I believe that object-oriented ontology (OOO) is something truly new in the world. If so, it couldn’t have come along at a better time. Because something truly new in human history is happening: something we call global warming, something we call the Sixth Mass Extinction Event.

For some months now I’ve been thinking about entities I call hyperobjects.¹ These are objects that are massively distributed in time and space. Hyperobjects become visible to humans in an age of ecological crisis. Indeed, it’s really the other way around: hyperobjects have alerted us to the ecological crisis that defines our age: for instance, global warming and nuclear radiation from plutonium. I believe that object-oriented ontology gives us some much-needed tools for thinking hyperobjects. I’ve been studying the various properties of hyperobjects. They’re nonlocal. They’re foreshortened in time.

¹ Timothy Morton, The Ecological Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 130-5.
They’re viscous—they have the strange quality of sticking to you the more you try to shake them off. The more you know about them, the more you figure out how enmeshed you are in them. The more you know about them, the stranger and even more terrifying they become. They occupy a high dimensional phase space so it’s only possible for humans to see pieces or aspects of them at any one time. 2 To understand hyperobjects, we badly need an upgraded theory of the sublime, which deals in scary and unknowable things. And if we’re going to do that, we might as well take on the whole issue of rhetoric as it pertains to objects. It’s in this spirit of working towards a greater understanding of our ecological emergency that I offer this essay.

Philosophy Should Be about Everything

Slinky Malinki is a children’s story about a black cat, a charming figure who steals all kinds of objects in the dead of night: “Slippers and sausages, / biscuits, balloons, / brushes and bandages, / pencils and spoons.” 3 At the climax of the story, the stolen objects begin to act with a spooky agency: “The glue toppled over / and gummed up the pegs; / the jersey unravelled and tangled his legs. / He tripped on the bottles / and slipped on the sock, / he tipped over sideways / and set off the clock.” Now if a children’s book can talk about objects in this way why can’t philosophy? Let’s put it in even starker terms. A simple children’s book tells me more about real things than most contemporary philosophy. Why?

To deliver anything so we humans can see it you need rhetoric. You need some kind of glamour. It would be churlish to point fingers and go “Hey, gotcha! Using a human tool to describe nonhuman entities! Busted!” I mean, come on, what are we speculative realists supposed to do, just sort of belch, and hope you can smell the pizza or whatever? In this

2 For easily accessible discussions of hyperobjects, including lectures (mp3), search for ‘hyperobjects’ at http://www.ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com.

essay I’m going to suggest that rhetoric isn’t just ear candy for humans, or even for sentient beings. I’m going to suggest that rhetoric is what happens when there is an encounter between any object, that is, between alien beings.

Heidegger’s essay “Language” is about anything but language as a sign for something—more like language as an alien entity in its own right. Language is a kind of object. And language is full of objects. Take onomatopoeia: granted, guns go pan in French and bang in English but in neither do they go cluck or boing. Bang and pan are linguistic contributions by guns. Before they are French and English, they are gun-ish, and get translated into human. Likewise plop and splat, crack, growl, tintinnabulation and sussurate and even perhaps visual terms such as shimmer and sparkle. Those sorts of words are a kind of sonic translation of a visual effect, the rapid diffusion of light across a moving surface. Shimmering is to light as muttering is to sound. Language is not totally arbitrary. And it is not entirely human—even from a non-Heideggerian perspective.

Then there’s the fact that language always occurs in a medium, what Roman Jakobson calls the contact. In OOO-ese, this means that objects encounter one another inside another object—electromagnetic fields, for instance, or a valley. When the interior of the object intrudes in some sensual way, we notice it as some equipmental malfunction: “Check, check, microphone check. Is this thing on?” More generally, media translate and are translated by messages. We never hear a voice as such, only a voice carried by the wind, or by electromagnetic waves, or by water, or by kazoo. Water makes whales sound like they do. Air and gravity make humans speak certain words in certain ways. Valleys encourage yodeling.

5 The linguist John Lawler has compiled an archive of research in this field, called phonosemantics, at http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jlawler/.
Speculations II

These directives don’t simply float around words, but emanate from words themselves. What’s happening when I read *Slinky Malinki* to a listener? He or she is picking up on my delivery, my voice, the way my son inspires me to speak (since he requests me to read it so often). The story contains words that ‘want’ to be read a certain way, that make you hear them a certain way—the words and rhythms and rhymes are directives that guide my voices and gestures as I deliver the text.

There are five parts of rhetoric: invention, ordering, style, memory and delivery. I’m going to argue that delivery is in fact the *first part of object-oriented rhetoric*, not the fifth. Why? Because rather than simply being the envelope in which the message is handed to you, delivery is the message, directly. Delivery is the object in its weird, clownish hypocris[y. Delivery has memory, a certain persistence. Memory is the way an object maintains or not its consistency, the way it conjures and is possessed by phantasmal memories and dreams, the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to. Delivery has style—imagery floating free from the object’s surface (we’ll see how significant this is when we study ekphrasis in a moment). Delivery has *ordo* and *dispositio*: an arrangement of notes and a tempo of parts (I shall now begin to use the technical terms of classical rhetoric). Delivery has *inventio*, an irreducible withdrawnness.

Attitudes to rhetoric have profoundly affected the long history of philosophy. Consider in particular the separation of rhetoric from invention and ordering, or as they could be known, science and logic. This separation, a massive world-historical event inaugurated by rhetoricians such as Peter Ramus in the Renaissance, defined earlier metaphysicians as scholastic petitfoggers obsessed with angels and pins. It gave rise to science as a separate discipline and the reduction of rhetoric to style—and the subsequent withering of style into tropology, and the subsequent withering of tropology into metaphor. So that when we read a De Man or a Dawkins,

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8 I borrow the term *directive* from Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 7-175.
a Derrida or a Dennett, we are still reading someone fully caught in the Ramist pinball machine that divides style from substance.

This affects everything. It’s deeply about how ontology has become taboo. It’s about how the aesthetic arose as a dimension separate from, even hostile to, rhetoric (consider Kant’s opposition to rhetoric). It’s about how philosophy has become obsessed with perfect arguments rather than suggestive cognitive work (as Harman puts it so well in the final chapter of *Prince of Networks*). It’s why the only alternative to perfect freeze-dried arguments is sheer tropological play. It’s why there is a desperate search for new and improved forms of metaphysics such as the lava lampy materialisms on offer currently, which are in fact a regression even from the choice between freeze-dried perfection and powdered nothingness. So in this essay I’m going to say a lot of counter-intuitive stuff.

I believe that OOO takes us out of that pinball machine. Precisely because it imagines style as an elementary aspect of causality rather than as candy on top of lumps of stuff bumping together indifferently.

### A Rhetorical Question

We could rewrite the whole of rhetoric as object-oriented by *reversing the implicit order of Aristotle’s five parts of rhetoric*. Instead of starting with invention and proceeding through disposition to elocution, then on to memory and delivery, we should start with delivery. Delivery is precisely the physicality of your rhema, your speech. Demosthenes used to practice his delivery by filling his mouth with pebbles and walking uphill. Pebbles and hills played a part in Demosthenes’ rhetoric. But we’ll see that rhetoric is far more concerned with nonhuman entities than that.

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Speculations II

We will find that reversing the order explodes the teleology implicit in common assumptions about rhetoric (common for instance in composition classes): first you have an idea, then you figure out how to argue it, then you pour on some nice ear candy, then you recite it or upload it or whatever. Withdrawn objects do not exist in-order-to anything.

We often assume that delivery is secondary to rhetoric, kind of like the volume control or the equalizer on a stereo—it’s a matter of conditioning the externals of rhetoric. This isn’t what Demosthenes and Cicero thought. Asked to name the most important parts of rhetoric, Demosthenes replied “First, delivery; second, delivery; third, delivery”—at which point his interlocutor conceded, but Demosthenes was ready to go on. If we rethink delivery not as a bottle into which the already-existing argument is poured like a liquid, nor as an envelope that delivers the message like mail, but as a physical object and its sensual medium, we will be thinking of it like Quintilian, who says of great actors that “they add so much to the charm of even the greatest poets, that the verse moves us far more when heard than when read, while they succeed in securing a hearing even for the most worthless authors, with the result that they repeatedly win a welcome on the stage that is denied them in the library.” The object-oriented explanation for this is that the voice, an object with its own richness and hidden depths, translates the words it speaks—a spooky evocation of the secret heart of objects not via revelation but via obscurity—as if (as if, mind you) it were summoning forth an obscure dimension of language. Quintilian discusses Quintus Hortensius, whose voice must have “possessed some charm” for people to rank him second only to Cicero, given how awful his written speeches appeared. Now before you go accusing me of logocentrism, realize that it’s not that voice

11 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 11.3. This fourth part of the Loeb Classical Library edition of Quintilian is not readily available in hard copy, but an online version can be found at at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/11C*.html#3.

12 Ibid., 11.3.

13 Ibid., 11.3.
really gives access to the hidden depth of meaning—it’s that voice is an object in its own right, vibrating with uncanny overtones. Like ekphrasis, like metaphor, voice leaps forth towards us, unleashing its density and opacity. Voice has, as Graham Harman puts it, allure.\(^{14}\)

We can proceed from thinking of voice as an object in its own right to asserting that a pencil resting against the inside of a plastic cup is a delivery of a pencil, a certain kind of physical posture similar to a loud voice or a cajoling whine. A house is delivery, disporting its occupants and its rooms and its backyard into various configurations. A record player is delivery, as is an mp3 player. A book is delivery. A waterfall is delivery. A computer game is delivery. A spoon is delivery. A volcano is delivery. A ribbon is delivery. A black hole is delivery. Working backwards, we would end up at \textit{inventio}. We could say that \textit{inventio} was actually object withdrawal—a dark or reverse \textit{inventio}, ‘covery’ rather than ‘discovery.’

Object-oriented rhetoric is not the long march towards the explicit, but a gravitational field that sucks us into implicit secrecy and silence. Harman argues that metaphor makes even the sensual qualities of objects, which seem readily available to us, seem withdrawn.\(^{15}\) What metaphor does, then, is not unlike another trope, which the old manuals call \textit{obscurum per obscurae}: describing something obscure by making it seem even more obscure.\(^{16}\) Percy Shelley was very fond of this trope—his images endarken rather than enlighten.\(^{17}\) If we generalize this to the whole of rhetoric, object-oriented rhetoric becomes the way objects obscure themselves in fold upon fold of mysterious robes, caverns, and fortresses of solitude and octopus ink.

Instead of looking at the five parts of rhetoric as a step by


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 162.


step recipe for making meaning explicit ("first you pick a subject, then you organize your argument...")), we could see them as simultaneous aspects of any object that render that object mysterious and strange yet direct and in your face. Accounting for them this way prevents us from distorting them as present-at-hand entities or metaphysical substances decorated with accidents: there’s a plastic cup and now we add some color, now we see it has a certain shape, etc. This simultaneity of aspects accounts for what musicians call timbre, a word that conjures up the substantiality of timber. A note played on a plastic cup sounds very different from the same note played on a smoothly polished wooden cylinder. Timbre is the sensual appearance of an object to another object, in contrast to Xavier Zubiri’s notes, which are aspects of the hidden dimension of a thing. So rhetoric in an object-oriented sense is the way the timbre of an object manifests.

If we started with delivery, the availability of a sensual object, we’d immediately unfurl a host of mysterious qualities that spoke in strange whispers about the object of which they are aspects. Delivery deforms what it delivers and the deliveree, stuttering and caricaturing them, remixing and remastering them. Working backwards, the sensual object persists (memoria), it displays a unique ‘style’ (elocutio), it organizes its notes and parts (dispositio and ordo), and it contains a molten core that withdraws from all contact (inventio). The plastic cup does this to the pencil. The garden does this to the house. The plastic cup even does it to itself. The parts of the cup ‘deliver’ the whole in a more or less distorted way, accounting for various aspects of its history and presenting the cup with a certain style, articulated according to certain formal arrangements—and finally, these qualities themselves are uncannily unavailable for present-at-hand inspection.

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19 Lingis, Imperative, 135.

The molten core is wrapped within the delivery. Latin gives us a clue about this by translating the Greek for delivery, *hypokrisis*, as either *actio* or *pronuntiatio*. We get the word ‘hypocrisy’ from *hypokrisis*. It stems from the verb *to judge* or *interpret*—objects interpret themselves. Yet in so doing they are like actors, both dissembling and generating an entirely fresh set of objects—as an orchestra ‘interprets’ a score by playing it. For instance, *hypokrisis* can signify the tone or manner of an animal’s cry. The cry expresses the animal, yet it’s also an object all its own. *Pronuntiatio* is more like the manifest appearance of an object to another object. It speaks to the dissembling part of *hypokrisis*. *Actio* sounds more like execution (Heidegger’s *Vollzug*); the dark unfolding of an object’s hidden essence. *Actio* speaks to the way objects magically foam with being.

Objects, then, are hypocrites, forever split from within. I’d rather live in a hypocritical Universe than a cynical one. We’ve had quite enough of that, a symptom of how the standard philosophical game for two hundred years has been “Anything you can do I can do meta.” That is, philosophy has more or less tacitly agreed that leaping away from objects into the beyond is the mark of true philosophy and intelligence.

Is it not possible to imagine that an object-oriented rhetorical theory might account for vicarious causation, the only kind of causation possible between ontologically vacuum-sealed objects? Harman talks about ‘elements’ or ‘quality objects’—the aspects of sensual objects that somehow communicate with one another. Could my strange reverse rhetoric supply a model for this? Is it possible then that an element resembles a phrase, or a rhetorical period? Harman hints that the linguistic trope of metaphor might be alluring precisely

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Speculations II

because it gives us a taste of some kind of deeper causality.\textsuperscript{24} Can we imagine the interaction between a pen and a wooden table as made up of rhetorical phrases and periods, whereby the elements of one object persuade another? Consider the Latin root of persuasion (\textit{suadeo}), which has to do with how one object urges, impels, induces or sways another.\textsuperscript{25} The aesthetic, in other words, is not a superficial candy coating on the real, but is instead the lubrication, the energy and the glue of causality as such. To think so is truly to exit the Ramist pinball machine.

A Speculative Sublime

According to OOO, objects all have four aspects. They withdraw from access by other objects. They appear to other objects. They are specific entities. And that’s not all: they really exist. Aesthetically, then, objects are uncanny beasts. If they were pieces of music, they might be some impossible combination of slapstick sound effects, Sufi singing, Mahler and hardcore techno. If they were literature, they might exist somewhere between The Commedia Dell’ Arte, The Cloud of Unknowing, War and Peace and Waiting for Godot. Pierrot Lunaire might be a good metaphor for grotesque, frightening, hilarious, sublime objects.

The object-oriented sublime doesn’t come from some beyond, because this beyond turns out to be a kind of optical illusion of correlationism. There’s nothing underneath the Universe of objects. Or not even nothing, if you prefer thinking it that way. The sublime resides in particularity, not in some distant beyond. And the sublime is generalizable to all objects, insofar as they are all what I’ve called strange strangers, that is, alien to themselves and to one another in an irreducible way.\textsuperscript{26}

Of the two dominant theories of the sublime, we have a

\textsuperscript{24} Harman, Guerilla Metaphysics, 172.
\textsuperscript{25} Lewis and Short, Latin Dictionary, suadeo.
\textsuperscript{26} Morton, The Ecological Thought, 38–50.
choice between authority and freedom, between exteriority and interiority. But both choices are correlationist. That is, both theories of the sublime have to do with human subjective access to objects. On the one hand we have Edmund Burke, for whom the sublime is shock and awe: an experience of terrifying authority to which you must submit.27 On the other hand, we have Immanuel Kant, for whom the sublime is an experience of inner freedom based on some kind of temporary cognitive failure. Try counting up to infinity. You can’t. But that is precisely what infinity is. The power of your mind is revealed in its failure to sum infinity.28

Both sublimes assume that: (1) the world is specially or uniquely accessible to humans; (2) the sublime uniquely correlates the world to humans; and (3) what’s important about the sublime is a reaction in the subject. The Burkean sublime is simply craven cowering in the presence of authority: the law, the might of a tyrant God, the power of kings, and the threat of execution. No real knowledge of the authority is assumed—terrified ignorance will do. Burke argues outright that the sublime is always a safe pain, mediated by the glass panels of the aesthetic. (That’s why horror movies, a truly speculative genre, try to bust through this aesthetic screen at every opportunity.)

What we need is a more speculative sublime that actually tries to become intimate with the other, and here Kant is at any rate preferable to Burke. Those more sympathetic to Kant might argue that there is some faint echo of reality in the experience of the sublime. Certainly the aesthetic dimension is a way in which the normal subject-object dichotomy is suspended in Kant. And the sublime is as it were the essential subroutine of the aesthetic experience, allowing us to experience the power of our mind by running up against some external obstacle. Kant references telescopes and microscopes that expand hu-

man perception beyond its limits.\footnote{Kant, Critique, 106.} His marvelous passage on the way one's mind can encompass human height and by simple multiplication comprehend the vastness of "Milky Way systems" is sublimely expressive of the human capacity to think.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} It's also true that the Kantian sublime inspired the powerful speculations of Schelling, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and more work needs to be done teasing out how those philosophers begin to think a reality beyond the human (the work of Grant and Woodard stands out in particular at present).\footnote{Iain Hamilton Grant, Philosophies of Nature after Schelling (London: Continuum, 2006) and Ben Woodard, Slime Dynamics (forthcoming with Zero books).} It's true that in §28 of the Third Critique, Kant does talk about how we experience the ‘dynamical sublime’ in the terror of vastness, for instance of the ocean or the sky. But this isn’t anything like intimacy with the sky or the ocean. In fact, in the next sections, Kant explicitly rules out anything like a scientific or even probing analysis of what might exist in the sky. As soon as we think of the ocean as a body of water containing fish and whales, rather than as a canvas for our psyche; as soon as we think of the sky as the real Universe of stars and black holes, we aren’t experiencing the sublime (§29):

Therefore, when we call the sight of the starry sky sublime, we must not base our judgment upon any concepts of worlds that are inhabited by rational beings, and then [conceive of] the bright dots that we see occupying the space above us as being these worlds' suns, moved in orbits prescribed for them with great purposiveness; but we must base our judgment regarding merely on how we see it, as a vast vault encompassing everything, and merely under this presentation may we posit the sublimity that a pure aesthetic judgment attributes to this object. In the same way, when we judge the sight of the ocean we must not do so on the basis of how we think, it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge which we possess (but which is not contained in
Tim Morton – Sublime Objects

the direct intuition), e.g., as a vast realm of aquatic creatures, or as the
great reservoir supplying the water for the vapors that impregnate the
air with clouds for the benefit of the land, or again as an element that,
while separating continents from one another, yet makes possible
the greatest communication among them; for all such judgments will
be teleological. Instead we must be able to view the ocean as poets do,
merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye—e.g., if we observe
it while it is calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by the sky;
or, if it turbulent, as being like an abyss threatening to engulf every-
thing—and yet find it sublime.32

While we may share Kant's anxiety about teleology, his main
point is less than satisfactory from a speculative realist point
of view. We positively shouldn't speculate when we experience
the sublime. The sublime is precisely the lack of speculation.
Should we then just throw in the towel and drop the sublime
altogether, choosing only to go with horror—the limit experi-
ence of sentient lifeforms—rather than the sublime, as several
speculative realists have done? Can we only speculate from
and into a position of feeling our own skin about to shred,
or vomit about to exit from our lungs?

Yet horror presupposes the proximity of at least one other
entity: a lethal virus, an exploding hydrogen bomb, an ap-
proaching tsunami. Intimacy is thus a precondition of horror.
From this standpoint, even horror is too much of a reaction
shot, too much about how entities correlate with an observer.
What we require is an aesthetic experience of coexisting with
1+n other entities, living or nonliving. What speculative real-
ism needs would be a sublime that grants a kind of intimacy
with real entities. This is precisely the kind of intimacy pro-
hibited by Kant, for whom the sublime requires a Goldilocks
aesthetic distance, not too close and not too far away (§25):

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\text{in order to get the full emotional effect from the magnitude of the}
\text{pyramids one must neither get too close to them nor stay too far away.}
\text{For if one stays too far away, then the apprehended parts (the stones}
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32 Kant, Critique, 130.
Speculations II

on top of one another) are presented only obscurely, and hence their presentation has no effect on the subject's aesthetic judgment; and if one gets too close, then the eye needs some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the peak, but during that time some of the earlier parts are invariably extinguished in the imagination before it has apprehended the later ones, and hence the comprehension is never complete.³³

The Kantian aesthetic dimension is an experiential condom that shrink wraps objects in a protective film. Safe from the threat of radical intimacy, the inner space of Kantian freedom develops unhindered. Good taste is knowing precisely when to vomit—when to expel any foreign substance perceived to be disgusting and therefore toxic.³⁴ This won’t do in an ecological era in which ‘away’—the precondition for vomiting—no longer exists. Our vomit just floats around somewhere near us, since there is now no ‘away’ to which we can flush it in good faith.

Against the correlationist sublime I’m going to argue for a speculative sublime, an object-oriented sublime to be more precise. There is a model for just such a sublime on the market—the oldest extant text on the sublime, Peri Hypsous by Longinus. The Longinian sublime is about the physical intrusion of an alien presence. The Longinian sublime can thus easily extend to include non-human entities—and, I shall argue, non-sentient ones. Rather than making ontic distinctions between what is and what isn’t sublime, Longinus describes how to achieve sublimity. Because he is more interested in how to achieve the effect of sublimity rhetorically than what the sublime is as a human experience, Longinus leaves us free to extrapolate all kinds of sublime events between all kinds of entities.

Longinus’ sublime is already concerned with an object-like alien presence—he might call it God but we could easily call it a Styrofoam peanut or the Great Red Spot of Jupiter. The

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³³ Kant, Critique, 108.

way objects appear to one another is sublime: it’s a matter of contact with alien presence, and a subsequent work of radical translation. Longinus thinks this as contact with another: “Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind.”\(^{35}\) Echo, mind—it’s as if the mind were not an ethereal ghost but a solid substance that ricochets off walls. We could extend this to include the sensuality of objects. Why not? So many supposedly mental phenomena manifest in an automatic way, as if they were objects: dreams, hallucinations, strong emotions. Coleridge says about his opium dream that inspired *Kubla Khan* that the images arose as distinct things in his mind. This isn’t surprising if cognition is an assemblage of kluge-like unit operations that just sort of do their thing. It’s not that this pen is alive. It’s that everything that is meaningful about my mind resting on the pen can also be said of the pen resting on the desk. Consciousness may be sought after in the wrong place by neuroscientists and AI (and anti-AI) theorists: it may be incredibly default.

Let’s consider Longinus’ terms. Luckily for OOO there are four of them: transport, phantasia, clarity and brilliance. Even more luckily, the four correspond to Harman’s interpretation of the Heideggerian fourfold. The trick is to read the terms in reverse, as we did with rhetoric in general. The first two terms, clarity and brilliance, refer to the actuality of object–object encounters. The second two, transport and phantasia, refer to the appearance of these encounters. It sounds counter-intuitive that brilliance would equate to withdrawal, but when you read what Plato, Longinus and Heidegger have to say about this term (*ekphanestaton*) you will agree with me.

1. Brilliance: Earth. Objects as withdrawn ‘something at all,’ apart from access.
2. Clarity: Gods. Objects as specific, apart from access.
3. Transport: Mortals. Objects as something-at-all for another object.
4. Phantasia: Sky. Objects as specific appearance to another object.

We’ll see immediately that each one sets up relationships with an alien presence.

(1) Brilliance. In Greek, *to ekphanestaton*, luster, brilliance, shining-out (it’s a superlative, so it really means ‘superlative brilliance.’ Longinus declares that “in much the same way as dim lights vanish in the radiance of the sun, so does the all-pervading effluence of grandeur utterly obscure[s] the artifice of rhetoric.” Brilliance is what hides objects. Brilliance is the withdrawnness of the object, its total inaccessibility. In the mode of the sublime, it’s as if we are able to taste that, even though it’s strictly impossible. Longinus compares it to the gushing magma of an exploding volcano—a description that’s highly congruent with several places in Harman’s work in which he refers to the molten core of an object. The light of this magma is blinding—that’s why it’s withdrawal, strangely. It’s right there, it’s an actual object. Longinus thus calls this brilliance an uncanny fact of the sublime.

For Plato *to ekphanestaton* was an index of the essential beyond. For the object-oriented ontologist, brilliance is the appearance of the object in all its stark unity. Something is coming through. Or better: we realize that something was already there. This is the realm of the uncanny, the strangely familiar and familiarly strange.

(2) Clarity (*enargeia*). ‘Manifestation,’ ‘self-evidence.’ This has to do with ekphrasis. Ekphrasis in itself is interesting for OOO, because ekphrasis is precisely an object-like entity that looms out of descriptive prose. It’s a hyper-descriptive part that jumps out at the reader, petrifying her or him (turning him to stone), causing a strange suspension of time like Bullet Time in *The Matrix*. It’s a little bit like what Deleuze means when he talks about ‘time crystals’ in his study of cinema. This is the jumping-out aspect of ekphrasis, a bristling vividness that interrupts the flow of the narrative, jerking the

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37 Ibid. 121.
reader out of her or his complacency. Quintilian stresses the time-warping aspect of *enargeia* (the term is *metastasis* or *metathesis*), transporting us in time as if the object had its own gravitational field into which it sucks us. The object in its bristling specificity.

Longinus asserts that while sublime rhetoric must contain *enargeia*, sublime poetry must evoke *ekplexis*—astonishment.39 This may also be seen as a kind of specific impact. In strictly OOO terms, ekphrasis is a translation that inevitably misses the withdrawn object, but which generates its own kind of object in the process. Ekphrasis speaks to how objects move and have agency, despite our awareness or lack of awareness of them; Harman’s analogy of the drugged man in *Tool Being* provides a compelling example.40 Now if somehow you get it wrong, you end up with bombast: the limit where objects become vague, undefined, just clutter (the word *bombast* literally means ‘stuffing,’ the kind you’d put in shoulder pads).

Ekphrasis accounts for a phenomenon that pertains to hyperobjects, something I’m calling viscosity. The hyperobject is so massively distributed, and so bizarre, that it melts you. And then you realize you’re covered in it, or suffused in it like radiation.

(3) Transport. The narrator makes you feel something stirring inside you, some kind of divine or demonic energy, as if you were inhabited by an alien. ‘Being moved,’ ‘being stirred.’41 We can imagine the sublime as a kind of transporter, like in *Star Trek*, a device for beaming the alien object into another object’s frame of reference. Transport consists of sensual contact with objects as an alien universe. Just as the transporter can only work by translating particles from one place to another, so Longinian transport only works by one object translating another via its specific frames of reference. In so doing, we become aware of what was lost in translation. Transport thus depends upon a kind of void, the withdrawn

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reality of the universe of objects, the aspect that is forever sealed from access but nevertheless thinkable.

The machinery of transport, the transporter as such, is what Longinus calls amplification: not bigness but a feeling of (as Doctor Seuss puts it) biggering: “[a figure] employed when the matters under discussion or the points of an argument allow of many pauses and many fresh starts from section to section, and the grand phrases come rolling out one after another with increasing effect;” in this way Plato, for instance, “often swells into a mighty expanse of grandeur.” By attuning our mind to the exploding notes of an object, amplification sets up a sort of subject-quake, a soul-quake.

(4) Phantasia. Often translated as ‘visualization.’ Visualisation not imagery: producing an inner object. It’s imagery in you not in the text. Quintilian remarks that phantasia makes absent things appear to be present. Phantasia conjures an object. If I say “New York” and you’re a New Yorker, you don’t have to tediously picture each separate building and street. You sort of evoke New Yorkness in your mind. That’s phantasia. What I’ve called the poetics of spice operates this way: the use of the word ‘spice’ (rather than say cinammon or pepper) in a poem acts as a blank allowing for the work of olfactory imagination akin to visualization. It’s more like a hallucination than an intended thought. In stories, for instance, phantasia generates an object-like entity that separates us from the narrative flow—puts us in touch with the alien as alien. Visualization should be slightly scary: you are summoning a real deity after all, you are asking to be overwhelmed, touched, moved, stirred.

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46 On the seductiveness of phantasms, see Lingis, *Imperative* 107–116.
In OOO terms, *phantasia* is the capacity of an object to imagine another object. Sensual contact with the alien as a specific object. How paper looks to stone. How scissors look to paper. Do objects dream? Do they contain virtual versions of other objects inside them? These would be examples of *phantasia*. How one object impinges upon another one. There is too much of it. It magnetizes us with a terrible compulsion.

Now for an example of the Longinian sublime, take Harman’s first great use of the ‘meanwhile’ trope (which Meillasoux calls the *rich elsewhere*), in his paper “Object-Oriented Philosophy”:

But beneath this ceaseless argument, reality is churning. Even as the philosophy of language and its supposedly reactionary opponents both declare victory, the arena of the world is packed with diverse objects, their forces unleashed and mostly unloved. Red billiard ball smacks green billiard ball. Snowflakes glitter in the light that cruelly annihilates them; damaged submarines rust along the ocean floor. As flour emerges from mills and blocks of limestone are compressed by earthquakes, gigantic mushrooms spread in the Michigan forest. While human philosophers bludgeon each other over the very possibility of ‘access’ to the world, sharks bludgeon tuna fish and icebergs smash into coastlines.

All of these entities roam across the cosmos, inflicting blessings and punishments on everything they touch, perishing without a trace or spreading their powers further—as if a million animals had broken free from a zoo in some Tibetan cosmology...47

This is nobody’s world. This is sort of the opposite of stock in trade environmentalist rhetoric (which elsewhere I’ve called ecomimesis): “Here I am in this beautiful desert, and I can prove to you I’m here because I can write that I see a red snake disappearing into that creosote bush. Did I tell you I was in a desert? That’s me, here, in a desert. I’m in a desert.”48

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48 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aestheti-
Speculations II

This is no man's land. But it's not a bleak nothingness. Bleak nothingness, it turns out, is just the flip side of correlationism's world. No. This is a crowded Tibetan zoo, an Expressionist parade of uncanny, clownlike objects. We’re not supposed to kowtow to these objects as Burke would wish. Yet we’re not supposed to find our inner freedom either (Kant). It’s like one of those maps with the little red arrow that says You Are Here, only this one says You Are Not Here.

From the Sublime to the Ridiculous

This essay’s title comes from Slavoj Žižek, whose Sublime Object of Ideology was the first book of his I ever read back in 1991. Žižek’s sublime object is sublime for someone, not in itself (that is, among its constituent objects) or with other objects. The sublime object of ideology is a correlationist sublime that really only has one message to deliver: that objects are an ideological fantasy. Yet the sublime gets at something that’s essential to objects: their withdrawnness and the way in which at the same time they manifest, in all their scintillating particularity, the kind Longinus calls ekphanestaton. The sublime underpins other kinds of aesthetic interaction between objects—even ridiculous ones.

Are there non-sublime interactions between objects? Of course. One can easily imagine, for instance, a ridiculous interaction between objects. The trick would be to ascertain whether the objects found the interaction ridiculous. A shoe meeting a banana skin might be a tragedy for either party, not a farce.

Slinky Malinki’s theft of household objects produces a marvelous Latour litany, a frequent figure of speech in OOO. It’s frequent because Latour Litanies are collections of nonrepeating, unique objects, as diverse as possible—a sort of mini-revenge of unicities against global goo and global

systems. Then the objects begin to malfunction, they unleash their forces on one another and the cat. Suddenly the family appears, but the objects via which they appear show up first: “On went the lights, / BANG went the door / and out came the family, / one, two three, four.”50 We perceive this appearance in the framework of malfunctioning equipment (that’s the sublime); the lights go on in an unconscious parody of Heidegger’s lichtung. “On went the lights” is the climax, the enargeia, that beams the family down—they are seen as aliens in their own house.

We need an object-oriented sublime in an ecological age. Google Earth wouldn’t qualify as Kantian sublimity—it’s too explicitly scientific—but it would count as Longinian, transporting us to real places. Ecological entities such as global warming need a Longinian sublime to evoke them. This requires sensitivity to hyperobjects, contact with alien entities that are here among us now. (We could apply the five parts of rhetoric to hyperobjects. Delivery as their sublime existence. Memory as their temporal foreshortening and the fact that they’re already here. Style as their viscosity and nonlocality. Ordering as their properties as derivatives, byproducts etc. that are more intense than the objects and relations in which they originate. Invention as the mysterious withdrawal common to all objects but obvious in their case.)

It would be a good start to look away from the supposed ‘content’ of rhetoric, and even away from styles such as metaphor or ekphrasis, and towards the most physical form, delivery. Then truly we can say that by generating more sublime objects of tone, pitch, bearing, rhythm, torque, spin, nonlocality, lineation, viscosity, tension, entanglement, syntax, climate, heft, density, nuclear fission, inertia, rhyme (the list goes on and on), rhetoric really does give us a glimpse of real sensual things, things even a cat and an eighteen month year old boy can steal, read about and get tangled up in.

50 Dodd, Slinky Malinki, 26.