

CROSSING WAYS OF THINKING: ON GRAHAM HARMAN'S SYSTEM AND MY OWN

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While writing most of *Form and Object*,¹ I was unfamiliar with Graham Harman's work. After I discovered it thanks to Quentin Meillassoux's recommendation, my initial reading revealed that he was concerned with the same questions as me and that his model was similar in some ways to the one I was trying to develop in response to them. I was happy to feel less alone.

Here I will examine the connections and differences between his work, which already consists of several separate works, and my own, especially the treatise *Form and Object*. I do not believe that they conflict anywhere, but I also do not think that they merely replicate each other. They provide a rare example of ways of thinking that intersect and meet at certain places and concepts, even though they derive from different horizons and traditions and aim at very distinct goals. I think that ways of thinking which have the same orientation always end in antagonism, and that those beginning in the same place never fail to differentiate. In our case, since we do not come from the same place and do not go in the same direction, we meet.

I have much admiration for Harman's way of thinking. Trying to compare it with mine is quite strange for me, first, since it is undoubtedly more mature, and, second, since any comparison is colored by the fact that I am the one making it. Anyone would be more qualified than he or I, I believe, at evaluating the possible parallels and gaps between our respective notions.

But I will nonetheless attempt to do justice to both of our systems.

GAPS

There is an agreement in principle between Harman's project and mine as presented in *Form and Object*.

In his recent book on Lovecraft and philosophy (*Weird Realism*²), Harman begins by mentioning that one of the main activities of philosophy consists in first producing and then filling in cosmic gaps. The primary motivation of Graham Harman's work, as well as *Form and Object*, I believe derives from the refusal to begin by supposing an ontological gap between consciousness and world, subject and object, human beings and other animal species, or animate and inanimate.

Harman is a "continuist" insofar as he sees no reason to suppose an ontological difference between thought and life, organic and inorganic. But if he is a continuist here, it is because he *already* posited an ontological difference between real objects and sensual objects, between each object and its qualities, situating it at the core of his system. In other words, since for him an ontological difference exists between the real object, withdrawn into itself, and the sensual object, internal to perception, there is no need to assume that there is an underlying difference between material or immaterial objects, sensory or non-sensory objects, conscious or unconscious objects. An ontological difference exists for him not between objects and non-objects, nor between object and consciousness, but within the category of object, between real objects and sensual objects.

Thus, he and Meillassoux disagree about the problem of dividing matter, life, and thought. Meillassoux is a strong discontinuist. His entire system derives from the critique of correlationism, a critique shared in large part with Harman. Meillassoux permits the speculative thinking of rupture and advent, differentiating the "realms" of matter, life, thought, and justice. In short, Meillassoux connects thought to the in-itself, and separates objects into successive realms, none of which are inferred from the previous realm. On the other hand, Harman separates the object in-itself from the immanent perceptual object and connects objects without positing any natural difference.

Although I share the critique of correlationism and a certain dialectical tradition with Harman and Meillassoux, unlike them I make room for neither an accessible nor inaccessible in-itself. However, I share Harman's idea that no natural ontological difference or hierarchy exists between different domains of animate or inanimate, thinkable or unthinkable, objects. And I share with Meillassoux philosophical traditions that have influenced my work, which lead me to an ideal which he also has (to confront the tragedy of thinking, "to visit death" and return, "to traverse the Acheron two (or three) times."³) Nonetheless, I think my project is closer to Harman's.

The principle of this project is to not posit any gap between several different objective domains (whether this be the emergence of life or zooanthropological difference) and not to assign the obligation of examining them to thought.

EQUAL

For Harman and me, thought should have the task of proving equality, that is, it should account for what all things, including human beings, have in common. In this way, we can differentiate them as distinct objects, but objects nonetheless, and exorcize the spell of an original rupture in being.

Form and Object and Harman's object-oriented ontology are thought-experiments on the "equality" of all things. Both see philosophy as having an imperative to combine knowledge and morality so that they cannot be separated. The role of philosophy is to understand what composes the world and the way to divide and order its elements on an equal plane by refusing to attribute any ontological privilege to anything in particular. It is therefore a question of grasping the equal ontological chance that every thing has, whether it is material, immaterial, possible, necessary, true, or false.

Nonetheless, it is not a question of an absolute ontological egalitarianism, aiming to necessitate every thing's equivalence to everything else in every respect. On the contrary, Harman writes: "My point is not that all objects are equally real, but that they are equally *objects*."⁴ Likewise, the first book of *Form and Object* considers why and how "no-matter-what" is something, neither more nor less than another thing, by constructing an

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ontological plane of equality. However, the aim of the second book is to order objects in relation to other objects, by redefining classificatory categories (species, gender, class) and value differences.

Our common idea is that the task of every ontology is to strive to be as open as possible to distinguishing and ordering either what Harman calls the distinct “regions” of objects in his “ontography,” or what appears in *Form and Object* as the classificatory or intensive differences between objects.

It is still necessary that one identify all objects as objects in order to be able to differentiate them. And “[a]ll such objects must be accounted for by ontology, not merely denounced or reduced to despicable nullities.”⁵

NEITHER... NOR...

Our common theoretical opponent is every kind of thinking that denies objecthood to some objects (for example, on the grounds that they are fictional or impossible), and philosophical traditions that reduce objects to the lower level of what they are composed of or dissolve them into the higher level in and by which they are comprehended.

The primary antagonism hinges around the claim that all entities, including imaginary or contradictory ones, have the status of objects. Of course, the claim is not specific to our projects. It derives from the early twentieth-century claims and arguments concerning existence, subsistence, and “absistence,”⁶ in the work of Kazimierz Twardowski, Alexius Meinong, Edmund Husserl, and Bertrand Russell.

On the other hand, the defense of the object as the “protagonist of philosophy”—an object attacked from above and below—is a more original idea. It appears, and receives comparable treatment, in both Harman’s and my own system. Both systems deny the reduction of an object to the smallest object and dissolution of an object in the biggest object.

Harman dismisses both the overmining and undermining of objects.⁷ I talk about a reduction of things either to “less-than-things” or to “more-than-things.”⁸ By “overmining,” Harman means a strategy that approximates what I mean by the reduction to “more-than-things.” In this approach, objects do not exist except by what they are in and by what comprehends them. Consciousness, society, history, or nature—though Harman does not discuss the latter three—can be “more-than-things” whenever they become all-encompassing totalities without anything external to them. This strategy includes Émile Durkheim’s sociological holism, which led him to say that society is to “its members [...] like a god is to the faithful,”⁹ historicism,¹⁰ and contemporary naturalism in its more extreme reductionist form. All of them admit that objects exist, but that these objects only exist as social, historical, or natural objects. Thus, they are “overmined” (in Harman’s words) by a “more-than-thing” (in my own words): consciousness (Husserl’s “residuum after the annihilation of the world”¹¹), society, history, or nature. Everything is then in “more-than-things,” which are in nothing other than themselves.

On the other hand, Harman’s definition of “undermining” corresponds to what I define as the reduction to “less-than-things.” Here we take aim at the intellectual strategy—for example, among certain pre-Socratics (Thales, Empedocles) or in the materialist tradition (from Democritus to the Churchlands)—that consists in reducing the level of the division of the world into objects to the level of components of objects, such that “what seems at first like an autonomous object is really just a motley aggregate built of smaller pieces. Only what is basic can be real.”¹² Even more profoundly, the reduction may lead to the discovery of a monist reality beneath what appear to be several different objects: the One, Being, *apeiron*, *il y a*. Harman also talks about how theories of pre-individuation “undermine” objects by populating the world with flux and processes in which objects are only secondary or transient effects, like foam at the wave’s surface. In these cases, “talk of *objects* merely crystallizes becoming in an abstract state.”¹³ But “the same problem arises here as before. [...] [W]e still need to ask whether the world is one flux or many. If only one, then we are back with monism. But if many, then each has some sort of specific and integral character, and this already makes it an object.”¹⁴

In *Form and Object*, I resort to a comparable argument:¹⁵ all ways of thinking that call objects into question (often confounding them with substance), in favor of a becoming-unity or becoming-manifold object, can only transform its “flux” into objects. If several lines of becoming, several processes of reality exist, then flux, lines, and processes are differentiated from each other, and thus are several different objects. The argument can only bring back what it was meant to dismiss. Harman and I share the idea that what one calls an “object” (or “thing,” in my case) is primarily what every operation of the division of the world, of the real, of the cosmos, and of that which is, rests on. One may divide the world into events, but one will end up attributing to these events the same properties attributed to objects. Talk about “objects” and “things” is talk about the division of everything. And if one decides to divide everything into something other than objects, one will be compelled to talk about objects without knowing it. Our common move is to try to remain as close to objects as possible, and to address the problem of the division of the world without any misunderstanding: an object is what derives from a division of the world, whether or not one calls it “flux.”

We certainly agree not to make “flux” the negative of objects, identified with immutable material entities, but objects like others.

NEGATIVE

We both refuse to begin with the problem of an ontological gap. Instead, we start with the problem of ontological division, since we do not think that thought gains anything by presupposing that existence is separated in general from consciousness, world, language, things, thought, and being. Rather, we claim that existence is separate from *all things*, whether they think, do not think, live, sense, are true or false.

On this view, thought is the comparison of several different possible divisions of the universe.

Our general picture of the universe appears *prima facie* more or less the same. Harman explains his idea of the universe with a downward infinite regress, a “turbulence” of decomposable objects. However, there is no upward infinite regress—for example, in his description of the “empty sky.”¹⁶ I define objects as accumulating in each other, such that smaller objects can always exist. But a maximal object also exists, which I call the universe. This object ceaselessly expands, since something new always exists. But I distinguish the universe, which is the biggest possible thing, full of objects that comprehend other objects, from the world, which is filled only with one thing at a time and is “formal.” While the universe is always the biggest possible thing, the world is not a thing, but the form of each thing, its opposite or its negative. The world exists at each level; this dust particle is in the world, neither more nor less than our galaxy is in the world. Therefore, the world short-circuits the terracing of things, while the universe is simply the higher, maximal state of the accumulation of things. The universe is the sum of objects. The world is the opposite of each thing.

Harman has no equivalent to this world, which is the negative of each thing at each level. Why? Because Harman does not conceive of “form.” My definition of form partially comes from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and from Hegel: form is the condition, container, and outside of objects.

Our two projects are similar in many ways: a joint rejection of the reduction of objects to a lower or higher level, a desire to think equally about objects, and a refusal to presuppose an ontological difference between two kinds of objects (humans and non-humans, for example), which would eliminate what objects have in common.

But like all ways of thinking which intersect, our two ways of thinking stem from very different traditions.

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ORIGINS

Harman's thought is anchored in Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. He revives Brentano's central idea of intentionality, which his followers often modified. Harman understands intentionality as the fact that the object consciousness is directed at exists not merely outside of consciousness, but also *within* consciousness.

For reasons stemming from a contradictory Hegelian and Wittgensteinian tradition, *Form and Object* proposes to interpret being as the opposite sense of comprehension: to be a thing is to be *in* this thing, that is, to be comprehended by this thing.

But while I attribute to "being in" a kind of transcendental topology, where each thing is determined by what the thing is in, Harman conceives of the fact of "being in" as an expression of the immanence of the intentional object. Thus, for him, an object that is comprehended in and by another object is called a "sensual object." Harman, then, attributes a wider sense to perception, which is what makes his system interesting: objects perceive whenever they enter into relation.

I prefer to say that an object that contains another object "comprehends" it, using the set-theoretical sense of the term: a set "comprehends" this or that element.

Harman and I understand relations between objects only in a very particular form: one object *in* another. A relation is not primarily the contact or intersection of two entities situated on the same plane (which provides Harman with the argument of "indirect causation"), but the relation between a thing that comprehends and a comprehended thing. Harman considers this relation through the model of intentionality, extended to perception, whereas I consider it as a part-whole relation.

This is why the extension of the sense of perception leads Harman to his defense of "polypsychism"¹⁷ (rather than panpsychism): an object can *perceive* another object. On the other hand, the extension of the sense of comprehension (the opposite of the sense of being) leads me to interpret each relation between objects as a part-whole relation: two objects never *equally* come into relation; one is always a part of the other.

Harman's position derives from his generalization of a phenomenological principle just as my position is the result of analytic and dialectical training:¹⁸ the Hegelian process of being consists in the assimilation and internalization of the object, and the Tractarian thing is what enters into "the possibility of all states of affairs."¹⁹

We both consider an object less as "what is one" than as "what is in." Harman's real object is in-itself, and his sensual object is in what perceives it. For me, a thing is outside itself, in the world, and an object is in another thing. But a kind of tonal difference remains in both cases: a phenomenological color in Harman, which leads him to talk of sensual objects and to defend "polypsychism," and an analytic and dialectical hue in my work, which leads me to define comprehension as the relation between element and set, and then to hold that what is comprehended is exceeded by what comprehends it.

In our two projects, intentionality is generalized in some way and not a property of consciousness. Directly influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, Harman defines his "sensual object" as an hyperbolic intentional object-form. Brentano's immanent objectivity is pushed to its limit: the fact that an object exists for and in consciousness becomes the fact that a sensual object exists for and in another object.²⁰

However, I generalize intentionality from the other side. What interests Harman is that the sensual object exists for and in another object (which perceives it). What I hold is that the object does not exist for- and in-itself. This is the central claim of *Form and Object*: that no thing is in-itself, that any thing is outside itself, in the way that Jean-Paul Sartre's²¹ intentionality of consciousness was projected outside itself. In *Form and Object*, any thing is thus outside itself.²²

The primary difference between Harman's way of thinking and my own therefore derives perhaps from our different interpretations of the in-itself.

IN-ITSELF

A noteworthy characteristic of Harman's work is his reevaluation of the thing-in-itself.

According to him, the real object always withdraws, inaccessible and in-itself. We know that this analysis is drawn from his rereading of Heidegger's tool-analysis.²³ Harman inherits the opposition between the in-itself and the for-us from Immanuel Kant and the phenomenological tradition. In the speculative realist domain, Quentin Meillassoux does likewise with very different results.

Yet the model I propose is different. For me, the in-itself, which is the foil of *Form and Object*, is a reaction against two ideas: the *in-another-thing* (for example, in us) and the *outside-itself*. Positing the in-itself thus leads to two contradictions: first, the “in” is contradicted by the “outside,” and, second, the “itself” is contradicted by “another thing.”

Harman contrasts the sensual object, which is in something other than itself (in the object that perceives it, to be precise), with the real object (which is in-itself). I contrast the thing, which is outside-itself (in something-other-than-a-thing), with the object (which is outside-itself as a thing, and in another thing as an object), and I deny the possibility of the in-itself.

For Harman, an object is either in-itself or in another thing. But the idea that a thing could be in something other than a thing is meaningless for him. In my model, a thing is always outside-itself, and is either in something other than a thing, or in another thing. But a thing in-itself is meaningless for me. More precisely, the in-itself is the figure of nonsense, what I call “compact.”²⁴

For Harman, only two possibilities corresponding to two poles exist: the real object withdraws in itself, or the sensual object exists in and for another object, which perceives it. For Harman, there is no “negative.” Hegelian dialectical thinking is not a major influence for him. Therefore, the idea that a thing could be in its negative (in a non-thing) is mostly foreign to his system.

It is quite different in my system, which rests on this alternative: every thing is either *formally* in its negative (in something other than a thing, in a non-thing), or *objectively* in another thing (in which case the comprehended thing becomes an object). My dialectical tradition is clearly expressed in the existence of this “formal” system.

Every thing is twofold: either in other things that positively exist and that determine the thing, or in its negative, which alone constitutes it as a thing.

Each thing—whether it is my finger or my hand or a table—is a “thing” insofar as it is alone, that is, a *solitary* thing existing only in its negative. The table is only something, in the widest and least determinate sense, when it is comprehended in *everything that is not the table*. On the other hand, comprehended in the set of other tables, or in this room, or in my perception, the table becomes an object: a piece of furniture, a particular table, endowed with a color, a weight, and all that, for Harman, would emanate from its number of qualities.

But the table, neither as a thing nor as an object, is not in-itself. As a thing the table is in the world, and as an object the table is in other objects that give it all its determinations and qualities.

For me, the in-itself is not merely inaccessible. It is “compact.” This means that it only functions at a stage of analysis on the condition of failing at the next stage. And if there were a thing-in-itself, it could only be in-itself in the world, that is, in something other than itself. Therefore, no in-itself exists *in itself*.

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The principle of compactness is that the condition of possibility of a thing is its impossibility; to be able to be, it is necessary that the thing not be.

Since nothing can be in-itself unless it is compact, a thing is necessarily outside-itself. But being in another thing, it can be either in something other than a thing (what is formal), or in another thing (what is objective).

SCHEME

Let us summarize our two ways of distinguishing two types of objects:

(a) In *Form and Object*:

No in-itself

THING
Outside-itself

Either, in something other than a thing:
Things (formal system of the negative)

Or, in another thing:
Objects (objective system of accumulation)

(b) In *The Quadruple Object*:

No negative

OBJECT
Double

Either, withdrawn in-itself:
Real object

Or, perceived in another object:
Sensual object

Now the second parts of our two major works are devoted to the reconstruction of an order of objects in relation to other objects. In *The Quadruple Object*, it is through fusion or fission, including the determination of a system of ten permutations, classified into families. In *Form and Object*, it is through a series of studies devoted to classificatory categories (species, class, gender) and to the variation of intensities (time, values).

However, their first parts differ. In *The Quadruple Object*, the real and sensual object are given. The real object is withdrawn into its inaccessibility. The sensual object appears phenomenologically in its presentation to the mind. In contrast, in *Form and Object*, things are never obtained except through a process that always betrays its vaguely dialectical origin. It is a process of de-determination, which allows me to explain every difference between the given object in Harman's model and the obtained thing in my own.

PROCESS

I try to remove the determinations that make any object enter into relation with other objects.

To de-determine this tree is to remove this tree from my perception. But when it is no longer for me, it is nonetheless not in-itself. The tree enters into a complex series of relations—it is in an ecosystem, the set of all trees, and the series of past and present instances of this tree. The challenge of *Form and Object* is to treat essence, space, and time as determinations like others. Removing the tree from the forest, or more generally from

nature, evolution, its bundle of tree-qualities, it loses everything that made it a tree. Then it is extracted from the series of everything that it had been until now, or shall be later. It becomes an increasingly indeterminate something, but not *absolutely* indeterminate. At the end of this process the tree is always something—neither localizable, nor enduring, nor definable. As such, the tree is a thing, neither more nor less than one of its branches, the earth, the word “tree,” what it was two hours or two minutes ago. De-determination is an equality operator, allowing us to reach a point where no-matter-what is something as much as another thing. The tree is *only* something when it has sufficiently lost its determinations, no longer being a plant, a tree, this tree, or this tree at a certain time of the year, but is not yet purely indeterminate. Instead, it is *the least possible determinate*. And this minimal determination is the fact of being in the world, of being outside itself, in “everything except itself,” in its negative. This something is therefore formal.

The formal thing that I obtain is very different from Harman’s sensual or real object.

In his system, a set of constraints, represented by its fourfold division, always articulates and structures objects in such a way that no-matter-what cannot be an object for Harman. For him, space and time are not determinations like others, which could be cast aside to reach the formal concept of thing. Harman defines time as the fundamental tension between a sensual object and its sensual qualities. The relation between the springtime tree that appears to me in full bloom and the autumnal tree that loses its leaves is not the same relation between the tree and an African rhinoceros or Greece’s debt. In other words, the characterization of time as a tension yields a privileged relation between an object six months ago and the same object today, which is not the same relation as that between this object and a completely different object. Harman considers that an object does not relate to its different temporal occurrences in the way that any object relates to any other object. Time is a privileged relation between certain objects—to be precise, the manifestations of the same sensual object.

This means that to define the support of identity, one must presuppose this identity: I assume that this tree is the same tree in the spring and in the autumn to be able to construct this tree as an object in time. What warrant do I have to assume this?

TIME AS TRIBUNAL

Harman is much closer to the common sense of time than I am.

He chooses to not consider time as a relation like other relations. For me, he is objectively correct. But formally (which is not a category that would make sense for him), I consider that it is necessary to think of time as a relation or a determination like other relations or determinations. In other words, to consider the possibility that there could be the same type of relation between the springtime tree and the autumnal tree, and between the springtime tree and a cat, or a word, or an event. The formal domain inherited from dialectics, I believe has as its role to push contradictions to their maximal state by claiming that the same thing is several things and that the tree at each moment is a different thing, differing from itself as much as from every other thing.

Why? Because to be able to account for time, one must be able to advance the hypothesis of doing without it. Otherwise, for me, one produces a temporal constraint on an object without managing to identify it. Why claim that this tree is an object, and that an imaginary tree is also equally an object, but that this tree a year ago and this tree today are not two objects, and make but one object? I think that nothing in the concept of object allows us to justify the spatio-temporal constraint. An object does not carry with itself the necessity of being identifiable or reidentifiable in time. (1) Either, it is necessary to decide to create new sub-objects, objects either illusory or secondary. In this case, the tree last winter is not completely an object, of course, but then what is it? A part of a higher object, which would be this tree, from its birth to its death? It is then necessary to espouse a perdurantist theory of time, which claims that objects are at each moment the spatial parts of their entire temporal existence. (2) Or, it is necessary to return to concepts such as those of “occurrence,” “manifestation,”

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or “exemplary,” which are other ways of talking about secondary “sub-things.”

Time is a tribunal deciding between a theory that treats everything as equal objects, but transforms these objects into purely formal things, and a theory that treats its objects as objects, but excludes some things and transforms them into secondary objects.

If one wants to treat everything equally as an object, I believe that it is necessary to be formal. Thus, one must gradually disembody the object and consider time and space²⁵ as determinations that can be disregarded in order to consider this or that, this ten minutes and that ten seconds, as equal things.

The consequence is that to consider everything equally as objects, it is necessary to take this line of argument to its limit, and to agree to formalize objects step-by-step. The minimal object that one obtains, which has no other determination than being something, being outside itself, in the world, is what I call a thing. We have seen that this thing is not inaccessible, for it is not in-itself nor absolutely indeterminate, it is determined *a minima* (which means that it is always the result of a process) and outside itself.

On this view, a thing is contrasted with Harman’s real object, which is in-itself and absolutely withdrawn, and therefore outside of access.

EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER

For this reason, I think that my project and Harman’s are faithful in different ways to the same imperative: that of being equal with objects.

I choose a path that leads me to treat no-matter-what as a thing and to explode the spatio-temporal constraints in order to define a formal system, which necessitates having recourse to the “negative” of a thing and which is therefore dialectical in some way. But there is a price to pay. My thing hardly has anything to do with objects of common sense or at least the objects that “object-oriented ontologies” would like to account for. No-matter-what being something, my thing is too formal: each instance of something, each event, and each part of each thing are so many things. And in a way, my thing slips through my fingers. My world is populated not only with football teams, words, ghosts, falsities, golden mountains, and square circles, but also and above all parts of ghost fingers, and parts of parts, and parts of these parts at time t , and in the following moment, and the hundred moments before, and ten seconds before that... Therefore, my world hardly resembles a collection of objects, but rather a generalized decomposition of this world—certainly a nightmare.

On the other hand, Harman chooses to remain at the level of objects and not to break with the common sense notion of objects, that is, spatio-temporal identifiable and reidentifiable entities. In this way, his objects are more concrete, more easily discernible. The price to pay for his ontology is that it presupposes time and space as specific constraints, internal to the object (to be precise, two of the four tensions that he identifies, along with essence and *eidos*). But what is his theory of time? Is he a presentist or an eternalist?²⁶ Permanentist or endurantist?²⁷ For me, he considers that each instance of this tree (and not only its qualities) as seconds, hours, and seasons pass, is a different sensual object, and thus that the tree throughout time is a secondary object that is constructed from the series of all successive trees. Or he considers that the tree as time passes is one and the same sensual object, in which case the tree at this instant is only a part, an instance, or sub-product of this tree.

What the classical metaphysical dilemmas on time teach us is that it is impossible to consider temporal objects as equal if one wants to carefully consider their identity. Either one sacrifices the object that endures in favor of its manifestations at each moment, or one sacrifices the manifestations in favor of the enduring object.

Yet the very principle of our two projects was to demonstrate the equality of objects, and to endeavor to produce neither “less-than-things” nor “more-than-things.” I think that the only solution consists in treating the tree

at each moment and the enduring tree equally by claiming that both are equally *distinct* things. But in doing so, one sacrifices the identifiable and reidentifiable character of the object, and one necessarily formalizes the thing—one loses the “common sense” of the object.

The support of identity is for Harman a solidly structured object, between the real object and the sensual object, between an object and its qualities. He borrows from the classical model of substantiality and endows it with an innovative meaning. Internally, his model is strengthened by space and time. But in this way, he gives up considering many things like full-fledged objects.

Faced with this dilemma, I think that Harman chooses to safeguard the “sense of the object,” its identity, especially since the tradition of thought he comes from is not dialectical and does not seek to consider the relations between a thing and its opposite. My project, on the other hand, sacrifices substantiality, gives up the in-itself, and therefore produces a more formal picture, less obvious and less close to the sense of the object. But it attempts to produce the weakest possible ontological constraint and to consider no-matter-what as a thing. Of course, it sacrifices the possibility of immediately identifying and reidentifying the same temporal object. It does so, however, in order to reconstruct this possibility, which is not presupposed but obtained by thought, by conceiving time as an intensive classification of objective presence.

VARIABLE INTENSITIES

Harman’s view is a much better way of thinking about objects than mine. I sacrifice objects to a more dialectical demand: requiring a formal determination of an object, being nothing but a thing, broad enough to embrace no-matter-what; putting things back in each other, reconstructing classificatory categories, and returning to intensities.

Like me, Harman appears suspicious of philosophies of intensity. He does not think that the world is composed and traversed only by variable intensities—a view he criticizes, for example, in Manuel DeLanda’s work. However, the aim of my project is not to presuppose that the world is constituted by intensities, but to rediscover these intensities in a world of objects. Unlike Harman, I am therefore led to redefine intensity in objects. I cannot do without intensities—otherwise I would no longer have time or any possibility of identifying or reidentifying my tree—which are dispersed in as many things as there are temporal instances.

I think that extension is the relation between an object and the object that comprehends it (my finger and my hand, a plot of the prairie and the prairie, or the number one and the number five), whereas intensity is the relation of an object to itself. Insofar as no in-itself exists, where nothing is in-itself in the model that I advance, an object related to itself cannot be itself. But as this object is not absolutely otherwise, as it cannot relate or be related to itself as to *any other* object, it is not capable of being either itself or another. In fact, it relates to itself as to *either more or less* itself, but never *equally* itself. Equality is formal and only belongs to things, not to objects. In this way, I relate to myself, I am always either *a little more* or *a little less* than myself. I am not myself, but I am not completely other either.

On this view, I advance a theory of time as the classification of intensities of presence:²⁸ the present is the maximal intensity of presence. The present I is myself such that no I is more myself than the present I. A past I is an I less myself. But this is valid for every object: the tree of a year ago is a little less intensely present than the tree two days ago. Time is nothing other than the classificatory order of variable intensities of presence.

Form and Object is therefore, if not a dialectical work, at least a *twofold* work. First, it deprives objects of their qualities and determinations in order to have at one’s disposal a minimal concept of things. Second, it orders objects in each other through classificatory categories (gender, class, species) and intensities (time, values).

In contrast, Harman’s work is marked by uniqueness; it is a genuine theory of objects.

CROSSING WAYS OF THINKING

I arrive at things by depriving objects of their determinations, and then order them again into categories and intensities. Harman never betrays the level of objective reality. He isn't as formal as I am. The spatio-temporal constraints that he integrates into two of the four tensions of his fourfold guarantee that he will never dissolve his objects, whether they are physical, imaginary, or contradictory, into mere "somethings." He also never goes so far as to discuss, as I attempt to do, definitions of the human species, speciesism and antispeciesism, social classes, gender, or racialism—all kinds of discussions that concern less the "objects" than the objective classification applied to living things or to society.

On this view, *Form and Object* may disappoint those who strictly adhere to "object-oriented ontology." It is a book that, from objects, discusses beneath formal things and above classification and intensities.

In that way, I deviate from the principle that I thought to have had in common with Harman, which consists in avoiding the overmining and undermining of objects, or, in my own words, in not producing "less-than-things" nor "more-than-things." I do not exactly contravene this principle, since I do not reduce objects to less or to more than objects, but I do not really think at the level of what we call objects. Common sense objects populate the pages of Harman's work: cotton, diamond, unicorns, apples, hammers, Japanese ghosts, or the European community. I plunge deeper towards formal things, or I rise higher towards classes and intensities.

But I think I remain faithful to the other imperative posited in the early pages of this article: to prove equality and to consider everything equally as objects, including parts of objects or temporal moments.

My tropism towards a dialectics without overcoming, which is expressed in *Form and Object* through the concepts of chance and price, pushes me to see in our two projects a kind of betrayal and fidelity to the same principle, which balances out. Equality exists between myself and all objects, but not at the objective level. Harman's objects are at the objective level, but they are not exactly equal to all other objects.

CHANCE AND PRICE

My project was born from a personal tension between the analytical and dialectical ways of thinking. Harman's project derives in large part from the conflict within phenomenology between Husserl and Heidegger. I think that I seek to be equal with all things, to the point of losing the common sense of things. I think that Harman seeks to account for common sense objects, to the point of not considering everything equally as objects. We meet at the precise point where our ways of thinking enjoin us both, for different reasons, to consider objects equally. In my own terms, the price that his way of thinking pays is the chance of my own, and the chance of his is the price that my way of thinking pays.

And since I have obtained through my past discussions with Harman the means to better understand our two projects, I am certain that I will read his response, sooner or later, in order to better understand our two ways of thinking and what brings us together and separates us.

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NOTES

1. Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet. Un traité des choses*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011. The forthcoming English translation, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, will appear in the Graham Harman's "Speculative Realism" series at Edinburgh University Press, translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn. All page numbers below refer to the original French pagination. The translator of the article above sincerely expresses his gratitude for the genuine kindness, encouragement, assistance, and professionalism of Jon Cogburn, Tristan Garcia, Graham Harman, and Jon Roffe.
2. Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2012.
3. Quentin Meillassoux, "Subtraction and Contraction" *Collapse III* (2007, 107). *Form and Object* concludes with a chapter on death.
4. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2011, 5.
5. Ibid.
6. J. N. Findlay sought to categorize in the work of Meinong the fact of "being given" without necessarily existing nor even being possible.
7. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 7-19.
8. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 47-50.
9. Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Carol Cosman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 154.
10. In Karl Mannheim's intensified version, for example, one could not determine history "from the outside."
11. See paragraph 49 of the *Ideas*, according to which consciousness does not require things to exist. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. F. Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982, 109.
12. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 8.
13. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 9.
14. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 9-10.
15. In the Introduction, I talk of the "vectorial channel of being" to describe ontologies that, for Harman, populate the world with flux. This model of being takes root in Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gilles Deleuze.
16. "If we imagine the universe as an ocean, it would be an ocean without a floor, but with a turbulent surface of objects and nothing but empty sky above." Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 113.
17. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 122.
18. In addition to the influence of Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux and their use of set-theoretical concepts in ontology.
19. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. Trans. C. K. Ogden. London: Taylor & Francis, [1922] 1990, 2.014.
20. The mistake, for Harman, would be "to identify the sensual with human and perhaps animal experience." Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 110.
21. "If, impossible though it may be, you could enter 'into' a consciousness, you would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown back outside." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Ideal of Husserl's Phenomenology" Trans. J. P. Fell. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1:2 (1970, 4-5). *Form and Object* generalizes this idea to all things: if, impossible though it may be, you could enter into a thing, you are outside it, since a thing is not in-itself, but outside-itself, in the world.
22. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 68-72.
23. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
24. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 72-74.
25. I treat space as a determination that one can neutralize by considering that, formally speaking, a part is not less than the whole. Each branch of the tree must be something as much as the tree that comprehends all its branches.
26. The eternalist thinks that "objects existing in past times and objects existing in future times are just as real as objects existing at the present." Trenton Merricks, "Goodbye Growing Block" *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 2 (2006, 103). The presentist does not only think that only present objects exist, but also that objects that exist all exist in the present—in other words, that a past object is only past *today*.
27. The perdurantist believes that objects have temporal parts. The endurantist believes that an object is entirely present at each moment of its temporal existence. David Lewis makes the distinction between the two positions.
28. Tristan Garcia, "Un autre ordre du temps. Pour une intensité variable du maintenant" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (October 2011, 469-486).