or perhaps new *real* objects being created in the relations between sensual objects, which are in turn created between real objects, and so on. The real tornado is not any of them.

Apart, then, from asserting that there is *something* to a tornado that touches nothing else and is untouchable by anything else, we would have no way of accessing that something. We can only abide in the faith that the real tornado is there somewhere, inaccessible to all or any other objects. But, then, to the existence of *which* objects do we extend our faith? Do we do so equally to tornadoes and to flying spaghetti monsters? We cannot say. What, then, can we know about the reality of anything at all, and about what is real and what is not? If we cannot pin down that difference, will our non-knowing make a difference?

Proponents of OOO have often suggested that there are political or ethical stakes in their account of the object: that an object's withdrawal means that the object is deserving of our respect simply because it eludes our comprehension and control.[25] It is autonomous from human observers. But if this carries ethical implications for us, it would be important that we be able to specify what *is* a real object and what is not. Does an amoeba or a virus count in the same way that another human or an elephant counts? Does a hypothesized deity who allegedly created the universe in seven days (before there were days), or a flying spaghetti monster, count? If we ourselves (metaphysical philosophers) cannot specify these things, is there someone—a scientist, a theologian, or a mystic perhaps—to whom we should defer in determining the ontological reality of an object?

This question resembles another that has featured in debates among environmental philosophers, specifically among biocentrists and their critics. Biocentric egalitarians, such as Paul Taylor, have argued that every living thing deserves a certain respect due to its being alive and the implications that arise from that. Their critics have responded with questions about how we can, then, decide between the respect deserved by, say, a deadly virus (deadly for humans) and an endangered flowering plant or charismatic animal?[26] OOO pushes the boundaries beyond the living to include in its array of morally considerable entities those things that are not alive. But since it does not tell us what their reality consists of (apart from a withdrawal that makes them inaccessible to us), it fails to provide a tangible means for making decisions about how we ought to relate to different such entities.

Harman's reply to such questions focuses on ontological issues, not on epistemological or ethical issues. In his "Response to Shaviro," he writes:

> My point is simply that objects are somehow deeper than their relations, and cannot be dissolved into them. One of the reasons for my saying so if that if an object could be identified completely with its current relations, then there is no reason that anything would ever change. Every object would be *exhausted* by its *current* dealings with all other things; actuality would contain no surplus, and thus would be perfectly determinate in its relations. As I see it, this is the major price paid by the ontologies of Whitehead and Latour.[27]

This claim that a relational account as provided by Whitehead provides no means for accounting for change is one that I will respond to next. I will argue that Harman's solution to the object-relations problem is less different from Whitehead's earlier solution than he makes it out to be. What it does, however, is to replace the latter's processual language, which is rooted in a dynamic understanding of temporality, with an object-centered terminology that is not.[28]

HARMAN'S WHITEHEAD

Harman's writing on Whitehead is characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, Whitehead is praised repeatedly for being the only philosopher to seriously question the correlationist, anthropocentric agenda of post-Kantian modern philosophy. Harman goes so far as to call Whitehead the "towering exception in recent

philosophy" to Kant's prioritizing of the human-world relation.[29] On the other hand, his effort is said to have fatally foundered on its commitment to a thorough relationism, a reduction of entities to their relations.

> A thing must exist in order to prehend, but we find that for Whitehead this existence consists in *nothing more than a previous set* of prehensions [emphasis added]. And this is a house of mirrors indeed, because there is no point or moment at which an actual entity is distinct from its relations with others. […] Shaviro's supposed difference between the private and public faces of the 'dual-aspect ontology' is really just a reflection of one set of relations passing to its successors.[30]

The problem in this account of Whitehead is that Harman has reduced *prehension*, that is, the process by which subjective feeling emerges in response to immediately given data in the form of a creative synthesis, to *relations*, a category counterposed to *objects* in a universe in which there are clearly bounded things and there are the events that happen to them. In Harman's ontology, there is a separation of *being* and *doing* (or relating), a separation between what things *are* and what can *happen* to them. For Whitehead, on the other hand, this "being" and "doing" is internalized into a single process, which consists of the relational act of prehension (which involves others in a unifying project) and concrescence (which provides others with data for future unifying projects).[31]

But if, for Harman's objects, being is separate from doing, it is not clear what the *being* of these objects consists of. What, if anything, can an object that is not relating to another object be said to be *doing*? Harman calls this state of non-relational being "dormancy," which we might take to be a simple, inactive form of self-maintenance.[32] But is it possible for something to maintain itself without interaction with anything else? Without external relata, is dormancy merely a timekeeping term, a way of saying that between the time that such and such a thing happened elsewhere, nothing happened here? I will return to this question of the dormant object momentarily. (Let's let it remain dormant.) Harman, again:

> In Whitehead's reverse-order version of the pyramid scheme, 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. [. . .] To say that the tree is made of pieces is not to pass the buck of reality to those pieces in the way that a relational house of mirrors passes the buck from one relation to the next to the next.[33]

Here Harman again is implying that prehension *lacks reality*; that reality is found in a substance that *is what it is* rather than in the action of that substance or the experience it undergoes. He writes:

> if a thing is fully exhausted or deployed in its current relations, with nothing held in reserve, then there is no reason that any current situation of the world would ever change. A thing would already be exactly and only what it is. No principle of movement could be found in the world.[34]

Quite to the contrary, however, for Whitehead a principle of movement is found *everywhere* in the world, because that is how he defines the world. "'Actuality'," he writes, "means nothing else than this ultimate entry into the concrete." "An instance of concrescence is termed an 'actual entity'—or, equivalently, an 'actual occasion'," and "an actual occasion is a concrescence effected by a process of feelings."[35] Each "piece" of the universe, in effect, is an event of creative synthesis, involving some measure of self-determination, and thus of novelty.[36] What a process-relational metaphysics needs to work at is not how to account for movement, which it takes as its general premise of reality, but how to account for stasis, stability, and the organization of movement into manifold and varying forms. Whitehead's philosophy *does* work at all of these things, with variable degrees of success (which we will not get into here); and so does Deleuze's, among others. But to say that it does not account for movement is to deny or misunderstand its basis.

"For Whitehead, after all," Harman nevertheless reiterates, "nothing can change." "In ontological terms," he continues, "all major and minor changes are on the same footing for Whitehead."[37] But this ignores White-head's account of "nexus" and "societies," which is where the everyday realities we are accustomed to in our experience—those things that Harman calls objects—are found. Where actual entities are ontologically equiva-lent, "societies" of such actual entities are the self-sustaining "groupings" of occasions that constitute the world we are more familiar with and that give it its shape and texture.[38]

By the end of this critique, Harman is accusing Whitehead of being "the true philosopher of stasis" and is hail-ing his own philosophy as "the true philosophy of becoming and events."[39] In the next section, I will look at a few similarities and differences between Harman's and Whitehead's ontologies to make the case that they are not as opposed as these claims suggest.

HARMAN VERSUS WHITEHEAD: AFFINITIES AND A CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE

There are larger affinities between Harman's metaphysics and those of the relationists he critiques, which are well known among his readers. These include a shared commitment to metaphysical realism and to at least some version of an anti-correlationism (*avant la lettre*, in Whitehead's case). Instead of examining these, I will discuss some affinities at the more microscopic level of their respective ontologies.

One such affinity concerns time and temporality. Martin Heidegger's writings are a touchstone in Harman's de-velopment of his ontology of the object. Heidegger, in Harman's own account, often refers to a threefold struc-ture, or "triplicity," of temporality whereby "A situation is given (past), but is interpreted differently according to which entity is doing the interpreting (future), and the two of these combine into a new and ambiguous model of the present."[40] In Whitehead, similarly, a prehension takes account of what is given to it, the objectified data from previous actual occasions; and in its manner of taking account, a manner that leads to a "concrescence" or "satisfaction," which every prehending subject does differently, it contributes to the shaping of the future.[41] A second affinity concerns the question I discussed above of how we might distinguish between a real and a sensual object. As I argued, Harman does not provide us with a failsafe method for knowing whether a particu-lar object is a real object (a thing in its own right) or a sensual object (such as a perception, idea, or proposition we entertain). But he does provide an ingenious solution to this problem that allows us to at least entertain the possibility of there being both kinds of objects. Real objects cannot touch each other, Harman argues; they have no direct contact. They "forever withdraw from one another into the shadows of the world."[42] They only directly contact the sensual objects, which are the "sensual caricatures" of the real objects, "exaggerated profiles" that translate the real things into perceivable objects that are mere simulacra of the real that are in turn perceivable by other real objects.[43] The sensual objects are the mediators, the translators, the go-betweens, though they themselves are not real but merely perceived. It is, however, in "the sensual realm of experience" that "all causation is triggered." Causality, then, or actual relations—actual events, in fact—are only possible through the mediation of translations of real objects by and through sensual objects. So there are two levels to the universe: the real which withdraws, and the sensual which is where the action occurs, though not where the action is (apparently) motivated or sourced from; and there is an asymmetry between these.

All of this is oddly consistent with Whitehead's description of a prehension, which is a dipolar relation between a subject-pole and an object-pole, or a "mental" and a "physical" pole.[44] The physical pole consists of the data of actual occasions that are "objectified" in the course of a prehension. It is, effectively, a real object (or many real objects) *turned into* a sensual object for another real object. The relationship between the real object and the sensual object is played out in the prehension. The difference here, then, is that Whitehead *internalizes* the real-sensual relation into every actual occasion, whereas Harman *externalizes* this relation, even going so far as referring, at times, to the two as making up two worlds or "zones."[45]

Related to this, Harman's claim that "any relation immediately generates a new object" also sounds very Whiteheadian, since Whitehead would say that any new object, or actual occasion, is its own distinctive set of

relations between its subject-pole and its object-pole.[46] Harman explains that "insofar as we somehow connect with a real object outside us, giving rise to perceptions of sensual trees, mailboxes, or blackbirds, we have somehow linked with that object to form a new real object." Our perception of a tree meets the criteria, he says, for an object:

> It is definitely unified, for it is one perception. It is also something new, irreducible to its pieces in isolation, since neither I nor the tree in a vacuum give rise to anything like a tree-perception. And furthermore, this perception of a tree has a reality deeper than any attempt to describe it […]. But if my relation with a tree forms a new object, then I as a real piece of that object find myself on its interior, confronting the mere image of the other piece.[47]

In other words, the new object is a sensual object consisting of a relation between the real me and a sensual object representing that tree to me (but not the actual real tree). This reflects an "asymmetry on the interior of the object, between the real me and the sensual tree." This duality, he writes, "is inescapable: there is always a non-transitive contact in which a real object caresses merely sensual ones. If the tree relates to me as well, this must happen on the interior of a separate but related object," which will in that case be a relation between the real tree and the sensual image the tree has of me.[48]

At times Harman describes this as a division *within* the object, which he calls a "two-*face* theory" whereby "every entity has two sides."[49] This, needless to say, sounds even more consistent with Whitehead's account of an actual occasion. The difference, however, is that Harman's two faces are faces of an entity that *is what it is* and that stays that way for an indefinite duration. Its being as an object is eternal *until* a relation forces itself upon it to somehow change it. It does not relate with another object *until it does* relate, whereupon it "generates a new object." For Whitehead, on the other hand, the two faces are two poles of a dynamic relational process which is constantly on the move between its initiation, its culmination, and its rendering itself available for a new initiation. The poles do not stand still long enough for us to be able to perceive or describe them; they can only be distinguished analytically as a kind of best abstraction of what is understood to be a process in motion.

What Harman's ontology does, then, can be thought of as a "detemporalization" or "deprocessification" of Whitehead's ontology. The temporality of Harman's objects is taken out of the definition of what constitutes an object; whereas with Whitehead, the temporality is *constitutive* of every object, that is, every actual occasion. This should lead us to ask what is gained and what is lost in this detemporalization. One thing that is gained is an additional layer to the world: that which distinguishes between real objects and sensual objects, real qualities and sensual qualities, and between the different relations that can be had between each of them. One thing that is lost is the sense of processuality of each of them, whereby it is the relational movement between reality and sensuality—or between subjectivation and objectivation, to use a more Whiteheadian set of terms, or becoming-subject and becoming-object, in Deleuzian terms—that continually recreates the real as a process of becoming.[50] Because the real does not merely sit there, nor does the sensual merely arise of its own accord without a real to activate it (so to speak). For Whitehead, in fact, it is all real, and the two faces, or poles, are the subjective and the objective, which we might translate as the interior and the exterior of a single relational event. And it is such dynamic, temporal, processual events that constitute the world.[51]

HARMAN'S OBJECTS-RELATIONS RIFT: TWO WORLDS OR TWO FACES?

Harman, as mentioned, agrees that Whitehead's metaphysics removes the "basic ontological rift" that "correlationist" philosophy has held to exist between humans and non-humans and replaces it with another one, or perhaps more than one. Whitehead introduces a gap between actual occasions (which are the microscopic bits of reality) and nexuses/societies (which are those collectively organized sets of actual occasions that maintain a continuity over time and/or space), and, secondly, a gap between actualities and potentials (or what he calls "eternal objects"). Arguably, however, Whiteheadian metaphysics also displaces Descartes' ontological rift between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* into a dynamic relationship occurring at the nuclear core of every actual

occasion. This, for Whiteheadians, is an enormous gain.

Harman rejects this gain, and instead displaces the basic ontological rift to the boundary "between *objects* and *relations* in general: between their autonomous reality outside all relation, and their caricatured form in the sensual life of other objects": "everything plays out in the strife between concealed objects and the twisted or translated forms in which they appear to other objects."[52] Yet what does it mean to say, as Harman's ontology requires him to say, that fire never makes "direct contact" with cotton, because "direct contact is impossible," with "the sensual realm as the only possible realm of contact"?[53] Just a few pages earlier he had been convincing us that to think of the real and the sensual as two separate realms or "worlds" was quite wrong: "we must oppose the theory of two worlds […] because objects and relations are not two fixed points on a map. Instead, every entity has two sides" or "faces."[54]

There is a tension, then, between the Harman of *two worlds*, with contact appearing in one of them only (the sensual) and not the other (the real), and the Harman of *two faces*, with contact being a quality or capacity of one face but not of the other. The first falls into a trap that he himself warns us against, in which there are two levels of reality characterized by different rules. The second avoids this trap precisely because its structural dichotomy has been shifted out of the rules that *structure* what happens in a world or level and into the *enactment* of what occurs, of what the respective faces of things *do* or are capable of doing. The second, in other words, is consistent with Whitehead's metaphysics in a way that the first is not.

What is clearly different between Harman's objects and Whitehead's occasions—and what I think Harman wants us to see as the major gain in his ontology—is that his objects *wink in and out of relationality*, whereas Whitehead's objects wink into existence *relationally*. Perceiving and non-perceiving, Harman writes, "must be found in the same entity at different times; they are modes of being rather than types of object." Objects "do not perceive insofar as they *exist,"* but only "insofar as they *relate.*" There is no reason, he contends, "to think that all objects find themselves in such relations at any given moment": "not all objects perceive at all times; some objects are sleeping, or *dormant.*"[55]

In Harman's evocative account, in *Circus Philosophicus*, of the world as a giant ferris wheel filled with things, being observed and responded to by people and other respondent things, Harman describes an object that becomes his example of a dormant object. This object is a flag, "a purple lozenge on a field of amber," which used to be celebrated by a union of arrowsmiths, but the guild was disbanded long ago, and now the flag merely flaps in the wind, unrecognized.[56] "Yet there is a certain reality possessed by this flag," Harman writes, "no matter how cruelly ignored, and someday a new throwback union or sarcastic artist may arise to adopt it as an emblem once more."[57]

The flag's dormancy, it would seem, consists in the fact that it no longer means what it used to mean for anyone, and that it therefore no longer triggers celebration—but that it one day might do that again. The implication is that the flag's meanings are still there, hidden away in its withdrawn essence, and that they can at some future point re-emerge in their glory. But what Harman seems not to recognize is that in order for that "throwback union or sarcastic artist" to retrieve the flag's forgotten meanings, they would need more than just the flag. They would need access to some retained memory of what the flag meant (and what flags in general mean): a history book, a web site, a newly rediscovered underground archive, a storyteller passing on stories to other storytellers, a memory of attention-rapt bodily postures as flags were raised or lowered, a mystical insight received through a learned practice of poetic reverie, and so on. Each of these requires ongoing relations to keep the information—the ink on paper, the data on disk, the words and syntax, the bodily held posture, the mystical practice—from deteriorating to the point that it becomes illegible and unreconstructible. If it is the flag's meaning, then, and not merely the fabric and the colors, that constitutes its inner essence, then that meaning was never found in the material of the flag alone; it always required recording instruments of some kind, instruments that have persisted in some form *elsewhere,* beyond the actual lozenge on its field of amber flapping in the wind of Harman's ferris wheel.

In his effort to privilege the object—the flag as a piece of the ferris wheel—Harman is losing access to the relational network within which that object becomes what it is, a network that includes practices, experiences, and mediators. In contrast to this account, what is real for Whitehead is always what is *happening*. The result of this trade-off, then, in Harman's ontology, is a *demotion of experience*. Experience, after all, occurs only in perception, which is the realm of the sensual, not the real. The "mode of being" of real objects "is to be disconnected from each other in advance"; connection "is found only in experience, not in withdrawn genuine reality."[58]

CONCLUSION: FINDING THE INNER BEATNIK

There is a thread that weaves its way throughout Harman's comments about relational ontologies. That thread is a claim that such philosophies have had their day and are now somehow exhausted—exhausted in part because they have failed to account for the stabilities, novelties, and inner depths of objects that make up a posthumanist world.[59]

But this claim is easily contested. Process-relational philosophies have been influential at many points in history: arguably, they developed and even flourished in ancient Greece (Heraclitus), India (Nagarjuna, Śāntarakṣita), China (Zhuang Zu, Zhiyi, Fazang), Renaissance and early modern Europe (Bruno, Spinoza), and in the Anglo-American pragmatist and processual traditions of the last 150 years (Peirce, Whitehead, James, Dewey, Hartshorne, Neville, and others). But they have been largely marginal within academic philosophy of the last one hundred years. In part this is for the same reasons that systematic metaphysics in general has been marginal. Thinkers with a *somewhat* processual approach—Marx, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and others like them—have been influential, and even dominant, within some circles of Continental philosophers. But Continental philosophy is hardly dominant in academic philosophy today (at least in North America), and most of those thinkers' processuality has tended to be somewhat circumscribed: Marx's was constrained within a general tendency toward material-economic reductionism, and within a theory of history that is too simplistic to be taken seriously today; Derrida's processualism tended toward a textual idealism that tightly circumscribed the ontological dimensions it might otherwise have shared with process-relational traditions. Only Deleuze, and arguably the later Foucault, have been fully process-relational thinkers, and while both maintain an army of followers, to say that they are dominant or hegemonic in philosophy (or elsewhere) is to stretch the truth too far. Whitehead's explicitly process-relational metaphysics, on the other hand, have been largely ignored until their recent revival.

The second point—that process-relational philosophy has failed to account for the stabilities, novelties, and inner depths of objects—is a complex and multi-faceted point. I have tried to suggest here that interiority, novelty, and creativity are not only central themes in the philosophy of Whitehead, but that they are rather well accounted for. Process-relational philosophers, to be sure, have not had the last word on how the universe has evolved into the particular stabilities, forms, and dynamisms that characterize it. No one has this final word, so the challenge remains wide open; and, as some speculative realists have argued (including proponents of OOO), science can play an important informing role on how these things might have occurred.

Process philosophers, for whom the universe consists of dynamic relational processes, of events, encounters, and becomings, account for stability in a variety of ways. If everything is in motion, as a processualist would claim, there are still differences in processual speeds, durations, currents, flows, extents, variances, and the folds or structural relations these give rise to. Rocks could be said, for instance, to consist mainly of *slower* processes than humans, mollusks, tornadoes, or lightning storms. But they are processes just as are suns and galaxies, if the latter be defined as singular objects. All have their life cycles or developmental trajectories (or something like it), or else their constituents do, and these are never entirely predictable. There is, furthermore, the problem of how to map out the expressed actuality of the world and the potentials in the world for further actualization. This question is central to all process-relational philosophers, and each—Whitehead, Hartshorne, Simondon, Deleuze, Delanda, and others—have struggled with it, with varying results.

Process-relational philosophers assume that anything that *exists* exists in relation to other existing things. There is no withdrawn essence that is independent of all else and that stays the same independently of all else over time. For Harman, by contrast, objects simply are what they are; they do not need to enter into relations with others, or at least it is not clear why they would or how they might not. But if we, objects that we are, had that option, might we not choose to simply be what we are, for as long as we wanted to? Why bother with a world of others, a world of relations that affect us, change us, and in the end bring out demise? Why bother with a world that requires effort for self-maintenance in the face of an environment that is always there, even if the qualities and forms it takes for us are always changing? In the real universe, the process-relationist would contend, there is no opting out. We are always already implicated, always already called to relate, attracted and repelled in one direction or another by the opportunities, the challenges, and the threats that face us. The universe is a place that requires doing, not simply being.

There are times, however, when Harman's own inner beatnik appears to take hold of him and make him more interesting to a process-relational thinker. These are times, for instance, when he suggests that it is not up to *us* to decide to withdraw or re-emerge from our relationless cocoon. It is, as he puts it in the final chapter of *Circus Philosophicus*, up to the things *beneath* us on the scale of objects, the parts that make us up. Sleep overcomes us, and waking overtakes us, not because we decide to do these things. "Only the zebra's pieces," he writes, "are able to guide it into new situations of some kind." Free will, Harman continues, "does not exist for objects, but only for pieces of those objects." There is, he says, "an excess in our pieces beyond what is needed to create us, and this excess allows new and unexpected things to happen." It is this way with all objects: "We are awakened neither by our own powers nor by the world outside, but by the swarming landscape *within*. … The dormant zebra, like all other objects, awaits a hailstorm from below."[60]

I find this version of the object more lively, in Jane Bennett's terms,[61] more Deleuzian even, insofar as it suggests a swarming dynamism within an object that is no longer a black hole of pure withdrawal, but that has become an actual field of relations affecting the object. That this zebra is woken from within—from its pieces, as it were—does not mean that it cannot also be awoken from without. This is, after all, a zebra Harman sees painted on a flag that is waving in a hailstorm. In this strange closing chapter of a strange book, a chapter framed by an account of Bruno Latour's hosting the author in his flat in Paris, Harman acknowledges both the strangeness of this idea and the strength of the Latourian burgundy flowing in his blood when this idea seized him.

There is something about this seizure—the swarm of burgundy entering Harman's body from a Parisian glass and filling it over the course of an evening, the swarm of a thought process ricocheting between a painted zebra waving in the wind and an idea building in the mind of a philosopher—that suggests that Harman's objects are affected not just by the pieces within. They are kicked into life because of a world in which what is within and what is without ceaselessly ricochet back and forth across the permeable boundary of a questing subjectivity. This, to me, seems as Whiteheadian and Deleuzian as anything.

Pass the burgundy, Mr. Harman. You may discover yourself to be a beatnik brother after all.

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BEATNIK BROTHERS?

NOTES

1. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, eds., *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Post-modernisms* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); Jeffrey A. Bell *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos: Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Keith Robinson, ed., *Deleuze, Whitehead, Bergson: Rhizomatic Connections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Roland Faber, ed., *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambrige, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking With Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts,* trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Roland Faber and Andrea Stephenson, ed., *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Erin Manning, *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).
2. Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2009), 6.
3. Ivakhiv, "Things slip away (on Harman's Latourian object lessons)," *Immanence,* September 9, 2009, http://blog.uvm.edu/aivakhiv/2009/09/09/things-slip-away-on-harmans-latourian-object-lessons/. The debate continued through 2009, 2010, and 2011 on blogs including Immanence, Larval Subjects (larvalsubjects.wordpress.com), Object-Oriented Philosophy (doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com), Networkologies (networkologies.wordpress.com), The Pinocchio Theory (shaviro.com/blog), and several others. See, for instance, http://blog.uvm.edu/aivakhiv/2010/12/12/being-knowing-knowing-being/, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=888, http://naughtthought.wordpress.com/2011/08/17/the-twilight-of-becoming-and-process/, http://knowledge-ecology.com/2011/08/18/process-rising/, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=995.
4. Steven Shaviro, "The Actual Volcano: Whitehead, Harman, and the Problem of Relations," in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 279-290; and Graham Harman, "Response to Shaviro," in *The Speculative Turn*, 291-303.
5. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," in *The Speculative Turn*, 291-303; Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Aylresford, Hants, U.K.: Zero Books/John Hunt Publishing, 2011); Harman, *Circus Philosophicus* (Ropley, Hants, U.K.: Zero Books/John Hunt Publishing, 2010).
6. This article arises out of a larger project, which is a defense of, and a specific articulation of and contribution to, the notion of a "process-relational" metaphysical tradition. Such a tradition shares an account of things and the universe as inherently dynamic, processual, and relational in nature. I take this tradition to be cross-cultural and spanning centuries, from ancient thinkers such as Heraclitus (Greece), Nagarjuna and Śāntarakṣita (India), Zhiyi and Fazang (China), to many in the modern and contemporary West. While there are undeniable and significant divergences between those brought together under such a loose rubric, there are points of agreement that render them a distinct and significant philosophical tradition. In the 20th century, this tradition has been most notably represented by the pragmatist and processual currents identified with C. S. Peirce, William James, A. N. Whitehead, and many of their followers. Among leading Continental philosophers, Deleuze has arguably been a notable exponent of a process-relational metaphysics. It is only in the last two decades that a growing cadre of Deleuzian theorists has recognized deep philosophical affinities between Deleuze and Whitehead. These theorists have not taken the more radical step of affirming a cross-cultural and deeply historical "process-relational tradition," though Anglo-American process philosophers and pragmatists such as Charles Hartshorne, Robert Cummings Neville, and John Deely, have in various ways done that. See, for instance, Nolan Pliny Jacobson, *The Heart of Buddhist Philosophy,* Southern Illinois University Press, 1988; Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead's Differences from Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 25. 4 (1975): 407-413; Robert Cummings Neville, *The Tao and the Daimon: Segments of a Religious Inquiry,* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982; John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. The dialogue between these two schools—the Deleuzo-Whiteheadians and the process-pragmatists—is one upon which the notion of a process-relational tradition hinges.
7. Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 6.
8. Harman, "now writing," *Object-Oriented Philosophy* (blog), September 28, 2009, http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2009/09/28/now-writing/ .
9. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 291.
10. Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* Corrected Edition, ed. D. R. Griffin and D R. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 212.
11. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 294.
12. Ibid., 299.
13. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

14. Harman, *Quadruple Object,* 12.

15. Harman, "Stengers on emergence," *Biosocieties* 9(1), 94-109, p. 100. And see Harman, "Undermining, overmining, and duomining: a critique," in Jenna Sutelo, ed., *ADD Metaphysics* (Aalto, Finland: Aalto University Digital Design Laboratory, 2013), 40-51.

16. Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 9.

17. Ibid., 12.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 116.

20. Ibid., 47.

21. Ibid., 48.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 49, emphasis added. A reviewer of this article pointed out that this move simply ontologizes Kant's relationship between the thing in itself (*noumenon*) and the perceived thing (*phenomenon*). This is an important point about Harman's ontology, but does not defend it from the criticisms outlined below.

24. Ibid., 73, emphasis added.

25. This is particularly the case for Levi R. Bryant and Timothy Morton. See, for instance, Bryant, "The world is enough: on overmining and undermining," *Larval Subjects,* October 11, 2011, http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/the-world-is-enough-on-overmining-and-undermining/, last accessed June 1, 2014; Bryant, "Politics and Speculative Realism," *Speculations* IV (2013), 15-21; Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

26. Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); James C. Anderson, "Species equality and the foundations of moral theory," *Environmental Values* 2: 347-365; William C. French, "Against biocentric egalitarianism," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): 39-57; David Schmidtz, "Are all species equal?", *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 15.1 (1998): 57-67.

27. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 295.

28. The argument that follows is paralleled by Peter Gratton's in "Post-deconstructive realism: it's about time," an article that came out after my own was submitted for publication. Gratton argues that Harman's notion of time as epiphenomenal to the "real object"—time as "the tension between *sensual* objects and their *sensual* qualities" (89), with the *real* object subsisting in an eternal present—forces Harman to ignore the reality of time in such thinkers as Derrida and Deleuze. See Gratton, "Post-deconstructive realism," *Speculations* IV (2013), 84-90.

29. Harman, *The Quadruple Object,* 46. And see the section "Whitehead and Continental philosophy" in Harman's "Response to Shaviro," pp. 292ff.

30. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 296.

31. The classic account of Whitehead's metaphysics is given in *Process and Reality,* corrected edition ed. by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

32. See, for instance, Harman, "The road to objects," 177, or the examples from *Circus Philosophicus* discussed below.

33. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 297.

34. Ibid, 297.

35. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 211.

36. For an elucidation of this reading of Whitehead, see Thomas Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

37. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 300.

38. See the chapter "The grouping of occasions" in Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 201-208.

39. Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 300.

40. Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 58.

41. See Part Three, "The Theory of Prehensions," in Whitehead, *Process and Reality.*

42. Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 74.

43. Ibid., 75.

44. The clearest account of this comes in Whitehead's chapter "Objects and Subjects" in *Adventures of Ideas,* 175-190.

45. To be fair, he does clarify that "there is not one special world of real objects and another of sensual ones" (*Quadruple Object*, 110). But the impression of such distinct "zones" (a word he uses on the same page) persists in some of his writing.

46. Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 117.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 117-118.

49. Ibid., 111.

50. Deleuze does not himself employ the terms "becoming-subject" and "becoming-object," though they would fit within

the series of becomings described by Deleuze and Guattari in the chapter "1730: Becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible…", *A Thousand Plateaus,* tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 232-308. These are terms I develop in my attempt to fuse Deleuze with Whitehead and Peirce in *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

51. For instance: "The actualities of the Universe are processes of experience, each process an individual fact. The whole Universe is the advancing assemblage of these processes" (Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 197).

52. Ibid., 119-120.

53. Ibid., 121.

54. Ibid., 111.

55. Ibid., 122.

56. Harman, *Circus Philosophicus,* 8.

57. Ibid., 9.

58. *Quadruple Object,* 132.

59. See, for instance, "Marginalia on radical thinking: an interview with Graham Harman," *The Disloyal Opposition to Modernity,* June 1, 2012, http://skepoet.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/marginalia-on-radical-thinking-an-interview-with-graham-harman/, or Harman, "Review of Bennett," Object-Oriented Philosophy, May 4, 2010, http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2010/05/04/review-of-bennett/ , where he writes, "my reservation about Whitehead is well known: I think relational ontologies are a spent force, even though so many bright people think they're the wave of the future."

60. *Circus Philosophicus*, 75.

61. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).