

**OBJECT-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHY**  
**The Noumenon's New Clothes**

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URBANOMIC

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**SPECULATIVE  
DYSTOPIA**



Having examined Harman's work in as much detail as possible, we are finally in a position to carry out the promised hyperbolic projection of a world in which it has achieved absolute victory over its competitors. Unfortunately, unlike the more or less rosy pictures Harman paints of a world dominated by DeLandian, Latourian, or even Meillassouxian philosophy, my hyperbolic portrait is remarkably bleak. This is not a function of spite on my part, but simply an attempt at honest prediction, faithfully extrapolating from the data so far provided. Nor is it a deliberate attempt at hyperbolic hyperbole. If you accept the conclusions already drawn, then the conclusions that follow from the hyperbolic hypothesis cannot but be *dystopian*. A world of object-oriented dominance could not be judged as anything but a philosophical *regression* of the lowest order: a new philosophical *dark age*, in which we could only hope that the knowledge of the present day was hallowed and preserved, as was the knowledge of antiquity, in order that it might emerge on the other side as the seed of a new philosophical renaissance. The real disanalogy here is that this would not be a dark age of conceptual *austerity*, limited by the theological dogmas of the church, but a dark age of conceptual *abundance*, in which a dogmatic refusal of all critical limits would unleash a torrent of speculative noise so great as to drown out any coherent philosophical signal.

The crux of this dystopian vision is the central claim of this book: that OOP should be seen as the natural successor of correlationism, rather than the radical critique of correlationism it presents itself as. It has established itself as the torchbearer of the epistemological scepticism that has dominated much of twentieth-century Continental philosophy, in the face of renewed epistemological challenges to this dominance from within Continental philosophy itself. In order to properly

elaborate this point, it is necessary to trace the historical trajectory of which OOP is a part back into the heart of the twentieth century, before drawing it forward through OOP's manifestation in the present day, and finally into the stark future in which it reigns supreme. The following three sections will concern themselves with the different parts of this narrative, dealing with the *past*, the *present* and the *future*. Moreover, they will endeavour to account for the *theoretical*, *historical*, and *sociological* dimensions of correlationism in the past and present, in order to project them into the future.

### 3. THE HORRORS OF THE FUTURE

Finally, the time has come to cast ourselves into an object-oriented future. Everything that could reasonably have been done to prepare us for the hyperbolic reading of Harman's philosophy has been done, and so the promise made in the very first pages of this book must now be fulfilled. In accordance with the rules of the hyperbolic procedure,<sup>501</sup> we must imagine a world in which the trivial flaws in Harman's work have been overlooked and the embrace of his philosophical picture is so thorough and widespread that even his few remaining opponents must concede its inestimable worth.<sup>502</sup> Let us begin with the following hypothetical scenario:

By the year 2050, Harman's self-pronounced philosophical virtues have triumphed: rhetoric has thwarted argument, vividness has humbled clarity, and aesthetic taste has finally overcome rational sobriety; his methodological mixture of historical dramatisation, phenomenological performance, and metaphysical speculation has coalesced into a new norm of thought; and his threefold doctrine of withdrawal, the fourfold, and vicarious causation have become the pillars of a new intellectual orthodoxy as powerful and enduring as scholasticism. Harman's legacy as the Aristotle of his era is secured, his influence singlehandedly undoing Kant's Copernican turn, demolishing the regrettable

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501. Laid down most clearly in *Philosophy in the Making*, 126 and 152–3.

502. I will assume that the present book was either left unpublished or largely scorned by my philosophical contemporaries. I myself am either dead, or locked in an asylum ranting about the dangers of *gastronomic mysticism*, *semantic romanticism*, and *pyrotechnic scepticism* to any who will listen. It is safe to say that I will not have gone down without a fight.

monuments of Hegelian thought, wiping the historical slate clean and refounding the tradition on a lineage running from Leibniz through Whitehead, Heidegger, Lingis, and Latour. Critique is dead. Analytic philosophy is no more. Copies of *Das Kapital* and *Word and Object* are hidden away from prying eyes and exchanged only in secret. The age of objects is upon us.

This gives us a rough outline of the object-oriented future, but we must fill in the details if we are to draw any interesting conclusions. Perhaps the best way to do this is to work out how this state of affairs could possibly come about. What follows is an attempt to do just that, by constructing a plausible narrative leading to Harman's absolute victory.

The first APA conference panel composed entirely of inanimate objects is held in 2023, to much applause. The ensuing audience discussion unanimously agrees that the contribution of a small half-eaten pot of jam—whose unknown organic composition, ruptured purplish surface, and burgeoning film of green-grey mould present a haze of interacting ecological qualities that perfectly infuse their collective musings on the ethical implications of the ever-worsening environmental crisis—is the highlight of the whole event. The practice quickly becomes a fixture of humanities conferences, though the funding never comes through for object-only meetings. In 2026, a small number of American philosophy departments expand their commitment to interdisciplinary education by insisting that, alongside studying a human language such as German or Spanish, each graduate student must specialise in a nonhuman substance (e.g., graphite, silk, or nematode worms), whose features they learn to commune with and cultivate through a series of immersive practical and theoretical studies. This too becomes popular, and is the de facto standard within a decade,

with some PhD students taking out whole semesters to mine tin, perfect their custard recipes, or wallow in their own filth, preceded by a thorough methodological survey of the area and followed by a detailed research report. By the end of the third decade of the twenty-first century the object-oriented craze has spread to all but the most conservative bastions of the humanities, its increasing philosophical dominance and its proliferating extra-philosophical applications mutually reinforcing on another.

OOO's major foothold on culture remains the artworld, which has been increasingly dominated by object-oriented theory and practice since the early 2020s. Some specialised curators have even abandoned the constraints of the white cube entirely and begun to lead paying visitors on excursions to view objects in their native locations, cultivating innovative and tasteful selections of everything from industrial electrical transformers, to piles of medical waste about to be incinerated, to the half-excavated remnants of abandoned quarries, while providing critical appraisals of the nuances of the many genres of things. Other guerrilla practitioners specialise in removing objects from these spaces and juxtaposing them with new contexts, producing strange encounters with antelope in New York's Central Park and volcanic ash on the London Underground, or, most famously, stealing the extant replicas of Duchamp's *Fountain* and refitting them for use in public toilets. Furthermore, the possibility of aesthetic value completely unmoored from any artistic origin generates a new and even more bizarre market for financial speculation, a generalised and quantified allure pulling free of its origins and spinning into complex webs of object futures. By 2035 it is possible to invest in pools of collateralised mystique composed of randomly selected thing-tranches whose diverse inner mysteries await discovery.



Meanwhile the political pull of the nonhuman has only intensified. Against the backdrop of economic and ecological catastrophe, the demand to empathise with the myriad and misunderstood components of our social and environmental infrastructure takes root, generating an expanding reservoir of feeling *that* something must be done, while further splintering our understanding of precisely *what* this is and *how* it should be achieved. The affective impetus towards conservation pulls in divergent directions, with those determined to respect the animate and the natural (e.g., ecological diversity, animal rights, genetically unmodified plant life, etc.) increasingly in conflict with those determined to establish the autonomy of the inanimate and the artificial (e.g., geological diversity, electronics rights, fandom-unmodified fictional life, etc.). The triumph of Latour's amodernism leaves no principled distinction between the two, and warring factions emerge whose conflicts are won or lost through strength of feeling alone. By 2040 this indirect democracy of objects has produced half a dozen underground coalitions of sympathy who claim to represent divergent constituencies of people, things, and people-things. These mostly fail to have any effect on the political policy of organised democratic states, though the coalitions dedicated to entertaining the feelings and desires of corporations and states themselves are a notable exception.

For a long time scientists are indifferent to or hostile to OOO. However, its increasing pervasiveness gradually wins them over, though at first they are only inspired by it in the same way they are inspired by poetry, art, and speculative fiction. They do not grapple with the arguments of the object-oriented pop-philosophers who come into vogue in the 2030s, but simply let the ideas flow over them, so as to commune with the alluring magma that flows beneath the surface of the

universe their mathematical models trace. Philosophy finally wrests its independence from science, by ceasing to talk to it in any meaningful way. Things begin to change in the 2040s as the spiralling budget for public research erodes access to the experimental resources needed to test hypotheses at the edge of physics. Those research programmes whose ties to falsifiability are already tenuous seize the opportunity to become fashionably untestable, drawing upon the philosophical weight of OOO in the process. *Rhetorical string theory* emerges as a bold new synthesis of physics and metaphysics, diving headlong into abstract theory construction with naught but aesthetic constraint, generating unusually eloquent debates regarding how many variations of supersymmetry can pulsate in the heart of the standard model in the process. Not to be outdone, rogue mathematicians inspired by Tim Morton's visceral rejection of the principle of non-contradiction<sup>503</sup> decide that  $\pi$  is insufficiently irrational, and devote their energies to the study of a new set of flamboyantly irrelevant *withdrawn numbers*, whose haunting symbolism is matched only by their utter uselessness. By 2050 the pathological peer-review system can no longer maintain the fragile link between the theoretical and applied dimensions of the natural and mathematical sciences, and the culture of science has begun to revert to the premodern configuration it enjoyed in the heyday of scholasticism.

What conclusions does this narrative suggest? Crucially, that Harman's work could achieve absolute victory in the only manner a philosophy unconcerned with justification can: by birthing a **dogma** that supplies the ideological infrastructure of more expansive social system. It is this that reveals the age of objects for a new dark age. It also suggests the true

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503. Morton, *Realist Magic*, 25–32.

significance of the parallel between Harman and Aristotle: if we ask ourselves how Harman's work could birth such a dogma, it seems almost obvious that it could provide the core of a neo-animistic theology around which contemporary hostilities toward both scientific and human hubris could converge, much as Christian theology crystallised around Aristotle's monotheistic metaphysics. To be truly victorious, OOO must resurrect scholasticism and reinvent the social order that supported it, weaving together cultural, political, and scientific trends so as to undo modernity and prosper in its wake. We are still left to wonder: what would this authentically postmodern world look like?

Under the reign of **negative animism** we would no longer be restricted to *effing the ineffable* nature of God, Being, *Ereignis*, or whichever principle encapsulates universal mystery, but would be free to ponder the unspeakable essence of anything and everything: toasters, lint, neutrinos, and the unsettling reflexivity of sentences such as this. A new breed of philosopher-shamans would rise to guide us through these encounters, teaching us the secret of making the everyday as mystifying as the phenomenological extremes of human experience. Even scientists would come to accept that their own pronouncements are not to be taken literally—their claims about the great pre-human past naught but caresses upon its sensual face—and the faithful among them would turn to writing hymns to the arche-fossil, so as to penetrate its glittering folds, striving toward the warm dark recesses beneath. All this is to say that Harman's metaphysics would inspire acts of intellectual onanism more extreme than the worst excesses of the Heideggerian orthodoxy: failed romantic overtures to noumenal intimacy doomed to wallow in the most pathetic mysticism; a sort of theoretical suicide akin to death

by auto-erotic asphyxiation—lonely, and mildly embarrassing for everyone who hears about it.

If we ask ourselves the ultimate question of hyperbolic reading—what would be missing from this world?—it is hard to answer, simply because so much has been washed away by the tide of object-orientation. However, there is one crucial thing that is missing, notable above all others, namely, the love of wisdom named philosophy.<sup>504</sup> *Pace* Harman, this love is not supposed to be unrequited. Its object is not supposed to be placed upon a pedestal beyond our reach. Its satisfaction is to be embraced as a genuine possibility, even if, as in life, its actuality is far more complicated than our desires ever anticipate.

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504. I am not the first to express this idea. See Amy Ireland's 'Ontology for Ontology's Sake: Object-Oriented Philosophy as Poetic Metaphysics', <<http://aestheticsafterfinitude.blogspot.fr/2013/04/ontology-for-ontologys-sake-object.html>>.