

6.30-8.30PM, ON THE SECOND WEDNESDAY OF FEBRUARY,
MARCH, AND APRIL 2012.

While there's been an OOO¹ buzz of late in the art world, we would like to take some time to look closely at specific suggestions made by some of the group's most vocal advocates--Graham Harman and Levi R. Bryant--alongside some by Isabelle Stengers. We're particularly eager to consider "object-orientedness" and/in contemporary art.

We suggest two simple activities: reading and conversation. We have selected brief texts and the ICI has scanned and uploaded them to their server. These sessions are of an informal nature: while Manuela and I will give a general introduction to the text, the idea is to consider its concepts from your own specific position--i.e., as participant in, or close follower of, contemporary artistic practice. The readings are instigators, starting points from which to develop further thoughts together.

This co-productive dynamic rarely surfaces in public events. Curatorial practice, mostly focused on presenting finished propositions, hardly ever engages texts to such a degree and with such a variety of participants. We'd like to use this format to bring our own focused, and thus far solitary, reading to a space where common concerns emerge and can trigger novel thoughts and associations.

1 "OOO," also known as "triple O," stands for Object-Oriented Ontology. Broadly defined, this metaphysical movement rejects the favoring of human over nonhuman existence.

I. FROM SCIENCE STUDIES (WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2012)

Isabelle Stengers, "Becomings," *The Invention of Modern Sciences*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 150-167.

II. ABOUT OBJECTS, WITHDRAWAL AND CAUSATION
(WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2012)

Graham Harman, "Physical Nature and the Paradox of Qualities," *Towards Speculative Realism*, London: Zone Books, 2010, pp. 122-139.

III. OBJECTS AND AGENCIES (WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 2012)

Levi R. Bryant, "Regimes of Attraction, Parts and Structure," *The Democracy of Objects*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2011, pp. 193-227.

Interested readers:

An assortment of New York City-based artists, graduate students, teachers, academics, curators. All different, but all dilettantes, amateurs, aficionados, even friends.

A core group and occasional drifting participants.

Should you have colleagues interested in these topics, please let us know and we'll be sure to invite them as well.

ICI Curatorial Hub, 401 Broadway #1602

White furniture,
books.

Large east-facing windows.

Impressive dusk views over lower Manhattan.

In the adjacent office landscape, behind closed double doors,

staff finish up the to-dos of the day.

A tray of sweets,

a tray of savories.

White wine and water.

We very much look forward to discussing with you!

—

But that was then, and you may not have been there.

Here. Now. And for later. There's some writing after the reading group.

Now, the group turns into an intermediary entity—like a block of resin, packed and solidified but waiting to be parsed out again and integrated into different products, from chewing gum to the coating of a violin string.

This writing transcribes and reconfigures the reading group into an exquisite corpse. It's part document, primary and secondary, and part generative. It stems from the idea that what was read and said can create another object that goes beyond those closed double doors. It exists because we suspect that there could be more than the experiential component to a series of reading groups. That there's something to be gained in sharing and reworking afterthoughts, even though we now already think and feel differently about the readings and the group's original goals.

This publication distills, self-reflects, reconfigures and circulates what was said, read, gestured, doodled. It's the other side of the coin of singular analysis, theoretical paraphrasing, or book reports that are produced as closed entities, functioning as time capsules rather than as flowing matter.

Take the classic joke of the ping-pong ball. Its resistance to measurement creates humor. The ball has known properties: colored white, 2.7g, 40mm diameter. And so does the player: colored white, 59kg, 163cm. Although these qualities can help predict certain reactions or spatial behaviors, truth be told, the measurable data matter little. When the paddle meets plastic, both ping-pong and player resonate: they are part of the same set, they meet and select information of mutual significance. The game starts and the joke sparks laughter. Is the ball or the person being hit? Hard to say, both are true. Hitting happens.

It's a classic example of mutual perturbation, undermining distinctions between human and non-human. This is also when complete knowledge gives way to temporary grasping, which is how games are played and how humor works. As an attitude towards the world and an aptitude for shifting perspectives, humor lends insight instead of quantifiable expertise. Even if the *real* ping-pong ball—the total, theoretical one—withdraws and can never be understood, it's through humor that we share visibility with other objects, so that we can chuckle discreetly or even burst out laughing. We just need to get over the need to know it all, whether through measurement or a cognitive unveiling of the deep realities surrounding us. It all makes more sense with a bit of laughter.

The ping-pong ball is now surrounded by an environment of other black and white objects, together flickering on a screen. The player is nowhere to be seen. The ping-pong ball now moves of its own accord. The audience laughs. As the staccato motion of the ball continues, the laughter gets louder. We hear relief in this collective laughter. What makes this trope of early cinema so comical?

The comedy of a sovereign object is indeed a funny thing, the suspension of causal laws is exhilarating. An ecology of freedom now parades its resistance to death and triggers the audience's laughter. The absolute freedom of objects is shameless because it is guiltless. Objects are comic; subjects,

more often than not, are tragic. Yet attaining the zero degree of subjectivity is a liberating feat. The laughter contains solace as it fills the darkened room.

A picture like this one, where nothing is lacking, is an inhuman picture. Or should I say post-human? The perturbation moves from object to object: the ping-pong ball, the flickering light, the screen. No players required. Yet the audience, formerly the subject, still does all the laughing.

Objects exist on the same plane as subjects in the world yet they share no sameness; or do they? The ping-pong ball cannot laugh.

Yet it is by facing the white sphere that I, one of the singularities contained in the cluster of subjects that is the audience, finally get a glimpse of myself through another (a blind other, at that), and manage to remove myself from the picture all together.

Laughter follows that removal. I become the bemused witness to an ontology, or an onticology² if you prefer, that does not include me. Let's not forget that always being at the center is quite exhausting, and that transcendental anthropology is also a drag...in particular for the subject. Ping-pong balls do not care, one way or the other.

When the human actor finally steps into the scene to chase the ball, paddle in hand, she too is a flickering white and black object on the screen. The ecology of the scene does not fundamentally change: for it still consists of a cluster of objects being in the world, whether we look at the screen or close our eyes to fall asleep. The movement on screen, detached from life as it is, is as indifferent to the audience's perception as it is to their laughter.

A movement that can no longer be reduced to the trace of impermanent life continues on screen. The perturbed light flickering on the screen remains unchanged when the human actor steps in. A set of objects resonate with each other; the world as an onticology. The freedom of the objects populating the screen is also impassive. That freedom has now spread to the actor who brandishes a paddle. She too behaves impassively; her movements are those of a mechanical doll. The comedy has reached its climax: the subject has become an object, mimicking the staccato rhythms of the ball, following

² A branch of object-oriented philosophy articulated by Levi R. Bryant.

its cues in a state of frenzied symbiosis. The audience now roars with laughter.

It is the removal of the subject as such from the screen that allows for the freedom of the object to proliferate, subjects are never free, objects cannot but be free. The subject still appears in this film, albeit in negative effigy. But more of that later, once we move on to yet another screen.

Let's make a stop along the way though, to catch the sight of a can of sardines. The story comes by way of a thinker one would rarely associate with a world of objects, yet here it is:

It is a true story. I was in my early twenties or thereabouts—and at that time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical, something physical, in the country, say, or at the sea. One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port. At that time, Brittany was not industrialized as it is now. There were no trawlers. The fisherman went out in his frail craft at his own risk. It was this risk, this danger, that I loved to share. But it wasn't all danger and excitement—there were also fine days. One day, then, as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean, that's what we called him—like all his family, he died very young from tuberculosis, which at that time was a constant threat to the whole of that social class—this Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!

Jacques Lacan goes on to recount how he was not amused by Petit-Jean's laughter, as it reminded him all too clearly of the indifference of the fisherman for the exploits of his own intellectual self. He was an invisible object. Through his well-meaning double-consciousness, he was able to see the working class fishermen but they, in turn, did not see or did not very much care to see him. They were as resistant to his gaze as a can of sardines.

This story of indifference is, against all odds, also the story of shared ontological characteristics between subject and object

(very much like the human actor and the ping-pong ball in our slapstick sketch). Both are partially withdrawn and contain an opaque core neither perception nor knowledge can unveil. The acceptance of this opaque core has consequences for the subject but none for the object. Knowing that I am also an object transforms my sense of self, my keyboard remains unmoved by the fact that its substance exceeds the sum of the keys I now type on.

Let's turn to another screen. A grid over a pixelated aerial image of a remote landscape—and it would continue to feel remote even if I were to tell you it is your backyard and the dark shape on the right is your dog taking a nap. A mechanical eye with sensors to detect movement, which in this instance still operates as a trace of impermanent life, equipped with color and black-and-white TV cameras, image intensifiers, radar, infrared imaging for low-light conditions and lasers for targeting. The unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) can be manned by an automated computer system or by a pilot on the ground or in another vehicle. It can target a pipeline or a walking civilian. Subject and object equalized in the game of either/or; reduced by, and to, a violent sameness.

You are fifteen again. Only the screen of your phone and your laptop has a better image quality than you can possibly remember. Words and sentences proliferate and persist, unattributed, with voices that scream silently, faceless. No contact required. Your skin remains untouched. But these algorithms cut and sting all the same, if not more.

In a world of objects, the subject is a very vulnerable thing.

It's funny, because I was first able to grasp the importance of the Higgs boson when it was portrayed as the sand on a dining-hall tray that kept all the ping-pong balls from sliding around like crazy.

In this short explanatory video, published on the website of a leading British newspaper, the iconic balls represented subatomic particles, with the orange plastic tray standing in heroically for the rest of the known universe. Which I guess would make the guy holding the tray God. In any event, as soon as the tray was tilted even slightly, the ping-pong balls began

careening wildly toward the edge. We are of course unsettled by this arrangement until some humble sand arrives on the scene—the elusive boson!—and things are given their proper weight.

The whole thing was a bit unfair on the ping-pong balls, I have to say. If you really think about it, they were just patsies—stand-ins for nameless particles in some non-existent, all-too-slippery alternate universe. Our feeling of anxiety watching the blank orbs skitter toward the tray's edge—wasn't this a holdover from elementary school, when it would have been our lunch splattering on the floor? Otherwise, why fear a make-believe frictionless universe? Indeed, if the ping-pong balls had made it past the tray's raised lip (now suddenly you *can* picture our universe's outer limit), this little video might have been a lot more fun. And truer to life. But I digress.

The whole thing was a cheap set up, obviously—but just who was being set up?

Initially I thought it was the ping-pong balls, but I'm starting to think they enjoyed playing the straight man. It kind of suits them, right? Feigning weightlessness is their second nature.

What about the tray? Ok, so the dining-hall tray didn't exactly star in the production, but "the Universe" was a pretty big step up from its usual gig as a food-service prole. It gave a solid performance that could potentially lead to bigger things. And the science reporter playing God? Talk about a dream role! The sand also took a big step up. Usually cast in relatively small parts in a beach scene or almost invisibly, as a windowpane, these often overlooked particles were subtly re-cast as that-which-gives-things-their-essential-slowness. Certainly a break-out role for sand. Sand is having friends over to watch Higgs at the Nobel ceremony. Sand is seen out with his agent, laughing.

That leaves the viewer. You know, I'm starting to think it's the viewer who got set-up. Basically, the ruse goes like this:

Here, take this point of view. No big deal, just hold on to it for a minute. Lack the perpetual, animating doubt of actual scientists. Lack the hard-won self-awareness of the various actors. Lack the unfathomable power of God. But still, observe—as if from outside, as if from on high—and convince yourself you can understand.

Quite a precarious position when you stop to think about it.

READINGS

ISABELLE STENGERS

GRAHAM HARMAN

LEVI R. BRYANT

to assess the difference between what, from singularities, refers to "matter itself" and what refers to the convictions and ambitions of the practitioners (belonging henceforth to the second world). Royal science "mobilizes" the ambulant process. "In the field of interaction of the two sciences, the ambulant sciences confine themselves to *inventing problems* whose solution is tied to a whole set of collective, non-scientific practices but whose *scientific solution* depends, on the contrary, on royal science and the way it has transformed the problem by introducing it into its theorematic apparatus and its organization of work."⁹

Thus, this mobilization is not simply rhetorical. It presupposes the event, the invented-discovered possibility of redefining singularities and the problems they were posing, and this from a double point of view. From a first point of view, these singularities are judged in the name of a "form" that has the power to render them intelligible, to "integrate" them, and thus to confer on them an intrinsic status through which they can be deduced or anticipated. But from a second point of view, these singularities are then judged and disqualified in the sense that they had previously created the terrain of a practice, for the latter, annexed in its principle, is henceforth qualified by the "particular," "accidental," and merely "practical" interests that assure it a certain de facto autonomy. The differentiation between royal science and ambulant science lies elsewhere. Thus chemistry is "ambulant" for the theoretical physicist, who is interested, for example, in the diversity of chemical elements, of which only the hydrogen atom is sufficient, according to him, to make the model intelligible (physics understands that, chemistry learns it).¹⁰ In short, we here find once again the hierarchized landscape of contemporary scientific knowledges, in which connections are described as conquest and reduction, and whose status is "in principle" measured at the level of the judgments that assess the difference between the intelligible "same" and anecdotal and subordinate difference.

To refer the invention of the modern sciences to the order of the event and not of right [*droit*], as I have tried to do, is first of all to insist on the difference between the "matters" that royal science presupposes and whose availability it sometimes creates, and those that the laboratory effectively invents. If the laboratory is the place where the coappropriation of matter and idea is created, where an "objective third party" is invented, capable of imposing on humans the putting in risk of their fictions, it is "royal" only to the degree that the practice of the sciences is governed by mobilization. It is the locus of a very singular operation: the creation of a third party to which one can attribute the power to ratify its own identification. But this power, if the mobilization does not transform it into the power to disqualify itself, can also define the terrain of a practice that comes to be added to the others,

and that poses, in itself, the problem of its prolongation, of its possibilities to link up with the others.

The mutation is both nil, because scientists, insofar as they do not mime science, are already ceaselessly posing the problem of prolongation and linkages, and drastic, because prolongation and linkage are most often, today, redefined as a confirmation of the power of one pole and the subordination of the other. Thus the theorem, which "is of the order of reasons," is constantly making one forget the problem, which is "affective, and is inseparable from the metamorphoses, generations, and creations" through which the prolongations and linkages are negotiated.¹¹ Correlatively, what royal science "brings into existence" is not celebrated as a story, the actualization of a new existant through multiple metamorphoses and the addition of ever-new significations in ever-new milieus. The actualization is reduced to a revelation: atoms, the void, the force of gravity, nucleic acid, and bacteria had in themselves the power to exist "for us" in the mode that science was content to "discover."

Conversely, could one conceive of the third world inhabitants as nomads, as producers and products of "objective" manners, putting power at risk for the fiction of posing problems, but without designating an available world, waiting for its objective reduction? It is not without interest that mathematics itself, which created the first theorematic appropriation, seems, at least for certain mathematicians, to engage in it. Thus, René Thom pleads for a form of "nomadic" mathematics, whose vocation would not be to reduce the multiplicity of sensible phenomena to the unity of a mathematical description that would subject them to the order of resemblance, but to construct the mathematical intelligibility of their qualitative difference. The fall of a leaf, then, would no longer be a very complicated case of a Galilean register, but would have to provoke its own mathematics. One could also cite Benoit Mandelbrot's fractal mathematics. Here as well, to "understand" means to create a language that opens up the possibility of "encountering" different sensible forms, of reproducing them, without for all that subjugating them to a general law that would give them "reasons" and allow them to be manipulated.

However, just as the invention of theorematic mathematics does not foreshadow or explain the invention of the modern sciences, neither are the aesthetic, technological, and practical mutations of contemporary mathematics enough to ensure a "demobilization" of the positive sciences.¹² This is the signification of the Parliament of Things, namely, to recall the primary and above all political character of the problem (in the sense, of course, that politics itself is also reinvented through the *explication* of problems provoked by certain inhabitants of the third

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Aristotelian Nicolas d'Autrecourt, the devout Catholic Malebranche, and the impious David Hume. In all of these philosophies, one object or one quality is unable to link directly to another. Unfortunately, all of them make a single hypocritical exception. For the theologians it is of course God who is able to break the side-by-side principle and let His power link the things. For the empiricists it is the human soul which exerts the hypocritical power by bundling separate qualities into a supposed underlying substratum that probably isn't even there. But hypocrisy is no solution. Instead, we should bite the bullet in each individual case and not look to some magical super-entity to link withdrawn objects together, whether it be almighty God or the almighty human mind. Each individual object must be equipped to touch and jostle others despite withdrawing from those others.

Then occasionalism is a philosophy of externality, with things existing side-by-side without bleeding or breathing into one another. This may take the form of impotent fire and cotton never acting without God's intervention, or perhaps it will be expressed instead in the empiricist maxim "relations are external to their terms". But whereas real objects trap us in an occasionalist deadlock in their cryptic mutual withdrawal, intentional objects already bleed and breathe, one phasing into another without difficulty. Furthermore, the intentional object somehow already achieves the godlike effect of blending countless profiles, halos, masks, and veils into a single intentional object, packing numerous qualities into a single essence even as they somehow remain separate qualities. For this reason perhaps the problem of occasional causation can be solved by looking to the field of perception, and then in some way moving back to the zone of real objects. I will now make a brief attempt to do so. The problem is important not only for clarifying Heidegger or Husserl (in however unorthodox a fashion) but also for elucidating numerous central problems of classical metaphysics. For

occasional cause, which we can rename *vicarious cause* so as to avoid needless theological overtones, is nothing less than the problem of how things can be both separate and linked. And this problem lies at the root of famous classical oppositions such as the one and the many, identity and difference, and the opposition between substance on the one hand and aggregates, accidents, relations, and qualities on the other.

being apart
together

⊗

4. The Volcanic Core of Objects

My thesis, which will sound strange at first, is that everything in the world happens only on the *interior* of objects. Since objects cannot touch one another directly they must be able to interact only within some sort of vicarious medium that contains each of them. The inside of an object can be viewed as a volcano, kaleidoscope, witch's cauldron, steel mill, or alchemist's flask in which one thing is somehow converted into another. It is not difficult to show why this must be the case. Let's start with the ambiguity lying in intentional acts. Husserl openly admits that our intention of an object is in a certain sense *one*, but in another sense *two*. It is not just as if two entities were sitting side-by-side; rather, the intentional act forms a union from the start. On the other hand, since the tree or flower and I do not fuse together into some colossal glacier without parts, we must also admit that each of the components of the act still somehow remains separate from the other.

Now, there is no choice but to call this unified act an object in its own right. Not because it is made of atoms or stone or metallic ore; not because it lasts for millions of years; not because it can be picked up and thrown like a ball or a firecracker. No, the intentional object is an object for the same reason as any other object: namely, it is a reality whose full depths can never be exhaustively probed. My intention of a chimney, pirate ship, or avalanche provides endless fuel for *ad nauseam* description by

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perturb or irritate one another, each system relates to these perturbations according to its own organization or closure such that we can't treat relations between objects as simple input/output relations.

Because objects are operationally closed and are composed of other objects, it follows that tensions or conflicts can emerge between multiples or larger scale objects and sub-multiples or smaller scale objects. As Latour writes, "[n]one of the actants mobilized to secure an alliance stops acting on its own behalf [...]. They each carry on fomenting their own plots, forming their own groups, and serving other masters, wills, and functions".²⁵⁰ Here it could be said that each object contends with its own system-internal entropy arising from the surprising and dissident role that other objects play within it. In enlisting other objects to produce them, larger scale objects must contend with the tendencies of other objects to move in other directions and act on behalf of other aims. Each object therefore threatens to fall apart from within, to have the endo-relations presiding over its own organization destroyed, and therefore must develop negative feedback mechanisms to maintain its own structural order.

For example, if a class is an object, the professor, an element or sub-multiple of the class, might conduct him- or herself in a way different from his or her prescribed role as professor, teaching nothing at all, talking about unrelated things, relating to students in inappropriate ways, and so on. In these circumstances, some or all of these students or perhaps administrators might relate back to the professor in such a way as to steer him or her back to his role as a professor. Indeed, today one major administrative trend in academia is to formulate ways of gauging the performance of professors by selecting samples of student work as well as student evaluations. At a higher system-specific level, these are ways in which the administrative level increases its capacities to be "irritated" or "perturbed" by classes that are difficult to directly observe on a day to day basis. Based on these ways of constructing openness to an inaccessible environment, administrations devise techniques to steer faculty or introduce negative feedback into the classroom that strive to normalize or codify academic standards and techniques. Meanwhile, many faculty who are called upon to construct educational rubrics for these purposes try to structure them in such a way as to minimize the intervention of administration into their classroom

L.B.?! ✓

businesses that both create jobs (which translate into votes) and which line the pockets of politicians through the campaign contributions they require to get re-elected. Closely related to this, we might note that many politicians enter the private sector as lobbyists and consultants after their terms of office, getting paid handsomely for the access they have to other politicians and agencies. Faced with the option of low-paying activist work that improves the world and high-paying consultant and lobbying work that largely benefits big corporations, they tend towards the latter and most likely are thinking about such a future while they're in office.

→ || Finally, questions of political change are constantly beset by issues revolving around resonance between systems. Resonance refers to the capacity of one system to be perturbed or irritated by another system. As we saw in the last chapter, because systems or objects are operationally closed such that they only maintain selective relations to their environment, they can only see what they can see and cannot see what they cannot see. Most importantly, they cannot see that they cannot see this. Niklas Luhmann has argued that modern society is functionally differentiated (legal system, media system, economic system, and so on), such that it contains a variety of different subsystems each organized around its own system/environment distinction within the social system. In addition to these function systems, society is also inhabited by various groups that become objects or systems in their own right, organized around their own system/environment distinctions.

|| As a consequence of this, one of the major issues facing any collective seeking to produce change within a social system is that of how to produce resonance within the various subsystems in the social system. This issue can be seen with particularly clarity in terms of how the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests were reported by the media system in the United States. While there was indeed a great deal of reporting on these protests, one curious feature of this reporting in televisual media was that there was very little discussion of just what was being protested and why it was being protested in cable and network news. Rather, viewers were presented with images of massive throngs of people and acts of vandalism protesting the WTO, while being told little in the way of just why these activists were protesting the WTO. The positions and complaints

TRANSCRIPTS

ISABELLE STENGERS30:14

LH There is a place where she says, humor is a way of resisting without hating. Just that is fantastic.

[LAUGHS]

DP That's a good line.

AH This idea of "being" as a way to avoid; to protect oneself from the impulse towards the heroic. I think this idea she talks about humor as safe is proof of not falling into human heroism. And then, passion as equally, and obviously, always already compromise. Open to... holes that can be punched through.

35:00

AH That's what everyone says about John Stewart, that he's untouchable.

LH Yes, he is untouchable but also powerless because he is a joker.

DP It's weird, there's also a way that humor that can be used by a benevolent dictator. Yes there is this dictator, but at least he's funny.

[LAUGHS]

SD It's like Carnival.

37:30

SN Regarding humor being a way of resisting without hating; just that is fantastic.

When she is talking about heroism, she is also talking about a tragic paradigm, where the subject is at the center. When the subject is at the center there is no space for comedy, because everything is relating to the self and there is no world either. I think it's beautiful--the notion of humor and the notion of comedy--humor always takes the point over the object, actually takes the point of the nonhuman. That is why there is

a distancing mechanism... because hate is a fully subjective emotion and humor, on the other hand, is an objectification of the world. I think distance for her it is very important as a scientist, and that is when I think the question of vanity becomes totally fascinating, because what she is pointing out to us is that we can basically... that it is possible to transfer agency onto this thing, and this thing is necessary... With that distance you can actually perceive the world.

43:47

AH "Humor is the art of resistance without transcendence."

[OTHER INTERVENTIONS]

SN The question of measurement is totally key. When I say comedy, I do not mean "ha ha ha" comedy--but it's about perspective and shifting, shrinking things or putting them into proportion, and it's a question of scale. You were saying, Manuela, something about not being in the center of things. That has to do with the question of measurement; of shrinking the subject to the size of the object. When she talks about measurement, she reminds us to think of her as a scientist, and about how the idea of measurement and scale relates to the idea of a method. She folds her argument at that moment: she is talking about radical comedy and radical science, that is when you are measuring, you're coming up with a completely arbitrary value that will allow you to play with scale. Measurement becomes a way of equalizing without becoming identical.

...Measure as something to do with humor is very very interesting.

1:15:56

SD She is not looking for rupture. There is a moment where she says, we do not have to try to be different; we are different as we are.

DP That was amazing.

SD It is towards the end.

[LAUGHS]

SD It's 164.5: "We do not have to invent ourselves

as radically different from what we are, for we are already very different from what we believe ourselves to be.”

SN This is re-phrasing a thing that Freud says about freedom. We are less autonomous than we think, than freedom will think. It's paradoxical, and she is repeating it in other words.

1:18:32

SN She is trying to talk about heterogenesis avoiding the idealism that she is also resisting. What she is doing is revising the notion of heteronomy in a sense of becoming collective.

[OTHER COMMENTS]

SD It is the connection between sciences and non-sciences... When she discusses how singularity (and heterogenesis) is understood as an event that is different to the production of truth--that is where she criticizes...

GRAHAM HARMAN39: 40

- RA What I really missed in this text is that a lot of these objects... they didn't just turn up. They weren't just there--we're not just reacting to them and they reacting to us, but there's a whole stage of production; a lot of them have been produced. First, it's the production, and second, it's what he touches on a little bit--this whole idea of the atmosphere the objects are in and how that is created and how it's presented. There's a certain amount of script in there before it comes back to us or we go back to it. It seems like a lot of it is: it just appeared, there's just a stone and its relation to me, and my relation to it. There's a difference, I believe, between a thing being produced with a certain idea behind it and instruction as to how something is produced. Right? But then it goes in a different direction. I don't know. I'd like to hear what you think of that part.
- SD So do you mean that the system of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand falls apart when you think of a stone versus a hammer? The hammer has been produced for certain reasons...
- DP ... Tracing the causes of non-natural objects... So it can be a pencil or a rock, it doesn't matter...
- RA He shifts from tree to tool. And I think that gap is huge! Maybe it's not a gap, but...

43: 15

- RA I think the most interesting point when he speaks about fabric, you know, he says something like "things don't bleed," but then they bleed with this very specific quality of that fabric, or the haptic quality of it. But then he withdraws.... But that's something that is manufactured, as a fabric, as a grid, with layers.... So what is the object?
- MM Can I say something? I think, for Harman, it's the same--the tree, the fabric, the print.... There is no difference. I think he makes a case for how those aspects don't come from anywhere but, maybe what he is saying ... the point he is making, is that any

thing has something behind it, it doesn't matter whether it is manufactured or natural. It will affect something in a specific way, depending on how they relate... They can even be imaginary, like unicorns. It's very much about those points of contact.

47:20

- SD It takes guts to talk about objects like that when we've had an entire century of talking about commodities, labor, and what not. He says, "It's fine that's there, I'm doing my own thing..."
- LG But there is some kind of labor there. Right? It's a shift in how we think about labor or laboring. Everything is always working. It's never really available... It moves to another space of working... That's the part that's really interesting but also difficult to deal with.

52:10

- DP I'm trying to trace it. There's something very weird that happens. He says, on page 131, this is his thesis--right? "Everything in the world only happens in the interior." It's bizarre.
- MS Yes, so: nothing happens between things.
- DP [shows a schematic drawing]
- MM That drawing is good, yes!
- DP I'm good. I'm good at.... So the traditional thing would be subjects-objects. He says: no no no. [sound of DP drawing] So you have these two things. But then he says, things happen between the two things. And then he says: "Now you have no choice but to call this unified act an object." The time it lasts doesn't matter. [expressions of affirmation from the group] ... And then he places the activity and the mystery right there in the middle of two things.

1:27:07

- SD Maybe we should just take Harman elsewhere.
- DP I'll go wherever he goes...

LEVI R. BRYANT12:00

SD Both Harman and Bryant are into this "invisible" thing, the invisible object. Maybe Harman more so--he speaks of depths and these kinds of things--but Bryant also speaks of things that are invisible to us; regimes of attraction and such. I'm always struck by how confined, as people, we are to thinking about things--and we need to speak about things in terms of perception, even though we don't want to talk about the perceiving subject. There's something about the object... it's not just a static thing, it needs to change. What I find striking about Bryant is that he talks about cells or bacilli, and then he jumps to the citizens of the United States. But there's no proverbial "rock" or "string of hair" or any of that.

13:10

PK Well, because--I wasn't here for the Harman discussion and I actually didn't read it--but his whole point is essentially relational. It's not about the objects themselves, as much as it is about a thorough analysis of set theory; looking at how we look at objects, and the sets of objects (which are themselves composed of autonomous objects). I think it's a very interesting idea that he has--these top-level objects are autonomous themselves, but the sub-objects contained within them are also autonomous. The point that I was very interested in is that he looks at objects and their environments. This is another kind of relational thing. He keeps coming back to how an object affects its environment, and that this kind of change is not only about objects changing over time, but how objects also change their own environments or contexts as they do this.

This is very much a pop-culture reference, but it kept reminding me of *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan. It kept going back and forth about how the objects themselves are changed, and how their environments are also changed. That, to me,

was the most important thing. He's trying to open up the idea of an object, that's why he's not talking about rocks. He's specifically using human examples because he wants us to understand them in arms; it's about the strength of relationships between objects and how those broader "meta-objects" or "set objects" are also objects.

15:15

SD You know, you're totally right in bringing up the relational aspect. At some point, I thought, because he also talks about the domestic relations of the object, which are the aspects that nobody has access to, it's more like the virtual object. In the end, IT'S ALL RELATIONS! I started to think, what does he mean by "relations"? Maybe it is just a word of our time. It's also very related to "organization" and then his fascination with maps, and drawing maps, is also reflected in this.

15:45

SN I thought it was very interesting that he was taking up relationality, which is something that Harman rejects in one of his most problematic points. Bryant begins his argument with the question of the autopoietic--the thing that is absolutely sovereign. From there, he actually goes on to define relationality in a new way. When you think about relationality, it's always about a lack--"incompleteness" or "heteronomy"--you know, it's about not being self-generated. So what he does is very interesting; I'm not yet sure how it works, but it has to do with preserving the structure of something in terms of wholes and parts rather than essences, which is perhaps why he refers to molecular biology. There's also the idea that it has to do with a set theory and that somehow it can account for time. Although the question of change is not left completely in the hands of time; rather it is contained in the structure itself.

For instance, Bryant quotes Marx, who is concerned with change as historicity, but then he is also really invested in the fact that these

objects are self-generated, which is something that Marx never would have said in a million years. So I'm starting to see... what's interesting is how he puts sovereignty, temporality, and structure together... It seems that he is reconfiguring these three elements, in a way that Harman doesn't. Bryant is putting it all together. It's interesting to think about what he means by these terms, because, for example, for him structure is a question of organization, not a question of essence. One could think about structuralism--and basically eliminate temporality as a problem by turning structures into processes....

20:15

SD Sara, you were talking about Bryant's notion of structure. I also found other words striking, such as "resonance"--and he takes a lot of examples from media culture also. How things are represented in the media. So there's a sense of him actually using certain experiences that are of our time to talk about very basic things; about how objects influence each other. Which I find useful is that he looks for terms that aren't loaded, and just takes them.

At some point when he's talking about the relationship between organism and environment, he uses the notion of "relevance"--an object makes or constructs an environment based on what is relevant for that object. And probably vice versa. Although the environment does not seem to have quite the same sense of agency as the object itself.

21:30

PK I love that part! The way that an object "selects" certain things as information and then basically doesn't pay attention to the rest--its relations are specific. Bryant goes into this in the last section, which we didn't read for today. In the last section he talks about entropy and the idea that, if all objects had the same relations with every single thing, in a non-specific way, then this actually breaks down and becomes like an entropic relation rather than any organizational structure. The object

has specific channels. Like in his example:
 “The United States cares about certain demographic
 qualities of its citizens, but it doesn’t care
 about what they had for dinner.”

22:30

- SD Yeah, even though I wrote there, “He chose the
 wrong example!”
- SN It’s interesting that...
- SD Um.
- SN ...
- SD No, you go.

50:05

- PK No, but he wants us to focus on regimes of
 attraction.
- SD Right, but the resonance, from what I understood,
 is just the capability of an object to be...
 irritated or perturbed by another object?
- PK Ooooh, OK...
- SD I don’t know what that means...
- PK Where’d you find that? I like his talking about
 “perturbation”...
- [voice]
 Yeah
- [another voice]
 Where does he say that?
- SD Well, I think it’s around page 220 or 219. That’s
 what my notes say...
- [SHUFFLING PAPERS]
- SD I mean, what does resonance literally mean? Like
 something reverberates something else, like sound?
- [another voice]
 Yeah, as a result of its surroundings or its,
 like, components or material makeup?
- RP Where does the word show up?
- [another voice]
 Resonance? um...
- SD Two-oh something
- SN It’s somewhere here--I think it’s somewhere here
- PK I think he uses it earlier, too.
- [TURNING PAGES]
- RP Ah, I see, there’s something on 222.

PK OK.

RP On page 222 it says, "resonance refers to the capacity of one system to be perturbed or irritated by another."

PK Right, right. And it's like, since he's arguing that every system is essentially blind to many things about other systems, it's only selectively interested. It's a very microbiological metaphor. I mean, he's talking about enzymes coupling with other proteins, essentially--it's almost that kind of a metaphor.

RP Right.

Looking for terms that aren't loaded

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