Having considered the views of my friendly acquaintances Tom Sparrow and Steven Shaviro, we now enter terrain occupied by critics who do not always wish me well. Peter Gratton was one of the first outside critics to pay attention to Speculative Realism, and on this basis he earned a not undeserved reputation as an authority on the movement. Productivity, curiosity, and alertness to new trends have long been among his signature strengths, so it was little surprise that he arrived early on the scene. Yet this should not obscure a crucial difference between Gratton and the founding figures of Speculative Realism; although he is somewhat younger than all of us, his intellectual allegiance is to earlier currents of continental philosophy as embodied in the writings of such figures as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. This is the context for his view, expressed repeatedly in his 2014 book *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*, that the Speculative Realists often merely repeat insights that were already clear to Derrideans. He compares our evident lack of interest in deconstruction to the latter’s own dismissal of Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism, before concluding as follows:

“Many generations of philosophers suffer from an anxiety of influence, and the speculative realists are no different.” We should first note that this is a misuse of Harold Bloom’s theory of how different generations of authors interact. The anxiety of influence, strictly speaking, occurs when a later author “deliberately misreads” a predecessor they regard as exceptionally strong, in an effort to carve out their own distinct space in the intellectual world. It does not follow that every critique of an older author by a younger one is a case of such anxiety; often enough, the new generation simply experiences the previous one as a stale ruling power whose ideas no longer sparkle. On this note, it is easy to see why the young deconstructionists would have regarded existentialism — if somewhat unfairly — as a tired form of modern humanism. But it would be rather odd to claim that the young Derrida’s anxiety of influence stemmed from Sartre, and far more plausible that it came from structuralism on one side and phenomenology on the other. As for the alleged Speculative Realist anxiety in the face of deconstruction, there is no such thing. If one examines our writings collectively, Derrida is simply not one of the central figures with whom we grapple, my frustrations with his critique of Aristotle notwithstanding.

In fact, it is Gratton himself who likely feels some anxiety of influence with respect to deconstruction, the most important school in forming his own outlook. Thus, we are dealing with a case of projection on his part. Rather than calmly identifying the authors who risked overpowering the various Speculative Realists in their youth — as Bloom would do — Gratton invents a theory of secret Derridean influence that suits his own agenda without fitting the case at hand. Elsewhere in the book, he makes the more interesting claim that I am heavily indebted to

the philosophy of Levinas in a way that some readers do not realize. This is both true and insightful, though I will show that Gratton misreads the nature of that influence, which has less to do with “alterity” and “the Other” than with Levinas’s insights into the sensual hither side of being.

More generally, Gratton’s jet drifts too easily into Airspace Snide-and-Cocky. His eleven-page introduction is mottled with so much regrettable shade that the book would have been better served by having no introduction at all. At the bottom of page three, we read the following: “But I’ve delayed long enough. What is speculative realism anyway?” (3). Under normal authorial circumstances, “What is speculative realism anyway?” would have been the first sentence of the book, or close to it. So, we might ask, what was going on in the three full pages before Gratton finally got to the point? A good portion of those pages is filled with statements reminiscent of “many people are saying…” insinuations. A few examples are in order, starting with this one: “But to make it for real these days, the cynical will claim, you must have a system, and it better come with a ready-made politics. Which, of course, you’ll say, it does, since it’s the subject of your forthcoming book; anyone can have a book forthcoming, and it is best to have several to have a trump card to throw into any conversation at conferences” (1). To whom, pray tell, is Gratton referring here? And what does any of it have to do with a book on Speculative Realism? While there is some ambiguity in the passage as to whether the author agrees with “the cynical,” anyone reading a few pages further will conclude that the introduction is designed primarily to generate alibis for such cynicism among readers ill-disposed toward Speculative Realism. Is there really a problem in our discipline, for instance, with people having too many book contracts? Normally, no one has multiple contracts unless they have reliably published actual books, so that publishers come knocking on their doors for more. Gratton would appear to be dog-whistling at someone, and there is little point speculating who. It is his job to lay his cards on the table, not mine.
But perhaps Gratton is aiming his accusations instead at those who actually have published a good deal, despite his own relatively prolific track record. The cat would appear to have escaped the bag near the top of page one: “Philosophy, the fear is, has become even more of a bazaar of self-branding academics pumping out articles and books and pushing new systems of thought with clumsy titles” (1). “The fear is?” Whose fear, exactly? We are never told, though apparently many people fear that “self-branding” academics are “pumping out” too many articles and books. But as a rule, it is a good sign when academics are productive rather than unproductive, and I have mentioned that Gratton himself very much belongs to the productive side of the profession. Nonetheless, he sees fit to consider—or perhaps many people are considering—whether it might be better to behave instead like “[Hans-Georg] Gadamer […] publish[ing] his first major book at age sixty” (2). Is there really a problem with Speculative Realists publishing too much too early? The evidence suggests not. At the time of the inaugural Goldsmiths workshop, the four participants were relatively obscure, dues-paying veterans ranging in age from thirty-eight to forty-three, which is hardly a premature blossoming. Yet it is difficult to respond to anything in the introduction with much precision; the smoke signals are always mixed, and Gratton never quite tells us where he stands on all this cynicism that many people are said to be feeling.

Unfortunately, the closest he comes to tipping his hand comes when his very first block-quote is original Speculative Realist Ray Brassier infamously referring to SR as an “online orgy of stupidity,” followed shortly thereafter by a false piece of objectivity: “Let us thus make Brassier’s analysis our starting point” (3). Why make Brassier’s insult—hardly an “analysis”—the “starting point” of the book, when Gratton is fully


aware that Brassier has a personal axe to grind against his former group, and also fully aware that Brassier’s primary target (the Object-Oriented Ontologists) are not primarily “online” figures but instead are “pumping out” articles and books by the dozens? Then again, amidst the fog of the introduction and its confusingly contrary hints as to what many cynical people are saying, who’s to say that “pumping out” articles and books is any better than having written nothing, but having “several” books “forthcoming” instead of written? So thick is the gloom of insinuation that at times there is no way to parse the meaning of the book without interpreting the numerous tacit digs that lurk in the background.

Gratton does make a number of interesting arguments, and I will consider them, though it would have been preferable to meet them in less alloyed form. His claim that he “wouldn’t write at such length […] about] authors [he doesn’t] greatly respect” (6) makes a strange fit with the rest of the introduction, which reads like an extended permission slip — written in invisible ink — for mainstream continental philosophers to indulge in sarcastic remarks at Speculative Realism’s expense. For instance, “A movement should have to prove its staying power and importance, not just get name-dropped in art catalogues and cloying treatises” (3). Is Gratton one of the many people who are saying this? Presumably not, since he went ahead and “pumped out” a 266-page book on Speculative Realism less than a decade after the movement began. Furthermore, what is wrong with art catalogues? And what on earth is a “cloying treatise”? There is no telling, for we are in the London of Bleak House:

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and
small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards.⁷

Gratton habitually belittles the originality of the Speculative Realists, claiming that Meillassoux’s philosophy was anticipated two years in advance by the analytic philosopher John Nolt (40), despite minuscule similarity between these authors. He claims that Meillassoux stole his theory of God from both Philo of Alexandria (66) and Richard Kearney (75)—or should I say he insinuates it, since Gratton rarely comes right out and says anything of the sort. Perhaps most foolishly, he tweaks my nose with a “[sic]” following a typographical verb-tense error in my translation of Meillassoux’s *L’Inexistence divine*: “because it cannot be understand [sic] how the lifeless […].” Such things happen when writing and editing books, but Gratton makes the decision to leave the typo and draw attention to it, rather than quietly fix it or put the correct word in brackets as well-mannered authors generally do. Unfortunately for him, the snark backfires when his own book turns out to be riddled with more typographical mistakes than any other I have seen under the Bloomsbury label. The errors include frequent cases of words missing from sentences, the oddly foreign tourist-like claim that the aforementioned Nolt teaches at the “University of Knoxville” rather than the University of Tennessee (40), the misstatement of my article subtitle “A New Theory of Causation” as “The New Causality” (105), the misspelling of the Polish journal *Kronos* as *Chronos* (217n1), and two different misspellings of Jean-Luc Boltanski’s surname just five lines apart (198–99). He also omits Steve Woolgar’s name as co-author from Bruno Latour’s *Laboratory Life*, while calling the subtitle of that book *The Construction of Scientific Fast* rather than *Facts* (90). In a crowning bizarrie, he even ascribes some words I wrote my-

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self to Leon Trotsky, though he should have known that “dusky underworld” sounds a lot more like me than like the goateed revolutionary (92). Gratton has what it takes to be a solid, adult critic of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology from his holdout Derridean position. But one wastes so much time unravelling his smirky innuendoes that I occasionally find myself longing instead for Wolfendale’s open expressions of hatred. Unfortunately, it will be necessary to call out more cases of this kind as we move forward, since there are times when Gratton’s arguments are practically soaked in sub-verbal insinuation.

Amidst a surprising occurrence of the phrase “fuck and die” on page ten, the reader finally gains sight of a clear statement of Gratton’s own philosophical outlook:

My hunch is this: speculative realism may stand the test of time, but only if takes the reality of time as a test to pass. [...] My view is that those critiqued by the speculative realists, such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and several others were not “correlationists,” but were after a realism of time — Being as time, as Heidegger put it, a claim that made his project and the later deconstruction possible. (10)

This is, in fact, the intended lesson of Gratton’s book — philosophy must be grounded in a specific theory of time, and Meillasoux and I both fail this test because we are too close to Plato. Coming from a Derridean like Gratton, the accusation of Platonism is obviously not meant as a compliment. But at least it is a clear thesis, and like all clear theses, it is honorable enough to risk refutation. My response will be as follows: (a) Leaving Meillasoux to defend himself if he wishes, I will show that Gratton is wrong to claim that my philosophy bears any significant resemblance to Plato’s, and (b) I will show that Gratton is wrong to link Heidegger’s philosophy of time with Derrida’s. For in fact, they are completely different.
General Survey of Gratton’s Views on Sr

Gratton’s book covers not only the four original Speculative Realists but also an interesting cross-section of neighboring thinkers — Jane Bennett, Elizabeth Grosz, Adrian Johnston, and Catherine Malabou. Nonetheless, I will focus here exclusively on his treatment of Meillassoux’s philosophy and my own. The reason is that the two of us are the primary targets in the closing argument of his book (201–16), as presaged in the introduction:

Meillassoux could not do his work […] without the mathematics of set theory. I began to wonder if we weren’t returning to Platonism, the view that what is ultimately real is outside time. […] But Harman argues that objects as they are in themselves are not in time, since time is embedded in appearances, which seems to repeat Plato’s account. We will ask if this is a major problem with his work. (8)

But “we” will do considerably more than “ask.” “We” will answer that it is a major problem indeed. The book’s conclusion will give us Gratton’s argument for a “realism of time” (202). He urges that the Speculative Realists follow him down this path, “lest they give themselves over to the idealism of objects, mathematics, and so on” (202). The role played by “and so on” in this passage is unclear. But no matter, since objects and mathematics take the brunt of his criticism.

Before entering into his account of Meillassoux, allow me to point to two passages where Gratton overgeneralizes about the Speculative Realists. The first comes when he says, “it should be said that there has been a longstanding divide between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy, and speculative realists promise a move beyond this divide” (40). Gratton does not back up this claim with citations, and as far as I know, Brassier is the only Speculative Realist who offers such a promise.9 Badiou also
makes this promise, in the course of boasting about his personal prowess in both mathematics and literature, but I do not recall Meillassoux having said much at all about the analytic/continental divide. For my own part, I wish to widen the gap between the two traditions. The second overgeneralization comes when, after quoting a passage from The Quadruple Object in which I note that we humans are a relatively minor species orbiting a mediocre sun, Gratton leaps to the assertion that “this apocalyptic affect pervades speculative realism, from Meillas- soux’s depictions of the end of humanity to Brassier’s nihilism” (52). Not really. There is nothing inherently “apocalyptic” about saying that humans are not so important in the universe as a whole, which is all I say on the topic. Meillassoux does speak of the possible coming of a Messiah and then a God who will completely transform existence into a World of Justice, and I suppose this could be called “apocalyptic,” though “eschatological” or “soteriological” would seem more to the point. Brassier is really the only Speculative Realist who revels in discussing the end of our species and the universe as a whole, and this remains a fetish of his personal project. Moreover, even the arguments Gratton cites against us on this score — from Adrian Johnston and Slavoj Žižek — are not so much anti-apocalyptic as outright idealist, through their shared claim that it can only be a “fantasy” to imagine gazing upon a world in which humans are no longer present, since we would still have to be there gazing at the fantasy (52). Alain Weisman’s bestseller The World without Us was based on an interesting concept, a consideration of what would happen to various buildings and facilities if humans were

divide as a mere “sociological fact.”


suddenly to disappear. And it is true that Brassier and Meilllassoux both make extensive realist use of the trope of a world devoid of humans. But this is not what OOO is about, since for us the thing-in-itself is not attained by removing humans from the scene, but by stressing that objects remain mysterious even when humans are right there staring at them.

In any case, after “praising” Speculative Realism (with the word “luckily”) for having oversimplified a 200-year period of philosophy by dismissing it as anti-realist (14), Gratton eventually gets down to business with an opening-chapter summary of correlationism. That summary is actually quite good, beginning with a brutally anti-realist epigraph from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a thinker who too often provides cover for phenomenological idealists masquerading as realists (13). Whereas the Speculative Realists themselves tend to explain correlationism by referring to Immanuel Kant, Gratton usefully expands the map by also incorporating the analytic philosopher Michael Dummett (22–26). Late in the chapter, he also reaches a genuine insight about Meillassoux: “What’s striking about After Finitude is that Meillassoux, frankly, has little to combat idealism as such. He expends a lot of energy on correlationisms but, as we’ll see, his method has nothing to say about idealisms that simply deny any correlation at all” (37). No one who reads Meillassoux carefully could argue that he is close to naïve realism; in chapter 6 we will see that Christopher Norris makes this claim about the early parts of Meillassoux’s first book, though this is merely a product of Norris not reading very carefully. Yet I myself have argued, and Gratton rightly implies, that there is no sufficient remedy for outright idealism in After Finitude, a charge that might be extended to Meillassoux’s teacher Badiou as well as their fellow traveler Žižek, given his minimal Lacanian sense of the Real as nothing but a traumatic wound to the symbolic order.

Before getting to the most interesting parts of Gratton’s reading of Meillassoux, there is no escaping the burden of what he gets wrong, starting from the least important errors and working our way to the more serious lapses. First, there is the following: “This is perhaps why Meillassoux differentiates between
‘refutation’ and ‘disqualification,’ […] though frankly it’s impossible to make out” (41), in connection with Meillassoux’s presentation at Goldsmiths.14 In fact, it is very easy to understand this particular distinction. In the passage in question, Meillassoux is looking for a rational argument to “refute” the correlationist, as opposed to a mere “disqualification” such as casting aspersions on the correlationist’s psychological motives or calling him boring. Second, Gratton spends a bit too much time dwelling on the “ridiculousness” of Meillassoux’s theory of a virtual God who does not now exist but may exist in the future, though he lets Adam Kotsko shoulder the burden of mocking it for him (65). While it is no doubt true that Meillassoux will convert few readers to his strange theology, one should not just admire those philosophies with whose content one happens to agree; this is the dogmatic flaw found in Brassier, Wolfendale, and others, not a good general model for philosophical behavior.

There are other problems with Gratton’s account of Meillassoux. As mentioned earlier, he reports that “[i]t so happens that two years before the publication of After Finitude, John Nolt, a University of Knoxville [sic] philosopher, published a similar argument confronting anti-realism” (40; italics added). This looks very much like a trial balloon for questioning Meillassoux’s originality. The real problem with this strategy is that Meillassoux’s discussion of ancestrality and the arche-fossil is not meant to be original, and is not even meant as an “argument.” Nolt’s article is a perfectly lucid piece of analytic philosophy which proceeds through several steps to the conclusion that “the cosmos has structure that is independent of our cognition — i.e., intrinsic structure.”15 While this may sound similar to Meillassoux’s discussion of the arche-fossil, the difference is that Nolt is a straightforward scientific realist who considers the existence of an intrinsic structure of the universe to be the final


lesson of the story. Nowhere does Nolt defend the equal rights of
the correlationist side of the argument that “the universe has an
intrinsic structure — for us.” Now as always, those who overlook
this side of Meillassoux are advised to reread his portion of the
Goldsmiths transcript. Those crucial pages are all about how the
correlationist has a point, and needs to be defeated by oblique
means rather than the direct ones used by Nolt, Paul Boghos-
sian, and others.16

A more serious difficulty, in which Gratton is not alone and
Meillassoux not blameless, stems from the false claim — ex-
pressed rather triumphantly, I might add — that Meillassoux is
merely confusing epistemology and ontology:

Is his refutation of the correlationist as knockdown as Meil-
lassoux argues? In a word, no. First Meillassoux is in danger
of portraying Kant et al. as particularly daft philosophers
who can’t distinguish between ontological and epistemologi-
cal claims. Kant isn’t asserting that the in-itself doesn’t exist,
but rather that what we know can’t simply be accounted for
by some unmediated access to the in-itself. [… And] as Pe-
ter Hallward points out, one can say such and such are the
epistemological or linguistic conditions for knowledge […]
without ever believing that the things in the world “depend”
on thinking for existence.17 (46–47)

Along with Hallward, David Golumbia makes a similar point
in his article, which claims that correlationism never really ex-
isted.18 But in fact, Meillassoux is guilty of no such conflation

16 Ray Brassier et al., “Speculative Realism,” 408–49; Paul Boghossian, Fear of
Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism (Oxford: Oxford Univer-
sity Press, 2006).
17 The reference is to Peter Hallward, “Anything Is Possible: A Reading of
Quentin Meillassoux’s ‘After Finitude,’” in The Speculative Turn: Continental
Materialism and Realism, eds. Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham
18 David Golumbia, “‘Correlationism’: The Dogma That Never Was,” boundary
between the epistemological and ontological registers. Nowhere
does he claim that Kant says the thing-in-itself depends on the
human mind for existence. Instead, he draws a distinction be-
tween “weak” and “strong” correlationists, with Kant a textbook
example of the “weak” type who holds that something does exist
outside thought, though we simply cannot know it. Although
Meillassoux is not guilty of misreading Kant, he is nonetheless
guilty in After Finitude of an ambiguous use of the word “cor-
relationism,” as he later admitted in his 2012 Berlin lecture.19 The
ambiguity is as follows. On the one hand, Meillassoux usually
treats Kant as the shining exemplar of correlationism. But on
the other, he defines the “correlational circle” in terms that do
not apply to Kant, namely, “to think a thing outside thought is
itself a thought, and therefore to think anything outside thought
is impossible.” This view is of course not held by Kant, but only
by the strong correlationist, as well as the idealist, and therefore
should have been called the “strong correlational circle” instead.
We should emphasize once more that, far from being a sci-
entific realist in the manner of Nolt, Meillassoux holds that even
Kant makes too many concessions to the thing-in-itself outside
thought, and much prefers the strong correlationist to the weak
one. He reaches his own philosophical position by radicalizing
the strong correlational circle, just as ooo can be interpreted
as a radicalization of Kantian weak correlationism beyond the
human sphere.

There is a final point on which I am not sure whether Grat-
ton gets Meillassoux right or not, because the textual evidence
is murky. In the course of comparing Meillassoux with Philo,
Gratton makes the following statement: “Meillassoux is clear
that matter was created ex nihilo” (67). This was once my view
as well, though I no longer think it is so clear. The reason for
doubt stems from Meillassoux’s argument, in After Finitude,
that his “principle of unreason” should be accepted in a strong sense rather than a weak one. The weak sense would be that if something exists, then it must be contingent, while insisting that this in no way entails that something must exist (73). The strong sense, on the other hand, would say that it is necessary that something exist, because it is necessary that contingent things exist (74). We need not go into Meillassoux’s attempted proof of the strong reading here, and only mention in passing that he does support it. But this runs counter to the sense one gets from The Divine Inexistence that matter was created ex nihilo, just as later happened with life and thought, and as might happen one day with justice and the Virtual God. For if the strong reading of the principle of unreason is correct that something must exist, it is hard to see what that could be for Meillassoux other than matter, which provides the indispensable bedrock in his philosophy for the later contingent emergence of life and later thought. But it is time to turn to Gratton’s account of OOO.

Gratton deals with me primarily in chapter 4 of his book, though numerous other references are sprinkled throughout, including in the all-important conclusion of the book. Chapter 4 contains a few misleading remarks that need to be dealt with before getting to the substance of Gratton’s critique. Unlike Wolfendale, he judges that my work is “clear and schematic” (85), which frankly is the reaction most readers have. We will see that Gratton has plenty of criticisms to make of my philosophy, though he thankfully avoids the affectation of claiming that I am so unclear that he had to work oh so very hard just to make my writings intelligible, a pretense with which Wolfendale’s book is irredeemably saturated. Gratton also claims that although I write extensively about my differences from Edmund Husserl and Heidegger, “a better passkey to [Harman’s] work is through the writings of Levinas” (85), Naturally, “this is not to say that Harman’s account is not original” (85), though in fact there are numerous insinuations throughout the book that it is not original. In any event, Gratton shows insight in pointing to the impact of Levinas on my thinking, which occurred primarily in my early twenties, an age at which influences leave
a deeper and more primordial stamp than affinities discovered later. By contrast, I was nearly thirty years old before starting to read Latour, meaning that he helped refine my position rather than shape its basic suppositions.

There are two possible ways in which the link Gratton draws between me and Levinas could be misleading. First, he over-stresses the importance of Levinasian “alterity” for my work (87). For one thing, this is historically false. It is true that I was first reading Levinas in 1991, at twenty-three years old, under the guidance of his translator Alphonso Lingis. It was Lingis’s critique of my holistic reading of Heidegger, along with my readings of Levinas, which helped set the stage for what is now my decidedly non-holistic interpretation of Heidegger’s tool-analysis. Lingis’s own version of this critique can be found today in his under-read article on Levinas and substance.20 But this movement toward substance is already enough to show that absolute alterity was not what interested me about Levinas. In his wonderful short work Time and the Other Levinas links alterity with the futuricity of time, as contrasted with what he regards as Heidegger’s mere “future of the present,” in which the so-called future is merely collapsed into the threefold present of Dasein’s “thrown projection.” I still admire Levinas’s argument about futuricity today, despite the paradox that he seems to draw it from Bergson, who is not a thinker of alterity in Levinas’s sense. In any case, what I found interesting in Levinas (and still do today) was not so much his famous notion of alterity as his discussions of the hither side of being, referring both to the enjoyment of such entities as cigarettes and apples and the elemental medium in which they occur. My concept of withdrawn real objects dates instead to 1997 and my long summer readings of Xavier Zubíri, whose notion of individuals has a more Aristotelian flavor and which subtracts them from their relations to such a degree that he (wrongly) denies that a knife or a farm can be real, given that they exist only in their “respectivity” to other things. Zubíri also

strikes a disappointingly naturalist note in locating the reality of things in their “atomic-cortical structure,” so reminiscent of Saul Kripke falling back on the number of protons in gold as being the core of its reality.

Second, it is hard to follow Gratton’s argument when he identifies my “object in withdrawal” with Levinas’s “elemental” (86). Rather, the elemental in Levinas is the sensual, sub-objective medium in which sensual objects first take form. Although I ultimately call this elemental medium “black noise,” meaning that it emanates from objects which become objects as soon as we turn our attention to them, there is indeed something to be gained from a phenomenology of the non-objective element. The growing interest in Gernot Böhme’s theory of “atmospheres” shows that many others are intrigued by this topic as well.21 But I cannot endorse Gratton’s claim that the interpretation of the elemental by John Sallis is a good fit with my work. Sallis writes as follows: “the recession of the elemental, its withdrawal into fathomless depth, its withdrawal that is neither simply revelation nor concealment.”22 When I speak of withdrawal in a OOO context, I do not mean a withdrawal “that is neither simply revelation nor concealment” (the old Derridean tap dance of neither/nor), but a withdrawal that is simply concealment. But this is clearly not what Levinas means by the element, and the discrepancy is explained simply by the fact that Sallis uses the word “withdrawal” in a less hardcore sense than my own.

Next Gratton gives, as an example of my term “undermining,” the philosophy of British Empiricism and its bundles of qualities (89). But for me this is a textbook case of overmining—the empiricists hold that a bundle of qualities is all we need, and any notion of a distinct object holding them all together is a needless fiction. In short, they think the “object” is simply the sum total of content to which we have access in

sense-experience, not something that remains unified despite its shifting, kaleidoscopic figures, as phenomenology holds. On a related note, Gratton glosses my rejection of materialism as a *duomining* move with the following sentence: “For Harman, scientific materialism ‘jeers’ objects from below, while a ‘German Idealist’ ‘dialectical materialism’ ‘jeers’ from above” (92). This may be the least felicitous use of scare-quotes I have ever seen; they are so numerous and disjunct that I lose track of which are direct quotes and which are intended as sarcastic putdowns of my argument. Accordingly, I cannot begin to respond. Surprisingly, however, there is another point on which Gratton does me *too much* credit:

Spinoza’s point [when he claims that thought and extension are just two of infinitely many modes] is that there is no reason there wouldn’t be infinite modes or means of accessing this world. Harman’s description of sensuous objects is similar: there may be indeed many ways objects, animals, and so on, have of relating or accessing the things of this world beyond the three noted [by Levinas]. (95)

This is a beautiful idea expressed in lovely prose, and one I agree with in principle. But most of my writing on this topic has been about the difference between real objects and *any* form of sensuousness, and I have not done enough as of yet to explore the variety of possible sensuous worlds. It is Shaviro in *Discognition* who has gone some way towards opening up this topic, and even Metzinger with his account of various neuropathologies in *Being No One*.

We shift now to a topic where Gratton typically gives me *too little* credit instead, when he refers to the discussion of the “tension” between objects and qualities as “doing much of the conceptual heavy lifting in Harman’s accounts” (102). Given that “term X is doing a lot of heavy lifting for you” is established continentalese for “you’re just throwing that term around without even knowing what it means,” this is an especially ungenerous moment in his account. It would be more accurate to say that
the word “tension” is the result of a lot of heavy lifting. Years of work were needed to reach a simple understanding of how time and space can both be understood as different forms of the object–quality tension, and more years needed before it became clear that the two other forms of such tension (RO–RQ and SO–RQ) could be identified as “essence” and “eidos.” I daresay this is one of the most original and productive results of OOO so far. Traditionally, philosophers have speculated on space and time as two peerless aspects of the cosmos, sitting on a pedestal by themselves, with discussion mostly limited as to whether or not they should be collapsed (as with Hermann Minkowski and sometimes Heidegger) into a single space-time. I am not aware of other efforts to expand the spatio-temporal schema to show that essence, eidos, or anything else belongs there as well. The fact that there is more to be said about the underlying “tensions” than I have said so far is simply how things go in philosophy. A placeholder term is never the final stage of an insight, but it does help make the ultimate insight possible.

A related deficit of generosity occurs when Gratton quotes a passage from The Quadruple Object which says that real objects must somehow be translated into sensual caricatures of themselves, must serve as the fuel that makes causal relations possible, and so forth. The italics are Gratton’s own, and he hammers them repeatedly into the citation, as if to suggest that I am taking undue liberties in merely waving my arms and asserting something I cannot explain: though we will see later that his sainted Derrida does this himself at a key moment (103). Gratton continues to hammer this point for several pages, eventually concluding as follows: “His use of ‘somehow’ and ‘must’ covers over an argument for causality, and previous antecedents in the history of philosophy using occasionalism could only offer mysticism in place of explanation” (105). Here, like Norris who is discussed in chapter 6 below, Gratton openly invites the reader to imagine that I am mystically appealing to God as the universal causal agent. There is no trace here of my frequent emphasis that both my model of indirect causation and Latour’s differ not only from occasionalism but also from Hume and Kant, by re-
fusing to permit any privileged super-entity (whether God or the mind) to be the sole locus of causation. Furthermore, OOO has nothing to do with “mysticism,” which claims direct access to the truth just like rationalism, though by different means, while the object-oriented position is that any such access must be indirect. In short, the case here is the same as with “tension.” The “musts” and the “somehows” are not invoked from thin air as an excuse for nothing to say, but are the provisional result of a process of narrowing down the place where causation must occur. We are not left with mere guesses about causation, but are partway down the path to a solution. In the famous words of Sherlock Holmes, “eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”23 The passage above that Gratton mocks with extensive italics represents the stage of having eliminated the impossible, which, for me, is direct causation. The improbable option that remains is vicarious causation, in which real objects are mediated by sensual ones and sensual objects by real ones, and even Sherlock Holmes needs time to progress from one step to the next. This could certainly lead to what is called “the Holmesian Fallacy,” in which someone prematurely eliminates an option as impossible that is actually quite possible. But in that case, Gratton would need to show that direct causation is possible, or at least refute my argument that it is not. He does neither of these things.

There are a few more matters to deal with before getting to the core of Gratton’s temporal argument against OOO. One is his implication that, with the advent of the Anthropocene Era — in which human impact on the non-human world is more obvious than ever — it is somehow irresponsible or shifty maneuver to switch to a discussion of inanimate things. He actually puts it in even less flattering terms, “To describe, then, the power of things at precisely this time could have the feel of an alibi for [avoiding] the human responsibility in the ecological strife in and around us — like an only child suddenly talking about the

powers of an imaginary friend when caught with a mess” (110). We cannot allow Gratton to get away with the word “could.” He must take full ownership of this passage: not only of its insulting comparison of OOO to a lying or deluded child, but more importantly of the implied — and bizarre — thesis that the Anthropocene gives us even more reason to continue the human-centered emphasis of post-Kantian theory. This argument rests on a simple equivocation. The fact that humans have a very strong causal role in giving rise to the Anthropocene does not mean that the appearance of the Anthropocene to human thought must be our theoretical starting point now more than ever. It is the same equivocation noted by Manuel DeLanda on the first page of his book A New Philosophy of Society: the fact that humans are necessary ingredients of human society does not entail that human society is equivalent to how it appears to humans.24 Instead, we are dealing with real causal forces — in the cases of both human society and the Anthropocene — that resist any precise thematization by human theories. In Art and Objects I make a similar criticism of the modern formalist theories with which I otherwise agree, namely, those of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.25 For art to be independent of the human beholder does not also require that art be devoid of a human ingredient, which is wrongly assumed in the Greenberg/Fried critique of much “postmodern” art.

In the next passage I have in mind, Gratton refers to “Harman’s rhetoric on undermining and overmining” (116). Although I personally view rhetoric in a positive sense, as the branch of philosophy that studies the power of unspoken syllogisms (see Marshall McLuhan’s treatment of media) it is clear that Gratton means “rhetoric” in the more recent, dismissive sense of the term.26 He could have just said I was wrong, but he chooses instead to farm out this task to my fellow Specu-

lative Realist and all-around good guy Iain Hamilton Grant. The occasion for my debate with Grant was his response to my essay faulting his anti-object-oriented theory for a form of “undermining.” He responded in his usual warm and friendly way, in an accompanying piece entitled “Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman.” Gratton captures the gist of that article when he writes,

Grant is arguing that his Idealism, contrary to the normal uses of that term, concerns horizontal formations of powers that would both produce and undo any particular being, and thus, unlike Harman, is fully temporal. One cannot discuss any given object without discussing its history and its becoming. This is what links all forms of Spinozism from (early) Schelling to Deleuze. (116)

Gilbert Simondon would be another name to throw into the mix. Yet there are at least two problems with this aspect of Grant’s position. The first, as Brassier and I both noted at Goldsmiths, is that as much as Grant wants to stress the productivity of nature in his position and downplay its status as a one, individual objects are accounted for in his position only as the result of “retardations” of a more primordial productive force. It is hard to see where such retardations could come from if there are no preexistent obstacles to the free flow of production. And without such obstacles, one is left with vague talk about “tendencies” or “virtual powers” that might exist quasi-independently of each other in nature without quite being fully-formed objects.

The next problem comes in the following statement by Gratton, one with which Grant would presumably agree: “One cannot discuss any given object without discussing its history and its becoming.” This is a statement that poses as a truism while barely concealing a falsity in its breast. It is similar in form to the argument that artworks cannot be understood apart from their socio-political contexts, or that all architecture must be “site-specific.” These arguments are fundamentally deceitful insofar as they give themselves a low hurdle to clear and their opponents a very high one. The low hurdle is cleared in approximately the following fashion: “obviously everything must be understood in relation to its context, and therefore everything is defined by its context.” But there is a *non sequitur* after the comma, since there is no good reason to hold that *all* aspects of a thing’s context are relevant. By contrast, the high hurdle looks something like this: “our opponents say that things are completely unaffected by their context, which is obviously ridiculous.” I have repeatedly faced some form of this objection over the years, usually from people who play the Simondon card and claim that I am dealing only with fully-formed individuals rather than the deeper process of individuation. But this Game of Hurdles deceives for the following reason. The more plausible solution is that every object is affected by *some* aspects of its context but not others; a “site-specific” building may respond to the river nearby, to the specific type of sunlight found at the site, to the area’s rich Native American history, to the buildings currently located across the street, or to all these factors — and much more — simultaneously. But no building can possibly relate to *all* aspects of its context. Certain selections are always made as to the inclusion and exclusion of what belongs to the “site.” The same holds for the individuating history of an object. Some incidents in my life, as in Gratton’s no doubt, have had a powerful or even transformative impact on who I am today. But by no means does *everything* that happens leave a trace, unless we beg the question by positing some sort of universal cosmic memory that preserves everything at a level too minute for the human sensorium. In short, objects have firewalls and do not
reflect the sum total of everything that has happened to them. Even the evolution of animal species responds to certain specific environmental pressures, not to all of them. The only theory capable of addressing both the effectual and ineffectual aspects of history or environment is one that allows for things to be cut off from each other to some extent. The “everything is continuous” option, such as Grant’s “retardation” model of individuals, leaves us with no explanation of why retardation should ever occur. As Brassier put it at Goldsmiths, “If you privilege productivity, if these ideal generative dynamisms that structure and constitute material reality can be characterized in terms of the primacy of production over product, then the question is, how do we account for the interruption of the process? How do we account for discontinuity in the continuum of production?”

Gratton pulls out a different knife in the ensuing passage: “But Grant implicitly, I think, is making another suggestion: it is Harman who is a reductionist in his object-oriented ontology, reducing being from its utter contingency and creativity to an order of given objects” (116). If so, this would be reminiscent of Brassier’s objections to Latour, which I considered in Speculative Realism: An Introduction, to the effect that Latour claims to oppose reduction but then reduces everything to actors. This is actually a legitimate point, and not just a product of Brassier’s well-known animus against Latour, as can be seen from the fact that the same question was once put to me by the prominent Dutch Latourian Gerard de Vries. I have had different thoughts about this question over the years, and will simply explain how I see the issue now. The grain of truth in Gratton’s and Brassier’s objections is that no philosophy can place equal valuation on everything. Latour’s theory entails that local actors are the ultimate reality, and there are losers in his theory as in any other. “Economy,” “society,” and “capitalism” cut a rather

30 Ibid., 315.
sorry figure in the eyes of the Latourian, since all of these look like massive reifications that fail to account for the details. And speaking of capitalism, in Marx’s thinking most cultural forms are losers, since they look like mere ideological superstructure by comparison with the true, underlying economic forces. In Gratton’s work, we will see, time is the winner and enduring individual entities the big loser. Whatever your philosophy, there is no escaping this sort of result, though there are always ways of arguing for the primacy of one sort of reality over another. I do not think “reduction” is a good name for this process. Another name is needed, and that name would also describe what OOO — much like Latour and Whitehead — does when giving arguments that individual entities are the only game in town.

So, what does “reduction” mean? It already has an established sense in much analytic philosophy, in distinction from the harsher activity known as “elimination.” But this is not quite the sense of reduction I use. For me, it means “wrongly ridding the world of things that actually exist.” The argument for a third term existing between the undermined and overmined versions of an object is as follows: (a) undermining cannot explain emergence, and (b) overmining cannot explain change. This is not the place to repeat that argument, which can be found in literally any of my published accounts of mining. The anti-reductionist justification in this case is that the third term must exist in order to be able to explain emergence and change. Therefore, to remove the elusive real object from existence is to get rid of something that we know full well is an inhabitant of the world. Usually it is easy to spot the reducers in any quarrel, because they are the ones who want to move most quickly in removing as many things from existence as possible (as with Brassier’s disturbing crusade against Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy) while the non-reducer is the one who proceeds more cautiously. Well then, Gratton might ask, is OOO not the overly hasty party in

“reducing being in its utter contingency and creativity” to a set of fully formed objects? No, because I see no argument for the existence of any such thing as “being in its utter contingency and creativity,” and do not think Grant’s account of individuals as produced through the “retardation” of a primal productive force is a workable model. More than this, despite Grant’s argument against my reasoning in his “Mining Conditions,” I still see him as a champion of the One in the manner of Giordano Bruno, and am unaware of a way to get from that starting point to a theory that resembles anything like the world we know.33

Before giving an exposition of Gratton’s main argument against me, it can be said that it goes wrong in three basic ways, two of them the result of his grossly exaggerating my similarities with Plato, despite the far more obvious similarities between OOO and Aristotle. The first is his false claim that I consider time to be “illusory,” and the second is his ascription to me of a “two-world theory” that I simply do not endorse. As for the first of these, Gratton says “If time is but the sensuous, it cannot touch the reality of the thing itself, and [Harman] himself notes there is no correspondence between the thing itself and its sensuous objecthood or qualities. Time would be, in the strictest sense, ‘illusory’” (99, italics added). I have italicized “no correspondence” because it does not mean the same thing as “no connection.” True enough, I do not uphold a correspondence theory of truth between sensual and real objects, because there is no identity of form between the two: as if the real object were simply the same thing as the sensual one but “inhering in matter,” or something else of that sort. At the heart of OOO is the idea that the real object undergoes translation into a sensual one, so that there is no isomorphy between the two; the form itself changes between one place and another. But this does not mean that the sensual interplay between object and qualities has no effect at all on reality. Unlike Plato, I have no theory of eternal forms. For me, forms can always be transmuted or utterly destroyed. More

importantly, real objects are only transformable or destructible by way of something that happens on the sensual level, which distinguishes this theory from Deleuze’s treatment of “sterile surface effects” atop a vibrant virtual realm where the real action occurs. The real object does remain buried beneath the play of surfaces, but it remains perfectly vulnerable to happenings on the surface. A collision of cars, for example, can destroy the real cars, not just their appearances. By contrast, if Plato had ever allowed for the form of a car in his dialogues, he would have had to treat it as being just as indestructible as the others. Gratton, who is overly committed to a Derridean notion of difference and more difference everywhere, sets an impossibly high bar for the avoidance of stasis. In this respect he bears some resemblance to Shaviro. It is not enough for either of them that my real objects are mortal and perishable. They demand in addition that these objects must not remain what they are for even the smallest fraction of an instant. Granted, in Shaviro’s case there is a Whiteheadian allowance for the momentary “privacy” of an individual, but for Gratton as for Derrida, any trace of identity whatsoever is a grave signal of “Platonism.” It is another case of the Game of Hurdles, a low hurdle for oneself to clear and an impossibly high hurdle for one’s opponent.

As for the second point, after quoting a passage from The Quadruple Object in which I explain that interaction only occurs on the sensual level, Gratton writes as follows:

Pausing for [a] moment in this account, we are in danger of another Platonism. Recall that the vulgarized Plato posits a two-world theory — Harman argues that his is not “two worlds,” but “two faces” of objects — in which there was the world of becoming where time takes place, and an eternal realm in which the “form” of things is accessible only to thought. (102)

Gratton does go on to admit that I differ from Plato in certain respects, but none of them touch on the three major differences he elides in the passage above. First, there is no “eternal” realm
in ooo, and this is a difficult barrier indeed to any attempt to characterize it as Platonism. Second, I do not hold that the “form” of things is accessible only to thought, a point on which I explicitly criticize Husserl, given my view that both thought and sensation belong to one and the same sensual level. Third and finally, the phrase “Harman argues” implies that I make some sort of hair-splitting verbal distinction to distance myself from Plato. But the difference is perfectly obvious. There are not two worlds in ooo, but trillions of them. The interior of every object is a sensual world, or what Lingis calls a “level,” and there is no special, insuperable barrier between a unified world of forms and another of appearances. The ooo theory of real and sensual is as different from Platonic doctrine as it is from Kant’s own two-world theory. The real and the sensual are everywhere intertwined, and the barriers between them are local and provisional. This leads us to the heart of Gratton’s argument, which pertains to the supposed incoherence of the model of vicarious causation. My general sense while reading along is that he makes my theory more complicated than it is, and that the supposed errors he highlights are the result of his misreading how certain key terms are used. Let’s go through his argument and see what he gets right and what he gets wrong. There are some of both in his account.

For the most part, Gratton is right that I am closer to Husserl than to Levinas on time. We have seen that for Levinas, alterity gives us a real future of surprising otherness that is foreclosed by Heidegger’s theory of temporality (and I agree more with this critique of Heidegger than does Gratton himself). There is nothing like alterity in Heideggerian temporality, and in Tool-Being I made an argument to this effect, to be reprised in a moment when Gratton tries to wield Heidegger against me. But it is true that The Quadruple Object, in treating time as a tension purely between sensual objects and sensual qualities, puts alterity to the side. This does make me closer to Husserl, insofar as no in-

itself plays a role in either of our accounts of time—the difference being that Husserl does not accept even the existence of a withdrawn in-itself, while for me the in-itself does exist, though at a level submerged between the sensual-temporal play of surfaces. But immediately after linking me with Husserl, Gratton claims that I have nonetheless misread that philosopher’s theory of time: “for Husserl, there is no such thing in intentionality as a static entity,” he claims (98). At first it is unclear how to read this statement, since obviously there are static entities in Husserl; the adumbrations of an intentional object shift constantly, but if the object itself did not remain constant during this process, we would be back in the world of British Empiricism that Husserl refutes. Instead of a “static” apple remaining the same beneath its shifting sensory profiles, we would have a series of loosely related apple-manifestations. But I sense that this is not Gratton’s central point. Instead, he immediately shifts to Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time-consciousness and says that “Harman, to his loss, makes little use of Husserl’s discussions of time, though they bear directly on the discussion of adumbrations in all of Husserl’s texts”35 (98). Later in this chapter, I will consider what Husserl actually says about time. But it is hardly to the point when Gratton adds that time itself is needed for the construction of immanent objectivity, since without it we would have nothing but “a frozen moment attached to one adumbration or another” (98). Yes, but this is precisely how I define time: as the tension between an enduring (not eternal) immanent object and its shifting adumbrations. It does not follow, as Gratton seems to argue, that “time” is an overarching category that subsumes both the stable immanence of an object and its adumbrations. My argument, rather, is that the experience of time is itself generated by this duality. For his part, Gratton wants to posit time as some sort of non-momentary force that makes the duality possible in the first place. But there is a genuine tension

between objects and qualities in Husserl, and no reason to claim that change is more primordial than stasis in his work.

Drawing on my essay “The Road to Objects,” Gratton italicizes a number of phrases in order to emphasize my purported but non-existent Platonism: for me “only the present exists,” “time does not exist because only the present exists,” “seem to feel,” apparent endurance”36 (99). Yet he quotes enough from my essay that its meaning should be clear enough. The point is to strike a balance between our lived experience of time, the endurance of sensual objects within the flow of time we do experience, and the further endurance of real objects that are affected by shifting adumbrations even less than sensual objects are. What Gratton is really trying to do is argue against any possible identity of anything over any stretch of time at all. But this is merely a product of his own Derridean anti-identity agenda. Indeed, a typical Derridean accusation is not long in coming down the pipe:

[Harman’s theory] is precisely what Heidegger and Derrida critique as the “metaphysics of presence”—the view that there is an eternal present beyond or behind the appearance of things, whether the forms in Plato, the cogito in Descartes, the transcendental ego in Husserl, or indeed, the non-material, transcendental objects in Harman. (99)

This passage suffers from two small problems and two big ones. Small Problem 1: my real objects are not “transcendental” but closer to what he should have called “transcendent,” while keeping in mind that they do not transcend in some perfect, eternal world but just slightly beyond the temporal interplay of sensual objects and sensual qualities. Small Problem 2: OOO upholds neither eternal forms like Plato, nor an idealist cogito like Descartes, nor a transcendental ego like Husserl. Big Problem 1: Gratton blurs the distinction between the relational and temporal senses of “presence.” Big Problem 2: Gratton blurs the distinction between Heidegger’s and Derrida’s very different senses

of the “metaphysics of presence.” Let’s ignore the small problems and turn immediately to the big ones.

Heidegger’s concept of the metaphysics of presence is best understood through his hundred-page critique of Husserl at the opening of his brilliant Marburg Lecture Course, *History of the Concept of Time*. The problem with “presence,” Heidegger tells us there, is that phenomenology ultimately thinks that whatever is real can be made present to consciousness. It is on this basis that Heidegger accuses Husserl — rightly — of missing out on the *Seinsfrage*, with its implication that being is what withdraws from any direct presence. It is the most basic of Heidegger’s characteristic insights, and one that will be linked with his name forever. In the context of OOO, this is incorporated explicitly into the notion of real objects, which cannot be made present to consciousness or indeed to anything else whatsoever. When Gratton claims that the metaphysics of presence means belief in “an eternal present beyond or behind the appearance of things,” he misses the point in a couple of ways. First, we have seen that there is nothing “eternal” in object-oriented philosophy, which is a thoroughly earthly theory of the creation, endurance, and destruction of individual things. Second, “beyond or behind the appearance of things” is a phrase that refers not to the metaphysics of presence but to Heidegger’s remedy for it. Among other things, Being is not identical with appearance — that would be Husserl — but “beyond or behind it.”

Gratton has little choice but to agree with me on this point: there is no feasible sense in which we can say that Heidegger thinks everything must be present to the mind, unless one wishes to make the claim — as some Husserlians and even Wolfendale do — that Heidegger’s *Sein* is really just another Husserlian “horizon,” still present to conscious thought as a tacit background rather than as something explicitly present. Yet I doubt

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Gratton would do this, given his own tendency to put Heidegger and Derrida on the same side against Husserl’s idealism. What makes the situation more perilous is that Gratton — like Derrida — blurs “present” in the sense of “presence before the mind” with the temporal sense of “present” as “a single instantaneous now.” If we assume that Gratton concedes my point that Heideggerian Sein is not something that can be present to the mind, he can still shift equivocally to the second sense of time as a present instant. Here, he has backing from most mainstream readings of Heidegger, which treat the philosopher as an enemy of “isolated now-points.” Since Gratton has read Tool-Being, he knows that I reverse this usual understanding of the issue. As I have argued, the reason Heidegger opposes now-points is not because — in the manner of Bergson — he thinks of time as a continuous flux without isolated nows, but because he argues that even in any “now,” there is already a threefold structure of thrown projection. This structure is a hybrid mixture of the situation in which I find myself, the possibilities I project upon it, and the unification of these in a single moment, which, when confronted “authentically,” becomes the Augenblick or moment of vision. It is Bergson rather than Heidegger who argues that time is a continuum that cannot possibly be thought as composed of isolated cinematic frames. Far from making a Bergsonian critique, Heidegger conceives of temporality in a way that can easily be confined to a single instant. In fact, this is the very critique made by Levinas when he says that Heidegger’s future is just a “future of the now,” one that must be complemented by the radical future of surprising alterity.

In a word, Heidegger has much in common with the occasionalist tradition of time as a series of vanishing instants, whereas this is the polar opposite of Bergson. Gratton’s depiction is different. He claims — rightly — that Heidegger was opposed to “vulgar clock-time” and also holds — wrongly — that this opposition is eventually consummated in the move from the Zeitlichkeit of Dasein to the Temporalität of being itself, as
in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*\(^3^9\) (100). While mainstream enough, this view is incorrect. *Dasein*’s temporality is only comparable to vulgar clock-time in what Heidegger calls the mode of inauthentic everydayness. And even there, the structure of thrown projection is already visible, meaning that *Dasein* in any instant already finds itself in a situation and projects possibilities upon it. Awareness of this is heightened in the authentic moments Heidegger calls “anticipatory resoluteness,” and we need no supposed transition to the *Temporalität* of Being. This is just Gratton’s back-door way of claiming that Heidegger joins Derrida in a joint rejection of any present instant of time, though this merely reflects Derrida’s own obsession with getting rid of anything like identity. In Heidegger’s own philosophy there is no hostility to the present instant, but simply a brilliant analysis of how any present moment is already more textured and layered than we realize. The fact that he calls certain dimensions of a moment “past” and “future” has nothing to do with any view of time as a continuous and non-identical flux, though admittedly most readers of *Being and Time* do jump to that conclusion. When Gratton asserts that “Heidegger argues for the reality of time implicit and prior to any correlation of *Dasein* and *Sein*, humans and world; it is the condition of possibility for our ‘thrownness’ towards the future itself” (99–100), this is simply another instance of the mistake seen above, when he claimed that time must be prior to Husserl’s distinction between enduring intentional objects and their adumbrations. Time in Heidegger is not some disembodied condition of possibility for the thrown projection of *Dasein*, but first emerges from this structure itself. The great German thinker never really gets beyond this brilliant analysis to account for what we might call the “flow” of time.

As mentioned, Gratton also blurs the line between Heidegger and Derrida. We have seen that for Heidegger, the metaphysics of presence is avoided primarily through the withdrawal of Be-

ing from any presence to consciousness, a withdrawal that is not incompatible with the identity of Being. There is a further apeironish tendency in Heidegger to allow only Being to withdraw, while individual beings tend to be stranded in the realm of presence. The partial exceptions we find in works like “The Thing” remain only partial because Dasein always stays on the scene as the user of jugs and temples, and thus we never really catch sight of object–object relations with no Dasein in the vicinity (this is Heidegger’s strong correlationist side).40 In Tool-Being I tried to show how a theory of individuals can be drawn from Heidegger, despite his likely reluctance to go along with it were he alive today. But more importantly, withdrawal of an identical Being is unacceptable to Derrida, because he thinks the rejection of presence must also extend to cases of “self-presence.” By this he means what we usually call “identity,” since “the thing itself is a collection of things or a chain of differences” or “an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring.”41 This is why difference is an important positive resource for Derrida in a way that identity simply is not, whereas for Heidegger both concepts are very much still in play.42 Yet it must be asked by what right Derrida—and with him, Gratton—redefines identity as “self-presence,” thereby automatically exposing it to the blows that he and Heidegger direct against the metaphysics of presence. The most flagrant case of this sort comes when Derrida praises, without evidence, “Heidegger’s insistence on noting that being is produced as history only through the logos, and is nothing outside of it.”43 But this is his own agenda, not Heidegger’s, and it will not do to invent—as Gratton does—a

43 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 22. Italics added.
doctrine that falsely places time *prior* to its actual emergence from either the duel between an intentional object and its adumbrations (Husserl) or *Dasein’s* thrownness into a situation and its projection of possibilities upon it (Heidegger). Such a dogma derives solely from an anti-identity research program that today is still a hip academic position, though it lacks philosophical grounding and impoverishes our ability to explore the workings of time, since it decides them by fiat in advance.

There are only a few more points to consider in Gratton’s reading of my theory. After misreading *ooo* space as being “inside” an object, he adds the Derridean warning that “we should be wary of the metaphor of ‘inside’” (100), and claims that I am unable to think the space between different objects. But my theory of space interprets it as the tension between real objects and sensual qualities, and Gratton forgets that this a case of “fusion,” meaning that the real object has no sensual qualities until it receives them in cases of allure. Strictly speaking, the only thing that exists inside an object for me is the interplay of sensual objects and sensual qualities, though there are also the real qualities that belong (as *ooo* learned from Husserl) to a sensual object as its *eidos*. The real object plays no role except as an observer of all this, and that is why no real object can ever be said to exist inside another real one. More to the point, space is nothing but the space between different objects. When allure builds a bridge to the real, it is a real that is not part of the current sensual interior. Thus, the whole *ooo* theory of space — and of vicarious causation — is about how the inside of one object bonds with a different object, despite Gratton’s claim that it occurs only “inside” a single one. For this reason, he is also wrong to claim that “tensions are hidden or invisible” (100), since the aesthetic cases covered by allure are just one example of a highly visible tension. Among other things, this marks an absolute difference between metaphorical and literal language of the sort that Derrida forbids, given his disallowance of real objects (the core of all metaphor) in the first place. For similar reasons, Gratton is wrong to link *ooo*'s allure with Husserl's eidetic variation, since the latter can occur within a purely sensual framework, which
is all Husserl has, after all, while allure, by definition, cannot. In OOO terminology, allure is RO–SQ and eidetic variation leads to SO–RQ, so that they actually have nothing in common. Later, we will see Wolfendale repeat this mistake.

This touches on Gratton’s further rejection of my claim that OOO can be understand in mereological (i.e., part/whole) terms. As he puts it,

I’m skeptical there can be a mereology of objects in Harman, for the simple fact that objects (even great and smaller ones, even “parts” and wholes) only gets as far as the sensuous, that is, can’t be a part of anything. (What would it mean to think that a part that is not really, but only “sensuously” a part of something?) And if the “interior” of one object is the “sensuous” one of another — the obvious way out of this whole maze — then the “interior” is not in the depths but surfing along the surface, which means it was never interior in the first place. (106)

Here I appreciate Gratton’s efforts to work through the technical details of OOO, and I can see why he is puzzled. But the root of the problem is that he is reading “interior” in two different senses while supposing that I am the confused party. It is certainly true that for me, an object is cut off not only from external objects but even from its own parts: which are themselves objects, after all, and thus are not exempted from the global problem of real object–real object interaction. An object has indirect relations with its own parts too, but these parts are real objects, not sensual ones, which Gratton rightly notes would be ridiculous. The real parts of an object do need sensual mediation in order to combine into the larger real object — real water is made of real hydrogen and real oxygen, but these atoms in turn make contact only through sensual mediation. But the parts of an object are not “inside it”; remember, only sensual objects and sensual qualities — plus the real qualities of the sensual object’s own eidos — are “inside” another object. The term “inside” does not pertain to the part/whole relationships that create a real object
in the first place. Ian Bogost expresses this nicely, in words cited by Gratton himself,

The thing that needs to be remembered here is that Harman’s sensual object only exists in the experience of another object in the first place; it’s not some persistent abstraction. [...] We must remind ourselves that objects have different senses of presence, both in themselves and in relation to other units. Time is on the inside of objects.44 (106)

Gratton responds, “But this is not Harman’s model” (106). Yes, it is! Bogost knows my thinking well. Even so, Gratton sees an additional difficulty, “this [just] inverts the problem: if time is on the inside of an object, then the sensuous part would be forever frozen in the present, which at least to this object that I am appears not to be the case — things in the world appear to be very much in motion and changing, which is generally taken to be an index of time” (106). I am not entirely sure that I understand Gratton’s objection, but there is nothing “frozen” about the interior of an object, since it is precisely here that the tension between sensual object and sensual qualities occurs, and this — as Gratton knows — is the tension I call time. “Finally,” he tells us, “if time is only at the layer of the sensuous, even for its parts, there can be no change, since they are ‘ever in the present’ — the true dictum of Harman’s view of objects” (106). But there can be change, because what happens on the interior of objects occasionally leads to allure, in which the interior of one real object makes contact with another real object external to it, and this is the root of change in my model. To draw an analogy from evolutionary theory, there is neither eternal stasis nor constant flux, but something closer to what Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould call “punctuated equilibrium.”45 Most of

the sensual interplay between objects and qualities has no effect on the outside world at all, but once in a while: boom! On this basis, I reject Gratton’s conclusion that “object-oriented ontology […] has hit an impasse” (106). He has not shown this by any means, and thus I reject his view that his own “realism of time” (202) is needed to escape the supposed but non-existent impasse of OOO.

One other issue is worth mentioning. Gratton claims in passing that my theory is simply arbitrary, no more justified than any other. After claiming that “each philosopher has a depiction of the absolute, or a method that begins with a given starting point” (100), he goes on to list a number of historical examples. It seems at first as if he were about to assert that all philosophical theories are equally right and wrong and there is no way to choose between them. But that is not what he does. Using the example of Levinas, he says that (unlike OOO)

Levinas had a method, which was to take phenomenology to its limits, as he lays out in Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being. […] At the least Levinas uses a well-known method to show where that method would fail, namely in trying to make the Other correlate back to the ego of transcendental phenomenology. (101).

Though he never quite says so, Gratton’s point seems to be that OOO has no method justifying its conclusions. Yet I do not see that Levinas is any more methodical than I am, even if Gratton prefers his philosophy to mine. As is clear from many publications, the OOO method is to interpret Heidegger’s tool-analysis, which I take to be the most insightful moment of twentieth-century philosophy, and show that it cannot work on its own terms. Heidegger counters the presence-at-hand of entities with a ready-to-hand system of equipment, reading the former as falsely non-relational and the latter as the true relational root from which present-at-hand beings emerge. My method is to

show that this opposition cannot account for another key Heidegger insight: the broken tool. If an entity were purely relational, then it would hold no surplus in reserve that would enable it to be out of joint with the tool-system in any way, let alone break. On this basis, I argue that the usual distinction readers draw from Heidegger—implicit practical dealings with things vs. explicit encounters with them—is superficial, since both must be read in relational terms. In order to account for the broken tool, we need a submerged entity that is never fully expressed in any of its practical or theoretical appearances and is ultimately unexpressed even in its brute causal relations with non-human things.

Although controversy has surrounded this reading from the start, it would be hard to argue that I have not even attempted to ground ooo by working through the failings of a well-known method—namely, Heidegger’s own. Gratton takes a more specific stab at claiming some arbitrariness in the theory, one that Wolfendale also attempts: how do we know that there is not just one object behind everything (101)? How do we know that there is not just one Platonic form (103)? Interesting questions, but it cannot be claimed that I have not tried to answer them. For example, in my critique of James Ladyman and Don Ross, I offered an argument against their view that there is really just a single mathematical structure behind everything, while what we call “objects” are simply the correlate of the humans who try to come to grips with them scientifically, whether it be quarks, chemicals, or even traffic jams. In the first place, Ladyman and Ross have to assume the existence of an observer who is sufficiently distinct from the underlying mathematical structure to be able to encounter derivative objects that are less real than their hypothesized structure. So, their ontology already contains at least three terms: mathematical structure, apparent entities, and an observer who correlates with them. Why not just remain content

with this situation, then? Because in that case we are left with a theory like that of Parmenides, in which reason tells us that everything is one, while the senses deceive us with apparent multiplicity. Deleuze improves considerably on this model by populating his “virtual” with varying intensities along a continuum, but in either case it is unclear why the primordial continuum should bother erupting into local appearances in the first place. If you say that this is merely an artifact of sensing or thinking subjects — as Shaviro and Bryant seem to do — it is still unclear why such subjects would ever emerge from the continuum. We can always be wrong about the specific links between sensual objects and their supposed substrata in real ones — that’s what fallibilism in science is all about. But there are no grounds for holding that multiplicity as such is a mere surface effect generated by a specific entity — the subject — whose very existence already proves a real multiplicity. Object to this argument all you like, but please stop pretending I have never made it.

Before his concluding remarks on his own philosophy, Gratton sees fit to take a few more digs at Speculative Realism. For instance, “[Speculative Realism’s] turn to realism often means stomping at times inelegantly across subfields long covered in analytic philosophy” (201). There is much to celebrate in recent analytic metaphysics, and I look forward to more interaction between that tradition and ours. But on what grounds does Gratton claim that we are “stomping inelegantly” in our progress toward that goal? I do not recall him attempting to link OOO with analytic philosophy at all. His primary effort is to claim that Meillassoux was beaten to the punch two years in advance by Nolt, though we have seen that the latter is a straightforward scientific realist and Meillassoux is not. This argument is certainly not Gratton at his most “elegant.” It is also strange, to say the least, for a Derridean to call upon analytic philosophers to beat up Speculative Realists as copycats; it would be an understatement to say that Derrida is not part of the canon of great thinkers recognized by analytic philosophy, so perhaps Gratton ought to have sided with us. Instead, he sends mixed messages about his own future intentions, saying in the same
sentence “such a movement as I call for here” and “we declare no new brands or movements here” (202). Brands, schmands. The reference to “brands” is just a decaffeinated version of the same insult—directed primarily at OOO—that we will see is cherished by Wolfendale and Brassier. Gratton accuses me of “dismissing” Heidegger just because I say he has “nothing to teach” us about time” (202). But it would be hard to look at my career and characterize my attitude toward Heidegger as “dismissal,” and equally hard to claim there is anything contemptuous about interpreting his theory of time as a theory of the collapsed threefold instant rather than one of time in the usual sense. Such sentiments are not limited to Gratton’s conclusion. Elsewhere, he sees fit to lecture Speculative Realism about proper humility before the history of philosophy:

The speculative realists hold [...] that there is something outdated about [Heidegger, Derrida, and Irigaray], trapped constantly spinning yarns about a tradition now being surpassed. [...] But while I think Heidegger’s grip on the history of philosophy is a grip that almost strangles it, the insistence that movements are wholly new and the word “tradition” is a synonym for “naïve” leads me to speak up to point out the repetitions of a past we can’t easily escape. (202)

Since to my knowledge none of the original Speculative Realists has written about Luce Irigaray, I am not sure why she was listed among the offended parties. More importantly, the passage above is a field filled with straw men. What Speculative Realist has ever referred to the “tradition” as “naïve”? Gratton well knows that I spent years of work developing my reading of Heidegger, that I constantly credit Aristotle and Leibniz as inspirations for my position, and always do my best to give historical precedents for any idea I introduce. His insinuation that he is somehow more respectful of the “tradition” than OOO is an injustice not supported by even a cursory examination of our respective writings. Worse yet, it is a form of what magicians call “misdirection.” After all, Gratton does not really believe that the
Speculative Realists are disrespectful to “the tradition.” What bothers him is our collective lack of reverence for continental philosophy as it was up through the mid-1990s, in which Derrida ruled the roost. This was no doubt a world in which Gratton would have felt more at home, and he is perfectly free to fight for its return using whatever arguments he can muster. Yet in doing so, he need not pretend that he is fighting for the “tradition” in some more general sense. What he champions is simply a further extension of the priorities of early 1990s Anglophone continental thought, which was as limited a period as any other, and one that simply left no room for either the “speculative” or “realist” aspects of Speculative Realism, as Gratton also knows. The issue is one to be settled on the intellectual battlefield, not by insinuations of arrogant disregard for precedent by those with whom he happens to disagree. After declaring his “humility” in the book’s final paragraph, Gratton expresses his humble sentiments by ending as follows: “This is my speculative gambit, and unlike speculative realists returning to a certain Platonism, time is on my side” (216). But the supposed Platonism has not been demonstrated, nor has a convincing case been made that “time is on his side,” except in a punning sense of the phrase.

The Role of Levinas

A good rule of thumb: whenever a Derridean links you with Levinas, you had best be on your guard. You may find yourself dragged to the swamp and beaten by thugs driving a pickup truck with the words “Violence and Metaphysics” stenciled on the side.47 This is not to say that Derrida does nothing interesting with Levinas, only that the latter has too often been treated in recent decades as if he were a wholly owned subsidiary of deconstruction. My view is different. I see Levinas as the more redoubtable figure in the long term, and as the post-war figure

who pushed Heidegger further than anyone else. To show why, we need to explore what Derrida misses in his often powerful critique.

I am not among those who consider Derrida a sophist or charlatan, a view found among many analytic philosophers and even some continentals. But yes, I do experience considerable frustration with his prose style, which even Gratton concedes can be “infuriating.” To see what I mean, one need only read the first sentence of his “Violence and Metaphysics,” which takes up sixteen lines of text and bears no resemblance to the ways that James Joyce or Marcel Proust make such outbursts work effectively. Above all, these lines are nowhere near the point of Derrida’s essay; as too often happens in his work, an argument meriting ten or so pages is encrusted with uncouth pirouettes for dozens more. Thus I will be forgiven for not giving a blow-by-blow account of this piece, which contains too many passages like the following: “A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question” (VM 80). We are too quick to blame “Derrida’s second-rate imitators” for crimes against good prose, when the philosopher himself deserves significant blame. After reading seventy-three pages of this sort of river sludge, any commentator deserves an iced tea and a recliner.

Yet there is another sense in which Derrida’s prose has a style to which one grows perfectly well accustomed, one that does not hide the sheer emptiness that many of his foes imagine. In Guerrilla Metaphysics, I complained about his essay “White Mythology” that “as in many other cases [in Derrida], we find a hard-hitting ten-page core surrounded by an additional fifty

48 Gratton, Speculative Realism, 215.
49 Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 79. Subsequent page references are given between parentheses in the main text, preceded by vm.
But I would say that “Violence and Metaphysics” is considerably less annoying than “White Mythology.” In the present case a more apt metaphor would be that of a foam mattress standing eight inches tall, but compressible — with some work — to its true height of two inches of material. In the essay now to be discussed, it only takes Derrida three pages to get to the point, and he then stays on top all the way to the end, though without being very economical in arriving there.

In a sense, the whole point of “Violence and Metaphysics” can be grasped from its final words, drawn from Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet.” After all, it would be perfectly fair to say that Levinas opposes Greek philosophy with the Judaic ethical and prophetic tradition, largely to the disadvantage of the former. Amidst a spirited defense of Husserl, Heidegger, and the Western philosophical tradition against the Levinasian claim that they are “violent,” Derrida shows, among other things, that there is no simple way to read “violence” and “nonviolence” such that the first would belong to philosophy and the second to ethics or religion. This is what he means by “Jewgreek is greekjew.” Many of his points are good ones, though I will also say that Derrida misses something important in Levinas. Gratton’s presumed point in linking me with the notion of “alterity” is to imply that OOO becomes committed to the same impossible pure otherness that Derrida exposes in Levinas. This, I will show, is not quite right.

Derrida begins by setting the parameters for his analysis of Levinas, whose work he clearly knows well: “The entirety of philosophy is conceived on the basis of its Greek source. As is well known, this amounts neither to an occidentalism, nor to a historicism. It is simply that the founding concepts of philosophy

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are primarily Greek” (VM 81). He will soon make the important point that Levinas himself is also a philosopher working within the Greek tradition, not some sort of Jewish mystic: “In the last analysis, [Levinas’ work] never bases its authority on Hebraic theses or texts. It seeks to be understood from within a recourse to experience itself” (VM 83). In other words, Levinas is primarily a phenomenologist, despite his religious-sounding way of turning against this tradition. Nonetheless, “the category of the ethical is not only dissociated from metaphysics but coordinated with something other than itself, a previous and more radical function” (VM 81). And indeed, “it is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble” (VM 82). Despite its phenomenological underpinnings Levinas’s thinking “seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One [...] as if from oppression itself — an oppression certainly comparable to none other in the world, an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world” (VM 83). And further, “this thought calls upon the ethical relationship — a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other — as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics” (VM 83). As for Derrida’s own stance on these matters, he claims a certain neutrality: “We will not choose between the opening and the totality” (VM 84). While this is arguably true of Derrida’s career as a whole, it is fair to say that his “Violence and Metaphysics” falls more on the side of Greek philosophy than on that of the ethical opening proposed by Levinas, who comes off primarily as an unfair critic of Husserl and Heidegger. Bear in mind that this is also what Gratton wants to say about OOO — that it unfairly critiques Husserl and Heidegger despite taking these figures as its basis.

The first signs of Derrida’s preference for phenomenology now begin to appear: “it is difficult to overlook the fact that Husserl so little predetermined Being as an object that in Ideas as I absolute existence is accorded only to consciousness” (VM 85), though he nearly concedes that Levinas has a point about Husserl’s confinement to the subject–object correlate. Derrida
is far from accusing him of being a sloppy interpreter of phenomenology, since “Levinas is certainly quite attentive to everything in Husserl’s analyses which tempers or complicates the primordiality of consciousness” (VM 86). Nonetheless, “despite all these precautions, despite a constant oscillation between the letter and the spirit of Husserlianism [...], a break not to be reconsidered is signified” (VM 86). Namely, in Levinas’s eyes, “one cannot simultaneously maintain the primacy of the objectifying act and the irreducible originality of nontheoretical consciousness” (VM 86). This seems to push Levinas more in the direction of Heidegger, with his greater awareness of pre-theoretical comportment and the historical situatedness of Dasein, far from any theoretical mastery. But the same charge Levinas makes against Husserl will also be made against Heidegger, “and made with a violence that will not cease to grow” (VM 88). Despite Heidegger’s apparent overcoming of the Western priority of theory and light, “Heidegger still would have questioned and reduced theism from within, and in the name of, the Greco-Platonic tradition” (VM 88). One example is his concept of Mitsein, being-with. This might look at first like an anticipatory Levinasian moment in Being and Time, but “the structure of Mitsein itself will be interpreted [by Levinas] as a Platonic inheritance, belonging to the world of light” (VM 89). By contrast with this, Levinas seeks “only the other, the totally other, [which] can be manifested as what it is before the shared truth, within a certain nonmanifestation and a certain absence” (VM 91). For, “incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other, phenomenology and [Heideggerian] ontology would be philosophies of violence” (VM 91).

The only possible escape from this situation is an encounter with the absolutely other, that textbook Levinasian theme: “there is no way to conceptualize [this] encounter: it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable, ‘resistant to all categories.’ […] The infinitely other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always the horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recog-
nized” (VM 95). This is why for Levinas ethics is first philosophy, and he also speaks of *metaphysics* in opposition to ontology. Yet Derrida is suspicious as to whether Levinas really escapes totality in this way: “Levinas is very close to Hegel […] at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion. This is a situation he must share with *all* anti-Hegelian thinkers” (VM 99; italics added). The Hegelian path, of course, would be to say that the other is the negation of the same, thereby drawing it into a dialectical process, with the accessible always recuperating the inaccessible in the manner of Meillasoux’s correlational circle. After all, the infinitely other does appear in the form of a *face*. And “Levinas also often says *kathâuto* and ‘substance’ in speaking of the other as face. The face is presence, *ousia*” (VM 101). And furthermore, “for the Other not to be overlooked, He must present himself as absence, and must appear as nonphenomenal” (VM 103). A nonphenomenality that appears is not the only paradox in play, since the Other is simultaneously both the only being I can wish to murder and the one I am forbidden to murder (VM 104). This leads to the surprising realization that “asymmetry, non-light, and commandment then would be violence and injustice themselves” (VM 106), even though “infinity […] supposedly] cannot be violent as totality is” (VM 107). Similarly, God is both the infinity that speaks against war *and* the very possibility of the offending otherness that summons us to war. “God, therefore, is implicated in war,” but as linked with ethical infinity He is its opposite, so that “war [both] supposes and excludes God” (VM 107). And speaking of God, since He hides his face from Moses in Exodus 33, it is “at once more and less a face than other faces” (VM 108).

A related paradox is that Levinasian ethics is beyond any ethics in the sense of a specific set of rules: “Ethics, in Levinas’ sense, is an Ethics without law and without concept, which maintains its non-violent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws […] I]t is perhaps serious that this Ethics of Ethics can occasion neither a determined ethics nor determined laws without negating and forgetting itself” (VM 111). Levinas thus finds himself trapped in “the necessity of lodging oneself within tra-
ditional conceptuality in order to destroy it” (VM 111). Even as he claims that “true” exteriority is not spatial, he is nonetheless forced to have recourse to the spatial sense of the term (VM 112). Anticipating one of ooo’s own criticisms, Derrida notes that despite the infinite taking shape in the face, “the infinitely Other would not be what it is, other, if it was a positive infinity, and if it did not maintain within itself the negativity of the indefinite, of the apeiron” (VM 114). There is a related problem with language, for although Levinas is faced with the “problems [of speaking positively] which were equally the problems of negative theology and [intuition-based] Bergsonism, he does not give himself the right to speak, as they did, in a language resigned to its own failure” VM (116). Namely, both negative theology and Bergson permit themselves “to travel through philosophical discourse as through a foreign medium” (VM 116), but Levinas cannot do this because of his view that “only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous” (VM 116), even though discourse is also the very possibility of violence. Finally, the same fate befalls history; for Levinas “history [is] the very movement of transcendence, of the excess over the totality without which no totality would appear as such,” but at the same time, “history is violence.” Thus, Levinasian metaphysics is itself “violence against violence, light against light” (VM 117).

Derrida follows up with a lengthy defense of Husserl, a defense relevant to us here because ooo mostly takes Levinas’s side against the founder of phenomenology. First there is the familiar critique that “[Levinasian] metaphysics […] always supposes a phenomenology in its very critique of phenomenology” (VM 118). Whereas Levinas accuses intentionality of being governed by the model of adequation between thought and object, Derrida claims that Husserl was already beyond this, “by demonstrating the irreducibility of intentional incompleteness, and therefore of alterity” (VM 120). He asks rhetorically whether there is “a more rigorously and, especially, a more literally Husserlian theme than the theme of inadequation” (VM 120)? Another rhetorical question follows, when Derrida asks “whether Husserl finally summarized inadequation, and reduced the in-
nite horizons of experience to the condition of available objects” (VM 120). Like contemporary Husserlians when they challenge Heidegger’s supposed step beyond his teacher, Derrida seems to think the “horizon” in phenomenology is already enough to overflow totality: “The horizon itself cannot become an object because it is the unobjectifiable wellspring of every object in general. [...] The importance of the concept of horizon lies precisely in its ability to make any constitutive act into an object, and in that it opens the work of objectification to infinity” (VM 120). This is enough, Derrida holds, to show that Husserl respected infinity and exteriority perfectly well. Indeed, “phenomenology is respect itself, the developing and becoming-language of respect itself” (VM 121). In this sense, phenomenology is ethics, however phenomenal it remains, since “ethics [...] must have a meaning for concrete consciousness in general, or no discourse and no thought would be possible” (VM 121–22).

Against Levinas’s complaint that in the Cartesian Meditations Husserl only allows the other to be an alter ego, another me, Derrida states bluntly that “this is exactly what Husserl does not do” (VM 125). And anyway, the only means to avoid violence is to see the other as an ego; this is “the most peaceful gesture possible” (VM 128). Even God “has meaning only for an ego in general. Which means that before all atheism or all faith, before all theology, before all language about God or with God, God’s divinity (the infinite alterity of the infinite other, for example) must have a meaning for an ego in general” (VM 132).

From here Derrida turns to a similar defense of Heidegger, who is also criticized by Levinas despite his evidently greater departure from totality thanks to his ever-withdrawn Sein: “If the meaning of Being always has been determined by presence, then the question of Being, posed on the basis of the transcendental horizon of time [...] is the first tremor of philosophical security, as it is of self-confident presence” (VM 134). Nonetheless, Levinas is quoted as accusing Heidegger of subordinating the relation to the other to the ontological difference between a being and its being (VM 135). Derrida defends Heidegger from this charge in two different ways. The first is to deny that Being
“precedes” beings in the ontological difference: “Being, since it is nothing outside the existent […] could in no way precede the existent, whether in time, or in dignity, etc. […] Being is not a principle, is not a principal existent, an archia which would permit Levinas to insert the face of a faceless tyrant under the name of Being” (VM 136). This eventually leads Derrida to one of my least favorite Derridean themes, the misleading claim that “since Being is nothing (determinate), it is necessarily produced in difference (as difference)” (VM 150). The other way he defends Heidegger from Levinas is by invoking the classic late Heideggerian theme of sein lassen or “letting-be.” Letting-be turns out to be the condition of possibility for ethics itself, since without it, “violence would reign to such a degree that it would no longer even be able to appear and to be named” (VM 138). Thus, Levinas cannot be right that anyone’s relation with a person could be “dominated” by Being (VM 139). While Levinas holds that all violence is a violence of the concept, Heidegger bans from the outset any notion that Being is equivalent to the concept of Being. As for Levinas’s beloved Greek phrase epekeina tēs ousias, referring to the Platonic Good beyond Being, Derrida does not interpret this epekeina as beyond Heidegger’s Being, but rather as “beyond ontic history,” which pertains only to specific beings (VM 141–42). In defending Heidegger’s ontological difference from Levinas’s critique, Derrida makes the somewhat alarming statement that “the difference between the implicit and the explicit is the entirety of thought” (VM 142), a statement less harmless than it looks, since it implies — like hermeneutics itself — that thought is primarily about what is implicit or explicit for humans. Another alarming moment comes when Derrida tries to affirm that Heidegger is beyond Levinas’s critique insofar as he already beyond all “humanism” (VM 143). But just as Hegelians like to attack “subjectivism” to distract readers from their own idealism, Heideggerians attack “humanism” in order to distract us from their own inability to think relations not involving humans — and please do not tell me that Dasein is not human. Derrida is another such Heideggerian, though at bottom he is really more of a Husserlian.
So goes the most influential interpretation of Levinas ever written, so influential that in certain quarters Levinas has never recovered. Although “Violence and Metaphysics” surpasses its self-imposed stylistic burdens to become yet another intelligent reading by Derrida of a contemporary, we should not overlook the narrowness of his concerns. For as we will see shortly, there are actually three central themes in Levinasian philosophy, of which ethics and its non-totalizable infinity is merely the most famous. The second, barely mentioned by Derrida, is the enjoyment that occurs on the hither side of being, which always deals with specific things even as it bathes in an amorphous “elemental” realm. Derrida could and should have paid more attention to this aspect of Levinas. The same may not be true of the third aspect of Levinas, since perhaps only Alphonso Lingis has paid it sufficient attention: the Levinasian philosophy of individual substance. We will see that Levinas sometimes verges on abandoning this theory, ascribing the inexhaustible depth of things to their “matter” alone. But eventually he is unable to escape substantiality, though this is not an issue Derrida can touch, given his obsession with the idea that nothing is produced except as difference. Substance, after all, is always a positive term in its own right, not something primarily differential or relational. But let’s return briefly to the one aspect of Levinas that Derrida does discuss: metaphysics, infinity, ethics, non-violence. What does Derrida give us here, if anything? I would say that he gives us little more than a return to the old correlational circle; the inapparent must somehow appear, and therefore alterity fails to be a pure alterity, since it must always have a face. Let’s return to this issue later, since I first need to counter Gratton’s suspiciously Derridean link between ooo and alterity by showing that otherness is just one part of my interpretation of Levinas.

If memory serves, there are four places where I have written extensively about Levinas, all of them more than a decade old. It had been years since I reread any of them, and the greatest pleasure of responding to Gratton’s book was the spur it pro-

52 Lingis, “A Phenomenology of Substances.”
vided to revisiting my earlier thoughts on this crucial French thinker. The first passage is §21 of Tool-Being, “Contributions of Levinas” (2002). The second is the whole of chapter 3 of Guerrilla Metaphysics, entitled “Bathing in the Ether” (2005). The third is an article published in the British cultural magazine Naked Punch, entitled “Aesthetics as First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-Human,” which focused on Otherwise Than Being (2007). The fourth is my article on Totality and Infinity, published in Philosophy Today under the title “Levinas and the Triple Critique of Heidegger” (2009). In its original form, this article was delivered as a 2006 conference paper in Sofia, Bulgaria under the title “Bread, Tobacco, and Silk: Levinas on Individual Substance.”

Let’s revisit these publications briefly, so as to contrast the main points of my own interest in Levinas with Derrida’s and Gratton’s.

The pages on Levinas from Tool-Being make it immediately clear that they are not very concerned with otherness: “Most discussions of Levinasian philosophy quickly zero in on his notion of ‘the Other’; it is here that both his friends and his enemies reach a final verdict as to his legacy. But for the moment, I ask readers to forget all of the ongoing disputes over ‘alterity’.” I suggest there instead that we focus on the reading of Heidegger found in Levinas’s important early works Existence and Existents and Time and the Other, the first of them written in a prisoner of war camp near Hannover during World War II. The phrase “existence and existents” is the Levinasian way of writing “being and beings,” Heidegger’s famous ontological difference. As Levinas puts it, “Heidegger distinguishes subjects and objects — the beings that are, existents — from their very work of being [...]
The most profound thing about Being and Time for me is this Heideggerian distinction. And further, “a thing is always a volume whose exterior surfaces hold back a depth and make it appear.” Against Gratton’s constant refrain that time must be presupposed for any analysis of specific beings to be possible, in Tool-Being I agree with Levinas that the opposite is the case. As that great master puts it, in one of his finest passages, “Is [the relation of being and beings] not rather accomplished by the very stance of an instant? […] An instant is not one lump; it is articulated” (ee 17–18). Here I wonder why Gratton does not explicitly address this point. Instead, he immediately changes the subject to alterity, which I openly downplay as an issue of much importance to my work. According to my reading of Levinas, he acknowledges Heidegger’s analysis of the articulated single instant; only then does he break free of it by recourse to Bergson and the surprises of novelty, and eventually through an appeal to alterity itself. But I also cite an important difference between Heidegger and Levinas in their respective views of the ontological difference: “while Heidegger situates this duel [of a being and its work of existing] between being and beings […] Levinas says that beings are the between. The philosophical implications of this delicate shift are enormous […] The famous ontological Zwischen [between] now occurs within the things rather than above or beneath them; the difference between almonds and rivers is no longer simply ‘ontic.’” I add later that “[Heideggerians] remain so fixated on the step beyond present-at-hand entities […] that they assume that entities can be interpreted in no other way than ontically [… But] the reality of objects does not unfold in some sort of ontic junkyard.” In fact, despite Levinas’s step beyond Heidegger in elevating the status of specific beings, there is a sense in which he continues to dismiss them as “ontic” too. As discussed in Tool-Being, the Levinas of Exist-
ence and Existents is too devoted to the notion of a formless *il y a* or “there is,” encountered in insomnia just as Heidegger’s formless Being is said to be met with in *Angst*. For Levinas, it is only through a *hypostasis* performed by the human mind that individual beings first take form.\(^61\) Nonetheless, individuals play a central role for Levinas in a way they normally do not for Heidegger. As Levinas says, “We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living. Life is a sincerity.”\(^62\) In chapter 7 below we will encounter Dan Zahavi’s mockery of the term “sincerity,” which suggests a surprising lack of familiarity on his part with the importance of this term for Levinas. At the moment we are more concerned with Gratton, who fails to mention any of these central aspects of my interpretation. His apparent goal, as suggested earlier, is simply to maneuver me into the usual Derridean Kill Box for Levinasians that is set up by “Violence and Metaphysics.”

In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, I am once again not concerned with Levinas as a thinker of “alterity,” and thus escape the Derridean death zone once more. Levinas, like Merleau-Ponty and Lingis, is treated instead as a “carnal phenomenologist” concerned with “the translucent mist of qualities and signals in which our lives are stationed.”\(^63\) Here I openly assert that phenomenology still has much to teach us, though we will see that Zahavi is in such a rush to deny that I know what phenomenology is about that he never pauses long enough to see that we agree. I cite Levinas as saying that “I eat bread, listen to music, follow the course of my ideas.”\(^64\) But I also defend Husserl against Levinas in one important respect. Levinas holds that “the thesis that every intentionality is either a representation or founded on a representation or is founded on a representation dominates the [*Logical Investiga-

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61 Ibid., 239–40.
[tions] and returns as an obsession in all of Husserl’s subsequent work.”65 We have seen that this is a half-truth, and that it applies more to Brentano than to Husserl; in the fifth of the Logical Investigations, Husserl makes it perfectly clear that he views intentionality as primarily object-giving rather than representational, due to the rift he discerns between the intentional object and its adumbrations. In this respect, Levinas is wrong to say that Husserlian intentionality is merely a luminous presence of the given. For Husserl, it takes a great deal of phenomenological labor to perform the eidetic reduction that gives us the object in its own right, rather than the object as encrusted with superfluous sensory detail.66 But Levinas misses this side of Husserl, and sees an escape route only in an immediate turn to alterity in the form of passivity: “to assume exteriority is to enter into a relation in which the same determines the other while [also] being determined by it.”67 Such passivity is not enough as long as the Other is treated as a place foreign to all individuality (as in the Levinasian il y a and his formless alterity), instead of allowing it a home in advance. Much like Gratton and Sallis, Levinas sometimes equivocates between an alterity beyond experience and a medium within it, their common feature being that neither is made up of specific things: “In enjoyment the things are not absorbed in the technical finality that organizes them into a system.”68 Yet we must not lose sight of the fact that enjoyment is beyond and alterity is on the hither side; the first is on the near side of being while the latter is beyond it. But true enough, Levinas sometimes mixes these two registers: “In enjoyment, the things revert to their elemental qualities [… O]ne is steeped in it; I am always within the element [… T]he adequate relation with the element is always bathing [… A]s though we were in the bowels of being.”69 Yet for Levinas the bowels of being must surely be found in alterity, while enjoyment takes place not in its

65 Ibid., 122.
67 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 128. Punctuation and italics modified.
68 Ibid., 130.
69 Ibid., 134, 131, 132 (italics modified), 132.
bowels but on its outermost layer. These are two completely different places—I certainly do not “enjoy” the Other in the sense of immediate bathing. The only point in common between the beyond and the hither side of being is that together these dimensions sandwich the Heideggerian tool-system. As Levinas writes, “The element has no forms containing it; it is content without form […] The pure quality of the element does not cling to a substance that would support it […] Quality manifests itself in the element as determining nothing.” ⁷⁰ It follows that whether we enjoy bread, cigarettes, or something else entirely, the role of the element in both cases is the same. It is a flowing liquid, so that there is no elemental bread or elemental cigarette, but simply a disembodied element that flows on the hither side of both.

There are other passages where Levinas seems to register the opposite intuition: “in fact the sensible quality already clings to a substance. And we shall have to analyze further the signification of the sensible object qua thing.” ⁷¹ It is a contradiction he never quite resolves, given his tendency to distinguish—more sharply than Husserl—between an elemental sensibility on one side and a praxis and thought that carve up the element—and the il y a and “mythical” realm of alterity—into pieces on the other. It is here that I depart from the Levinasian element by calling it “black noise,” by analogy with the cybernetic term “black boxes,” since the supposedly shapeless element is really made of objectified units that come into focus as soon as we pay attention to them. Even the wind and waves have definite contours if we take care to notice, and are not some sort of sensible apeiron. But neither is the realm beyond being just an ethical apeiron, a view Levinas unfortunately seems to hold when, replacing the il y a of the early works with the “mythical” in Totality and Infinity, he tells us that the mythical is “an existence without existents, the impersonal par excellence.” ⁷² In ooo terms, Levinas undermines at two different levels, that of alterity and that of the element. He

⁷⁰ Ibid., 131, 132.
⁷¹ Ibid., 137.
⁷² Ibid., 142.
makes this point easy for us when he openly admits it: “the element extends into the il y a.”\textsuperscript{73} This line of thought concludes in Levinas’s passage about the Kantian Ding an sich, which is simply a projection of his own anti-realist side onto Kant himself: “in postulating things in themselves so as to avoid the absurdity of apparitions without there being anything that appears, Kant does indeed go beyond the phenomenology of the sensible. But at least he does recognize thereby that of itself the sensible is an apparition without there being anything that appears.”\textsuperscript{74} In closing, I suggest that this disallowance of real individual objects leads Levinas in the wrong direction when it comes to aesthetic phenomena. In his own words: “The aesthetic orientation man gives to the whole of his 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 being moves into enjoyment, in which the Infinity of the idea is idolized in the finite, but sufficient, image.”\textsuperscript{75} But this movement from the idea to the aesthetic is not the same thing as the one from the objective to the non-objective, as Levinas wrongly holds. Just as every enjoyment is a specific enjoyment, every artwork has a specific effect, and is neither an ethical nor a sensible apeiron. Here again we see that Gratton misses my rejection of the formlessness of Levinasian alterity, which is so reminiscent of Kant’s own formless sublime.

In “Aesthetics as First Philosophy” I lay out my full critique of Levinas, which treats him as overcoming the oppressive “totality” of things not through the sole avenue of “alterity,” as Gratton wrongly implies. Instead, there is a threefold overcoming, of which alterity is only one of the folds. We have seen that the second occurs through the elemental, which Levinas mistreats as formless in the same way he mistreats alterity. The third way, whose recognition I owe to Lingis, is through the treatment of entities as individual substances. As I put it in my 2007 article, “What best resists the sleek power struggle of totality is the iden-

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 142. Translation modified.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 136.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 140.
tity of individual things. The world is filled with concrete realities never fully grasped by any handling, bathing, or biting.”

Hence my claim that, contra Levinas, “ethics cannot be first philosophy” Instead, aesthetics is first philosophy. Totality, being, and war are different names Levinas gives to the oppressive system of being that — like Heidegger when crusading against the “ontic” — he too often identifies with the realm of specific beings. These three terms are interchangeable for Levinas, but cannot be taken in their literal meaning. To give just one example, what Levinas means by “war” is not the opposite of “peace.” As he tells us, “rational peace […] is calculation, mediation, and politics. The struggle of each against all becomes […] reciprocal determination and limitation, like that of matter.” In this respect, Derrida’s supposedly liberating claim that “the thing itself is a collection of things or a chain of differences” is really just a reprise of the Levinasian model of war, despite the typically ineffectual Derridean proviso that “in this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable.” Such a play of inter-relationality is another name for totality, and Levinas aims to go beyond it, though we must criticize his way of doing so. Unfortunately, he identifies what is beyond relatiology as both the “One” of Plotinus and as a rather un-Cantorian unified “infinity,” both of them simply latter-day forms of the shapeless pre-Socratic apeiron. To make matters worse, by also calling it the Good he denies that it has any “quiddity,” any specific character that an individual object would have. As I put it in the article, “Just as Levinas exaggerates the Infinite Other into a single rumbling mass of Goodness, he exaggerates the realm of enjoyment into a flickering chaos of nonsense.”

77 Ibid. Italics removed.
79 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 90, 36.
80 Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 95, 147.
81 Ibid., 182.
82 Harman, “Aesthetics as First Philosophy,” 23.
In what follows, I go on to show that *sincerity* is the term that unifies all three aspects of his philosophy: the ethical, the elemental, and the substantial. And ultimately, the substantiality of individual things is the place where sincerity is best understood, “Nails, screwdrivers, cages, and drums are not merely devices enslaved to a wider system of tools: each reposes in itself, busy being itself and not just passing into relation with the others.”83 In other words, “sincerity is the Levinasian version of the classical principle of identity,” though we know that identity is dismissed by Derrideans as belonging to a naïve and oppressive metaphysics of presence.84 It is what Levinas famously calls *illeity*, which “indicates a way of concerning me without entering into conjunction with me.”85 Levinas treats language as one important way of touching things without fusing into them, though language in his view “remains a localized power belong to humans, or at most to sentient creatures more generally.”86 Most importantly, he distinguishes in language between the said and the saying. Whereas the said is a literal content of communication, saying “signifies to the other […] with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. The signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship.”87 While this might seem to link ethical proximity to language, we should remember that proximity is a broader category referring to contact without fusion, including such cases as the enjoyment of bread or tobacco, and that human ethics therefore cannot take the lead. Instead, proximity — also known as sincerity and illeity — occurs whenever two things are closed off from each other but still make contact, which is precisely what is meant by the ooo idea of vicarious causation. For “sincerity is everywhere: in surface, in depth, and in the substance that straddles them both.”88 But

83 Ibid., 24.
85 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 12.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
Levinas falls into the usual modern error that Whitehead was the first to challenge openly, by placing sincerity primarily in the human subject: “the subject is [...] too tight for its skin. Cutting across every relation, it is an individual unlike an entity that can be designated as tode ti [...] The ego is an incomparable unicity.” Here we are too close to Badiou and Žižek, with their shared neo-modernist notion of a unique thinking subject alone in its placement outside the world, even if Žižek grants this ability to all humans while Badiou is highly restrictive as to who counts as a genuine subject.

Like all phenomenologists, Levinas plays a double game, claiming that his concept of language is neither subjective nor objective but combines the best aspects of both: “the implication of the subject in signification [...] is equivalent neither to the shifting of signification over to the objective side [...] nor to its reduction to a subjective lived experience,” though we have seen that this game — in Merleau-Ponty as well — ultimately collapses into idealism with a realist alibi. This is nothing but correlationism, although correlationism is a specific form of relationism, and relation is precisely the totality or war that Levinas needs to escape. But in attempting to do so, he focuses too intensely on human ethics, despite the wider sense of proximity he has established, and thus falls back into the Cartesian rift between what I call “full-fledged humans and robotic causal pawns.” After considering Levinas’s marvelous analysis of the “fission” of the subject, in which the asymmetrical relation between me and the other leads me to “substitute” myself for the other and take responsibility for them, I argue that his conception of aesthetics leads in a direction far broader than this narrowly human one, before concluding that “Levinas is the accidental mentor of a new theory of causation.” Once again, it is clear that my inter-

89 Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 106, 8.
91 Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 131.
93 Ibid., 30.
est in Levinas has nothing to do with the “alterity” that Gratton highlights, since I dispense with both the anthropocentric and *apeiron*-like aspects of the Levinasian other.

That brings us to my final extended piece of work on Levinas, the Sofia lecture that eventually became “Levinas and the Triple Critique of Heidegger” in the pages of *Philosophy Today*. As the title suggests, this article reprises the threefold consideration in “Aesthetics as First Philosophy,” and again draws on Lingis’s important inquiry into the Levinasian conception of individual substance. Here I will simply draw out a few complementary topics that this article handles better than the publications already covered. My case is that Heidegger misses not one but three aspects of reality that Levinas highlights like never before: the alterity of ethics, the enjoyment of the elemental, and the closed-off character of individual things against the Heideggerian tool-system with its global and mutual referentiality. Yet as we have just seen, there is still a major problem with how Levinas does this, one resulting from his ingrained modernism: “While Heidegger is quick to dismiss drums, houses, and tea plantations as ‘ontic,’ Levinas glimpses the metaphysical dimension of particular things. My one criticism of the Levinasian approach is that it remains too human-centered, too much in the shadow of Kant’s Copernican Revolution,” though here Descartes deserves blame as well.94 As I add, “only in this way do we make a clean break with the Heideggerian climate, where being and *Dasein* always come as a pair.”95 Much like Chalmers and Strawson in recent philosophy of mind, Levinas sees first-person experience as the one place where the global war of relations is halted. This was already clear in *Existence and Existents*, when only human thought was allowed to “hypostatize” a rumbling unified being into pieces, and this notion remains operative in *Totality and Infinity*: “The separation of the Same is produced in the form of an inner life, a psychism. The psychism constitutes an event in

95 Ibid., 408.
being [...] it is already a way of being, resistance to the totality."\textsuperscript{96} Yet it is not only a way of resistance, as if there were others. For Levinas it is the only one.

Here he makes two different errors. The first is the sort opposed — perhaps excessively — by panpsychists when they claim that "psychism" is found not only in humans. We have seen that Chalmers extends it as far as thermostats, while Strawson (like Shaviro and Whitehead) finds it absolutely everywhere. A bigger issue is that, even if we were to uphold the existence of full-blown panpsychism extended to every existing entity, we are still left with the old distinction between direct first-person experience and third-person scientific description, although both involve a view from the outside. My experience of myself does not exhaust myself, which is why the deeper, zero-person reality of the self must be taken into account, despite its withdrawal from direct access by introspection and science alike. In short, the self is also a substance, and thus it sets up shop in the world in a way that neither the psychologist nor the neuroscientist can master. Levinas is aware, perhaps too aware — given his aforementioned tendency to conflate them — that even the things of enjoyment are saturated with something of the beyond. Speaking of our enjoyment of the sensuous, he states that "what is essential to created existence is its separation with regard to the Infinite [which is why he describes enjoyment as an "atheism" (GH)]. This separation is not simply a negation [...] but precisely opens upon the idea of infinity."\textsuperscript{97} Lingis has argued further, in \textit{The Imperative}, that this penetration of the sensual by ethical considerations also holds for individual things, each of which generates the rules for perceiving or enjoying it properly.\textsuperscript{98} This takes Lingis some way beyond Levinas, given that for the latter, both ethics and the elemental are meant to resist the particularity of individuals, while for Lingis it is individuals themselves that simultaneously incarnate our specific enjoy-

\textsuperscript{96} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 54.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{98} Lingis, \textit{The Imperative}. 
ment of them and a specific secular form of the moral law; it is ethically wrong. Lingis holds, to listen to recorded music on a snowy day in a temple in Kyoto. 99 By contrast, Levinas seems to think that infinity itself is produced by the human psyche: “Infinity does not first exist, and then reveal itself. Its infinition is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in me.” 100 This is every bit as correlationist as Heidegger’s positing of the Sein/Dasein couple, and his adoption of it from Heidegger shows why Levinas remains subsumed by it, even if he partly succeeds in leaving the “climate” of Heidegger’s philosophy. If there is one way that Levinas truly gets us beyond Heidegger, it is neither in his alterity of the infinitely other nor in his enjoyment of the elemental but through the combination of the two in his theory of substance, though he never fully rises to the level of his insight.

Nonetheless, against Heidegger’s tool-analysis, he tells us that things “are not entirely absorbed in their form; they […] stand out in themselves, breaking through, rending their forms, are not resolved in the relations that link them up to the totality […] The thing is always an opacity, a resistance, an ugliness.” 101 This is not only the object-oriented side of Levinas; it is Levinas at his best, freed from his apeironish commitments to a shapeless other and equally shapeless element. Even as he discovers the innate substantiality of things in the selfsame palace of Versailles, the stone that remains the same stone even as it crumbles, the same pen and armchair to which I return each day, he shrinks back from this insight by ascribing it to the realm of human experience alone: “the world of perception is thus a world where things have identity,” and “an earth inhabited by men endowed with language is peopled with stable things.” 102 Though he shifts back quickly to the intuition that things have a depth in their own right, he ascribes this to “matter,” implying that form is produced by humans alone. 103 Even so, he joins OOO

99 Ibid., 21.
100 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 26.
101 Ibid., 74.
102 Ibid., 139. Italics added.
103 Ibid., 192–93.
in rejecting a two-world theory of shapeless matter and visible form, when he offers the following wonderful gesture towards a mereology of things: “But a part of a thing is in turn a thing: the back, the leg of a chair, for example. But also any fragment of the leg is a thing, even if it does not constitute one of its articulations — everything one can detach and remove from it.”104 This is actually closer to Tristan Garcia than to OOO, since Garcia’s ontology is much flatter than mine. He allows for any fragment of anything to be equally a thing, while OOO places some restrictions on this.105 But unlike Garcia, Levinas seems to imagine that a fragment of the leg must actually be broken off by a human to become a thing, which treats the reality of parts as nothing more than a correlate of human action. What Levinas fails to consider is the crumbling of an abandoned chair in the absence of any human witness, or even after the outright extinction of our species. In the end, he is too much a phenomenologist to take such a possibility seriously. In any case, we see for a final time that Gratton’s manner of linking me to Levinas through alterity is a gross misreading, and primarily the symptom of a Derridean wish to maneuver me into the ambush site of “Violence and Metaphysics.” But I was never there, and it is not clear that Levinas was ever there.

Let’s summarize what we have seen in this chapter about Levinas, his flaws according to Derrida, and the link Gratton implies between those flaws and OOO’s own. Despite being a phenomenologist himself, Levinas critiques Western philosophy for its over-reliance on “light,” its bias in favor of the given. Derrida essentially makes a twofold response to this critique, (a) there is no way to deal with non-light in a philosophical register, since the hidden must somehow appear in a face, and (b) Husserl and Heidegger already do a fine job of getting as close to the hidden darkness as a philosopher can, and in this respect Levinas is unfair.

104 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 160.
We begin with the second point. Derrida’s strategy for defending Husserl against Levinas is roughly threefold. First, despite Levinas’s claim to the contrary, Husserl is the great theorist of inadequation, given that the fulfillment of intentionality always remains an unreachable ideal. Second, Husserl’s concept of “horizon” is as “other” as we will ever need, since the horizon is not an object but the permanent wellspring of any new objectification that might occur. Third, even Husserl’s supposed idealism is not as bad as it seems, since—we have seen—even the inapparent must first have meaning for an ego in order to strike us as inapparent in the first place. What is remarkable about all these points is that they are the same things a conservative phenomenologist would say, thereby causing a clash with Derrida’s image as a cutting-edge innovator. Inadequation is certainly an interesting theme in Husserl, but it merely concerns the difficulty of overlap between sensual and intellectual access to things. Try as we might to intuit the essence of a pineapple, it is impossible not to be waylaid by its numerous adumbrations. Yet for Husserl both the essence and the adumbrations are still correlates of a possible intentional act, even if that act remains elusive. And for all his calls for a return to “the things themselves,” this phrase is the very opposite of “the thing-in-itself,” an object not only beyond adequation but beyond correlation altogether, which is what Levinas rather than Husserl seeks. The same holds for the supposed wonders of the “horizon,” which Husserlians often claim beats Heidegger to the punch on Sein. But there is a difference between the two. The fact that the horizon is a pre-objective wellspring for objects does not mean that it is not the vague correlate of an intentional act, which of course it always is for classical phenomenology. Heidegger’s Being, by contrast, is supposed to be that which withdraws from any presence, even though in practice he treats it as always the correlate of Dasein. Finally, the notion that the other must first “mean” something and thereby appear to the ego is flat-out correlationism, and we will address it shortly. Those like Gratton who contrast Speculative Realism badly with Derrida should at least concede that Derrida never really argued this point thoroughly, and that he
would have been forced to sharpen his arguments had he been with us at Goldsmiths and in the years that followed.

What about Heidegger’s supposed pre-emptings of the Levinasian critique? One would expect these to be stronger challenges, given Heidegger’s own frequently expressed worries about presence. But Derrida cannot quite say this, given his commitment to the notion that Husserl already had sufficient resources—with inadequation and horizon—to address the alterity with which Levinas reproaches him. While I largely agree with Derrida that Heidegger was well on his way to something like what Levinas wanted, Levinas already knows this. He is second to none in his admiration for what Heidegger brings to philosophy. Derrida also rightly notes that Heidegger put the meaning of being in question, thereby showing that all philosophical light is haunted by shadow. Finally, I would also side with Derrida in saying that Heidegger’s ontological difference cannot “subordinate” my relationship with the other, since ungraspable otherness is already entailed by the “Being” side of the difference. There is also something to be said for Heidegger’s “letting-be,” though I do not follow Late Heidegger Exceptionalism in taking this to be some sort of clean break with the early concept of resoluteness. I also suspect that Heidegger’s Being is in fact already epekeina tēs ousias, and that Derrida is right in thinking it is primarily beyond the present-at-hand beings of the ontic realm. To summarize, I think that Heidegger (but not Husserl) has much to say in advance about what Levinas calls alterity, and that is why alterity is not the most interesting part of Levinas. What can be found in Zubiri but never found in either Heidegger or Levinas was the notion of the specific alterity of individual things; the latter two thinkers are too beholden to the conception of Being or Infinity as something like a formless apeiron, as Derrida notes himself.

What I love about Levinas that Derrida does not even see is the former’s shift to a new conception of individual substance. We enjoy this bread, this cigarette, this car, the ideas playing in our minds right now. Unlike for Husserl, these entities are not just the correlates of an intentional act, but objects closed off in
themselves and not amenable to presence, not even as a *telos* somewhere down the road. And unlike for Heidegger, they do not simply fuse into a holistic tool-system, since each forms an end in itself. Finally, unlike for Derrida, these individual substances are perfectly determinate — this bread is this bread and nothing else — and hence it is untrue that bread “is necessarily produced in difference (*as* difference).”\(^{106}\) To say that the bread is produced in difference is the same as to hold that it is nothing outside its context (i.e., outside the text) but simply emerges *from* its context via differentiation from it. What this shows is that Derrida had more to learn from both Levinasian alterity and Heideggerian *Sein* than he realized. What Derrida misses, and what is missed by the correlational circle he affirms no less than Meillassoux, is the specific non-*apeironish* alterity of things that exist before entering into the drama of mutual differentiation, which happens only on the relational level.

How Gratton Is Wrong about Time

We have seen that Gratton is critical of me for saying that only the “now” exists. For this reason he sends me to the library to consult Husserl’s *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, which in his view establishes that everything is immersed in time, leading to a refutation of my supposedly “static” sensual entities. That is not actually what Husserl shows in the work in question, and we will get to that shortly. But I want to begin with two points about the use of Husserl by ooo. One is that Husserl’s intentional object enables him to differentiate his own position from two distinct and even opposite competitors. The one closer in age was Kazimierz Twardowski, whose theory of an object “outside” the mind struck Husserl as a road to skepticism; this is why he kept his own intentional objects immanent enough that they could always be, in principle, the correlate of some intentional act. In ooo terminology, this enables Husserl to distinguish SO from RO, and he also made the explicit deci-

sion to reject the very existence of RO. The other, much older competitor was his teacher Franz Brentano. For Brentano, as we learn again in Husserl’s writings on time, experience is all about content. Yet for Husserl the content of an experience is never enough, since an intentional object — like the act that correlates with it — can remain the same despite shifting content, as when an apple remains the same apple despite oscillating surface-features (PIT 36). Again resorting to OOO terminology, this is enough for Husserl to be able to distinguish SO from SQ, while for Brentano — as for the empiricists — there is only SQ with no underlying SO. Insofar as Husserl does utilize SO as the very core of his philosophy, he is in fact committed to the identity of stable intentional objects, which does not mean eternal ones.

The second point is one where Gratton misreads my intentions, though it is probably my own fault since I have not written very much about this topic. The fact that I say only the “now” exists does not mean I think that the now is a single point of time; quite the contrary. Here is what I really mean. Every reader of OOO knows of my fondness for the Islamic and later the European occasionalists, who posed the important problem of how two things can interact at all. I reject their solution that God is the universal mediator, and for the same reason reject the related Hume/Kant solution that the mind is the mediator of all causation. Like Latour, I hold that the mediator must always be a secularized and local one, though unlike Latour I approach the problem with a duality of real and sensual objects, each able to touch the opposite kind directly. Yet there is another point to consider about the occasionalists, which is that they come in two basic forms that are often combined. Namely, we can speak here, as in the chapter on Shaviro, of “spatial” and “temporal” occasionalisms. Spatial occasionalists are those who raise the problem about causal interaction between separate beings.

107 Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness, 29ff. Subsequent page references are given between parentheses in the main text, preceded by PIT.
Temporal occasionalists, who push things further, are those who hold that even the present moment cannot endure by itself, but is constantly annihilated and therefore in need of a continuous creation. (Note that this is not the same thing as holding that God “sustains” the world, as in Philo of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas, since in this model things can still touch each other directly. God is simply a background energy source on which they rely when making contact.) Now, I am on record as supporting “spatial” occasionalism, since I hold that real objects cannot make direct contact. But in no way do I support “temporal” occasionalism. Here I am with Aristotle as viewing time (in the so–sq sense) as a continuum, not a sequence of distinct instants. At times Gratton seems to think that when I say only the “now” exists, what I mean is that it exists only in punctiform fashion, with no bridge to previous or upcoming instants. But that is not my position.

Let’s begin by showing that Husserl’s analysis of time is by no means incompatible with the treatment of this topic in oo0. He begins his discussion in the most Husserlian possible fashion: “Involved in this [analysis …] is the complete exclusion, stipulation, or conviction concerning Objective time (of all transcendent presuppositions concerning existents)” (PIT 23). He then adds that “one cannot discover the least trace of Objective time through phenomenological analysis” (PIT 23). In a word, he is bracketing the existence of any real time outside its presence to us. Normally oo0 has a bone to pick with phenomenological bracketing, since it leads directly to idealism. But in the present case that hardly matters; for oo0, time arises from the so–sq rift, which unfolds entirely within the sensual realm and has nothing to do with withdrawn reality. Thus, if there is any topic on which Husserl and oo0 are likely to agree most, it is time. Although Gratton wants to imply that Husserl is more oriented toward flux and alteration than is static old oo0, we will see that this complaint is hollow. The reason is that Husserl is the absolute champion of objects capable of enduring through time. After all, this is the whole point of his disagreement with Brentano’s theory of it. As Husserl puts it,
Let us look at a piece of chalk. We close and open our eyes. We have two perceptions, but we say of them that we see the same piece of chalk twice. We have, thereby, contents which are separated temporally [...] The object, however, is not merely the sum or complexion of this “content” [that we perceive in it], which does not enter into the object at all. The Object is more than the content and other than it. [...] Phenomenologically speaking, Objectivity is not even constituted through “primary” content but through characters of apprehension and the regularities which pertain to the essence of these characters. (PIT 27)

The regularities of intentional objects are not just a primordial fact for Husserlian phenomenology, but are the central fact that differentiates phenomenology from empiricism and its bundles of qualities, as well as from Brentano. To claim that such objects are rooted in a priority of temporal change gets it backwards: instead, we notice change only because all the changing apples and blackbirds remain the same objects. And furthermore, “we are concerned with reality only insofar as it is intended, represented, intuited, or conceptually thought. With reference to the problem of time, this implies that we are interested in lived experiences of time” (PIT 28). As for Gratton’s complaint about OOO confining itself to the “now,” I should note that Husserl deliberately confines himself in just the same way, as when he speaks of such “self-evident laws” as these: “that two different times can never be conjoint; that their relation is a non-simultaneous one” (PIT 29). In short, OOO and Husserl agree on the following basic principles when it comes to time, despite Gratton’s stated wish to drive a wedge between us: (a) There is a now that is not simultaneous with other nows; (b) The now is not punctiform, meaning that it does not occur in a single temporal instant; (c) The intentional/sensual object remains undivided despite its wildly fluctuating surface-qualities.

It is Brentano rather than OOO who can be criticized for thinking of time in terms of an excessively narrow “now,” and Husserl does precisely this. He tells us that Brentano developed
his theory of time in lectures, and that it was only partially re-
ported in the writings of his prominent students Anton Marty
(1847–1914) and Carl Stumpf (1848–1936) (PIT 22). For Brentano,
when we hear the sounding of a musical note, it neither disap-
ppears nor remains when the stimulus to the ear is gone. If it
disappeared, we would simply experience a sequence of isolated
notes with no connection between them; if it remained, the op-
posite problem would occur, “a chord of simultaneous notes or
rather a disharmonious jumble of sounds” (PIT 30). The solution
is obviously somewhere between these two extremes. But Hus-
serl does not accept Brentano’s own solution; quite apart from
his dislike for Brentano’s mixing of physical and psychological
elements in his discussion of time, he rejects even the phenom-
enological core of his teacher’s theory. According to that theory,
the sound does cease once the stimulus is gone, but the present
moment is filled with what Brentano calls “primordial associa-
tions” with notes now past and even the anticipated notes of the
future (PIT 33). The real present is always the present of what-
ever the current physical stimuli to the sense-organs may be.
Thus, for Brentano, our lived experience of time is really just
the product of phantasy. Husserl notes that “as a consequence of
this theory, Brentano came to disavow the perception of succe-
sion and alteration. We believe that we hear a melody, that we
still hear something that is certainly past. However, [for Bren-
tano] this is only an illusion which proceeds from the vivacity
of primordial presentation” (PIT 32). A strange side-effect of this
fixation on the present is that our real intuition of the present is
combined with non-real “primordial associations” with absent
past and possible future experiences. As Husserl comments,
“This involves something remarkable, namely, that non-real
temporal determinations can belong in a continuous series with
a unique, actual, real determinateness to which they are joined
by infinitesimal differences […] Temporal determinations of
every kind are joined in a certain way as necessary consequenc-
es to every instance of coming to be and passing away that takes
place in the present” (PIT 34). A few pages later, he speaks even
more harshly: “This implies […] that the past […] must also
be present, and that the temporal moment ‘past’ must, in the
same sense as the element ‘red’ that we actually experience, be
a present moment of lived experience—which, of course, is an
obvious absurdity” (PIT 38).

Something decisive occurs as Husserl critically sifts through
the problems with Brentano’s theory of time. He notes that what
leads Brentano to append “primordial associations” to time is
his prejudice that all intentionality consists of represented con-
tent, and thus the only way to make room for the past is through
modifying such present content. Thus, “to the primary content
of perception are joined phantasms and more phantasms, quali-
tatively alike and differing, let us say, only in decreasing rich-
ness and intensity of content” (PIT 37). For Husserl, whose initial
break with Brentano hinged largely on his emphasis of inten-
tional objects over experienced content, this sounds like a repet-
tition of the same problem as before. For “we do not encounter
temporal characters such as succession and duration merely in
the primary content, but also in the Object apprehended and
in the acts of apprehension” (PIT 37). And “Brentano […] also
[falls] into the error of reducing everything, in the manner of
sensualism, to mere primary content” (PIT 38), which is pre-
cisely Husserl’s basis for rejecting empiricism no less than “sen-
sualism,” assuming they are different in the first place. This is
a serious problem for Gratton’s critique of OOO on time. For if
Husserl’s theory of time—like his phenomenology more gener-
ally—is based on a shift from the content to the objects and acts
of experience, this is a point on which the OOO theory of time
closely resembles him. In short, our theory of the present is like
Husserl’s, not like Brentano’s, and thus it cannot be claimed that
we fail to live up to what Husserl has seen in these matters. What
he has seen is that our relation to the past and future cannot be
explained in terms of present content.

Husserl traces Brentano’s now-centric model to an idea
found in Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) and Hermann
Lotze (1817–81) to the effect that everything must be in the
present, since even a temporal succession of instants must be
understood as such by a single momentary consciousness. On
this basis, Brentano would be justified in reducing the past to phantasmal inscriptions in the present. But Husserl notes an objection to this idea by William Stern (1871–1938) who termed it the “dogma of the momentariness of [the] whole of consciousness.”\(^{109}\) What Stern defends by contrast is a model according to which, in Husserl’s words, “we do not have the sounds all at once, as it were, and we do not hear the melody by virtue of the circumstance that the earlier tones endure with the last. Rather, the tones build up a successive unity with a common effect, the form of apprehension” (PIT 41). In other words, there is something like a “specious present” in which we perceive a series of temporal nows without having to shove them all into the current one. While this is a good step forward, Husserl remains unsatisfied with Stern’s model, and asks as follows: “The question still remains how the apprehension of transcendent temporal Objects which extend over a duration is to be understood. Are the Objects realized in terms of a continuous similarity (like unaltered things) or as constantly changing (like material processes, motion, or alteration, for example)” (PIT 42)? Both Gratton and Shaviro are no doubt cheering for the latter option, but Husserl—and I with him—will choose the former. As he puts it in a crucial passage, “a phenomenological analysis of time cannot explain the constitution of time without reference to the constitution of the temporal Object. By temporal Objects, in this particular sense, we mean objects which not only are unities in time but also include temporal extension in themselves” (PIT 43). Thus for Husserl there is no kaleidoscopic flux-o-rama acid trip in which change is primordial and unified objects a mere byproduct, as if opposed to a stodgy, middle-aged cigar party that affirms the stasis of enduring things. In this case, the middle-aged cigar smokers are not just closer to what Husserl and OOO think, but closer to the philosophical avant garde.

In §8, Husserl begins to develop his own theory, beginning with a familiar Husserlian gesture: “We now exclude all trans-

gratton

cendent apprehension and positing and take the sound purely as a hyletic datum” (PIT 44). The sound “begins and stops, and the whole unity of its duration, the unity of the whole process in which it begins and ends, ‘proceeds’ to the end in the ever more distant past. In this sinking back, I still ‘hold’ it fast, have it in a ‘retention,’ and as long as the retention persists the sound has its own temporality. *It is the same and its duration is the same*” (PIT 44; italics added). I added italics to the final sentence in order to emphasize that, contra Gratton, there is an abiding *identity* here that precedes any discussion of change. Only in the shift to the “modes” of this experience can we speak of a “continuous flux” (PIT 44). There is a specific phase in which I become conscious of the sound beginning, and I remain “conscious of it as now” for as long as “I am conscious of any of its phases as now” (PIT 44). But I am also “conscious of a continuity of phases as ‘before;’ and I am conscious of the whole interval of the temporal duration from the beginning-point to the now-point as an expired duration. I am not yet conscious, however, of the remaining interval of the duration” (PIT 44). Once the sound ends, “I am conscious of this point itself as a now-point and of the whole duration as expired […] the end-point is the beginning of a new interval of time which is no longer an interval of sound” (PIT 44). The whole interval of sound is now “something dead […] a no longer living production, a structure animated by the now productive point of the now. This structure, however, is continually modified and sinks back into emptiness” (PIT 45). In other words, “the sound vanishes into the remoteness of consciousness” (PIT 45). And furthermore, “The sound itself is the same, but ‘in the way that it appears,’ the sound is continually different” (PIT 45). Brentano gets into trouble by thinking that experience is only of the present, so that therefore anything past must be inscribed into the present through indirect “primordial associations.” It is an analysis of time based on “content,” whereas Husserl insists that the content remains the same and the sound changes only in the “way” it appears. This way or modality belongs not to the content of the sound-experience, but only to the changed status of the act that intends it. In short, Husserl deals with past sound
as a modification of the structure of the intentional act rather than of its content. Only the current sound is truly “perceived,” whereas the expired moments of the sound are something of which “we are conscious […] in retentions, specifically, that we are conscious of those parts of those parts or phases of the duration, not sharply to be differentiated, which lie closest to the actual now-point with diminishing clarity, while those parts lying further back in the past are wholly unclear; we are conscious of them only as empty” (PIT 46). And further, “that part of the duration which lies closest still has perhaps a little clarity; the whole disappears in obscurity, in a void retentional consciousness, and finally disappears completely […] as soon as retention ceases” (PIT 46). The closer we are in time to the present sound the more distinction there is, while the further we go the more blending there is (PIT 46).

Even though the sound-object or musical object continues, it remains one and the same thing, but its past phases become modally cloudier and more obscure. To repeat, Husserl treats the past not as an inscription in the present, but as an emptier intention than the perfectly fulfilled one of the current phase of sound or music. These emptier intentions that pass away are called “running-off phenomena” (PIT 48). There is a “continuous line of advance” that is “constantly expanding, a continuous line of pasts” (PIT 48). This is a continuum, even though no moment in it is ever repeated. “Since a new now is always presenting itself, each now is changed into a past, and thus the entire continuity of the running-off of the pasts of the preceding points moves uniformly ‘downward’ into the depths of the past” (PIT 49). Impressional consciousness passes into retentional consciousness (PIT 50). Each retention “bears in itself the heritage of the past in the form of a series of shadings” (PIT 51). The now is “the nucleus of a comet’s tail of retentions referring to the earlier now-points of the motion” (PIT 51). Once the sound ends, “we have a mere fresh phase of memory, to this is again joined another such, and so on” (PIT 52). Retentional sound “is not actually present but ‘primarily remembered’ precisely in the now” (PIT 53). There are always reverberating echoes as well, immediately following the
“now” of a sound, but these are directly perceptual rather than retentional. As Husserl puts it, “The reverberation of a violin tone is a very weak violin tone and is completely different from the retention of loud sounds which have just been” (PIT 53). Brentano failed to recognize that there is a difference between the phantasy of a sound and the present of that sound. “Past’ and ‘now’ exclude each other. Something past and something now can indeed be identically the same, but only because it has endured between the past and now” (PIT 56).

Husserl goes on to draw even more insights for another seventy pages or more. But since we are concerned primarily with Gratton’s critique, what we have already cited is enough to establish the following points. First, the OOO conception of time as so–sq is no more confined to a timeless now-point than in Husserl’s conception, since the two conceptions are one and the same. Time is concerned primarily with the identity of an object that persists over a duration, even though different phases of that duration pass further and further into the depths of retentional consciousness. In other words, there is no contradiction between identity and time. Quite the opposite. Second, and related to this, there is no question of a wider category called “time” that must be drawn upon as if it were prior to the difference between an intentional object and its adumbrations. If there were just one adumbration after another, as in Brentano’s theory of one momentary set of present content after another, then we would not experience time at all, and would live our lives in the manner of disconnected instants of consciousness. The only reason Husserl can account for anything like time is because he rejects Brentano’s model of consciousness as a specific experienced content and shifts to his own model of intentional objects that are deeper than any such content. The same violin-sound rings out for five or six seconds with a subtly waverin vibrato; it is the same because it is the vibrato of one and the same violin-sound. Far from identity being excluded from the analysis of time, time is always the time of identities. Third and finally, and again contra Gratton, this model of present immediacy fading ever further into the depths of the past is not at
all what is going on in Heidegger’s threefold temporal structure, which would still be found even if we could condense time into a single punctiform instant.

Stated differently, I am saying that Husserl has a philosophy of time but Heidegger most certainly does not. Any claim that Heidegger passes from vulgar clock-time to *Dasein’s* authentic temporality to the *Temporality* of Being itself does not even address the issue of whether he has any theory of time at all. Indeed, the shift from the vulgar flow of clock-time to *Dasein’s* authentic temporality is an explicit effort to get rid of the Husserlian notion of time as a flow, which is precisely why *Augenblick* (moment of vision) is a key term for Heidegger but not for his teacher. In other words, there is no “phenomenology of internal time-consciousness” anywhere in Heidegger’s philosophy, despite the fact that he was the editor of Husserl’s own treatise on the subject (though rather reluctantly so, I might add). As for the supposed shift from *Dasein’s* temporality to the *Temporality* of Being itself, this is no switch back to the moving flow of time, but simply another aspect of Heidegger’s movement from an activist conception of resolute *Dasein* to the passive model of letting-be, eventually completed at some point in the 1930s. But the active/passive distinction has nothing to do with the instant/flux distinction. Heidegger belongs, I have said, to the occasionalist tradition of time: much like Whitehead, which is one of their most striking points in common. Husserl, idealist though he is, belongs instead to the tradition of time as an unbroken continuum found not only in Bergson and Deleuze, but much further back in Aristotle’s *Physics*. On this point I side with Husserl and his confederates, not with the Heidegger/Whitehead model of occasionalist time, though I do accept the “spatial occasionalist” problem of the difficulty of causal relations.

Given that Husserlian time is so far from refuting the *ooo* model of so–sq that it practically coincides with it, one has to wonder why Gratton was so confident in the lethality of his appeal to Husserl. There must be another influence. I smell Derrida nearby, and in particular, I smell the Derrida of “*Ousia* and
In this article Derrida deals not with Husserl’s theory of time as just discussed, but with Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger, and—to a lesser extent—Kant. It contains Derrida’s usual wordy historical analyses, culminating in a four-page summary of the general ideas of his piece. Two in particular jump out. The first is his claim that “presence” in the sense of presence-at-hand and “presence” in the temporal sense of the now are so closely related as to be indistinguishable. For this reason Derrida will oppose both, and Heidegger understands himself to be doing much the same thing, though here I think he misreads the tendency of his own philosophy. As Derrida writes, at the bottom of his first page,

In what way has a certain determination of time implicitly governed the determination of the meaning of Being as presence in the history of philosophy? Heidegger announces the question [...] only, and does so on the basis of what he still considers a sign, a point of reference, an “outward evidence.” This outward evidence is the treatment of the meaning of Being as parousia or ousia, which signifies, in ontologico-Temporal terms, ‘presence’ (Anwesenheit). Beings are grasped in their Being as ‘presence’ (Anwesenheit); this means they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time — the ‘Present’ (Gegenwart).

The point is repeated near the end of the article: “In Being and Time and Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics it is difficult — we are tempted to say impossible — to distinguish rigorously between presence as Anwesenheit and presence as Gegenwärtigkeit (presence in the temporal sense of newness).” Note that Derrida is not just “tempted” to call it impossible but does

111 Ibid., 31. Both of the Heidegger passages cited here are from Being and Time, 47.
call it that, despite his usual mannerism of quickly half-revoking whatever he says in order to escape possible charges of being too simple-minded. It follows for Derrida — as for Gratton — that if we are to break free of the ontotheology of the metaphysics of presence, we must escape both the immediate presence-at-hand of anything to the mind and the idea that there is any “now” in time. Here I disagree with Husserl on one side, with Heidegger on the other, and with Derrida altogether.

In the case of Husserl, I agree with both Heidegger and Levinas that his phenomenology is utterly saturated with the presence of Anwesenheit. We have seen that Heidegger makes this case brilliantly in the first one hundred pages of History of the Concept of Time. For Husserl, the being of anything consists in its presence before the mind, and he never questions the being of intentionality as such, which is why he missed, perhaps narrowly, posing the question of Being himself rather than letting Heidegger do it later. Levinas makes the same objection by arguing that intentionality closes off alterity, though he is also unsatisfied with Heidegger’s solution, since Being belongs to the circle of the Same and is therefore not enough. We must go further and seek out that which is epekeina tês ousias, the Good beyond Being. We are now familiar with Derrida’s argument that Levinas is unfair to both Husserl and Heidegger, given his claim that Husserl knew about the ultimate unfulfillability of intentional acts and the non-objectifiability of the horizontal wellspring of all intentional objects, and his further claim that Heidegger’s ontological difference already does the work of alterity that Levinas thinks ethics alone can perform. As a reminder, I reached a mixed verdict on Derrida’s assessment here. For there is no sense in which unfulfillment and the horizon can do the work of Heideggerian Being, given that Husserl cannot accept either an object or a horizon that would not, in principle, be there implicitly for consciousness, and also — contra Derrida — no sense in which the implicit/explicit pair exhausts the theme of philosophy. The implicit is still found only in intentional acts, and the being that withdraws is what is inaccessible to any intentional act, and therefore nonexistent in Husserl’s eyes. In Heidegger’s
case I largely agree with Derrida that the ontological difference is good enough to resist the reign of presence, and thus I think that Levinas has a better case against Heidegger in the other direction — on the side of immediate enjoyment and the elemental ether in which such enjoyment takes place.

In the case of Heidegger, I do not agree with Derrida’s view that *Anwesenheit* and *Gegenwärtigkeit* are one and the same. The reason is that Heidegger easily overcomes *Anwesenheit* with his relentless assault on presence-at-hand as accounting for the Being of beings. Indeed, this is his most singular philosophical achievement. But in no way does he overcome the *Gegenwärtigkeit* of the temporal now. No matter how hard Derrida tries to show that Heidegger and Bergson are both stuck in the Aristotelian tradition of thinking about time, Bergson and Aristotle (like Husserl) are deeply aware that time is a continuum. Indeed, this is the central insight of all three thinkers when it comes to time. Presumably, Heidegger as a human being was also aware of the continuous aspect of time, but this does not mean that Heidegger’s *philosophy* accounts for it. To the contrary, Heidegger is unable to reach any continuum through his threefold analysis of *Dasein’s* authentic temporality (or even of the *Temporalität* of Being itself). When Heidegger analyzes the threefold structure of thrown projection, this merely gives us another critique of *Anwesenheit*, since thrownness means we are always thrown into a situation whose exact character can never be directly present to the mind. But it is not also a critique of the *Gegenwärtigkeit* of the now, even though most readers assume he has also accomplished this very different step. By treating time as a continuum, Aristotle, Bergson, and Husserl all reject the notion of an isolated now-point from the start. But Heidegger merely shows that in any given instant, much more is going on than meets the eye, so that even *Gegenwärtigkeit* automatically excludes *Anwesenheit*, despite Derrida’s assumption that the two concepts are indistinguishable.

I argued as early as *Tool-Being* that if we attempt the thought experiment of asking what a single, isolated instant of time would be like, we immediately find that this experiment cannot
even be attempted in the continuum model of time found in Aristotle, Bergson, and Husserl (not to mention William James and Deleuze). But it can easily be carried out in Heidegger’s philosophy, since any isolated “now” can be analyzed perfectly well in terms of thrown projection. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in Heidegger that requires him to refuse the theory that time is made up of individual “frames” in the cinematic manner. Stated differently, there is no easy passage from thrown projection to any “flow” of time. This is a passage that Heidegger simply never illuminates for us; in fact, this is already the thrust of his critique of vulgar clock-time: the fact that such a vulgar conception merely treats time as “passing” without pausing to understand how complex the “now” already is. Heidegger, like Whitehead and Latour, belongs to the occasionalist tradition of time rather than the continuist tradition, even if he never calls upon God or anything else to explain how one moment gives way to the next. To summarize, Derrida gets it wrong in both cases. There is no infinity beyond representations in Husserl, and no effective critique of the “now” in Heidegger, even if Heidegger himself seems to think so. Contra Gratton, to say such a thing is not insulting to Heidegger, but simply the natural result of considering what Heidegger did and did not actually accomplish. No commentator should aspire to flattery at the expense of precision. There are plenty of insights of which Heidegger can be proud, without our having to credit him with non-existent ones.

Earlier I mentioned that there is a second key idea that jumps out from “Ousia and Grammē,” and it is one we have seen before. Midway through his article, Derrida says the following about Hegel: “The transformation of Parousia into self-presence, and the transformation of the supreme being into a subject thinking itself, and assembling itself near itself in knowledge, does not interrupt the fundamental tradition of Aristotelianism.”113 Forgetting about Aristotle for a moment, the critique of Hegel’s concept of the subject thinking itself in knowledge as a form of “self-presence” looks fair enough. Hegel does tend to treat

113 Ibid., 52.
thinking as self-transparent, though we need not accept this idea, which is precisely why I rejected the Shaviro/Strawson/Chalmers priority of first-person introspective experience. In this limited respect, I am happy to agree with Derrida’s rejection of self-presence. But he also means self-presence in what he takes to be a more damaging sense — namely, in the sense of identity. This is the same reason why, in *Of Grammatology*, he rejects the idea of Being as anything apart from its manifestation in individual beings, and in “White Mythology” conflates his own critique of the literal meaning of words with the individual being of substances. This leads him to misread Aristotle’s theory of substance as a police-like attempt to govern our use of language, though it is clear that Aristotle values ambiguous poetic language to a degree matched by few other philosophers. To summarize, Derrida not only thinks that the now of *Gegenwärtigkeit* is illusory, but also thinks that we cannot critique the Anwesenheit of onto-theology without also denying that a thing can be one and the same as itself. Remember that I am no Hegelian, and do not accept that there is a subject viewing itself in utter transparency, which would be the only valid meaning of the phrase “self-presence.” The mere fact that a substance is itself and not another — as Aristotle argues, to Derrida’s chagrin — does not entail that any substance is “self-present.” A substance is zero-person, not a transparent first-person.

This is what makes the closing pages of “*Ousia and Gramme*” so unsatisfactory. In the first place, Derrida’s opening thesis is wrong: “Therefore we can only conclude that the entire system of metaphysical concepts, throughout its history, develops the so-called ‘vulgarity’ of the concept of time […] but also that an other concept of time cannot be opposed to it, since time in general belongs to metaphysical conceptuality.”114 The first part of this statement is correct in a sense — insofar as the vulgar concept of time sees it as consisting of a series of transient “nows,” it is tied to the metaphysical conception of a present now, although one that Husserl’s critique of Brentano already over-

114 Ibid., 63.
comes. But to assert further that Heidegger’s own conception of time cannot overcome this vulgarity neglects the fact that he actually does so. Dasein is thrown into an absence, and even if we view Dasein as existing in a single instant (which nothing in Heidegger forbids), that instant of time is not constituted by vulgar presence. The whole point is that we are thrown into something fundamentally absent. As if anticipating this objection, Derrida soon adds the following complaint: “that which gives us to think beyond the [Greek] closure [of presence] cannot be simply absent.” This statement has a mixed relation to Derrida’s reflections in “Violence and Metaphysics.” On the one hand, Derrida in that essay does credit Heidegger’s ontological difference with already doing the work of otherness that Levinas found missing in the German philosopher. But on the other hand, we recall that Derrida immediately recuperated the otherness of Being into presence by claiming that the inapparent must somehow appear, and that this is an unsurpassable limitation of philosophy. The latter sentiment enables him to turn now against the same otherness of Being in Heidegger that he had used against Levinas and to offer, in contradictory fashion, something that sounds like a Levinasian objection to Heidegger. Derrida adds, with a typically modern European note, that “absent, [absence] would either give us nothing to think or it would still be a negative mode of presence.”

Essentially, Derrida paints himself into the corner of Meno’s Paradox several decades before Meillassoux does the same. That ancient Paradox, we recall, says that we either know something or we do not, which Socrates opposes with philosophia, the idea that we can look for something that we do not have and will never have. The modern-day Meno counters, like Derrida, with the claim that we are then left either with negative theology or with good old presence, albeit it in scare-quotes, and no other option in sight. Derrida’s philosophy is thus a classic case of Modern Onto-Taxonomy. He calls for a “sign of […] excess [that] must

115 Ibid., 65.
116 Ibid.
be absolutely excessive as concerns presence-absence, all possible production or disappearance of beings in general, and yet, in some manner it must still signify it, in a manner unthinkable by metaphysics as such.”117 Where is Gratton when you need him? For all the hard knocks he dealt me for saying “somehow it must” and using the term “tension” before having a completely worked-out theory of all its details, he apparently gives Derrida a pass on saying that “in some manner” there must be an excess that signifies without signifying. But this is hardly a surprise. Derrideans always grant Derrida the license that they permit no one else, though this is perhaps “a merely sociological” fact, as Brassier might say.

Yet that is less interesting than Derrida’s coincidence with Meillassoux on this point. Readers of my book on the latter will recall my criticism of his argument that strong correlationism, which he attempts to radicalize into his own position, is not a form of idealism. He begins by deploying the correlational circle against both naïve realists and Kantian weak correlationists, using the familiar German Idealist argument — to think a thing outside thought is to turn it into a thought, and thus the circle of thought closes on itself. Nonetheless, Meillassoux adds, the fact that we cannot think the in-itself does not mean that there is none, and — presto! — the strong correlationist is not an idealist, because at least the former knows that thought and reality need not coincide. But nothing comes of this, because “reality” as anything different from thought has already been disqualified in the first step. Thus, there is only a choice between realism, weak correlationism, and outright idealism, and Meillassoux is stuck with idealism. See also Derrida, who accepts a version of the correlational circle (“there is no absence that does not also appear”) while adding that there must be another kind of excess that is somehow beyond the unified presence-absence of the circle that “must still signify, in a manner unthinkable by metaphysics as such.”118 But in for a dime, in for a dollar. If you

117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
accept the correlational argument, you can never emerge from it, no matter how sophisticated a word-trick you produce, since any possibility of “excess” has already been foreclosed in the first step of your argument. This is why I opt instead for a radicalization of weak correlationism, which avoids the impossibility of direct access as called for by mainstream realism, and the equal impossibility of an idealism that reduces things to their appearance, however sophisticated the dialectics that turn it into an “objective” idealism that at least avoids “subjectivism.” Eliminate the two impossibilities as Sherlock Holmes would do, and radicalized weak correlationism, however improbable, becomes the only place to look.

But perhaps Derrida is not so incompatible with the object-oriented approach after all. This is the verdict of Levi Bryant in his important article “The Time of the Object.” Bryant has a great deal to say about “Ousia and Grammē,” and he is more positive about it than I am. As usual, he shows considerable generosity to my position:

[In “Ousia and Grammē,”] Derrida immediately assimilates substances, things, to presence. Henceforth substance will be treated as a synonym for presence, such that to speak of substance is to speak of presence and to speak of presence is to speak of substance […] Yet] far from being characterized by presence, substance seems to be that which withdraws from presence, or that which is nowhere and never present. It is for this reason that Graham Harman argues that the very being of the substance of objects lies in withdrawal.119

At the end of his article, Bryant speaks in the same spirit, “Harman’s concept of substance as withdrawal therefore renders legible a whole series of ontological aporias” (TO 89). But a great

deal happens between these two passages. Even while seeming to endorse my conception of withdrawn substance, Bryant adopts in the meantime a number of elements from Derrida, Maturana/Varela, and Luhmann that he thinks will help us gain a better conception of substance than my own. In doing so, he repeats Shaviro’s claim that my substances are too “static” and need to be invested with greater dynamism.

Early in the article, Bryant quickly says something that I would never say myself, “if substances are necessarily withdrawn, if they cannot be treated as synonymous with presence, then this is precisely because they are fissured from within by time” (TO 74). In other words, Bryant wants a more dynamic theory of substance than the one I provide. We recall that for him, local manifestations are produced by various “regimes of attraction” or contexts of relation in which they occur. In a pair of fine examples, Bryant notes the different behavior of flames on earth and in a space station, and the different effects on human skin of different weather conditions (TO 75). Yet Bryant is still basically object-oriented in his approach, and thus he still holds that entities must have a certain independence from the various regimes of attraction in which they find themselves. Yes, a mouse will die if placed inside one of Robert Boyle’s vacuum pumps, but it is the mouse that dies rather than the entire context—death is a local manifestation of the mouse rather than the mouse itself, and rather than the experimental apparatus as a whole (TO 75–76). For Bryant, what entities possess apart from their various manifestations are powers. By contrast, qualities are simply manifestations of these powers. Furthermore, powers are “fluctuating […] because they can gain and lose powers, and because the power of a substance’s powers can diminish and intensify in their strength” (TO 77). Thus, the withdrawn powers of virtual proper being are not static, but constantly shift through variable intensities and even by adding or losing specific powers, “The affects of a substance are not fixed, but fluctuate in all sorts of ways as a result of processes within the substance and encounters with other substances” (TO 77). Thus, actualization is a temporal process — unlike in my theory of substance, which
treats process as belonging only to the sensual realm—and this leads Bryant to Derrida’s infamous notion of *différance*. Although *différance* has at least two main senses (differing, deferral), Bryant says that “Derrida seems to prefer the sense of difference as a *verb*, seeing ‘difference between’ as an *effect* of the activity of *différance*” (TO 78). Bryant makes a surprising link between Derrida and Whitehead when he adds that “substances and their differences […] are therefore like blooming flowers. Their extended nature is something that must be produced in an extending or extensionalizing activity akin to that described by Whitehead in *Process and Reality* in his theory of extension” (TO 79). Although Bryant wrote his article on the occasion of a Whitehead conference, there is more to his invocation of the British philosopher than this. We recall that Bryant is primarily a Deleuzean, and bridges between Deleuze and Whitehead have long since been built (as by Shaviro and Stengers) despite my aforementioned objections to this link.

Further distinguishing his OOO position from my own, which is sometimes abbreviated OOP (for Object-Oriented Philosophy), Bryant employs Derrida to argue that “the powers or potentials of an object themselves never become present, nor are they ever static, but rather they fluctuate in terms of the degree of their power and the power they possess” (TO 79–80). This brings us to the part of Bryant’s article influenced by autopoietic systems theory. From his previous arguments, he states, “it follows that the *identity* of a substance is not a fixed and abiding given that persists beneath change, but a perpetual *activity* on the part of substance” (TO 82). And further, “because objects are structured by *différance*, it follows that the identity of an object is not an abiding sameness, but a perpetual activity or process wherein the object constitutes itself as that object across time and space. Identity is a perpetual work objects must do in order to maintain themselves as that object” (TO 82). This having been established, it is easy for Bryant to turn to autopoiesis. As is well known, Maturana and Varela distinguish between “allopoietic” and “autopoietic” machines. The former are produced from the outside, with Bryant’s example being an asteroid formed from
the compression of numerous colliding rocks. A good example of an autopoietic machine, by contrast, would be a living organism such as a cell. The cell’s unity is not given once and for all, like the asteroid until it is destroyed, but must be constantly produced by labor on the cell’s interior. As Bryant puts it, “where allopoietic machines are largely indifferent to maintaining their unity across time, autopoietic machines both strive to maintain a particular sort of unity and are perpetually producing that unity through the interaction of their components” (TO 83). Autopoietic machines are also negentropic, in the sense that by producing their own unity, they work to decrease their own entropy. In this respect, transferring the terminology beyond its biological roots, “substances or objects are negentropic systems” (TO 83). The social systems theorist Niklas Luhmann, whose work Bryant knows well, draws on these ideas heavily. In Luhmann’s own words, “All elements pass away. They cannot endure as elements in time, and thus they must be constantly produced on the basis of whatever constellation of elements is actual at any given moment. Reproduction thus does not mean repeatedly producing the same, but rather reflexive production, production out of products.” Bryant glosses this nicely by saying that “identity is not something in addition to the changing qualities of that substance but is rather the activity of the substance itself” (TO 84). But despite this “structural” openness, there is “operational” closure, to use Luhmann’s terminology. Bryant cites the case of electric eels detecting other creatures in a river by means of electromagnetic fields, a type of perception closed to humans in our current evolutionary form (TO 84).

Nonetheless, différance would still seem to be incompatible with substance. As Bryant notes, “the local manifestations of substance are a product of deferral that is generally produced as a result of the exo-relations the substance enters into with other substances […] leading to the suspicion that substances are constituted by their relations, such that they have no autono-

nomous existence [apart] from their relations” (TO 86–87). Yet he also reminds us of the other sense of différance as “spacing,” through which “entities are differentiated from one another” (TO 87). It follows that difference is not just about the process of becoming-other, but also about the “scissions and divisions between entities whereby they become independent entities […] in the form of polemos” (TO 87). Turning to Derrida’s “Signature Event Context,” Bryant highlights his awareness of “the possibility of [a sign] breaking with the context in which it emerged, such that it can fall into other and different contexts” (TO 88), something we would never catch Ferdinand de Saussure saying about signs, given his purely differential conception of how they work.¹²¹ Derrida refers to this as the “iterability” of signs in places other than their originating contexts, and Bryant wonders why Derrida restricts iterability to signs rather than naturally extending them to allow for “iterable” substances that can be the same thing in multiple times and places (TO 89–90). In Voice and Phenomenon Derrida sounds a lot like David Hume (and Gratton) when claiming, in Bryant’s words, that “we must abandon the thesis that the synthesis of time is accomplished by a pre-existent transcendental identity or unity that affects the synthesis of traces of the past”¹²² (TO 90). It is the intentional object as a “bundle of traces” rather than a bundle of qualities, though to me this seems like needless forfeiture of what makes Husserl the thinker he is. Bryant challenges Derrida by saying that substances are real precisely as produced by “the interplay of these traces and differences themselves” (TO 90). There is no identity preceding the synthesis of time, since identity is the result of this synthesis itself (TO 90).


Bryant’s article has a number of points in its favor. First, it makes an ingenious attempt to synthesize the ideas of OOO with those of Derrida: a union that many find impossible, and that I for one prefer to downplay, given what I regard as Derrida’s excessive anti-realist baggage. Bryant also offers a vision of OOO as a dynamic theory opposed to the “static” model of reality that many readers see and reject in my version. As usual, he also does fine interdisciplinary work in linking these ideas with the autopoietic systems theories of Maturana, Varela, and Luhmann, which he already did in memorable form in his widely read book *The Democracy of Objects*. To explain why I cannot follow Bryant in all of this will require several steps.

Let’s start with his “virtual proper being,” which is made up of powers, but powers which shift in intensity and even increase and decrease in number. The problem here, as I see it, is that Bryant thereby joins Derrida in a retreat from Husserl to Hume, though we should note that Bryant has far less at stake in Husserl than does Derrida himself. Essentially, Bryant is saying that virtual proper being does not stay the same over time but is a “bundle” of altering powers with no inherent identity, even if it is “operationally closed” from its environment. He makes this clear at the end of the article when he proposes alliance with Derrida in holding that identities are not non-existent, but are *produced* through a bundle of traces synthesized in time. I imagine that Derrida would be happy to go along with this, because it cedes the central point that identity is a derivative product of the non-identical, though the French thinker would surely add the distracting proviso that the primary/derivative distinction “remains within the language of metaphysics,” thereby “erasing” this claim in the same moment as uttering it. But more importantly, such an alliance would leave Bryant with no way to account for the identity of a thing over time—given that its powers are constantly shifting—other than through a historical trajectory that links all the shifting powers as connected to

some original virtual proper being at some unknown point in the past. Something similar is attempted by both DeLanda and Latour, though I do not think that either has much success with the maneuver. The problem is that it is far too permissive about what constitutes the identity of an object in its assumption that all the details of the history of a thing must be inscribed in its present state. In this way, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the essential and accidental “powers” of a thing, except by means of some arbitrary external criterion.

As an example, imagine a precocious four-year-old child who watches a chess program on television, becomes intrigued by the game, and receives a small chess set as a gift. It is easy to imagine such a child introducing the game to a growing circle of friends and easily defeating them in match after match. Let’s now imagine that this child does not continue with chess, forms entirely different mental interests within a few years, and by midlife is a rusty and barely competent chess player. Perhaps the grown-up child has become a world-renowned cellist, one so remarkably gifted that critics frequently say they were “born” to be a cellist. Now, we can say that this musician’s former chess-playing powers have atrophied to the point that they barely exist any longer. Even so, a good number of their other four-year-old traits still persist as enduring aspects of their character. If we are devotees of Bryant’s philosophy, we will say that chess-playing power belonged to the musician for a while at ages four to five before “de-intensifying” or perhaps disappearing. Yet given that Bryant wishes to speak of virtual proper being solely as a “bundle of powers,” it is not clear how the chess-playing future cellist can be the same person as the post-chess-playing child. One could always push things to the limit and say that they were not the same child, that the child is “many,” an adventure across time: that we can only speak of the “lives” of the cellist in the plural (there are still intellectual circles today where pluralizing any noun is taken as a sign of superior insight). But in that case, it is not clear why the fifty-year-old cellist would have any closer relation to their four-year-old, chess-playing self than they would with other present-day cellist friends of similar lifestyles,
political views, taste in literature, and so forth. More generally, to say that identity is produced only from the outside is to sacrifice both the phenomenological fact that entities are recognized as the same despite changing features, and the ontological principle that the same object can simultaneously be seen in different ways from different vantage points without being more than one object. After all, the latter claim would soon lead us to Merleau-Ponty’s impossible view that a house is “the house seen from everywhere,” as if it were a sum of views rather than being what makes views of the house possible in the first place.\textsuperscript{124} Such a procedure treats everything as primarily a surface-effect or bundle-effect so that identities come second, as derivative products of those surfaces and bundles. But in that case, I am not sure why Bryant would still want to call his position object-oriented. It would be more accurate instead if he were to call himself “difference-oriented,” while adopting a Derridean position that iterability is all the identity we need.

Second, I do not think the references to autopoietic systems theory do the work Bryant wants them to do. According to systems theory, a system does maintain a certain identity across time from a standpoint outside it, which is precisely why it has often been accused of a bias toward political conservatism. I mentioned earlier that Luhmann is famous for holding that systems are extremely difficult to change, since they tend to interpret outside influences in their own terms; his contempt for political protests is just one result of this view. In short, it is not even clear that autopoiesis is more committed to change than to stasis, which is why Luhmann’s ontology is nowhere near as relational as Latour’s.

It is true that as soon as we look inside any system, we will see that a lot of work goes into maintaining it. My former employer, the American University in Cairo, is still there in basically the same form as I left it, but there has been such turnover from my time in administration that I count only three people still in

place of the dozen or more colleagues I had in the Provost’s Office. Eventually, those three will also be gone, no doubt replaced by competent successors. Any living or quasi-living system will experience abundant changes in its parts. But all this means is that the parts of a university administration, or of any system, have a limited time on the job. It does not follow that everything is in constant flux, so that identity is only a second-hand product. It was not through some change in my identity that I decided to leave university administration; my position involved relatively stable tasks over the course of four years, and this did not change even though the Provost, my boss, changed two or three times in rapid succession while I was there. In order to leave Cairo, I needed my wife to prefer to live elsewhere, then needed to cut down on commuting by accepting a new job closer to her own. In short, the notion of constant flux is a continuist solution to what is often a punctuated problem, as in the Eldredge/Gould or Margulis challenges to Darwinian gradualism in evolutionary theory. The parts of a cell seem to us to change constantly, but that is mostly because they die quickly by the standards of the human lifespan, which is not the same thing as saying that they have no identity but are immersed in Heraclitean flux. In my book *Immaterialism*, I criticized the actor-network approach to history on analogous grounds. Whereas ANT could treat the Dutch East India Company only as a flux or trajectory across time, characterized by constantly changing powers and personae, I argued that historical objects are best seen through a discrete series of initial symbioses — half a dozen or so, not infinite in number — that fix the nature of an entity early on, thus leading it into a long period of relative stability marked by a phase of ripening and a phase of decline, ending ultimately in destruction as it falls out of phase with its environment. By contrast, the “flux” model of history cannot explain why entities do remain relatively stable. When autopoiesis theory is successful, as in Luhmann’s best work, this is generally because it emphasizes the stability of a system over its many vacillations. Yes, every system is swarming with internal parts, but once we regard these parts as systems, we see that they too are marked
by relative stability, however short-lived by comparison with the solar system or even the Roman Empire.¹²⁵

Everyone knows that the world is marked by both stability and change, by the discrete and the continuous. The only question is how we account for both of these in our thinking. Aristotle does this with a division of labor, placing endurance and discreteness on the side of substance, and perishing and continuity on the side of accidents, time, space, and number. We have seen that the occasionalists opt instead for radical discreteness, and philosophers of difference for radical continuity, even when they add the last-minute epicycles of “folds” and “spacings.” The problem with both groups of extremists (the Bryant of “The Time of the Object” belongs with Derrida in the second group) is that they must treat the opposite term as a byproduct rather than as something real in its own right. OOO in my version follows a more Aristotelian model, treating the real as discrete and the sensual as the continuous, with ruptures on one level or the other intermittently rearranging the map. Note that I say intermittently, not constantly. Those who hold that flux and becoming must be constant are simply reducing all stasis to flux, and when everything is flux, then no flux is significant. The difference between stability and change becomes trivial.
