The matter of objects

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review of

A return to the real?

Recent years have seen both a turn towards realism and a turn away from overweening epistemological speculation. Graham Harman's work has been central to both of these moves.[1] What contemporary reinvigorations of realist concerns seem to share is a dissatisfaction with what increasingly appears to be the endless regress of considering the implications of how humans can and do 'make' the world as they make sense of it. For those in this broader emergent 'realist' tradition such regress comes with costs of, *inter alia*: enforced silence in

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[1] Of course, this is not the first time that we've been enjoined to take 'reality' more seriously, with various incursions from those claiming to plough a 'critical realist' furrow being particularly prevalent in the recent organisational and administrative sciences literature. Readers interested in the ways in which this incursion has developed, and could perhaps develop better, could do worse than consult Al-Amoudi and Willmott (2011).

the face of matters that are apparently too big for prevailing human consideration (e.g. Morton, 2013); of having helped hold open the doors to a polluted post-truth public space (e.g. Ferraris, 2014); and of the unsatisfactory nature of a project which shows interest in the matters of the world when, and only when, their reflections take place in the correlate of human consideration (e.g. Meillassoux, 2008). Harman sees himself as pursuing a 'speculative realist' agenda and, more particularly, he is engaged in developing what he terms an 'object-oriented ontology' (see, for example, Harman, 2011; Bryant et al, 2011). These concerns have been present in his work since his first publication *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Harman, 2002); a popularisation of his doctoral thesis which radicalised and ubiquitised Heidegger's insights into the nature of the things which constitute our world. 'Heidegger only makes sense if pushed in a radically realist direction' [DeLanda and Harman, 2017: 2].

We believe that Harman's *oeuvre* will be of increasing interest to scholars of management, organisation and the wider social sciences for at least two reasons. Firstly, the empirical domains of these disciplines are contoured by and studded with myriad 'objects' that have too often been ignored, fetishized or black-boxed and too infrequently speculated upon with any degree of seriousness. Secondly, these are domains that have sporadically toyed with Heidegger in their ruminations and it is through Heidegger that Harman sees his opening toward a different way of thinking about the objects of the world.

Harman attends to Martin Heidegger's (1962) famous distinction between the ready-to- and present-at-hand in a manner both idiosyncratic and, on occasion, tending to the monomaniacal. Heidegger most famously plays out this distinction in relation to a hammer. He reminds us that when we look at a hammer in our hand and notice it, at that moment it is not a hammering tool delivering its function. There is a world of mystery between our hammer in the hand as an object of some form of contemplation; and the hammer in a hand that moves seamlessly with us as it sinks nails into wood. The hammer's presence is revealed only when it breaks in its function, or otherwise breaks out of its immersion in the world of objects with which it interacts. Harman is directly interested in the objects of being and a metaphysics that would enable them to *be*; and to *be real*. He suggests that for any object for which the hammer makes itself present-at-hand as a hammer to be contemplated, the other side of the hammer object - in which it is ready-to-hand, immersed in the extending equipment of the world - must be withdrawn into recess for the making present to take place.

Harman's radicalisation takes place by extending Heidegger's insights concerning the relationship between human being(s) and objects of use to

relationships between objects of all sorts. Not merely those in interaction with a human partner; and not merely those that have already been shaped into tools by such human partners. Harman makes these moves to combat what he sees as the 'general prejudice of post-Kantian philosophy [... which is] that the human-world relation is the sole genuine topic of philosophy' [2016b: 10], and posits a world in which 'objects interpret each other just as we interpret them' [DeLanda and Harman, 2017: 88].

In this extended review piece we consider three of Harman's recent books in which he begins to apply his ideas to more prosaic domains than that of a splendidly isolated philosophy. We consider Harman's reading of *The Divine Comedy* in *Dante's Broken Hammer*; his re-reading of the history of the Dutch East India Company in *Immaterialism*; and join him in conversation with Manuel DeLanda in *The Rise of Realism*.

Why leave the comfortable confines of philosophy?

> Philosophy is *philosophia*, not *sophia*. It is a love of wisdom, and therefore it does not know the truth about... anything[2].

Building a philosophy on an understanding of its limits is a trick that has been played at least since the time of Socrates, who famously claimed that 'the only thing he knows is that he knows nothing' [Harman, 2016b: 180]. For Harman's project it is particularly pregnant with possibility since in his approach to the 'objects' he sees as making up the world he is keen to avoid the traditional trap of either under- or overmining his quarry (or worse still, doing both at the same time). This is what happens when we seek to answer the question 'what is it?' with an account of what the 'it' does or what the 'it' is made up of. In the foray into consideration of art objects that Harman undertakes in *Dante's Broken Hammer*, this is made abundantly clear and is rendered as one of the benefits of considering the objects of art as a way of exemplifying the distinctive contribution that object-oriented ontology seeks to make. For whilst it may be of interest to some to know of the chemical constituents of the splash of vermillion before our eyes, such knowledge does little to inform us of the nature of the artistic object of which it forms part. Similarly, what the artwork may be doing is subject to change on the basis of the perspective with which it is approached as, say, decorative object and/or political call to arms. And what is true of the art object is true of objects in general. It is perhaps just that with the art object the insufficiency of partial explanations (at whatever level) is all the more evident. Harman's point is an ontological rather than an aesthetic one. Or rather what he

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[2]https://euppublishingblog.com/2015/09/10/an-interview-with-graham-harman/

makes clear is that any appreciation of an object *qua* object is necessarily aesthetic, for the ontology of *all* objects is one that escapes direct capture and thus demands an approach that is speculative and interpretative. For Harman this does not mean that the nature of the object is uncertain or unspecified – 'real objects are always finite and specific' [2016b: 208] - but they also cannot be fully known or apprehended (either by 'us' or indeed by other objects in general) since they are 'withdrawn from *direct* contact' [ibid., original emphasis].

Drawing on Latour, Harman (2009: 102) is fulsome in his admiration for the ways in which Actor- Network Theory has granted 'dignity' 'to all sizes and type of actors' (or 'objects' in Harman's broader terms):

> Neutrons are actors and black holes are actors, but so are buildings, cities, humans, dogs, rocks, fictional characters, secret potions, and voodoo dolls...

But apparently 'this sorcerer's chant of the multitude of things that resist any unified empire' (ibid.), does not in itself do enough to show what might happen when one begins to consider the world as made up of more categories than just the human and the non-human and rather opens up categorisation to the myriad range of objects of all sorts.

> [T]he rhetorical power of these rosters of beings stems from their direct opposition to the flaws of current mainstream philosophy... [and shifts] the weight of philosophy toward specific actors themselves and away from all structures that might wish to subsume them. (Harman, 2009: 102)

It is here that Harman identifies an insufficiency in Latour's otherwise admirable interventions. For in his over valorisation of the 'network' at the heart of Actor-Network Theory, Latour risks the very reality of the objects he posits. Seeing objects as exclusively the product of the relations in which they are embroiled renders them as only *effects* and for Harman objects must be more than *just effects* if they are not to be completely consumed and exhausted by the relations which they enter into. To really convince us of the value of his approach Harman needs to do more than just assert that 'we gain access to [reality] only by indirect, allusive, or vicarious means' [2016a: 17]; he needs to show us how such allusion works in practice in relation to specific fields of inquiry with their specific sets of objects of interest.

The ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics of objects

In Harman's view, if objects were wholly apparent in the given they would not have enough in reserve to persist and would be quickly exhausted by the relations which they form. In an object-oriented ontology, the object itself remains

reserved whilst only its vicarious cousins come forth to do battle. These representatives engage with the representatives of other reserved objects and in the process may form new objects through miscegenation with each other. And just as unreserved relation would destroy the object worthy of the name, in Harman's terms, so too would complete explication or explanation. Which is another way of saying that unreserved relation and complete explication are impossible. Confronted then by a need to address particular objects in a sustained way but precluded from any simple empirical assay by the tenets of his philosophy, how does Harman proceed? Glibly, the answer is, and must be, allusively. But what does such allusion look like? And where might it take us?

In the case of *Dante's Broken Hammer*[3] we find three chapters that in turn draw out object-oriented philosophical lessons from Dante's classic in the realms of ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics. In the chapter on ethics we first note the virtue of Kant's formalistic approach in maintaining a specific space for the ethical that neither dissolves down into the consequences of our actions or up into genuflection to the will of God. Rather, the ethical finds a place of its own in a realm of *duty*; a duty not to what we might gain or what our maker might determine as for the best, but rather to a conception of the good derived on its own terms as categorical imperative. But in its abstraction this imperative risks 'a drab ethical uniformity, with the same actions binding on all humans at all times' [2016b: 156]. To mitigate this, Harman draws upon Max Scheler whose *Ordo Amoris* (or 'order of love') seeks to attend to the specificity of the historical ethical agent in the specificity of their situation. 'For Kant, we reach the true ethical state by abstracting from all objects of our interest; for Scheler, it is a

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3   Following a brief introduction in which we are informed of this history and reminded of Harman's abiding philosophical concerns, the first two thirds of the text, prior to these three more reflective chapters, take us through an extended *précis* of the three excursions into purgatory, heaven and hell that make up the whole of the Comedy. It is worthy of note that Harman begins this *précis* with a foray into the middle of the poem; the portion concerning purgatory. Harman believes that 'the key to Dante can be found in this second canticle' [2016b: 10] and we would contend that this key is the *movement* made most visible in this section of the poem; movement through which new *realities* are created by *objects* and their *attachments*. 'Attachment' is a key term for Harman, for which he draws inspiration from Latour and Lépinay's reading of Tarde [Harman, 2016b: 12]. What is of interest to Harman is perhaps most easily communicated via consideration of the dual meanings of the word in English, in which it 'pertains both to emotional and physical joinings' [2016b: 247]. 'Love' is a special form of attachment and usage of the term is reserved for when one of the objects involved is a God, a human or an animal. Harman reminds us that love is present in both heaven and hell (and indeed in the purgatory between them). Our movement will tend to be upwards towards God and his heavenly hosts when we sincerely love and attach to appropriate objects for our ardour; and it will be downwards toward the Devil and his hell-fires when our love is either insincere or misplaced.

matter of enthusiastically increasing our attachments to more and more things.' [2016b: 168]. It is in this sense that Harman sees Scheler's (1973) 'Ordo Amoris' not only as 'a near-perfect fit with Dantean cosmology' [2016b: 11], but also as hugely sympathetic with his own position with regard to the inexhaustible specificity of the objects of speculative realism.

In the second reflective chapter, which deals explicitly with aesthetics, we tread a now familiar path tracing the risks and opportunities of formalist thinking. Harman argues that Kant, in his mobilisation of 'the sublime', ends up not in awe to a nature that inevitably exceeds us but rather tames that very nature by placing 'the dynamically sublime not in [the] overwhelming forces' of objects such as 'volcanoes, hurricanes and mighty waterfalls' but rather 'in our minds' [2016b: 195]. Harman avoids what he sees as the 'correlationism' in this move by taking a detour via Ortega's consideration of metaphor's function, which Harman has previously rendered as a special form of the 'allure' through which the sensual, vicarious cousins of real objects interest each other in trade (2005). Indeed he further develops his understanding of metaphor in the context of an object-oriented ontology, suggesting that when we form a metaphorical connection with an object 'the real [object] is necessarily absent from the scene. There is only one real object that is not absent, and that is *I myself as the beholder of the metaphor*' [Harman, 2016b: 193, original emphasis]. This beholder is not to be seen as a separate, inviolate entity that arrives on the scene alone, ready to encounter the metaphor in play. Neither are we to see the aesthetic as residing solely in the metaphor to be apprehended. For alongside the real 'I' doing the beholding are the sensual objects that the metaphor mobilises.

> OOO [object-oriented ontology] joins Scheler in treating the lover and the beloved (in ethics as in art) as a single unit irreducible to either term, or to a mere side-by-side existence of both. By the same token, the aesthetic unit contains the object and the spectator to an equal degree, and cannot be obtained by fumigating one or the other out of existence. [2016b: 215]

Unsurprisingly, we witness a similar set of moves in the final chapter of the book in which Harman addresses metaphysics. Here he builds on the distinction previously drawn between the policing sort of 'criticism' that we witness in the rather tawdry point-scoring vein of writing all too familiar to readers of academic texts, and the more appreciative form of 'criticism' that is the realm of the 'amateur' aficionado and indeed of those professional wine and food critics whose words we enjoy in glossy Sunday supplements.

> In the case of metaphysics, attachment occurs when we abandon the taxonomic and hence formalist distinction between thinking subjects on one side and everything else on the other, so that the basic unit of metaphysics becomes the indirect relation between myself as real object and the withdrawn real object

> behind the sensual one [that is present in the encounter]. Among other
> consequences, this model of *attachment* as the central principle of philosophy
> devalues the aloof and cynical critic of modernity in favor of a more enthusiastic
> human, defined by his or her loves rather than his or her all-knowing sneers.
> [Harman, 2016b: 248, original emphasis]

It is in this sense that Harman concludes by reiterating 'the object-oriented claim
that aesthetics is first philosophy' [2016b: 249].

Empiricism, formalism and materialism

In his exchanges with DeLanda, Harman and his dialogist both dismiss the
analytical philosophical tradition as empiricist rather than realist, on the grounds
that it too often appears to consider reality exhausted by the 'given', with nothing
hidden behind it [2017: 9]. Although they concur on their dismissal of the
analytical tradition, their reasons for this dismissal are subtly different and the
rest of the book explores the basis of this differentiation. The text appears as
amongst the more serious attempts to tie together and mutually explore some of
the nuanced range of 'realist' thought that has emerged in recent years. At the
most superficial end of these encounters we witness the myriad laudatory
introductions, forewords and afterwords with which many writers in the new
realist mode valorise their texts as complementary to the work of others within
what then increasingly appears to be an emerging tradition. Harman's
engagement with DeLanda here is at least more substantive and sustained.
However it does at times feel as if depth of engagement is partly sacrificed to
maintenance of loose agreement. This may in large part be the result of the way
in which the conversation is staged around consideration of a list of paired
'theses' primarily derived from the work of Braver (2007, 2012). Whilst the
theses themselves are potentially of some interest, their lack of direct attention to
an object nature of reality seems to leave Harman always somewhat on the back
foot in the subsequent discussion.

To our minds, this is the least successful of the three texts of Harman that we've
been considering and for our purposes the most interesting point of the joint text
is the way in which it begins to clarify for us Harman's object-oriented ontology's
relation to materialism. As Harman puts it:

> On the one hand, we have your philosophy, which is both ardently realist and
> ardently materialist. Then there is my own position which is ardently realist while
> rejecting materialism as a form of either upward or downward reductionism,
> depending on whether it takes a scientific/Marxist or social constructionist form.
> [DeLanda and Harman, 2017: 3] (See also Harman, 2010.)

Whilst for DeLanda a material account of the matters of the world entails the information through which that matter is organised.

> [T]he term 'materialism' should not imply only the mind-independent existence of matter, but also energy and physical information (material patterns and forms)... I use the analogy quite often to give mathematics a material status [DeLanda in DeLanda and Harman, 2017: 11]

For Harman, material is more easily dismissed than the forms which it might take when we encounter it. Given this, he unsurprisingly struggles to conceive of a matter without form or at least struggles to see the virtue in such a notion.

Harman is at his most appreciative of DeLanda in relation to the 'brilliant opening pages' of his *A new philosophy of society* (2006) [Harman, 2016b: 221]. When describing these pages Harman delights in DeLanda's demand for 'a *realist* philosophy of society' [ibid.]; a 'philosophy of society as it exists apart from humans' [ibid.], by which Harman takes him to mean a 'society autonomous of any human *observer*.' [ibid., original emphasis]

> That is to say, society must have an innate character that exceeds the knowledge of any particular sociologist, since no one can claim to plumb the depths of society fully [Harman, 2016b: 221].

We thus conclude our extended review with the 2016 text, *Immaterialism: objects and social theory* which is Harman's most direct attempt to consider matters sociological via an approach that he terms 'immaterialist'.

What's the matter here?

The specific 'object' upon which Harman's gaze alights in *Immaterialism* is the Dutch East India Company. This object is chosen since the famous philosopher Leibniz had previously mobilised it in an effort to show that considering it as constituting a 'substance' would be 'so patently ridiculous that no one could ever take it seriously' [Harman, 2016a: 37].[4] Harman claims his text is about 'objects and their relevance to social theory' [2016a:1] and explicitly links an 'interest in objects' with 'interest in "materialism"'. For Harman, however, there has too often been too easy an identification between a concern for 'materialism' and a concern 'objects' and he is keen to distinguish the two to clarify what he sees as distinctive in the object-oriented approach. 'Materialism' or more specifically what Harman recognises as 'New Materialism', is a loose set of theses that he

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4   See also Rutherford (1995) who reports in a footnote Leibniz's use of such a pejorative account of the Dutch East India Company in a letter to Arnauld of 30th April 1687.

discerns as more or less implicitly present in much recent social theorising.[5] Key amongst these theses would be the notion of relatively constant change, an abiding contingency to world and a tendency to view what a thing *does* as more important than what a thing *is*. Harman's concern throughout his delineation of new materialist tendencies is what appears to him to be their 'deep commitment to the *overmining* method' [2016a: 15, original emphasis] in which discernment of the action attendant upon objects of the world occludes the objects themselves. In this he continues his long abiding love-hate relationship with the transformations wrought in academia by the twists and turns of the development of Actor-Network Theory.

Harman [2016a: 15-16] proceeds to list 'axioms of immaterialism' which he sees as avoiding the risk of overmining and thus as guides to more effective development of theorising about the social. The obverse risk to overmining for an object-oriented ontology is that of the *undermining* that is most apparent in the reductionism favoured by certain forms of natural scientific discourse that endlessly seek the absolute, underlying entities of that which confronts us; the sort of disciplinary hierarchisation that sees either physics or sometimes mathematics as the *ur*-discipline, with everything else something of a poor cousin.[6] Harman is convinced that his axioms of immaterialism will not fall into such an obverse trap 'because immaterialism recognises entities at every scale of existence without dissolving them into some ultimate constitutive layer' [Harman, 2016a: 16].[7]

Harman sees the objects of his interest as being instituted and sustained by moments of what he, following Margulis (1999), calls *symbiosis*; a biological term used to denote interaction between two distinct organisms in physical

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5   The term 'new materialism' was coined by a number of writers who see themselves as working this vein (see, for example, Coole and Frost, 2010). Harman uses it to describe not only their work but other work that he sees as sympathetic to the underlying loose set of theses he discerns within the new materialist tradition, regardless of whether or not all the authors so identified would explicitly rally to the specific banner of 'new materialism'.

6   This is not, as DeLanda points out, necessarily a stance taken by the whole of the natural sciences, for as he reminds us, chemists are more than capable of seeing equivalent reality in both the hydrogen and oxygen that fuel fire and their combine in the water that can extinguish it [DeLanda and Harman, 2017: 8].

7   Of course, it is entirely possible for an object to be both undermined and overmined simultaneously in a process that Harman terms 'duomining'. He provides the example of 'certain forms of scientific materialism, which ruthlessly undermine when they treat ultimate particles, fields, strings, or indeterminate "matter" as the ultimate layer of the cosmos, but then ruthlessly overmine when claiming that mathematics can exhaust the primary qualities of this genuine layer' [Harman, 2016a: 11-12].

association, often mutually beneficial in nature. Harman believes that each object experiences a number – but a relatively small number – of symbiotic moments during its life and he further contends that these moments tend to concentrate at the earlier stages of that life, which is clearly consonant with his immaterialist axiom that 'change is intermittent and stability is the norm'. Symbiotic moments are often both 'non-reciprocal' and 'asymmetrical' [2016a: 120-121]. Harman gives the example of his own relocation to Cairo to illustrate his point; for whilst this clearly changed *his* life significantly it probably did considerably less to the object we call Cairo, in part because he and Cairo are significantly dissimilar objects. Harman sees a path dependency in the development of objects, an *irreversibility*, which he renders in terms of his account of symbiosis as a constraint upon the flexibility of the development of an object. In the most general of terms for Harman, symbiosis refers 'to a special type of relation that changes the reality of one of its *relata*' [2016a: 49]. In developmental terms he sees a tendency for symbiosis to shift historically from constituting relatively weak ties to those ties becoming so strong that they may imperil the object itself. For example, when the tightness of coupling of the entities so symbiotically bound becomes a co-dependency in which a break to or perturbation of any remaining weak link can rapidly take down the whole [2016a: 118-120].

Harman terms his stance 'immaterialism' because he believes that 'formalism', 'the natural opposite to materialism... is too closely linked [in philosophy] with abstract logico-mathematical procedures that are foreign to the object-oriented method' [2016a: 15]. But it is clearly a formalism that he favours. That is the formalism of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* which highlights the unbridgeable gap between our knowledge of the objects of the world (what Kant terms 'phenomena') and that which might exist regardless of our perceptual peregrinations (what Kant terms 'noumena', the things-in-themselves). Just as *Tool-Being* previously ubiquitised an insight from Heidegger, *Immaterialism* radicalises Kant by taking 'us' out of the equation; suggesting that for any account of the world in which objects are sufficiently deep to be not fully given in their relations and thus for any account of a world capable of change, 'every inanimate object is a thing-in-itself for every other as well' [2016a: 29]. Which is all well and good. But we still have a nagging sense that the excursion which applies the ideas of object-oriented ontology to the *Comedy* [2016b] is considerably more satisfying than the account of their application to the Dutch East India Company. Why might this be so?

Concluding remarks

As Campbell, Dunne and Ennis (2017) point out, and as we have intimated above, Harman remains a philosopher and avowedly so. As such his theorisation essentially advocates, and can only advocate, an aesthetic approach to the revelation of necessarily withdrawn and withdrawing objects of the world. Thus he can offer no definitive 'method' to the organisational and social sciences and this is why the latter pages of *Immaterialism* are taken up by a series of what must remain 'provisional rules of method' [2016a: 114 *et passim*]. Such a stance towards aspects of our world works tolerably well when directed to a foundational text such as the *Comedy*, which has a relatively constrainable context and a central concern with love. But it is less successful when confronting the messier text of the Dutch East India Company with its endlessly ramifying contexts. For here it is forced to address and at least partially answer, however implicitly, questions such as the ways in which Coen, its 'grim... Governor-General' [2016a: 39] can and does represent the company and its sponsor state; the stability of the referent of the term 'the Dutch' in an era of different borders than our own; and the relationship between the rapacious colonization of Indonesia and the achievements of the Golden Age in Holland. It may simply be that there is more to appreciate, more to which one can warmly attach, in an epic poem of love than in a tragic account of imperial adventure. Superficially this might suggest that object-oriented ontology is unlikely to be a definitive guide to better appreciation and understanding of the objects of our world, which is undoubtedly the case. But the problem here is not so much with object-oriented ontology's lack of capacity to deliver definitive answers. It resides rather more in the persisting desire for definitiveness in the face of objects whose nature is to inherently resist complete explication.

More fundamentally however, our dissatisfaction with the *provisionality* of the rules that Harman offers us for the conducting of social scientific investigation probably reflects our inability to really take seriously the lessons that his philosophy offers us. Which, curiously, takes us right back to the Heidegger with which both we and Harman began our excursions. Heidegger informed us that the 'enframing' of the world of modern technology as 'standing reserve' is an active process in which only aspects and parts of recalcitrant reality are brought forth and stabilised as representations of instrumental value. A view of the world that bears much similarity to that offered by Dutch still life paintings of the Golden Age; paintings which present that world 'as a table top ruled by the human hand and eye' (Fisher, 1978: 144). For, despite superficial robustness, such representations are *always* at risk of falling back into the world from which they were drawn; a tendency which is itself productive of the congenitally failing desire to enforce and stabilise the enframed standing reserve.

> Pressed to its extreme, this process tends towards finality through the construction of large-scale systems of certainty which seek to master what remains of uncertainty; a continuous chain of terms is forged which must reinforce each term's certainty. Heidegger calls this process 'the gigantic' (Cooper, 1993: 288).

As we saw, a key strength of Harman's interventions is his insistence on pressing aspects of Heidegger's insights to their absolute limits. It is thus not only the 'terms' of *our* making that we would deliberately seek to forge that subsequently press back in on each other and begin to dedifferentiate that to which they are attached. Rather *all* of the objects of the world possess both the capacity to persist and the capacity to produce change and novelty through their symbiotic entanglements with other objects. But social and organisational objects, just like *all* objects within an object-oriented ontology, engage with each other only partially and via intermediaries and thus can only be grasped by other objects, including objects such as ourselves, in partial and incomplete ways. If we wish to do them justice we must approach them with this understanding of their and our nature in mind. To take but one pressing example, it is just such an understanding of the shifting faithfulness of the objects of the world that we might need in revising our organisational and social sciences such that they are better able to reverently engage with 'the environment' as a cryptically reserved potential source of surprise that endlessly exceeds the category of mere container.

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