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Dictionary of concepts for Graham Harman's object-oriented philosophy [draft: work in progress]

Object-Oriented Philosophy: A Graham Harman Dictionary of Concepts

[Feel free to comment if you have improvements for any of the definitions or notice any errors. I will continually update, add new words and generally make it more comprehensive as time goes on. This is by no means a definitive list, and beware that Harman's philosophical terminology and descriptions have changed in parts from Tool-Being to Prince of Networks. Some of the definitions are a little short and scrappy, so there's lots to work to do]

A

ALLURE

"Allure is a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing's unity and its plurality of notes somehow partially disintegrates" (GM, p.143). In humans, allure is produced by humour, "which feels superior to its objects" (GM, p.142) and charm "which feels enchanted by it" (GM, p.142). Allure does three things: 1) It pushes the sensual object to a distance, 2) notes become sensual objects, 3) it rearranges an objects compartment to other objects. Allure "is the separation of an object from its qualities" (GM, p.153). Allure is a seductive power as it alludes to a things mysterious depths beyond its qualities. Harman's concept of allure is the same as how Heidegger describes the artwork. Allure "exists in germinal form in all reality, including the inanimate sphere". "Allure is the principle of revolution as such, since only allure make quantum leaps from one state of reality into the next by generating a new relation between objects" (GM, p.244).

AESTHETICS

"Relations between all real objects, including mindless chunks of dirt, occur only by means of some form of allusion. But insofar as we have identified allure with an aesthetic effect, this means that aesthetics becomes first philosophy" (OVC, p.221). Harman quotes Levinas to stress "the aesthetic orientation man gives to the world represents a return to enjoyment and to the elemental on a higher plane. The world of things calls for art, in which intellectual accession to be moves into enjoyment, in which the Infinity of the idea is idolized in the finite, but sufficient, image" (GM, p.44). Relations translate "the dark and inward into the tangible and outward, a task which it

always comes out short, given the infinite depth of things" thus aesthetics is important, as art is a system of "expressive signs whose function was not to tell us about things but to present them to us in the act of executing themselves". Art is something that *seemingly* lets us see the "impossible depth of objects" (GM, p.105). "Art is the volcanic force of our planet, releasing magma from the hidden core of things" (GM, p.130).

B

BONDS [incomplete]

- PHYSICAL BONDS: "there is the unremitting duel between an object itself as a real unity, as a single thing, and the same object as made up of numerous specific features". The traits, attributes and features of an object are its notes. Some notes are inessential but even those which aren't "do not in any individual case constitute its full reality as one thing". "The object in and of itself is merely doubled, split between its formal unity and its abundance of traits" (GM, p.149).

- CAUSAL BONDS: "There are relations that exist between distinct objects of the world. These relations are the genuine riddle, given that objects or tool-beings are supposed to withdraw from one another, failing to grasp or exhaust each other despite their mutual interference through subtle connections and outright physical blows"

- SENSUAL BOND: "

BLACK NOISE

Black noise is "muffled objects hovering at the fringes of our attention" ... Black noise is the "object like status of the clouds of qualities surrounding... an object" (GM, p.183). Black noise is the contiguity interior to objects (GM, p.198). It is black as it is the "obscuring fluctuation" of the object and noisy because it is "some thing audible" (GM, p.204). It is the result that "objects belong to each other and fail to do so... separation with a unity" (GM, p.209). Black noise is one world level of engagement that has been solidified. "TIME is black noise" (GM, p.250).

BLACK HOLE

Objects are receded from view but have radiant energy. Allure is a black hole that sucks us into another level of the world. Black hole is the perfect metaphor for Heidegger's "inaccessible tool-beings... its gravity is so strong that no information can escape, hence we never see the black hole or have direct access to anything about it... we can discover more about black holes by looking at their effects on other objects, but they are not reducible to these effects" (PON, p.184).

BLACK BOX

A term Harman adopted from Bruno Latour. "A black box is any actant so firmly established that we are able to take its interior for granted. The internal properties of the black box do not count as long as we are concerned only with its input and output" (PON, p.33). For Latour "the black box replaces traditional substance... while traditional substances are one, black boxes are many – we simply treat them as one, as long as they remain solid in our midst. Like Heidegger's tools, a black box allows us to forget the massive network of alliances of which it is composed, as long as it functions smoothly" and "every actant can be viewed either as a black box or as a multitudinous network, depending on the situation" (PON, p.34).

BEING see MEANING

BINARY CONTACT PRINCIPLE (NB- disposable definition)

“The general demand that any contact has only two terms”. “Perhaps, the initial object is built from a pair.. or an already existing object draws multiple new objects into its orbit simultaneously and separately”.

C

CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Philosophies which hold “that there are absolute gaps or dualisms that must be respected, and which are generally only described or else solved by fiat”, such as classical occasionalism (*PON*, p.155).

CARNAL PHENOMENOLOGY

In writers such as Immanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alphonso Lingis we “encounter the lascivious warmth of the sun and air and the mastery of strange flashes at midnight”. Essentially, it is to give the world its body and flesh, of sensuous and voluptuous being. The carnal phenomenologists all share Husserl’s insight that “objects always lie beyond any possibility of total presence” (*GM*, p.2).

COMEDY

Harman reiterates Bergson’s theory of comedy: “comedy results when we witness what is human reduced to a mechanism”, which is linked to the sincerity of objects unable to free themselves from a kind of fundamental ingenuousness (*GM*, p.128). Comedy does not occur all the time but only at certain times. Comedy is a type of art. “What we laugh at is the way in which human transcendence and free decision making power are undercut by his being delivered to the force of things, unable to master them”, but only in the absence of *feeling* (*GM*, p.131). Comedy presents those who are worse than we are. Imitation brings out the automatism of people. Comedy and humour are aspects of allure.

CONNECTION

Every connection is itself an object. Only two vicariously linked real objects form a new object, since they generate a new internal space which is, in-itself, inexhaustible from the outside. Every object is the result of a connection.

CAUSATION

-ASYMMETRICAL CAUSATION

Within the ‘intention as a whole’ there must be a real object intending a sensual object. The relation is asymmetrical, as the real object is engaged in relation yet the other real object is withdrawn from all relation, as only its sensual object is in relation to the real objects intention. (*OVC*, p.197). “All direct contact is between objects of *different* types – just as fertility requires both male and female, and just as magnets make contact only when opposite poles meet. We can call this the Principle of *Asymmetry*” (*PON*, p.208).

-BUFFERED CAUSATION

Object A does not fuse into object B. Nor does object B fuse into its neighbours since “all are held at bay by unknown firewalls sustaining the privacy of each” (*OVC*, p.201). Black noise produces a slow down (buffer) in the casual relation.

-REDUNDANT CAUSATION

Objects within an object assemblage can be replaced without affecting the object as a whole. They still remain the same object.

-VICARIOUS CAUSATION

“Objects confront one another only by proxy, through sensual profiles found only on the interior of some other entity.” (*OVC*, p.200). In brief: real objects can never touch, because by nature they must withdraw from each other, but sensual objects always touch real ones, because they exist only insofar as they are confronted by a real object (real objects are never real “for” something else, but sensual objects are *only* real “for” something else). Hence, the way that the two real objects interact is through the mediation of the sensual realm.

CHARM

Is an aspect of ALLURE. It is the relation to an object which is enchanted by it. Types of charm include metaphor, beauty, hypnotic experience and cute actions.

CORRELATIONISM

Harman's main enemies are philosophies of human access known collectively under the title 'correlationism'. This term was coined by Quentin Meillassoux, but Harman finds it an invaluable reference. “Correlationism holds that we cannot think of humans without world, nor without humans, but only of a primal correlation or rapport between the two. For the correlationist, it is impossible to speak of a world that pre-existed humans *in itself*, but only a world pre-existing humans *for humans*” (*PON*, p.122).

D

DORMANT OBJECT and SLEEP

Are “entities that are real despite entering into no outer relations... To sleep is to withdraw to some extent from all outward associations. Although humans surely never achieve a perfect state of sleep, we see that the act of human sleep has a metaphysical significance beyond its clear physiological one... sleep preserves the creature perfectly in tact – but free for now of relation, ready for another day” it frees “us from the various trivial encrustations of relation in which we become enmeshed. It restores us for a time to the inner sanctum of our essence, subtracting all surface ornament” (*PON*, p.214).

E

EIDOS

"The eidos is not the same as the sensual object, since different aspects of the eidos can be articulated by different statements, whereas the object itself is always unified in the manner of a rigidly designating proper name". "The eidos of the sensual object is withdrawn from view". The eidos hints at that which really belongs to the real object, not just the surface adumbrations and accidents. It is not the "adequate visual incarnation of the essence" (*PON*, p.203). Eidos is a situation in which "the sensual object exists in a duel with real qualities" for example "a sensual tree is an enduring unit apart from its shifting crust of accidents, it is also a unit quite apart from the roster of its essential features unlocked by the phenomenologist. The tree has an *eidos*", in the Husserlian not the Platonic sense of the word. "Whatever the eidetic features of the tree may be, they have no sensual component whatsoever. This gives us the unusual situation of a sensual object having real qualities, just as relational gave us sensual qualities for a real object" (*PON*, p.219).

ESSENCE

The unity of a real objects notes. It is the "concealed underworld of real objects, or genuine tool-beings. The real object is a unified thing, but not an empty unity. It possesses a multitude of qualities that is unifies in a highly specific way" (*PON*, p.218). Harman quotes Zubiri: "it is a unity such that, with respect to it, *the notes are nothing but moments* in which, so to phrase it, the unity in question exhaustively *deploys itself*" (*PON*, p.205). Essence is the unity of the real object over against its moments. It is the interplay between the unity and the plurality of an object. It is "incarcerated in the very reality of the individual thing; it is not a universal perfect form lying outside the thing and shared by many individuals" (*PON*, p.206).

ELEMENTS or ETHER

Elements "are the glue of the world, the vicarious cause that holds reality together, the trade secret of the carpentry of things" (*GM*, p.166). "Perceptions bathes amidst elements". "elements are the basis of all relations, not just sentient ones" (*GM*, p.169). "elements are the notes of sensual objects" (*GM*, p.171). "nothing exists but the interiors of objects, since objects are nothing but their interiors.. in these interiors, only one sort of reality can be found: elements... an element is a sensual object incarnated in highly specific form" (*GM*, p.193). Elements are more than notes as they include features that are purely variable or accidental. "An element is always one specific, ruthless, sincere incarceration of a sensual object" (*GM*, p.195). Sensual objects inevitably become elements, and there is something inherently flat and caricatured about elements, however brilliantly they may sparkle. Elements do not read towards the depths, towards other levels of the world, but simply as facilitating links within the current level of experience". (*GM*, p.217). "An element is an overdetermined sensual object" (*GM*, p.222). For Levinas, *the element* is the "medium in which enjoyment occurs", an ether that envelopes us, in which we sincerely bathe (*GM*, p.37).

Harman added this blog entry on the 14th of January. The description is from a set of Tool-being playing cards he made back in 1992: "When we look at things, we break them down and analyze them. But the analysis always stops somewhere. Dissolved in thought, objects survive as unique crystals, haunting residues that must be experienced in their own way rather than explained.

The elements is what cannot be broken down: The power of any world lies in its elements. Whether they're letters of the alphabet or the ingredients in a tea recipe, elements are things to conjure with. Every domain of our lives, from the nursery to the factory to the laboratory, has its recurring forms and stock characters. Once we have mastered these familiar shapes, we feel ourselves to be citizens of that kingdom.

When things are reduced to elements they all belong together. No element, no matter how lowly, can take the place of any other. The emperor's crown is no more and no less an element than is a dinosaur or an aluminum can.

Nothing can escape its own elemental nature, its own distinctive configuration. Even the mightiest power has a face."

ENDOPSYCHISM

"There is a universal interplay between: (a) objects in their concealed zero-person reality and (b) the distorted first-person or third-person way in which these objects are encountered" (ZP, p.254). "'To be conscious' means *to be in the interior of a larger entity*, but 'to exist' means only *to have an interior*, not to be conscious." "Instead of an epiphenomenon, consciousness is now an *infraphenomenon* in the heart of an object, confronting images in their intentional inexistence or immanent objectivity" (ZP, p.278).

F

FOURFOLDS and QUADRUPLE STRUCTURES

- Heidegger's fourfold (*das Geivert*) - "Each and every thing is a mirror-play of earth, sky, gods and mortals". "Earth is described as a global unity; in each appearance of this term, Heidegger refers to earth as a unified nourishing or fertilizing force, never as a set of specific earthly powers" (DWF). "Earth is the concealed, the bearing and supporting system on which all else forever rests" (TB, p193). "The gods are also sheltered and harbored in concealment, since it is said that they communicate only through hints", the plurality of gods is not a retrieval of neopaganism, but a plurality of the "numerous discreet features" of beings against a "single lump of unity". Mortals refers to the as-structure: "the thing in its appearance, and also as a unified single thing – the world as a whole". "Sky also refers to things as present, but in a manner of having specific features" (DWF). "Sky is the system of explicit entities, the stars and comets but also potatoes and lakes that seduce us with their blatant energies" (TB, p.193).

<http://avoidingthevoid.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/heideggersfourfold.jpg>

The mirroring/marriage relations are tensions between the poles. "The primary duality in Heidegger's world is the axis that divides the shimmering facade of an object's present-at-hand surface from the underground rumble of its enigmatic depth...[the] second axis of the world is the difference between any thing's *specific* character and the fact that it is something at all". However, the main problem with Heidegger's fourfold is its "lack of dynamism", hence Harman's fourfold changes focus to the *tensions* between Heidegger's four quadrants (DWF).

- Harman's fourfold – see TIME, SPACE, ESSENCE, EIDOS. The diagram below will be explained on the publication of Harman's next book *The Quadruple Object*. So far, all is known about the tension lines between the poles is the following: 1) essence, 2) space, 3) eidōs, 4) time. Harman gives a preview of the meaning of this diagram on his blog [HERE](http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/levi-on-the-diagrams/) (<http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/levi-on-the-diagrams/>)

<http://avoidingthevoid.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/diagram1.jpg>

- Fourfold's in general – “The only way of obtaining a rigorous quadruple structure is to cross-breed two dualisms, yielding a world split into four distinct zones” (*M&M*). Harman likes to extrapolate fourfolds which have a universal structure. Only with Heidegger, and the possibility of McLuhan's tetrad (see *MCLUHAN*), is this possible to do, as both emphasize the figure/ground relationship of objects. Other classic examples of fourfold quadruple structures are: Empedocles four elements (earth, air, fire, water); Plato's dividing line (shadows, things, mathematical objects, perfect forms); Aristotle's four causes (material, formal, efficient, final); the medieval cosmology of Scotus Eriugena (based on two dualities of created/uncreated and capable/incapable of creation); Bacon's four idols (of the tribe, cave, marketplace and theater); Ken Wilber's New Age *holons* (based on a doubling of the part/whole duality) (*M&M*).

FIREWALL

Relations are held at bay “through unknown firewalls sustaining the privacy of each” (*OVC*, p.201). They “prevent all possible absurd relations from being regarded as real objects” (*GM*, p.230). A firewall is not a thing but the effect of the internal relations of a real object striving to unify its notes. The notes of a real object are different from that of an imaginary object, therefore a real dog can unify itself, an imaginary object can't (*GM*, p.231). “An object is separated by firewalls from whatever it modifies, transforms, perturbs, or creates. It is completely independent of these, since it can shift into any new environment and still remain the same thing. On the other hand, an object is also separated separated by firewalls from its own pieces, since the thing emerges as something over and above those pieces, and since ‘redundant causation’ means that these pieces can be shifted or replaced to some extent without ever changing the thing.” (*PON*, p.188).

FLAT ONTOLOGY

“A flat ontology is one that allows countless layers of larger and smaller structures to have equal ontological dignity” (*ATS*, p.12-13). However, Harman's ontology is not flat in some sense, unlike DeLanda's and Latour's ontologies, as his includes two types of objects (real and sensual). However, Harman's ontology is flat in another sense, as it declares natural and unnatural (i.e. cultural and imaginary) objects to be real (*PON*, p.215).

FOREIGN GLUE PRINCIPLE (NB- place holder phrase)

“Two sensual realities cannot make direct contact, because both consist entirely in their reality for some real entity... the bond between a sensual object and its qualities must be outsourced from the sensual realm” (*PON*, p.210).

G

GAVIRILO'S COROLLARY

Named after Gavrilo Princip who assassinated the Arch Duke Frans Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian empire. This triggered a chain of events that led to the outbreak the first World War. “We must reject the popular view that there is no single cause of an event but rather a multitude of environmental factors”. “Of the various contextual factors that surround me right now, not all are having an effect on me. Of those that are, they have an effect only insofar as they are part of an object that affects me. There is no ‘context’ except as inscribes in individual objects”. “Triggering incidents cannot be viewed as interchangeable flukes that might easily have been replaced with

some other initiator; instead, they suffuse the entire causal event with their personal style" (*PON*, p.209). "We must restore dignity to individual causes and resist the seductive dogma of total context" (*PON*, p.210).

H

HEIDEGGER, MARTIN

HUSSERL, EDMUND

HYPERBOLIC THINKING

Harman wants to replace the "piously overvalued 'critical thinking' with a seldom used hyperbolic thinking... it is only books of the most stunning weakness that draw attention to *non sequiturs* and other logical fallacies. The books that stir us most are not those containing the fewest errors but those that throw light on unknown portions of the map". We should ask "what if this book, this thinker, were the most important of the century? How would things need to change? And in what ways would we feel liberated or imprisoned?". To start "place any given author into a position of maximum strength" (*PON*, p.121).

I

IMMEDIACY

"All realities, whether they be sensual or endlessly withdrawn from the senses, are quite specific and positioned somewhere quite determinate. But this means that at bottom there must be a single type of reality, one form of self-contained being that belongs both to the phenomena encountered by the senses and to the tool-beings that recede from us. For this form of reality, we have every right to use the term *immediacy*, since it refers to the side of things that is not influenced in any way by its relations with other things, but reposes in itself" (*GM*, p.147). "...there must be some sort of immediacy to perception: if everything simply pointed elsewhere in the manner of equipment, and were nothing in its own right, we would experience nothing at all. There is then a strange sort of ether in which immediacy occurs" (*GM*, p.153).

INTENTIONALITY

An ontological feature of all objects in general. Intentionality means 'sincerity' (contact between a real object and sensual object). It has two functions: 1) as an adhesive: cementing subject and object together so the intentional experience is one; 2) to be selective: as it binds object and subject in a specific way and defines itself by what it experiences (*GM*, p.22).

INTENTIONAL OBJECT see SENSUAL OBJECT

INTENTION AS A WHOLE

When two objects meet they can only relate through the interior of a third object. The intention of each object meets through a unified relation; the intention as a whole is a real object, because the content of the intention is arbitrary to the fact of the intention itself. (*OVC*, p.197).

INFINITE REGRESS

Harman's world has objects all the way down: "we have a universe made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects", as "every object is both a substance and a complex of relations" (GM, p.83). If there is no regress, then there remains an ultimate level of reality at the bottom, a stance entirely incompatible with OOP. Although Harman does support an infinite regress in terms of objects themselves, he is against Latour's infinite regress of mediators.

J

KRYPTOOUSIA

The "hidden reality that actually makes up each entity: its irreducible execution amidst the cosmos, utterly distinct from the execution of anything else" (GM, p.110). Krypto is from the Greek *kryptos*, which mean the hidden and concealed, as in a 'secret'. *Ousia* means 'being'. Harman only used this term once, but I feel it contains enough interesting etymological resonance for its inclusion in this dictionary of concepts.

LOGOS

In *Tool Being*, Harman disputes Heidegger's separation between two types of logos. The first is *apophantic* and the second is *semantic*. "The semantic logos simply refers to the object, the apophantic kind makes the referent present 'as' what it is [in particular]". Harman claims that there cannot be a pure division of logos. When an object is referred to it is always already in every instant "irreducibly torn between the 'as' and its dark twin". Semantic logos thus appears to be a kind of logos that "completely primitive, and therefore should already belong to any situation characterized by the merest 'broken tool,' including that of animal life" (TB, p.73-75).

LEVELS

Alphonso Lingis' levels "are a feature of reality itself", yet "a level is a place from which objects are physically *absent*, but into which they phosphorescence all of their qualities, and by means of which they communicate with each other" (GM, p.67). "The world is "a whole architecture, a whole complex of phenomena 'in tiers', a whole series of 'levels of being'" (Merleau-Ponty in GM, p.54). "Beings collide with one another in a field, in a series of levels that connect them with one another. These objects can never be fully deployed in a any single level, since their nature is never to manifest themselves entirely in any interaction at all. But insofar as entities interact at all, they share a common language of charm or brute force by which they are able to pursued or annihilate one another. The language they share is, in each case, a level of the world" (GM, p.70).

LEIBNIZ, GOTTFRIED WILHELM

LEVINAS, IMMANUEL

LOVECRAFT, H.P and HORROR

Harman is a big fan of H.P. Lovecraft's science fiction novels. Harman argues that "science fiction is not only in 'science fiction' but in great literature of any sort" – the key criteria being the *weirdness* and *strangeness* of its idiosyncrasies (HOP, p.244). "For nothing resembles science fiction more than philosophy does – unless it be science itself" (HOP, p.333). "Few will object to the term 'weird realism' as a description of Lovecraft's outlook" (HOP, p.348). "In Lovecraft, the relation between a thing and its surface is perturbed by irregularities that resist immediate comprehension, as if the object suffered from a strange disease of the nervous system" (HOP, p.356). Lovecraft's materialism

gives him a “philosophy rooted in the surface, but one in which the relation between objects and their crusts is rendered problematic”. Horror comes “from the declared insufficiency of the description, combined with a literary world in which the monster is a genuine player rather than a mere image” (*HOP*, p.357). Horror also “comes not from some transcendent force lying outside the bounds of human finitude, but in a twisting or torsion of that finitude itself” (*HOP*, p.360).

LINGIS, ALPHONSO

Lingis is well known as the translator of Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, yet his own work is less well read due to, Harman believes, the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy. Harman looks to Lingis for his great style and for his philosophy of the ‘imperative’ which is linked to Harman’s concept of allure. The imperative is the way we respond to directives from the sensual world as if they were ethical: “we listen and respond to the weakness of the bird and the frailty of the flower, and ratchet our tenderness or viciousness up to the appropriate level needed to comfort or destroy these creatures” (*GM*, p.63). Perception has an imperative structure, an obedience, in which we “respond to directive of a signaling but inaccessible unit that is able to seduce only with its various limited facades”. This is not determinism or unfreedom as “thought is obedience. The freedom of thought makes this obedience possible” (*GM*, p.64). See also LEVELS.

LOCAL OCCASIONALISM see VICARIOUS CAUSATION

Occasionalism is the idea that God is the cause of all things. Harman’s motif example of object-object relations is fire and cotton which comes from the the Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali, who repeats from the Qu’ran: “Fire does not burn cotton – only God burns cotton”. Different forms of occasionalism are found in Descartes (where God is the occasional cause between mind and matter), in Malebranche, and Spinoza (as Nature=God), and Kant (as consciousness through transcendental apperception acting as the occasional cause between the world and consciousness). Local occasionalism is the term used to describe how actors can never directly touch, but are always mediated by other actors. “Two actors are always mediated by a third; this is the ultimate lesson of circulating reference” (*PONI*, p.77).

M

METAPHOR

The use of metaphor is essential for Harman, as he wants philosophy to do “justice to a world where objects are always more than they literally state. Those who care only to generate arguments almost never generate objects. New objects, however, are the sole and sacred fruit of writers, thinkers, politicians, travellers, lovers, and inventors.” (*OVC*, p.212). Metaphor “shatters the usual immediate bond between an object and its notes” (*GM*, p.176). There is a strong link between McLuhan’s media analysis and Harman’s use of metaphor.

MCLUHAN, MARSHALL (and ERIC)

The poetic and creative emphasis on the figure/ground (media/message) relation is clearly evident in Harman’s Heideggerian reading of objects as tool/broken tool. Through McLuhan’s work on the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, we can see how Harman mobilizes the tool of rhetoric to not only add weight to his arguments but to give his work an ‘alluring’ style. Style is essential to Harman as it gives form to the figure of any argument’s content. Thus a good style can make or break philosophers. Harman is also interested in McLuhan’s notion of the ‘tetrad’. The tetrad is

McLuhan's fourfold structure of media transformation. The four simultaneously engaged areas of the tetrad are (in no specific order): enhance/retrieve/obsolesce/reverse. The tetrad expose the process of change between a media's ground and figure (its medium and message). The ground withdraws from view while the figures are in play, in the same way that beings are present and absent simultaneously, as seen in Heidegger's tool analysis. Here is a tetrad using Heidegger as an example: (TAT)

<http://avoidingthevoid.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/tetrad.jpg>

MEANING

"The being of equipment is *Vollzug*, execution or performance, a shifting of the issue beyond itself: a "reference" toward the end it accomplishes. Then the tool is reference; for the tool, to be is to mean". Harman substitutes 'meaning' (*Sinn*) for 'reference' (*Bedeutung*) and concludes: "the tool's "meaning" is nothing other than the visible termination of its underground action... the meaning of equipment is the final explicit reality that it serves to bring to the stage". But it is also the opposite as "equipment is "meaning" or "reference" in two distinct senses. It is the performance of a withering subterranean force, but the force that also acts to summon up some explicitly encountered reality. This ambiguity of meaning is nothing but the tool itself: a reality that is also somehow an appearance, or a verb that is also a noun". Being, meaning, equipment, reference, and world, "and other terms become versatile synonyms for a single reversal between the withdrawn tool-being of the world and its present-at-hand" (*TB*, p.26). "The being of the tool and its meaning are one and the same... the 'question of the meaning of being' is a reverse tautology" (*TB*, p.26). "For Heidegger, readiness-to-hand is not itself a single being in each case. Instead, it is the total system of equipment, the unitary system of reference which Heidegger calls 'world', and which withdraws behind any present-at-hand property... world is the meaning of being". "Being doesn't simply "mean" world: it is world, is the ready-to-hand". "Being is *Vollzug* [executing itself] concealed from all presence-at-hand" and to 'mean' is "to exit as the *terminus* of a concealed action, to be that which comes into view as a result of the withdrawn work of equipment" (*TB*, p.67). "In the first respect, the meaning of being is *Vollzug*; in the second, the meaning of beings is *beings*. This second point does not imply that being is itself a being. Rather, it says that the meaning of being is *metabole*, *Umschlag*, the very *reversal* into beings" (*TB*, p.67).

MOLTEN CORE

This is one of Harman's favourite metaphors for sensual objects. The internal space where all intentional relation occurs. It is a place of activity – "a sort of plate tectonics of ontology" (*OVC*, p.190).

METAPHYSICS

The discussion of the fundamental traits of specific types of entities: human being; language; artworks; God; any type of object distinct from others (*OVC*, p.204).

MOMENTS

"If we speak of the eidos of the sensual object as having *moments*, these moments are directly accessible neither through the senses nor even through the mind." "The moments of a sensual object are *submerged* from view" (*PON*, p.203). "The moments are not abstract qualities able to float

around outside their specific incarnations... individualized qualities that cannot be stripped from the entity to which they belong and shared elsewhere" (*PON*, p.206).

METONTOLOGY

"Metontology' is not a theory of being carried out on the "meta-level," but is rather an ontology fueled precisely by the constant *metabolism* between being and beings" (TB, p.). It is this metabolism that Heidegger's ontology fails to venture further into. Harman's fourfold is a attempt to articulate a metontology of objects based on their dynamism not their stasis.

N

NOTES

Notes are the qualities of the object itself that we cannot come into contact with. Qualities are public, notes are private. When an object encounters another, this means that it "makes contact between the unitary reality and specific notes of its neighbour" (*GM*, p.174). It could be said that a real object is both one single note and a plurality of notes. The plurality of an objects notes are its real qualities.

NUCLEAR METAPHYSICS

Harman declares 'nuclear metaphysics' the mechanics of the fourfolded internal relations of objects (*PON*, p.216).Correspondingly, Levinas uses the term 'fission' to describe the asymmetrical communication between things. Harman notes "consciousness splits from itself in such a way that we ought to speak of "nuclear metaphysics". The passivity of saying, in which the other is there but not *fully* there, "is fission of the nucleus opening the bottom of its punctual nuclearity... The nucleus does not open this depth as long as it remains protected by its solid crust, by a form..." If the nucleus of the world is the intentional relation between me and phenomena, this nucleus is not a hermetically sealed vacuum, since it is penetrated by rays from elsewhere". "I do not fuse with things, but exist side by side with them in the nuclear core of intentionality, sincerely absorbed with them even though they do not return the favour" (*AFP*, p.26 and 27).

O

OVERMINING PHILOSOPHIES

"The overmining philosophies say that objects are naive because they are posited uselessly as substrata lying behind what is more directly given. This might be images in consciousness. It might be relations, or events, or bundles of qualities. Correlationism is just one type of overmining philosophy, though it happens to be the most common type in the past two centuries. There is also simply *relationism*. I myself (like Meillassoux) hold that Latour is not a correlationist, though one might argue the opposite without being ridiculous; there are certainly correlationist *moments* in Latour ("microbes did not exist before Pasteur"). But it should be crystal clear that *Whitehead* is not a correlationist. Yet he is still an overminer of objects" (OOP Blog Nov 6th 2009).

ONTOLOGY

The description of the base structural features shared by all objects: the basic opposition between real and sensual objects; the five types of relation between them; the bondage of sensual objects to their various qualities, accidents and relations; time and space; universals. (*OVC*, p.204)

ORTEGA Y GASSET, JOSE

OBJECTS see RELATIONS see SENSUAL OBJECTS see REAL OBJECTS

P

PANPSYCHISM and ENDOPSYCHISM

“Human cognition is just a more complicated variant of relations already found amidst atoms and stones”. However, “there is one important alliance with the panpsychists. It refers to the prefix ‘pan-’ (meaning ‘all’, in Greek), which seems to go too far. For in the first place, not all entities can have psychic life, but only *real objects*... all real object are *capable* of psyche, insofar as all are capable of relation.; for real objects have psyche not insofar as they exist, but only insofar as they relate”. (PON, p.213). Harman is in favour of the term polypsychism or endopsychism instead of the more reductive panpsychism. See also ZERO-PERSON PERSPECTIVE.

PRINCIPLE OF IRREDUCTION

This is a principle from the work of Bruno Latour, but Harman readily accepts it into his philosophy: “No object is inherently reducible to any other”. We can try to explain anything in terms of anything else but we must do the work that translates and transforms relations through “chains of equivalences” (PON, p.15). See TRUTH.

Q

QUALITIES

“The qualities of an object are its sensual notes, not its parts” (GM, p.177). Qualities exist through submergence and encrustation (the accidental surface profile of an object as a unified sensual thing” (PON, p.203).

R

RIGID DESIGNATOR and PROPER NAME

Term coined by Saul Kripke. Harman uses it in reference to real objects: Heidegger’s ready-to-hand, the “impossible real kernel” that can never be made present. The ‘proper name’ is “one that points to some inaccessible “X” lying behind any descriptions that might be given of it. Even if all our current descriptions of a thing turn out to be false, if gold actually turns out to be green in pure light or to have fewer neutrons than we once believed, or even turns out to be an elements at all, the name “gold” still refers to that same inaccessible *stuff* that it has refereed to all along” (TB, p. 213).

RADICAL PHILOSOPHY

Any philosophy that promotes the claim that “the object is nothing over and above one or more of the terms to which it might be opposed”: e.g. The radical denial: of “the distinction between object and subject”; of “the split between objects and relations”; of “separate autonomous entities in the real world in favour of a primal whole”; of “any distinction between an object and its shifting accidents”; that “an object is different from its qualities”; that “an intentional object is different from its Husserlian *eidōs* – from the sum total of essential qualities that it requires in order to be intended as what it is”; “that an object is different from its pieces” They are radical as they all try and

“identify a single *radix*, the root of reality as a whole” (PON, p.152-154). “Whereas the radical gesture is always to say ‘there is nothing more to S than P, our contrary gesture is to insist that ‘there is *always* more to S than P” (PON, p.155).

REINFORCED OBJECT

“It will always be the case that one object will be the dominant ‘real’ object and the other a merely sensual image. However, in many cases it will happen that each term of the pair has an active relation to the passive caricature of the other – like two mutually reinforcing objects giving the appearance of one, with the [real object 'a'] encountering an image of [real object 'b'] as well” (PON, p.209).

REAL OBJECT

“Real objects withdraw from our access to them, in fully Heideggerian fashion. The metaphors of concealment, veiling, sheltering, harboring, and protecting are all relevant here. The real cats continue to do their work even as I sleep. These cats are not equivalent to my conception of them, and not even equivalent to their own *self*-conceptions; nor are they exhausted by their various modifications and perturbations of the objects they handle or damage during the night. The cats themselves exist at a level deeper than their effects on anything. Real objects are non-relational” (PON, p.195). “All real objects are *capable* of psyche, insofar as all are capable of relation” (PON, p.213). “A real object meets only the shadow of another, thereby allowing effects to proceed *asymmetrically* in one direction alone” (PON, p.147). “Real objects exist ‘whether we like it or not’” (PON, p.195).

RELATIONS (NB: relations are OBJECTS) (OVC, p.199-200)

-CONTAINMENT

The intention as a whole contains real object A and sensual object B

-CONTIGUITY

The identity of an object stays the same, yet other objects and conditions may cause the object to be obscured in some way.

-SINCERITY

Real object A takes sensual object B seriously as it fills up its intention. But this relation is not a ‘connection’ and so does not yet make a new object. It exists for all objects at all times. It is the proper meaning of intentionality: “all consciousness is consciousness of something”. Intentionality is already a sincerity (GM, p.135).

-CONNECTION

The ‘intention as a whole’ is a real object which must arise from a real connection of real objects through a ‘vicarious’ indirect connection.

-NO RELATION AT ALL

Real objects are incapable of direct contact with other real objects. So too are real objects and sensual objects. They can only relate through a third object.

RETROACTION or RETROACTIVE CAUSATION

RHETORIC

“Getting the argument right is not quite enough to build a philosophy”. There is the important factors of form with content, which is why Plato’s great humour and Nietzsche provocative anti-philosophy, as Alain Badiou calls it, will continue to be read even though they are constantly attacked from all sides for gaping holes in their arguments. Thus, there is always something more to the work of a philosopher than merely the logic of a proposition. For Meillassoux, primary is “tearing down the faulty logic of unsound argument”, for Harman it is “descriptive generalization” which makes rhetoric as the stylistic ground that frames the figure of argument as important as dialectic and grammar (*PON*, p.169). It must be noted that McLuhan’s work on the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) is probably an important influence in regards to Harman’s championing of rhetoric.

S

SLEEP see DORMANT OBJECT

SENSUAL OBJECT and INTENTIONAL OBJECT see ELEMENTS

“Instead of saying that the sensual tree has ‘intentional inexistence’ in human consciousness, we should say that both the sensual tree and the real me ‘inexist’ on the interior of the object composed of the real me and the real tree” (*PON*, p.211). Sensual object is a more ‘charming’ name for an intentional object. Although “Husserl uses ‘intentional’ to refer only to the unified objects of consciousness, while excluding the shifting surface qualities of things from the intentional domain. “Intentional objects are always already present” *PON*, p.195). “*Intentional objects* [are not] capable of mental life of any sort, since they exist only as passive figments encountered by something real” (*PON*, p.213). “The sensual object is a unity over against the swirling accidents that accompany it”. “The eidos is not the same as the sensual object, since different aspects of the eidos can be articulated by different statements, whereas the object itself is always unified in the manner of a rigidly designating proper name” (*PON*, p.203). “We have immediate access to the sensual object from the moment we intent it, since that is all it takes for a sensual object to exist” (*PON*, p.203).

SPACE

Is one quarter of Harman’s fourfold. “When a real object lies concealed behind any of the qualities that it manifests to any relation... [it is] the locus of relation and non-relation. Things make contact in space, but space also has distinct regions in which things can hide from each other” (*IONH*, p.11). Space is the tension “between a real object and the sensual qualities through which it is accessible... It is the tension between a real object and its *relations*, since relating to a thing only gives us a specific range of tangible qualities rather than the thing itself... Space is both nearness and distance. Things make contact along specific surfaces but are not exhausted by this contact, and recede partially into private depths” (*PON*, p.218).

SINCERITY see RELATIONS

SUBSTANCE

“An object or substance is a real thing considered apart from any of its relations with other such things” (GM, p.19). “Reality is made up of nothing but substances – and they are *weird* substances with a taste of the uncanny about them, rather than stiff blocks of simplistic physical matter” (HOP, p.347).

T

TOOL-BEING

“The tool system is the meaning of being; *being itself is tool-being*” (TB, p.67).

TIME

Is one quarter of Harman's fourfold. It is “the difference between unified objects and their transient surface fluctuations is exactly what we mean by *time*. Time is not just change, but change of that which endures... Time is the tension between intentional objects and the accidental, specific, changing ways in which they are manifest” (IONH, p.11). Time is the tension “between a sensual object and its equally sensual qualities... The feeling that time is flowing along is in fact a sense of the swirling play of accidents on the surface of slightly deeper intentional objects” (PON, p.218). Also see BLACK NOISE

TRUTH

“It is wrong to seek truth in the *foundations* of what lies before us... ‘those who look for foundations are reductionists by definition and proud of it’ says Latour (PON, p.29). “We assemble the truth as painstakingly as a symphony or an electrical grid, and any of these things can collapse beneath the weight of unexpected resistance” (PON, p.44). Truth is instituted by lengthy chains of objects... Truth is *nothing but* a chain of translations without resemblance from one actor to next. To focus only on the end-points is to distort the meaning of truth” (PON, p.76). Harman follows Latour's ‘industrial metaphor’ of truth – the ‘circulating reference’ between a line of actors which translate differences from one actor to the next.

TRANSLATION

Is the distortion of the reality any intention addresses. This intention is not specific to human logic or language, but to all object-object relations. See also TRUTH.

U

UNDERMINING PHILOSOPHIES

“The undermining philosophies say that objects are naive because they are not deep enough. There is something deeper than objects. In an extreme case, it might be “the One.” In less extreme cases, it might be some pre-individual realm. Or it might be atoms; or water or air, for that matter. The pre-Socratic philosophies are all undermining philosophies, but there are also more recent versions of this option” (OOP Blog, Nov 6 2009).

UNNATURAL OBJECTS

Unnatural objects are real object essences which withdrawn from the brute relations of nature. They are the “infinity beneath phenomena” (GM, p.18). “The more radical way of avoiding scientific naturalism is to realize that nature is not natural and can never be naturalized, even when human beings are far from the scene. *Nature is unnatural*, if the world “nature” is supposed to describe the status of extant slabs of inert matter” (GM, p.251).

V

VICARIOUS CAUSATION

See ‘Causation’. NB – ‘Vicarious’ is an important term, as it plays on the notion of ‘vicar’ as a metaphor for a mediator between objects. A Christian vicar is a mediator between God and people, but acts locally to the people themselves. In contradistinction to this local mediator, God, in classical occasionalism is mediator for all relations between all objects (Islamic philosophy and Malebranche) or between mind and body (Descartes).

W

WORLD see MEANING

WEIRD REALISM

OOP is weird as objects have never been defined like this before. To define objects as having their own independently existing reality exterior to human consciousness is to reject not only a long history of correlationism and anti-realism, but most importantly, other realisms, such as transcendent realism (such as Plato) and the realism of scientific materialism. “I would propose that philosophy’s sole mission is *weird realism*. Philosophy must be realist because its mandate is to unlock the structure of the world itself; it must be weird because reality is weird” (HOP, p.334).

X

Y

Z

ZERO-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

The zero-person stance “refers to the essence or intrinsic nature of any entity apart from any access we might have to it” (ZP, 253). “Objects must be granted zero-person reality that can only be *translated* into descriptive terms of the first or third person kind”. “Zero-person” refers to “the reality of any entity apart from its interactions with out entities of any kind. This changes the nature of the problem. Instead of trying to bridge the gap between two kinds of descriptions, we now have a gap between description and reality” (ZP, p. 261). “Both mind and body occupy the zero-person stance, quite apart from any experience of them”. Zero-person is a synonym for ESSENCE. “Georg Cantor’s insights into transfinite numbers even suggests that we cannot have a total set of all properties of the house, which strengthens the hand of the zero-person stance all the more” (ZP, p.263).

ZUBIRI, XAVIER

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Alphonso Lingis – The Elemental Imperative [HERE](#)
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Maurice Merleau-Ponty – The Intertwining: The Chiasm [HERE](#)
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(HOP, p.

7 Responses to “Dictionary of concepts for Graham Harman’s object-oriented philosophy [draft: work in progress]”

nice work « Object-Oriented Philosophy Says:

December 18, 2009 at 1:43 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] 18, 2009 Ennis just pointed me toward this EVOLVING DICTIONARY OF MY PHILOSOPHICAL TERMINOLOGY at Avoiding the Void (Ennis is not the author, Mike Champion [...])

Ronaldo Says:

January 22, 2010 at 9:45 pm | [Reply](#)

Thanks for the dictionary (enlightening). I have followed Harman here in Brazil.

two good essay links « Object-Oriented Philosophy Says:

March 19, 2010 at 2:37 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] 2010 Wonderful... I’ve just taken a first look for awhile at Avoiding the Void’s DICTIONARY OF MY CONCEPTS, and found the following [...]

Mark Crosby Says:

March 23, 2010 at 2:08 am | [Reply](#)

Hi Mike. This is great! I spent some time this past weekend meditating on the juxtaposition of the 2 graphics. I'd previously taken my own Guess at the Riddle by trying to fill in the blanks using Graham's 11/12/2009 comments on "The Ten Possible Links". It looks like you've got the order of the "objective tensions" mixed up (see p217-218 in PRINCE OF NETWORKS). Before I'd thought to check there I'd reasoned that (3) must be essence because, following Santayana, essences "are all equally immediate and equally unsubstantial... They are dream-lights kindled by my fancy" (from somewhere in SCEPTICISM AND ANIMAL FAITH – Santayana is, unfortunately, almost as forgotten as Zubiri !); so, that would make them the link between real qualities and sensual objects, certainly not the real qualities of real objects. Likewise, for me, eidos is purely radiative – between sensual objects and their qualities.

I'm an over-the-hump, overworked amateur and very slow reader, so I have not yet finished the final chapter of PoN and am unsure if Harman uses similar logic. I like Peirce's triadic ontology, so I was interested in something beyond the Fourfold. I actually sense something akin to Peirce in Harman's Tensions (1stness), Radiations (2ndness) and Junctions (3rdness). Here are my interpolations (without, of course, having read THE QUADRUPLE OBJECT :) 5) experience or conjunction, 6) disjunction, 7) contiguity or mediation, 8) contraction, 9) emanation, 10) duplicity. We'll see how accurate these intuitions are!

Keep up the good work and, by the way, more posts on Bogost's UNIT OPERATIONS would be much appreciated, if you have the time..

Thanks, Mark

avoidingthevoid Says:

March 24, 2010 at 11:58 am | Reply

Hi Mark,

I was thinking about adding in some of the terms Harman has outlined for points 5-10 of the diagram, but I decided I will wait until the book comes out proper. I've tried my own speculations to explain the other links but didn't get far.

I don't see how essence can be anything other than link 1 (between a real object and real qualities). Essence is the tension between the object and its parts. When Harman lists the tensions in 'Prince of Networks' they are in a different order to the tensions on the diagram... I re-read those pages and I don't think I've got it wrong.

I've not read any Pierce or Santayana to be able to comment on your quote or thoughts on 'triadic ontology' but it's something I might look into as I'm sure many would consider my neglect of Pierce to be a sin.

As for more on 'Unit Operations', when I have the time I will write the next section but I'm working a lot and so any other time I have I need to read rather than write. Over the next few weeks this may change somewhat, so hopefully, more writing will be done. Here's a link to 'Unit Operations' if you haven't already read it (although do buy the book as it is truly excellent reading):

<http://depositfiles.com/en/files/n8vjqfcs8>

sex in the real: an all-too-quick note on realist philosophies « something Says:

April 11, 2010 at 11:18 pm | Reply

[...] own concept of Allure which is 'the separation of an object from its qualities' which Avoiding the Void goes on to note, in a dictionary of Harman's very poetic terminology, as an object's [...]

Great Resource: Dictionary of Harman's OOO Concepts « Networkologies Says:

June 12, 2010 at 5:30 am | Reply

[...] Dictionary of Harman's OOO Concepts Mike over at AvoidingTheVoid has a great post up of Dictionary of Concepts for Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Philosophy. Its all quotes from a wide variety of OOO texts, a very cool resource. Still a work in progress, a [...]

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