

# A Dialogue Between Graham Harman and Tristan Garcia

*Moderated by Rik Peters*

April 6th, 2013 at Wijsgerig Festival Drift, in the OT301 in Amsterdam, NL

*Wijsgerig Festival Drift is an annual student-organized philosophy festival in Amsterdam, with close ties to the student association of the philosophy department at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). The programme consists of lectures by philosophers in two or three different halls; live music; poetry. The combination of location (an old film academy building), time (from 8 pm to 4 am) and content (serious academic philosophy) makes for an unusual evening. In 2013, the festival's theme was 'de dingen de baas', which translates to 'things in charge' or 'in charge of things'. The headliner was the debate between Graham Harman and Tristan Garcia.*

## Rik Peters

We are very pleased to welcome two special guests who will be having a special dialogue. For the next hour and fifteen minutes, we will talk about things.

Things and objects - as Noortje Marres has just shown<sup>1</sup> - are traditionally only half of what philosophy is about; half of the duo of the subject and the object; the human and the thing. In Graham Harman's words, philosophy traditionally

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<sup>1</sup> Just prior to this debate, Noortje Marres gave a lecture titled 'Nothing special: for a more forgiving nonhumanism'.

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had a 'human-world duopoly'<sup>2</sup>, a dual monarchy of human and world, a 'Habsburg metaphysics'<sup>3</sup> forever incapable of considering humans as 'just one kind of entity among trillions of others',<sup>4</sup> and equally incapable of considering what things do when there's no humans around. Objects are pushed from the centre stage to the periphery of philosophy, as human consciousness lays a claim to total power.

However, the objects are back, and they're back with a vengeance. Tonight, Drift welcomes perhaps the two leading figures in the philosophical turn towards objects: Graham Harman, of the American University at Cairo, and Tristan Garcia, of the Universite de Picardie at Amiens.

Graham Harman was one of the first to put objects back on the philosophical agenda in a series of books, starting with his dissertation on Heidegger's analysis of the tool. He is one of the original four Speculative Realists, having taken part in the seminal conference in London in 2007, and has been in constant philosophical debate with the other speculative realists ever since. Besides tirelessly developing an Object Oriented Ontology, he has published on such diverse figures as Bruno Latour, H.P. Lovecraft and Quentin Meillassoux. I should also mention that he has published a book of literary experiments with philosophical myths.<sup>5</sup>

Tristan Garcia, whose first major philosophical work *Forme et objet* was published in French in 2011 (and the English translation will be out in 2014), can be considered as a member of the second generation of object-oriented philosophers. While he was writing several highly acclaimed works of prose fiction - notably, 2008's *La Meilleure Part des Hommes*, (translated

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2 Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 46..

3 Graham Harman "I am also of the opinion that materialism must be destroyed" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010), 772-790, 772.

4 Ibid.

5 Graham Harman, *Circus Philosophicus* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010).

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as *Hate, a Romance*) - Garcia was working on a mature philosophical system dealing with things and objects, rooted in the dialectical tradition of Hegel, as well as in analytical philosophy ranging from Wittgenstein to such lesser known figures as Twardowski and Meinong.

Tristan Garcia was only introduced to the work of Graham Harman after his book had been finished; which makes it all the more intriguing that both theories of objects share so many features. In Garcia's words, their systems 'provide a rare example of ways of thinking that intersect and meet at certain places and concepts, even though they derive from different horizons and traditions and aim at very distinct goals.'<sup>6</sup> Both Harman and Garcia are committed to defending the fundamental equality of all things - the equality not only of tables and humans, but also of Japanese ghosts, Popeye, the AIDS virus, parts of horses and the Roman Revolution. Besides, both are committed to treating imaginary or impossible objects as objects no less than one would cows, chairs and neutrons. Finally and perhaps most importantly, both preserve a sense of the richness of the world of things, of the fine texture of the carpentry of things; objects in Garcia and Harman are never boring bundles of qualities or grey dull substances, but always fascinatingly complex realities, torn from themselves or withdrawn into themselves, solitary objects alone in the desert or cosmic Russian dolls wrapped up one in the other.

Tonight, we will explore the similarities and differences between their two systems of thought in the first installment of a philosophical dialogue that will occupy not just these two philosophers, but all of philosophy for at least the few decades to come. Please welcome Tristan Garcia and Graham Harman.

[\*applause\*]

Now, we will start with an opening statement of about 15 minutes by each of you in which you explain the basic structure of your philosophy; starting with Graham Harman.

## **Graham Harman**

I will try to give you a very compact fifteen-minute account

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of Object-Oriented Philosophy and I will try to do it more slowly than I normally speak, because I know that I'll lose some people if I speak at my normal high speed. And I'll end with *one* point of difference that I feel exists between my philosophy and Tristan's. There are several: we agree on a lot of things but we also have several differences.

Object-Oriented Philosophy. First of all, I would agree with my good friend Noortje Marres in opposing both kinds of exceptionalism, human and non-human. What I would disagree with is the idea that Object-Oriented Philosophy is a non-human exceptionalism. The term 'object' does not refer in my use to non-human objects...

Is it too fast? [\*laughter\*] Sorry. I'll slow down.

The term 'object' does not refer only to non-human objects at the expense of human ones. It's meant to be more general; to refer to all objects: to people, and also to things that are not people. All of that under one heading. Object means people and non-people, it means objects and subjects.

For me, it started with Heidegger, whom I read in a rather unorthodox way. Heidegger can be viewed as a rebel within phenomenology. Phenomenology, of course, wants to avoid any hypotheses about what is outside the phenomenal; avoid at the first step any scientific theories or other theories of what causes phenomena to appear to us, and focus on a very patient and subtle description of what appears to us.<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger, while learning those lessons well, also pointed out that for the most part things are *not* present to us. For the most part the things we encounter are hidden from us, they're withdrawn from us. So you aren't thinking about the chair you're sitting on until I mention it, unless it's very uncomfortable. You're not thinking of your bodily organs unless they're failing. You're not thinking about the oxygen in the air unless it's very hard to breathe. For the most part, we're taking things for granted; we rely on things.

This is Heidegger's famous tool-analysis from *Being and*

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6 Tristan Garcia (2013). "Crossing Ways of Thinking: On Graham Harman's system and my own", *Parrhesia* 16, 14-25.

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Time which he actually came up with eight years earlier in his first lecture course in Freiburg. Now, this is often read as 'Heidegger shows us that praxis comes before theory and that all theory emerges from this unconscious practical realm.' And I object to this reading. The reason I don't like this reading is because praxis distorts things just as much as theory does. So if I look at the table I'm not understanding all aspects of the table, but if I use the table I'm also not exhausting the table. Praxis is just as shallow as theory. It's not getting to the bottom of things any more than theory does. Praxis and theory are basically on the same level of reality for me.

But you have to push this one step further to make it even weirder which is to say that objects do this to each other as well. It's not just that we poor finite humans with our tragic finitude, our limitations, are unable to grasp the thing-in-itself. Objects are also unable to interact with things in themselves. When fire burns cotton - which is the famous example from Islamic philosophy - fire does not interact with the color or the smell of the cotton. Most likely, it's interacting with the flammability of the cotton. So the fire is also distorting the cotton, it's translating the cotton into its own terms.

So things never make direct contact for Object-Oriented Philosophy. They're *withdrawn* from each other (Heideggerian term), they're hidden from each other. And this is true of all objects, all objects in their interaction with each other.

Just like Bruno Latour and Alfred North Whitehead, I would say that all relations are on the same footing. The human relation to the world is not special. The human relation to the world is just a special case of the relation between raindrops striking the table or fire burning cotton or two rocks slamming together in outer space. Every relation distorts the terms of the relation. There's something withdrawn, something real. And I hold that this is all that Heidegger meant with his *Seinsfrage*, his question of Being: the fact that something withdraws from presence. Being is that which withdraws from presence.

Now for Heidegger, tools tend to form a system. You can't take one tool in isolation as if one tool came first and then another. The bottle gains its meaning from its use for me,

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from the effect it has on the table and so forth. I say that this is inconsistent even on Heidegger's own terms, because for Heidegger tools can break. The table can collapse, your bodily organs can fail, the chair can crack and even fall to the floor. This would not be possible if tools were reducible to what they are in a system, if tools were holistic. So tools are *not* holistic. Tools are partly withdrawn from the systems in which they are inscribed. Which means Being cannot be one - being is multiple.

Heidegger sometimes uses the difference between Being and beings - the ontological difference - to mean the difference between absence and presence. And I think that's the good sense of Heidegger's philosophy: absence and presence. But he sometimes also uses this to mean the difference between the one and the many: that Being is this inarticulate thing that withdraws and you can't say that it's made out of parts, and beings are individual things, which are always superficial for Heidegger. And this is why discovering Bruno Latour in my graduate school career was very helpful for me because Latour is someone who takes individual entities very seriously. In a very witty fashion, he takes them seriously as objects for philosophy.

So objects cannot interact directly, they interact indirectly in what I call *vicarious causation* or *indirect causation*<sup>7</sup> They have to be mediated by a third term. I'll explain in a second how that can happen.

First, I want to say: why don't people like Object-Oriented Philosophy? What is it that they dislike about objects?

There are two basic ways you can destroy objects as the basic topic of philosophy. The first is to *undermine* them. You can say that 'these things aren't real. What's real are neurons, or what's real are quarks and electrons. You go down to the very small and that's what's real. Everything else is an illusion made of these tinier parts.'

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7 See Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation", in *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development II*. (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007) 171-205

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And you find some extreme forms of this. You also find it in pre-Socratic philosophy, in the beginning of Western philosophy and science, where water is the fundamental thing or air is the fundamental thing or atoms. Individual mid-sized objects are considered superficial in this tradition. And we see this today in scientific materialism in its extreme form: that you can break everything down to its tiniest parts and explain it that way. Undermining.

The problem with undermining as I see it is that it cannot explain emergence. It can only treat larger things as aggregates of tiny particles. It can only treat Amsterdam as a set of atoms so that Amsterdam's going to change every time the atoms change. And this seems philosophically quite arbitrary to me. Things are somewhat robust to changes in their parts. We lose the atoms in our bodies every 7 years on average. Drift had almost completely different people last time I was here four years ago; a few of my old students are still here, but otherwise the room is filled with people I've never seen before in my life - it's still Drift in some sense. It's in the same building, it has the same structure and so forth.

That's undermining. You can also go in the opposite direction which is the more typical modern technique, which I call *overmining*. I invented that term by analogy with undermining, which you can do in English. The French translator had a hell of a time trying to render it. He did a pretty good job, but you can't do that in French of course, and in a lot of other languages.

Overmining says not that objects are too shallow; it says objects are too deep. 'Why do you need this superstition of objects hiding behind experience? All that exists are events or perceptions or language or power or the human-world-interaction. There's no need to naively posit these real objects hiding behind the world.' That's the overmining critique of objects.

My critique of this is that it cannot explain change. Because if everything is nothing more than how it is currently expressed, how can it become something different in the future? If I am nothing more than the effect I'm having on

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all of you this moment, the effect I'm having on the chair, the effect I'm having on family members and friends who are thinking about me right now; how is it that my life will be different 24 hours from now when I'm in Berlin? It's a very basic philosophical question. It's because I am not reducible to all that I am right now. I am detachable; I am something more than what I am right now. So we can move into different contexts.

Now, I found that these two strategies do not usually act in isolation. They usually go together. Usually, they need each other as a crutch. They're parasites off of each other because either one in isolation seems too extreme. I'll give you some examples.

Scientific materialism, for example, seems like the classic undermining theory because it's going all the way down to the bottom and there are these tiny particles everything is made of. And yet, they're not just hidden down there because they're knowable. They can be mathematized for the scientific materialist, which means that they are isomorphic with the mathematical knowledge we have of them. Quentin Meillassoux is a good example of this: he thinks we can mathematize the primary qualities of things, yet he realizes that if he did that, if he said everything is mathematizable, he'd sound like a Pythagorean; he'd sound like he's saying everything's mathematical. So he has to posit this undermining term: 'matter'. There's this 'matter' that the mathematical forms inhere in and he never really explains what that matter is. So that's one example of a theory that undermines and overmines simultaneously.

Another example would be my good friend Bruno Latour, who on the one hand looks like a classic overminer, because he's saying that objects (or 'actors', as he calls them, not objects) are nothing more than their effects. 'Actors are nothing more than what they transform, modify, perturb or create', his famous phrase from *Pandora's Hope*.<sup>8</sup> Which means there

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8 Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press., 1999), 122

is no actor hiding behind the thing it does. That's a superstition for Latour. The problem with that in my mind is that you cannot explain how the actor is able to do different things at different times; how it's able to have different effects from one day to the next. And I think he began to realize this is a problem, because starting about seven years ago he posited this new concept we hadn't seen before called the 'plasma'. And the plasma is what explains all change for him. It's this kind of inarticulate lump, kind of like the Presocratic *apeiron*.

And he gives great examples in *Reassembling the Social*. He says 'what caused the Soviet Union to collapse overnight without a warning? The plasma. What causes your friendships and love affairs to break up when you don't expect it? The plasma.' And the best example of all - which might never have happened: 'How does the most mediocre academic musician suddenly compose a brilliant symphony? The plasma did it.'<sup>9</sup>

Now you can see the problem. Because the same plasma's shared by everything. He says the plasma is the size of London and all the networks of actors are the size of the London underground, so it's much smaller.<sup>10</sup> So the plasma is this gigantic force, kind of like Aristotelian potentiality. But that's an example of the two, undermining and overmining, going together.

I needed a name for the two going together, undermining and overmining, and I thought of *duomining* because that's the natural Latin solution to it. And I looked it up on the web and that term does exist, thankfully, because I hate coining new terminology; I prefer to use words that already exist in a different sense. Duomining comes from the credit card industry, of all places. It means they're finding all about you using data-mining *and* text-mining. They call it duomining.

And so duomining is now my technical term for most philosophies in the Western tradition. Only a few philosophies reduce in only one direction consistently. Berkeley is

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9 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 245.

10 *Ibid.*, 244

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probably one of the few examples: everything's overmined, everything is simply 'to be is to be perceived', there's nothing hiding beneath that. He's probably the only case of a complete overminer. Are there any complete underminers? If there are materialists who said that there are these particles that we cannot know anything about then that would be an example. I don't know if there are any materialists like that.

That, I think, is the biggest danger to thought.

Rik Peters

Could you go to your problems with Garcia's position?

Graham Harman

Okay, I will. Let me just say parenthetically that for me, the object is not given. Dan Zahavi was talking about the object as a mode of givenness.<sup>11</sup> There's also room for that in my model, because I also believe that Husserl is right too. Heidegger misses what's great about Husserl in many ways. What's great about Husserl is his discovery of objects at the level of experience.

What's so great about this? Well, if you think of empiricism... Empiricism loved to say that there are no objects. There are bundles of qualities but there are no apples. There's just red and hard and juicy and sweet and shiny; and we see those go together so often that we kind of naively posit this object there, an 'I know not what', *aje ne sais quoi* that's holding all these qualities together. So for them the qualities is all that we encounter.

Husserl reverses that relationship and says that we encounter the apple, because you can rotate the apple in your hand and you can see it from different angles and never do you think 'oh, these are closely related apples with a family resemblance.' - no! You say it's the same apple seen from different directions. So there's also this other kind of object that inhabits the realm of experience that you could call the

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<sup>11</sup> Dan Zahavi was the first speaker of the evening, giving a lecture titled 'subjecthood and objecthood'

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‘intentional object’ - I call it the ‘sensual object’ for various reasons.

Just to put the final thrust in before I go to Garcia’s position. What’s important for me about the fact that there are two kinds of objects [real and sensual] is that if you have two real objects they can never touch, because they’re going to withdraw from each other. So causality becomes impossible; relation becomes impossible. Just like if you had only north pole magnets you could never touch magnets: they would repel. So you need a second kind of object to be the bridge between pairs of the first kind; those are what I call the *sensual objects*.

So two real objects meet through a sensual object. Stated more bluntly: two real objects meet in the mental experience of a third object. It doesn’t have to be human mental experience. It can be the mental experience of rocks or plants or armies or any entity you want to talk about.

So. I won’t go into detail about that. But I should just say that that means that there are two kinds of objects, two kinds of qualities: that gives a fourfold structure. Which I argue is analogous to the fourfold Heidegger talks about but explains miserably in his late work. But it’s the same thing, basically. And the research program of Object-Oriented Philosophy is to explore the tensions there between the four poles. Whereas most kinds of philosophy want to deny the tensions, they want to collapse reality into appearance or they want to collapse objects of experience into bundles of qualities, Object-Oriented Philosophy is about not allowing that collapse. It’s about preserving the tension and it’s about explaining how it occurs.

Tristan Garcia - you’ll all be reading him a year from now. If you read French I hope you’re reading him already; if you don’t read French you can all read English I guess. His book *Form and Object* (that will be the English title) will be out from Edinburgh University Press a year from now. It’s this wonderfully large systematic treatise that none of us in the older generation have been able to match in terms of its scope and breadth. It’s a wonderful achievement.

Just to talk about *one* aspect of the text where we disagree

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(he can explain the other positive features of the text, we're going on long enough): Tristan Garcia seems to agree with me that objects are irreducible in both directions. They cannot be reduced to that which they are made of or that in which they are as an environment. However, whereas I say the object is neither its parts nor its effects - it's in between those - Tristan says it's the difference between those two: it's the difference between its pieces and its outward effects.

For me, this risks duomining, because this risks making the object hypersensitive in both directions; so that I change when my atoms change and I also change when I'm three centimeters further from you rather than four centimeters. Whereas for me the object is that which is robust to such changes in both directions; the object is that which maintains an identity to some extent. You can't take away all my atoms, but you can certainly take away some of them.

So, that is my question to Tristan: does he avoid duomining; and if he does not avoid what I call the duomining position, reducing the thing in both directions at once, how can he explain emergence, how can he explain change in things? Is duomining the price Garcia pays for avoiding the thing-in-itself? "Price to pay" is a great technical term in Garcia's work. I'm saying: is this the price he's paying for avoiding the in-itself? If so, I think it's too high a price.

RP

Thank you Graham Harman. So to summarize: we should avoid undermining, we should avoid overmining, we should avoid duomining, and if we avoid all those then we are left with a fourfold structure of which the tensions should be investigated. And you think Garcia might risk falling into duomining.

GH

One last sentence if I can. I forgot to say that the price I pay for this is the notion that you cannot talk about things directly. Because you cannot formalize things mathematically, you cannot explain them by talking about what their parts are.

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You have to allude to things. You have to speak about them indirectly. To those who say that this leads to poetic gibberish (as some of my critics say) I say: that's what philosophy has done all along. Socrates is the one who told us that *philosophia* is the *love of wisdom* and not wisdom. So you can never know for sure what the features of virtue are or what the features of friendship are. So it's no different.

RP

Then - Tristan Garcia, could you explain the basic structure of your philosophy in *Forme et objet*?

Tristan Garcia

Thank you Graham. I hope you will be patient because my English is not very fluent. If Graham was speaking a bit too fast, I will be speaking too slowly. So be patient.

I wrote this book called *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*. It's about things and objects. Because on the contrary to Graham, I have two concepts: object and thing.

Part one of the book is about the definition of what 'something' is. Just: what is a thing? I'm trying to avoid two considerations. If Graham is speaking about undermining and overmining, I'm speaking about *less-than-a-thing* and *more-than-a-thing*. First, I try to demonstrate that there cannot be such a thing as 'less-than-a-thing' or 'more-than-a-thing'. There's just 'something' and equally something. That's why I'm trying to build a pattern or schema to understand what a new and original definition of 'something' could be.

The first point of my argumentation would be: let's try to imagine something that would be absolutely *less* than something. Something absolutely *less* than something would be nothing. Something absolutely *more* than something would be a substance or absolute; or what I would call something 'in-itself', something being in-itself.

I claim that there is no such thing as 'nothing'. I try to demonstrate that 'nothingness' is in fact always a confusion between two concepts. Because when we say 'nothing', in fact we want to say at the same time - we want to mean at the same

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time - the *opposite* of something and the *absence* of something.

The *opposite* of something is just the reverse of something, the negative of something. If you have something, at the same time you always have something-other-than-a-thing, which is everything-but-that-something. And everything but that something is the opposite of something.

Then you have to deal with the absence of something. The absence of something is just an operation; it's an event. If you take the something out of its mold, so to speak, (admitting that the something lies in its negative as in some sort of mold) - if you take the something out of its mold, the something is there no more: it's absent.

If you're trained to think something like 'nothing' in the great Western tradition of philosophy you're trying to think that the opposite of something is the absence of something and the absence of something is the opposite of something. But, by showing that the absence of something and the opposite of something are two different things, I reveal that there is no such thing as 'absolute nothingness'. If you never have nothing, you always have something. So you never have less-than-a-thing and you cannot have absolutely less than a thing: you always find something.

Can you think absolutely *more* than something? Something that would be absolute, something in-itself? The book aims to show and to demonstrate that if you have something in-itself, there's two options. If it's really in-itself you no longer have something to be in-itself.

If you have in-itself you cannot have something anymore. And if you still want to have entities, it cannot be in-itself, because there still remain a small difference between that which is in the thing and that in which the thing is: the thing as a container and the thing as content. In *Form and object*, I came to the conclusion that all that western philosophy used to call substance is neither *nothing* -I show that nothing leads to something - and that if there is not nothing, if there is really something to be in-itself, then there are *two* things: the thing as a content and the thing as a container.

If you have *more* than something, in fact you have always

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two things. If you have *less* than something, you still have something. All the ways, all the paths thus lead us to thingness. To the fact to be something.

In saying that you have something, that you cannot get more than something and that you cannot get less than something, I'm trying at the same time to give a new definition of what that something could be.

Well, what could 'something' be? I would like to defend a totally liberal ontology, where each thing could equally be something - no more, no less. I intend to build this liberal ontology - not in a political sense, not a 'liberal' or 'libertarian' ontology, but to show by building a liberal ontology that in fact any political liberalist theoretician is never liberal enough. I'm just trying to be more liberal than any kind of liberalist, by saying that each thing could be equally something. This table is something, but each part of the table is something as well. My finger is something as well as my hand. And my hand as it was 10 minutes ago is something as well as my hand now.

As a consequence: no differences of time, no differences of space, no determination. What I'm saying is: give me no-matter-what thing, it's going to be something and it's going to be equally something. My main concept is no-matter-what. If you ask: what is something? I'll answer you: no-matter-what is something.

And if no-matter-what is something, it's because it's not reversible. It's exactly because something is never no-matter-what. So no-matter-what is something; and something is not no-matter-what. Why? Just because something is *some* thing. So something is never whatever thing. I try to make clear that to be is always the exact opposite of to comprehend. So no-matter-what is something; something comprehends no-matter-what. And I try to show a way to represent *being* as a channel of distribution. Being - comprehension.

Let's say it again: no-matter-what is something. Which means: the table, each part of the table, each table at each moment and so on. Why could it each time be something? We could think that each thing, each entity, is something just because it is *one*. But I found out that oneness was not the condition

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of thingness. Why?

For example, a famous quotation of Leibniz is ‘a *being* is *one being*’<sup>12</sup> - but a thing is not *one* thing. It’s not because something is *one* thing that it is *some* thing. Why? Because to be one thing is always to count as one. And to count as one - to count as one finger, for example - is to count as one possible finger among many other fingers. This means that to count as one is not to be equally. Because to be one is the beginning of inequality: of the contrary of equality. To keep it simple: two will always be more than one. Two fingers are more than one finger.

To be something is not to be *one* thing. Why? To be something is to be the only thing. Something is something if and only if it is the only thing. My ontology is an ontology of solitude and exclusivity. I do believe that every entity in the world has the capacity to destroy the capacity of all other things to be something. If something is something, nothing else is something. When and if my finger is something, my hand is not something; I am not something; the table is not something and so on. Why? Because to be something is to be the only thing. So in so far as my finger is something, everything but my finger should be indistinguishable.

You have only one thing at the world at the time, in my ontology. You never get two things at the same time. You have only one thing, because each thing stays alone or solitary. Which means that each thing is entering into the world alone.

The world is the place where each entity is absolutely alone. The world is, so to say, at the same time the common place of things, because each thing lies in the world. It means, paradoxically, that the world is a place, a common place, where each entity is absolutely alone.

Basically, I’m trying to build this model assuming that no-matter-what is something and something is in the world. Nothing is no-matter-what; no-matter-what is something; something is in the world; and the world itself is not something, not some thing. The world is not something and the

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12 G.W. Leibniz, “Letter to Arnauld” 30 April 1687 (G II 97/AG 86)

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world is not in something.

‘Something’ is just the small difference between no-matter-what and the world. Each thing can be at the same time in the world - namely in something-other-than-a-thing, its negative; or in another thing. Each thing, for example the table: the table is something if it’s in the world: if it’s in something other than the table. But the table, at the same time, can be in this room, it can be in Amsterdam, it can be in the material world and so on. It can be in a lot of other things. And something in another thing is what I call an *object*.

To recapitulate: a thing is what is alone in the world. An object is a thing being in another thing (being in another thing, being in another thing...). Objects are within each other. Objects are things in relations to each other. Something, a thing, is always alone with no relation, because a thing stays lonely - there is no other thing. A thing is in the world and has no relation to another thing.

Trying to build this strange kind of dualism between thing and object, in the second part of my book I have a new look at the kinds of belonging of objects. An object in another object can be in *extensive* or *intensive* relations. And I do think we’ll talk about that. In the second part of the book, I’m wondering about *extensive* relationships, such as classes, gender, species, ages of life and so on; and at the same time I’m wondering about *intensive* identities of objects, such as time, life, or values.

All of my book is about this difference between being alone and being in a relation; being a thing or being an object.

To answer Graham and to begin with our debate, the main difference between Graham and me is that I am always trying to maintain, to sustain this difference between thing and object. In my view, what I am now, what I was 10 minutes ago, what I was 1 second ago cannot but be different things. Each version of me is something. But I am still one and only one object in time. Therefore, I’m trying to find at the same time the concept of some object that can have identity and at the same time I’m trying to conceptualize things which are entities *without* any identity. What I call ‘things’ have no identity at all, because each thing is something different.

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And to have identity you must identify something to something else; which I cannot do because my thing is alone and each thing is something else. Things are entities without any identity; objects are things *with* identity: extensive and intensive identities.

RP

Thank you. Before we go into the technical details - a question that will be on some peoples' minds right now is: why should this be the path that philosophy is taking? After all, we are humans and philosophy is difficult enough when we are talking about humans. Why go down this particular path of objects? What is there to gain from this?

TG

Well, I would say: to think is just a marvelous possibility to make abstraction of our humanity. It's a blessing. And it's a possibility that becomes a sort of duty of thinking: to think each entity as being equally something. It's a duty of thinking because *while* thinking, you have access to the thingness. And as I said, I'm firmly convinced that you *cannot* but think with things. Meaning: each time you are trying to overmine or undermine, as Graham would say, you are caught in a trap, in a theoretical trap. And each time you're trying to get something less than a thing or something more than a thing you are going on a way outside the things and then going back to the things. Because if you want to have such things as 'events' or 'pure intensities' or 'pure differences', in fact you are building a new thing. One day or the other, you will find differences between your pure differences or differences of intensities. And then you will have to say: okay, these are your things. So to think about things is just to try to be honest with the duty of thinking; and to try to show what our entities are, what our fundamental entities are. It cannot be something less than something and it cannot be something more than something. So let's try to really think what 'something' could be.

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RP

Okay, so the point is that we cannot escape from things.

TG

Yes, we cannot escape from thingness.

RP

Is this why in your book you talk about an epidemic of things?

TG

Yes. Because I think that as long as there is something, there cannot be something less or something more than something. If there were no thing, absolutely nothing, well, we couldn't think about something. But if there's just something, then there's an epidemic of things. For example: if there were nothing before something, then the nothing coming before something is something too now. That's why we do have to think about somethingness or thingness.

RP

Next, let's talk about the in-itself; which is of course a classic philosophical problem, but takes a very specific form in this debate. Graham, if you could first explain why you think the in-itself needs to be defended; and then Tristan can reply.

GH

Yes. The last really great universal revolution in Western philosophy that everyone reacts to in some way is Kant's revolution. You'll find people who say that Hegel is a charlatan or that phenomenology is useless; you're not going to find too many people in the western philosophical tradition, analytic or continental, who say that Kant was a charlatan. I don't think I've ever heard that. People take him very seriously.

What did Kant do for us? What are we responding to? At least two different things. And you can try to overcome either of those two things and whichever one you choose to try to overcome is going to determine your path. You could say: Kant gave us the thing-in-itself that can be thought but

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not known, it's outside of us. Then you can reply that that's a contradiction, because to think of the thing in-itself is already to think it and therefore we're trying to get into a thought and therefore we're already inside the loop. And this is the German Idealist response to Kant; and you see it again today in Zizek and Meillassoux and to

some extent in Badiou. It's the more fashionable one right now.

You can also do a different thing, which is what I like to do. Which is to say: Kant was right about finitude. Finitude is here to stay. He's got a good point about that. His mistake was to limit it to poor, tragic, finite humans. Instead, objects are finite with respect to each other as well. If that path had been followed, you wouldn't have had a German Idealism, you would've had a German Realism. And this would have been quite possible counterfactually, because Germany was so steeped in Leibniz; they were already used to this idea that not only humans perceive. They could have gone in that direction and said that Kant was right about finitude but he was wrong to restrict it to humans, and so everything is noumenal for everything else.

That's the second path. I think you have to do that because I don't think you can get around finitude. If you try to get around finitude, you're trying to say that the thing is equivalent to what we can know of it or to what relation we can have to it. I've tried to show that that cannot explain change. That's why I think the thing in itself must be preserved. I think if you try to reduce it in either direction you're lost.

RP

Tristan Garcia, can you explain why you are against any notion of the in-itself?

TG

First of all, I don't use the in-itself concept the way Graham or even Quentin Meillassoux are using it. Maybe I could talk a bit about a famous text of Sartre where Sartre was at the same time interpreting and misreading Husserl, in one of

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the first French texts about intentionality.<sup>13</sup> Sartre was saying that with intentionality, you can have a representation of the fact that *if* you were able to enter into someone else's mind, the fact that consciousness is intentional is the fact that if that someone was looking at the table, to enter their mind would be to learn how to go outside the mind. If you were entering consciousness, you would be immediately thrown out of this very consciousness. I aim to extend this intuition to every kind of thing: if you were able to go inside the table, to be the table, you would be excluded from the table, because that which is in the table is not that which the table is. The table is always outside itself. Why? Because a table is in the world. Because each thing is outside itself in the world.

I'm not trying to say there is no in-itself because it's inaccessible. I am not saying that we cannot have access to the in-itself. I would prefer to argue that no thing can have access to itself. To have a concept of thing, in my opinion, is to understand what we share with every kind of entity: the very fact of being exiled from ourselves.

It's a prime fact of ontology, to me: the fact that human consciousness is not the only one to be exiled and excluded from itself. Each thing, being a thing, has no access to itself. Each thing comprehends a lot of parts, of qualities, that are *not* itself, and the thing is *not* in the thing, meaning: the container of the thing is not the thing, and the thing is not its own content. So each thing lies not in-itself but outside of itself in the world. And I seek to understand the fact that the world is the common place of things. And if the world is the common place of things it's because there's a price to pay. The price to pay is the ontological exile of every kind of entity. To cut a long story short: I'm not pretending that we have no access to the in-itself, I'm just saying that no thing, absolutely nothing, has any kind of access to itself. Because there is nothing in-itself, meaning: everything lies outside of itself.

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<sup>13</sup> "Une Idee fondamentale de la phenomenologie de Husserl: Intentionalite", written in 1934.

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GH

I would agree that nothing has direct access to itself, but for me that's a proof *for* the in-itself, not against the in-itself, because this shows that nothing is reducible to any of the ways it can be viewed or seen by anything. Introspection is a great example, because you might think: 'I don't know what's motivating you but at least I know what's motivating me because I can see what's in my own thought.' Well, of course that's not true - why does psychotherapy exist? It's because we don't understand our own feelings or motives completely. Also, we often learn more about ourselves from other people, from remarks other people make about us than we do from introspection. And of course, the same would be even true all the more for tables and rocks and those sorts of things.

But I think that the fact that nothing can see itself to me means that there is an in-itself that you can get by subtracting from all the different views that we have on things.

Another question: you said earlier that a thing is one by being counted-as-one. Do you mean that in the same sense that Badiou means it or do you mean it in a different sense?

TG

I use, like Meillassoux did, some ontological background of theory of sets.

GH

Okay.

TG

I do not mean that there is only the void and then pure multiplicity; I mean that for me, to be is to be in. This is a prime fact of what I'm trying to explain. In my book, to be is to be in, not in a spatial way of thinking, but in a kind of ensemblist meaning. If I would say for example that my finger is in my hand, then my finger *is* my hand, because to be is the exact opposite of to comprehend. If my hand comprehends my finger, it means that my finger is my hand.

Maybe we could think about something more concrete, to

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understand that. For example, what I say about ontological exile or exclusion is grounded on the fact that if you [claim to] comprehend what you are, then in fact you are not what you are comprehending. You are already something else. You could never comprehend what you are, and you could never be what you are comprehending. Because there's a reverse function between to be and to comprehend.

So I would still be close to Badiou in this particular sense: that to be means to-be-in.

GH

Right, because the problem I have whenever Badiou says 'to be one is to be counted as one' is that it sounds like humans then have the power to determine what unity is; or thought, I should say; although I see no examples of thought other than human thought in his work. And this seems to be - not to beat my own terminology to death - it seems like a classic case of duoming. Because you have all the consistent multiplicity, which is everything that is counted as one; then you have the inconsistent multiplicity for Badiou, which isn't really a multiplicity at all, it's just there as an alibi that can erupt and create surprising events in politics and art and love and science from time to time. But it has no prior articulation before that happens. And what you miss again in Badiou is that middle ground where there are things that are not accessible to us but are still there. So what I'm getting at is that I'm worried that when you say 'the one is what's counted as one', you're moving towards a human exceptionalism, to use Noortje Marres' terminology, where it's the counter who decides what's real and what's not.

TG

But I'm not, because I say that to be one is not to be one thing. That's where I'm not Badiouian, in fact. It's not in fact to count as one. To be something is to be lonely. It's to be the only thing.

To answer your question, I still think that what comes first is the thing, not the relation. I'm not pretending that there

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would first be a relation between that which is in the thing and that which a thing is in. There is no 'first'. The world is not some kind of primary bundle of relations and relationships. There is just things. And I think we agree about that.

But I would like to specify that, for me, there is *only one* thing; because what exists is *each* thing. Existence concerns one thing at the time, and then, if there is one thing, then this thing should be analyzed as the relation between that which is in the thing and that which the thing is in. As soon as you discover this relation, *then* you can define objects, saying: this thing is in another thing, so it's an object, there's a determination and so on. But I'm not trying to say that first we have a relation and then we have things.

And then I try to understand the very fact that relations between objects are not objects as well. But objects *and* relations are things. An object is equally something as any relation is something.

RP

To come back to Graham's question: for you, to be is to be comprehended. This is your definition.

TG

Yes, it's 'to be been'.

RP

But comprehension, in the examples you give in your book, seems to be a function of the human mind. At least, so you seem to suggest.

TG

No, absolutely not. Because comprehension is not understanding. Meaning: the table comprehends all of its qualities and its color, its mass, its form, its geometrical figures, and even its possible uses. So to comprehend means simply the opposite of to be; and to be means simply the opposite of to comprehend.

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RP

So what is the relation between comprehension and understanding then? Because there does seem to be a sense in which...

TG

Understanding could be a very specific way of comprehending, if you are for example any kind of superior mammal. Or something like that.

To continue what I was saying: maybe Graham says. There are many times where Graham says that if you have new relations, then you have new objects. And I would like to talk about that, because I don't know if we agree about that.

RP

Graham, could you explain what that idea is based on?

GH

My criterion for an object is simply something that is not reducible in either direction; that is not simply an aggregate of parts and is not reducible to an effect.

There are some things that are. There are times when undermining and overmining are justified, I should say that. I'm not saying they're never good methods. For example, you can undermine morning star and evening star by saying they're both Venus, to take an example from analytic philosophy. In some sense you can do that. Fine, it's the same planet.

You can overmine something like witches. If someone says there are real witches causing all these things to happen in Amsterdam, you can overmine that by saying no, there's just these coincidental events that someone is stupidly ascribing to this witch who's being burned at the stake tomorrow because she cast all these spells on all of us.

So there are times when you can do that. What I object to is the idea that you must always do that to destroy all objects. I agree that in individual cases it's a must.

For me, all it takes to be an object is that something is not reducible in either direction. We can't always be sure.

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We can't be sure about anything, that's why it's *sophistia* and not wisdom (sophistry).

Does a relation meet the criterion of objecthood? For me, yes. Because if there's a relation that's a *real* relation, it's something over and above its parts. It's not reducible downward to its elements, and it's also irreducible to what anybody says about it or to how it looks from the outside. So let's say there's a real relationship between two people. You'd say that that's more than the two people, right? You'd say that something is created there that wasn't there with the two people alone. But you would also say that nobody really understands that relationship, including the people in it. That there's something real about it that is robust to our different understanding of it in different times. It's a mystery to people, even to the ones who are in it.

And then you can apply that to any kind of relationship, like the chemical relation that creates a molecule out of pre-existent materials.

RP

Tristan, you had a question about this theory.

TG

Yes. Because I think there's always a sort of trap in an ontology of objects. If you think that relations between objects are objects as well, for example, if there's a relation between this glass of water and this table, and if you say the relation between this table and the glass of water is an object too, if relations are absolutely the same kind of objects as the objects that are in this relationship - well, you have a serious problem. Because you will have to have some relation between the relation and the object, then you will have to have a relation between the relation-as-an-object and the object, and so on and so on.

RP

Graham?

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GH

My answer to that is that you can go as far as you want with that, but you don't have to go along that path. If we're talking about a real relation, which means a real relation between real objects, that problem doesn't occur. You can of course specify. I can say there's a relation between this [\*points at bottle\*] and my brother who's off in Portland, Oregon. But that doesn't mean there's really a relation there.

And then, yes, this problem arises, I admit, then there's a relation between those parts. But I don't think it arises when you look at real relations. Ones that create a robust identity, that are irreducible in either direction.

TG

I'm pretty sure that each of us has to have a way to protect his theory against this reduction *ad infinitum*. Graham, you have your distinction between real objects and sensual objects. And I think this is partly why I have to distinguish between thing and object. Saying: each relation is something else, *and* the relation and the object are different things, and are equally things - no more, no less. Because the relation is *something*, entering into the world as well as the object; as well as the event or the object. But the relation is not an *object* as well as the object in the relation.

GH

How is that compatible with your ultra-flat ontology - even flatter than Meinong's?

RP

Could you explain the term 'flat ontology' first, for those unfamiliar with it?

TG

Some people talked about flat ontology before but I didn't know that. I was speaking about a 'flat world': an ontology of the flat world. Meaning by this expression that I wanted to have a plane, an ontological plane, where nothing, absolutely

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nothing, could be more or less what it was: something. By flat world I meant the fact that nothing can be more or less in the world than something else. Something - a contradiction, half of the table, the word 'table', the idea of the table - should be equally something.

But to think such a configuration of the world is more difficult than it seems. Because, for example, you will have to think that the idea of the table is something as well as each possible table. Meaning: you have to admit with the nominalist that this table is something. But the nominalist is going to tell you: this table is something, but you know, the general idea of a table is just less-than-something, because it's a construction of your mind and so on.

Then you need to speak with the Platonist, for example, who's going to tell you: *the* idea of the table is something. *That* is something. The idea of the table, *that* is something; but this table is just an ontological degradation of the idea of the table.

So you have, at the same time, to admit with the nominalist that each table is something, and to admit with the Platonist that the idea of table is something. And you have to argue against the nominalist: well, you're right: this table, that table, are equally something. But the general idea of table, the abstract idea of table is something *as well* - no more, no less. It's not less-than-a-thing, because it would be some kind of abstraction. But it's not more-than-a-thing, as what the Platonist would say: it's an *eidōs* or it's an idea of table.

To build a flat world is a very complex gesture, where you have to be the best friend of your theoretical enemies. You have to get into the habit of giving a right to each philosophical opponent. And to say: okay, you are right, this [\*points at table\*] is something, but you are right too, this [\*points at sky\*] is something; this is no more, no less something.

And to somebody that could be what you call in the theory of time a 'presentist' (who claims that what exists only exists at *this* time, it's present), you have to say: okay, you are right. It exists, it's something, everything which is present is something. But then you have to say to the eternalist too, who's going to tell you everything that exists *eternally* exists

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- past, present, future - you have to say: you are right, too. It exists, it's something.

It's very difficult as a philosopher to concede to *anybody* that he's right. In saying that he's right, you have to say that he's wrong too. He's wrong, because he's denying to another the opportunity of recognizing other entities. To think of a flat world is to say 'yes' to everybody, until this very point where you have to say no again. Saying: yes, you're so right that I have to tell you no; because you're trained to deny the other the possibility to have his entities. So to have a flat ontology is this kind of philosophical gesture, where you say: no- matter-what is something; give me anything, and I'll have to admit that it is something.

RP

This is interesting, because you seem to arrive at a *flat* ontology by going as far as you can, but ultimately rejecting reduction upwards and downward. Graham, on the other hand, also by rejecting reduction, arrives at a *fourfold* structure. How do you think this difference between your systems of thought arose?

GH

Because my ontology in the end is not entirely flat. I want it to be flat in the sense that philosophy should be able to talk about everything. You shouldn't say that there's just physical particles or that there's just language games; you should be able to talk about all the different kinds of things there are. But I found it necessary to say that there are two different kinds of objects: there are some kinds of objects that are absolutely required to be the correlate of something. So an imaginary thing I invent is there for me, it's a correlate of my thinking. When I sleep or die, it's gone. Whereas there are also certain things that are independent of me, and can act on other things without my mediation.

I was going to ask Tristan another question, if I can.

We have an interesting exchange coming out in the journal

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*Parrhesia* in Australia.<sup>14</sup> This is an open access journal, so the article can be read for free by anyone with an internet connection. It'll be out any day now.

In it, Tristan makes some very good points about our similarities and differences. And one of the really interesting ones is that he points out that both of us agree on an infinite regress downward: there's no smallest particle, the world is infinitely decomposable (which is not a typical position people have, but we both believe this). Then on the other hand there's a limit when you go upwards. Which is a similarity, but it's also a difference, I would say. Because for Tristan the biggest thing of all, the one that comprehends everything is the universe. For me, there is no universe. For me, the top is ragged: you have all these disconnected things that simply haven't engaged in a relation yet. So my question is: how can you justify the existence of a universe, unless you either stipulate that humans have the power to name it and thereby create it, or say that it's a physical reality that we can detect, and therefore there must be all things together in one big physical thing?

TG

Yeah. I'm trying to have a universe because at the same time I have a world. I need a world and a universe. As you remember, the world is the common place where each thing is alone. And the universe is a place where objects are together, one into another. I define the universe as the biggest thing possible. But the universe is still a *thing*. The universe, being the container of all other objects, is a thing. And it means to me that the universe is no more and no less in the world than this table, or half of my finger. Because being a thing means to be equally - no more, no less than something else - in the world.

If the universe is the biggest thing, it's still a thing. That's why it's in the world. By that, first, I mean that I am against any kind of reductionism of universe to the world. For example, a cosmology that would tell us: if you are able to have

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<sup>14</sup> PARRHESIA 16

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a representation of the universe, you have a representation of the world. I say this is not the same. Because the universe is universal. And universality is always a process - it's a process of identities and differences, where you say: this object is inside of this object, so they have something identical and they have some differences; then you go from one object to another until the biggest object possible, which is the universe. This is universality. And science, cosmology, is trying to represent some kind of universality.

But universality is not totality. And the biggest mistake of, for example, Hegel, is to confound universal and total; saying what is universal is the totality, and the totality is universal. But on the contrary, I'm trying to make a very disjunction between universality and totality; because totality is just the container of each thing. Not of all things, but of each thing alone.

To get the world is very simple: you just need to have *one* thing. If you are able to abstract every kind of determination from an object and to consider that this object is something, then you have the world. Because if you have something, you know that this something is in the world. And the world is always a dead-end street to me. If you enter the object, then there's a kind of abstraction by which you try to aim at the *thing*, at the object as just being something. And when you find that this is something, you just find that being something, it's in the world. But the world is not something, so it's a dead end. The thing is in the world and the world is not in something. You have to go backwards to gain determination once again, and to say: this is an object. But then every object is in the world, is a dead-end or a one-way street you can go into and find the world once again.

The lesson should be that we can have the world with each thing. But to have the universe, you need universality, and universality is a process. If I need the universe it's because I'm still a universalist. Meaning: for me, objects within each other are not, for example, in pluriverses, or in different parallel universes. Objects within each other are in the end in the biggest thing possible, meaning the universe.

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And I would be a limited materialist. I just believe that what I call the universe is the cosmos, is the material universe. But at the same time, I just mean that the universe is a material universe, while speaking about objects. But at the same time, I believe that each object is something and the universe is something, so the universe is in the world. So I'm not absolutely materialist, because I don't think that the world is something material.

RP

Graham, can you explain why for you, the set of all relations between all things doesn't compose one biggest thing which would be a universe?

GH

Because we can't just stipulate that everything's in relation. I can't just say 'everything in the world is related to everything else' and thereby posit...

TG

Yes, because you have sleeping objects.

GH

That's right. I have what is called sleeping or dormant objects: objects that exist, but are not currently in any relation. I think that is possible, and probably there also are such objects.

RP

Such as?

GH

I always play with examples like the Romney victory coalition. Because it was probably there; it just didn't come into relation with Mitt Romney. But it was probably there. He had a chance. He just didn't actualize that object by linking with it to form a new object - Romney the winner. All such examples are open to challenge, but I think it's at least possible that there are objects out there that are simply never activated,

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never actualized by anything.

TG

But what is interesting is that you have sleeping objects, but not possible worlds. Because most of the time, thinkers (I'm thinking, for example, about David Lewis' *On the Plurality of Worlds*) say: okay, Mitt Romney could have won, in another world, in another possible world. They say: from each possible object, you can build a possible world. And you're not saying that, you just say: this is a sleeping object. But it doesn't belong to another possible world.

GH

It's this one, it's simply never actualized.

TG

Yes.

GH

So possible worlds are in a way contained in this one, in the form of actualities that are not expressed. That's right. I hadn't thought of it that way.

RP

Graham, in your opening statement you posed a challenge to Tristan, namely that he's confronted with some sort of hypersensitivity in his model of objects. Can you explain once again; and then Tristan can respond.

GH

For me, the virtue of the in-itself is that you have a thing that is not reducible in either direction. It's not an aggregate of its component parts and it's not simply the sum total of the effects it has on other things, as in Latour's philosophy. It's in between those two. I don't think it's the difference between those two. Because if you say it's the difference between those two, that's like saying  $x$  is the difference between numbers  $y$  and  $z$ . So if you vary  $y$  and  $z$ , of course  $x$  is going to change

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wildly whenever you vary  $y$  or  $z$ . And I'm worried about that. Because this means that the thing, instead of being resistant to changes in both directions is hypersensitive. Now, I understand his reasons for rejecting the thing in itself. And I don't think he's bothered by the idea that a thing changes every time its two directions change because for him, things change every time there are small changes in them anyway.

TG

I would agree: each thing is something different. To me, if you change anything in this table, it's something else. But it's not another *object*; it's some thing else. And even if you do not change anything from this table, the simple fact that this is...  $A = A$  for example, logical equality, means to me that the first  $A$  is something, but the second  $A$  is something else. And the equality (=) between  $A$  and  $A$  is another thing. And ' $A =$ ' is something else. And ' $= A$ ' is something else and so on and so on.

GH

And yet I heard you say earlier tonight that for example the Tristan Garcia before and after the publication of *Forme et objet* is in some sense the same person.

TG

Yes.

GH

Okay, so what's the mechanism that allows it to be the same person?

TG

First, I need to think this totally flat ontology where anything, absolutely anything can equally be something, and then I need to rebuild identities. Because what I want first are entities *without* any identity. And then I need to recover some identity. But I claim that identity is just a concern of objects, not of things. Because things have no identity, for me.

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If objects have identities, they have, to my opinion, two kinds of identity. The first kind of identity is an extensive one. It's the fact for something, being an object, to be in another object. This *extensive* identity is the fact, for example, to belong to a class of objects.

Then, you have a second kind of identity (which is far more interesting), which is *intensive* identity. It's for an object to relate not to another object, but to itself. But, as we've seen, nothing can be in-itself. Which means: if something is related to itself, it's no more itself. So by *intensive* relation I mean that an object in relation to itself can just be more or less what it is. But it cannot be what it is.

And then - that's why I have a theory of time and of identity through time, for example - if there is some kind of becoming of objects, it's because in fact, there's a close link between identity and intensity. A lot of thinkers, of French thinkers, like Gilles Deleuze, thought: intensity is pure difference. Bergson discovered the link between intensity and difference. Then Deleuze claims in *Difference and Repetition*: intensity is pure difference.

And I say: no, intensity is not pure difference; it's minimal identity. To be intense is for an object to be more or less itself. And this minimal identity exists for example in time. If I'm trying to have a theory of time, it's because I need to get a concept of intensities of presence and of their variations.

RP

I think we're almost out of time. Is that correct? One last question, about literature. Now, Tristan, you've written a series of novels which have been very well received; Graham, you've performed literary experiments with mythology in *Circus Philosophicus*, but your philosophical prose, too, is often praised as sparkling and vivid. What is the relation between literary and philosophical activity for both of you?

GH

Would you like to go first?

## Speculations VI

TG

I always feared to become something like Sartre: writing some literary philosophy and some philosophical literature. When I'm writing a novel, in spite of myself, I sometimes to destroy my own system as a philosopher. For example, I wrote a book about the theory of animal rights. And then I wrote a novel about animals; about monkeys and apes. And I the more I think about it, the more I think that my novel expresses exactly the opposite of my theory. But this is the only way I found to be not some kind of... I think that if you don't want to win on each side, you have to learn to lose on each side. You have to know how to be your best enemy. As a writer, to be the enemy of what you are as a thinker. And as a thinker, to be the enemy of what you are as a writer. I'm trying to do something like that, in fact.

RP

Graham?

GH

I think it's important to write well. In fact, 'when in doubt, write well' is the principle that philosophers should follow. What do I mean by that? Sometimes there's too much of an emphasis on clear writing. Now clear writing is better than unclear writing - but at the risk of offending any analytic philosophers in the audience, I think one of the problems of analytic philosophy is its over-emphasis on clarity in writing as opposed to vividness in writing. There are plenty of clear writers in analytic philosophy; there aren't too many vivid writers. There are a handful, I think.

What does vividness mean? It means you're not always clear. It means you're clear when the things are clear and you're not clear when the things are not clear. What if Italian Renaissance painting had tried to never use shadow? If there'd never been *chiaroscuro*? It would be absurd. It would not be better painting.

At times, reality is something you have to hint at. And you need to do that metaphorically, you need to do that mytho-

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logically sometimes. Plato's cave myth is far more powerful than any set of propositions that Plato could've translated it into, right? 'What Plato is trying to say is that all A's are B, or.' You'd ruin the myth then. The myth is a lot more powerful in the form that it's in. So I think it's very important that philosophy have a strong component of literary style to it. And we've seen too little of that.

RP

Well. This debate is at an end now, but we will see the debate continue - in vivid literary style - in journals and books over the next few years. Thank you both very much for being here. And everyone, enjoy the rest of the evening. I think there's music starting now. So please give a warm hand to these two philosophers.

[\*applause\*]