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Feeling-Things

An Ethics of Object-Oriented Ontology in the Magic Realism of Murakami Haruki and Don DeLillo

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Towards the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

March 2020

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: ....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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FEELING-THINGS: AN ETHICS OF OBJECT-ORIENTED ONTOLOGY IN THE MAGIC REALISM OF MURAKAMI HARUKI AND DON DELILLO

SUMMARY

This thesis studies the writers Don DeLillo and Murakami Haruki in conjunction with the philosophical field known Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). I argue that all three are united under the figure of Magic Realism, which I read through the critic Franz Roh, who first coined the term. Magic Realism in this frame is centred upon representing the persistence of discrete and finite objects and things in spite of a background of flux which seeks to engulf them. OOO shares this philosophical concern in arguing that objects are the central constituent of reality. I hold that the writing of DeLillo and Murakami mobilises these concerns in an ethical response to the overwhelming forces of late-stage capitalism, which is the totalising force par excellence when it comes to reducing independent and discrete entities to mere parts or useful energy within a system. This project reads these writers through the affects of anxiety, humour, and charm, and the lens of everyday life to extract an ethical response to the age of anthropogenic forces in a non-anthropocentric frame, a response to the non-human other based on the basic contention that no entity holds a privileged position in the universe of things. My methodology remains within the realm of literary close-reading, but with the added caveat that, in the spirit of objects, it does not pursue any great investment in authorial intention or author biography as part of the function of the literary text as an object in its own right. This work concludes that a proper ethical position, on the level of an everyday affective stance, requires a vulnerable commitment to being amongst things, to abandon any aspiration to a limitless or unbound free-floating freedom, and to believe in changing the world by living from it.

Contents

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Doug Haynes, whose consultations never failed to renew my confidence in the project, no matter how far outside the academic world I may have felt beforehand.

With thanks to my parents, whose support and faith in me has never wavered, no matter how far away they or their thoughts may have been from me or my thoughts.

With thanks to Dan, Kim, Corey, Gian, and Henry, who helped immeasurably whether they knew or intended to do so or otherwise.

With thanks to Jackie, who was an incomparably generous and thoughtful manager.

With thanks to Laura, whose kind assistance it will not be possible to repay.

And to B, who I have followed into a brand new world.

Introduction: Flat Ontology as Methodology

'Total sincerity is the moment of birth [...] of waking up inside an object, of being amongst things, in medias res.'

(Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic*)

'Begin from naïveté.'

(Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*)

This work has to do with things. Specifically, three things: the writing of Japanese author Murakami Haruki[1], the writing of American author Don DeLillo, and the writing of continental philosopher Graham Harman. However, as much as these three things, this work is about things. Non-specifically, it is about things, items, entities, objects, some-thing, every-thing, any-thing insofar as all things are things. It is about how our three specific things define a particular comportment towards things in general on the part of particularly human things. We will call the comportments humans take towards things (of which humans are only one subset) affects. The use of this term will be addressed. The argument is organised into three parts around three affects: anxiety, humour, and charm. The reasons for the discovery of these affects in particular in the works at hand will become clear throughout the argument and addressed in part below. This work argues that conceiving of things or engaging with things through these affects discovers a micropolitical critique of everyday life under the stage of capitalism contemporary to Murakami's and DeLillo's writings. This critique will rely on negotiating with the status of things relative to humans, or rather, on negotiating and dismantling any kind of division which splits the category of humans from that of things. Whether this critique is successful or not will be up to the reader at the conclusion of the argument.

It will do to shortly parse the three particular things this work addresses for any readers unfamiliar with them.

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[1] I will place Murakami's surname before his forename in the convention of the Japanese language.

Don DeLillo is an American author famous for numerous novels from the 1980s to the present. In general considered across the boundaries of modernism and postmodernism, his novels address the concerns of late twentieth century American society, particularly taking up concerns around money and capitalism, violence and death, media and representation, and various other subjects from science and technology to embodiment and fear. DeLillo is well-recognised internationally with a good reputation in both literary and popular audiences.

Murakami Haruki is a Japanese author famous for numerous novels and short stories from the 1980s to the present day. Considered to have one foot in postmodernism and another in Magic Realism, his works address the concerns of late twentieth century subjectivity, not necessarily, but often explicitly related to a Japanese context. These works take up concerns around romantic love and embodied sexuality, personal and national guilt and responsibility, the metaphysical condition of dreams and reality, and various other subjects from terrorism and religion to semiotics and language. Murakami is much-celebrated internationally with popular audiences, though his reception is more ambiguous in literary circles.

Graham Harman is the founder of the philosophical school known as Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). Emerging in the early 2000s, Harman follows the continental school of phenomenology in Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, adding later innovations from philosopher/sociologist, Bruno Latour. Harman's works aim at a full systematic philosophy from the ground up, a whole metaphysical theory of everything. Received with much more interest in circles outside of philosophy, OOO has been engaged with across disciplines from literature and architecture to business and management ethics.

This work will expand much more upon these three things as it proceeds, so not much more need be said here. However, in the case of OOO, the reader may benefit from some quick grounding before embarking on our investigation proper, as OOO will mainly play foil to our other works and its own philosophical tenets will be at play but not necessarily reiterated in full.

1.   The word 'object' for OOO refers to anything.

This means that 'object' is removed from the baggage it usually has as something that is 'not a subject' which is to say, something inert, solid, simple, physical, acted upon but not acting, of a certain size visible to the human eye, etc. Objects can be larger than the known universe or smaller than an atom, imaginary, unreal, fictional, hypothetical, man-made composites, seemingly arbitrary combinations, parts, and social entities *as well as* the usual physical nuts

and bolts kinds of objects. OOO makes no distinction between the word 'object' and the word 'thing', as some do.

2. Something is an object if it is irreducible.

An object is irreducible in two directions: upwards and downwards. That is to say that (a) there is no 'lower level' which gains ontological privilege as if to say 'atoms and quarks are real objects, but novels and minds are not because they're derivative of atoms and quarks', and (b) there is no 'higher level' which gains ontological privilege as if to say 'the power relations and language games in which things take part are what really matter, objects like trees and armies don't really exist apart from those relations'. Anything that qualifies as an object is something irreducible in both of these directions.

3. Because objects are irreducible both to their parts and to their effects, all relations between objects are indirect.

A trickier point, but as a result of the very strong commitment to the irreducibility of objects, OOO (at least in Harman's style which will be our focus, though there are other variants both interlinked with and independent of Harman) every object finds *change* rather difficult. In other words, if a thing's *identity* is not affected either by its relationship to its parts or its relationship to other things, then how can its identity change? Further, if all things meet the same irreducibility criteria, then how does any thing change at all, ever? In order to resolve this problem, OOO introduces the notion of a 'sensual' object, which is to say an object as it is *represented* to another object. Representation or sensuality here does not carry the connotation of thought, mind, language, or biological senses in animals, but refers to the ways objects interact with caricatures of one another – images or particular qualities of a thing interact, but the thing's identity remains hidden in reserve. The argument is too complex to reproduce in full here, though it will be given more thorough treatment throughout this work's argument. Ultimately, Harman concludes that all relation is *aesthetic*, a mode of representation or perception between things, all causation indirectly mediated through sensual objects in an aesthetic register.

4. Objects have a four-fold structure.

If objects are irreducible in their identity but interact via sensual representations of themselves, and both real and sensual objects have qualities which separate them from other objects, then all objects may be described in terms of the following structure: Real Objects, Sensual Objects, Real Qualities, Sensual Qualities. Study of almost every object will involve examining the relations between these different poles of objecthood and what these relations mean for different objects and object-object interactions. Like the argument around indirect

causation, this is a rather complex notion and not possible to do justice to so briefly. Indeed, OOO's fundaments are much more rich and complex with the potential for many other interpretations and alternative paths. The most comprehensive treatment of OOO's early fundamentals may be found in Harman's *The Quadruple Object*. *Guerrilla Metaphysics* is an earlier work which is richer in its argumentation and depth for a reader investigating OOO's roots and origins. *A New Theory of Everything* is a more recent summary of OOO from Harman for a wider readership.

5. The spirit of OOO is one of sincerity and naïveté.

OOO aims to deal with things themselves. This means, in some senses, dispensing with the attitudes which have been taken as standard practice in the humanities since at least the mid-twentieth century which insist upon looking at the conditions for the possibility of an object's production or appearance, the historical genesis of the object, or the way the object is relevant to human interests or affects the human sphere. This does not mean that OOO dismisses such concerns as irrelevant to objects or uninteresting to study, but rather that OOO approaches objects with a naïveté or sincerity which insists upon addressing the immediate object in-itself prior to any relations into which it may enter or which enter into it. This sincere approach to things demands taking the things themselves seriously. This means making contentions directly about things which are not always and sometimes directly in opposition to the various other relations around an object. Whether contentions made naïvely about an object are right or wrong will also be contested naïvely in kind, on their own merit. It will be in the things that this work will invest its effort and in the things that this work will be shown to be justified or otherwise.

The question that next becomes apparent is why I have chosen these three objects (Murakami's writing, DeLillo's writing, OOO) to be studied in conjunction.

My choice of text starts with how I conceive of text in the first place. I do not cleave wholly to either the notions espoused in Roland Barthes' *From Work to Text* and Michel Foucault's problematisation in *What Is An Author?* which challenge the possibility of the literary work or body of work as a bounded, fixed entity, or the notions espoused in Wimsatt and Beardsley's essays and the formalism Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn*, which defend the notion of the literary work and body of work as a self-enclosed, independent whole. It is my position that literature is neither unbounded, limitless chains of signifiers and supplemental texts proliferating to infinity, nor entirely rigid, eternal, concrete universal works which refer to nothing outside themselves. Literature most certainly does refer to something outside itself, and is not a mere internally holistic language game bereft of world or objects. Moreover, and more importantly, literature is a *participant* which is to say, a

causal actant in the world, even if the worlds in which it acts and which act upon it are not the ones to which it refers. There most definitely are things outside the text. It is also the case that a given literary work is most certainly a bounded and distinct thing. *Moby-Dick* is not *Jane Eyre*, *The Waste Land* is not *The Canterbury Tales*, Joyce's *Ulysses* is not Homer's *Odyssey*. Some of these texts may owe a great debt to another, some of them may have been impossible to write without the other, and some may even be futile to attempt to adequately interpret without the other. This nevertheless does not prevent them being distinct and different texts which participate in the world in different ways. An incomplete collection of letters which is being added to and increasingly compiled all the time, or a text in multiple editions, updated as the author's notes are posthumously published, both still *act* as distinct, bounded, singular things when they confront the worlds in which they roam. The fact that *how* they act and the *results* of their acts may vary wildly depending on the state of their compilation or revision, or the fact that their *meaning* and *significance* may be entirely reversed by a new discovery does not prevent these works retaining their identity as the works they are. Rilke's body of work after Heidegger, Mallarmé's body of work after Derrida, H. P. Lovecraft's body of work after Harman may all take on new meanings heretofore un-investigated, but they remain Rilke, Mallarmé, and Lovecraft.

My method therefore begins with examining the literary text in a way not dissimilar to what Bruno Latour does in his sociology of science, which begins by describing the two faces of what he calls a *black box*. In Latour's sociology, all scientific facts are black boxes insofar as a given scientist needs only refer to its output to sufficiently treat with it. One does not, for instance, need to rediscover Einstein's theories to make reference to them in current work. They are black boxes, what they output into the world at hand is all that is necessary to know. Latour's method is to open the black box and investigate the processes through which it came to be black-boxed. Mine is the opposite. I take the literary work *as black box*. I want to conceive of the text as a bounded object, an object formed of language, of culture, of concepts, ideas, and imagined unrealities perhaps, but an object nonetheless, and examine how it participates in the world, study it in its executant reality, see *what it does*.

This leads me to the realm of affect and phenomenology. It is not my project here to examine all the worlds in which these texts intervene. Instead, there is one site which I take as my starting point: the reader from the point of view of phenomenology. Within the purview of this world, what the text as black box *does* is to, first and foremost, affect the reader. The text engenders a certain response, a mood, a feeling, a sense of repositioning oneself in relation to reality, to the text itself as a new reality. It is this engendering, this impact, no different in kind from an asteroid striking the surface of the moon, that I wish to investigate here. My method is, if you will, a phenomenology of the crater left behind, an examination of the

aesthetic effect the text produces in the reader by its flightpath. I organise my investigation around the affects of anxiety, humour, and charm, selected in the same way that an astronomer investigating a celestial body will expose that body to different ranges in the spectrum of visible and invisible light in order to view its many aspects. These three affects are the radiation signal of certain compounds within the friction between text and reader. Like new elements formed in the super-heat of a meteoric collision, certain compounds, concepts, contradictions, and answers, are glimpsed in the friction between text and reader. These affects serve as filters which allow us to detect, locate, and identify these compounds.

And it is in the spirit of compounds that this work proceeds, part literature, part philosophy. In the most interesting confluences between literature and philosophy, each profits from the other's involvement. Literature does not enter philosophy to show philosophy, rather the literature itself *does* philosophy. One thinks again of the philosophical richness drawn from Heidegger's work on Rilke or Derrida's work on Mallarmé, Gaston Bachelard's extensive use of poetry. Philosophy is not mobilised in literature to pose as shorthand for some evacuated idea, but rather the philosophy is grappled with as part of the literature. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's use of Nietzsche, Murakami Haruki's handling of existentialism, Don DeLillo's meditations on Wittgenstein spring to mind. This is of course not to mention the many writers who straddle both fields: Simone De Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus among the most famous examples of writers whose philosophy and fiction were created in an ongoing symbiosis. It is my hope to produce a work which attains to this level of compound work: literature does philosophy, philosophy does literature. Though the end result may be disappointing to purely literary scholars and purely philosophy scholars alike, it is upon the existence of literature and philosophy as a semi-stable and perhaps even interestingly reactive compound that my method places its interdisciplinary wager here.

The reader may notice that my style in engaging with other writers, of any field, as a critic, an ally, an enemy, or simply a source of information is perhaps more direct, confrontational, and uncharitable than it might be. This may simply be a matter of personal position on my part, perhaps inherited from, or perhaps not, some untraceable discourse buried in my own cultural milieu from which I can no-longer extricate myself. Be that as it may, my reasons for this more direct and forthright style are as follows:

In an illuminating interview, Tristan Garcia, French philosopher and Prix de Flore-winning novelist, comments on the intellectual dialogue style of friend and mentor Quentin Meillassoux;

> [Meillassoux] has always practiced an "active critique," which is to grow the opponent, rather than humiliate, and build by thinking a stronger opponent than they actually are. Waiving any irony and

> derision, Quentin Meillassoux defended a noble, ethical form of philosophical battles: invent enemies more powerful, by reinforcing rather than weakening them.

'Interview with Tristan Garcia', *Figure/Ground*, 2014

Like Garcia and Meillassoux, I pursue a rhetorical strategy which eschews irony and derision. While I am most certainly not adverse to a frontal attack on the positions of my intellectual opponents, I by no means wish to dismiss, denigrate, or diminish the standing of the work against which I pit my efforts, and against which my own position is arrayed. However, unlike Garcia and Meillassoux, I do not believe in inventing enemies more powerful than really exist, enlarging and reinforcing my foes' positions. While, of course, in the case of debates, roundtables, panels, seminars and similar styles of discussion, such a method is both admirable and constructive in the best sense ('give new weapons to the enemy even before the battle. Thinking is enlarged by enlarging what is opposed to it, the better to triumph in the end' (ibid)), it seems to me that outside of such a format it appears neither appropriate nor constructive at all.

It seems to me that to take a completed work, one which bends all its pages, thoughts, its rhetorical determination and force towards its argument, its purpose, and its beliefs, and act in advance as if I am in a position to enlarge and reinforce such a work does the work a disservice. For me, all work begins from a place of equality; no advantages are installed in a work in advance. Thus, when I address any given work, I address it with full force, as a work against which only full commitment will do justice. For my rhetorical strategy, it is a kind of complacency, even arrogance, to give to another work less than the full force of one's argumentation. Nothing is excluded in advance, which means that everything is worthy of address; nothing gains privilege a priori, which means nothing is unworthy of full confrontation. Thus, to confront a competing idea with anything less than a full effort is as if to introduce an a priori hierarchy between my work and the other. Whether it is my work or the other which takes a higher position in the hierarchy, this approach still presumes, at the very least, that I am in a position to install such a hierarchy, to judge the order of precedence. Thus, I do my best to directly confront ideas which compete with my own; not in the spirit of demeaning, debunking, or making fun, but rather making my own work vulnerable in committing to a position in order to honour opposing ideas and do them justice as equals, such as is within my ability.

This rhetorical strategy is, in fact, similar in spirit to the metaphysical strategies of Harman and Latour. My deployment of Latour's notion of the black box assumes there is nothing which in-advance prejudices the status of the work at hand. In other words, just as in Latour's notion of the black box, the historical, genealogical, and productive features which

went into the creation of the work, and the effect the work has in terms of its reception, its reputation, or reach, do not have a deterministic effect upon *what the work is* and the fact that it enters into the field of its inquiry as equal to every other work in that field. Similarly OOO's insistence all things are objects is something Harman explicitly claims is a *starting point* but by no means an *endpoint* to his philosophy (*New Theory of Everything*, 54-5). This flattening of all things does not aim to reduce, eliminate, or disregard the real differences between things, rather it aims to disregard nothing in advance so that the real being of things may be understood as much as is possible in the end.

It must be noted that this is also the context in which I approach OOO itself. It cannot be neglected that, though OOO is descriptive in-itself, there is a normative aspect to OOO insofar as it contends that the world *should be conceived of* a certain way as well as simply *being* that way. My basic use of OOO is to confront it in this normative sense. In other words, my method in terms of OOO is to pursue the claim that reality *should* be conceived of in its terms by testing the consequences of doing so. I do not confront OOO in the same way that I confront literary texts and literary critique for the simple reason that I do not have a position from which to launch any attack. My work is metaphysically open, which is to say, it will happily pursue a metaphysical position as a normative contention to test its efficacy and later adopt another metaphysical position to do the same. This particular work remains limited to the pursuit of OOO in Harman's vein, but does not have a position of its own to place alongside Harman's. Rather, it allows OOO to enter into relationships of conflict with other works, predominantly those of phenomenology and some contemporary counterparts in vital and new materialisms to investigate the results of the frictions between these works.

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The ever-present question must be addressed: why this work and why now? In answer, I will state the following:

I am against the disaster rhetoric which pervades much writing today since calls for urgency and immediate action seem, invariably, to foreclose the remit of thinking to the limited goals of the next three months of political memory, the next year of funding cycle, the next round of promotion or employment prospects, the next networking opportunity, rather than the next fifty years or three lifetimes' worth of human (let alone non-human) history. This approach does not deny the existence of pressing problems such as ecological crises, mass global displacement, resource shortages, and growing worldwide inequality. Rather, this approach holds that, because of the very scale of these problems, which will require plans and forms of action which endure beyond multiple generations of human life to address properly, the panicked call for urgency and action *now* is as unhelpful as it is ineffective;

little more than pain salve for a discontent public rather than any meaningful mode of change; as much a (and admittedly a rather feeble) lip-service call by which one might justify one's research as 'relevant', 'pressing', or 'necessary' to an ever burgeoning results-driven neoliberal mode of intellectual exchange as it is *not*, in any way, serious about the next two or three lifetimes' worth of work on these problems beyond the knee-jerk of having something to show for one's labours in the metrics which may only be morally and professionally justified by the institutions of power if nothing else.

I, of course, speak only for my own work here and do not mean to discredit any other work which may have been written under the flag of urgency. Indeed, the world needs emergency room surgeons, and for those equipped to carry out the task, it is a noble undertaking. Only, I cannot justify such a methodology in my own practice. I do not expect others to hold to the standard I apply to myself according to my capacities here, nor do I expect others to mean by the words I have used the same things I interpret in them.

Be that as it may, I do not believe my work falls entirely outside the scope of being-made-use-of (as nothing which takes part in the academic world can) and, if even only tangentially, may perform the following functions:

1. A micropolitical critique of the conditions of everyday life within the contemporary capitalist paradigm.

2. A distinct approach to reading world literature which allows novel interpretations of both Murakami's and DeLillo's works.

3. Wider theories of both literature and affect which may be put to use in themselves.

How my work acts in this way will be parsed in brief below.

Consider the model of Neoliberalism espoused by Byung Chul-Han in his 2017 update to Michel Foucault's notion of Biopolitics: *Psychopolitics*. Han argues that, in today's lived and felt experience, Neoliberalism is identified with a decay in the disciplinary mechanisms of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, which are being replaced by mechanisms of permissivity, or mechanisms which promote and encourage freedom, better to optimise and exploit freedom itself: 'power is shedding its negativity and presenting itself as freedom', […] 'to activate, motivate, and optimise – not to inhibit or repress' (14). Neoliberalism as Han describes it encourages unlimited individual freedom: a constant becoming-new, becoming-more, 'refashioning and reinventing', 'free of external and alien limitations' (1), reformatting all things into potential, eliminating any remainder which might stand outside of the system

of capital. We might say that power as freedom is power as *in*-finity, as losing all 'external and alien limitation', as liberation even from finite identity itself.

Han's solution is to pursue a freedom which he contends is of a different kind to that espoused by Neoliberal psychopolitics; an even more free freedom. Han's utopian freedom is a gesture of negativity (31) in the Hegelian vein embodied in the notion of profanation; 'a practice of freedom that liberates us from transcendence' (53) according to Han. This prescription only makes sense if Capitalism itself is thought of as a 'transcendence' which may be escaped from by rejecting its rules and refusing its boundaries and limits.

I am not optimistic about this freedom which seems to be even more without-limit than the without-limit Han himself critiques in his examination of Neoliberalism. The fundamental discourse which Han is unable to escape in his critique of Neoliberalism is the subject-object divide and a glut of corollary binarisms to go with it. Subject, freedom, choice, thought vs object, limitation, determination, matter. Indeed, Han founds his critique of psychopolitics on this divide unashamedly:

> [in psychopolitics] *persons* are being positivised into *things*, which can be quantified, measured, and steered. Needless to say, no *thing* can be free. But at the same time things are *more transparent* than persons. Big Data has announced the end of the *person* who possessed free will.
>
> (12, original emphasis)

In sustaining the person/thing opposition concurrently with a freedom/limitation opposition, it is no surprise that Han finds his argument shipwrecked on the shores of trying to find a freedom that is more free than free. If we recall that Han critiques Neoliberalism for exerting a permissive power 'free of limitation', to suggest that somewhere elsewhere than Neoliberal capitalism, there really is a completely free freedom, a freedom 'subject to nothing; [...] self-sufficient' (86) seems only to make sense if subjects must remain absolutely free in contrast to objects which are not; an infinite progress of freedom.

This argument pursues the much more straightforward manoeuvre of eliminating the fundamental discourse which confounds Han's argument: that of the absolute taxonomy between subject and object, between person and thing, between freedom/will/choice/action on the one hand, and limitation/determination/fixity/inertia on the other. The Object-Oriented insistence that all things are things challenges both the Neoliberal and Han's notions that there exists somewhere an infinite, unlimited freedom.

Han would also object to my use of anxiety, humour and charm, since he differentiates strongly between affect, emotion, feeling, and mood. For Han, affect and emotion are strictly

subjective, feeling and mood strictly objective. For him, affect is expressed through a linear temporality, a spontaneous discharge (42). Emotion is divided from affect by its performativity; emotion operates through an act or deed. Feeling, for Han, has a temporality of duration related to an objective state; mourning, oneness, anxiety, calm (41-4). Mood is identified by a permanent temporality related to an objective state; absolute passivity, static, merely a 'way-it-is' (43). Places, objects, states of being can have a mood, 'neither intentional nor performative' (43).

In Han's model, it would be difficult to speak of anxiety, humour, and charm under the same heading since anxiety, identified with a temporality of duration, would qualify as a feeling, where humour could be reasonably split between affect, in the form of the immediate discharge of laughter, and mood in the sense that a room might '*be* in good humour', or a story '*be* funny or humorous'. Charm is even more complex according to Han's terms since one can 'be charmed', a kind of affective seizure; but equally a person or thing can '*be* charming' in a state of being closer to mood; while even then a state of being charmed or finding something charming possesses an ongoing duration which would identify it with feeling. Clearly, a meaningful discussion of these three terms would be, at the least, difficult to justify under Han's model.

In the terms of this argument, however, the divisions between affect, emotion, feeling, and mood as Han defines them cannot be sustained. For Han's division ultimately rests again on a hard line between subject and object, an unbreachable taxonomy around which is structured a binaristic relation between freedom and inertia, activity and passivity. This argument disputes the existence of such a division, which is why, for my purposes, the strict categorisation of anxiety, humour, and charm between affect, emotion, feeling, and mood is not as important as it would be for Han.

For the sake of clarity, and while this work's primary goal is not an intervention in the realms of affect theory, it will be worth developing within what category I do examine anxiety, humour, and charm and how this position differs from terms such as those deployed by Han. I consider anxiety, humour, and charm, *feeling-things*. This term falls closest to Han's model of mood or *stimmung*, not dissimilar from the notion mobilised in Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, in that it is an objective state of being. But what must be made clear here is that the term 'object' and 'objective' can apply to any being whatsoever in our terminology, subjective, thought, imaginary, and felt beings included, and does not carry the baggage of *a priori* stasis, inertia, or passivity as opposed to any supposed dynamism, agency, or power to act. Something is an object, and therefore may be considered *objectively*, on the grounds of its own being. Under this definition, which aims to be as broad as possible, all four of Han's

terms (affect, emotion, feeling, mood) would be considered feeling-things. Again, this does not mean to erase the actual differences between the categories or the particular affects, emotions, feelings, or moods which they describe, but rather allows the investigation to begin from a flat ground which refuses to exclude anything in advance and in so doing may meaningfully identify the distinctions between the things in its reach without recourse to categories which prejudice the argument before it even begins.

As already said, I conceive of the impact between reader and text as no different in kind from the physical impact between celestial bodies (or any other kinds of entities for that matter), the affective response no different in kind from a crater, extra-terrestrial debris, emissions of energetic discharge across the spectrum of visible and invisible light. As such, the affects discharged from these compounds between reader and read object, even if they are *only* transient realities confined to this compound encounter, are as much objects as any other entity. Thus, a *feeling-thing* is specifically this kind of object, a way two objects are tuned together, a kind of unified image of the impact between the component pieces of a compound. What kind of impact releases these emissions? What is the relation between the objects which form the compound in each affective state? What precisely is the character of each state itself? Anxiety, humour, and charm all fulfil these barest of criteria and will be read under these terms.

It might be noted further that this approach is not dissimilar in spirit to that of Eugenie Brinkema in her *Forms of the Affects* (2014), which seeks to unmoor the study of affect from reading affect as a 'magical mysterious intensity X that escapes signification' (21). Rather, Brinkema's approach studies how affects are linked to forms which may be read and examined through textual close analysis. In studying affect this way, she begins from a position in which affect is 'de-subjectified', or in which affect 'sheds the subject' as well as any notion of necessary embodiment (45-6). My approach to reading affect is close to Brinkema's and will also match my approach to OOO in taking it as *normative*, which is to say that if I consider affect de-subjectified in the same way Brinkema does, or *objective* insofar as it is related to objects and the forms they take, then affects are not spontaneous or immediate effects which appear as if direct and unmediated, but something which appears as part of the form of an object and therefore something which the object, in a sense, dictates *should* be taken up as a response. In other words, if the affect belongs to a form in an object, then there will be some space between that form and how another object responds to that affect when it enters into a relation with that object. How one takes up, responds to, and how one *should* respond to objects affectively is one more way of understanding the project this work undertakes here.

And it may occur to the reader to ask, what does the lens of affect as feeling-thing contribute to our discussion at all? Here I follow such writers as Donna Haraway whose career-long project has centred upon not merely challenging what she calls 'big actors' like Capitalism and Imperialism (*Companion Species Manifesto*, 64), but challenging their modes of thought and paradigms of representation. Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* aims to discuss the experience of non-human subjects as narratives not different-in-kind from the kinds of narratives humans tell. Haraway calls this method a kind of translation, one which takes 'experience as living historical labour, through which subjects can be structurally situated in systems of power without reducing them to raw material for Big Actors like Capitalism and Imperialism' (64) and widens the scope of what can be called 'experience' beyond the realm of human subjectivity. My method is no different in principle, also taking the idea of translation as its keystone: an examination of how things form compounds, how things appear to one another, what is successfully translated between entities and what remains hidden, dormant, undisclosed. This work looks at the experience of the written word, a text and its world, as an experience of a non-human other. A being which exists and experiences and creates compound experiences in the world need not be living, have psyche, be natural, or be real to do so in my reading. Furthermore, a being which is inanimate, unthinking, man-made, and imaginary can just as easily be considered under my readings of affect as any other being. The crossing and mixing here between these boundaries, again rooted in the modern subject/object division, is my challenge to the prevalent *mode of thought*, the prevalent *paradigm of representation* which holds still today in Haraway's Big Actors, Capitalism and Imperialism. To conceive of the feeling-thing in this way is to strip away the privilege of the human subject, to see it as an equal part ingredient (if not an always equally reactive or contributory ingredient) in compounds with other beings, with other realities.

It should be noted here that there is a strong precedent, though one which will require some teasing out, for studying literature and particularly literature in a cross-cultural context in the objective way we have described. In *What is World Literature*, David Damrosch insists upon defending the study of literature from two extremes which, he argues, threaten to swallow the discipline. Damrosch holds that 'world literature is not at all fated to disintegrate into the conflicting multiplicity of separate national traditions; nor, on the other hand, need it be swallowed up in the […] "global babble"' (*What is World Literature*, 5), by which he means that the study of world literature requires a conception of literature *irreducible* to both the cultural particularity of different literary traditions ('conflicting multiplicity') and the universality of the global circulation of literature in translation ('global babble'). In other words, this approach to world literature cleaves neither to the notion that there is an essential incommensurability between cultures, nor that meaning can be rendered

completely transparent without loss. Literature is thus conceived of in the same way that Harman identifies objects, by a criterion of irreducibility to the poles of the particular and the universal. Literature, like any other object, is thus particular *but not fully or only particular*, and takes part in the universal *but does not fully or only participate in the universal.* This approach flattens literature in the sense that it refuses to acknowledge any pre-installed hierarchies, any firewalls of geography or language, or any pre-emptive canonical inclusions or exclusions. Just as with the flat ontology of OOO, this approach to literature allows an engagement with objects first and foremost as things-in-themselves, a sincere and naïve engagement which takes, above all else, the thing itself seriously.

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In the interests of not spoiling too much, and indeed spoiling as much the aesthetic as rhetorical effect of the reading, I will not summarise my chapters in too much detail.

Chapter 1 will be a minimal and sparse investigation into the aesthetics of Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore*. I will ground my basic understanding of the genre of Magic Realism through this analysis and give my reasons for the deployment of this category. I explore the confluence between Object-Oriented Ontology and the characteristics of Murakami's Magic Realism and show how this reading lends itself to understanding *Kafka on the Shore*'s use of fate and romantic love as well as the text's metaphysical commitments. This reading will serve as a minimal grounding for the work to follow.

Chapter 2 shows that the same description of Magic Realism articulated through *Kafka on the Shore* can be witnessed in DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. Of particular focus will be the affect of anxiety and the notion of death as finitude, key themes in *White Noise* and the writing of Martin Heidegger, who we will interpret in an Object-Oriented frame. This chapter will confirm the aesthetic of Magic Realism's resistance to totalising structures and begin its study of the human affective comportment to everyday life amongst objects in its examination of *White Noise*'s use of the Nature/Culture divide and man-made ecological disaster.

Chapter 3 expands the reading of Magic Realism in DeLillo's *Players*. The chapter reads how the affect of humour appears in the novel in both a metaphysical sense and as a gesture critiquing the paradigm of globalised capitalism which saturates the narrative content of the text. Humour is examined through the models of repetition and rhythm as discussed by thinkers Simon Critchley and Henri Lefebvre, as well as Heidegger's notion of boredom. Particularly Lefebvre's thought it used to study the affective conditions of the everyday as presented in the novel through its humour. The chapter will push towards a notion of

humour as a failure of change or a failure to escape finitude and thus a resistance to any structure which would elide the persistence of finite things amidst change.

Chapter 4 pursues an alternative avenue in the reading of humour by examining an example of the affect where laughter occurs in conjunction with catharsis in *Players* and also searching through the early works of Murakami in *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973*. Making much of the difference between Murakami's early phase of ironic detachment and his late phase of commitment, this chapter reads the difference in his aesthetics of the two phases concurrently with an interpretation of Søren Kierkegaard's own understanding of irony and faith along familiar Object-Oriented lines of infinity and finitude. This reading allows a stricter clarification of humour, ultimately concluding that comedy never performs an emancipatory or revolutionary function.

Chapter 5, the final main chapter, centres upon the affect of charm. Reading DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* and Murakami's *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in tandem, this chapter identifies ways in which the two novels go beyond the aesthetics of the sublime on the one hand and the cute on the other to describe charm as an affect which does not depend upon a subject-object relationship of distance, but which holds onto the finite being-amongst-things opened up through anxiety and the persistent staying-amongst-things found in humour. Through charm, this chapter elucidates a proper affective stance towards commitment and change in a world described by an Object-Oriented metaphysics, and suggests charm as the proper representational mode for a reality saturated by worlds of things which, no less now than any other time in human history, press their demands upon humans powerfully, unquestionably, and intimately.

1. Plasmogamy

'When you're in the forest, you become a seamless part of it. When you're in the rain, you're a part of the rain. When you're in the morning, you're a seamless part of the morning. When you're with me, you become a part of me'

*(*Murakami, *Kafka on The Shore*, 472)

In the spirit of the work, we begin from the things themselves and their aesthetics. We pursue the textual object because we believe that the object's form and formal characteristics itself produce an aesthetic effect. We hold equally that an aesthetic effect is a relation, which is to say an effect on some other object, in the case of the text, a reader. Thus we pay attention to the text's relationship to the reader to discover something about the text itself: its style. This style has nothing to do with the text's relation to an author or other texts written by the same author. This is not to say that an author cannot write many texts in the same style, but rather that an author may write many texts in different styles should she so choose. Each text has its own style Whether texts have a common style cannot be determined in advance. If we begin anywhere other than the text itself, we may do justice to whatever object constitutes our starting point, but not to the thing itself, the text. When we look at the text as object, we do not apply discourses to it see how it looks under different gazes, as one might spear an insect and view it using different magnifying lenses. Instead, we look at what the text does in the world, what it does to its reader. We do not carry out this manoeuvre in a reductive way, as if to suggest that the text is only what it can do. Nor do we universalise the reader, as if to say all readers respond identically to a given text. Rather, we suggest that if a the relation between the text as object and the reader as object is not different in kind than the relations between any other kinds of objects, then to propose features to this one text which may have a bearing on the experience of all readers is not a fruitless task. What we hold those common features to be and the precise nature of the effects they have remains an open question which may be challenged or contested on its own terms, but only, indeed, by paying attention to and making contentions about, in the final calculation, the thing itself.

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Kafka on the Shore, which I take to be emblematic of the Murakami style of Magic Realism, is a novel which produces a sense of the fateful, or the fatal, that is, the sense of 'fraught with death or destiny', from the Latin *fatum*, 'that which has been spoken', that which has been pronounced by the Gods, so to speak (OED[2]). This aesthetic is founded upon the sense of *in medias res*, of being in the midst of things. The lines which serve as the epigraph to this

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[2] http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68488#eid4488760

chapter, taken from a passage late in *Kafka on the Shore*, encapsulate this aesthetic sense through which I will interrogate the Murakami style. I will initially and tentatively identify this aesthetic sense as the absorption of the reader within things alien to them. Consider the objects which are inserted into the structure of repetition of the passage: the forest, the rain, the morning, me. Each of these lends a different aspect to the sense of being-in, only one of those compatible with the familiar notion of physical spatial localisation: being in the forest. One is not 'in the rain' in the sense of physical location within a determinate boundary, but rather one is 'caught in the rain' or 'out in the rain', precisely; the rain falls on one. One is equally not 'in the morning' in the spatial sense, but rather 'in the morning' one wakes, eats breakfast, washes; being in the morning therefore refers to being in neither a physical nor temporal locality but a certain habitual frame, a mood, a state of waking and sleeping, a quality of light, a milieu of immaterial and material things. The inclusion of being 'with me' places human being-with alongside these three other kinds of being-in, spatial, climactic, sensual, as one of the same kind of being; being-with as a kind of being-in, intersubjectivity as a seamless part of interobjectivity. The address itself, mimetically posed to both the first-person narrator and the reader, engages the reader in a formal reflection of this elision of the difference between interpersonal being-with and interobjective being-in. The novel addresses the reader as a seamless part of itself (not itself as a part of the reader's subjectivity or language) because the reader is a reality no less objective than the novel (rather than considering the novel as non-existent outside of the reader's mind). It is as if the reader finds themselves in a 2D theatre, the scene springs up around them, cardboard props rising layer upon layer; the novel creeps up on you, stitches you into its reality with no seams to be found: in the morning, I am a part of the morning, in the novel, I am a part of the novel. This enmeshedness is essential to the sense of the fateful in the novel: to be enmeshed here is to be given over to a world in which the subject plays no special part, in which the surrounding objects form the ground through which the subject accesses the world to begin with.

This section of the novel, as with many others is framed as a conversation between an in-world character and a first-person voice. Half the novel's chapters are told in the first person and the present tense, an effect which is used to mimic the immediacy of address found in the Japanese register impossible to directly translate in English. The effect itself, however (and this, in my view is testament to the translation quality), remains unchanged in both languages: which is the effect of presencing the reader within the scene. By this I mean the effect of enmeshedness already detailed above which curiously occurs concurrently with the withdrawal of more elements of the scene from description. Tim Morton identifies this effect with what he calls aperture: a sense in which the reader is 'there', emerging through what he calls 'the realm of the plus-one' (*Realist Magic*, 126), where there are always more objects,

always more withdrawn than is possible to directly represent explicitly. The subject is merely one among objects, but this aesthetic effect is not achieved by exhaustively describing objects. Rather, the subject's (and reader's) enmeshment and even dependency upon things is cast into light by the way the prose allows their presence to remain ambiguous. In a later Murakami novel, *1Q84*, a character goes so far as to state that 'what you can eliminate from fiction is the description of things that most readers *have* seen' (*1Q84*, 250). Thus we have an aesthetic effect whose content is the flattening of the relationship between the reading subject and the world's many objects, and which achieves this effect through the formal characteristic of eliminating the description of that which is most familiar. In other words, the objects upon which the reading subject is most dependent, which form the most intimate part of its world, are those which are least given over to explicit description, whose presence is most obscured. This is enmeshedness or, as Morton might call it: 'the experience of total sincerity: of waking up inside an object, of being amongst things, *in medias res*' (*Realist Magic*, 148).

Form besides, the novel *Kafka on the Shore* has much to say about fatefulness as its direct narrative content. Consider the following passage, a conversation early in the novel between the as-yet-nameless first-person protagonist and another character known only as the boy named Crow:

> "Picture a terrible sandstorm," he says. "Get everything else out of your head."
> I do as he says, get everything else out of my head. I forget who I am, even. I am a total blank. Then things begin to surface. Things that – as we sit here on the old leather sofa in my father's study – both of us can see.
> "Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing direction," Crow says.
> **Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing direction. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something *inside* you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step. There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time. Just fine white sand swirling up into the sky like pulverised bones.**
>
> (*Kafka on the Shore*, 3, original emphasis)

Here again we have a certain kind of being-in. Fate is like being-in a sandstorm, an inexorable natural force that you are in, but that at the same time is in you, and is you, so the

boy named Crow tells the novel's protagonist. It is something metaphysically tied to your being, but also something which can be inhabited; one can flee from it, one can 'step right inside' it. The sandstorm is not the subject in the form of the Cartesian cogito, for that role is taken by the protagonist, who resembles the free, thinking, agential subjectivity expected of such a subject. Nor is the sandstorm something purely physical or embodied, for though it is made of bones, these bones are in a macabre abject form, a dust which has become the subject's cage, somehow unmoored from time and space as told by the moon and sun, this sandstorm is altogether *metaphysical.* One's fate is one's metaphysical reality; it is one's being in the world, one's being an object amongst other objects, a non-subject amongst unknowables. The way this passage addresses the reader directly produces a simultaneous formal image of the passage's content. The address between Crow and the protagonist is doubled in the way the reader receives it as her own reality. The literature, as an object, engenders what I will call a *feeling-thing* in the reader, drawing her into performing an affective and imaginative response to the work, one which invites her into the reality of the text. The fatefulness, the tinged-with-death-ness, of the passage is generated in the reader not merely as explicit and present thought, but as intuited feeling-thing.

Feeling-thing is the affective summons of an object, a kind of kindling in the perceiver which induces a phenomenal response. Alphonso Lingis parses this idea in germ when he argues that 'a perceived thing is real in being explorable', by which he means that exploring a thing leads the perceiver to 'an overall design that coordinates and unfolds facets, to a behaviour in an immediate setting that extends beyond it and into the future' (*Imperative*, 55). Lingis develops the argument of a kind of transcendent demand, an imperative imposed on a perceiver in the phenomenal experience of all things. In other words, the *form* of things directs the very reality open to the perceiver. The world available to perception is dependent upon objects. This is how I interpret Lingis' comments that a thing is perceived by 'projecting itself in us as a diagram of our own forces' (ibid, 114). Graham Harman, founder of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), marries this perspective with a theory of metaphor found in Jose Ortega y Gasset, and his own form of realism which holds all objects independent of their phenomenal profiles, to come to the sense of the feeling-thing: metaphor 'forces us to live a *feeling-thing*' (Harman, *GM*, 109, original emphasis), or rather, metaphor invokes a feeling-thing in a human observer, it 'puts one's own existence into play by taking on the theatrical role of the real object' (Harman, *Dante's Hammer*, 197). So far, we have developed only a tentative sketch of what this means, but will develop this notion in full through our investigation.

The doubled address between reader and protagonist produces an aesthetic world as *feeling-thing*. When Crow tells the narrator to picture a sandstorm, I, the reader, put my existence

into play in the text, act as the narrator acts. The repetition, litany like, deepens this trance-like state: 'get everything else out of your head', 'get everything else out of my head', 'sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm [...]', 'sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm'. The novel can't be read without the reader performing the scene from within the novel's world. There is a mimetic elision. What the narrator imagines, the reader imagines. The sudden disembodiment of narrative voice in a single passage of bold text in the middle of the passage completes the mimetic elision. The novel is like the storm. It plays itself out inside the reader – when you're reading the novel, you're part of the novel.

In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach argues that the 'dark and incomplete' nature of the Old Testament demands that the reader seek to interpret and investigate the meaning of the world. For Auerbach, the text leaves a hidden depth in the background; the text withholds its content in order to induce interpretation in the reader (*Mimesis*, 15). In the Old Testament, of course, all darkness and mystery can be interpreted as the will of God, an aesthetic we might call Occasionalism. The name Occasionalism is taken here from the philosophical tradition of Occasionalism, which is characterised by a particular understanding of causation. Stemming from the Islamic philosophy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in al-Ghazali and al-Ash'ari, Occasionalism begins with the premise that individual entities have no agency in the world. There are no laws of cause and effect and not even physical contact between things is possible; all of reality contains only one prime mover, God, who directly causes every relation, duration, and event. This theological Occasionalism was dependent on what Harman calls 'a divine monopoly on all relations' (*The Quadruple Object*, 70). In other words, Occasionalism is the belief that causation, or interaction between different kinds of entities, is obscured. This viewpoint resurfaces in 17th century Europe with Descartes, who introduces the mind-body problem into European philosophy, and thus also introduces a causal gap between mind and matter. I argue that the incompleteness Auerbach identifies in the Old Testament functions as Occasionalism in an aesthetic form, a gap between cause and effect, filled in by the reader's interpretation which, for the Old Testament reader, returns to a monotheistic deity.

Kafka on the Shore produces a near-identical effect in the reader without the use of a monotheistic deity. It produces this sense of the 'dark and incomplete' by a non-theistic Occasionalism, an Occasionalism without God. This is how I read Murakami's claim that '*Kafka on the Shore* contains several riddles, but there aren't any solutions provided. Instead several of these riddles combine, and through their interaction the possibility of a solution takes shape' ('Questions for Murakami About *Kafka on the Shore*', Interview). Narrative incompleteness, a refusal of narrative closure, is a structural feature of the work. The gaps

between the novel's riddles which refuse to be resolved into any kind of totalised whole function in the same way as the dark incompleteness identified by Auerbach.

However, while the novel raises the same problem as Occasionalist philosophies, Murakami's writing presents a much more radical solution to the Occasionalist problem than either the Islamic or Christian philosophical traditions, a solution found in only one philosophical movement in the present day: the new metaphysics of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). *Kafka on the Shore*'s narrative is split into two threads which relate to each other only by tangent and allusion. The protagonists of each thread never meet and, though they move through the same physical space, they seem to live in different worlds entirely. The novel resists any attempt to combine these narratives into a unified whole with any denouement. In the same way, Object-Oriented Ontology is a philosophy which has explicitly embraced the Occasionalist problem which declares an unbridgeable gulf between things, only ever bridged historically by the intervention of God. This is the kind of Occasionalism we see reflected in Auerbach's discussion of biblical texts: a hidden background, withheld from the reader, but nevertheless causally necessary, and interpreted as the hand of God. OOO claims to solve the Occasionalist problem of causation by offering a theory of how entities which are autonomous and alien to one another nevertheless interact *without* the intervention of God (*Quadruple*, 75). The interacting across an obscure gulf of two independent things or narratives is what I have called the *fateful* in *Kafka on the Shore*.

For Auerbach, the stark ordinariness and everydayness of the figures of both the Old and New Testaments warrants them the possibility of the tragic – to experience the deepest humiliation and equally, to have the possibility of rising out of that humiliation (18). The possibility of tragedy is also predicated on the Occasionalism of the texts – that the 'random everyday depths of popular life' come into contact with the divine and through this interaction gain the dignity of tragedy (44). In short, the divine intercedes between the random and disconnected. In *Kafka on the Shore*, fate fills in for the missing God. But how does the novel's style produce this sense of the fateful without the divine? How does the novel create the sense of *causality* which is usually attributed to God or Gods which ties its everyday characters into a single coherent fateful narrative? We must not make the mistake of thinking that the reader stands in for God in *Kafka on the Shore*. The reader does not stand outside or above the text, as some omnipotent overseer who lends the text's events reality. As identified at the outset, the human subject is no different in kind to rain, to forests, to mornings. Being-in the novel makes a reader no different to any other object in the novel. Rather, the reader is involved in the text as an object no more or less in-the-world of the text than any other character, animal, place, thing, or idea in the text.

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We have, so far, identified 3 features of the work which are key to its aesthetic form:

(1) Ontological flatness – the notion that everything in the text's world is in that world no more or less than any other thing. This can be described negatively as the absence of any privileged position which holds meaning-making power over any other element of the work.

(2) Feeling-thingness – related, but not identical to the above, the notion that the reader performs, or is in some sense summoned to take part in the text. The work's form directs the reader to intuit a way of reading appropriate to the text.

(3) Occasionalism – the narrative incompleteness which refuses a totalising horizon which would give meaning to or complete the work, and which leaves a space of causal indeterminacy in the work.

How do these features of the work manifest across the work? Consider the following passages:

Truck driver Hoshino, secondary protagonist of the novel's second thread, is startled to be addressed towards the end of the novel by a cat named Toro, who explains the phenomenon of this cat-human discourse by saying: 'we are on the border of this world, speaking a common tongue'. (482).

Oshima, librarian and companion to Kafka Tamura, protagonist of the novel's first thread, gives these parting words to Kafka close towards the end of the novel: 'the world is a metaphor, […] but for you and me, this library alone is no metaphor' (503). These comments follow an extended commentary on libraries, the crux of which is 'everyone of us is losing something precious to us. […] But inside our heads – at least that's where I imagine it – there's a little room where we store those memories. A room like the stacks in this library. […] In other words, you'll live forever in your own private library' (501).

In the novel's second thread, a spirit taking the form of scotch whisky mascot Johnnie Walker says to Nakata, this thread's protagonist: 'so you're no longer yourself, […] that's very important Mr Nakata. A person not being himself anymore'. He repeats this point for effect and adds a quote from *Macbeth* for good measure: 'O, full of scorpions in my mind!' (159).

If we take Murakami at his word that *Kafka on the Shore* is composed of riddles whose solution is gestured at through the riddles' loose interaction, is there a solution or structural reality around which these riddles above orbit?

From Toro the cat, we underscore the notion that human being-in is no different in kind to any other kind of being-in. Two things in the same world (cats and humans) are equally in that world. However, we also learn that there are *borders* between worlds, where things which usually cannot communicate (cats and humans) are able to speak a common tongue, where a kind of translation occurs between them.

From Oshima we learn that the world itself is a metaphor, a kind of translation, a state of one thing being another, one thing in the guise of another. Yet we also learn from Oshima that there are libraries, places where things remain themselves, unchanging, undecaying, private, hidden from the world.

From Johnnie Walker we learn the importance of a thing not being itself. Particularly of note here is the allusion to *Macbeth*. These lines allow an intertextual reading of the notion of fate, vital to both texts. Macbeth's tragedy, dependent upon the prophecies of the witches, acts as a counterpart to Kafka's (the character's) own narrative thread, also under the influence of an Oedipal prophecy lain down by the spirit of Johnnie Walker (his own father), which leads him to metaphoric and allusory (but never confirmed) patricide and incestual partnerships with possibly both his mother and sister. Something not being itself, or the possibility of something changing into something else, which is to say, achieving causation (and thus solving the problem of occasionalism) is the difference between Macbeth's end and Kafka's, one succumbing to his fate, the other transforming it.

If we recall again the epigraph to this chapter, we find a method for not-being-oneself: being-in. Being-in the rain, being-in the morning, being-in a novel makes something an equal part in the rain, the morning, the novel. Being-in a world makes one a part of that world, a part subordinate to a whole, something other than one is in-oneself. The possibility of being not oneself is not tied to a notion of freedom or a free subjectivity exceeding its limits, progressing or growing or developing, rather the possibility of *change* is tied to being-in something else, to becoming a part, to becoming less, not more.

Here we turn to the notion of *hamartia*, tragic flaw, sometimes referred to as 'fatal flaw', that sliver of being in the self which brings about doom. In *Realist Magic* (2013), Tim Morton transposes this feature of the literary tragic into an ontological feature of all objects: all entities have a 'wound', an intrinsic fragility (*RM*, 199-200), or, in our terms, all objects are fateful – they hold their own doom within themselves. Harman depicts this notion in philosophical myth using the image of a 'phantasmal calliope, unleashing its music into the night' (*Circus Philosophicus*, 36). The calliope (a kind of musical steam engine) he hears, untuned and dynamically irredeemable, unrelentingly chugs out a kitschy stream of unfinished musical one-liners from songs of its local Chennai to Bach and some well-known

European inter-war marches. This ghastly performance leads Harman (perhaps improbably) to the ontological realisation that the object is 'in strife' (ibid) with its own phenomenal appearance. He conceives of the idea of reality as like a vast calliope made of calliopes, all interlocking valves and whistles, steam and pistons, each slightly and grotesquely out of tune with one another in a dreadful orchestra. Remarkably (and perhaps even more improbably), this notion combined with the music summons in Harman the sense that he has been born with the memories of not only his own death, but with the memories of the end of the universe as a whole. Given that the book in which this is written, *Circus Philosophicus*, is explicitly mythological in character, it is hardly necessary to question the likelihood or reality of such a tale – however, the philosophical claims are of interest. For what Harman has described is the very character of hamartia in all objects – the idea that, inborn in all things, there exist the memories of the moments preceding their own death, and that the sense of this doom can be brought on by a kind of musical resonance with one's own internal, ghastly calliope.

All this is to do with metaphor and translation. When Harman says objects are 'in strife', this is to say that all objects are in-themselves, and at the same time not themselves. Just as in Murakami's world according to Oshima, the world is metaphor: a place where things are in translation: I translate sunlight and shade into warmth and squinting, I translate bread and butter into sugars and gut fauna, I translate stomach and lung into living and reading and writing. But it is amidst all these translations that we hear that haunting calliopic wail – the sound of hamartia. Morton argues that a completely literal translation destroys an entity, causes death (*RM*, 200). To 'reduce something to consistency', to remove its strife, is to cause its demise. If my gut bacteria literalise my reality into their terms, I become a corpse, eaten from the inside. If sunlight literalises my flesh into its terms, I contract metastatic skin cancer. If I literalise Indonesian rainforest into lumber, Atlantic cod into annual catch, life into labour and value into paper, I become an equal part in the Anthropocene, with a world reduced to its appearance *for me*. What the tale of the calliope lets us know is that the sense of doom, of fatefulness, is the feel of the tension between strife and literalisation. As Morton puts it, our own calliopic wail is like 'a record called *I Cannot Be Played on This Record Player*. When you put the record on, the sounds that are recorded on the disk cause the record player to vibrate in such a way that it falls to pieces' (*RM*, 189). It is like (the very real) discovery that each species of cordyceps fungus targets only one host species, then subsequently realising you are infected, carrier and host to your own parasitic nemesis – already-undead. The sense of the fateful, the sense of the doom brought on by hamartia, is the sense of something resonating too closely with us, threatening to make us fall to pieces. It is the sense of a wail from within, the memories preceding our own deaths, inevitable, fatal. In a startlingly similar metaphor, *Kafka on the Shore*'s Kafka Tamura identifies fate in just

such a way, as a kind of machine, a tiny being deep inside, a part of himself: 'if I want to drive [it] away, I'd have to get rid of *me*. There's an omen contained in that. A mechanism buried inside me. **A mechanism buried inside you.**' (9, emphasis original).

The lines which opened this chapter are spoken by a ghost with whom the fateful Kafka Tamura is in love. More precisely, he is in love with this ghost of a fifteen-year-old-girl, and also her living counterpart old enough to be his mother. He is in love between two appearances of the same object. When the ghost girl says, 'when you're with me, you become a part of me', he asks her, 'what does it feel like to be part of yourself and part of me at the same time?' to which she replies, 'it's very natural [...] like flying' (472). What this conversation touches is the element in *Kafka on the Shore* which replaces God in producing the causal bond of Occasionalism: love. Kafka Tamura is the causal element which joins together a fifteen-year-old ghost and a fifty-something local librarian in a bond which, in human terms, is known as love. It is his *mechanism buried inside him*, his fate, which acts as the reality which cements these two otherwise separated beings together. When he describes his feeling of falling in love as 'like the remnants of some faint, distant memory' (235), his feeling resembles Harman's memories of his death-to-come, a pre-installed temporal fold in his perception, activated by the proximity of the object of his fatal flaw. As it turns out, his hamartia, his fateful flaw, his ultimate bond, is to fall in love.

There is significant precedent for proposing love as the causal tissue which grounds the Occasionalistic, calliopic aesthetic of the text. In *Dante's Broken Hammer*, Harman proposes that 'love is the basic ethical unit' (173). He also uses the terms 'amorous object' or 'attachment' (247-8) to refer to the bonding of two entities, the causal union of two things in the formation of a new object. For OOO, any true relation between objects necessitates the formation of a new object (*Quadruple,* 117), and this relation must always be aesthetic, proximal, a contact without fusion. An instructive metaphor here is the notion of plasmogamy. A phase of mating in species of fungi, in plasmogamy two cell nuclei (called karyon [s.], karya [pl.]) inhabit the same plasma, the same membranous world, still genetic individuals, neither yet fused nor separate, a near-perfect analogue for the cohabitation of two independent entities sharing a world. Plasmogamy is the perfect metaphor for the sense of contact without fusion, called variously 'sincerity' or 'attachment' (*Dante's Hammer*, 248) that OOO discusses; a putting into play of one's own existence (ibid, 197) through an aesthetic bond such as metaphor or translation.

This is what Harman means when he calls the 'amorous object' the basic ethical unit – that one thing seduced by another is a new object. All objects and entities generally are seductive – all objects are stylish and 'every style wants us to love it, and love it *exclusively*' (Harman,

Guerrilla Metaphysics, 139, original emphasis). Things ceaselessly charm and seduce: the seduced object 'lives out its life in being seduced by the object before it' (Harman, 'Object-Oriented Seduction', 133). This seduction is not a 'desire' in the psychoanalytic sense; it is not the fulfilment of a lack. As Levinas puts it: 'we meet with the distinction between Desire and need: Desire is an aspiration that the Desirable animates; it originates from its object [...] need is a void of the soul' (*Totality & Infinity*, 62). Desire and seduction in this argument are aroused by the thing itself which beckons and resonates; amorous, 'fateful'. The object that wins our affections (or our 'attachment') enters into a true relation with us, forming a new object, a plasmogamy. Within this kind of relation, this kind of desire, seduction, or love, what is sensed is hamartia, the resonance of inner vulnerability, a fateful encounter, intimately sharing a world with something autonomous, something other. In *Kafka on the Shore*'s terms, when two beings meet on the border between worlds, communication becomes possible. When two things become parts in the same mutual thing, they do so as metaphor, and become something other than themselves. In Kafka Tamura's case, love is the solution to the Occasionalist problem because it is through becoming a part of something else, becoming a metaphor, becoming attached to some other being, that the possibility of change arises.

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The feeling-thing is another name for plasmogamy; a union between entities borne in by an object entering from beyond. Harman borrows from Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, in describing feelings as unified and distinct entities, formed like the departure or arrival of an object in the midst of the feeling subject; 'just as a bird that lights on or leaves a branch starts it trembling' (Ortega in Harman, *GM*, 107). In this formation, objects in themselves are the birds, the perceiver is the branch and the feeling borne in the branch is its trembling, each its own unified and distinct object.

Harman is at pains here to differentiate the feeling-thing from affect as mobilised in Deleuzian philosophy and acknowledges this difference explicitly in his counter-contention that the feeling-thing is 'a kind of image without organs' (*GM*, 108), against the 'body-without-organs' in Deleuze and Guattari. The feeling is not pure contingency or immanence because it is absolute and finite: the trembling of the branch is an object in-itself. The feeling-thing is always a determinate bond between two other determinate entities – a unity formed between two karya. A thick oaken bough alighted upon by a goldfinch will tremble very differently to a Kashmir rowan bearing a scops owl. As Harman argues: 'it is a new *thing* that has entered the world' (ibid, 109). What I am calling plasmogamy is the sense of multiple entities melded into a new, re-tuned entity, which can be un-tuned just as easily

without destroying its components; the owl takes flight. It is this harmonised wobbling, this willowy dance which is the feeling-thing, which constitutes plasmogamy.

Harman approaches this idea of the feeling-thing through metaphor, but Emmanuel Levinas, 20th century phenomenologist heavily influential in OOO, already provides a strong precedent for studying the being-together of entities through language. Harman first draws his conception of 'contact without fusion' from Levinas, repurposing it to fit all objects, not only human relations. Levinas recognises language as a form of communication which opens up entities to one another without reducing them to their ends or uses for one another, critiquing Heidegger's tool-system (Harman, 'Aesthetics as First Philosophy', *Naked Punch*). Levinas holds that language is a way of relating between humans which opens them to their mutual, irreducible, and absolute Otherness. Just as with the feeling-thing, language as a community between two terms alien to one another can only be formed because the terms remain independent: 'discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* "knowledge" or "experience"' (Levinas, *T&I*, 73). What Levinas calls 'discourse' here, corresponds to what I have called plasmogamy – a relation between entities which creates a new object, a 'pure experience', one absolved of the relation itself. For Levinas 'to speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces' (ibid, 76).

Harman takes this idea of language as 'pure experience' and remaps it onto all entities (sentient or otherwise). What Harman calls sincerity corresponds to Levinas' proximity; a relation which 'lets the things be themselves while also transmitting messages to one another from afar', or 'something that is neither fusion nor side-by-side indifference' (Harman, *Aesthetics as First Philosophy*). Harman's wager is that metaphor and style ['a specific mode of de-creating images and recreating them as feeling-things' (*GM*, 109)] are structural models for how real entities exist in the world together, not just human communication in language. There is a difference here between general contact and causative relation, however: causative relations, those which induce change, *always* form a new object, where general contact does not. Harman's earlier metaphysics suggests that this is a difference in kind, and Levinas points the way to a resolution which suggests that truly *fateful* or *amorous* relations are indeed different in kind from generalised contact-without-fusion between objects. In his Phenomenology of Eros, Levinas argues that the relationship between lovers 'is supremely non public, […] a society without language, […] as though they were alone in the world' (*T&I*, 265). This marks a difference between discourse as contact-without-fusion with the Other, and the relation of love with the Other. The caress for Levinas responds to 'an absence other than the void […] and absence referring to being' (258). This absence that Eros seeks is 'a *not yet* more remote than a future' (264, original emphasis). An absence referring to being in OOO is a withdrawal, a characteristic of a real object. Morton expounds on this point:

'*Essence is the future*'. 'Futurality is what is meant by the term *attractor*, [...] a destiny, or destination, or end.' 'An attractor is the *future future* of a hyperobject' (*Hyper*, 91, original emphasis). What Eros pursues, unlike the general seductions of all objects, is a withdrawal, a future future, a 'not-yet' more remote than a future; essence. Where general seduction occurs in the sensual realm, 'between the sensual object and the beholder who is engrossed by it' (Harman, *Seduction*, 131), this deeper bond aims at essence, a real object; the real object it can sense being formed as an amorous new object, the resonance between hamartia (my very own destined *attractor*) and an Other entity.

It must again be recalled that *Kafka on the Shore* does not merely discuss fate as its content, but equally produces a sense of the fateful as form through a resonance between the novel and the reader. Auerbach's claim that everydayness and ordinariness is the formal element which affords the possibility of the swings of fortune proper to the tragic in biblical texts (*Mimesis*, 18) is again informative. *Kafka on the Shore* is littered with trinkets and sundries, everyday objects which ground the text in the mundane and ordinary. The first scene-setting passage in the novel tracks the movement of a bee-shaped glass paperweight (2-3); a gold lighter and folding knife make early appearances, with attention paid to their handling and aesthetic appeal, along with a pair of sunglasses, with pains taken to denote its brand and colour (5). Other examples abound. If we recall the writing philosophy found in Murakami's *1Q84*: 'what you can eliminate from fiction is the description of things that most readers *have* seen' (*1Q84*, 250), we must question why such attention is paid to these mundane objects; why are these things left to wander across the reader's attention as real bee might, alighting on a desk or tinking against a window frame? Light may be shed here by comparison with Auerbach's description of earlier forms of literary realism, such as that of Honoré de Balzac, whose style is characterised as detailed and exhaustive (*Mimesis*, 470), a far cry from Murakami's elimination of things readers have already seen. According to Auerbach, Balzac's exhaustive descriptive style depends upon a unity between things and persons and ideas; an 'atmospheric realism' which unites the moral and physical in his world through its aesthetic presentation (*Mimesis*, 473). In other words, 'the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieux' (ibid); Balzac's writing is a total unity in which all things correspond to a whole; his style renders as much of his world visible as possible, directed towards producing a full harmony between all elements of style and content. By contrast, Murakami's mobilisation of the mundane and everyday in non-exhaustive description, only allowing seemingly random and ornamental objects to guide the scene, denies any total unity of the novel's world. The objects which appear remain somehow unmoored, independent; gaps left between distinct things and any total milieu. This form engenders both the 'dark and incomplete' aesthetic necessary for an

Occasionalist universe, and the ordinariness necessary for the tragic which takes on the aspect of the fateful in *Kafka on the Shore*.

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Four points bear reiterating thus far:

Kafka on the Shore's aesthetic is founded upon the dissolution of borders between different kinds of being-in. To be a part of something is to take part in it, as much a part as other parts.

Since all parts in a whole are equally parts, none in advance gain more agency or causal power than any other, leaving an Occasionalist gap to be filled. Where everything is its own private library, unchanging, in order to bridge the Occasionalist gap and act as a part, it must become metaphor, become something other than it is. This is what it means to enter the world: the world is metaphor.

Love, or the amorous relation between two things, is how *Kafka on the Shore* solves the Occasionalist problem. In the novel, love stands for the anthropomorphic equivalent to a bond which summons something to be other than one is. To be with another and part of another.

This is the foundation of the aesthetic of the fateful, to find oneself in a world of things which one cannot influence directly; to be at the mercy of one's own parts no less than the world; to choose to become other than oneself through attachment to some other thing. The reader is invited to experience this aesthetic phenomenally, as the experience of reading the text, through its formal enactment of Occasionalism: its dark and incomplete narrative content; its non-unified and non-totalised everydayness; things subsisting together in the same world but irreducible to one world picture, equally parts, but not *reduced* to parts. It is this that we have called plasmogamy or the feeling-thing.

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Now we must examine in more detail the philosophical ground of Object-Oriented Ontology, and its solution, parallel to Murakami's aesthetic, to the problem of Occasionalism. For OOO, all things are objects. This means that anything, real or fictional, solid or intangible, big or small, simple or composite, or anything else whatever is equally considered an object (Harman, *Quadruple*, 5). By object, OOO means something finite, distinct and irreducible: anything which retains its finite character and resists reduction to its constituents or its effects on other things may be considered an object (ibid., 7). Because of OOO's insistence that objects retain their finitude and irreducibility regardless of any interaction into which

they enter, OOO suffers from the same causal gap as the Occasionalisms of old: there is no easy way for objects to interact directly in OOO (ibid., 69). OOO's solution to this problem rests in the claim that causality has a structure analogous to that of aesthetics, to metaphor. Just as Murakami's work contains unchanging, private realms like libraries hidden in the core of beings, and whole worlds of metaphor where things interact and behave as things other than themselves, so too does OOO's metaphysics hold that things are distinct and absolutely so, but may yet interact with one another through something resembling metaphor.

Again the problem arises: if all objects interact by way of aesthetics, then what is the distinction between aesthetics as everyday perception and aesthetics as causation, which creates new objects? Harman calls this second category of causative aesthetics 'allure'. For Harman, 'the world itself is an ongoing state of hypostasis, with every object emerging into a local sensual medium of its own. Our present task is to contrast how this happens in normal perception and in allure' (*GM*, 180). To again remap this difference onto *Kafka on the Shore*'s terms, the aesthetic experience of the world as metaphor is the raw perception of objects; things appearing in terms other than their own. Change or causality is the way one changes on the level of the hidden library; the usually changeless hidden core of a thing transforms only in special circumstances. For OOO, all interactions between entities constitute a kind of translation or metaphor (Morton, *Poetry*, 206). When read in tandem with *Kafka on the Shore*'s words from Toro that cat (that beings speak a common tongue on the borders between worlds), this argument forms an unequivocal refutation of Wittgenstein's famous statement that 'if a lion could talk, we wouldn't be able to understand him' (*Philosophical Investigations*, 223). Such theories of language suggest (in crude paraphrase) that beings are unintelligible to one another because the 'forms of life' (ibid, 241) which would give common meaning to their languages are utterly incompatible. Murakami's aesthetic expressly refutes this claim: if a lion (or any other kind of cat) could speak, we most certainly could understand it, provided we met it on a border between worlds, in a common place, speaking a common tongue.

Tim Morton puts another spin on this in his OOO, arguing that 'humans are like Aeolian harps' (205) insofar as all perception is mediated, aesthetic; we never hear the wind in itself, only translations of it in leaves, in doorways, on harpstrings. Walter Benjamin, with startling similarity argues that in translations of the highest calibre, 'the harmony of languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind' ('Task', *Illuminations*, 80). This is because every work has a 'nucleus […] the element that does not lend itself to translation […] even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted' (ibid, 76). As if to emphasize the mirroring between OOO and

Benjamin's translation, Morton elaborates that we only can hear translations of the wind in branches and leaves and trees because 'there are branches and leaves and trees, "withdrawn" prior to their relations—not temporally prior, but ontologically prior' (206).

We now have a picture of objects, each with their own nucleus, an originality of style which is irreducible to transmission and paraphrase. This describes how essence in OOO is withdrawn from all relations. Yet we continue to perceive objects; the wind in the trees, the words on the page. If, as Benjamin states, 'it is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work' (80), then a true translation can never be an imitation or paraphrase of an original but is always a 'pure language' released, as if from under a spell, in a new form. Just as for Levinas, 'discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* "knowledge" or "experience"' (Levinas, *T&I*, 73), translation is the experience of something pure or original, which does not lend itself to translation. A true translation has the form of something liberated from worldly appearance, a new object.

Translation in these ontological terms is close to a kind of reincarnation – translation is the rebirth of the original, the progeny of its translator, and a new entity all at once. The translation is a new object which 'produces in it the echo of the original' (Benjamin, 77). These echoes interact with the translator to form the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience 'transforms *something* inside us'. Like love, the aesthetic object consummates itself by leaving behind a trace of its own DNA in the reader, a phrase we can't help but play anew, an indelible chord in the reader's Aeolian mechanism.

Reading is therefore like playing music; both interpretation and performance at once. Without mentioning the practical difficulties literary translation proper, all reading generally is a kind of translation in the Object-Oriented sense. All texts, and all aesthetic works more generally are objects – not because they subsist in pages and paper, or because they have material traces in ink, typewriters, brushes, biographies, cultural artefacts, and physiological neuro-plastic footprints – but because they are *originals*. When Harman argues that 'every object emerg[es] into a local sensual medium of its own' (*GM*, 180), this means that every given entity must have a phenomenal world of its own, a way of experiencing the sensual interference of other objects. This means simply that any sensual appearance of any object does not exhaust the object-in-itself, its essence, whether or not the thing has mind or sentience. The Occasionalistic feature of OOO sustains this unbridgeable divide between the withdrawn reality and sensual crust of objects without having to recourse to a theory of mind. In any case, Harman addresses the charge of panpsychism in *The Quadruple Object*

(118, 121), so I will not reiterate it here. The pertinent point for this work is that if the literary object exists as an original, with a nucleus withheld from translation, then the relation between reader and text must take place in the text's phenomenal world, its 'local sensual medium'.

What is the nature of the world as metaphor? It will be useful to draw a contrast between this notion and the term 'plasma' as used by Bruno Latour, famous for his Actor-Network Theory which moves within the same intellectual neighbourhood as OOO. Latour's plasma 'resembles a vast hinterland providing the resources for every single course of action to be fulfilled', 'that which is not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialised' (*Reassembling the Social*, 244). Latour's plasma is a single unformatted zone out of which all actors and networks emerge. By contrast, the 'local sensual medium' in this work constitutes a thing's metaphorical world and always belongs to a particular nucleus, a certain object; it is neither unformatted nor generalised, but particular, discrete, and finite. In other words, an object is always an original and its local sensual medium always gestures towards that original, like a climate surrounding its object with phenomena. To be enveloped in a sensual medium is like standing on an earth-like real object and knowing that all your aesthetic senses, the smell of the air, the colour of the sky, the firmness of the ground, the sound of the sea, the senses of dread, tedium, or elation are all particular, specific, and unique to your sensual interaction with that particular real object. Latour's plasma is one thing out of which all others seem to emerge. The world as metaphor is, by contrast, a medium formed of two (or more) distinct and specific real objects sharing one specific sensual plasma, a translation between them.

This model appears to run counter to some of Levinas' ideas of Infinity and Alterity – apparently problematic in my mobilisation of Levinas' ethical framework. Like Latour, Levinas tends towards eliminating determined objects from his plane of being: 'to think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object' (*T&I*, 49). Indeed, in Levinas' phenomenology, there is no thinking specific objects apart from phenomenal experience at all: the *I* 'is a substance because it is endowed with thought' (*Existence & Existenz*, 88), while everything Other to the I lacks identity unless *identified* in 'the very positing of an entity in the heart of the anonymous and all-invading being' (ibid). For Levinas, 'the *I* always has one foot caught in its own existence' (ibid, 84), a move that OOO embraces wholeheartedly. However, the idea that being itself should be a singular, all-invading whole is not compatible at all with OOO's distinct objects. The claim that a subject's identification of a being endows it with substance is even less compatible. Yet the idea that 'transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality (*T&I*, 41), is also an idea that OOO is not hostile to, nor is the idea that such a transcendence

would disrupt a totalising system like Levinas' idea of war, 'an order from which no one can keep his distance' (ibid, 21).

The caveat that can be applied to set Levinas and OOO into a less uncomfortable union is to propose 'transcendent Capital Xs numbering in the trillions rather than just one of them' (Harman, *Phenomena & Infinity*). In this claim, Harman extends the transcendent relation of the I and the Other to all things. In this way, all objects come to disrupt totality, to stand as enclosed infinities beyond the possession of the I or the ego. If the world for Levinas is a single anonymous being, then for OOO, 'if any object is inexhaustible by any set of its relations or qualities, then the thing is always elsewhere than the world, meaning that in some sense the thing is otherworldly' (ibid). It should be noted that Harman is writing against the idea of 'world' as totality, or a fully exhaustive description of all that exists. This is not a proposal of ontological escapism, as if things can jettison themselves from reality, but rather one of seeing the non-totalisable and otherworldliness already extant in all things. Abandoning the concept of a totalised world for otherworldly objects does not imply that there must be other worlds elsewhere which house the otherworldly bits of the objects in themselves. Rather, this notion suggests that there is no single totalised world which expresses and describes all reality, and there is no other world to which escape is possible. In the words of Tim Morton: 'there is no "away" after the end of the world' (*Hyper*, 109). Thus when Harman proposes in *Immaterialism* in 2016 the seemingly opposite thesis that the thing-in-itself is not otherworldly (32), I see no contradiction given that his claim in *Phenomena and Infinity* speaks against the idea of a totalising world, and his claim in *Immaterialism* speaks against escapism: 'the point is that each object in *this* world is a thing-in-itself' (Harman, *Immaterialism*, 32). I see no reason, therefore, why it cannot be further added that rather than *the* world there might now be worlds in the plural, or rather, shared worlds, not places to escape to or from, but places which cannot be escaped, the beckoning seductive bonds between objects; their shared sensual mediums.

If translation, like the resonance of the Aeolian harp in the wind, is a characteristic of how all entities appear to one another generally, then the fact that beings are otherworldly to one another suggests that reading, in a far more literal sense than is typical of the phrase, takes place in other worlds.

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Murakami has been discussed under the heading of Magic Realism by such writers as Susan Napier who holds that 'Murakami's works are particularly good examples of contemporary Japanese magic realism' (*Magic of Identity*, 471). I have already characterised Murakami's aesthetic by the features of fatefulness and Occasionalism: while Napier suggests that

'Murakami's use of the fantastic brings a fresh perspective to many of the problems of urban modernity, most of which are not restricted to Japan' (ibid, 473), I add that it is Murakami's treatment of objects, his use of their ability to charm and draw the reader into their otherworldly presence which allows this wider reach which does not appeal to a universal, but rather involves readers in a specificity. If, as Napier holds, this aesthetic should be considered a form of Magic Realism, in what ways can we parse the characteristics, both formal and ontological, of the writing we have discovered so far such that they relate to the genre?

There is one formation of Magic Realism which I will adopt to describe the aesthetics this work has uncovered so far. This is the formation first coined in the 1920s by Franz Roh as a description of the new art movements of the period, and though it differs somewhat from the categories usually applied to literary Magic Realism (in Borges and Garcia Marquez for example), it has some important associations which will prove fruitful for this work.

For Roh, Magic Realism or *Magischer Realismus*, is characterised by how it 'separates itself from Expressionism *by means of its objects* (*Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism*, 16, original emphasis), through a 'calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces' (ibid, 20). This is almost a direct reflection of the rallying call of the phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl, a call embraced by OOO: 'return "to the things themselves"' (*Quadruple*, 20). Roh's Magic Realism and OOO find themselves snug bedfellows here, both concerned immediately with objects as reality and furthermore, objects as concrete and discrete against the idea of reality as a pure flux or fluid background. Roh argues that Magic Realism tries, above all, to depict the 'miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (*MR: P-E*, 22), illustrating how the magic realist focus on objects serves to bring out a particularity from within an unceasing mass, express a finite determinacy within a background – 'the background is the last frontier, absolute nothingness, absolute death, from which something emerges and vibrates with energetic intensity' (ibid, 20). This exact same move is found in OOO in Harman's critique of Latour and Levinas, and more prominently of Heidegger – Harman always writing against the reduction of objects to an all-encompassing holistic system: '[against Heidegger's system of equipment] we might say that the different parts of a machine refer to and mutually determine one another, this mutual interrelation does not exhaust the reality of these parts' (*Quadruple,* 43). Just as with Levinas' notion of war, looking at objects; discrete, finite entities, functions as a way of disrupting an holistic or totalising attitude to the concept of world.

As to how this is accomplished, Roh is once again telling: 'it is a question of representing before our eyes, in an intuitive way, *the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world* [... that is,] to discover objects beginning with spirit (*MR: P-E*, 24, original emphasis). By 'spirit', Roh means the interiority of human being; the sensual or aesthetic modes by which humans approach things in the world. It is nigh redundant to note that this 'proximity of the object as spiritual creation' (ibid, 23) resembles exactly the kind of phenomenological approach this work proposes[3]. To meet with an Object-Oriented world, a Magic Realist work is needed which appreciates the intuited summons an object lays upon its reader as sensual *feeling-thing*. Roh adds that this Magic Realist work 'almost always manifests itself in miniature form', by which he does not mean literal smallness, but 'attempting to locate *infinity* in small things' (ibid, 27). Just as Harman's ontology litters reality with otherworldly little transcendencies, and claims that 'the entire field of reality is laced with infinity' (Harman, *P&I*), Roh's Magic Realism responds by aiming directly at this infinity, the finite nature of objects through a phenomenological, aesthetic approach to the real.

It should be obvious at this point how my reading of Murakami's writing fulfils the criteria for Roh's Magic Realism. His prose traces objects in their everyday realities, but through a phenomenal filter. Attention to detail is paid which summons and draws the reader, but which discloses something withdrawn, a sense of otherworldliness, a sense of being-there which is at once familiar and unfamiliar. Recall the glass paperweight in the shape of a bee, how the movement of this sensual object directs the performance of the reader's experience of the passage of time and space through the text. *Kafka on the Shore* offers no totalities or grand narratives, just leading trails left by things which the reader follows, making leaps through performing the text's Occasionalist style of causality. This kind of literature refuses to totalise, to add in a background which would rationalise, explain, or give meaning to the disparate objects it presents. Instead it demands the being-in of the reader, the investment or sincerity of the reader in the text, which beckons as the feeling-thing, the sense of the fateful.

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Along-for-the-ride truck driver Hoshino and transgender librarian Oshima have a conversation about Beethoven:

> "Do you think music has the power to change people? As though you
> listen to a piece and go through some major change inside?"

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[3] It is perhaps not surprising that OOO and Roh have such close allegiances as Roh took inspiration from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose work is also the root of Harman's OOO, and that Roh's original essay was translated into Spanish in 1927 by Jose Ortega y Gasset, the very philosopher of the feeling-thing from whom Harman takes a significant portion of his theory of metaphor and aesthetics.

> Oshima nodded. "Sure that can happen. We have an experience – like a chemical reaction – that transforms *something* inside us. When we examine ourselves later on, we discover that all the standards we've lived by have shot up another notch and the world's opened up in unexpected ways. Yes, I've had that experience. Not often, but it has happened. It's like falling in love."

> (*Kafka on the Shore*, 407-8).

This conversation juxtaposes Hoshino, a hapless everyman, with an improbably educated librarian. The cat Toro calls Hoshino 'a happy go lucky guy who has never taken responsibility for anything,' (486) and lays a fateful duty upon him: 'it's as if fate decided everything', 'I [Hoshino] am the one who chose this path, I've got to see it through to the end' (487).

Kafka Tamura reads a book in Oshima's cabin where he finds the words 'in dreams begin responsibility' (141), and from this comes to the conclusion that 'it doesn't matter whose dream it started out as, you have the same dream. So you're responsible for whatever happens in the dream' (142).

These passages suggest two things: first, fate can be experienced as responsibility. Second, responsibility appears regardless of where the dream or fate that occasions it has come from. One's becoming a part within a whole, a figment within a dream, regardless of who or what is doing the dreaming, therefore functions as a change in fate, a change in the *mechanism inside you*, an essential change. Responsibility is a matter therefore of embracing the change which takes place in one's inner reality by translating it into the outer world. It is a matter of aesthetic and affective response to an ontological shift. This is why Hoshino remarks to Oshima on the power of music to invoke change: it is by way of aesthetics, of metaphor and translation, that causality emerges into the world. We can see in this passage again the reference to human being-in as a non-special kind of being-in, no different to a chemical reaction, equivalent to substances in a thermodynamic soup. Only by intuiting *Kafka on the Shore*'s aesthetic of fatefulness, being amongst things, in the rain, in music, in love, can Oshima's response be read properly, not only in its reference to love directly, but also in its understanding of the world, or *worlds*, opening up.

When Morton argues that 'we must develop an ethics that addresses what Derrida calls *l'arrivant*, the absolutely unexpected and unexpectable arrival of what I [Morton] call the *strange stranger*' (*Hyper*, 124), *Kafka on the Shore* offers an answer through its Magic Realism. An ethics addressing this strange stranger is precisely the responsibility *Kafka on the Shore* presents through its form and content. It is a matter of the aesthetic and affective response to the being-in in which we find ourselves enmeshed.

This is why Beethoven is able to intervene in Hoshino's life. Being in the music (like being in the forest) makes Hoshino an ingredient in the chemical reaction that is translation. The music is translating his phenomenal world by allowing him the opportunity to share in a sensual experience which belongs to it: 'lost in the music, a number of thoughts crossed his mind [...]. The more he thought about himself, though, the less reality his existence seemed to have. He began to feel like some meaningless appendage sitting there' (348). The aesthetic experience, the greeting of the strange stranger in our midst calls into question our own reality, makes us equal parts among others, equal objects among others. Just as for Levinas 'the strangeness of the Other is [...] accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics' (*T&I*, 43), the strangers in *Kafka on the Shore* demand that we begin to feel not ourselves.

The ghost girl asks Kafka Tamura to accept something inside himself in an otherworldly town without a concept of time or memory:
'"[after you accept it] you'll become completely yourself," she says.
 "You mean up til now I haven't been completely me?"
"You are totally yourself, even now," she says, then thinks it over. [...] "The most important thing about life here is that people let themselves be absorbed into things."' (471-2)

This feeling of being not-yourself, the feeling of being 'some meaningless appendage' caught up in an inhuman design, the feeling of being summoned by a destiny which is yours alone, but is not you yourself – this is the aesthetic of *Kafka on the Shore*, the sense of the fateful, the sense of otherworldly summons, the feeling-thing. It is a recurring motif which consistently indicates the possibility of seeing the world other than it is, and being-in-the-world other than you are, while still being exactly what you are and nothing other. It is in being absorbed in other things, being-with other things, in giving up your own being to their summons, in donating your own parthood to their world, that this is accomplished. It is to give in to *hamartia*, not to flee the fateful call of an otherworldly summons as Oedipus does, which opens the possibility of an inhuman ethics, of greeting the strange stranger. In its attention to the phenomenal experience of reality, in its Magic Realist focus on presenting the infinity in the objects of the everyday, in its aporetic presentation of an Occasionalist causality, and in its constant insistence on the force of the aesthetic experience, *Kafka on the Shore* invites the reader to perform with it the ominous dance of fate. The reader is caught up in the novel, which means just as much being caught up in herself *performing* the novel – 'the storm is you'.

In a cyclical yet contradictory structure, the novel fulfils its own fateful pronouncement: 'You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. […] When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in' (4).

'Our responsibility begins with the power to imagine. […] *In dreams begin responsibility*' (141, original emphasis).

'Eventually, you fall asleep. And when you wake up, it's true. You are part of a brand new world' (505).

Embracing the fateful means being absorbed in something, in some destiny, in some object. Yet it also means becoming completely yourself, meeting your own hamartia, the mechanism inside you. Facing this object-ness in yourself is like facing a storm; when you reach the other side you won't know whether you're a different entity or whether you have entered a new world entirely. This is what the feeling-thing means – a new experience of reality. What you have to accept along the way is the aesthetic experience itself, in other words, the power to imagine – responsibility. The feeling-thing is the beginnings of an ethical response to an Object-Oriented reality, a responsibility for and a commitment to the objects with which we share the world. It is at the edges of the world, an untotalisable region where new objects beckon and press in that this takes place. It is in carrying the reader off to this edge, where time and memory carry less significance, where the totalising and meaning-giving background begins to disappear, where I feel not-myself, that *Kafka on the Shore* points to where an ethics for a non-anthropocentric world begins.

2. The Founder of Hitler Studies is a Heideggerian

What can be gained from understanding this aesthetic phenomenon in Murakami's writing? Does a philosophical reading of a literary genre propose an ethical position which might reach any further than the limits of a single cultural history, a single literary moment, or even a single writer? It is my position that even were it not possible to find a single other instance of the ethical position derived from *Kafka on the Shore*, it would still be possible to expand, apply, and widely develop this position. However, this work does hold that its reading of Magic Realism through Object-Oriented Ontology as an ethical position is more widespread than a single author and culture. In fact, examining this same aesthetic phenomenon through a different lens brings out more aspects and facets to its character. It is here this work turns to the work of Don DeLillo, American novelist, and the notion of finitude.

Attunement

Prestigious Academic Found Scared of Death

J. A. K. Gladney, Chairman of the department of Hitler Studies at College-on-the-Hill, Blacksmith, has been found to be inauthentically scared of death, our exclusive sources can reveal. In a series of secret interviews conducted with persons close to Mr Gladney, we have unearthed the dark secrets of the otherwise well-respected professor, amongst which may be included the scandalous accusation of Heideggerian tendencies in the psychic life of the illustrious professor at the school of American Environments.

Mr Gladney, known as J. A. K. (pronounced 'Jack') to his friends and family, has lived in Blacksmith for many years with his wife and children. He may often be seen wandering the campus of College-on-the-Hill alone or with his colleague and friend Dr Murray Siskind, and is occasionally spied eating take-out in parking lots on the outskirts of town. A larger than life man, Gladney boasts an imposing figure in his academic robes. With his big hands and dark glasses, he looks every inch the academic visionary and Hitler founder we all know him to be.

But under those thick lenses lies a troubled man. Suspicions were raised about Gladney at the recent Hitler symposium, where Gladney was seen to deliver a rousing opening speech on assorted topics to do with Hitler including his dog and family. One visiting scholar commented that Gladney's aura lay over the whole conference, even though he was rarely present-at-hand himself, but noted that when he did make himself objectively present, there was a certain sense of death-prone anxiety to J. A. K. which intensified his Germanic melancholy. J. A. K.'s German was also praised for being remarkably similar to his English.

Smelling a rat, an interview was quickly undertaken with an anonymous source whose words have been typeset by an interpreter to protect his identity:

Q: 'What do you make of Gladney's largely *zuhanden* performance at the Hitler symposium?'

A: 'It's obvious. His aura is everywhere. The more nowhere a big man is, the more his bigness grows in significance. I have to like that in J. A. K., I have to envy that in him. One can't so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in his direction. He's a total contexture of reference. He's what people talk about when they talk about Hitler. He *is* talking-about-Hitler, talking about Hitler. Such men withdraw from objective presence, have you ever seen such a man stay objectively present for long?'

Q: 'What about this death-prone feeling around him? Is this anxiety something new in J. A. K.?'

A: 'J. A. K. has always been prone to death. Recently he has been frenzied, eclectic, covetous. He's not death-prone because he wants to die, he's death-prone because he wants to live. We're not really talking about J. A. K.; once we've heard about Hitler, it becomes impossible to talk about J. A. K. There is an aura around J. A. K., a deathliness, an accumulation of deathward energy. To speak about J. A. K. is to speak about J. A. K.'s being-towards-death. To speak about J. A. K. is to speak about talking about Hitler. To speak about J. A. K.'s being-toward-death is to speak about talking about Hitler.'

Q: 'You mean this death-prone anxiety is lost in talking about Hitler or comes from it?'

A: 'It's obvious.'

Q: 'This seems to please you greatly. Do you think it will be damaging to J. A. K. to be linked to Heidegger?'

A: 'People who are linked to Heidegger have always been damaged. Have you ever seen a man who was linked to Heidegger who was not damaged? Think of Levinas trying to *leave the climate of Heideggerian philosophy*, and look where that got him. I'm not saying J. A. K.'s career will be damaged by his ontically inauthentic mode of attuning which discloses his ownmost lostness in Hitler in being-towards-death; I'm not singling him out. Big men with limited exposure to Heideggerian toxic events have always been damaged. J. A. K. still has Hitler, he's still part of something, he can't get outside of the aura, the here, the now. To plot is to live. J. A. K. needs to plot, to be aimed, to advance the action according to a plan.'

We can also report that Gladney has been spotted dashing madly between campus buildings, uttering phrases in German as a way to pass between levels of being, and longs for 'a night that swallows existence so completely that he is cured of his own lonely dying'. This reporter thinks this is a vain hope; it is worth remembering that Heidegger is explicit here: 'in the dark there is emphatically "nothing" to see, though the world is *still* "there" *more obtrusively*.' (*Being & Time*, 183, original emphasis). This reporter would advise Mr Gladney against escapism: death is, after all, '*the ownmost, nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and insuperable possibility of Dasein*' (ibid, 248, original emphasis). It remains to be uncovered how Gladney's dying will proceed. (Full interview and story on p5 or online.).

Divine Irreference, Sacred Immaterial

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) is the story of Jack Gladney's anxiety, his flight from his fate, his attempts to sabotage, disguise, cover over and conceal the fact of his dying. It is also the story of the objects of Jack's daily life through which he neutralises his terrible angst, the spectres that loom in everyday things. Martin Heidegger is the philosopher who stands colossal over the concepts of anxiety and death in the 20ᵗʰ Century, his legacy touching deconstruction, phenomenology, affect studies, psychology, ethics, and metaphysics. OOO inherits and is born out of the passage of Heidegger's *Being and Time* known as the 'tool-analysis', which Harman treats with in *Tool-Being*. In an alternative reality, or a counter-textual biography, what would a Heideggerian Jack Gladney look like? What does the existential phenomenology of *Being and Time* add to DeLillo's own meditation on death in *White Noise*? In his encounter with deathliness, what does this imaginary Gladney offer to our Object-Oriented reading of fatefulness and the feeling-thing? If anxiety is fundamental to Heidegger's philosophy, what is it to OOO?

Immediately after the events of the Hitler conference, Jack Gladney attends an appointment for medical tests at the ominously named 'Autumn Harvest Farms'. Jack, who narrates *White Noise* in the first person, comments: 'would a quaint name fool us into thinking we live in pre-cancerous times?' (*WN*, 316) passing over the sense of the words 'to feed off' (harvest) and 'to agriculturally manufacture' (farm) the end of life (Autumn). The name is as redolent of the fields of humans grown as machine fuel in *The Matrix* (1999) as it is of the pastoral idyll it seems to invoke in Gladney. Jack goes on: 'What kind of condition might we expect to have diagnosed in a facility called Autumn Harvest Farms? [...] Familiar old farmhouse miseries calling for bed rest, a deep chest massage with soothing Vicks Vaporub' (ibid). Exposed to a toxic substance earlier in the novel, Jack's imagined sanctuary of Autumn Harvest Farms is exemplary of continued attempts to outfox death. To escape his sense of death and have his anxiety assuaged, Jack turns to the crowd; the cacophony of humanity. He wants his death to be hidden by reflecting himself in the mass and noise of the species: 'I stood with my arms folded trying to create a picture of an impassive man [...]. It seemed the only way to neutralize events' (ibid. 163). It matters very much to Jack how he *appears* in his dying. He propagates performances in which to conceal himself. When his family are beset by the Airborne Toxic Event, they carry on their meal as if nothing is wrong, 'there passed among us a sheepish hope that only in this way could we avoid being noticed' (ibid, 138). Jack projects an image of himself into the domain of public interpretation as an antidote to the intense solitude of his deathward angst.

This is nothing new in DeLillo criticism. Mark Osteen in *American Magic and Dread* declares that 'the characters of *White Noise* try to counteract dread by mouthing chants and litanies, practicing pseudo-religious rituals, crafting narratives that deflect or purge their fear' (*AM&D*, 165). Osteen reads *White Noise* as an 'American Book of the Dead', a guide to passing on in postmodern USA, a book of magic spells and 'a book of packages – a thesis on the kinds and uses of intellectual, linguistic, commercial, personal, and televisual packaging' (ibid, 167). In other words, Osteen locates magic in images and representation, in the dissemblance of things in simulated form. His analysis examines how the image dispels the dread of death, how 'packages' both shield and obliterate individuals in the language of consumption: 'Consumption turns persons into packages radiating and receiving psychic data,' he argues. 'We become spectacular commodities who consume everything we see, but most of all, ourselves' (ibid, 171). Typical of such readings of DeLillo, the focus on image and simulation is pushed to the point where no real entities exist, and there are instead only events mediated through sign systems: 'advertising and television seem to exist for just such events, and create them as "events"' (ibid, 177). This Baudrillardian ontology eliminates the real altogether, 'a liquidation of all referentials' (*The Precession of Simulacra*, *NACT*, 1557). When mediation generates reality itself, all that remains is a hyperreal state, a world that resembles a museum prematurely dedicated to a still-living subject: well-trodden ground in DeLillo criticism.

What all readings in this vein miss in DeLillo is Magic *Realism*. There is magic aplenty in the illusory hyperreal, but that is no reason to assume that real entities play no part in consumer capitalist life. Maverick readings of DeLillo such as Elise Martucci's *The Environmental Unconscious in the Works of Don DeLillo* (2005), take pains to divest themselves of the postmodernist style of reading which too easily defers to the Baudrillard model of society in DeLillo. Rejecting what she calls 'dualistic modernist/postmodernist terms' (16), Martucci focuses on ecocritical perspectives, exploring the material and natural in DeLillo, eschewing discussions of the fluidity of commodity and identity. My position is stronger still than Martucci's. If Martucci argues (against Osteen) that it is not the magic of simulation, but 'characters' integration within, or acceptance of, their immediate environment, while still maintaining an awareness of its natural origins' which brings them 'community and sacredness' (ibid, 39-40), then I reject Martucci's reliance on the material, natural, and environmental. I do not oppose the magical interpretation of DeLillo's work, on the contrary: I hold that it is *realism* in DeLillo which produces the magic. Our reading of Magic Realism through OOO and Franz Roh, I will show, qualifies DeLillo, without ambiguity, as a Magic Realist.

Recall that for Roh, Magic Realism is characterised by a 'calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces' (*Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism*, 20), an 'attempting to locate *infinity* in small things' (ibid, 27). DeLillo's work does nothing if not discover that things have their own faces, mirages of themselves which dissemble their contents. It is worth bearing in mind that Levinas, whose discussion of the face is central to his ethical philosophy, holds that 'the face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it' (*Totality & Infinity*, 198) (the facing of things is a theme which will recur later). What more evidence for DeLillo's status as a Magic Realist can be found? Support for this idea exists in even Osteen's analysis. Consider this passage in which Osteen likens *White Noise* to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in how it 'describes the space between lives' (*AM&T*, 165):

> In *White Noise* DeLillo seeks to unveil "the radiance in dailiness" by examining those "American forces and energies" beneath the surface of the banal. The novel dramatises how this "extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions". The sources of "radiance" are […] across the street and in the living room: the supermarket, the shopping mall, the TV set.

> (Osteen, *AM&T*, 166, in-text citations removed).

Osteen is too quick to reduce *White Noise* to a capitalist / consumerist ideology which serves to 'derealize the real' (ibid). It may not be inaccurate to describe commodities as 'derealized' objects, at least in their representations in advertising, packaging, TV, and radio, but DeLillo's work cannot be reduced to a tract performing or critiquing the postmodern condition. It is DeLillo's *realism*, his careful attention to the experience of a particular reality, *to the things themselves*, through which the magical aura of his work becomes apparent. If in *White Noise*, 'the extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions', is this not captured most acutely in the way the text presents concrete and finite realities as a 'miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (Roh, *MR: P-E*, 22), Roh's precise description of Magic Realism? If 'the background is the last frontier, absolute nothingness, absolute death' (ibid, 20) in Roh's Magic Realism, does not Gladney's struggle to escape this background, the electrical noise of death, to persist amidst a demoniacal flux, clearly place *White Noise* within this Magic Realist tradition? As a work of Magic Realism, is not the 'radiance in dailiness', discovered in the infinity within the minute, in everyday entities which resist

the background noise of death? Is this not the true source of magic in *White Noise* the real in things which haunts the deathless images and simulations which paper it over?

Calls may be heard from writers such as Martucci: If I claim that it is the real which haunts the image with magic in *White Noise*, why do I reject the material and natural? Indeed, a writer such as Jane Bennett might prove deeply insightful if we were to pursue a materialist reading along Martucci's lines. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Bennett makes the case for a kind of noticing and recognition of the way matter itself is agential, vivid, somehow living. She argues; 'if matter itself is lively, then not only is the distance between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of things is elevated. All bodies become more than mere objects' (*VM*, 13). Could we argue that the 'shared materiality of things', along with Martucci's acceptance of the natural environment (39), resists the kingdom of the consumed image? The potential for such a reading of *White Noise*, with extended themes across DeLillo's oeuvre (e.g. DeLillo's preoccupation with waste as art in *Underworld* (1997), which Martucci takes up), surely exists. When Bennett holds that contemporary ecological thinking should conceive of nature as 'a *creative not-quite-human force capable of producing the new*' (*VM*, 118, original emphasis), it is far from impossible to read potassium and death, automobiles and toxic waste, children and supermarkets, chicken and brownies and microbes and sunsets as vibrant material assemblages, creative inhuman forces capable of presenting new political, philosophical, and ecological configurations. Nevertheless, and despite its worthiness, this interpretation of *White Noise* would be impoverished.

First, this is still not a realist position, but a materialist one, and fails to address realism in DeLillo's writing. Notice that Bennett's vibrant matter is a not-quite-human *force*. She further likens nature to 'a process of morphing, of formation and deformation, that is to say, of the becoming otherwise of things in motion as they enter into strange conjunctions with one another' (ibid, 118). It is no great leap to see the link between this material flux of things melting and recrystallising into one another and Baudrillard's hyperreal, itself a flux of images and simulations without reference to any real objects. The two forms are nigh identical. Yes, Bennett's materialist model finds its realm of irreferential becoming in matter and nature, but trading one realm of flux for another only transplants the problems to a new site. If Gladney is lost in a realm of images without reference, why should he be any less lost in a realm of matter without reference? If Osteen critiques consumer society for 'derealizing the real', dissolving its objects into processes of simulation, then why should a materialism which dissolves objects into processes of morphing and deformation be any better?

These criticisms aside, it must be noted that nowhere does DeLillo's writing privilege a fluid zone of matter or nature; rather it focuses on Gladney's phenomenal experience of distinct things which punctuate his everyday life. Much has been made of the litanies of brand-names which litter *White Noise*: 'Krylon, Rust-Oleum, Red Devil' (186), 'MasterCard, Visa, American Express' (119), 'Clorents, Velamints, Freedent' (229), 'Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida (181). Though the text presents these words as 'supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable […] part of every child's brain-noise' (ibid), this does not consign them to mere simulacra – these names are not without reference; they refer to finite concrete realities and have concrete realities of their own. This is why it matters in *White Noise* whether you drive a Datsun Maxima (*WN*, 150) or a Land Rover (183); concrete realities project different images on reality. A Datsun Maxima is not an endless flux of becoming in the material or simulated sense. Even if it is masked by images, branding, reproductions, and material agencies, a Datsun Maxima is not a Land Rover – this is why even indefinite and ambiguous objects in *White Noise* such as the Airborne Toxic Event (also known as the Black Billowing Cloud), and Gladney's 'nebulous mass' should be considered *real*. This is also why Roh's Magic Realism; the 'miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (Roh, *MR: P-E*, 22) applies unambiguously to DeLillo's writing. It is about demonstrating how the real persists *in spite of* flux and fluidity, be it material, capital, or simulational.

To do justice to this Magic Realism, I follow Graham Harman's 'immaterialist' position, another hallmark of OOO. Harman argues that theories of flux have 'an inability to distinguish objects themselves from how they currently happen to be acting or otherwise manifesting in the world' (*Immaterialism*, 15). In OOO, as in our reading of Magic Realism, 'reality exists as a surplus even beyond the causal interactions of dust and raindrops, never fully expressed in the world of inanimate relations any more than in the human sphere' (ibid, 18). This logic plays out in *White Noise* in a conversation between Jack and his son, Heinrich, early in the novel:

'It's going to rain tonight.'
'It's raining now.'
'The radio said tonight.'
[…]
'Look at the windshield,' I [Jack] said. 'Is that rain or isn't it?'
'I'm only telling you what they said.'

'Just because it's on the radio doesn't mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses.'

(*WN*, 25-6).

Martucci describes this scene as a critique of postmodernity's alienation from nature, the way mass media intervenes in the ostensibly natural relation between humans and rain ; 'Heinrich finds it difficult to discover the authentic or the natural' (*Environmental Unconscious*, 142), 'what *is* rain anyway?' (*WN*, 28, original emphasis). This analysis falls short in its discussion of both representation and reality. Rain is not real merely because it is natural, and when Heinrich questions the validity of the human senses he is no less incorrect in challenging their access to reality than Jack is to challenge the radio's. Jack's affirmation that there nevertheless *is* rain serves as the text's presentation of the irreducibility of rain to direct perception, mass mediation, and any causal relation; 'a surplus even beyond the causal interactions of dust and raindrops'. To refer again to Roh, if Magic Realism appears as the 'enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (Roh, *MR: P-E*, 22), then it must appear as concrete, opaque real entities, which disrupt all forms of continua, relation, or representation, of which the human sphere of language and representation is only one part. If this magical reality is formed of opaque and irreducible substances, 'the opaque surprises in question must be due to fully formed individuals at every scale rather than to [...] what Jane Bennett vividly but wrongly describes as "the indeterminate momentum of the throbbing whole"' (Harman, *Immaterialism*, 20).

It should be clear why I pursue neither a postmodern(ist) nor a materialist reading of DeLillo. Both moves divest DeLillo's writing of its strongest suit in both aesthetic and critical senses: realism. By privileging a background of flux, a holism of material or symbolic substitutions, such readings cannot account for DeLillo's *resistance* to such structures. It is DeLillo's attention to finite realities *against* a background of flux which marks him as a writer of an Object-Oriented and Magic Realist style. Osteen is right to look for magic in *White Noise*, but this magic does not belong to the image. If DeLillo's writing constitutes 'a calm admiration of the magic of being' in the way it seeks radiance in the everyday against a background noise which flows everywhere and engulfs us like death, then there is no question: DeLillo is a Magic Realist. DeLillo's magic is to summon the authentic spectre of the real, to create an aesthetic mode of contact between a reader and an irreducible reality in a patient, loving, attention to the postmodern American moment.

Apocalypse

Gladney's choice to interpret Autumn Harvest Farms as a bucolic vision of rural America is exemplary of the way he flees the real. It is, almost to the letter, the attitude Timothy Morton critiques in *Hyperobjects* (2013):

> Ideology is not just in your head. [...] It's in the way some things appear "natural" – rolling hills and greenery – [...] as if agriculture was Nature. The "landscape" look of Agriculture is the original "greenwashing." Objectors to wind farms are not saying "Save the environment!" but "Leave our dreams undisturbed!"

> (*Hyper*, 106).

Jack's hope that Autumn Harvest Farms might fool him into believing he lives in 'non-cancerous times' (*WN*, 316) is just such an ideology, one that allows Jack to flee away from his anxiety and his death. This is not some insidious capitalist deceit; Jack is quite happy to be fooled. When his quaint intertextual image ('Would someone read to us from *David Copperfield*?' (ibid)) comes up against the facility's medicalised bio/necropolitics, magnetic scanners which harvest and farm Jack's body for data, the doctor's pronouncement that Jack has a nebulous mass that can 'cause a person to die', Jack lashes out, apoplectic: 'Speak English for God's sake. I despise this modern jargon!' (*WN*, 322). The doctor's words can only be read as modern jargon in the sense that they disrupt Jack's pastoral fantasy – his rage becomes a cry of anguish: 'Leave our dreams undisturbed' (Morton, *Hyper*, 106). And it is not merely notions of the Natural that are at stake in Jack's self-induced cultural hypnosis. The Arcadian idyll that Jack flees to is not merely a strategy 'to overpower or disguise the realities of toxicity and banality of a consumer culture' (Martucci, *Environmental Unconscious*, 156), but a singular instance of a larger ontological phenomenon: 'the "world" as the significant totality of what is the case' (Morton, *Hyper*, 108). For Morton, this concept of 'world' is a way of totalising, knowing, sterilising and tranquilising reality and is the form of the escapist fantasy Jack indulges in. Environment and Nature are derivations of this conception of 'world': 'a container in which objectified things float or stand' (ibid, 99). Morton's subtitle is telling here; what Jack needs is *Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. And for the End of the World, he needs Heidegger.

What is Heideggerian about the end of the world, or what we might call *Apocalypse*? In the Christian tradition, the word is taken from the final book of the New Testament; the Revelation. The end of the world is a kind of *revealing*, something coming forth from concealment. The ancient Greek etymology of the word also corroborates this reading: ἀποκαλύπτειν to uncover, disclose, the prefix ἀπό off or away in conjunction with the

verb καλύπτειν, to cover or conceal[4]. This is not mere wordplay. Apocalypse as unconcealing, as revelation, is fundamental to the characterisation of 'the end of the world' as 'the end of a totalising horizon'. Readers familiar with Heidegger's work will not have missed the similarity here between Apocalypse and ἀλήθεια, truth, or, in Heidegger's translation, 'unconcealment' or 'discoveredness' (*Being & Time*, 211). Heidegger holds that truth as ἀ-λήθεια (un-concealing, or dis-covering) is a mode of being towards things-in-themselves; 'to let beings be seen in their unconcealment (discoveredness), taking them out of their concealment. [...Truth] refers to the "things themselves", that which shows itself, *beings in the how of their discoveredness*' (ibid, 210). This form of truth combined with OOO's Heidegger-derived metaphysics departs from Heidegger's own work in a significant way. In this Object-Oriented Apocalypse, the shining-forth of objects as magical-yet-real entities at all scales disturbs the idea of world as totality. Evidence has already been presented for the apocalyptic character of objects in the feeling-thing – the notion that objects in union form their own reality irreducible to 'world' as totality: 'if any object is inexhaustible by any set of its relations or qualities, then the thing is always elsewhere than the world' (Harman, *Phenomena and Infinity*). When things disclose one another other as revelation, they escape the totality of 'world'. This is not meant in the sense that they somehow 'go elsewhere', but that 'world' and 'elsewhere' themselves vanish. To refer again to Morton: 'there is no "away" after the end of the world' (*Hyper*, 109).

Jack before Autumn Harvest Farms is not unlike Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. Like Calypso's island, a paradise where Odysseus is held captive by an immortal nymph, Autumn Harvest Farms as pastoral idyll offers an undying solace from the tribulations of the real, a landscape of freedom from death and anxiety. It is a totalised zone of eternity, a 'world' in the sense Morton critiques. Where Odysseus escapes the nymph Calypso to return home, Jack has no such desire to abscond from paradise. What he needs is to go ἀπο-Καλυψώ, to *depart from Calypso*. He needs to become *Apocalyptic* and, like Odysseus, forsake the sanctuary of a totalised world. It is fitting that, upon leaving Autumn Harvest Farms, Jack senses something poetic in himself: 'How literary, I thought peevishly. Streets thick with the details of impulsive life as the hero ponders the latest phase in his dying' (*WN*, 322). It is his return to being amongst things that brings him to the status of hero. Jack interprets this as both ironic and tragic, but he does turn, if only by degrees, towards an Apocalyptic path. For it is only in his love and commitment to his home, wife and family, that Odysseus turns away from Calypso's paradise and fulfils his homecoming, and though Jack is surely no Odysseus, *White*

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[4] http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229?redirectedFrom=apocalypse&

Noise shows that there is hope yet that he may achieve an authentic, resolute being-in-the-world of his own.

Falling Prey: 'They do it in groups and crowds and masses'

Early in the novel, Jack lends his prestige as the founder of Hitler studies to his friend Murray, who is attempting to set up a niche for himself in Elvis studies in the department of American Environments. To this end, Gladney, unannounced, arrives at one of Murray's lectures and delivers a rhapsodic meditation on Hitler, his language and his crowds:

> Hitler called himself the lonely wanderer out of nothingness. He sucked on lozenges, spoke to people in endless monologues, free associating, as if the language came from some vastness beyond the world and he was simply the medium of revelation. […] Let me whisper the terrible word, from the Old English, from the Old German, from the Old Norse. *Death*. Many of those crowds were assembled in the name of death. They were there to attend tributes to the dead. Processions, songs, speeches, dialogues with the dead, recitations of the names of the dead. They were there to see pyres and flaming wheels, thousands of flags dipped in salute, thousands of uniformed mourners. There were ranks and squadrons, elaborate backdrops, blood banners and black dress uniforms. Crowds came to form a shield against their own dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone. Crowds came for this reason above all others. They were there to be a crowd.
>
> (*WN*, 86-7).

There are few passages more telling on Jack's flight from the anxiety of death. The Hitler Jack describes is no more than another projected phantom he wears to cover over his angst. It is Jack who wields the 'professional aura of power, madness, and death' (ibid, 86), whips the crowd (albeit a small, academic, and intellectual one) into a fervour, and wears that crowd as a shield against dying: 'Death was a strictly professional matter here. I was comfortable with it' (ibid, 88). Jack is the lonely wanderer who longs for 'a night that swallows existence so completely that [he is] cured of [his] own lonely dying' (*WN*, 314), and he looks to find it in the crowd, in the anonymous murmuring of the world; 'I listened to the women talk. All sound, all souls' (ibid). Jack's language, from a 'vastness beyond the world', is founded upon the notion of *both* world as totality *and* the beyond as flux. It is crowd-gathering language, which finds a bigger, more vast flux or world to hide in every time the limits and finitude of its current world are exposed – like sinking a ship to avoid seeing it sails on the sea.

But we should not be too hard on Jack – being tethered to the 'world' and fleeing death into the crowd are not traits which belong to him alone. Heidegger holds that 'initially and for the most part, Dasein is lost in its "world"' (*B&T*, 213). This is a characteristic of all human being for Heidegger, what he calls 'falling prey': '*Because it essentially falls prey to the world, Dasein is in "untruth" in accordance with its constitution of being*' (*B&T*, 213). If untruth, falling prey to the world, is an essential feature of human being, then how can we prescribe the end of the world for Jack? Here we must dig more into Heidegger and his use of the 'Everyday'. For Heidegger, Everydayness denotes the average lostness of Dasein in the world – it is the attitude taken by Dasein in its general surrender to the world. Everydayness in this sense takes two forms: '*handiness* [*Zuhandenheit*]', and the '*they-self*'. Since handiness or readiness-to-hand has been treated with extensively by OOO, we will start with the they-self.

The They for Heidegger is a meaning-giving context, a common sense which obscures the reality of individual things; the same kind of totality Morton critiques as 'world': 'The They itself, for the sake of which Dasein is every day, articulates the referential context of significance' (*B&T*, 125). Thus, the they relieves Dasein of its own weight in Everydayness: 'The They *disburdens* Dasein in its everydayness' (ibid, 124). In this way, Dasein is always-already in Everydayness in its surrender to the referential context of the They.

Thus, are not Gladney's constant appeals to crowds, to rural America as Agrarian Idyll, to TV logic ('These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. [...] Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? (*WN*, 133)), to the chancellor of College-on-the-Hill ('If I could be more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously' (ibid, 19)), to Hitler himself, all instances of surrender to the They? To put it another way, is not the crowd the essential form of Gladney's disburdening from himself? A recurrent theme throughout DeLillo's work, the crowd is the no-one everywhere in the background which disburdens individuals from themselves: 'longing on a large scale is what makes history (*Underworld*, 11), 'the future belongs to crowds' (*Mao II*, 16). Isn't even Jack's self-styling as the founder of Hitler studies a reversal of Jack into one amongst Hitler's crowd – armoured against his death in the They-Self's anonymity: ''I'' ''am'' not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the They' (Heidegger, *B&T*, 125). Is not Gladney's submersion in the language and ritual of Hitler, the 'processions, songs, speeches, dialogues with the dead, recitations of the names of the dead' (*WN*, 87), a way to divest himself of who he is, becoming no one, concealing himself in the 'world' and hoping that his own death simply doesn't notice him?

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Handiness or *Readiness-to-Hand* [*Zuhandenheit*] is the concept most vaunted in Harman's reading of Heidegger from which OOO was derived. Handiness is 'a dealing which makes use of things […]; it has its own way of seeing which guides our operations and gives them their specific certainty. Our dealings with useful things are subordinate to the manifold references of the "in-order-to"' (*B&T*, 69). Typically juxtaposed with 'presence at hand', Handiness is a mode of engaging with things in which things cease to appear as independent entities. Handy things are part of a system of reference; a global contexture of equipment: 'There always belongs to the being of a useful thing a totality of useful things in which this useful thing can be what it is.' (ibid, 68). Just as the They disburdens Dasein from itself, Handiness wrests individual objects from themselves. As Jack vanishes into the crowd, so too do the hammer and nail vanish into the 'in-order-to' of 'build a fence'. As Harman has it, this conception of tools and the *Zuhanden* leads to a world in which 'beings are swallowed alive by being, vaporised and emptied into the ether, electrified within a homogenous referential circuit' (*Tool-Being*, 44).

We can see that Jack is just as lost in the contexture of equipment as he is in the They. He is within the crowd, but the crowd needs objects to fulfil its crowdhood. Jack describes the paraphernalia at a Hitler rally: 'pyres and flaming wheels, thousands of flags dipped in salute, thousands of uniformed mourners. There were ranks and squadrons, elaborate backdrops, blood banners and black dress uniforms' (*WN*, 87). The text's use of inanimate, composite, mass-human objects far outnumbers its use of linguistic forms in representing the crowd. If ready-to-hand tools 'guide our operations and give them their specific certainty' (Heidegger, *B&T*, 69), then do they not, like the They, entail an horizon of reference? In other words, and to reverse the terms of the relation, is not the crowd merely a human-shaped part of a much wider crowd: the crowd of objects? Against Heidegger's claim that 'being-toward-others is ontologically different from being toward objectively present things' (*B&T*, 121), the Object-Oriented view holds that being lost in the they is no different in kind to being lost in the tool-system of a person's trash, their gun, the paraphernalia of their Everyday. This is why Jack is stricken with guilt on going through the family garbage (*WN*, 297), why his receiving a gun immediately alters his phenomenal experience of the world ('the gun created a second reality for me to inhabit' (ibid, 341)), and why he even links the two as 'secret histories' (ibid, 315). These things are presented in the text as conduits for flight into the Everyday of the totalised world, a shield against death, against Jack's *finitude*. Jack shops voraciously when his identity is threatened (*WN*, 99), and his children utter

the names of car models in their sleep (ibid, 180) not because of some capitalist conceit, or the evils of advertising saturation, but because lostness in the contexture of objects is just as soothing a tranquiliser as lostness in They against 'the terrible word, from the Old English, from the Old German, from the Old Norse. *Death.*'

Conceptualised this way through an Object-Oriented perspective (and consciously departing from orthodox interpretations of Heidegger), Everydayness is nothing less than 'falling prey' to the world (*B&T*, 169). It is a way in which one's own being is dispersed and referenced away to a system of objects, a crowd of noise, a totality of context. This is the fundamental form which undergirds both the postmodernist simulational and new materialist readings which might be applied to *White Noise*. He might not know it, but the founder of Hitler Studies is a Heideggerian. If this reading may be borne out, then to escape inauthentic Everydayness falling prey to the world, one must face Heidegger's great gatekeepers of authentic being: anxiety, and being-towards-death, to which we turn next.

Preciousness Based on Fear and Anxiety: An Anxious Quivering Thing

In §40 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls Anxiety the 'fundamental attunement', or 'eminent disclosedness' of Dasein (178). For Heidegger, an attunement or a mood means to be concerned with things in particular, for them to matter to Dasein in a certain way, prescribing the totality of reference that is 'world'. Further, attunement does not discriminate between things at hand and the They. Anyone who has been struck by a sudden rage at unwashed dishes or experienced irritation at a person's mere presence can attest to this. In this way mood circumscribes the things that concern us in the world, be they things-at-hand or persons, or compounds wrapped up in one another. In Heidegger's own terms: '*In attunement lies existentially a disclosive submission to world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered*' (*B&T*, 134, original emphasis).

What is distinctive about Anxiety as a mood is that it does not encounter something in the world as other moods do: in Anxiety there are no things in particular which press in to concern Dasein. This absence of any definite thing is none other than the referential contexture of the Everyday, meaning that Anxiety attunes to the totality of 'world' itself. For Heidegger: 'what crowds in upon us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the *possibility* of things at hand in general, that is, the world itself' (*B&T*, 181). In this way, Anxiety individualises Dasein, throwing it into relief against the world of its Everyday: 'anxiety takes away from Dasein the

possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the "world" and the public way of being interpreted' (ibid). It puts Dasein out of joint with the world of the They and the handy, in a state of uncanniness, of feeling not-at-home. In Heidegger's words, Anxiety 'fetches Dasein back out of its entangled absorption in the world. Everyday familiarity collapses' (182). This formulation allows Heidegger to contrast Anxiety and the Everyday, and declare that Anxiety discovers the being of Dasein itself against the Everyday:

> [Falling prey] is not a flight *from* innerworldly beings, but precisely *toward* them as the beings among which taking care of things, lost in the they, can linger in tranquillized familiarity. Entangled flight *into* the being-at-home of publicness is flight *from* not-being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in Dasein as thrown, as being-in-the-world entrusted to itself in its being. This uncanniness constantly pursues Dasein and threatens its everyday lostness in the they, although not explicitly.

> (Heidegger, *B&T*, 183).

Anxiety, is, in Heidegger as in DeLillo, intimately linked with death. For Heidegger, death is an aspect of a being's finitude in both the sense of expiry and of individuation. This is because the dying of others cannot be experienced in an authentic sense; can only be represented in the mode of the Everyday and the They – as an experience of the crowd and the readiness to hand or presence at hand of objects left behind; personal effects, possessions, a cherished photograph, a corpse. In Heidegger's words: 'Every Dasein itself must take dying upon itself in every instance. Insofar as it "is," death is always essentially my own' (*B&T*, 231). As such, death in Heidegger's terms is something nonrelational, certain, and indefinite[5], which lays claim to Dasein and individualises it. It is no concrete object, but is rather a constant threat to Dasein as being-in-the-world itself, precisely the uncanniness of Anxiety; it is that which Dasein flees from into the world of the Everyday. Falling prey is explicitly flight from death (ibid, 244), an attempt to neutralise or tranquilise its uncanniness. Conversely, '*the attunement which is able to hold open the constant and absolute threat to itself arising from the ownmost individualized being of Dasein is anxiety*' (ibid, 254).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

> In the dark the mind runs on like a devouring machine, the only
> thing awake in the universe. I tried to make out the walls, the

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[5] Heidegger's full terminology is to say that death is the 'ownmost, nonrelational, insuperable, certain, indefinite' possibility of Dasein (*B&H*, §53, 249-55). Heidegger's understanding of death is more complex than is necessary for our discussion to treat it in full, so I abridge here in the interests of focus and brevity.

> dresser in the corner. It was the old defenceless feeling. Small,
> weak, deathbound, alone. Panic, the god of woods and
> wilderness, half goat. I moved my head to the right,
> remembering the clock-radio. I watched the numbers change,
> the progression of digital minutes, odd to even. They glowed
> green in the dark.
>
> After a while, I woke up Babette.

<div align="right">(DeLillo, WN, 257).</div>

Gladney struggles with the dark. He has episodes of disturbed sleep (*WN*, 56) where he awakes in the night in the thrall of a deathly anxiety. In the night he is thrown into his solitude, attuned to his ownmost being. Deprived of things to take care of and the comfort of the They in his family, friends and colleagues, the tranquilizing noise of the TV and radio, all Jack has left is an immense uncanniness, a not-at-homeness. Is it any surprise that he identifies this feeling as 'the god of woods and wilderness' – the ultimate frontiersman set-piece to disquiet the suburban American male? Jack peers around, he seeks the comfort of his Everyday, his referential context of things at hand, his walls, his dresser, his clock-radio, anything to keep out the 'old defenceless feeling'. It is as if Heidegger is there, whispering in his ear: 'in the dark there is emphatically "nothing" to see, though the world is *still* "there" *more obtrusively*' (*B&T*, 183, original emphasis). Anxiety is attunement to being-in-the-world, it reveals Jack's lostness in the world, his ownmost being, the intimacy of his death: 'Small, weak, deathbound, alone.' Finally, he wakes Babette; it seems two's a crowd: 'To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone' (*WN*, 87). This is not to mention that he wakes Babette for the specific purpose of asking her for a drug which is designed to *alleviate fear of death*. What might perhaps be called the title-drop of the novel says it best:

"What if death is nothing but sound?"
"Electrical Noise."
"You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful."
"Uniform, white."

<div align="right">(WN, 228).</div>

If Anxiety brings Dasein before itself as surrendered to the world, and holds open the constant threat of its ownmost potential of being-toward-death, then could the White Noise that roars through DeLillo's novel be anything other than the phenomenal experience of Anxiety? *White Noise*, the novel itself, acts upon the reader as the summons of death. Is not the experience of reading the novel itself an alternation

between being at home and the dreadful uncanny? *White Noise* is, as Osteen claims, a book of the dead, but it is not a book of commodity-litanies which armour against death. It is attunement to death itself, the ghostly summons of one's own dying. The fact that these summons occur out of the minutiae of the Everyday, out of a fine and devoted attention to the banal and common experience of small discrete realities, out of the '*infinity* in small things' (Roh, *MR: P-E*, 27) (supermarkets, bedrooms in the night, cars, spectacles, toast, a gun, a baby) show unequivocally that this is a work of Magic Realism. What is the Anxiety of being-toward-death if not 'total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (ibid, 22)? *White Noise* is a summons, a spell which conjures. It is Magic, and it is Real.

Dialetheia – Double Truth

Recall at this point the feeling-thing. This is the Object-Oriented conception of metaphor or translation, the way objects affectively summon one another in a shared sensual medium. In the case of Anxiety as a feeling-thing, what is translated in the Object-Oriented sense? Anxiety is a translation of Dasein for Dasein; a mode where Dasein appears to itself as a sensual image which summons it and alludes to its own reality. This proximity to reality is what we referred to as *hamartia* in our discussion of *Kafka on the Shore*, a fatal flaw, a kind of destined doom. Since *hamartia* refers to the fateful bond with objects in general, a destiny buried within a thing, a finitude, like *pre-installed memories of one's own death*, Anxiety as a specific sense of one's *ownmost* destiny could be none other than the summons of death – what could be more destined in one's attunement to oneself?

Yet we must be cautious here. For Heidegger, it is *always Dasein* which discovers 'beings in the how of their discoveredness' (*B&T*, 210). Dasein discloses things 'in the how', and 'Dasein essentially *is* its disclosedness, and, as disclosed, it discloses and discovers, it is essentially "true". *Dasein is "in the truth"'* (ibid, 212). In other words, for Heidegger, discovering things in the 'how' always loops back to Dasein discovering its own disclosure. In the Object-Oriented view, Heidegger's claim that Dasein is really always in both truth and untruth equiprimordially (ibid, 213) sets up an opposition between Dasein's own discoveredness (truth) and innerworldly objects (untruth), exiling objects from ἀλήθεια. Thus, Heidegger's ἀλήθεια corresponds to an anthropocentric world with *my* Dasein at its centre. Is it not understandable then that the founder of Hitler studies misreads his own ἀλήθεια, his relation to objects in the 'how', as a justification for defending himself from death through murder? His friend Murray advises him: 'They do it in groups and crowds and masses. […] The more

people you kill, the more power you gain over your own death. There is a secret precision at work in the most savage and indiscriminate killings' (*WN*, 335). Is it necessary at this point to note the dramatic irony of a man who embodies himself in Hitler seeking solace in mass killings as a means of self-preservation? To depart from this logic and embrace the dissolution of the 'world' as totality, to continue to pursue the method of plasmogamy; shared *worlds*, Apocalypse needs not Heidegger's *ἀλήθεια*, but *δι- ἀλήθεια*, double-truth.

Timothy Morton derives *dialetheia* from the OOO principle that 'an object withdraws from itself' (*Realist Magic*, 76). This means there is a rift between an object's appearance and essence, that it is impossible to reduce any object to the multitude of images that immerse and emit from it. This principle first appears in Harman's interpretation of Heidegger's *zuhandenheit* and *vorhandenheit*: 'Heidegger's thought starts from a *universal* dualism between tool and broken tool […] Any being that is encountered at all must share in this structure' (*Tool-Being*, 45, original emphasis). It is also important to note that though the Heideggerian idiom of referring to 'tools' and 'equipment' here, the withdrawn reality of objects in OOO is not correlated with tools or 'use' but rather corresponds with *withdrawnness from presence*, and has little to do with toolhood per se. In OOO, the reality of any object 'exceeds any theoretical understanding and *also* exceeds any pretheoretical *use*' (ibid, 117), which means that relations of all kinds, both practical and theoretical, are kinds of *presence at hand*, *vorhandenheit*. Morton to derives *dialetheia* from this principle of relations between objects via Lacan: 'What constitutes pretense is that, in the end, you don't know whether it's pretense or not' (*RM*, 18). Mapping this contention onto his ontology, Morton suggests that it is impossible to determine whether any mode in which an object appears present-at-hand truly discloses its in-itself being: one is always in the presence of the object, yet one is never in contact with the object-in-itself. Truth as unconcealing is no longer contact with 'the world', with the one reality of Dasein, but instead becomes contact with the multitudinous realities of objects. *Dialetheia* is this form of double-truth, an aesthetic contact with OOO's duplicitous reality.

A consequence of an object's split from its appearance is that, upon coinciding with any of its appearances, an object will die, which is to say, it will cease to be itself. As stated in chapter 1, a literal translation destroys the object translated. Thus, for a world of objects, Anxiety as feeling-thing cannot only be being-towards human death. If all things contain a splinter of death, a *hamartia* or tragic flaw, as Morton argues (*RM*, 198), then Anxiety as a sincere attunement to the essence of objects is an attunement to their *finitude*. Being in contact with objects at all, to sense their reality, is to be

permeated by Anxiety, to be confronted by the spectre of death. In this way, Morton's schema accounts for death in not only living, but *all* things. If Heidegger's *aletheia* describes the discovering of the world in Dasein's relation to things encountered, then Morton's *dialetheia* describes the uncovering and unconcealing which exposes that 'the world' itself is just one object amongst many objects, or even one world amongst many shared, interfering worlds – a plenitude of objects reveal themselves, Revelation, Apocalypse, the end of 'the world'.

Black Noise

Ian Bogost in his *Alien Phenomenology* (2012) uses the metaphor of 'Black Noise' to ground his phenomenology of objects: '*Black* is the colour of sonic noise that approaches silence, allowing emissions of but a few spikes of energy' (32-3). Black noise is an alluring, otherworldly summons which enchants and enthrals as much as it horrifies. It is the summons of death, that fateful bond we call the feeling-thing. Through the aesthetics of black noise, we can study objects: 'as the astronomer understands stars through the radiant energy that surrounds them, so the philosopher understands objects by tracing their impacts on the surrounding ether' (Bogost, ibid). Another name for this black noise is the aesthetic experience of beauty. The resonance between two things in the experience of beauty is a kind of vibration. When I vibrate in tune with an object, am ontologically warped by the alluring call of some beautiful thing, I am experiencing the Anxiety of the real at the same time as its beautiful reality. Morton calls this is a 'subject-quake', a 'little death' (*RM*, 193) 'orgasmic' (ibid, 207). To be anxious is not to be numb to the world, it is to 'glimpse its secretiveness' (*RM,* 204), yet also to be aware of its threat. It is to be open to the fateful doom of the end of the world and the appearance of shared worlds, plasmogamy – the deathliness in all things. This vulnerability, this anxiety-inducing openness to violence is the condition for a responsible attunement to OOO's reality.

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Early in the novel, *White Noise* produces the aesthetic effect of Anxiety as Black Noise wonderfully:

> I woke in the grip of a death sweat. Defenseless against my own racking fears. A pause at the center of my being. I lacked the will and physical strength to get out of bed and move through the dark house, clutching walls and stair rails. To feel my way, reinhabit my body, re-enter the world. Sweat trickled down my ribs. The digital reading on the clock-radio was 3:51. Always odd numbers at times like this. What does it mean? Is death odd-

numbered? Are there life-enhancing numbers, other numbers
charged with menace?

(DeLillo, *White* Noise, 56).

What makes the aesthetic sense of death appear here in the midst of Gladney's banal, secure, Everyday life in 'a town of dry-cleaning shops and opticians [...] a town of tag sales and yard sales' (70)? At this early stage in the novel, no events of great narrative peril have occurred, there has been nothing to suggest danger or any upheaval in Gladney's everyday mundane life, even taking into account the vague foreshadowing hinting at the not-yet-realised Airborne Toxic Event. Yet even so, the passage is perilous. The house, walls and stair rails are invoked as supports, these familiar objects appear as reassuring monuments to Gladney's suburban security. This is not the pure fleeing to the Everyday in Heidegger. These objects hold within themselves a sliver, a half-gesture of betrayal: the way Gladney imagines clutching them, depending on them, placing himself at their mercy is threatening. The clock-radio, an innocuous symbol of the technologically munificent, electrically powered, well-regulated reality of Gladney's upper-middle class condition, beckons him with a sinister gnarly finger: 3:51. This passage presents, through wafer-thin dabs of everyday life and its objects, not death, but Anxiety – the sense of death. The Everyday, 'entangled flight *into* the being-at-home' (Heidegger, *B&T*, 183), releases a hiss of premature death-rattle, and the clock-radio wraps itself in a cloak of the uncanny. It emits Black Noise. It takes on the same character as monsters in horror movies –in full view it is unthreatening, easy to recognise and dominate. When it recedes from its surface appearance it becomes frightening, something deeply unsettling couched in the somehow unfathomably deep waters of '3:51'. If the clock-radio were represented as more than a clock-radio, its electronics, its buttons, its motherboards and LEDs, its plastic and quartz and rubber cladding, it would be without any uncanny at all, it would be the everyday prop it usually stands for. When the clock-radio is just a clock-radio at 3:51 in the dark, it becomes uncanny – the unfamiliar within the familiar.

The text presents to the reader what Gladney experiences before his everyday objects - 'a pause at the centre of my being'. This is what Morton describes as the sense of aperture, the arrival of an object: 'An object appears like a crack in the real [...] Beginnings are open, disturbing, blissful, horrific' (*RM*, 124). In invoking Gladney's stair rail, his academic robe, his clock-radio, the text allows these everyday things to interrupt the comforting totality of 'world' – these things become uncanny, deathly, real. In the same way that everyday things interrupt narrative totality in *Kafka on the Shore*, the text here interrupts Jack Gladney's world with a 'pause' at the centre of his

being. This pause constitutes a halting, a hesitation, a caesura. This is the moment in which, in Morton's words: 'A new translation has appeared. A fresh Rift has opened up between appearance and essence. *An object is born*' (*RM*, 110). The object remains opaque, but emits black noise: '3:51'. A separation between appearance and reality opens up, death as the finitude of objects appears. DeLillo's writing performs the ghastly anxiety of death as it manifests in all things – as finitude. Anxiety is not a melancholy human lament as Heidegger has it, but a scuttling at the edge of vision, black spider's eyes in the dark seams of real objects. A little distortion in Gladney's everyday life provides the perfect vessel for introducing the inherent finitude, or death, found in all objects, and the aesthetic sense of the uncanny anxiety shared by reader and Gladney both, finding this tiny caesura in the real.

Taking Pause

There are notable *absences* of this aesthetic sense in DeLillo's novel too which would be surprising if not for the Object-Oriented separation between a thing's essence and its appearance. On Friday evenings Gladney's family watch TV disaster footage together. Though these episodes are awash with 'floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes' (*WN*, 75), they fill neither the reader nor Gladney and his family with a sense of anxiety, but rather a longing, a thirst for more. The family are not made anxious in the face of this carnival of violence, but rather 'wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping' (*WN*, 76). Why is the *feeling-thing* of anxiety absent from this direct representation of death in its most spectacular form? This absence occurs precisely because these scenes of 'calamity and death' (*WN*, 76) fail to accomplish what the novel itself performs: approaching the subject of death obliquely, aesthetically. The clock-radio and its 3:51 are presented in the same way identified in *Kafka on the Shore*'s Magic Realism – with a causal opacity, a non-totalised objectivity, gaps between causes and effects. Conversely, the televised scenes of destruction, the visions of 'watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite' (*White*, 76), do not afford the feeling of anxiety which gives pause. This is because there is no separation between the object and its image, the representation little more than a literal depiction. Where DeLillo's text is compelling in its representation of deathly anxiety, it is so because it maintains the separation between object and representation – the caesura in being, the pause between reality and image, the 'infinity in small things' that makes the real magical, to recall Roh. The on-screen images in the Gladneys' living room replace objects with their representations, denying an aesthetic access to the finitude of things rather than depicting it as the persistence amidst general becoming insisted upon by our reading of Magic Realism.

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The great Apocalyptic event of the novel is the 'Airborne Toxic Event' (ATE) (136). The presence of this world-shattering object translates the entirety of the Everyday into new terms. This 'black billowing cloud' (132), formed of an unknown substance (and even when the substance is identified as 'Nyodene D', it remains more or less entirely epistemologically opaque), this shadowy nimbus arrives in the second section of the novel as a visitation of reality upon Gladney and his family. The Airborne Toxic Event is a vastly distributed entity beyond the scale of human recognition, what Morton calls a 'hyperobject'; 'fractals that contain more of themselves than they let on on the outside [...] like Doctor Who's Tardis [they are...] bigger on the inside' (*Hyper*, 79). In other words, the object recedes from all attempts to access its inner reality. Morton argues that the accumulation of data around hyperobjects only deepens their unthinkable, enveloping intimacy with the data-collecting subject. Of course, this is an argument OOO makes about all things, hyperobjects only a particular way of examining the phenomenon through entities of massive size. Thus, when confronted with the Airborne Toxic Event and exposed to it, Gladney encounters a reality which envelops him, which sticks to him like a viscous film with all attempts to peel it away through data or knowledge useless. DeLillo's text renders precisely this hyperobjective sense of intimacy and anxiety: Gladney's whole data profile is used to analyse the effects of his exposure to the Airborne Toxic Event (163), yet the text frustrates the reader and Gladney both in aligning them in positions of desperate misdirection. For all the 'big numbers', 'pulsing stars', and pronouncements of 'we have a situation' (163-4), when the reader and Gladney both put forward the question 'what does it mean?', we are only met with a sly 'you don't want to know' (163).

The thing-in-itself withdraws from presence. Neither the Airborne Toxic Event nor Gladney are 'the sum total of your data' (165), they are both beings which are inexhaustible by any data whatsoever. Recall that for OOO 'to end is to coincide with one's sensual appearance' (Morton, *RM*, 188). A thing reduced to its appearance is lost. A man replaced by information about a man has died. Data cannot replace the objects it represents, but rather is a site of imperfect translation between Gladney and the Airborne Toxic Event. It imports the 'strange strangeness' of the Airborne Toxic Event into Gladney's secure, comfortable, bounded reality and opens him up to an influx of the real he cannot sensibly contemplate. He does not know what this means. All he is told for sure is that 'it is real' (165). Upon this pronouncement Gladney experiences a 'subject-quake', a 'little death':

> I think I felt as I would if a doctor had held an X-ray to the light
> showing a star-shaped hole at the center of one of my vital
> organs. Death has entered. It is inside you. You are said to be
> dying yet you are separate from the dying, can ponder it at your
> leisure, literally see on the X-ray photograph or the computer
> screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is
> rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an
> eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A
> network of symbols has been introduced, [...] it makes you feel
> like a stranger in your own dying.

(DeLillo, *WN*, 165).

A Little Death

Is this not a flawless rendition of the aesthetic effect Morton describes as *dialetheia*? Gladney is brought before his ownmost possibility of being, yet this intimacy with himself throws him out of his world, sunders him from being-at-home with his own Dasein: 'You are said to be dying yet you are separate from the dying'. Jack beholds his own being but, unable to coincide with it, confronts the rift between his finitude and its representation: 'A network of symbols has been introduced, [...] it makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying.' Is not this world-sundering experience the sense of Dasein as merely one object amongst objects, of Jack's world as merely one world amongst worlds, *dialetheia*?

Death, which is to say, finitude, is an always-already in all things – a star-shaped hole in the internal organs of being. It is only when 'a network of symbols' is introduced; an image, an appearance, a phenomenal adumbration, that death, my inherent towards-deathliness, is made present to me, makes me a strange stranger in my own dying. The alien logic of it all (or 'alien phenomenology' as Ian Bogost calls it) is the sense of being subject to the disinterested goings-on of inhuman things: 'to become subsumed entirely in the uniqueness of an object's native logics' (Bogost, loc. 2557). Gladney is subsumed by the Airborne Toxic Event which places him in contact with his own death. His anxiety in the face of finitude is translated to the reader through a direct address which makes the reader complicit in the dying; 'death has entered. It is inside you. You are said to be dying yet you are separate from the dying'. If, as Morton argues, 'the knife of beauty is able to insert itself into the slit between an object's essence and its appearance' (*RM*, 205), this passage is beautiful simply because it acts as that knife – it

isolates the separation between a man and his own dying and threatens to close it up; to make the man dead.

'All plots move deathward. […] We edge nearer death every time we plot' (*WN*, 30). Death is the feeling of closure, the aesthetic sense of completion, unity, wholeness. Morton argues that 'closure is the feeling of death. The feeling of death is a feeling of isochrony: of the two channels of plot and story synchronizing with one another. The plot attunes itself to the story. In so doing, it vanishes' (*RM*, 194). Plot and plotting itself, movement towards narrative closure, totalisation, produces an aesthetic sense of death. Almost as soon as Jack intones the imploring prayer: 'May the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to a plan' (*WN*, 116), he is thrown into the Airborne Toxic Event, prefaced by a conversation in which he and his wife Babette discuss who should die first based on the size of the abyss solitude would leave in their lives (119). Only it is not Jack and Babette who leave the abyss behind in each other – it was always already there: 'the interobjective abyss' (Morton, *RM*, 178), the aesthetic gap of *translation* in all objects, the caesura in being, the deathly division between object and appearance. Osteen likens *White Noise*'s depiction of shopping to the bardo in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a 'gap between lives' (*AM&D*, 170), except this in-between is within all things. 'The bardo of this life is like coexisting with seven billion people, all having slightly different nightmares' (Morton, *RM*, 179), except the dreams are deathward translations of one another: 'The dead have a presence. […] Perhaps we are what they dream' (*WN*, 116). Anxiety is this translation – the sense of the deathly. When *White Noise* foreshadows the Airborne Toxic Event it puts the reader in this state of Anxiety because to plot is to move deathward. As the plot advances, the sense of the deathly intensifies: the reader becomes more Anxious, anxious to finish the novel, anxious to see it end, anxious to find out how it will conclude, anxious to drive it to its own demise.

Jack and his friend and colleague, Winnie, have a conversation which says it best. They behold the setting sun, which, since the Airborne Toxic Event, has become a dramatic, horizon-engulfing, otherworldly, beautiful spectacle: 'everything in our field of vision seemed to exist in order to gather the light of this event' (*WN*, 260). 'What *can* you think about in the face of this kind of beauty? I get scared, I know that' (261), intones Winnie. This horizon is Apocalyptic, Hyperobjective – an object which dislocates the totalising horizon of 'world', which creates the aesthetic sense of death, of *finitude* in all entities. It is so vast it seems to absorb all things it lands upon, everything suddenly 'seemed to exist in order to gather the light' [in the sunset, you are part of the sunset, *Kafka on the Shore* might say], but it is not infinite – it is a 'very large finitude'

(Morton, *Hyper*, 60), a real object which dwarfs all the objects in its peripheral vision, which itself has a death waiting for it which humbles or 'humiliates' (Morton, ibid). Its beauty is this deathward being, only visible because Jack and Winnie observe it already from the inside, from within its massive dying which will, itself, outlast their own. Winnie has the right of it. Being amongst objects of such ghastly beauty, what is there to feel but scared, deathward Anxiety?

> Picture yourself, Jack, a confirmed homebody, a sedentary fellow who finds himself walking in a deep wood. You spot something out of the corner of your eye. Before you know anything else, you know that this thing is very large and that it has no place in your ordinary frame of reference. A flaw in the world picture. Either it shouldn't be there or you shouldn't. Now the thing comes into full view. It is a grizzly bear [...]. The sight of this grizzer is so electrifyingly strange that it gives you a renewed sense of yourself, a fresh awareness of the self – the self in terms of a unique and horrific situation. [...] The beast on hind legs has enabled you to see who you are as if for the first time, outside familiar surroundings, alone, distinct, whole.

(DeLillo, *WN*, 263).

Winnie addresses Jack and the reader as one, sedentary fellows – how many readers of *White Noise* regularly encounter grizzly bears? Hyperobjects absorb us; we are in them, their reality sneaks up behind us and throws us into a brand new world [In the forest, you are part of the forest, *Kafka on the Shore* might say] which puts us not-at-home with 'the world' as a single familiar totality, makes us feel uncanny in ourselves. Objects which do this do not strictly need to be large; all objects are like hyperobjects in this sense, hyperobjects just happen to be big and powerful when considered on a human scale. They produce '*a flaw in the world picture*', a shattering of the totality of the Everyday, a revelation of the way the concept of 'world' underwrites the fleeing of paradigms of 'Nature', 'Materialism', and 'Capitalism' from the reality of finitude. Note that it is not the bear in full view that causes the shattering of totality, it is its withdrawn reality, it is when it is sensed but not itemised, when it is 'there' but beyond representation, when its translation presses in as *feeling-thing*, nameless Anxiety, that it shatters the world picture, is Apocalyptic. Winnie is surpassingly Heideggerian here: the bear allows Jack a contact with death, which exposes him as 'alone, distinct, whole' – who could tell it was Heidegger rather than her if she added that it also allowed him '*to be [himself] in passionate, anxious **freedom toward death**, which is free of the illusions of the they, factical, and certain of itself*' (Heidegger, *B&T*, 255, original emphasis). When she further questions 'whether anything you do in this life would have beauty and meaning without the knowledge you carry of a final line, a border or limit'

(*WN*, 262-3), does she not cross breed an OOO theory of beauty with Heidegger's command to face death with being Resolute? Death is just the living name for finitude, and since all objects are finite, very large or very small, they all possess a death of their own, one which is attuned to in Anxiety, and as beauty, the closing of the rift between image and object. Winnie knows that beauty *is* the sense of deathliness in objects. When she advocates retaining this sense of death, the Anxiety, the not knowing, the strangeness (or strange strangeness in Morton's idiom), would it not be entirely in character of her to quote Heidegger again in claiming that Resoluteness is the most authentic being of Dasein; 'Resoluteness means letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the They' (Heidegger, *B&T*, 286), and further 'Resolution does not escape from "reality" but first discovers what is factically possible in such a way that it grasps it as it is possible as one's ownmost potentiality of being in the They' (ibid)? In other words Resoluteness is openness to the Anxiety of the finitude of objects in OOO's sense. Resoluteness grasps being-with objects in the hyperobjective light of Blacksmith's setting sun, the death which objects seem to exist to gather in the radiance and beauty of. When Osteen remarks that 'the god of nature has been soiled by the devil of technology' and argues that Blacksmith's residents retain their 'dread and magic' as 'another poisonous sunset' or 'airborne aesthetic event' (*AM&D*, 189, quotation and emphasis removed), he is right on the mark, but for the wrong reasons. Nature as part of 'world' has indeed been soiled – it has died. Taken by the Apocalypse of objects, the dying of 'the world', of a secure and totalised Everyday of meaning, lives in the *airborne aesthetic event*, which summons its viewers, just as *White Noise* summons its readers, to Resolute, Anxious, freedom toward death, magical, fateful, and real.

This is *White Noise* at its most life-affirming. It is its embracing of what Morton calls 'Magic Life', the force of an object to remain itself, to weather the storm of contact with other objects, what he calls 'the disco of the present moment' (*RM*, 154); an affirmation of the dignity and power of discrete units to stand as themselves amidst the furore of a world of rifts and deaths which threaten to engulf them. Or, one more time in terms of Roh's Magic Realism: 'the miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (*MR: P-E*, 22). It may be true that all plots lead deathward, but DeLillo's text, while deathly in its beauty, is not deathward-bound. It is affirmative, passionate, Anxious but tenderly so. The rhythms of DeLillo's text draw to a gentle synchronicity, a soft closure in its final pages, yet the reader is given an image that is sublime. If closure is beauty and aperture is the sublime, then the novel, in its final moments offers us the end of one object (itself), and the beginning of another (the imaginary continuation of Gladney's life). And it is indeed life, both magic and human that the novel affirms above

all other things. On the overpass, Gladney, his family, and residents of the town gather to watch the sunset.

> It is hard to know how we should feel about this. Some people are scared by sunsets, some determined to be elated, but most of us don't know how to feel, are ready to go either way. […] The waiting is introverted, almost backward and shy, tending toward silence. What else do we feel? Certainly there is awe, it is all awe, it transcends previous categories of awe, but we don't know whether we are watching in wonder or dread, we don't know what we are watching or what it means, we don't know whether it is permanent, a level of experience to which we will gradually adjust, into which our uncertainty will eventually be absorbed, or just some atmospheric weirdness, soon to pass.'

(DeLillo, *WN,* 373)

Faced with a world beyond criteria, with a universe of great gulfs at the essential heart of things, a worldless Everyday of shattered horizons and great chasms between the knowable and the real, DeLillo's novel offers us an aesthetic of Anxiety which responds to the dark call of objects with an affirmative 'I don't know'. If Magic life, the suspended being of all things, is the cacophonic resonance of a thousand thousand thousand objects twisting, splintering, plopping, dancing, and croaking away from themselves into the night, then it can only be in the deathly resonance between all these living, dying entities that being-in-the-world happens at all. The Anxious who sense the depth and breadth of reality, who tune to the twisted harmonics of the strange stranger, who stare at sunsets, who contain fatal nebulous masses of no definite shape, form, or limits (DeLillo, *WN*, 322), who dance in mad discos, who take pictures of barns, who take pause, and who listen for the everywhere-ness of objects' otherness; these are the ones who glimpse the alluring reality of being and touch its essence, who answer its demands with a humble, yet sincere aesthetic and Resolute response. It is only in the rhapsodic uncertainty of the awful real, of the *end of the world*, that life, living, dying, and ending, of fate and destiny, in both wonder and dread, are affirmed.

3. Laugh Your Way Out of This One

Titus: Ha, Ha, Ha!

Marcus: Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour.

(William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.263-4)

Towards the end of Don DeLillo's *Players*, in the final chapter of the main section of the novel, Pammy, specialist worker in Grief Management, is witness to the suicide by petroleum and lighter of her friend and one-time sexual misadventure, Jack. The irony here, both irresistible and horrifying, is that Pammy remains unable to manage her grief before her friend's charred corpse. What *Players* refuses to deliver is the sense of catharsis which might close, or complete the event - a catharsis that might stabilise the reality of this inexplicable death. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, the sense of the deathly is that of anxiety, it is the feeling-thing of being involved in another object which culminates in the aesthetics found in *Kafka on the Shore* and *White Noise*, whose protagonists both find resolve, that is, resolution, through the bonds they form with the objects, human and inhuman, in their worlds. What happens in *Players* is a refusal of this being-involved, a failure of attachment, a misfire from the guns of Eros. The telling the reader receives of Jack's death is after the event. Like Pammy, we arrive too late. Like her, we may search back through the text for hints, for warning signs, but there is nothing to precipitate Jack's suicide which offers any causal link to the event itself. Typical of the Magic Realism we have described, causality itself is left indeterminate. But in this case, it produces the opposite effect to that of *Kafka on the Shore*, forcing the reader to a distance. From this distance is born irony and hence, humour. What kind of attunement is this form of ironic humour in the context of OOO? What kind of feeling-thing is humour and how does it bear upon or direct the attunement to objects found in plasmogamy? Once again we must recall the words of Timothy Morton: we never hear the wind in itself - we hear it in the hallway, in the gap under the door, in the aeolian harp on the windowsill, in the helpless and hysterical wheeze from our convulsed lungs. When we laugh, we laugh with objects. To study humour means to study how objects refuse catharsis.

Humour as the rejection of a catharsis that might totalise an event or an object is described most candidly by Simon Critchley. This description comes from an interview in the volume *Impossible Objects*. His stance here is exceedingly clear; humour is the inability to die:

> The tragic hero takes death into him or herself and it becomes meaningful; we experience catharsis [...]. Comedy is about the inability to achieve that catharsis. So either you can't die in comedy [...], or if they do die, they pop back up to life.

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(*Impossible Objects*, 105)

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Like Wile E. Coyote in the *Roadrunner* cartoons, like Tom the cat in *Tom and Jerry*, it is the failure of objects to die, or to achieve attachments which engenders laughter. It is the failure of fated lovers to resolve their destiny (as is the ongoing driver of any romantic comedy nameable). It is the failure of plasmogamy - of world-forming between objects.

Jack's suicide takes place at the conclusion of a country retreat shared by himself, Pammy, and their mutual friend, Ethan. The three decide to leave the city for the northern state of Maine, the quintessential site for the consumption of an American pastoral. This proposed escape from the everyday rhythms of city life and urban employment functions as an object of fantasy for part one of the novel – almost a full half of the book elapses imaginatively constructing this arcadian environment. Just as we have seen in *White Noise*'s depiction of an American pastoral, an ultimate 'over-there' which functions as an undisturbed dream in which we escape the burden of finitude, *Players* too sets up a play between the everyday world of objects and an American environment which functions as a background, a demonic flux (Roh) through which one might escape the turmoil of one's being. Pammy and Ethan long for it seemingly daily at work:

'Say it, say it.'
'Maine.'
'Again,' he said. 'Please, now, hurry, God, mercy.'
'Maine,' she said. 'Maine.'

<div align="right">

(*Players*, 63)

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This passage, somewhere between sexual murmur and desperate prayer, derives its humour from precisely the failure of fulfilment that it cries out for. Whether Ethan's cries ('please, now, hurry, God, mercy') are imagined as the throes of orgasm or a dying man, the effect remains the same: 'Maine' as a response fails to fulfil the release he seeks. Maine as a destination too fails to fulfil its promise of 'vast miles of granite and pine [...] a separation from the world of legalities and claims, an edifying loss of definition' (*Players*, 88). To understand the full irony of this failure, we must first understand the environment from which Maine represents an escape.

Pammy and her partner, Lyle, both work in the World Trade Centre. Not the first or last time DeLillo will examine finance and economic exchange as a figure of everyday existence, he is especially fine-tuned here in the way he transforms the iconic structure into an object in OOO's sense, a thing in Magic Realist form. Pammy contemplates the towers thus:

> If the elevators in the World Trade Center were places, as she believed them to be, and if the lobbies were spaces, as she further believed, then what was the World Trade Center itself? Was it a condition, an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence, a state, a set of invariables?

> (*Players*, 48)

It is not a page later that Lyle, outside, pairs Pammy's metaphysical exploration with his own in a remarkable passage worth quoting in full:

> He sat on a bench in a plaza overlooking the river. He felt lessened somehow. Freighter cranes slanted across the tops of sheds in the Brooklyn dock area. It was the city, the heat, an endless sense of repetition. The district repeated itself in blocks of monochromatic stone. He was present in *things*. There was more of him here through the idle nights than he took home with him to vent and liberate. He thought about the nights. He imagined the district, never visited, empty of human transaction, and how buildings such as these would seem to hold untouchable matter, enormous codifications of organic decay. He tried to examine the immense complexity of going home.

> (*Players*, 49, original emphasis)

These two passages together are excellent for examining the Magic Realism in the book and establishing the grounds for the ironic sense of humour found throughout. Recall that, for Roh, Magic Realism indicates 'that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it' (*MR: P-E*, 16), and that it always seeks to represent the 'miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (*MR: P-E*, 22). The passage from Pammy performs this aesthetic through a mechanism Graham Harman calls fission: 'the qualities of the thing break off from the thing as a whole and seem partially distinct from it' (*Weird Realism*, 242); a division arises between an object and the everyday impressions through which it is experienced. Pammy's meditation picks out the daily experiences of the World Trade Centre; the static, sweaty nowhereville inside an elevator, going somewhere while going nowhere; the airy caverns of the lobbies, crawling with flows of foot-traffic like streams of sand, and splits them from their parent object. These shades of the building are left

unmoored, while the building itself comes into question: if it is incommensurable with even the way workers who visit it daily experience it, then how can it be experienced ('a condition, an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence, a state, a set of invariables')? This constructs Roh's sense of persistence and duration amidst demonaical flux, quietude in the midst of becoming. In separating the building itself from the myriad flows through which it endures, the text accords it the status of a Magic Realist object in the terms we have described.

Meanwhile, Lyle's passage performs the opposite gesture, what in Harman's OOO is called 'fusion': 'allowing the hidden object to deform the sensual world' (*Weird Realism*, 238); the unification of objects and qualities we have already discussed as metaphor. The object of Lyle's passage is the city, or rather, the atmosphere of the city. It is an object of which he finds himself merely a part, but in which he finds himself constantly present, in the *things* of his experience. These everyday objects all become repetitions; interchangeable pieces in the light of the city as a whole thing, a hyperobject not dissimilar to the Airborne Toxic Event of *White Noise*; a vast finitude which remodels the self in terms of a devastatingly grand inhuman other. From his view Lyle can see the river, cranes, sheds and docks, he experiences the heat and intensity of urban repetition – all these entities clump together, he himself reflected as a presence in all of them. The passage equates them, a jumble of bodies within one spirit: the city. Just as *Kafka on the Shore* insists that all parts of a whole are equally parts, so too are all parts of the city equally parts in the city. Yet the city remains hidden. Even as Lyle attempts to imagine it outside the flux in which it is immersed, it withdraws, retaining something 'untouchable', a monumental life-cycle of its own, 'codifications of organic decay'. Because of this invisibility, the city as hidden object is able to 'deform the sensual world', throwing Lyle into a reality not wholly familiar to him, both alien and alienating. This invisibility is also the figure found in Roh of the mystery that hides and palpitates behind the represented figure, a richness and darkness deeper than any possible surface manifestation.

Together, not only do these passages serve as an earlier example of DeLillo's Magic Realism, but foreground a particular tension in the novel which we will use to elaborate its sense of ironic humour. Pammy's passage, characterised by OOO's fission, revolves around the World Trade Centre as 'an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence', whereas Lyle's passage, characterised by fusion, imagines the city as 'untouchable matter,' something inaccessible and beyond examination. The interplay between presence and absence is key, as we have already seen for both OOO and the Magic Realism we have defined, and is also insightful for *Players*, however, it

will prove more fruitful to look at the name under which Lyle describes this play: repetition.

Floating out, Sinking in

Note again the precise formulation in which repetition appears: 'It was the city, the heat, an endless sense of repetition. The district repeated itself in blocks of monochromatic stone. He was present in *things*.' (*Players*, 49, original emphasis). Three elements constellate here: 1) repetition in the physical organisation of space; the blocks of monochromatic stone through which the city itself appears; 2) repetition as a floating *sense*, an aura laid over the whole of Lyle's experience; 3) repetition as Lyle's redoubling within *things*, repetition as his recurrence in the locales, objects, and architecture of his everyday life. Peter Boxall, in *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, offers a reading which might unite these three forms of repetition. He argues that *Players* is a novel driven by an historical time, an 'amplitude pulse of history' (*Players,* 132), the pulse of capitalist historical progress that emanates from the World Trade Center, the beating heart of late-stage capitalism. For Boxall, this flow of time is like a 'liquid medium' (*DD:PoF*, 72) in which the novel's characters are caught. He holds that the everyday experience of occupying one's body within this historical current is the driving force behind *Players*; 'a way of living in space and time' (ibid, 73) that belongs purely to the moment of late capitalism. Even more significantly, Boxall defends the thesis that what he calls 'the search for the historical counterfunction' is 'a search for a means of putting oneself outside of this flow, of escaping the rush from 1945 towards the end of history' (ibid, 73). In short, Boxall's reading posits an historical flow driven by the pulse of American financial power and holds that *Players* is a novel which can be read as a study of the experience of everyday life within this arterial gush of time, and a quest for a way to resist, prevent, or escape it.

This reading would correlate with our three senses of repetition thus: the 'endless sense of repetition' is the historical pulse, radiating out from the trading floor; the physical repetitive structure of the city is the intervention of this time in physical space, the making-malleable of matter by an historical imperative; and Lyle's presence in things is the repetition of his daily rituals, routines, and very identity within this history, his fit to this temporal mould. I am inclined to agree with Boxall that *Players* is a novel interested in the resistance of individual elements to a background flow, the totalising imperative of late capitalism the flow in question. However, I am less enthusiastic about Boxall's prescription for resistance, his historical counterfunction, which he characterises as 'a kind of suspended calm, a kind of absence from history, a kind of

death' (*DD:PoF*, 82). Through this suspended calm, a slow motion which might occur outside the space of historical time, Boxall hopes to recover 'a missing historical narrative, an unarticulated set of possibilities that inhabit the passage from European to American Imperialism' (ibid, 82). For my method, such a reading is untenable because once again, while it gives well-articulated credence to the 'magic' element of DeLillo's writing (its imaginative ability to gesture towards unarticulated possibility), it neglects the 'realist'.

Recall again Franz Roh's formulation that 'the background is the last frontier, absolute nothingness, absolute death' (ibid, 20). At the very least, if we are following Roh's form of Magic Realism (and we have already demonstrated above the ample resources for reading *Players* in this tradition), we cannot follow Boxall in holding that a suspended slow motion outside of historical time would enable freedom from a current of history. Where Boxall argues that a slow-motion filmic time of 'weightless, anti-gravitational emptiness' provides the historical counternarrative against the flow of historical totality, we hold, with Roh, that it is 'the miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming' (*MR: P-E*, 22) which presents the counterpoint to the undertow of globalised capital. Where Boxall excavates an alternative junction in history by stepping outside, by leaving the gravity and everyday lives of *Players*' late capitalist players, I argue that *Players*' resistance to totalising narrative must remain *in the midst* of the demoniacal flux, that quietude must be found *within* the general becoming. Where Boxall defends a weightlessness which floats out of the current of history, I defend the gravitational pull of discrete finite objects, the '*infinity* in small things' (Roh, *MR: P-E*, 27), which will weight and anchor us within the flow, but retain the quietude which separates us from it. If *Players* retains the Magic Realist credentials I find within it, it is no stretch to see this at work in the novel, where Maine functions (much like Autumn Harvest Farms in *White Noise*) as a bucolic fantasy which foregrounds the futility of escaping to anywhere 'away', where Lyle's presence *in things* is what cements him into his world, into a temporal frame of repetitions, where even an object as complicit in global capital as the World Trade Center must stand apart from the flows which rush through it as 'a presence, a state, a set of invariables' (*Players* 48). It is not escaping the flow which is sought in *Players*, it is standing still amidst it, *quietude in the midst of general becoming*.

Comic Timing

This returns us to our triad of repetitions: 'It was the city, the heat, an endless sense of repetition. The district repeated itself in blocks of monochromatic stone. He was present in *things*.' (*Players*, 49, original emphasis). How to interpret these temporal frames without imagining an outside? Here we may recall again Mark Osteen's formula in *American Magic and Dread*; that DeLillo wants 'to unveil "the radiance in dailiness" by examining those "American forces and energies" beneath the surface of the banal' (*AM&T*, 166). It is the surface of the banal, dailiness, the immediacy of everyday time to which we must turn. The work of Henri Lefebvre is eminently suited to this task, particularly the study of repetitions in everyday spaces described in his *Rhythmanalysis*. This work constituted for Lefebvre the analysis of the structure of rhythms, repetitions, measures of duration as mobilised in social spaces. For Lefebvre, these rhythms, these times, are inextricable from their location, their presence in a delimited region: 'all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localised time, or if one prefers, a temporalised space' (*Rhythmanalysis*, 89). The project is not to separate rhythms from their spaces for analysis, but rather to examine their cacophony, to seize upon what he calls their polyrhythmia. Consider this passage in which Lefebvre rhythmanalyses a garden:

> Each plant, each tree has its rhythm, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits, each have their time. The plum tree? The flowers were born in the spring, before the leaves, the tree was white before turning green. But on this cherry tree, on the other hand, there are flowers which opened before the leaves, which will survive the fruits and fall late in the autumn and not all at once. Continue and you will see this garden and the *objects* (which are in no way things) **polyrhythmically**, or if you prefer, *symphonically*. In place of a collection of fixed things, you will see each *being*, each *body*, as having its own time above the whole. Each one therefore having its place, its rhythm, with its recent past, a foreseeable and a distant future.

> (*Rhythmanalysis*, 31, original emphasis)

Note the distinction Lefebvre makes between the term 'thing', for him a pejorative for a sterile, inert entity, and our own use. We use 'object' and 'thing' interchangeably, and in OOO, an object is anything but sterile and inert. In fact, we have already touched upon an allegiance with Lefebvre in our discussion of all objects as finite – as inscribed with their own lifespan, their own expiry date, a *time*, shot through with periodicities, in Lefebvre's terms, its own rhythm. Lefebvre's method also bears allegiance to Roh's 'quietude in the midst of general becoming' insofar as for Lefebvre 'externality is necessary; and yet in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself 'inwardly' to the time that it rhythmed' (*Rhythmanalysis*,

88). Rhythmanalysis must be conducted from within the midst of a polyrhythmia, from within a general becoming (Lefebvre himself calls rhythm 'an aspect of a movement or of a becoming' (89)), even as something retains quietude, 'externality is necessary'. With the rhythmanalytical method we are already far from the stepping outside history proposed by Boxall, and closer to the Object-Oriented / Magic Realist approach I have defended thus far.

How might Rhythmanalysis apply to Lyle's sense of New York? Three rhythms play over one another: the sense of repetition which lies over the city; the rhythm of the district in the 2-by-2 of repeated building after building; the repetition of Lyle's own presence, his life iterating throughout his environment. Can a rhythmanalysis of Lyle's and Pammy's city, the city as it is localised to them, such as Lefebvre's analysis of the garden be imagined?

The financial district; each building has its rhythm, made of several: each floor, concourse, walkway, each street and plaza has its own time. The twin towers of the World Trade Center? The North tower completed first and six feet taller, the second a repeat of the first – 'but there is no identical absolute repetition, indefinitely' (*Rhythmanalysis*, 6). Inside the elevators are places, in which one goes nowhere, but each one who goes through the elevator has a time greater than the arrival and departure of the elevator at a given floor, each floor has a different time to those who arrive and leave. 'Pammy stood in the sky lobby of the south tower of the World Trade Center, fighting the crowd that was pushing her away from an express elevator going down' (*Players*, 14): each being has its own time above the whole, Pammy has her time, the crowd has its time, an aggregate other than the additive footfalls of each pedestrian, the south tower and the express elevator, each their own times, their own *quietude* – is the inside of an elevator not utterly still despite movement?

'She wanted to go down even though she worked on the eighty-third floor, because she was in the wrong building. This was the second time she had come back from lunch and entered the south tower instead of the north' (*Players*, 14), *but there is no identical absolute repetition*. The second iteration reprises the first, produces a rhythm, a rite, a ritual: 'you should see how I have to get to the cafeteria. A local and an express down, then an express up. Then the escalator if you can get there without them ripping your flesh to pieces' – Jeanette, a schoolmate of Pammy's (*Players*, 15). Another voice: 'the artist lives in doubling, in an act of duplication and repetition that splits us in two […]. Of course, once you're split and reproduced, you're not unique anymore: you're fake' – Simon Critchley (*Repetition, Repetition, Repetition*, 239). 'Torn asunder, I know' –

Pammy again (*Players*, 15). Humour is the failure of catharsis, it is being condemned to repetition, reprisal. 'Pammy thought of the elevators in the World Trade Center as "places." She asked herself, not without morbid scorn: "When does this place get to the forty-fourth floor?"' (*Players*, 23). The elevator rises and falls with its own rhythm – in order to grasp a rhythm, one must have been grasped by it. Movement through the city, the sidewalk, escalator, lobby, elevator, is to be grasped by the rhythms belonging to beings with their own times. Critchley holds that all humour is a form of ironic self-awareness: 'a series of repetitions and re-enactments; fakes that strip away the illusion of reality' (*R, R, R,* 240). Pammy: 'Torn asunder, I know'. Jeanette: 'You work for the state, being here?' Pammy: 'I'm in the wrong tower.' (*Players*, 15).

'This isn't funny'

Much of the humour in *Players* takes the form of these rhythmic repetitions. Indeed, much of the novel takes place in a neither-here-nor-there state of flux. Whether lost in the rhythmic pulse of New York or in the numbing distance of Maine's vacuous escapism, the sense of things overlapping, rhythms playing relentlessly over one another, pervades the novel. Formally, DeLillo achieves this effect by the total elision between perspectives, leaping without warning between Lyle and Pammy, failing to indicate changes in time or space, forcing the reader to experience the novel *in medias res*, amongst things. One way of reading this effect is through Critchley's sense of humour as already noted. Humour for Critchley is repetition, but there is a difference between Critchley's sense of repetition and the one mobilised by Lefebvre as rhythm. Both would agree there is no such thing as true, identical repetition – that any repetition necessarily falsifies, or renews its original. Yet there are two differing directions that Lefebvre's and Critchley's thoughts take here. For Lefebvre, 'in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself 'inwardly' to the time that it rhythmed' (*Rhythmanalysis*, 88). For Critchley, the opposite is proposed: '[the repetition that occasions] humour lets us take up a disinterested, theoretical attitude towards the world' (*On Humour*, 87-8).

What happens when we read *Players* with Critchley's position? We return to the post-mortem (forgive me) of Jack's suicide towards the end of the novel. Pammy receives a call from Lyle to whom she explains the situation. Her rendition of the event is 'a nearly delirious monologue' (*Players*, 200). She is only able to reassess the whole event after Lyle repeats it for her: 'to hear the sequence restated intelligibly was at that moment, more than a small comfort to her. It supplied a focus, a distinct point into which things might conceivably vanish' (ibid). Repetition is what gifts Pammy the possibility of

distance, of viewing the event from the outside, uninvolved. From this position, she tries to comfort Ethan about the death of his partner:

"Time will make it easier to bear."
"The consolations of time."
"That's right. That's it. The only thing."
"The healing hand of time."
"Are you making fun?"
"My time is your time."
"Because I don't think this is funny."

(*Players*, 202)

Ethan goes into an extended reverie imagining himself as an old man interspersed with Pammy's protestations: [Ethan]: 'I hobble to the store for cream cheese and a peach,' '"how much is that cucumber, young fella? No, the other one,"' [Pammy]: 'Stop, really' (ibid). Ethan finishes with a description of his imagined decrepit self, attempting to quietly drag globs of errant mucus up from his throat: '"I hawk some more. A phlegmy old man. This isn't funny," he said. "I wouldn't laugh if I were you."' (*Players*, 203). This is one of the most ironic and darkly comic passages of the novel; Pammy the grief management consultant unable to console Ethan, resulting in an almost hysterically bleak imagining of Ethan's own solitary dying. Through Critchley, we might argue that Ethan's ironic commentary allows him distance from the horror of the event, that the laughter shared between he and Pammy, even in its profanity ('stop, really', 'I wouldn't laugh if I were you') enables a reflective separation to be achieved and ironic commentary from a safe distance to unfold.

We can see that in Lefebvre's terms, Pammy and Ethan have failed to be grasped by a rhythm; they feel out of time with the events unfolding – they experience a failure to coincide with the flow of things, the immediate vanishing of Jack into the universe (he does, after all, sit in full lotus like a meditating buddhist to immolate himself). They experience a failure to die and a failure of catharsis, of *plasmogamy* –a failure to share Jack's world as he departs theirs. They are condemned to go on living, to keep repeating, their rhythms of everyday life. This is an intensified form of the ironic humour performed in Pammy's wanderings through the World Trade Center. What the novel foregrounds is failure to coincide with rhythm, failure to be one with the background, or *persistence in the midst of general becoming*. Unlike the terms of fate and Anxiety discussed in chapters 1 and 2 (distinct because they foreground a thing's finitude as its absorption in another thing), separation from the background here takes

the form of distance, irony and laughter because it individuates only as a *failure* of absorption. Humour, particularly this profane, ironic cackle, this separation found in repetition, places individuals outside rhythms, occasioning not only laughter, but the possibility of reflection and contemplation.

Pull the Other One

This is, however, far from all there is to be said of *Players*. Let's consider again rhythms and the failure which occasions repetition. In his OOO, Tim Morton holds that 'rhythms are fundamentally composed of the irreducible difference between an object and its sensual qualities' (*RM*, 154). He is fully in accord with Lefebvre's contention that every thing has its own rhythm made up of several, a polyrhythmic or symphonic series of times embedded in one another. It is no surprise to see Morton spend a whole chapter of *Realist Magic* accounting for 'time as an inherent feature of objects' (ibid, 153). We've already said that being absorbed, being grasped by a rhythm, would constitute a kind of death in the terms of Magic Realism, a vanishing into demoniacal flux. This interpretation is borne out by Morton's discussion of closure and death which was elaborated upon in chapter 2; 'closure is the feeling of death. The feeling of death is a feeling of isochrony: of the two channels of plot and story synchronizing with one another' (*RM*, 194). This refers not only to literary technique, but to the interior times of all objects – if one object falls completely into step with another it becomes a mere part, no longer an independent actor.

We are reminded again of Boxall's argument that *Players* discusses forms of time in order to find a way of resisting the temporality of late capitalism: 'a new form of global, information economy which threatens to loose the world from its moorings, to convert the whole experience of urban living […] into stylised "distortions of light"' (*DD:PoF*, 73). Re-configured through our interpretations of rhythm and time in *Players*, the historical time of late capitalism is indeed, as Boxall contends, a historical pulse which flows through the whole novel, its totalising ambition to subsume all other rhythms into its own, to reduce all objects to mere parts in its machine. Consider Lyle's thoughts as he wanders the financial district at night, amidst the quiet steel and glass monolith buildings:

> He knew the lack of activity was deceptive, time of day, day of week, an illusion of relief from the bash of predatory engineering. Inside some of the granite tubes, or a chromium tower here and there, people sorted money of various types, dizzying billions being propelled through machines, computer scanned and coded, filed, cleared, wrapped and trucked, all in a high speed din, that rip of sound intrinsic to deadline activities.

He'd seen the encoding rooms, the microfilming of checks, money moving, shrinking as it moved, beginning to elude visualisation, to pass from a paper existence to electronic sequences, its meaning increasingly complex, harder to name. It was condensation, the whole process, a paring away of money's accidental properties.

(*Players*, 110)

This meditation describes perfectly the system of late capitalism as noted by Boxall. Yet notice the great volume of things the text brings to bear, or rather, the great volume of *rhythms*: day, week, granite tubes, chromium towers, computers, machines, scanners, files, wrapping, trucks, encoding rooms, microfilms, cheques, paper. This passage emphasizes the carnivorous insatiability of late capitalism, its unrelenting ambition as 'predatory engineering'. When read with Lefebvre's eye with 'each *being*, each *body*, as having its own time above the whole' (*Rhythmanalysis*, 31), it becomes a vast rhythm which would engulf all others, strip away their 'accidental features', the *general becoming* of Roh. Or, in Morton's terms, late capitalism here functions like all world-engulfing hyperobjects: as the background which demarcates the totalising horizon known as 'world'. In the respect of time in particular, 'hyperobjects envelop us, yet they are so massively distributed in time that they seem to taper off, like a long street stretched into the distance. […] Because we can't see to the end of them, hyperobjects are necessarily uncanny' (*Hyper*, 55). Late capitalism as hyperobject is that which *we can't see the end of* – or, in *Players*, '[a] way of continuing on through rotting flesh, [a] closest taste of immortality. […] the system itself' (107) in the words of the terrorist cell who attack the stock exchange in the novel, or in Lyle's own phraseology: 'deathless presence' (110). We might say that this time of late capitalism functions as a taste of immortality because it wrests from each thing its independent reality – it isn't so much deathless presence as *presence without finitude*. It appears as the background, 'the last frontier, absolute nothingness, absolute death' (Roh, *MR:P-E*, 20), because it denies infinity in small things. It appears as absolute death because it appears as *immortality*, *in-finitude*, the absence of any singular discrete entities.

This passage is bookended by the comedic scene of three men in the street. In their first appearance, two grapple awkwardly over a bottle while the third pisses. Their wrestling takes place 'in slow motion' (*Players*, 109), an unreal mock, rehearsal or replay of battle. The comic effect is intensified when Lyle encounters them again: 'all three men wrestled now, back-pedaling in a roistering circle' (ibid, 110). The wrestlers gradually decrease in pace, the fight moving 'in even slower motion than it had before' (ibid), decelerating at each pass. Perhaps if Lyle were to return a third and fourth time, he

would encounter them slowed down even further, still orbiting the same bottle, as if moving in a thicker and thicker emulsion of time. This repetition does not occasion the contemplative distance endorsed by Critchley. Rather, it is an appearance of utter absorption, utter involvement. At each pass the men melt together, the third sucked into union with the two, then the three becoming a single object, a roistering circle. Would more be sucked in were they to draw too close? Lyle himself returns to this spot unbidden, drawn by some force ('somehow, he'd come back to South Street' (ibid)), as the men continue to slow, their own rhythms decaying. This slowing, these refrains, are the hyperobjective decay of these actors (or should I say players?) into the everyday of late capitalism. What happens when they've slowed to the point that no variation is visible between themselves and their background? The epoch of late capitalism as the everyday, as the object we cannot see the end of, slows everything into its massive time. Where Boxall argues that slow motion introduces a 'temporal gap' into the historical narrative of late capitalism, a 'freedom from bounds that is given to the players of *Players*, through the suspended time of slow motion' (*DD:PoF*, 79), I hold that the slow motion in this novel is a closing of the temporal gap between object and world, between finite thing and infinite background, between each being's own rhythm and the 'amplitude pulse of history' (*Players,* 132). When Lyle, on the trading floor of the world trade center says 'it's good that [the world] turns […] or there wouldn't be this stillness in here. We need that motion, see, that exterior flux, to keep us safe and still' (ibid, 158), does he not illuminate how the trading floor remains safe and still because it is perfectly in time with the exterior flux which it pumps out into the world?

The Yawn

Boxall does highlight another kind of rhythm, one not existing in slow motion. This is Pammy's tap-dancing. While Boxall conflates this stylised motion with others in the flow of late capitalism (*DD:PoF*, 73), it should be made clear that it presents an entirely different kind of rhythm to Lyle's slow motion wrestlers. Like all forms of dance, tap, as Lefebvre might have it, is about grasping a rhythm by being grasped by it, performing a musical rhythm bodily. Pammy's dance teacher intones: 'There are areas and awarenesses in you that tap makes accessible. You are accessible to yourself' (*Players*, 79). In this passage focused on tap and breathing, Pammy is instructed not so much in dancing, but in playing rhythmanalyst, one who 'draws on his breathing, the circulation of his blood, the beatings of his heart' (*Rhythmanalysis*, 21), one who examines how 'through a kind of *magic, images* change what they reach (and claim to reproduce) into *things*' (ibid, 23). Pammy is framed here as a being capable of sustaining her own rhythm independent of the rhythm of late capitalism: 'the body as a coordinated

organism able to make its own arithmetic' (*Players*, 79). The text itself here warns against too easily deferring this freedom to the material or bodily: the tap teacher herself 'attributed her prowess in tap to ethical systems of discipline' (ibid, 78). In other words, tap as a prowess in rhythms stems from an ethical programme, a regime of practice, being grasped by a rhythm, a discipline.

This is not the only instance of Pammy functioning as a figure sensitive to being grasped by the rhythms of things. Striking examples include Pammy's experiences of boredom and hers and Lyle's instances of late-night insomnia.

'Pammy examined the uses of boredom. Of late she'd found herself professing to be bored fairly often. She knew it was a shield for deeper feelings' (*Players*, 51). What use does boredom have in relation to rhythms, repetitions, time, and laughter? In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, originally a 1929 – 30 lecture course by Martin Heidegger, we find an answer. While we previously emphasised Anxiety's importance to Heidegger, this course speaks of fundamental *attunements* other than Anxiety, 'the kind that constantly, essentially, and thoroughly attune human beings' (*Metaphysics*, 7). Heidegger notes that such attunements are a matter of simultaneously grasping a concept as well as being grasped by it such that 'conceptual philosophical comprehension is grounded in our being gripped, and this is grounded in a fundamental attunement' (ibid). The parallels between this model and Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis should already be clear and will only become more so as we progress.

What are the 'uses of boredom' for Heidegger? He argues that 'becoming bored is thus the fact that particular things, in what they offer us or do not offer us and in the way that they do so, are in each case *co-determined* by a *particular time*, in each case have *their* particular time' (*Metaphysics*, 105, original emphasis). This definition is remarkably clear on the conditions from which boredom arises: the particular time of particular things, the rhythms of objects. Heidegger goes on to say;

> If things evidently have *their* time in each specific case, and if
> we precisely come across things in *their* specific time, then
> perhaps boredom will fail to appear. Conversely: boredom is
> only possible at all because each thing, as we say, has *its* time.

> (ibid, original emphasis).

We do not become bored if we come across a thing in its specific time, and boredom is possible because a thing has its time, which it is possible for us to be out-of-time with. Is this structure not almost identical to the structure of Lefebvre's and Morton's

rhythms? The thing has its time and being out of time with the thing, being forced into repetition, is the condition of boredom.

But is this structure not too broad if it describes both the ironic humour of Critchley and boredom in the same gesture? There are a few points Heidegger makes to refine boredom which will be familiar from our discussions of *White Noise* and *Players* thus far. In Heidegger's third form of boredom, 'we are not merely *relieved* of our *everyday personality*, somehow distant and alien to it, but simultaneously also *elevated beyond* the particular situation in each case and beyond the *specific beings* surrounding us there' (*Metaphysics*, 137). This description matches that of Anxiety as that which 'fetches Dasein back out of its entangled absorption in the world. Everyday familiarity collapses' (*B&T*, 182); that which puts Dasein out of joint with the objects of the everyday. Read this way, we can see that Anxiety and boredom are both fundamental attunements which perform the same function (Anxiety foregrounding death and boredom foregrounding rhythms); that of holding Dasein's finite existence in relief against the totalising background of the 'world', separating it from the time of the everyday, putting it out of time with the objects of the everyday situation.

Heidegger calls his third form of boredom a 'telling refusal of beings as a whole'; 'beings as a whole withdraw, this means: Dasein is indeed there in the midst of beings as a whole, has them around, above, and within itself, yet cannot give way to this withdrawal' (*Metaphysics*, 147). The telling refusal of beings, objects or things, is again a matter of them being out of time with us. Beings announce their obstinacy, their reality as objects, in their refusal to be in-time with other objects. What prevents Dasein recognising these individual objects is, according to Heidegger, its being entranced by 'the time which in each case *Dasein itself as a whole is*' (ibid). In our idiom, in boredom we are out of time with objects including the everyday world itself and thus recognise each's own rhythm as independent, polyphonic, and are furthermore entranced, or put in time with our own rhythm, the time corresponding to our own being, identity, finitude.

'Pammy examined the uses of boredom. [...] Things in the street, just things she saw and heard day to day, forced her into subtle evasions' (*Players*, 51). Things refuse themselves, abandon Dasein to its own finitude , forces it out of its everyday time into subtle evasions. Boredom occurs as being out of time with beings in the world individually, but also as being out of time with beings which withdraw as a whole, the totality of world; 'people talked to Pammy on the bus, strangers, a little detached in tone, a little *universal*' (ibid). 'Because we can't see to the end of them, hyperobjects

are necessarily uncanny' (Morton, *Hyper*, 55), yet boredom foregrounds the withdrawal of the world as hyperobject as *a whole*. Even though seemingly endless, it becomes one thing alongside others, a discrete finite entity, despite being of massive size; 'people talked to her on the bus [...] sometimes giving the impression they were communicating *out* to her from some unbounded secret place' (*Players*, 51, original emphasis). Pammy is bored in *places*, fixed locales which grasp her with their temporality, their rhythm; 'flying made her yawn. She yawned on the elevators at the World Trade Center. Often she yawned in banks, waiting in line to reach the teller' (ibid, 53). These are objects which one is *in*, objects which one is *in the midst* of, in line, in the elevator, in-flight, placed at the demand of their rhythms, experiencing boredom or 'the structural moment of being held in limbo' (Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 141). Boredom puts one out of rhythm with the objects in the world and the world as a whole, and one finds oneself before one's own rhythm: 'Banks made [Pammy] guilty. Tellers and bank officers were always asking her to sign forms, or re-sign forms already bearing her signature, or to provide further identification' (*Players*, 52). Let us not forget that Heidegger calls that which summons Dasein to its ownmost possibility of existence 'being-guilty' (*B&T*, 276). Anxiety brings Dasein before its ownmost being-towards-death, boredom brings Dasein before its ownmost being by entrancing it in its own rhythm, out of the rhythms of the world. When Pammy waits in line in the bank 'there was still this bubble of nervousness and guilt, there was still this profound anxiety over her name, her handwriting, there was still this feeling that the core content of her personality was about to be revealed' (*Players*, 52).

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Pammy and Lyle watch different TVs together:

> Embodied in objects was a partial sense of sharing. They didn't lift their eyes from their respective sets. But noises bound them, a cyclist kick-starting, the plane that came winding down the five miles from its transatlantic apex, rippling the pictures on their screens. Objects were memory inert. Desk, the bed, et cetera. Objects would survive the one who died first and remind the other of how easily halved a life can become. Death, perhaps, was not the point so much as separation. Chairs, tables, dressers, envelopes. Everything was a common experience, binding them despite their indirections, the slanted apparatus of their agreeing. [...] The spell that had to be entered was out there among the unmemorised faces and uniform cubes of being. This, their sweet and mercenary space, was self-enchantment, the near common dream they'd countenanced for years. Only absences were fully shared.
>
> (*Players*, 53-4)

This remarkable passage occurs between two segments of Lyle and Pammy pottering about their home, long passages of dialogue without identifying names, merely the syntax and grammar running together into a single rhythm. These periods of dialogue are laced with a disquieting humour, a half-laugh, more a smirk than a chortle. As Lyle puts it earlier in the novel; 'they were talking quickly and getting laughs on intonation alone, the prospect of wit. This isn't really funny, Lyle thought' (*Players*, 38). This is the minimal point of humour, its most reduced and irreducible form – rhythm, repetition, a prospect of wit. In contrast with Crichley's idea that humour is essentially distance, DeLillo presents it as essentially rhythm, or in Lefebvre's terms, *being grasped by a rhythm*, the intonation alone gestures towards the prospect of wit, which is the laugh. The wit itself need not materialise.

Here DeLillo reminds us that objects embody a *partial* sharing – just as in OOO any interaction between objects takes the form of metaphor, translation, 'a specific mode of de-creating images and recreating them as feeling-things' (Harman, *GM*, 109). Recall that in OOO all relations take place inside a compound object, a world which the interacting units share; a feeling-thing or metaphor, the translation in which partial sharing takes place, a kind of rhythm; 'just as a bird that lights on or leaves a branch starts it trembling' (Ortega in Harman, *GM*, 107). The feeling-thing does not sever real objects and their images, does not lift Pammy and Lyle from their private realities, their TV sets ('[Pammy] there was something private about television. It was intimate' (*Players*, 40)), but translates between private and intimate realities, allows them to share a common world, *plasmogamy*. Noises join Pammy and Lyle, the rhythms of the very air bind them together, emanating from things. Morton argues that 'when an object exists, when it persists, […] it breathes, moving and not-moving at the same time, emanating a certain tempo with which other objects may or may not synchronize' (*RM*, 177). The noises of the city night are not only the sounds of the endless flux of global capital, but the unsynchronised rhythms of objects in their persistence, polyrhythmically playing across one another. *The disco of the present moment*, as Morton might call it (*Realist Magic*, 154).

The objects of Pammy and Lyle's apartment are 'common experience', 'memory inert'; each object bearing memories of its surrounding objects. 'Perhaps memories are distributed holographically, that is nonlocally, in interference patterns' (Morton, *RM*, 180); an object memorises another in the interference pattern between their rhythms, their songs of each other – like the task of the *translator* to be an aeolian harp touched by the wind, with every translated object a 'nucleus […] the element that does not lend itself to translation' (Benjamin, 'task', *Illuminations*, 76). The apartment is a

'mercenary space', rogue, one foot in and one foot out of the capitalist machine – *private*, in a now-familiar description of the withdrawal of OOO's objects; 'utterly sealed in private vacuums but also unleashing forces' (Harman, *GM*, 97). It is a mass of interference patterns of rhythms, a nexus of memories, and still a thing-in-itself, an object, which withdraws from relation, remains private, a common dream ('if every encounter between every entity is a parody or translation [...] we are always dealing with an object's dream of another object' (Morton*, RM*, 182)). It is not death which threatens this space – death is, after all, finitude. It is absences which are fully shared, or rather, it is full sharing which results in an absence. Full sharing, the dissolution of boundaries between one thing and another, is what collapses things into 'unmemorised faces and uniform cubes of being', the endlessly flux of globalised capital, *money as deathless presence.*

Amidst this flux, rhythms sound out, like the heartbeats of tiny subaquatic animals rippling on the surface of a pond. DeLillo is right that humour is possible on intonation alone, on being grasped by a rhythm. Yet Critchley also seems convincing in that humour is the failure of catharsis, the failure to die, the drawing out of one's time. Is it possible to have both at once, the revelation of more than one truth, *dialetheia*? Humour is the essential condition of the rhythmanalyst: 'Externality is necessary; and yet in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself 'inwardly" (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 88). Humour is the sense of *partial sharing* embodied in the objects littered through Lyle and Pammy's home, in Heidegger's terms a *fundamental attunement*: 'conceptual philosophical comprehension is grounded in our being gripped, and this is grounded in a fundamental attunement' (Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 7). Humour is being gripped by a rhythm yet simultaneously remaining external, in one's own rhythm – polyrhythmia. The disjunction between the two rhythms is humour, the failure to be possessed wholly, the failure of catharsis. Neither pure distance, nor pure dissolution, a partially withdrawn relation. A failure to die, a drawing out and lengthening of one's time, being condemned to persist, or, as Heidegger says: 'what is at issue in boredom [*Langeweile*] is a while [*Weile*], tarrying a while [*Verweilen*], a peculiar remaining, enduring' (*Metaphysics*, 96). This is why Pammy's *uses of boredom* match so neatly with our rhythmanalytical reading. Boredom and humour are based on the same structure; a partially withdrawn involvement; two rhythms playing together out of step. Just consider *Waiting for Godot* – a repetition, condemnation to sit and endure, *tarrying a while,* missed rhythmic beats, objects' mistranslated and leaky memories and dreams of one another (Estragon: Let's go. Vladimir: We can't. Estragon: Why not? Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot. (Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, multiple locations, Acts 1

and 2)), being out of time, being in time but not on time, enduringly, persistently, almost boringly funny.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

There is one more thing boredom can offer us. Heidegger calls boredom a *telling* refusal, a making manifest, or a pointing to, a '*telling announcement* of unexploited possibilities of Dasein' (Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 141). Just as for OOO, the hidden real object is 'the reservoir from which objects radiate their startling novelties' (Harman, *GM*, 191), so here for Heidegger, is the possibility of something other, of change, predicated on what is withheld or refused to an outer realm of flux. Unexploited possibilities are gestured towards in humour / boredom, and can only be articulated through the work of rhythmanalysis, attunement to a thing, a time. In opposition to Critchley and Boxall, who look for emancipation in some 'elsewhere' realm (ironic distance and 'floating out') we hold that the chance of change is only found in attunement to things, being gripped by things even as our own finitude makes their grip loose and tangential, a stout dismissal of the idea of escaping from things, but rather a commitment to being amongst and amidst them, humour / boredom foregrounds persistence amidst demoniacal flux.

Pammy, Jack and Ethan visit Maine looking for 'an edifying loss of definition' (*Players*, 88), a pastoral 'outside', escape from Pammy's guilty signature at the bank. Jack most keenly feels the failure of this endeavour. What he can't bear is the repetition. He complains about the rituals (rhythms) of mealtimes (*Players*, 111), especially the talking about things, the mediation, translation, repetition; 'Jack complained they were talking about the food while eating it, that they talked about the sunsets while looking at them' (ibid, 135). Jack complains about Ethan's habit of drag-trawling up morsels of phlegm with his morning coffee; 'every morning it goes on. The exact same thing' (*Players*, 162). He can't stand repetition; it reminds him of the rhythms of urban life; 'it's like the subway, two in the morning, you get the pukers' (ibid). Why does Jack fail to find repetition either funny or boring and instead, see it as intolerable? It would be easy to claim that Jack has simply idealised Maine and mistaken the place for its image, perfectly encapsulated in his dismay at the darkness of the night and the coldness of the water (*Players*, 112), a straightforward case of losing the object in its simulacrum.

However, this is to miss the more fundamental lapse in Jack's character. 'In some rooms, […] people's reactions to Jack, whether friendly or indifferent were based on their feelings for Ethan' (*Players*, 39). 'Anytime Ethan wants to rent a house this nice in a setting this lovely, cetra cetra, I'm perfectly happy to have him supervise' (ibid, 112).

'Ethan is responsible for me. He is willing to be that.' 'My whole life. He is willing to be responsible' (ibid, 170). Jack is characterised by a translucency through which can be seen the compound object 'Jack and Ethan'. Pammy notes how 'Ethan rarely talked to Jack. He addressed Jack by talking about furniture, movies, the weather. That, plus third person. He said things to Pammy that were meant for Jack' (ibid, 138). As she and Lyle communicate through their shared objects and rhythms, so too does 'Jack and Ethan' constitute an object through which Jack and Ethan share a world. Jack, however, abdicates responsibility for his own part in the shared dream, a trait we already know to be fatal from *Kafka on the Shore*. Unlike Pammy, who is well attuned to her own rhythms, embodied in her love of tap, Jack has no ability to grasp or be grasped by rhythms. He lacks the capacity for humour / boredom – the capacity to persist, to retain his identity amidst objects and hyperobjects. What Pammy notices is that Maine puts us no more 'outside' rhythms than the noises of New York; 'a house that inhaled the weather, frequent changes in temperature. She heard noises all night long. [...] she couldn't tell the difference between the sounds of wind and rain, or bats and squirrels, or rain and bats' (*Players*, 113). Jack imagines Maine as a kind of pure, authentic realm, 'floating out' or affording distance, a *Nature*. This ill-attuned appreciation of the landscape, already critiqued in Morton's attack on the 'Natural' as 'the world' is what shuts Jack off from humour / boredom as fundamental attunement; when Jack meets the night in Maine all he hears is quiet and dark.

Following Jack's suicide, Pammy puts her hands over her ears, a gesture she repeats throughout the novel when dancing (79), when embarrassment or guilt threatens her private space (53), whenever she attempts to attune to her own rhythm at the exclusion of others. On this occasion, she hears 'a steady pressuring subroar, oceanic space, brain deadened, her own coiled shell, her chalky encasement for the world of children, all soft things, the indulgent purr of animals sunning' (*Players*, 199). The procedure fails, she is submerged in a polyrhythmic chorus, the sounds of her parts, bones, other beings. We are reminded of Anxiety and death in *White Noise*, particularly Morton's experience of beauty; 'non-ego experience' (*Humankind*, 87), further arguing that 'in the event of beauty, a nonself part of my inner space seems to resonate in the colors on the wall, in the sounds pouring into my ears' (*RM*, 205). Pammy faces exactly this resonance with non-ego parts of herself, her self as objects, the rhythms of her parts sounding over the rhythm at her untranslatable core. Unsurprisingly, just as DeLillo later expands on in *White Noise*, Pammy 'concentrated on objects' (*Players*, 199) to try to defer or delay this sense of deathliness. Like *White Noise*'s protagonist, she attempts to strip things of their uncanniness, to reduce them to Heidegger's everyday; 'nothing has a name. She'd declared everything nameless. Everything was compressed into a block. She fought the

tendency to supply properties to this block. That would lead to names.' (ibid). To escape the sense of death, she turns to a totalised world, a background in which all things are one and no thing is in-itself.

Pammy does not recover until she returns to her apartment, the place she and Lyle share as objects and lives. 'The apartment was serene. Objects sat in pale light, reborn. A wicker basket she'd forgotten they had. A cane chair they'd bought just before she left. Her memory in things' (*Players*, 204). Unable to sleep, she watches a movie; a 'tediously detailed' (ibid, 205), corny mashup of tropes, noted for its 'artificiality', its 'plain awfulness' (ibid), its almost funny level of boringness. Through this film, Pammy experiences catharsis, fifteen minutes of sobbing as the film concludes in an utterly ubiquitous denouement; 'the wife died, the boy recovered, the brother vowed to regain his self-respect, the hero in his pleated trousers watched his youngest child ride a pony' (ibid).

Inauthentic repetition gives Pammy a bridge which returns her to her world, persisting in the face of death. This film in its formulaic, seen-it-before, rhythmic structure, its boring-almost-funny plot, affords Pammy an aesthetic experience through which she can perform her grief. It returns her to the state of the rhythmanalyst – grasped by a rhythm yet also bound to one's own rhythm, the fundamental attunement of humour / boredom. Even as she is gripped by the mood of the film, sobbing away, she notes the 'whole topographies rearranged to make people react to a mass-market stimulus. No harm done succumbing to a few bogus sentiments' (*Players*, 206). Is the scene itself not humourous in its own repetition of the ubiquitous image of (in an admitted anachronism) a woman sobbing *Bridget Jones* style before a tedious movie alone at night in her apartment? But something odd has happened. Pammy *has experienced catharsis*. Did we not propose that humour is the *failure* to experience catharsis? Has our analysis gone awry? Is DeLillo's work simply too ambiguous about what is funny? We hold that our analysis is not mistaken. Humour's basic structure is that of the attunement of boredom – to be gripped by a rhythm and withdrawn from that rhythm, to be a partially shared object. Humour cannot be pure distance, a void which prevents involvement with a thing. Humour engenders persistence, enduring amongst things, periodicity, repetition. We do not end; catharsis is refused. But herein lies the hidden distributary, a second branch of the river down which Pammy's catharsis flows. Pammy has experienced humour / boredom, and yet she has also experienced catharsis. What she has experienced which is altogether different from our analysis thus far is another sense of repetition, to which we will turn next chapter.

4. The Wind Laughing – The Embarrassment of Being Alive

> Pod 042: "I am embarrassed."
>
> Pod 153: "Why is that?"
>
> Pod 042: "I launched a suicide attack, and yet, here I am, still alive. I must look very silly."
>
> Pod 153: "Do not feel bad about it. We are alive, after all. And being alive is pretty much a constant stream of embarrassment."
>
> (Taro, Yoko, *NieR: Automata*)

> *The third girl I slept with liked to call my penis my* "raison d'être."
>
> (Murakami, *Hear The Wind Sing*, 87)

The lines above come from the 2017 videogame *NieR: Automata*, a triple-A videogame (a term which might be equated with 'Hollywood' in film in terms of budget, public exposure, polish, and popularity) which unashamedly grapples in both a formal and narrative sense with the likes of Kant and Hegel, Sartre and De Beauvoir, Pascal, Nietzsche, Confucius, Laozi, Marx and Engels. The game confronts these philosophers in a manipulation of ludonarrative dissonance and consonance (the confrontation between the game's narrative content and played form) which engenders a deeply ironic tension between the ideas presented and the player/reader's possible range of engagement with them. See for example, the crane-like excavation machinery found in in-game factories named 'Marx'. These 'Marx' model cranes attach to robot bodies resembling oil rigs or mining platforms to form their arms. This robot is of course called 'Engels'. The player's only way of interacting with Marx and Engels is to fight them to the death in the proxy war between machines and androids on behalf of aliens and humans respectively over ownership of the Earth. The player-character fights on the android side on behalf of anonymous human masters who send orders from the moon, eventually tearing off the robot's arms (Marx) and using them to beat the robot body (Engels) to death. The player later has a chance to speak to a mass-produced Engels which has lost its Marx (arms) in combat, whereupon it reflects on the many thousands of androids it has murdered in service of its own masters. The result of this conversation is the Engels' suicide as it reflects on the guilt it feels for these deaths in its name. There is no action the player can take to alter this outcome.

The effect here is brought about by the discord between the player's perceived agency and the causative effects they are able to exert on the game-world. Though ostensibly the player is the only agential being in the game-world, the game itself foregrounds the causal incommensurability between actor and world while also foregrounding the way the Engels-bot is *beyond* the player's influence. The irony is on the player, who cannot harm Engels without using Marx against him, and cannot save Engels from death by his own hand. Conversely, Engels' situation itself appears more tragic; unlike the player, he does, after all, succeed in dying. Tim Morton argues that in the affect of shame, 'I feel like killing myself or killing the other' (*Dark Ecology*, 133). In this context, the shame which kills Engels is 'a deep physical complicity with other beings' (ibid), which drives him to take his own robotic life. The lines in the epigraph to this chapter, spoken in-game by a pair of cuboidal, roughly human-head-sized robots called pods, transform shame into embarrassment (and hence into humour) through their *failure* to successfully die. That they characterise life as a constant stream of embarrassment, a constant failure to die and hence forced repetition of the attempt, suggests an as-yet unexplored connection between the aspects foregrounded by the analysis above: the causal agency of an actor in the world, a kind of automatism which engenders repetition, and the affect of humour. What this precise relation is will become clear in what follows.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Our analysis of humour in DeLillo's *Players* has arrived at a perplexing position. We have elucidated the relation of humour to Heidegger's fundamental attunement of boredom: they share the essential structure of repetition, or rhythm as expounded upon by Henri Lefebvre. This structure is a kind of failure to reach the conclusion known as catharsis. In our initial examination of fate in Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, we concluded that the sense of catharsis is the sense of closure from the absorption of one object in another. In our examination of *White Noise* we elaborated upon how this sense of death bears resemblance to Heidegger's attunement of anxiety. We have anxiety: the sense of finitude as death; one object's vanishing into another. And we have finitude as humour: the sense of persistence or repetition; the failure of objects to easily slide into one another. Though anxiety is predicated on the success of catharsis and humour on its failure, these moods remain aspects of the same feature of objects: finitude. If Anxiety corresponds to finitude as death, humour corresponds to finitude as separation, as *life*, an object enduring for its due time, ticking out its rhythm; its refusal to disappear, its determination to persist, to repeat. Our examination of DeLillo's *Players* brought us to a position where we discovered an instance of humour *in which*

catharsis remained nevertheless, present. This does not undermine our explication of humour thus far, but rather gestures to its as-yet undivulged depths. If humour corresponds to a kind of repetition or periodicity, then it remains to be unearthed what sense of repetition this kind of humour is which somehow retains the possibility of engendering catharsis, a criterion we had thought discounted, and the focus of this chapter.

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Let's return to *Players*.

Earlier in the novel, Ethan, Jack's lover, speaks these words:

> To forge a change that you may be reluctant to forge, that may
> be problematical for this or that reason, you have to tell people.
> You have to talk and tell people. Jack sees what I'm getting at.
> You have to bring it out. Even if you have no intention at the
> time of doing it out of whatever fear or trembling, you still must
> make it begin to come true by articulating it. This changes the
> path of your life.

<div align="right">(*Players*, 43)</div>

Players is a novel preoccupied with the *failure* to change. It is the failure of change which is funny in the novel. The periodic movement from aspiration back to the same through failure sets up a repetition which is comic as much as it is bleak. In the light of the hyperobjective behemoth of capitalism which pervades the novel, this translates as a bathetic illustration of Tim Morton's claim that 'there is no "away" in the time of hyperobjects' (*Hyper*, 112), no 'over there', no 'beyond'. This is why the novel's two narrative threads conclude with futility: Ethan, Jack and Pammy's escape to Maine and Lyle's entanglement with terrorists and counter-terrorists both presume the possibility of an 'away', an 'outside' to their epoch of capitalism. Yet despite these failures, we must recognise in Pammy's strange experience of repetition which achieves catharsis something other than the impulse of escape returning to the failure of change.

Ethan's passage gestures towards a means to achieve change. Curiously, the mode of change upheld is antithetical to those of the main narrative branches of *Players*. Of particular interest is how Ethan's understanding of change contests that of the terror organisation with whom Lyle becomes embroiled. The terror cell contains two views. Bombers Marina and Raphael hold that 'one way of betraying the revolution is to advance theories about it. [...] Theory is an effete diversion' (*Players*, 107-8). Being bombers, this pair prefers the direct road of destruction. The pair attempt to bomb the stock exchange floor at the World Trade Centre, believing its destruction would 'disrupt

their system, the idea of worldwide money. [...] This is the center of their existence. [...] their way of continuing on through rotting flesh, their closest taste of immortality' (*Players*, 107). Opposed to them is J., who Marina describes as 'waiting for the instruments of world repression to fall apart on their own. It will happen mystically in a pink light. The people will step in and that will be that' (Ibid).

These two positions, and their failure to achieve anything other than comedy in the novel, serve as critiques of two revolutionary impulses. These are characterised in Tim Morton's *Humankind* as 'two main types of event concepts: the cutting-into-a-continuum type, and the continuum type' (*Humankind*, 175). Marina and Raphael are proponents of cutting-into-a-continuum type events. When their logic, they fall into a critique which Morton lays at even Marx's door[6]: 'human economic relations are taken to be the "Decider" that makes things real [...]. Everything else gets to be [...] the blank screen for the projection of these relations' (*Humankind*, 39). The assumption is that there is some core or top level beyond all others (in this case, 'the idea of worldwide money'). They identify the system with a singular physical locale and re-enact the kind of violence they perceive: they aspire to become the 'Decider'. Like a squabble for kingship, the bombers aim to become the arbiters who will supplant a singular locus of power.

J. is exemplary of the kind of thought Morton critiques as the logic of 'world' relocated to a revolutionary mindset: 'Individual beings don't matter; what matters is the whole that transcends them' (*Humankind*, 36). J. represents a kind of thought in which the revolutionary only avoids impeding history itself's onward march to the brand new future.

Ethan proposes something wholly different to these paired perspectives. Change can be brought about by the act of articulation. Through the representation of inner life in the public sphere you can 'change the path of your life'. In this passage, which extends over two pages, the word 'tell' is repeated 7 times, the word 'forge' thrice, the phrase to feel 'on the verge [of a wonderful change]' thrice, and that 'Jack sees my point' twice. It is, of course, comical. The repetitions generate an intense sense of self-parody, an unconvincing sermon even underscored by the phrase 'fear or trembling', from Philippians 2:12: 'Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with

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[6] Though it should be noted that Morton, and the Object-Oriented style of reading in general, does not attempt to interpret Marx, economic relations, or relations in general in the dialectical mode native to the Hegelian tradition, and thus makes little effort to address Marx from within that tradition's purview in this reading.

fear and trembling' (*The Bible; King James Version*). It is in this allusion that another kind of repetition, one which portends the possibility of change, appears. There is one writer for whom this biblical passage informs a full understanding of repetition, and grounds a career in thinking the finite and its relation to that which is beyond its reach: Søren Kierkegaard.

Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric and *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology* by Johannes de Silentio and Constantine Constantius were published pseudonymously by Kierkegaard in October 1843. Some remarks on each work and what I draw from them will be necessary before I proceed.

Fear and Trembling centres upon what it is to 'come *to* faith' (*F&T*, 66), using the biblical tale of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. What I wish to take from Kierkegaard here is his conception of the 'knight of faith' and its relationship to our familiar theme: finitude. He characterises the knight of faith thus: 'having performed the movements of infinity, it makes those of finitude' (67). What is meant by this? For Kierkegaard, 'the movement of faith must be made continually on the strength of the absurd' (*F&T*, 67). Thus, faith is a kind of repetition, a constant renewal. Kierkegaard returns to this point throughout *Fear and Trembling*: '[The knight of faith] is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such accuracy and poise that he is continually getting finitude out of it' (70); 'anyone who comes to faith won't remain at a standstill there' (146); 'the highest passion in a human being is faith, and here no generation begins other than where its predecessor did, every generation begins from the beginning' (145). Faith is therefore a repetition, a continuous beginning-again. Conversely, to abandon faith requires only a failure to repeat its movement; 'the knight of faith is kept awake, for he is under constant trial and can turn back in repentance to the universal at any moment' (*F&T*, 105). It is apparent at least from this much that faith, like humour / boredom, is a repetition.

But though faith is a repetition, it remains distinct from humour. Humour is predicated on *failure*: it is the absence of change, the failure of catharsis. The repetition which constitutes faith is *not* a failure. Kierkegaard is well aware of the closeness of these figures and takes care to check against their conflation: '[irony and humour] differ essentially from the passion of faith. Irony and humour reflect also upon themselves and so belong in the sphere of infinite resignation, they owe their resilience to the individual's incommensurability with reality' (80).

It is this difference around which *Repetition, An Essay in Experimental Psychology* revolves. The text is a kind of narrative parable detailing a friendship between the

pseudonymous author, Constatine Constantius, and a young gentleman in love, whose character is presented in epistolary form. Constantine Constantius, whose very name embodies the irony he represents (a repetition without change, constancy), is a figure of 'incommensurability with reality'. His interlocutor is a passionate youth, an archetypically hopeless romantic who achieves, momentarily, the condition of the knight of faith. Constantius claims to have 'long ago renounced the world and abandoned all theorizing' (*Repetition*, 71). The cause of his withdrawal from the world is his resignation that 'there was no such thing as repetition' (39).He concludes repetition is impossible from his failure to repeat a trip he once took; every experiences he hopes to undergo a second time ends in failure; 'the only thing that repeated itself was that no repetition was possible' (38). Constantius' half of the tale is humorous, ironic, a parody of a man foundering upon his own 'incommensurability with reality', failing, repeating.

This parodic representation is identical to the parody presented in *Players*. Pammy and co attempt a repetition of the American agrarian idyll, reciting the pastoral America embodied in the space of Maine, arcadian dream par excellence. Lyle and his conspirators hope to repeat or re-enact the foundational glory of American identity: revolution against a 'system' (nevermind whether the system is Catholicism, royalty, state, or capital).Both end in ironic and humorous failure. All that is achieved is the realisation that 'the only thing that repeated itself was that no repetition was possible'.

The youth in *Repetition* arrives at a different conclusion. He disregards Constantius' advice to free him of his fatal love, which is ill-fated not because of failure, but because it is *too-much a success*. Constantius characterises the young man such that 'he was already, in the earliest days [of his love], in a position to recollect his love' (*Repetition*, 7). The young man experiences his love as what Kierkegaard calls recollection, that is, his love is requited, and he finds the whole of his romance fulfilled, complete, already memory. Constantius notes that 'He was basically finished with the whole relationship. Simply by having begun, he advanced such a terrific distance that he had leapt right over life' (ibid). Just as Constantius (and Pammy and Lyle) make the mistake of approaching the world as recollection, so too does the young man. Recollection is 'the reflux of eternity into the present' (*Repetition*, 8), the transformation of finite and distinct realities into an unchanging world-picture, eternity. This is the same gesture of totalisation we have examined in the concept of 'world', and like all the kinds of totalisation we've examined so far, the young man's love is doomed because in the instant it begins its individual parts dissolve into a completed image or for Kierkegaard,

become recollections of eternal forms in the platonic vein, things unchanging, everlasting, in-finite.

Repetition's youth gets beyond recollection by achieving repetition. Where 'what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards', 'genuine repetition is recollected forwards' (*Repetition*, 3). What Kierkegaard is calling repetition here resembles the faith described in *Fear and Trembling*; a kind of renewal, a beginning again, a turning away from the eternal or universal for the finite and actual[7]. As to how repetition is achieved, it appears to the young man as if by accident. The woman with whom he is in love and has forsaken marries someone else – an event in which he plays no part and discovers by chance. Through this event the young man finds his old self returned to him and declares repetition possible (74). While this utter passivity (as if waiting for a miracle) might suit the religious thinker of Kierkegaard's day, surely this (much less Abraham's total obedience in the sacrifice of Isaac) cannot be the paradigm for *change* proposed in the age of globalised capitalism? To see how repetition of this kind has any bearing on change today, we must return again to the writing of Murakami Haruki.

Detachment; Blissing Out to Vivaldi

In Murakami scholarship, it is an accepted approach to examine his work in two phases; the early phase of detachment and the late phase of commitment. Coinciding with his residence in Europe and America (1986 – 1995), the phase of detachment is characterised in Murakami's literature by a sense of social isolation and an aversion to 'authoritarian collectivism' attributed to Japanese society at the time (Wakatsuki, 'The Haruki Phenomenon', in *Haruki Murakami*, 5). Prior to this period of exile, Murakami was out-of-favour with the Japanese literary world; considered to be 'destroying the tradition of Japanese literature' (Murakami, 'In Dreams interview', 554-5). The tonal characteristics of this period include a sense of distance, disempowerment, solitude, and irony. Some critics suggest that beyond this phase Murakami entirely loses his sense of humour, which alludes to the fundamental shift in his work from detachment to commitment[8].

The phase of commitment begins with Murakami's return to Japan in 1995 in the wake of the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack of January

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[7] Though it should be noted that repetition is not absolutely identical to faith as it appears in *Fear and Trembling*, which is noted clearly by Constantius in the text itself (81).

[8] (Kato, Norihiro. 'From *hara-hara* to *doki-doki*: Murakami Haruki's Use of Humour and his Predicament since *1Q84*'. 40 Years with Murakami Haruki Conference, 8 March 2018, Great North Museum, Newcastle-upon-Type, UK. Keynote address)

and March that year respectively. This phase is characterised by Murakami's direct engagement with the cultural life of his home nation (most explicitly in *After the Quake* (2000, trans 2002) and *Underground* (1997, trans 2002)) and by a shift in the mood and tone of his writing from an ironic distance to what Wakatsuki calls 'everyday cosmopolitanism'; 'an autonomous self-identity uninterested in ethnocentric collectivism' (6). Both phases retain a certain resistance to 'collectivism' (both as an imposed characteristic of national identity from within Japan and as a marker of ethnic exoticism from without), and a deep certainty in the aloneness or *finitude* of the individual in relation to such kinds of 'collectivism'. Given our characterisation of Murakami's Magic Realism, this is no surprise. What is revealed in Murakami's move from ironic detachment to passionate commitment is the distinction between his approaches to finitude and how they may parallel the movement from irony towards faith as responses to the epoch of globalisation.

Hear the Wind Sing (1979) and *Pinball 1973* (1980) serve as excellent examples of the detachment phase of Murakami's writing. The two are companions along with a third novel which completes the trilogy of The Rat. The narrator[9] in these novels finds himself in the same predicament as Pammy at the end of *Players*: confronted by death without catharsis in an inertial world. The death which is the centrepiece of both *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973* is the death of the narrator's third girlfriend, Naoko; a suicide by hanging which leaves her 'swinging in the wind for two whole weeks' before she is discovered (69). However, its significance is masked by the other deaths which litter both narratives. To give some examples; *Hear The Wind Sing* describes the deaths of two of the narrator's uncles. The first uncle dies 'in agony [...] of intestinal cancer', with 'plastic tubes ferrying fluids in and out of both ends of his body'. The narrator describes him as 'shrunken and his skin had turned reddish brown, so that he resembled a crafty old monkey' (5). The second uncle 'died just outside Shanghai two days after the end of the Pacific War when he stepped on a land mine he himself had laid'. The narrator follows up by telling us his final uncle 'works as a magician on the Japanese hot springs circuit' (5). The commentary accompanying each death underscores the detachment between the narrator and each event, and the failure of these deaths to carry any meaning – to achieve catharsis. The imagery in each case – crafty monkey as a transformation between evolutionary degeneration and mythical transfiguration, hot spring magician as a tacky and tasteless parallel to mine-laying and

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[9] In Murakami scholarship, the narrator of these early Murakami works is referred to as 'Boku' (僕), a specific first-person pronoun used usually for a male speaker in a semi-formal context. Since the linguistic point is not especially pertinent to my own discussion of the text, I will omit this usage and simply refer to him as 'the narrator'.

the Japanese imperial campaign in China – displaces these grisly deaths onto images which evade the events' realities. This displacement engenders a macabre irony in much the same way as Ethan's response to Jack's death in *Players*. It is a failure to coincide with the individuating experience of death and a failure to experience catharsis – meaning from death. A structurally identical configuration appears in *Pinball 1973*. A well-digger dies and the narrator states: 'the well-digger was killed by a train. The causes of the accident were a driving rain, chilled sake, and partial deafness' (13). These deaths all fail catharsis and achieve humour: the first and second uncle die without rhyme or reason, one reduced to an inhuman state, the other his own casualty of war *after* the cessation of hostilities, the well-digger a victim of driving rain, chilled sake, and partial deafness, a triumvirate of disinterested objects neither malicious nor cruel, making his death purely incidental.

All these deaths and the responses to them are burdened with struggles of meaning. Since OOO, our primary theoretical support, is concerned mainly with matters of *being* rather than *meaning*, it will do to note the place of meaning in an Object-Oriented universe before proceeding.

In Harman's OOO, meaning belongs in the relation between the sensual and the real. To remind us, in OOO, 'reality is *so* real that any attempt to translate it into literal terms is doomed to failure' (*New Theory of Everything*, 192). By contrast, the sensual appears *only* in the realm of presence and has 'no autonomy from consciousness[10]' (*Quadruple*, 22) – it is purely relational and appears only on an immanent or '*ad hoc*' basis (*Quadruple*, 106). Therefore, Harman is tentatively happy to sustain the claim that 'with Derrida […] there is no such thing as a proper *meaning* for every word, since every word does become entangled in a chain of further signifiers' (*New Theory of Everything*, 208). This is Harman at his most generous towards Derrideans, and he has been known to take a much more hostile view. Nevertheless, the place meaning has in OOO is now clear – meaning belongs to the relation between the real and the sensual; between that which resists all literal forms of perception or relation, and that which is immanent to perception or relation.

This is likely the only position on which OOO and the heirs of post-structuralism meet cordially. On all other fronts, Harman departs from their tradition without a backward glance. For even if Harman were to accept the loss of all proper meaning, 'it does not

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[10] We must note again here that Harman does not mean 'consciousness' in reference to human mind alone, nor does he mean that all entities possess a consciousness which is identical to that of human mind, but rather that human consciousness is merely one particular case of relationality, to which it is not different in kind.

follow from this that nothing has its own proper *being*' (ibid, 208). For OOO, this would constitute the untenable suggestion that 'reality itself were nothing but a holistic web' (ibid). To imagine that it is only possible to discuss being in relation to the meaning it carries *for us*, as Derrida does, is, for OOO, to vanish away any hope of a reality outside a(n anthropocentric) system of totality, even if that system of text, writing, and language remains forever incomplete. For Harman, '[Derrida] is too quick to equate 'we only *think* in signs' with '*there are* nothing but signs' as if the realm of being were one and the same as the realm of thinking' (ibid, 206). To repeat: meaning in OOO belongs in the relation between the real and the sensual – in how finite irreducible entities relate to their appearance-for some other entity, be it the electrons on copper wire, sunlight on salt water, ozone on skin cancer, signifiers on thoughts, or landmine detonators on plastic explosives.

Here we can see new significance for the category of change in Murakami's motley parade of deaths. If we call these deaths *meaningless*, it will not be because there is no transcendental signified or network of significations for them, but because there is an incommensurability between the sensual experience of the events in memory and narrative, and their reality; and because there is a *causal* incommensurability between the events' own reality and the effect they have on their surrounding reality. This manifests in *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973* as a sense of inertia, or a sense of *causal sterility*.

Hear the Wind Sing opens with an extended interior monologue from the narrator. Within this preface to Murakami's entire career are the basic ingredients of his oeuvre as a whole and the standout features of his phase of detachment. The vignettes which compose the chapter function as a series of epigraphs, as if the narrator (an aspiring writer) has a number of candidates in mind and refuses to elect a winner. The chapter opens; 'There's no such thing as a perfect piece of writing. Just as there's no such thing as perfect despair' (3). The next paragraph contains the lines; 'writing honestly is very difficult. The more I try to be honest, the farther my words sink into darkness' (4). In the next section the narrator discusses his greatest literary influence, fictional author Derek Hartfield. Imagined alongside the great American modernists Fitzgerald and Hemingway, the narrator says of Hartfield 'as a writer, Hartfield was sterile […] he could never fully grasp exactly what it was he was fighting against. In the final reckoning, I suppose, that's what being sterile is all about' (5). The narrator also quotes Hartfield; 'writing is, in effect, the act of verifying the distance between us and the things surrounding us. What we need is not sensitivity but a measuring stick' (5).

It is already evident from this list of idiosyncratic proverbs how important the themes of causal sterility and separation between the real and the sensual / perceptual is, underscored by the formal ambiguity and non-identicality of an indecisive and inconsistent narrative voice. The reader, who receives these thematic contents ((1) the incommensurability of reality and sense, and (2) causal sterility) also receives them performed through the narrator's repetitive re-beginning and re-positioning. While an archetypal (and admittedly straw-man) Derridean might read this as the immanent undecideability of the text and the infinite play of différance, our Object-Oriented position casts this narrative struggle as the *finite* and *real* difference between objects and their qualities.

This Object-Oriented reading is borne out in the quote from Hartfield ('writing is the act of verifying the distance between us and the things surrounding us'), and also in the narrator's own further contention that 'a gulf separates what we attempt to perceive from what we are actually able to perceive. It is so deep that it can never be calculated, however long our measuring stick' (7). Murakami's narrator here is (for once) decisive: reality is simply beyond the grasp of language, literature, thought or mind. As for Harman, 'reality is *so* real that any attempt to translate it into literal terms is doomed to failure', so for Murakami's narrator, no measuring stick will fully bridge the distance between things. This is what the narrator gestures towards when he notes the impossibility of 'a perfect piece of writing' and the way his words 'sink into darkness' the more honest he tries to be. All forms of representation and relation, as we have stressed time and again, are forms of *translation*; and as we have noted from Walter Benjamin, every work translated is in possession of a 'nucleus [...] the element that does not lend itself to translation [...] even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted' ('Task', 76).

Murakami extends this argument about literature to a metaphysical contention about reality in his use of Kant in *Pinball 1973*. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* appears as a recurrent trope, a singularity around which *Pinball 1973* circles, constantly returning as if trapped within a cosmic event horizon. This text is introduced as the narrator's bedtime reading, to which he returns daily after work (29), which he reads in between bouts of, and sometimes in favour of sex with the twins who share his bed (31, 69-70), to which he turns in moments of existential crisis (76). In spite of this, only one quote attributed to Kant appears in the text, offered as a prayer at the funeral for a telephone switch panel: '"The obligation of philosophy," I began quoting Kant, "is to dispel all illusions borne of misunderstanding... Rest in peace ye switch panel, at the bottom of this resevoir"' (*Pinball 1973*, 88). There is abundant irony in this elegy offered at as

incomprehensible an event as a funeral for a switch panel, but this is not mere
postmodern pastiche; it is effectively balanced by a counterpoint which, while not
attributed to Kant, is no less Kantian in nature: 'This world is rife with matters
philosophy cannot explain' (130). This line, given by the narrator on his love for pinball,
yields its Kantian heritage when compared to Kant's description of *noumena*; 'things,
not considered as phenomena, but as things in themselves', things which
understanding itself 'is compelled to cogitate [...] merely as an unknown something'
(*The Critique of Pure Reason*, 182). The term *noumena* thus describes the limits of the
worlds of sense and thought while contending that things beyond these limits very
much exist. *Noumena* are Murakami's 'matters philosophy cannot explain'. Thus, in
these earliest of Murakami's writings that the impossibility of writing being
commensurate with reality is not an epistemological characteristic of representation (a
routine postmodern(ist) argument), but an ontological feature of reality, of noumenal
things-in-themselves. *Pinball 1973*s orbit around *The Critique of Pure Reason* is just as
much an orbit around 300 years of Kantian philosophy, as it is the narrator's struggle
to gain some causal purchase on the world. Just as OOO preserves Kantian finitude (a
division between noumenal things-in-themselves and phenomenal impressions) and
rejects Kantian transcendental reason which contends that the human-world correlate
or *understanding* is the only meaningful access to reality (Harman, *Dante's Hammer*,
240, 241), so does Murakami maintain that there are noumenal realities beyond
explanation and reject through irony the idea that the only meaningful engagement
with the world is to 'dispel illusions borne of misunderstanding'. Read through Kant, it
becomes not-insignificant that the funeral at which Kant is recited is for a telephone
switch panel, an object which exists for the sole purpose of communication at a
distance between disparate entities. What is being buried with transcendental reason is
a single channel through which all things communicate – the human understanding as
the one medium through which reality can be accessed.

However, Murakami's narrator also rejects the opposed pragmatism which might
support a practical, 'live in the moment' position, abandoning contemplative distance
for a Nike, *Just Do It*, immediacy. For the narrator 'ascribing meaning to life is a piece
of cake compared to actually living it' (6): actual living, being-in-the-world, gets one *no
closer* to reality, 'what we attempt to perceive', than writing, thinking, or reading. The
novel is unambiguous: action does not close the gulf between 'what we attempt to
perceive from what we are actually able to perceive' any more than thought and writing.
No measuring stick will do. This notion reappears in Harman's critiques of pragmatist
readings of Heidegger ('handling turns things into superficial caricatures no less than
staring at them does' (*Quadruple*, 53)). Morton also weighs in on this point, calling the

idea that action is a superior attunement mode to thought 'the frenzied decisionism of correlationist action theory' (*Humankind*, 169), a model which, in his view, is fully complicit with the hyperobjective logic of capitalism. He contends that capitalism 'is a metastasized form of idealism in which just one nonhuman is allowed to have agency – a hyperobject' (*Humankind*, 60). In other words, capitalism is an alienation of objects, not (only) of human labour time, in which 'human economic relations are taken to be the "Decider" that makes things real [...]. Everything else gets to be the same kind of thing [...]: the blank screen for the projection of these relations' (*ibid*, 39). The 'frenzied decisionism' he points at is the way in which everything from politics to intellectual currents cleave towards an *urgent need* or *solution focused* approach to change, which only reiterates the paradigm that one thing decides and the others play inert projection screen – that one group of humans should be Deciders and *acting now* is the way to access 'real' change. Contrary to this notion, for Murakami's narrator as for OOO, acting gets no closer to the reality of things-in-themselves than thinking, speaking, writing, eating, dying, licking, or giggling.

However, the problem of sterility remains, for the world of Murakami's narrator remains a world of *hyperobjects*. The theme of causal sterility reminds us of Morton's claim that there is a causal incommensurability between the parts of hyperobjects and the whole: 'Every time I start my car or steam engine I don't mean to harm Earth. [Yet] harm to Earth is precisely what is happening. I am responsible as a member of this species for the Anthropocene' (*Dark Ecology*, 8). To put the equation in reverse: 'When you feel raindrops, you are experiencing climate in some sense [...]. But you are never directly experiencing global warming as such' (*Hyperobjects*, 48). In short, there is a fundamental distance between one's reality and the causal effect that that reality is able to impose on hyperobjects (and objects in general), as well as the reverse, a difference between the hyperobject and the effects it has on the parts of which it is made. While Murakami's text could not have been written as a direct response to what we now call the anthropocene, the inertia and sterility the narrator experiences remains identical to that Morton describes in the face of the hyperobject.

But we must ask against what background *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973* are set. Murakami's two early novels orbit a certain and very specific background: *Hear The Wind Sing* 'begins on August 8, 1970, and ends eighteen days later' (9). *Pinball 1973* 'begins in September 1973' (19) and ends on a November Sunday that same year (162). The epilogue dates the events of the whole saga from 1969 – 1973 (162). The significance of this time period is made clear through distinct episodes. The narrator relates meeting the second girl he slept with in Shinjuku station in the middle of 'the

most violent antiwar demonstration Shinjuku had ever seen' (*Hear The Wind Sing*, 68). This serves as a direct reference to the 1968 riot in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo, part of the global student movement at the time, appearing in *Pinball 1973* when the narrator relates the experience of an acquaintance who took part in the occupation of university campuses:

> Is it true that they were blissing out to Vivaldi's "Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione" at full blast when the riot police's third division came crashing into building Nine that perfect cloudless November day? Whether fact or fiction, it endures as one of the more heartwarming legends revolving around the year that was 1969.

> (*Pinball 1973*, 5).

Also important in terms of timeline, is the suicide of Naoko, the narrator's third girlfriend, which takes place in April of 1970 during the narrator's 6922nd cigarette (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 88). Naoko's suicide is a problem of *meaning* in the sense that it is explicitly and bathetically narrated as *meaningless*. Not only was she left 'swinging in the wind for two whole weeks' (69), an ironic visible-while-invisible illustration of the causal inertia of her act, but a further aporetic note is added by the narrator; 'noone knows why she chose to die. I doubt somehow that she did either' (94). As we recall that meaning in OOO is a relation between a sensual expression and its underlying reality or, the *causal* commensurability or incommensurability between an object or event and its sensual impression on some other real object or event[11], the significance of these background events is thrown into relief. The narrator was, at the very least present at the Shinjuku riot and knew people involved in the student movement, which arose in protest against Japan's postwar relationship with America and growing conservatism in the country at the time, as well as feeding into the global current of social protest involving, but not limited to, the civil rights movement and anti-war movements in the USA, massive social unrest and student uprisings in France, Italy, Spain, Pakistan, and across Europe and parts of Central and South America.

This historical period also includes what an event impossible to elide in Japan; the Mishima incident of November 1970 in which famed writer Yukio Mishima attempted a military coup in the name of Japan's Emperor, resulting in his own meaningless (causally inert) suicide by ritual disembowelment. Damian Flanagan depicts the long shadow cast by Mishima's literary career and sudden demise over Murakami's early

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[11] Since causation in OOO, we must not forget, is an *aesthetic* event, a sensual translation between mutually incommensurable withdrawn realities.

work[12]; though his suicide narrowly falls into the gap between the events of *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973*, it would be all the more fitting for it, as the one event which could not have been unknown to any Japanese at the time, to be the one lost to a whim of narrative unreliability and, like all the other deaths in the two novels, fail to make any meaningful change to the direction of the overall historical moment, the overwhelming hyperobject within which the events all play out. In this light, the novels become an elegy to the failures of these grand events, these great hopes for change – these are novels in mourning for the causal inertia, the sterility, of these dreams, these moments when the vision of some world other than the onrushing weight of globalised capitalism was visible on the streets, in the airwaves. The failed student movement worldwide and Mishima's failed coup d'état, both of which resulted in brutal, meaningless deaths (not to mention the shadow of the Second World War and its mass-production of death which also hangs heavy over Murakami's novels), stand for the causal inertia, the failure to close the gap between cause and effect on the political left and right in an age where the dissolution of anything meaningful at all is more and more impending to the narrator. Are *The Communist Manifesto*'s words; 'All that is solid melts into air', so different from the words of Murakami's narrator at the end of *Hear The Wind Sing*: 'All things pass. None of us can manage to hold on to anything. In that way, we live our lives' (145)? This is not a Buddhist / Shinto celebration of transience (which would be cultural reductionism in the extreme to say of Murakami's writing here), but rather a lament, jaded and ironic, quipped while the narrator enjoys his 'still-warm fries' (ibid), but a lament nonetheless for a decade of sterile, causally inert dreams, swinging dead in the wind. It is another detail of savage irony that the narrator's friends of the campus occupations of 1969 happened to be listening to Vivaldi's *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* at the moment the riot police arrived to put down the student revolts: *The Contest Between Harmony and Invention*, or perhaps better translated here as the struggle between inertia and novelty, stasis and transformation, despair and hope, between repetition of the same and the arrival of something other.

In the texts' explicit narratives, these grand failures are embodied in romantic relationships. Naoko, the recurring third girlfriend, apart from her meaningless suicide, also stands in for a certain cultural paradigm in Japan and worldwide. This paradigm is that of Oe Kenzaburo, Nobel Prize for literature recipient, a pillar of the Japanese

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[12] (Flanagan, Damian. 'Haruki Murakami and the Mishima Incident'. 40 Years with Murakami Haruki Conference, 9 March 2018, Great North Museum, Newcastle-upon-Type, UK. Address, Panel 5.

literary establishment and once-harsh critic of Murakami. Susan Napier describes Oe thus:

> Oe, who majored in French literature at Tokyo University,
> became a vehement anti-nuclear activist, and is a passionate
> espouser of relativistic humanist ideals, cannot completely
> break away from the golden imperial past of an absolute faith in
> a living god [the emperor].

> (*Escape from the Wasteland*, 158)

Naoko, whose father is a 'French literary scholar of some note' (*Pinball 1973*, 14), happens herself to major in French literature (*Hear The Wind Sing*, 69). She and the narrator first meet in the school library (ibid), a not-unusual place for a student to first encounter not merely a lover, but French literature and the humanistic ideals of European philosophy and political thought. Yet this is also the woman who tells the narrator in all seriousness that 'she had come to college in order to receive a divine revelation' (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 94). Having this walking, talking personification of French literature / European humanism also speak almost nonsensically of seeking inspiration from divinity makes her a firm match for the character of Oe – a whole national culture divided between a rapidly modernising, global sensibility and a living imperial and religious history. Though the real Oe is very much alive, the fact that in Murakami's earliest fiction, the embodiment of his ideals is left swinging by the neck in a quiet grove of trees on a university campus in a time period sandwiched between the brutal put-down of the student occupations and the Mishima incident, and furthermore that *this* of all the deaths in the early work is the one that affects the narrator the most, the only one not passed over with a touch of humour, an ironic quip, and a wink at the camera, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the difference between Murakami's writing and this giant of Japanese literature. Amidst a flood of violent repression, a merciless re-establishment of the status quo, and the coming-over-the-hill of global capitalism's behemoth in the distance, European humanism, along with its traditional counterpart in the mass religions promising divine revelation, hangs itself without telling a soul. The by-now-characteristic brutal comedy is that even among its closest friends, family and lovers, no one notices.

Martian Wells; History With Holes

It might be noted here that these texts appear stylistically different in their formal characteristics from our model of Magic Realism in Roh. They resemble more the Magic Realism described by Fredric Jameson in film. In what he calls 'an aesthetic of reduction to the body' (320), Jameson contends that film as a visual medium peels

narrative away from the viewer's visual experience in favour of 'elementary forms of bodily experience' (320). He holds that this form of Magic Realism has as its precondition 'the radical fragmentation of modern life and the destruction of older communities and collectivities' (321), and further claims that this 'reduction to the body' constitutes

> new kinds of relationships with history and with being. [...] A history-with-holes, for example, is very precisely the kind of bas-relief history in which only bodily manifestations are retained, such that we are, ourselves, inserted into it without even minimal distance. The waning of larger historical perspectives and narratives, and the neutralisation of an older complex of narrative interests and attentions (or forms of temporal consciousness) now release us to a present of uncodified intensities.
>
> (Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', 321).

Murakami's narrator in *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973* presents identical dissolutions of larger historical perspectives and the destruction of older communities. Formally, the novel's indecisive narrator, unable to pick from his various epigraphs, conversing with the reader colloquially, narrating his text as a non-linear jumble of memories, is a perfectly adequate translation of Jameson's filmic mode into text. Is not this pair of texts in which dead uncles from the war in China (*Wind,* 5), dead writers from pre-war America (*Wind*, 5), dead girlfriends from the turn of the 1960s to the 1970s, and not-quite-dead, but vanished friends from the student movement (*Pinball*, 5), rub shoulders with visitors from Saturn and Venus (*Pinball*, 4, 18), fictional characters in the far-future on Mars (*Wind*, 119), Hemingway, Fitzgerald (*Wind*, 5), Michelet (*Wind*, 77), Kant (*Pinball*, 29), and the three-flipper Spaceship pinball machine (*Pinball*, 105), not emblematic of the 'history-with-holes' in which 'only bodily manifestations are retained' that Jameson describes? We might add that rather than a subject-oriented 'bodily manifestation', our ontological position instead suggests that 'only finite objects endure'. Jameson's model is additionally suitable here in its claim that in Magic Realism, reality is not 'transfigured by the "supplement" of a magical perspective but [represents] a reality [which] is already in and of itself magical or fantastic' (311). This is eminently compatible with our model from OOO and Roh in which real objects resist the totalising forces of the background and persist as quiescence in the midst of flux. It is a shame that Jameson does not describe Magic Realism in ontological terms, instead reducing it to historical raw material which represents precapitalist modes of production (311) as the 'superposition of whole layers of the past within the present' (311), a description which consigns Magic Realism to a

ghetto of precapitalist (read: non-western / non-modern) societies. While it is the case that the Japan represented in these texts retains ties to its mythic past in the various Shinto and Buddhist rituals of daily life, not to mention the very real political significance of the emperor's loss of divine status in the postwar period, it would do a complete injustice to Murakami's writing at any stage of his career to present it as merely the product of a mythic precapitalist mode of production in conflict with a sudden invasion of modernity. Nevertheless, Jameson's formal characteristics for a Magic Realism remain useful in examining this early period of Murakami's writing and thus we return to the notion of history-with-holes.

History-with-holes or rather, holes in history appear explicitly in the Derek Hartfield short story entitled "The Martian Wells", cited as a standout work by the narrator in *Hear the Wind Sing*. As aforementioned, Hartfield is written into American literary history alongside Fitzgerald and Hemingway. The narrator adds another name to the list in claiming that "The Martian Wells" proved an important work in the emergence of Ray Bradbury (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 119), but more than an uncomplicatedly resident of the American literary canon, Hartfield is portrayed as a fringe character, a shade glimpsed through perforations in the literary tradition. This image is completed no more fully than in his never explicit, but undeniable similarity to the pulp writers of the 1920s and 30s in H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. Like them, he is a contributor to *Weird Tales* (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 151); like a stylistic mash-up of the two, 'almost everything Hartfield wrote was either an adventure or a horror story' (151); like Lovecraft, his stories are filled with aliens and monsters and he himself writes with an intense interest in what he calls 'Cosmic Ideas' (117-8); like Howard, it is the death of his mother which prompts his suicide in the late 1930s[13] (152). In taking this figure as a literary hero against the backdrop of the great American modernists, the text takes another unashamed shot into the already-sinking shipwreck of modernism and humanism, already damned through the allusion to Oe; it hardly need be added that Hartfield also has a tense relationship of both praise and criticism for Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Marie Louise de la Ramée's *A Dog of Flanders*.

Indeed, Hartfield's specific critique of *War and Peace* is that it fails to incorporate 'Cosmic Ideas' which the narrator parses for the reader thus: 'we can take "Cosmic Ideas" to mean "sterility"' (118). We have already mentioned causal sterility as the incommensurability between reality and sensual experience repeatedly: that 'Cosmic

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[13] It is additionally interesting to note that the narrator's uncle, who in fact gifts the narrator a copy of Hartifield's first work, dies, like Lovecraft, of intestinal cancer, an allusion which, at this stage, could hardly be coincidental (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 5).

Ideas' are equated with 'sterility' by the narrator, and that Hartfield is *critical* of Tolstoy for not including this concept in *War and Peace*, is indicative a more precise point than another jab at European literature's canon. 'Cosmic Ideas' as a phrase is immediately redolent of Lovecraft's writing, known by the genre Cosmic Horror. In Lovecraft, this manifests as a constant and sinister reminder of 'the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and the human race form transient incidents' (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu*, 167, qutd in Harman, *Weird Realism*, 55). Harman[14], in his own treatment of Lovecraft describes this as Lovecraft's 'cosmological finitude' (*WR*, 56), an effect in which the agential irrelevance, the *causal sterility* of any anthropogenic action is made apparent not by contrast with world, Nature, or God, but with distinct and finite beings; 'horrible creatures from other times and places' (ibid). In this light, Hartfield is not only making the claim that *War and Peace* could have benefited from some dimensional beings casually devastating our plane of reality, but is making the further claim that *War and Peace*, which again stands for a whole European literary and cultural history of realism, humanism, and religion (Tolstoy, like Oe's stand-in Naoko, did hope to receive divine revelation in his life), failed to imagine a reality in which causation is a brutal comedy of meaningless deaths – a world in which humanity's greatest hopes and grand narratives make less difference than a corpse makes a sound in a forest when no one is there to hear it. The last condemnation of the dream of this kind of art and literature is made by the narrator himself, though the comment's significance is only clear once returned to: 'If it's art or literature you're interested in, I suggest you read the Greeks. Pure art only exists in slave-owning societies' (*Hear The Wind Sing*, 7).

By contrast, "The Martian Wells" could be considered a tale of pure 'Cosmic Ideas'. A young man descends into a well on Mars seeking an 'anonymous death' (119). The wells are all that remains of Martian civilisation; 'no dwellings, no eating implements, no metal, no graves, no rockets, no cities, no vending machines, not even a seashell' (ibid). They are described as having been dug 'tens of thousands of years ago' and none of them have any contact with water (ibid). This is a tale of a civilisation whose endeavours have vanished without a trace, leaving only a system of wells which are incomprehensible in meaning and completely outside a functional or pragmatic use-value as they do not provide any supply of water; a parable of causal sterility in an Ozymandian vein. Descending into the network of Martian wells, the young man 'loses track of time' and emerges again to be informed by a voice which identified as 'the wind' that 'one and a half billion years passed while you were down the well. As you

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[14] And we should not think it a remotely surprising coincidence given the many stylistic and metaphysical allegiances already described to note that Lovecraft is as important a writer for OOO (and apparently Murakami) as Hölderlin for Heidegger or Mallarmé for Derrida (*WR*, 235).

earthlings say, time flies' (120). The wind is characterised by a dry and ironic wit. Through its constant use of bathos and persistent undercutting of the cathartic weight which ought to accompany an event like the dying of the sun ('"In another 250,000 years the sun will explode. [...] Click... OFF! 250,000 years, not so far away, you know"' (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 120)), the tone of the wind becomes increasingly more detached and humourous the more macabre the situation becomes for the young man. This humour serves to emphasise the wind's impotence, which is to say, its causal sterility: '"But what happened to the sun?" [asks the young man.] "It got old. It's dying. There's nothing either of us can do about it"' (ibid). To hear this admission of total causal inertia from a being which 'exists outside life and death' and is capable of crossing all of time 'from the creation of the universe to its final demise' (ibid) is perhaps the ultimate figure of sterility – a creature akin to an Old Testament God which can survey all of existence, immune to life and death (immune to finitude) remains unable to lift a finger to intervene in the universe it traverses. In a question which guides the reading of all Murakami's early work, the young man asks the wind: 'what have you learned?'. All he hears in reply is the vibrating of the martian plain; 'the air around him shook as the wind laughed'. Following this, 'the young man took a revolver from his pocket, placed it to his temple and squeezed the trigger' (121).

As far as 'Cosmic Ideas' and sterility go, this is the early Murakami's nadir. The last hope of the young man is that, though the wind may be able to *do* nothing about reality, maybe it might *know* something from its omniscient wanderings – a translation between something real and something sensual, some kind of *meaning*. When the wind laughs its hollow laugh and abandons the young man to the 'eternal silence of the Martian plain' (121), it is testament to the way neither action nor knowledge are capable of touching reality itself. The young man finds the anonymous death he sought. The bridge between real objects and some causal or sensual interaction which might confer meaning is one which, at least in the Martian wind's case, cannot be crossed. The Martian Wells' story is a literal version of Jameson's description of Magic Realism: it is explicitly a story of holes in time, history perforated with tunnels into which man descends to search for new relationships with history, the waning of traditional historical perspectives, along with encountering a living embodiment of an alternative temporal consciousness. Yet this treatment of the idea of excavating alternative histories is even more damning than our interpretation of *Players*. With *Players*, we argued that an historical counterfunction, 'a missing historical narrative, an unarticulated set of possibilities that inhabit the passage from European to American Imperialism' (Boxall, 82), was impossible to find by any kind of 'floating out' of history. There was no outside. Here, Jameson's hope might not be dissimilar to that found by

Boxall in DeLillo: an excavation of an alternative history, an alternative imagination of global possibilities from a 'history-with-holes', from the Martians' holes in history. On meeting the wind, a being which has traversed the entirety of history and is as much *floating-out* or *suspended calm* as it is possible to be, what answer might Jameson or Boxall have received other than the pitiless laughter of the timeless, deathless in-finite, *sterile* plain of history itself?

Automatism

We have travelled far from our starting point, so it is now time to begin the return journey. What is the explicit relation of humour, which we have previously characterised as repetition, to sterility? Why does the wind laugh?

In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, Harman expounds a theory of humour based on Henri Bergson's pre-existing theory of laughter and the early OOO. In his reading, the source of all humour is 'a kind of rigidity or mechanism in the comic object' with the caveat that rigidity only becomes humorous 'when something becomes rigid or mechanical that *ought* to be flexible, adaptable, or appropriately mutable' (*GM*, 130). This model has extremely close ties with the tension we identify in Murakami's early writing – that between sterility and transformation, between *dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*. When Harman argues that 'comedy requires strife between rigidity and free adaptation', and that humour arises where 'free decision-making power [is] undercut by being delivered to the force of things, unable to master them' (ibid), he puts his finger on the commonality between humour, change and repetition: that humour is repetition borne from the failure of change, and more precisely, from the failure to escape a feature of all objects, *essence*, a failure to be other than one is. For Harman, 'good comedy identifies *deeper*, more *genuine*, more *unshakeable* automatisms' (133); it *gets closer to essence*. In this model, the more inexorable the essence from which the comic object fails to escape, the funnier. In what may initially seem a contradiction, Harman also argues that 'the contrast [between freedom and mechanism] must be such that it places nothing genuinely at stake for us' (131). It would seem odd that humour should increase in proportion to both grasping 'more unshakeable automatisms' and placing less at stake, since revealing essence would tend to suggest *more* at stake. But here we must note that getting close to the essence of a thing does not necessitate a great deal being at stake in the *changing* of that essence. For it is no stretch to conceive of a perfectly permissible and even rather good stand-up sketch about one person's total failure to be able to function without tying their left shoe first in the morning, having to have their phone charge read only in odd numbers before going to bed at night, or needing to

touch their earlobe whenever they feel a sneeze coming on. Even the simple toilet humour of one who cannot conceal their farts fulfils this criterion. None of these are particularly consequential characteristics to change in a person, but the fact that they remain *essential* to that person who remains unable to change them, is nevertheless funny. Note that it is no less funny to substitute these relatively inconsequential traits of essence for ones of more momentous import, such as a superhero who must see justice done in all things, or a supervillain whose solution to all of life's problems is to attempt genocides. While it might be considered *in bad taste* to bring up such examples (for indeed one might actually hope that justice be done in all things, or never to see a genocidal villain succeed in their ambition), it would be false to claim that these instances are not funny (since many good actual political satires play precisely on the heinous and villainous character of their targets and produce many a good laugh while the *content* of their action remains contemptible). Thus, when Harman argues that humour is about showing deeper automatisms (ie. grasping the essence of a thing) and putting into play how essential (or susceptible to change) these traits are, such that 'it places nothing genuinely at stake', I add the rejoinder: it is not that nothing is placed at stake in the change of an essence, since one can imagine much being at stake if the overly righteous superhero suddenly loses her passion for justice, and the overly murderous villain suddenly loses her taste for weapons of mass destruction, but rather humour is present when there is no *causal* consequence for the world in which the comic object exists. In other words, it is possible to laugh, high stakes or not, so long as there is no *meaningful* connection between the comic object and the world, which is to say that the comic object must remain *sterile*. To take an example, British sitcom *Yes Minister* involves decisions and events which have rather high stakes, and could indeed have momentous consequence for the political history of Britain, the wellbeing of its people, international relations, etc. Why it is capable of remaining funny nonetheless, is because no matter the *content* of the political advice given and policy decisions made (with genuinely heinous or heavenly consequences for the people affected), they all remain *sterile* in relation to their given world; even should something dreadful or miraculous come to pass, it is neither received nor represented as a change in the world itself.

But we must also notice that there are two poles of change involved here: change to the world in which the comic object finds itself, and change *to the comic object itself*. In the model we have derived from Harman, humour is as involved with the question of whether the comic object can escape its own essence as whether its decisions have any effect on the essential character of its world. A character who fails on both fronts is comic *par excellence* – condemned to *repetition*, to repeat the mere fact of inescapably

being themselves in a world which will remorselessly (or hysterically in the comic sense) continue repeating itself regardless. Total sterility is achieved in absolute repetition. It is here that Murakami again shines, for even as *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973* are full with instances of causal sterility between the individual actor and their world, sterility on the level of change in the comic object (in this case, Murakami's narrator / protagonist) is of paramount importance to not only these early works but his whole oeuvre.

Prior to the death of his third girlfriend, the narrator lives his life seeking meaning through the following ethos: 'I believed in all seriousness that by converting my life into numbers I might get through to people. That having something to communicate could stand as proof I really existed' (*Hear The Wind Sing*, 87-8). This habit is inherited from a combination of traumatic childhood medical advice and his ever-faithful muse, Derek Hartfield. Hartfield holds that 'literature should be understood as information, quantifiable through graphs, chronological charts, and the like; its accuracy was therefore proportional to its volume' (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 118). The narrator also describes an episode of medical treatment for 'quietness' in his youth. A child so quiet his worried parents bring him to a psychiatrist (25) (though the actual treatment more closely resembles psychotherapy), the doctor "cures" the narrator of his quietness by imparting to him these words: 'Civilisation is communication […]. That which is not expressed doesn't exist. Understand? A big fat zero' (26). Thus narrator comes to conceive of numeracy as a mode of pure representation, a direct access to his being, both quantifiable and communicable. It is through these twin factors – one author known for his sterility, and a doctor bringing him out of quietude – that the narrator, upon Naoko's death, can precisely recall he was smoking his '6922nd cigarette' (88).

The devilish irony here is that though this event supposedly marks an end to this habit (as well as the hopes of modernism and humanism already mentioned), we find instances of it recurring, repeating, and resurfacing throughout the main narrative of these texts. The actual events of *Hear The Wind Sing* involve the narrator's short romance with a young woman whose defining characteristic is that she has only four fingers on her left hand (30). Here it becomes immediately clear why it has been so important to the formal structure of *Hear the Wind Sing* to refer to the narrator's girlfriends by numerical identifier. The girl with four fingers is marked to the reader, before the characters begin any actual romance, as *number four*. The narrator has never been able to stop counting – this is an *essential* and *inescapable* part of his character; an automatism which he fails to change. It is no surprise to further learn that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, to which the narrator returns daily like a lover in

Pinball 1973, holds that 'the science of mathematics presents the most brilliant example of the extension of the sphere of pure reason without the aid of experience' (376), not only illustrating just how deeply numeracy penetrates the narrator's essence, but also how closely linked this kind of numerical reasoning is bound up with the dream of transcendental reason and the by-now-familiar figures of modernism and humanism which, in Murakami's text here, lie long dead, though sorely missed.

The narrator's numeric habit provides a nicely comic moment on an early date between he and the four-fingered girl when he describes to her 'a famous leopard in Bhagalpur that killed and ate three hundred and fifty Indians in just three years', followed by 'an Englishman, Colonel Jim Corbett, who was known as the leopard exterminator, shot one hundred and twenty-five tigers and leopards, including that one, in eight years', to which she responds: 'you really are a little nuts' (75). The humour works on the level of content and form in relation to both object and world. We have a mass of inconsequential, numerically repeated death, with no causally meaningful change on its world; a character's habit brought out as automatism, or repetition, and furthermore as an *essential* repetition for his character; and finally neither of these are marked by any meaningful change in the relation in which they are brought to play, which is the relationship between the narrator and the four-fingered girl, which gives the scene the overall impression of leaning towards the absurd: 'you really are a little nuts'.

More than its comic effect, however, this relationship and its repetitions guide the dilemmas set up by the whole historical baggage brought into play by Naoko's suicide and the narrator's history. Recall the segment in *Pinball 1973* in which the riot police break in on the student occupiers of building nine blissing out to Vivaldi. This day is carefully described as a 'perfect cloudless November day' (5). This failure of pathetic fallacy creates the jarring sense of failed catharsis which leads to humour, but also indicates the causal sterility of the objects at play; the world goes on, the sun keeps shining, though the police may break bones and inflict life-changing injuries, and a whole generation of hope for political change may die, heaven sheds no tears. It is therefore no coincidence that the final page of *Pinball 1973* contains the line 'everything repeats itself...' (162), and is set on 'a November Sunday so tranquil it seemed that everything would soon by crystal clear' (ibid). Through the entire text, the narrator waits for meaning to arrive, for things to become 'crystal clear', for the world to begin registering the things he has lost and has achieved and has failed to achieve. November is the cruellest month.

The four-fingered girl is a similar repetition. In the essential constitution of the relationship she forms with the narrator, she is a repetition of Naoko. But, like the repeated clear November sky in *Pinball 1973*, her relationship with the narrator is one in which the promise of change, escape from sterility, is never achieved:

> It had been a long time since I had felt the fragrance of summer:
> the scent of the ocean, a distant train whistle, the touch of a
> girl's skin, the lemony perfume of her hair, the evening wind,
> faint glimmers of hope, summer dreams.
> But none of these were the way they once had been; they were
> all somehow off, as if copied with tracing paper that kept
> slipping out of place.

<div align="right">

(*Hear the Wind Sing*, 133).

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The narrator can only receive these impressions with the sense that they remain repetitions of a love already lost which neither he, nor the world, are aware of how to mourn, or rather, are capable of according *meaning*. The reason this repetition is neither ironic nor humourous is because though we see no change (indeed, we see its explicit failure in the dashing of the narrator's 'glimmers of hope'), we also see no automatism, no grasp of the essence of anything to laugh at. We simply have a situation in which nothing is achieved. The four-fingered girl puts her finger (no pun intended) on this kind of ultimate sterility in hers and the narrator's last encounter. She reveals to the narrator that she has recently had an abortion (of course, another sign of sterility), and though the child was not his, they share each others' grief over the hope and loss of change, of things being other than they might have been, of new birth. In one of their very last conversations of the novel, the four-fingered girl says: "'Everything is screwed up. It's like I'm caught in an ill wind." "Winds change direction." "You really think so?" "If you wait long enough, yes."' It seems that at the end of *Pinball 1973*, there he is, still waiting, and the wind, perhaps the very same wind which blew on desolate Mars for Derek Hartfield's time-tunnelling protagonist blows on and on, outside time, outside life and death, remorseless, pitiless, laughing and laughing.

Scientific Intuition

The early Murakami does offer two moments of hope in these stories for escaping the wind of sterility. One we have already touched upon. It is the occasion for the narrator's claim that 'this world is rife with matters philosophy cannot explain' (*Pinball 1973*, 130); his love for pinball, his sudden urge to play the three-flipper Spaceship pinball machine. Unable to explain to a colleague why he is so bent on this task, he responds with the above line, and admits some pride in his ability as a pinball player (130). His colleague responds; "'There can be no meaning in what will someday be lost. Passing

glory is not true glory at all." [...] "Is there anything in this world that can't be lost?" "I believe there is. You should too."' (130). What the narrator's colleague sees of value in the love of pinball, and in this absolute, inexplicable desire to play this particular pinball machine is precisely the fact that it is an impulse not graspable in communicable terms, and by dint of not being able to be explained, not able to be *explained away.* It is something, at least as far as this colleague is concerned, which *can't be lost*, or rather, which would persist as *quietude in the midst of some general becoming*.

The other instance appears in *Hear the Wind Sing* in a conversation between the narrator and the four-fingered girl, in which she teases him for a lack of what she calls 'scientific intuition' (81). Attributing this quality to Blaise Pascal, she says: 'an ordinary scientist thinks: A equals B, B equals C, therefore A equals C. QED. Right? [...] But Pascal's mind worked in a different way. He just thought, A equals C. He wasn't interested in proof' (81). Not only does this serve as another critique of the narrator's mathematical, deductive reasoning, but offers an alternative form of knowing reality which accounts for the incommensurability of things-in-themselves, noumena, and their sensual expressions, phenomena.

These avenues do not reach their full expression until Murakami's later phase, but before going there we must detour again through another category of OOO: namely, that of knowledge.

Both of these moments of hope deal with surpassing the gap between reality-in-itself and the sensual experience and knowledge of reality and gesture towards ways of relating to reality without reducing it to pure reason or totalising logic. We have already discussed access to reality through aesthetics and the metaphoric structure of causation the early OOO, and need not repeat it here. It is not until more recent work that OOO has been spoken of another bridge between the real and the sensual in anything other than derogatory terms; this is the category of knowledge.

As we already know, early OOO holds that the only two forms of 'knowledge' are 'undermining' and 'overmining'; ways of reducing objects to parts or uses. Only in the 2018 *New Theory of Everything* does Harman propose an alternative formulation of knowledge to these reductions. Harman's formulation is that knowledge is commitment (*New Theory of Everything*, 192). To précis: knowledge is not factual insofar as it cannot be stated as literal truths about its object. Knowledge rather, refers to a paradigm, a series of base assumptions or a medium from which further statements and decisions can be made concerning its object (185). The object of knowledge is a

sensual object, about which the thinker is attempting to derive *real* qualities. Because the object is sensual, it is immanent to relation. Because the qualities to be known are real, they are irreducible to, incommensurate with relation. Therefore, knowledge takes the form of *commitment* because closing the gap between the sensual and the real, or the phenomenal and the noumenal, is not possible. Knowledge also takes the form of a *paradigm* because it serves as a *ground* for factual statements and acts, but is not composed of statements or acts itself. In other words, knowledge is about making a commitment to the object of knowledge, without ever being able to determine its absolute reality through proof. Or, as Murakami has it, scientific intuition: A=C. In Harman's technical terms, it is 'justified untrue belief' (185) – untrue because 'truth' as a total correspondence between the real and the sensual is not possible, justified because, though no proof will ever be arrive at reality, one must nevertheless make decisions, take action, and live according to those beliefs. Sometimes you just gotta play pinball.

It has been a circuitous journey which has taken us to the point of forgetting, from one of our key waypoints, Kierkegaard's notion of faith. Now it is time to return. In Harman's formulation of knowledge as commitment, he refers directly to Kierkegaard, citing his position that 'we will never have enough proof to justify our life-choices, but must make a decision despite incomplete evidence' (*New Theory of Everything*, 192). Recall that in *Fear and Trembling* 'the movement of faith must be made continually on the strength of the absurd' (*F&T*, 67), and that in *Repetition*, 'what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards', 'genuine repetition is recollected forwards' (*Repetition*, 3). Though Kierkegaard is not speaking with the same voice in each of these texts and is not describing precisely the same phenomenon, there are points common to each position which are pertinent here.

For Kierkegaard, the gulf to be bridged by both faith and repetition is the incommensurability between the finite and the infinite, (the Christian God standing for the infinite and human subjectivity standing for the finite). Now, for OOO it is simply the case that finitude applies to all real objects and that knowledge of *any-thing* whatsoever makes the demand of the leap from the finite to the *infinity in small things*. Faith in an Object-Oriented light is therefore a repetition of OOO's basic commitment which constitutes knowledge. This is not Platonic recollection in which all truths are already known and must be recollected by following an epistemological ruleset (a mode resembling Murakami's narrator's attempts at mathematising meaning into his being). Rather, if knowledge is a commitment to living, acting, being-in-the-world, based on qualities which approximate at best the objects they refer to, then faith is repetition of

this impulse, a constant reaffirmation of this commitment to what one *knows* in the face of the absolute *unknowability* of not some ultimate God, but the reality of everything from coffee cups and pencil leads to the effects of mass industrialisation and the right mode of governance for a global polity in technologically-dependent societies. This impulse, in Kierkegaard's terms in *Repetition* is 'recollected forwards' – it does not appeal to some proof or self-evident argument already set in stone, since it admits of no such thing which would reduce reality to a fully commensurate ruleset, but rather reaffirms its basic commitment from a position of the impossibility of any knowledge to exhaust reality-in-itself at all. It sets out its paradigm from the ground up, as one not ordained by some self-evident doctrine or totalising regimen of truth, but from a sincere position of naïveté which does not beget either the cynical naysaying of opposition or the wild impulse to obliterate all alternatives (and the nitpicking need to have one's logical cards arranged in advance, the bane of all arguments and proposals in favour of real change in any form to our global societies today), but encourages instead the fearless and unrelenting pursuit of the paradigm to its end-point, knowledge as commitment transformed into faith.

Commitment; The Wind Rocks Me

It will take only the most cursory of glances to see how this model emerges in Murakami's later phase of commitment. A short-story written in 2005 and published in English in the collection *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (2007), will serve as a perfect counterpoint to the Murakami of *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973*. 'The Kidney-Shaped Stone That Moves Every Day' revolves around a male protagonist similar to the narrator of *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball 1973*. The protagonist, whose name is Junpei, is a writer of the literary style, nominated for, but not successful in winning, the prestigious Akutagawa prize four times (381). This almost-but-not-quite failure speaks to Junpei's *sterility*, which familiarly plays out in his relationships with women. Junpei, like the earlier narrator, is left a legacy, or curse, from an older generation – his father, who tells him in his formative years; 'Among the women a man meets in his life, there are only three that have real meaning for him. No more, no fewer' (377). Junpei severs contact with his father (as *Wind* and *Pinball's* narrator splits from his older generations and their worldviews), but this fatal, numerical, prophecy about women haunts him into 'a life pattern for him to maintain pale, indecisive relationships with one woman after another' (379). There may be no deaths or allusions to Kant but it is clear that Junpei is facing the same cosmic sterility in the same thematic frame as *Wind* and *Pinball's* narrator. Doomed by the leftover oracle of a previous generation, and trapped

in a logic of reductive mathematisation in the struggle to generate some meaning in the world (he is, after all, a writer), Junpei meets a new woman.

This woman's name is Kirie, which Junpei immediately comments; 'Sounds like "Kyrie" from a mass' (381). From the ancient Greek word for 'Lord' or 'Master', and used in Christian traditions to refer to God in prayer, this name immediately raises the theme of faith, man's relation to the divine, and knowledge's relation to an irreducible other, whether God, an object, or a woman in a bar. These themes are immediately addressed in the story: Junpei begins itemising Kirie as soon as he meets her, listing a series of facts about her, her height, the length of her hair, her tan, the shape of her head, her clothes, his estimates on the size of her breasts, etc. (381). He also immediately tries to assess whether she might be one of his three women who hold real meaning, screening her through the lens of his father's curse. His detached speculation proves fruitless, however, since Kirie is, from the outset, leading their interaction. She holds all the causal power about what they are as a unit: she first approaches him at the bar (380), she invites herself to his room (384-5), she decides their relationship will not become a serious one (388), she forces him to tell her the contents of his work-in-progress short story (something Junpei never normally discusses) (389), and when the relationship ends, it is she who vanishes from his life (395). This again highlights Junpei's causal sterility as much as it lambasts his approach to reality through detached, numerical analysis, but there is something subtly more, again, like *Wind* and *Pinball*, told through a story-within-the-story, Junpei's own unfinished short story about the Kidney-shaped stone that moves every day, which Kirie forces him to reveal.

Like Junpei, the protagonist of the Kidney-Shaped stone is in her thirties and carrying on a dead-end affair with an older partner (389). While on a trip alone she picks up a stone shaped precisely like a human kidney and brings it back to her workplace, where it feels right at home (she is a hospital doctor), and uses it as a paperweight (390). This stone, upon her return to the office every morning, has moved, seemingly of its own accord to a new location around the room. She always leaves it in the same place at night and it has always repositioned itself when she returns (391). It is at this point that Junpei places the unfinished story in the hands of Kirie and asks her what direction the story should take. Kirie replies, again leading the relationship with characteristic certitude; 'The kidney-shaped stone has its own reasons for doing what it does' (391), and further goes on to say:

> You know, Junpei, everything in the world has its reasons for
> doing what it does. [...] For example, the wind has its reasons.
> We just don't notice as we go about our lives. But then, at some

> point, we are made to notice. The wind envelops you with a
> certain purpose in mind and it rocks you. The wind knows
> everything that's inside you. And not just the wind. Everything,
> including a stone. They all know us very well. From top to
> bottom. It only occurs to us at certain times. And all we can do
> is go with those things. As we take them in, we survive, and
> deepen.

('Kidney-Shaped Stone', 392).

Here, we have Kirie functioning in her divine role as lord and master, driving Junpei's story, but as a particularly generous God. It is she, after all, who declares that she is not the only thing beyond the reach of Junpei's reasoning mind: 'everything in the world has its reasons'. Her litany to the wind and the way all beings 'know' us is reminiscent of our ever-present theme of translation in an Object-Oriented vein; how the embrace of objects is a kind of ekphrasis which 'makes us see ourselves as objects traversed – translated by others' (Morton, *Here Comes Everything*, 171), Aeolian humans played by the breeze. Junpei himself, with some surprise, notes that Kirie has turned his storyline into something metaphysical; beyond the 'tranquil, psychological storyline' he had imagined (394).

Like 'The Martian Wells' in *Hear the Wind Sing*, this tale expounds the metaphysical issue at play in the story overall – the irreducibility of reality to any formula which might make it easily intelligible – each and every thing has its own reasons. It further foregrounds humankind's cosmic sterility, a thing of no great significance in a world of other things (the wind reprising its cosmic role) which traverse and translate it – 'they know us very well. From top to bottom'. This story's conclusion takes a very different turn, however. For though Junpei does not ever see Kirie again, he does hear her disembodied voice by chance one day on the radio in an interview in which she reveals her profession and life's passion – inter-skyscraper tightrope walking. She admits to having absolutely no interest in any high place which is not a manmade structure (397). Unable to make a living entirely off this pursuit, she supplements her walks with a day job as a high-rise window cleaner, for which she quit a career as an analyst in a securities firm (396). Amongst other things of note – when window cleaning, she hates wearing a lifeline (397).

Here Kirie functions as a presence not unlike the wind of The Martian Wells – a being which appears akin to divinity, already made apparent by her naming, but a small 'd' divinity, neither omnipresent, nor omnipotent, nor omniscient. Kirie's functional divinity is limited to her transcendence of the numerical, rational, and calculating world to which Junpei remains welded. Her transcendence is nothing more than her

embracing of a basic ontological characteristic of all being, that 'the entire field of reality is laced with infinity' (Harman, *Phenomena & Infinity*). This (in this case, quite literally) lifts her out of the world of calculation, mathematisation, security, and hedging one's bets, no more straightforwardly represented than in her former career as a *securities analyst*, and brings her to the embrace of the wind in a leap which, like playing pinball, is a matter neither she, nor philosophy, nor anyone else, can explain. In one more edifying dialogue given to Kirie, she expresses how it is that she reaches the level of the wind:

> When you're up there, you change yourself as a human being.
> [...] You change yourself, or rather, you *have* to change yourself
> or you can't survive. When I come out to a high place, it's just
> me and the wind. Nothing else. The wind envelops me, rocks me.
> It understands who I am. At the same time, I understand the
> wind. We accept each other and we decide to go on living
> together. Just me and the wind: there's no room for anybody
> else. [...] We are there, inside our own warm void.

> ('The Kidney-Shaped Stone', 399).

Unlike the protagonist of The Martian Wells, who seeks answers from the wind, who wishes to reduce the wind to intelligible facts, Kirie seeks the wind *in translation*. Kirie does not *know* the wind as a reductive form of use, but rather their codependent relation is grounded on her knowledge of it as *commitment*, as the staking of something very real of her own being on an incomplete translation. This commitment is the only way she survives. The relation between her and the wind becomes a separate object from either herself or the wind, a world they cohabit and contend with through a sustained act of commitment and translation. Just as any marriage is something other than the sum of its participants on which all involved parties have to stake something essential to their being to keep alive, so too is the relation between Kirie and the wind. To return to our persistent metaphor, it is a plasmogamy. To make this kind of commitment requires nothing less than an expectation of everyday life *never to return* – for a total loss of the logic, rationality, and security given by worlds past; for the shared world to become one's *entire* world. This is the difference between Kirie and the narrator of *Wind* and *Pinball*: this early narrator longs for everyday life to return and can do nothing to escape his netherward spiral away from the world he has lost. When Kirie ascends to the heavens, she makes no backward turns – not even for Junpei's sake. Indeed, Junpei experiences a rush of jealousy for the wind, which, in a way, supplants him as Kirie's romantic partner (399). But by the end of the story, Junpei undergoes a change too. In perhaps Murakami's writing at its least subtle (and this short story is more than a little ham-fisted in this respect), Junpei finishes the story by

declaring: 'Numbers aren't the important thing. The countdown has no meaning. […] What matters is deciding in your heart to accept another person completely. And it always has to be the first time and the last' (400).

While we see plenty of automatism in this story on the part of the characters' essential traits, the end result is not humour because we arrive at *successful change* – a repetition which has completed catharsis, beginning again. Here we must note a conclusion implied but not yet made explicit about comedy and humour from our schema: comedy by definition is *never* emancipatory. Since it is predicated on extracting an essence from its comic object and presenting it as automatism in a context of causal sterility, comedy will only ever serve the aspirations of change in a negative or critical way. Satire may well effectively strike at the heart of a regime's, institution's, or individual's failings by putting its finger on an essential automatism at play, but will never successfully produce a vision of true transformative change lest it fail to produce the affect of humour and cease to be comedy at all. Comedy will never perform an emancipatory or revolutionary function. By contrast, Junpei's formulation is perfectly descriptive of Kirie, and an immediate guide to *causal fertility* (with the caveat that Kirie's target of affection is not a person). The commitment which constitutes knowledge and the renewal which transforms it into faith is precisely this repetition; it has to be the first time and the last, a total re-organisation of the architecture of the everyday; a full commitment to change. How this model has further consequences for the category of knowledge and the industries of knowledge, as well as how this change can be meaningfully achieved and pursued on the scale of anything beyond the solitary individual is something to be explored in our next chapter taking as its theme the affect of charm, and looking at the movement from sterility to fertility and how to make a world.

5. Charming: Where the Magic Happens

In *Ratner's Star* (1976), hailed as Don DeLillo's epic of postmodernity, Billy Twillig, fourteen years old, Nobel Laureate in mathematics, special invitee to Field Experiment Number One and Logicon Project Minus One, successful decoder of an extraterrestrial message from the vicinity of a celestial body known as Ratner's Star, stands on the shoulders of a gentleman identified as 'the fume sewer man' (39) in order to spy on a woman bathing through the mirrored light of a ceiling reflector. The woman in question is Una Braun, introduced as the consulting hydrologist at Field Experiment Number One. The narrative voice which slips, free and indirect, in and out of Billy Twillig's direct perceptual reality from its objective and sometimes extratextual seat, depicts Una Braun as 'softer than moon daisies, blessed with erotic madonna's eyes, hair of vandyke brown' (30); a woman who '[Billy] continued sneaking looks at [...], whose gentle heat he found enveloping' (31). When Una sits down in the grass, the text notes that she sits with 'legs disappearing under wide skirt, redwood needles clinging here and there' (35). When Una rises she 'got up, smiling, and shook out her skirt', the text sliding from past tense to present participle; 'the woman lifting the quilt, smiling once more at the boy on the grass' (37). As the text flicks through these perceptions it shifts phenomenological frame: the reader is given an aesthetic, almost painterly Una Braun as a vandyke, moon-daisy madonna. The reader is given Billy's Una Braun as he furtively glances her way, enveloped in imagined warmth. The reader is given a super close-up, intimate, almost voyeuristically posed Una Braun as the text draws attention to her legs nestled within her skirt, near enough to see the redwood needles clinging to her. The reader is given an in-process Una Braun, a character in-scene, in action, *in medias res*; she stands and is now shaking the quilt and smiling, smiling at an object nearby, a boy, sitting on the picnic lawn.

The effect of this narrative reframing, interesting not least because it resembles the method of examining an object in its perceptions common to phenomenology since Edmund Husserl, is to bring the reader into a perceptual proximity to Una Braun. To formulate in reverse; this technique of representing Una Braun through multiple contradictory phenomenological frames lends her, as an object of the reader's perception and of the text's fiction, a resistance to the perception of the reader. The variegated perceptions given of Una Braun, rather than make the character more transparent to the reader as a figment of the fiction or a function within the text serving a diegetic or symbolic purpose, in fact make her more opaque, grant her an increasing independence from the text and from the reader's perception of her. Representing her more makes her *less* reducible to representation.

With this in mind, how does the text present Una Braun to the reader during Billy's misadventure to view her naked while bathing? Consider the recurrence of imagery which deliberately refuses to present Una Braun as naked, accessible, or unveiled: 'In the tilted mirror he saw Una Braun', 'her body a bit foreshortened by the angle of reflection', 'water woman about to step into that clear and distorting, dense and colourless element' (41), all images which draw attention to the visual distortion, mediation, and reflection of images between Billy's peeping view of her and her actuality. This is followed by a paratactic explosion:

> Varieties of light glanced off the surface borders of air and water, water and glass, glass and oil, the whole room a medium of nonuniform density, these propagating waves graining her body, soon to be rubbed and soaped and misted, transformed in displaceable mass, passing through itself, beauty bare, an unfalsifiable and self-blinding essence, not subject to the judgement of mirrors, what Euclid might have danced to in the summer dusk. Oooo naaa.

> (*Ratner's Star*, 41)

Even though this passage's ostensible subject is Una Braun's naked body, it is as if the text details everything which obscures the thing itself. Una Braun's form takes shape by the attention paid to the mediums through which it is translated before reaching the reader (and Billy). The 'beauty bare' is not bared at all. What is made bare is the very medium of perception, visual perception, light. But to return to our steadfast companion in Walter Benjamin, even light has the aspect of translation which renders it touched only as an Aeolian harp is touched. Light is seen on 'surface borders', when it glances off fields of 'nonuniform density'. It is seen graining a body, a propagating wave only given presence in distortion, reflection, mirroring, translation, as Una Braun's body is said to be in water – 'transformed in displaceable mass'.

The effect of this constant perceptual displacement away from the object of perception creates the opposite of the effect described earlier. In increasing the number of phenomenological frames in which Una Braun appeared, the transparency of the character to the reader decreased. Here, expressing the resistance the body has to perception, the surfaces and densities traversed in perception, causes the body to appear *more clearly* even behind its mask of light and reflection. To reiterate: the object of perception (Una Braun) becomes less clear when described through varying perceptual frames, and becomes more clear when the perceptual frame itself is foregrounded. Thus, the most tactile language applied to Una Braun's body (to be rubbed and soaped and misted), even while veiling it in more robes of light distortion (oil and suds and floating steam), serves to bring the body's outline further into view. It

is through this phenomenalogical trickery that the text arrives at Una Braun; 'beauty bare, unfalsifiable and self-blinding essence', not subject to the judgement of mirrors' without actually describing the thing itself even once.

The reader is given Una Braun twice: Una Braun, irreducible to representation, enduring through varying perceptual profiles; and Una Braun 'beauty bare' through layers of distortion and translation which intercede between the voyeuristic gaze and its object. But the text's early fascination with this character should not be surprising. Billy, focaliser of the novel, is a mathematician surrounded by scientists and mathematicians at Field Experiment Number One. That the text should show preoccupation with the multiple facets of Una – Latin: aloneness, singularity, unity, *oneness* – and, in attempting to discover it naked, fail, is very much appropriate. It is further interesting that Una is described as 'water woman' (41) since, in the same chapter we are given the name of Endor, who calls himself 'the wizened child of Thales and Heraclitus' (22). We have another reference to Thales and Heraclitus in a later conversation: 'Cyril: "'All things are water,' said the Greek." Una: "'All things are flow,' said the Greeker of the two."' (31). Thales, the first western philosopher, declared water the primary substance of all things. Heraclitus, not long after, declared all things to be flux, ceaselessly changing. It also bears mentioning that Cyril Kyriakos, with whom Una Braun is in conversation here, has a wife whose name is Myriad.

So we have a text openly confronting the foundation of western metaphysics in a contemporary scientific / mathematical setting, but which is using an aesthetic frame which deliberately foregrounds the resistance of Una, the One, to representation even as it is expressed through the examination of the aesthetic frame itself. Meanwhile Myriad (the Many), wife of Cyril Kyriakos (Lord of the Lord), gives birth in the maternity wing. One and Many, Representation and Actuality, Pre-Socratic Metaphysics and science bordering on science-fiction. A novel split in two halves; part 1, Adventures (in wonderland), part 2, Reflections (through the looking-glass). We have set the scene. But we need more.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985, tr. 1991), a novel for which Murakami Haruki was awarded the Tanizaki prize, praised by Nobel laureate Oe Kenzaburo as a 'new *In'ei Raisan* [In Praise of Shadows]' (Japan Quarterly, 'The Other World', Rubin, 499), the nameless protagonist, expert in the clandestine profession of information laundering and information shuffling, is summoned to a secret location hidden in a cave in a closet concealed up a Tokyo skyscraper and finds himself

contemplating the sexual appeal of a young woman in a pink suit. In this novel, there are strictly two narrative voices belonging to two protagonists. Like *Ratner's Star*, this is a novel of two halves. Murakami's novel tells its halves concurrently, alternating narrators and worlds on alternating chapters; 'Hard-Boiled Wonderland' and 'End of the World' woven contrapuntally. The former of the two narrators, resident of the Hard-Boiled world, is the one to whom the reader is introduced first and with whom the encounter with the pink-suited lady occurs. I will refer to this narrator as Watashi (私), the formal Japanese pronoun by which he refers to himself in contrast to the narrator of the End of the World, who refers to himself by the informal masculine pronoun Boku (僕).

Watashi is greeted by the lady in the pink suit when he is released from a motionless elevator, or rather, when the elevator doors open 'mean[ing] the linking of two spaces previously denied accessible continuity by means of those very doors' (6). The woman has three distinguishing features: her outward garb ('pink suit, wearing pink high heels. The suit was coutured of a polished material, her face equally polished' (6-7)), her inability to speak, or rather, the lack of auditory component to her speech ('it was more her lips forming the words than speaking, because no sound came out' (7)), and her physicality ('the woman was on the chubby side. Young and beautiful and all that went with it, but chubby. Now, a young, beautiful woman who is, shall we say, plump, seems a bit off' (7)). These characteristics appear to correlate around one aesthetic form: cuteness.

According to Sianne Ngai, the cute is an aesthetic which 'depends on a softness that invites physical touching – or, to use a more provocative verb, fondling' (*The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde*, Critical Inquiry, 815). Anthropomorphism is also central to the cute for Ngai (ibid), as well as an 'exaggerated passivity and vulnerability' in the cute object, 'intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle' (816). Ngai links this desire for mastery to the desire for consumption, suggesting a correlation between an object's edibility and its cuteness (820). Ngai goes so far as to suggest that 'in its exaggerated passivity, there is a sense in which the cute thing is the most reified or thinglike of things, the most objectified of objects or even an '"object" par excellence' (834). But though Ngai does claim that '*cuteness* names an aesthetic encounter with an exaggerated difference in power' (828), it is not all one-way traffic from powerful subject to powerless object. Ngai's cute object is 'helpless and aggressive at the same time' (823). Further to this, 'prototypically cute objects […] often have a deverbalising effect on the subjects who impose cuteness upon them' (827); Ngai's cuteness is 'a relationship to a socially

disempowered other that actively transforms the speech of the subject who *imposes* the aesthetic quality on that other' (828).

It is not hard to read the pink-suited lady through Ngai's cute. Everything from the colouration of her garments to her physicality seems to exude cuteness. Her chubbiness invites the fondling mixed with consumption Ngai describes; almost the first thought that crosses Watashi's mind is that 'I might end up sleeping with her' (8) and that 'her wiggle was tight and cute. In fact, it turned me on. She was my kind of chubby' (9). Her soundless utterances can be read as Ngai reads Hello Kitty which 'has no mouth at all' (Ngai, 832), and embodies an object 'given just *enough* face to enable it to return our gaze', while still denying speech (833). In this light, the pink-suited woman would function as an object *contra* a subject; an inert entity subjected to a certain dominant power relation.

However, the cuteness in this character's presentation does not cause the expected effect. Rather than exaggerating her vulnerability, it is Watashi whose vulnerability and dependency comes to the fore. The pink-suited woman is neither malleable nor manipulable in the narrator's or the reader's hands. In fact, it is in her partial withdrawal from the speech-relation that Watashi's disempowerment, his otherness to her and his immediate world become apparent. The numbering of the rooms along the corridors through which the pink-suited woman leads Watashi baffle him; '<936> was next to <1213> next to <26>. Something was screwy' (7). The labyrinthine structure of the building resembles a corridor which 'goes around and around, like in an Escher print' (10), a corridor 'as long as Marcel Proust' (ibid). This is a world in which both refuses to obey a discernible numerical logic and resembles the labyrinthine aesthetics of Marcel Proust and M. C. Escher. The pink-suited woman's soundless mouthings place her (like her environment) outside the representational frame into which Watashi as narrative voice attempts to force her. Indeed, Watashi only grasps her syllabic vocabulary through his rudimentary lip-reading skills. The reader is thus exposed to a series of nonsense phonemes as he tries to apply meaning to her 'Proust': '*Truest?...Brew whist?...Blue is it?*' (9-10); amongst other undecipherables: '*Tozum'sta*', '*Sela*', '*Saum'te, sela*' (10-11). She is resistant to interpretation, irreducible to a representational frame. It is this irreducibility which places Watashi at her mercy, since it is she who navigates the aesthetically complex maze in which he finds himself. She leads him to his destination and commands him '"*Saum'te sela.*" Which, of course, is exactly what [he does]' (11).

Read this way, the pink-suited woman's plumpness performs the same function as her soundlessness: it disrupts the representational frame into which she might be easily placed. The narrative voice makes explicit the tension between her plumpness and her other physical qualities: 'around young, beautiful, fat women, I am generally thrown into confusion' (8). Watashi elaborates: 'I have visions of her mopping up that last drop of cream sauce'(ibid). This phenomenological conflict is so strong it becomes 'like acid corroding metal: scenes of her eating spread through my head and I lose control' (ibid). The narrative voice also notes that 'confusion and repulsion are two different things' and that it is emphatically confusion not repulsion he experiences. According to Watashi, 'if your confusion leads you in the right direction, the results can be uncommonly rewarding' (ibid). In other words, confusion, the confrontation between aesthetic frame and framed object, if successfully sustained, leads to an allure not identical to the possessive-dominant power relation of the cute. Needless to say, the pink-suited woman most certainly does sustain her contradiction with her aesthetic frame.

Consider the narrator's synaesthetic response on scenting her cologne: 'a scent reminiscent of standing in a melon patch on a summer's morn. It put me in a funny frame of mind. A nostalgic yet impossible pastiche of sentiments, as if two wholly unrelated memories had threaded together in an unknown recess' (9). The text here explicitly plays with sustaining conflicting images within aesthetic frames. Had the text simply read 'she smelt of melons', the entire effect would be lost. But the deliberately distinct imagery gives the scent of melons itself a scene, placing a frame within a frame, forcing the reader to experience the text's 'impossible pastiche of sentiments, as if two wholly unrelated memories had threaded together'. 'Standing in a melon patch on a summer's morn' disrupts the totality of the scene by adding a concrete reality to the sense-data 'melon scentedness' which binds these qualities to a world. Having these mixed realities subsist within one world is precisely Watashi's experience of the pink-suited woman and the entire realm in which he finds himself. As if to underscore her inability to be purely conceptualised in thought or perception, Watashi later attempts to recollect the pink-suited woman: 'I could recall each detail with alarming clarity, yet the composite was indistinct' (73). Once again, the overflowing myriad of varying contradictory frames of representation make the object itself resistant to perception, even in the most upfront of sexualised objectifications.

Bear in mind that, like *Ratner's Star*, *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* revolves around an explicitly philosophical opposition: the name of Watashi's profession is 'Calcutec', professional in information laundering, state-sponsored

employee of an organisation known as 'The System' (33). He is embroiled in an information war with a rival organisation known as 'The Factory' composed of professional information thieves known as 'Semiotecs' (ibid). Somewhere in between are a group, race, or species known as 'INKlings', subterranean entities sensitive to certain soundwaves, in cahoots with the Semiotecs (27, 52). In the middle of this, Watashi is asked to launder and shuffle, the highest protection possible, research data detailing how to decode the physical imprint of memory on bones in sound form. In an informational war, a war over representation, a war between Calculation and Semiotics, between a System and a Factory, a war in which INK plays a kind of wild-card role, an *aesthetic* war, Watashi is employed to protect a way of decoding the physical-aural imprint of memory itself. Within this context, the text presents to the reader a soundless young woman whose aesthetic reality is so strong as to be robustly irreducible to all forms of easy representational sublimation. And that's without considering the *End of the World* half of the novel. The second stage is set.

Too Close For Comfort: Not Cute, Not Sublime

Neither Una Braun nor the pink-suited woman, though explicitly sexualised and placed in situations which might be expected to disempower or make vulnerable, become inert, voiceless, or *objectified* in the pejorative sense. Rather, both are resistant to and beyond reduction to perception. They both resemble the aesthetic of the cute in that they are looked-upon, exposed to representation, placed in a power-relation in which they are the object of gazing, and eminently fondle-seeking, subject. However, they also defy the aesthetic of the cute in that both are partially withdrawn, retreat beyond the grasp of the subject which imposes the aesthetic frame upon them. This is an aesthetic which I refer to as charm.

Like anxiety and humour, charm is brought on by attuning to the finitude of the charming object. We can excavate charm's specificity from Ngai's cute and, in particular, Ngai's strategic enemies in the cute; the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful and the sublime are aesthetic concepts, in her view, which have the prestige of central places in a great many aesthetic theories but which fail (unlike 'minor' aesthetic concepts) to 'bear witness to their historical contingency' (Ngai, 811). If charm has elements in common with the cute but diverges from it, what relation might it bear to the beautiful or the sublime?

For this, I turn to Kant, whose concepts of beauty and the sublime remain some of the most important in aesthetics. For Kant, the beautiful demands universal assent; when one 'declares something to be beautiful, he expects the same delight from others'

(*Critique of Judgement*, 44). Furthermore, for Kant, no object contains beauty as an objective quality (70), meaning that beauty does not have a determination formulaically applicable to things, and that if some thing is beautiful it serves as an example of the beautiful, but is not beautiful in itself. Beauty in Kant therefore refers to the universal subjective conditions of judging an object of beauty prior to any pleasure derived from or objective quality of the object itself (49). Finally, within the universal conditions for subjective judgement, beauty occurs when the imagination ('productive and active in its own right', 'originator of arbitrary forms') acts 'with free conformity to the law of the understanding' (71). Beauty is therefore *obedience*, a free accord between the productive cognitive faculty (imagination) and the understanding which 'prescribes laws *a priori* for nature as an object of the senses' (29); the imagination, tethered to no object, projects a form in harmony with the laws of the understanding.

The sublime, for Kant, 'is the name given to what is *absolutely great*', which is to say '*beyond all comparison great*' (*Critique of Judgement*, 78). As with the beautiful, 'we have no interest whatever in the object'. Rather, 'in contradistinction to what is the case with the beautiful, [the sublime refers to a universal] delight in an extension affecting the imagination itself' (80). In other words, beauty and the sublime differ in that the sublime brings into focus the limit of the subject's senses where beauty does not. Both the sublime and the beautiful refer to the universal subjective conditions of judgement, but in the sublime the imagination finds a free harmony not with the understanding, but with reason (whose domain is the supersensible in the subject (30)). Since the sublime is the name for the absolutely great, which is outside the grasp of the imagination, the sublime derives its pleasure from how the failure of the imagination comes into accord with the law of reason; that the *a priori* laws prescribed by reason for freedom become 'the supreme measure of what is great' (88).

Bearing in mind that *Ratner's Star* is explicitly engaged with the history of metaphysics and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is explicitly engaged with aesthetics, calculation, and semiotics, do the figures of Una Braun and the pink-suited woman correspond in any way to the Kantian beautiful or sublime[15]?

We have already noted that the description of Una Braun takes the form of a paratactic orbit, touching on the perceptual mediums through which Una Braun is approached without attempting to directly touch the thing itself. Indeed, to call Una 'an

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[15] I would not, of course, want to suggest that the use of the female body in these texts is transparent, unproblematic, or without any of the baggage that comes with the reduction of the female body or character to the muse of the acting and narrating male subjectivity, but since there are perfectly good studies of DeLillo's and Murakami's uses of the female body and gendered politics elsewhere, I feel no need to retread their well-made arguments again here.

unfalsifiable and self-blinding essence (*Ratner*, 41) is to equate her to Kant's thing-in-itself; an essence neither reproducible by representation (unfalsifiable[16]) nor granted access to its own reality (self-blinding); quintessential noumenon. Thus, when the text focuses on 'varieties of light', 'borders of air and water', and 'propagating waves', it guides the imagination *towards* the object under description. While the object itself, like Kant's object of beauty, has no objective qualities of its own (Una's qualities are derived from fine art; 'madonna's eyes', 'vandyke brown'), the perceptual apparatus afforded the imagination appears lush and vivid without suggesting any fixed forms before the imagination at all. On this reading, it might be said that 'beauty bare' does not refer to Una Braun at all, but beauty itself in a Kantian vein, which is bared here – a passage which engenders the imagination's free accord with forms given by the understanding alone.

However, this description cannot be too easily aligned with a Kantian beauty if only for the reason that there is an obvious *interest* at stake in the viewing gaze. For Billy, the gazing subject, does of course have a libidinal and pleasurable interest in seeing Una Braun naked. A personal interest, something pleasing in sensation, for Kant, relegates something from the beautiful to the agreeable (37). And, while the presentation of Una Braun courts the aesthetic of universal beauty, this is Una Braun *as perceived by Billy*, an explicitly non-universal representation. Where Kant's beauty is felt only as a harmony between imagination and understanding, a strictly universal notion playing out in the subject, what we have with Una Braun is a concrete investment in the object itself. As such, it might be said that the text forces a Kantian style of representation, in its description of beauty, into a sustained contradiction with the position of the viewed object of beauty in relation to the reader.

As for the pink-suited woman, her presentation resembles Kant's sublime, though with some obvious differences. For while it is her size, her 'chubbiness', 'plumpness', 'fatness', which guides Watashi's imagination, she is certainly not the *absolutely great*, necessary for Kantian sublimity. She does fulfil the sublime in that she falls outside the grasp of the imagination, for when Watashi attempts to recollect her: '[he] could recall each detail with alarming clarity, yet the composite was indistinct' (73). It is also as a result of her physical proportions that the limits of Watashi's senses are brought into view; 'maybe it was because I hadn't slept with an overweight woman in a while that I just couldn't picture a heavyset woman in the altogether' (ibid). It bears additionally

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[16] It should also be noted that being *unfalsifiable* puts Una outside the realm of science itself, or at least as far as philosopher Karl Popper has it when he argues in his *Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934) that what makes a theory or statement properly scientific is that it is *falsifiable* rather than *verifiable*.

mentioning that, though the pink-suited woman is not herself of absolute magnitude, the environment through which she guides Watashi, the corridors as long as Proust, stairways as circuitous as Escher, is. When we compare Kant's description of fine arts (the pleasure accompanying the representation arises not out of sensation, but out of reflective judgement (134) and that 'we must be able to *look upon* fine art as nature, although we recognize it to be art' (136)) to the use of Proust and Escher in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* we find that Watashi's experience is a curious reversal of this formula: Watashi's reflective judgement looks upon reality as fine art, though he acknowledges it to be reality. This reversal is commented on overtly by the text through Watashi: 'if she'd cited this long corridor as a metaphor for the works of Marcel Proust, that much I could accept. But the reverse was bizarre' (10).

Consider also that the sublime is called 'at once a feeling of displeasure […] and a simultaneously awakened pleasure' (*Critique of Judgement*, 88), a concurrence of contradictory affects in a sustained sensation. This is far from dissimilar to the feeling the pink-suited woman inspires in Watashi who faces her with simultaneous apprehension and obvious sexual interest. As we have already discussed, she seems to precisely embody a sense of contradictory joining of oppositional affects; 'a nostalgic yet impossible pastiche of sentiments, as if two wholly unrelated memories had threaded together in an unknown recess' (9).

Thus we have again a partial identification with a Kantian aesthetic; a figure which produces a feeling resembling the sublime, but without meeting the conditions for the sublime. Since Watashi is a non-universal first-person voice and the pink-suited woman is a figure in whom he has a pleasurable interest, Kant's relegation to the agreeable also applies. And we have an additional reversal in which Kant's formula for fine art is upended in that the text formulates its world in terms of works of literature and painting, inverting Kant's schema that fine art should be viewed as nature.

So, on the one hand we have the cute, a relation marked by a power differential and the cute object's exaggerated vulnerability, imposed upon an object by a viewing subject, an aesthetic which transforms its object into an (inert) object par excellence. On the other hand, we have the beautiful and the sublime, which involve the imagination's *obedience*, to the understanding and reason. The beautiful and the sublime require subjective assent to something which strikes with the force of law; pleasure in free disempowerment. The figures of Una Braun and the pink-suited woman bear partial correspondence with these formulations. Both are the subject of gazes which exaggerate a power differential over their objects and correspond to the cute. Yet both are given

within aesthetic frames which cause the objects of the gaze to resist recuperation under the viewing subject's dominion. Indeed, the modes of representing Una and the pink-suited woman force the gazing subject and the reader both into a relation of *obedience* to the modes by which perception itself is achieved, foregrounding the viewing subject's *disempowerment* before the sensible phenomena of the understanding (beauty) in Una's case and before the supersensible phenomena of reason (the sublime) in the pink-suited woman's case. Charm can be found in the resistance between these two extremes.

The issue is that these novels do not allow the reader distance from their worlds, a requisite of both Ngai's and Kant's schemas. Ngai and Kant both rely on an absolute division between subject and object, with all the agency on the side of the subject. For Ngai, the cute object is utterly inert, the consumed/controlled/squished/fondled thing merely the correlate of the subject's cuteness-imposing gaze. For Kant, the beautiful/sublime object is in both cases irrelevant to beauty and the sublime and may serve only as an exemplar of the beautiful or the sublime which are actually just relations between the free imagination and the understanding or reason respectively. Neither *Ratner's Star* nor *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* maintain that such a one-sided division of labour exists between subject and object.

Going Down

Ratner's Star begins with a descent, a movement from the universal god's-eye view, a plane flying 'above the weather' (12), down, towards the first chapter's title: 'substratum'. A level below, not a level above; buried under reality, not surveying it. The text recollects for the reader that Billy awoke his mathematical genius in a literal underground; the New York subway system, where his father takes him to remind him that 'existence tends to be nourished from below, from the fear level, the plane of obsession, the starkest tract of awareness' (4). That this long downward journey settles on 'the surface of fixed things' (18) is indicative of the aesthetic this text imposes on its reader; not a novel of free-floating subjectivity gazing on the world. Rather, the text demands from the reader an involvement, an immediate, sensual engagement. Reading *Ratner's Star*, 'the surface of fixed things', 'the starkest tract of awareness', immediate sensation of phenomena, not in abstraction, is where we sit. We are amongst things.

Hard-Boiled Wonderland even more directly refuses to allow a free-floating, reflective reading from outside its world. The play between language and non-language, sound and silence, calculation and aesthetics makes this abundantly clear. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* begins with an ascent in an elevator; 'antiseptic as a brand-new coffin',

'dead silent', a 'hermetically sealed vault' (2). This elevator which lacks even an echo (2), and whose movement and direction is completely opaque to its rider, lacking any buttons or floor numbers (2, 5) takes Watashi to the Proust-Escherine corridors where he meets the pink-suited lady, but somehow his journey still ends underground in a pitch-dark cave containing an old man's secret laboratory (21-5). In a remarkable coincidence, Billy's journey to Field Experiment Number One, also a secret lab, contains an almost-identical elevator ride which moves 'with no sense of movement', 'absolutely no vibration', 'not the slightest linear ripple' (16). And, like Billy, Watashi, while taking his journey into the substratum, towards 'the end of the world', ponders numbers as a way to pass the time. For Watashi, numbers give way to aesthetics; the room numbers of the Proust-Escherine corridors follow no sequence (7), Watashi makes a mistake in the coin-counting game he plays to exercise the left and right sides of his brain simultaneously (4-7). But this passage references the magic of Houdini, the children's science-fiction character Tom Swift, Irish ballad Danny Boy, and actor Henry Fonda's performance in the 1959 film Warlock, in addition to Proust and Escher. Watashi goes so far as to imagine his reality as artwork: 'a still life: *Man in Elevator*' (3). We have already noted how the pink-suited lady's withdrawal from language maroons Watashi and the reader in a confrontation with her reality not reducible to the subject's gaze even as the subject is increasingly enthralled. All of these textual techniques deny Watashi as narrating subject, and the reader, distance from the novel's world. Instead, the reader is exposed to an aesthetic immediacy, a world which commands a kind of attentive perception.

Across these two adventures a common spatialised logic unfolds: journeys from over- to under-ground, through hermetically sealed spaces, an absolute separation or non-continuous divide from elsewhere. A second common logic appears in the play between light and darkness in tandem with the play between communication and muteness, signification and non-signification. Billy imagines the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs on Cleopatra's Needle in New York's Central Park as 'directions for knowing all dark things' (12). Watashi traverses a dark cave hidden in a closet on his way to the secret lab, which foregrounds his vulnerability before things unseen, just as the pink-suited woman's withdrawal from the sphere of language does. Meanwhile, in the *End of the World* sequence of the novel, the other narrator, Boku[17], has his shadow cut from his body for being 'useless' (63) in a clockwork town where each thing has its exact use and no more; 'everybody has a place, everybody has a job' (39). We shall return to the logic of spaces and places later, and for now focus on how these texts pivot around light and

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[17] Again referred to by the personal pronoun he uses.

revelation vs darkness and concealment, sound and communication vs silence and dumbness, or that which emerges into the phenomenal sunshine vs that which is withdrawn in the noumenal twilight.

For Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenology, light holds a place of unparalleled importance. For Levinas, light 'is a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning'; 'light makes objects into a world' (*E&E*, 40). Now, Levinas' aim in *Existence and Existents* is 'separat[ing] the notion of the world from the sum of objects' (34) and a critique of Heidegger; 'in order to describe being-in-the-world, [Heidegger] has appealed to an ontological finality to which he subordinates objects in the world' (34). Thus, Levinas' schema in which light makes objects into a world, makes meaning, denies the possibility of any 'ontological finality' to the world or objects. When Levinas claims that breath and air, food and drink, shelter and dwellings, books and manuscripts, are 'not for the sake of living, but [are] living', that 'life is a sincerity', that 'the world, as opposed to what is not of the world, is what we inhabit' (36), he is claiming that the world does not reach a final totality, an ontological whole, but rather that the world or worlds can be found, as DeLillo has it, 'on the surface of fixed things'.

For Levinas, 'a form is that by which a thing shows itself and is graspable, what is illuminated in it and apprehendable and what holds it together', and thus, 'a thing is always a volume whose exterior surfaces hold back a depth and make it appear'; 'while the I in the world tends towards things, it also withdraws from them' (39). Here we see the double edges of Levinas' thought, one which cuts against Heidegger and the other which was seized upon by Harman and transformed into OOO's theory of object withdrawal. It is clear that Levinas' model develops the notion that something withdraws from the world as a needs-meets-ends system[18]. Light's role, as that which makes objects into a world, is to give form, to give meaning and appearance to things which otherwise remain only depths, and in doing so, create a world. That which is illuminated in light *is* the world for the one to whom it is illuminated; 'illuminated space all collects about a mind which possesses it' (41).

Losing Light

The "End of the World's" narrator, Boku, like Watashi, has a unique skillset and vocation, known as 'dreamreading'. In the Town known as the End of the World, he is the one and only dreamreader, who undertakes his work with the assistance of the

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[18] Though it bears mentioning that what withdraws in Levinas and what withdraws in Harman are non-identical, though Harman's debt to Levinas is undeniable and explicitly stated in Harman's own work.

librarian of whom likewise, there is only one, her task tethered to his, to assist him and him alone (120). There is a price to pay for dreamreading; to lose the light of day (40). In a disquietingly painless ceremony, Boku's eyeballs are pierced by the Town's Gatekeeper who, by this mark, makes him dreamreader. 'As long as you bear this sign, you must beware of light', the Gatekeeper warns; 'your eyes cannot see the light of day. If your eyes look at the light of the sun, you will regret it' (40). It is this same Gatekeeper whose knife separates Boku from his shadow, another strangely painless ceremony marked by the absence of any sensation or agency on Boku's part, who stands inert, while his shadow 'writhes in resistance' til 'its dark form peels neatly away' (62). Somewhere between the loss of light and separation from the shade which is his lifelong companion, Boku becomes able to read old dreams.

Old dreams take the form of the skulls of the Town unicorns; 'light, with virtually no material presence […] stripped of flesh, warmth, memory' (59). Like Boku's pierced eyeballs and severed shadow, old dreams are another object strangely embodied but immaterial; visceral in content but not in form. Consider these descriptions of the old dreams, the importance of sensation and the way the descriptive language gestures towards the dreams' form:

1. 'The skull is enveloped in a profound silence that seems nothingness itself. The silence does not reside on the surface, but is held like smoke within. It is unfathomable, eternal, a disembodied vision cast upon a point in the void' (59).

2. 'There is a sadness about it, an inherent pathos. I have no words for it' (59).

3. [the librarian to Boku on the method of dreamreading] 'Before your eyes, the skull will glow and give off heat. Trace that light with your fingertips. That is how old dreams are read' (60).

4. 'I am overcome with a strong sense of déjà vu. Have I seen this skull before? […] Is this a fragment of a real memory or has time folded back on itself?' (60)

5. 'The threads of light are so fine that despite how I concentrate the energies in my fingertips, I am incapable of unravelling the chaos of vision' (61).

6. 'My fingers nimbly trace out the labyrinthine seams of light as I grow able to invoke the images and echoes with increasing clarity' (120).

7. 'When it reaches a certain temperature – like a patch of sun in winter – the white polished skull offers up its old dreams. I strain my eyes and breathe deeply, using my fingertips to trace the intricate lines of the tale it commences

to tell. The voice of the light remains ever so faint; images quiet as ancient constellations float across the dome of my dawning mind. They are indistinct fragments that never merge into a sensate picture' (183-4).

It should be clear how important light is to the novel's representation of dreamreading. Light's delicacy and tactility is a recurrent motif across all the instances of dreamreading, from the beginner (3.) and novice (5.) to the well-read (6.) and speed-reader (7.). Now, Boku is a character deprived of a world in one sense and deprived of the means to withdraw from the world in another. Recall that this Town at the End of the World is one where 'everybody has a place, everybody has a job' (39). It is a Town which is 'perfect', 'complete', 'It has everything. And if you cannot see that, it has nothing. A perfect nothing' (86). Within this working-parts-only Town, Boku's shadow represents his means of withdrawing from the Town's totalising system, as his shadow is the one who warns Boku against staying in the Town and incites him to hatch an escape plan. Simultaneously, Boku's impaired vision and vulnerability to conditions any brighter than an overcast winter's evening deprive him of the world in its most embodied sense – he is excluded from participation in almost all everyday life. In between these two extremes; both at the mercy of the Town and deprived of its day-to-day world, the threads of light which emanate from the old dreams become 'a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning'; 'light makes objects into a world' (Levinas, *E&E*, 40).

Dreamreading demands a receptiveness to light so intimate as to require the touch of a fingertip, another recurrent motif in the instances of dreamreading, referred to in (3.), (5.), (6.), and (7.). The aesthetic register of dreamreading inverts that of the blinding ceremony. Where the latter represents a bodily experience in as abstract, disembodied, the former represents an abstract event through the embodied sensations of heat, light, tactility, pain and exhaustion (61, 184). There is a tension in dreamreading between this intensity of embodiment and exertion, and the delicacy and fragility of the dreams themselves. The 'concentr[ation] of energies' in (5.) which recurs almost word-for-word on page 184, the exertion in (7.), emphasised by the refinement of dreamreading as technique on page 182, makes clear the physicality of the act. But the light itself must be 'traced', a verb ubiquitous in dreamreading ((3.), (5.), (6.), (7.)), and is presented as something thread-like (5.) or woven (6.), a light which hangs like a constellation (7.), a kind of ravelling and unravelling which may be followed with a light touch, but never seized in a forcible hand.

The presentation of the old dreams as light shows a remarkable similarity to Ngai's cuteness in its intense tactility foregrounding the delicacy and vulnerability of the handled object. In its invitation to touching and fondling, the light of the old dreams and even the unicorn skulls in which they are housed ('light, with virtually no material presence' (59)), are the same kind of almost-cute the pink-suited woman is. Other aesthetic techniques seen in her presentation recur here. Metaphors which interrupt the aesthetic frame with a frame of their own are rife around dreamreading (as in (7.)'s 'patch of sun in winter' and 'ancient constellations'); as are descriptions which foreground the limits of the mind like the sublime (in (7.)'s 'indistinct fragments that never merge into a sensate picture', and in an earlier passage '[the presence of the dream] is a busy current, an endless stream of images. My fingers are as yet unable to grasp any distinct message' (61)). And, as with the pink-suited woman, there are deliberate indications that the subject-object distinction held by both Ngai and Kant is not at play; after all, it is the white skull which 'offers' its old dreams up to Boku as reader (7.), not he who imposes a reading on it from some seat of consciousness.

All of this occurring 'on the surface of fixed things' (to again use DeLillo's phrase), at Boku's fingertips, indicates the prevalence of the aesthetic of charm in Murakami's novel. The old dreams' delicacy, tactility, fragility, and vulnerability sit in a relationship with their resistance to the forces of perception, mind, and the body to apprehend, understand, or master them while exerting their own forces on the world, Boku, and the reader. The sense old dreams impel in Boku is not that of domination, but that of familiarity, 'a strong sense of déjà vu' as in (4.). They beckon him as familiar as long-lost friends, faces grown up from a childhood. They exert a magic on Boku, who reads the dreams 'as if possessed' (183). They take ahold of his mind. They charm him. The theme of mind is stressed repeatedly throughout both sections of the novel and returns our reading to its core contention: that 'humans are like Aeolian harps' (Morton, *Poetry*, 205), and that 'the harmony of languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind' (Benjamin, 'Task', *Illuminations*, 80); every work has a 'nucleus […] the element that does not lend itself to translation […] even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted' (ibid, 76). All entities which enter into the realm of translation, worlds of light in Levinas' terms, worlds which *are* the old dreams of these sleeping skulls in the End of the World, are like singing wind-harps, only resonant with one another because of a translation, like the wind, leaping between them. When the librarian confesses to Boku that she does know what mind is, does, or how to use it (none of the shadowless Townsfolk do), Boku declares that 'the mind is nothing you use, […] the mind is just there. It is like the wind. You simply feel its movements' (61). The mind of the thinking

subject possesses no ontological privilege here; rather, it is a resonant element in the human sensory repertoire – something which, like the wind, moves and is moved by things, things which themselves are delicate and not particularly hefty, which may be as immaterial as an old dream; the use of the mind is a kind of tuning, an attunement, a being charmed by things.

The Pathos of Things

We have yet to discuss quotes (1.) and (2.) laid out above. What they allow is a reading of light and charm into a further discussion of language, culture, and sleep and silence, to which we will now turn.

Quote (2.) refers to the first unicorn skull Boku touches. This skull possesses an 'inherent pathos' which defies expression in language. Even those with only a cursory interest in Japanese culture will be struck by the similarity of Boku's experience to the experience known as *mono no aware* (物の哀れ), often translated as 'the pathos of things'. This aesthetic hearkens to some of the most venerable of Japanese literary traditions in Heian period (794-1185 AD) poetry and the *monogatari* form. In a study on the *Genji Monogatari* (Tale of Genji), Tomiko Yoda identifies *mono no aware* (via Motoori Norinaga) as 'a profound feeling with which one responds to a myriad of things and occurrences in the world ('Fractured Dialogues', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 526). In this schema, 'one's experience of an object, a discourse on this experience, and a communication of this discourse to others are organically linked in a seamless continuum' (527). Thus, '*mono no aware* is understood as a *process* of signification', in which the poetic expression does 'not so much represent *mono no aware* as *enact* it' (ibid). Yoda also describes *mono no aware* as 'the empathy of a spectator who identifies with the other without engaging in a relation of exchange or negotiation' (541) and gestures towards Norinaga's notion that the enacting of *mono no aware* in poetry may be compared with a sigh, 'a non-referential affective gesture/response' (ibid).

The mobilisation of the category of *mono no aware* is useful here for a number of reasons. The allusion to the aesthetic in Boku's description of the unicorn skull comes to mind, but more important is the similarity in structure between our analysis of charm and Yoda's analysis of *mono no aware* in the *Genji Monogatari*. Yoda critiques Norinaga's reading of *mono no aware* in the *Genji*, claiming that 'the referentiality of poetic language that Norinaga attempts to erase intervenes into the supposedly seamless linkage among object, subject, and other' (542). In other words, for Yoda, it is simply not the case that the language transparently and spontaneously converts an

affective stance towards an object into poetic form without loss or transformation of meaning. The use of *mono no aware*, the inherent pathos of the skulls bearing the old dreams in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, differs in that Yoda attributes the failure of language in the *Genji* to transparently reflect *mono no aware* to language's own referential structure, but in Murakami's case the inherent pathos of the old dreams has exactly nothing to do with representation whatsoever but rather its absence. The old dreams resist language, representation, narrative totalisation; 'between one fragment and the next there is nothing in common' (*Hard Boiled Wonderland* 184). The images which Boku dream-reads never congeal into a whole, and do not inspire the spontaneous poetry of Norinaga's model of *mono no aware*. And yet these 'these simple scenes summon forth a sadness I can find no words for. Like a ship sailing past a window, they appear only to disappear without a trace' (184). Old dreams inspire in Boku the sense of *mono no aware* precisely by withdrawing from the sphere of language, by disappearing into silence.

A guide to this phenomenon can again be found in Emmanuel Levinas. Consider this comment on the subject of language:

> Language is spoken where community between the terms of the relationship is wanting, where the common plane is wanting or yet to be constituted. It takes place in this transcendence. Discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* "knowledge" or "experience", a *traumatism of astonishment*. The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us.

> (*T&I*, 73)

This conception of language shares some points of marked interest with Yoda's discussion of *mono no aware*. Recall that in Norinaga's model of *mono no aware*, language is a spontaneous enacting of an affective position; a smooth, transparent and unbroken correspondence between the object of language and its poetic expression. Murakami's iteration on the theme of *mono no aware* takes a U-turn and suggests that the inherent pathos of things takes place outside language, in silence. Levinas' comments possess interesting commonalities with both senses of *mono no aware*. Levinas claims that language occurs in the transcendence between relating terms, that discourse is a kind of astonishment by the absolutely foreign: - this suggests *both* Norinaga's and Murakami's presentations of *mono no aware*. With Murakami, as with Levinas, it is absolute foreignness which is at play, an otherness in the old dream which inspires *mono no aware* in quote (1.),'a profound silence, unfathomable, eternal, a disembodied vision cast upon a point in the void'. But like Norinaga's model, Levinas

suggests that the foreign object 'instructs us', i.e. directly, even didactically, produces language.

We need to unpack Levinas' model more to fully appreciate this. Levinas' schema for language is grounded in the experience of the interlocutor in discourse. He calls this experience 'manifestation *καθ'αυτο* [kath'auto]', which 'consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*' (*T&I*, 65). Relating this to his work on light, Levinas notes that 'contrary to all the conditions for the visibility of objects, a being is not placed in the light of another but presents itself in the manifestation that should only announce it; it is present as directing this very manifestation' (*T&I*, 65). Here, the speaking subject is disempowered in the extreme. Instead of a subject who speaks, we have an interlocutor which expresses itself *and even in this expression* remains absolutely foreign, a stranger, threatening to the subject. The interlocutor is not placed in light and given a world in the way the earlier Levinas claimed that light gives a world to all on which it shines. Rather, the interlocutor announces itself, its very announcement *directing* its manifestation to the subject who receives it, yet still withdrawn from the world; not-shone-upon.

We must also note that Levinas here distinguishes between *language* and *representation[19]*. For Levinas, 'in the intelligibility of representation the distinction between me and the object, between interior and exterior, is effaced'. Further, '[representation] is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it' (*T&I*, 124). One more point; 'representation is a pure present' (125), by which Levinas means that representation takes place outside of time in an illusory forgetting of the movement from past to future in which the represented object might have a history or a potentiality. The 'pure present' of representation is a kind of transcendent eternity.

Boku's dreamreading folds together these two forms; language as discourse and representation as pure present. In their silent refusal, their quiet reticence, the skulls of the old dreams are deliberately withheld interiority. The silence which is 'nothingness itself', embodies this interiority, an absence which nevertheless possesses a form, gestured to by the language used in quote (1.). The silence which is 'like smoke' resembles precisely the being which is not placed in light but rather announces itself from a hidden darkness outside a world of light; the old dream enters into discourse by 'offering' itself (quote (7.)). But the pathos of *mono no aware* which comes over Boku

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[19] Though our own use of the terms does not match Levinas', it will still be useful to mark Levinas' distinction.

in the old dreams' presence robs him of, rather than engaging him in, language. This is because the old dreams announce themselves in the form of light; in the form of intentional representation in Levinas' terms – they are an eternal transcendence, pure presence. Even achieving a high proficiency in dreamreading, Boku is unable to intuit any meaning or cohesive picture from the dreams he reads. He wonders whether 'there exist[s] an intractable chasm between my waking time and the dream time of the skulls?' (184). When he finishes reading, 'the old dream returns to its ageless sleep. All the water of vision slips through the fingers and spills to the ground' (184). That the old dreams exist in something resembling a transcendent zone outside time, and that they cannot be perceived but in a pure present which vanishes as soon as the reading finishes, places them in accord with Levinas' model of representation. That this transcendence in representation occurs simultaneously with a withheld silence which commands a wordless pathos, suggests that the source of this transcendence is not identical to Levinas' (thought itself). That the old dreams 'possess' Boku in their address to him, that they call out to him intimately, personally, tenderly, suggests that the transcendence is not a grand transcendence like that of the sublime, but rather a little transcendence more on the scale of the cute. This is what I am calling charm.

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It may be prescient here to pause from our analysis to address the issue of universalism. I have so far proceeded by identifying characteristics of the texts at hand, based on their form and content, examining the texts and the affects I am attributing to them in a relatively abstract way, as if largely unmoored from their socio-historical and cultural backgrounds, their textual histories and authors and oeuvres. Why I have taken this approach should have been clear from my methodology from the outset, but a few points bear further mentioning around universalism, for the criticism remains open: do I not appeal to an abstract universality in my metaphysical model, which erases or elides the historicity of the formulations I describe in the texts? Are there not important particularities to the production of representations of everyday life itself (not to mention other things like gender and class) erased in my appeal to metaphysics?

Rebecca Suter in *The Japanization of Modernity* (2008) argues that there is a 'complicity between particularism and universalism' (33) which serves to sustain a binary relation between the particular and the universal – in her case with Japan standing in for the particular and the USA standing for the universal. The poles of this relation sustain one another by a mutually dependent otherness 'as the only possible alternatives in a binary schema' (ibid). She goes on to contend that Murakami's writing

undermines the universality of any given cultural referent by universalising different elements from different cultures, now treating the Japanese referents and genre tropes as the universal, now the American (95). For her, this serves to foreground 'the relativity not only of the cultural categories but also […] of both Western and Japanese categories of thought' (96).

In the essay '"Nature is Bad Art": Bad Transnationalism from Earthrise to Deep Horizon' (in *Navigating the Transnational in Modern American Literature and Culture*, 33-49), Stephen Ross contends that 'bad' transnationalism functions by producing a universal ground which exposes all the nations subject to its discourse to exploitation. He identifies this universal ground with both 'Romantic or "poetic" nature, and nature as "standing reserve"' (33), and suggests that 'pathetic fallacy – the projection of human feeling onto the non-human world – thus becomes the unifying figure for this equivalency' (34). He suggests that the poetry he examines, like DeLillo's Airborne Toxic Event in *White Noise*, parodies the use of this transnational nature in the way it is both produced by capital and effaces the anthropogenesis of ecological disaster (43).

In these two approaches to universalism in a transnational or intercultural context, in studies of American and Japanese literature alike, the same logic is at work. This logic is the disavowal of universalism as a static ground from which a text may speak. In Suter's case, the universal is critiqued (through Murakami) by reducing it to a relativity, by showing that the universal and particular are both contingent and interdependent positions. In Ross' case, the universal is critiqued (through DeLillo) by attacking the arbitrary construction of a single transnational universal which would subsume all particularities in the form of Nature. My own project's approach differs from the aforementioned primarily because its methodology is not that of critique, and we therefore do not consider it enough to disavow the universal by relativisation or parody. To reiterate a fundament of OOO, if everything is equally an object, a little infinity irreducible to a totalising world, we are in agreement that no all-engulfing universal can be sustained over and above every other being, but *not* because everything is a codependent relativity or because no field of universality exists. Rather, if every thing is equally an object, then *every thing intervenes equally in the field of the universal*. This does not mean that every thing intervenes in the universal in the same way or according to the same teleology, but that each thing, in a certain way, has its own world and reality which makes a claim to universality no less legitimate than any other thing. In conceiving of the works I treat with as objects, I do not reduce them to a philosophical logic found in a western tradition, but free the works from the traditions to which they

might be reduced and allow them to compete equally in a field not moored to national histories or other totalising backgrounds. I elect not to play within the particular-universal binary as if to say there is a particularity to certain historical moments and locations, but a universality to philosophical ideas, but rather than the texts' aesthetics make equal claims to universality which compete in a field of objects no less than any other object. For these reasons, I do not consider my use of metaphysics a reductive universalism as some might suggest.

Faces

Let us resume where we left off. In a remarkable essay in *The Henry James Review*, Neill Matheson identifies charm as a locus around which to read Henry James' identification with his much-admired predecessor and literary giant, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Matheson identifies charm as an 'aesthetic and erotic value' (124), but qualifies that charm seems 'less like an aesthetic object than a speaking subject: it makes demands, it insists on utterance, it embarrasses with its frank confessions' (125). Here again rises a sense in which charm defies the subject/object division of labour sustained by Ngai and Kant which I have repeatedly challenged. The charming object is far from an object in the inert or passive sense. Instead, it is an entity which reaches out for and entices the reader. Matheson also contends that charm 'resists analysis […] because it cannot be readily broken down into its elements, traced to causes, or generalised into more abstract categories' (125). This is due to the dismantling of critical distance Matheson attributes to charm, which for him, necessitates an 'intimate, proximate relation' between the reader and the read object, 'stitched together by a range of identifications and investments' (123). For Matheson, the aesthetic of charm presupposes a vulnerability in the text, an openness to the hostility of the critical reader (134) which simultaneously beckons a more intimate and personal engagement than traditional formal(ist) close reading allows.

The similarities between the aesthetic at play in *Ratner's Star* and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and Matheson's model are startling. Matheson's charming object is as resistive to analysis, withdrawn from discursive reduction, as self-announcing and affectively moving in its vulnerability and presence to the reader as Boku's old dreams are. It will also be fruitful to highlight Matheson's use of the idea of prosopopoeia which is also found in Ngai's cuteness. Prosopopoeia is the giving of face. Ngai develops this notion through Paul de Man whereas Matheson draws it from Walter Benjamin. What is common between the two is that prosopopoeia is conceived of as a kind of animation. For Ngai it is 'an act of endowing a dumb object with

expressive capabilities' (832). For Matheson, it is the 'opening up the circuit of identifications and desires', 'imagining a dialogue or encounter with another […the] transposition of human social responsiveness onto the inanimate' (123). In Ngai's cuteness, particularly the mouthless design of Hello Kitty, giving face is an act of domination which offers the face-given-object enough face to return the subject's gaze, to acquiesce to dominion, but not enough to be included in the realm of language, which, for her, confers agency proper to a subject (832-3). In Matheson's charm, giving face is an invitation of the reader's identification and desire, an intimate and familiar relation across the aesthetic object (in Matheson's case, charm acts as a relation between James and Hawthorne across the aesthetic object of Hawthorne's writing) (133).

There is a vitally important shift here which can be understood if we recall again one of the keystones of our own analysis; Franz Roh's Magic Realism: a 'calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery *that things already have their own faces*' (MR;P-E, 20, emphasis added). Ngai's cuteness does not afford this aspect to objects. In addition to the readings already offered, this should underscore how Ngai's cute cannot apply to *Ratner's Star* or *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* as Magic Realist, and furthermore illustrate that the true source of the domination Ngai finds in the cute is the fixed and permanent difference between subjects and objects, thinkers and things, humans and everything else. Matheson's model of charm goes some way beyond this, according the object of readership the power to seduce, entice, possess, and obsess the reader. But sadly, Matheson falls into the same absolute taxonomy that persists from Kant's metaphysics; the object is *imbued* with a face by the reader, and that face is the face of the imagined author. Though Matheson's charm illustrates clearly the force of the object to act upon its reader, his analysis falls short by situating the source of that force in a human origin, an authorial subjectivity. Matheson goes so far as to claim that 'charm floats free of substance' (130), that it is purely a relational position between two interlocutors *across* the textual object which has nothing to do with the text's own reality or properties. The notion that charm *requires* an intersubjective identification with an author or imagined author is at the very least mistaken since a reader can most certainly be charmed by a novel, short story, poem, or single line of text without an iota of knowledge about its authorship. To deny such would be to deny the essential experience of reading itself – the direct phenomenal connection with the text as it is given. Thus, what constitutes charm for us deviates from Matheson's model insofar as charm is not the granting or giving of a face to some inert or dead thing, but an engagement with the thing's own face.

The misunderstanding of charm, indeed, goes back to Kant himself, who treats with charm in the *Critique of Judgement* as a peripheral additive to aesthetic taste, claiming that 'taste that requires an added element of *charm* and *emotion* for its delight […] has not yet emerged from barbarism' (54); sensuous charm is precisely 'not permitted' in Kant's understanding of beauty (66). For Kant, this barring of charm from the aesthetic realm is predicated upon the need to keep the perceiving subject pure. For Kant, an aesthetic judgement may not be said to grasp beauty or the sublime if it is involved with, has an interest in, or shows any delight in the object of its perception (55). The ground of aesthetic judgement cannot be 'commingled' or even related to the object of the judgement for Kant (55). Yet Kant's idea of charm does contain the claim that charm in nature belongs to 'modifications of light and of sound'; that these sensations guide the subject towards form: the colour of the lily, the song of the bird (131). What is intriguing is that in this understanding of charm, Kant suddenly appears to suggest that non-human, non-thinking, and inanimate objects do and can get directly involved with the viewing subject, having an influence on aesthetic experience by the medium of their representation in light and sound. To sustain his pure subject, Kant has to suggest that the appreciation of nature is actually the appreciation of the reflection upon the form of the modification of the senses. Our reading of charm instead contends that the subject is simply not pure. If we are able to remove the transcendental division of labour between Man and Nature, between mind and thing, between subject and object, and instead suggest that *all objects* have their own faces, masks which possess, obsess, seduce, enthral; which charm, then it is no great violation of metaphysical principle to claim that charm is an aesthetic category which does not require the giving of face or the imagination of an intersubjective experience with another human invested in a dead material lump.

Things Not of This World

The ostensible focus point of *Ratner's Star* is the celestial object known, indeed, as Ratner's star, the source of a message of apparently extraterrestrial origin. The star's identity changes multiple times throughout the novel. A 'common G dwarf' with an orbiting planet (50), a 'yellow dwarf' star with a sister black hole (101), a binary system of red dwarf and white dwarf star (179), planet Earth itself (402) and so on. Ratner's star is a perfect example of what in *Science in Action* (1987) Bruno Latour calls a black box. A black box for Latour is something about which nothing needs to be known save its input and output (2-3). Black boxing can apply to technological artefacts, theoretical models, mathematical theorems, whole institutions, everything from the structure of DNA to the computer quietly working on your desk: 'no matter how controversial their

history, how complex their inner workings, how large the commercial or academic networks that hold them in place, only their input and output count' (3). To rephrase in a way Latour would not, a black box is an entity which participates in the world (receives inputs and exerts outputs) but whose internal constituents are irrelevant to that participation. Ratner's Star is a quintessential black box in this sense. A number of individuals in the novel express this exact opinion on the star; that the nature of Ratner's Star itself is entirely unimportant (eg 274).

David Cowart reads this novel as a systematic mocking of scientific reductionism built upon the medium of language ("More Advanced the Deeper we Dig", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 606). For Cowart, the failure of Field Experiment Number One's scientific community to produce any correspondence between reality and their modes of interpreting reality, embodied in the ambiguous Ratner's Star and its celestial message, is an artefact of '*différance*, the gossamer shadow never to be rent. What could be more terrible than this estrangement from the real, this exile in a Symbolic Order that mathematics, however pure, can never circumvent?' (616). Such a reading strikes us as peculiar when we consider the metaphysical complexity of *Ratner's Star* we have identified and its phenomenological attention to light, shadow, spatiality, and 'the surface of fixed things', where it dwells with relish in more episodes than that of Una Braun. When we couple this with the notion of the black box, it would be bizarre to suggest that the entirety of the blockage between reality and knowledge resides in the structure of language.

For those who remain sceptical about the possibility of reading the black box model into *Ratner's Star*, consider these words from Endor, Billy's predecessor in attempting to decode the celestial message: 'The importance of the message from Ratner's star, *regardless of content*, is that it will tell us something of importance about ourselves' (91). And these words from Hoad (another of the motley crew assigned to Field Experiment Number One) on the first discovery that Ratner's Star is a binary star system: 'It doesn't affect things at all and in practical terms it means next to nothing' (93). And again: 'We agree the message exists. […] One star or two, the message is not negated' (95). As explicitly as possible, DeLillo's novel tells the reader that the content of the objects of scientific enquiry simply need not be known. These objects act and are acted upon in the world regardless of their causal histories, inner workings and conditions of possibility which are almost irrelevant to their participation in reality.

Conversely, Cowart interprets these words, in their failure to link reality and knowledge, and their entrapment in the hermeneutic circle of language, as a prophecy

of 'an appalling breakdown, the collapse, even, of scientific pretensions to understanding of the phenomenal world' (604). He even contends that the novel dramatises a grand decline

> in which science and mathematics surrender their vaunted
> precision to enter the messy realm always already occupied by
> art and the humanities, the realm of imprecision in which
> history and literature and philosophy have, these many
> centuries, taken their solitary way.

(ibid)

But what is so peculiar is that such a simplistic sciences and maths vs literature and arts binarism simply doesn't appear in the text itself. While many of the characters embodying the institutions and practices of the sciences are satirical and comical, few are presented as opposed to the arts and humanities, or morally and intellectually heinous in other ways. Dated as it is, Jonathan Swift's Lagado academy in *Gulliver's Travels* poses a much more savage indictment of the follies of the scientific method than DeLillo's novel. The figures DeLillo presents are eccentric, idiosyncratic, by turns threatening, vulnerable, possibly psychologically or physically unwell, and altogether possessed of an odd and off-kilter charm for the reader. The scientific community is not presented as a privileged access mode to reality, but the novel does not privilege the humanities either. This bias stems yet again from the Kantian division of labour between subject and object, which manifests in Cowart's reading as a division between 'Idea and reality, signifier and signified, word and thing, language and the world' (616), all idiomatic variants of an absolute incommensurability between something *human* on the one hand and something *natural* on the other.

It would be easy to forget, in our torrential and unbridled assault Kant's transcendental split between subject and object, that our philosophical foundation in OOO *accepts* the Kantian contention that there is a division between the phenomenal and the noumenal, between things as they appear and things-in-themselves; the notion of finitude (Harman, *Dante's Hammer*, 241). OOO simply holds that finitude is not limited to the intersection between the human mind and the external world, but rather belongs to the confrontation between anything whatsoever. Reminding us of this guards against a certain misinterpretation which our response to Cowart invites. Namely: why not simply erase the difference between idea and reality, signifier and signified, if this supposedly artificial division is the root of the problem? Why not interpret *Ratner's Star*, particularly its final denouement in which the message from Ratner's star is discovered to actually originate from Earth, in *relational terms*? Might it not be fruitful

to mobilise the work of such a philosopher as Karen Barad, whose philosophy foregrounds notions of entanglement such that:

> Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the "phenomenon." Objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part.

(Dolphijn & Van Der Tuin, "Interview with Karen Barad", *New Materialism*, 52)

Barad calls this 'agential realism', in which agency exists as of configuration of possibilities in a subject and object's 'intra-action' (a term designed to oppose 'inter-action'). In Barad's work 'there are no agents per se' (ibid 55). If we read the denouement of *Ratner's Star* in this light, might we not conclude that the novel gestures towards this kind of entanglement, a dissolution of the difference between subject and object in which the most alien of the alien, a literal message from outer space, reveals itself to be inseparably bound up with and even originating from the human activity with which it is caught in intra-action?

This method would surely prove fruitful, but the reasons for which I oppose it are clear. Barad's agency-without-agents may interestingly describe aspects of DeLillo's text and the formal circularity it develops in the way the central object of scientific enquiry loops back on the enquirers themselves, implicating the reader as well in this process of intra-action. However, this reading's dissolution of all individual entities into one agential field of potential is not, in my view, as productive a reading as the approach I take to the text and the aesthetic mode it engages.

Holes

Let's return to the text. Any reading of *Ratner's Star* must address its preoccupation with hermetically sealed, dark, literally and metaphorically isolated spaces. Places that relate, but also do not relate. They are not determined by some interaction in advance. Examples abound:

We have already mentioned the elevator ride near the beginning of the novel, remarkably similar to the elevator ride which opens *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. This is the first of many enclosures, capsules, holes, *boxes* which are 'deprived of the natural language of the continuous' (16). Billy's room for the first half of the novel is known as a 'canister'; windowless, soundproofed, with walls 'distorted by [a] concave topography' such that the room seems 'largely devoid of vertical and horizontal reference points'

(17). In this canister 'the lighting was indirect, coming from a small carbon-arc spotlight focused on a reflecting plate above it' (ibid). This room is hidden within 'a series of subcorridors that ended at the mouth of a masonite labyrinth' (ibid). Again, this is remarkably similar to the opening of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* in its disorientation of open continuous *space* into Escherine sealed-off *place*, particularly foregrounded in the concave, *inward-reflecting* topography of the room. When we consider the room's lighting, we find an effect similar to the description of Una Braun. In Una's case, light played the role of simultaneous illumination and distortion – here, in the hermetically sealed interior of Billy's canister which is not directly lit, but rather reflected upon, light dislocates the room from its surroundings, separating it from horizontal and vertical orientation. To re-apply Levinas' use of light, while light makes objects into a world, this room is only *indirectly* lit. In other words, this inwardly-curved room, topologically severed from spatial dimensions, is in part outside light and hence, outside the world.

Endor lives in a hole within a hole, a hole dug within the floor of a pit dug outside Field Experiment Number One. 'The second hole was a concealed entity, a truer than usual pit', distinguished from subways and tunnels by its refusal to lead toward, or act as a passageway for anything. A sealed-off place alien to light, traversal, and language, withheld from the world, but present in the world; 'it evoked only: *second hole*. Untraveled territory. Nothing to picture. No noise to imagine' (86).

Members of a Honduran Cartel identify Billy as 'maker of sums […], betaken to the night hole where names exceedingly marked as sacred will be no more forbidden of usage' (148). They also call him 'a thing deprived of living existenz'; 'Beyond the final number you'll find nothing to cling to but existenzphilosophie. In your case philosophie will have to suffice since you possess no existenz' (149). Thus, pure mathematics (Billy's specialist area is 'zorgs', numbers which 'are useless' and apply to nothing outside mathematics (20)) is conceived of as a dark enclosure, a night hole, a place outside language, full of unspeakable names, deprived of existenz.

The second part of the novel, Reflections, moves underground to Logicon Project Minus One, a subterranean architectural inversion of Field Experiment Number One. Known as the 'antrum', the cave belonging to prophetess Sybil of Cumae in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this 'hole in the ground' (282) serves the purpose of constructing a complete and pure 'transgalactic language[,] pure and perfect mathematical logic[,] a means of speaking to the universe' (274). The workspace of antrum personnel embodies universal communicability – close to a parody of an open-

plan office; 'a series of cubicles for working and sleeping. [...A] first-aid room, a kitchen, a primitive toilet, some field telephones. Everything was set on a slightly curved surface' (283). But though this space aspires, in purpose and in physical form, to engender a smooth gradient of loss-free intelligibility across all its parts, its very name undercuts this possibility. The oracle Sybil, like those inheriting the name of her antrum in Logicon Project Minus One, wished to escape her finitude and live forever, and was sealed in a jar issuing nothing more than a voice. Conceiving of the antrum in this way sheds a wholly different light on its gently curving surface, which holds nothing above but darkness (283). Logicon does not escape the inwardness of its enclosure, the underground hole, *ampulla* in which it finds itself. Billy later reconstructs for himself a canister made of a blanket draped over a table, a cubicle within his cubicle. Placing himself within this place, box within a box, Billy gains the sense that 'between himself and his idea of himself there was an area of total silence' (361) and again; 'there is something in the space between what I know and what I am and what fills this space is what I know there are no words for' (370). This is non-communicability, non-relation, darkness, silence, holes.

From the start of the novel, shadows leak through and under the walls of Field Experiment Number One, the trail of that which withdraws from the world hugging the light of discovery (20, 21, 22, 24, 29, 31).

The Great Hall is actually called the Great Hole (204).

The model of relativity which predominates in *Ratner's Star* is called Moholean relativity. Its key tenet is that 'in a Mohole the laws of physics vary from one observer to another. [...] In the value-dark dimension the laws are not equally binding in all frames of reference' (185). A mohole is strictly not something which can be disclosed within the realm of human knowledge or language (181). Moholes are outside the worlds of light, sound, representation, and discourse; 'it's as though the Mohole were a surface that absorbs light and sound and then reflects either or both to another part of the universe', except strictly speaking, is not a surface, is not absorptive, and lacks both spatial extent and temporality (181). Moholean relativity allows for a universe with 'an indefinite number of bottoms' (182), which is to say that moholes, entities which absorb phenomena on their surface and redirect them to other parts of the universe, or, *translate them* in time and space, are also entities which contain a possible infinite regress on their insides. Their reality is 'value-dark'. And they are *holes*; enclosures, something like shapes, the interiors of which are inscrutable even as they take in and emit effects into the world; black boxes.

When it is revealed the message from Ratner's Star actually originated from Earth, Earth is at the same time revealed to be 'mohole-intense', value-dark, within an entity which contains an infinite regress of entities – 'an indefinite number of bottoms'. Earth is said to be in a realm bursting at the seams with objects which are in part withheld from the world; each confronting and translating the laws of reality as its own frame of reference, its own Mohole (410). Remarkably, the tool used to discover the moholean nature of Earth is the zorg, Billy's useless, purely abstract numbers, which by definition do not take part in application, in the world of use-value. Zorgs do not act as blueprints or descriptors here, but as intermediary objects, identifying moholes by *translating* between them and the phenomenal world: 'the discrete-continuous quality of zorgs is what really helped us work out the necessary mathematics of Moholean relativity' (418). Zorgs do not play an explanatory role, but an *aesthetic* one.

Rob Softly, Billy's mentor wonders 'if an object too dense to release light is any *purer* for the experience. Does it rank as a sort of Everyobject?' Moholean relativity demonstrates (to Softly's devastation) the answer is no. An object withheld from the world of light is not *pure*; it retains its relations to its parts and the world, labyrinthine as those relations may be. An object withheld from the world does not rank as an everyobject; it remains absolutely and inalienably what it is. In a mohole, which turns out to be reality as we (in part) know it, 'the entire field of reality is laced with infinity'; 'if any object is inexhaustible by any set of its relations or qualities, then the thing is always elsewhere than the world, meaning that in some sense the thing is otherworldly' (Harman, *Phenomena and Infinity*). *Ratner's Star*, as a novel, is a moholean relativity, laced with sealed spaces, black boxes, which themselves contain infinities of sealed realities, cut off from, endarkened in the face of the world. The novel, in my reading, is not *relational* in the sense of relations, flows, events, and fluxes taking metaphysical priority over things. The novel is *relativistic* in the sense that things *relate* across their mutual withdrawal; things engage in a world together even as they remain otherworldly. The novel's concerns are not the confrontation between the sciences and humanities, the human world and the natural, but between the communicable and the inexpressible, the hidden and the revealed, the worldly, and the otherworldly. This is why the sciences are portrayed more *akin to* than *against* the humanities. After all, the most avant-garde of the sciences and maths in *Ratner's Star* flirt with the mythic/religious forms of the Kabbalah, the poetic/oral forms of the aboriginal dreamtime and philosophical and metaphysical forms as far back as western culture can remember. The fact that entities may only confront each others' reality through an aesthetic act of translation, as black-boxes unmoored from any binding logic, simply serves to underscore the Magic Realism we find in DeLillo's writing, the mode which

pays attention to and foregrounds a 'calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces' (*Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism*, 20), an 'attempting to locate *infinity* in small things' (ibid, 27).

The Second Basement

Through our analysis of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, we have established that charm is close to, but essentially different from, the notion of prosopopeia used by Matheson and Ngai. Charm is not the giving of face to something inanimate. Rather, it is a condition in which things guide the senses and perceptions, as in Kant's description of the colour of lilies or birdsong, not dissimilar to the way Levinas describes the interlocutor in discourse: 'a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*' (*T&I*, 65). Through our examination of *Ratner's Star*, we have seen that how things express themselves, how they face and confront one another, takes on a spatial logic. Things call to each other from opaque surfaces, black boxes, or take in signals and emit them from dark and indefinitely bottomed holes, the depths of which it is impossible to plumb. The universe is shot through with moholes – with little transcendencies which, in spite of their otherworldliness, exert an attraction, a guidance, a distorting, a bewitching of the senses (the human senses simply the closest-to-home example of a referential frame in any interaction between things). Charm's spatialised logic is a calling out across a finite yet intractable distance. It is this spatialisation to which we now turn.

In Harman's OOO, space is defined as the relation between 'concealed real objects and the sensual qualities associated with them'; a site of both 'relation and non-relation' between real things withheld from the world and the unmoored sensual emissions of perceptual reality (Harman, *Quadruple*, 100). The other name for this relation is allure, the breakdown of the bond between an entity and its myriad traits and qualities (Harman*, GM*, 141). Allure, for Harman, the spatial relation between withdrawn things and sensual qualities, is the emblematic example of the structure of *causation* in the early OOO (*GM*, 172). It should also be noted that Harman identifies humour as a *subset* of charm (*GM*, 141) and charm as one kind of allure (142). What is the relation then precisely between *space, charm*, and causality – the structure of *change* – in the spatial logic of our novels under reading here?

There is a famous spatial metaphor widely known in the reading of Murakami's work, employed no more emblematically than in the work of Matthew Strecher. Here is Murakami's view in full:

> I think of human existence as being like a two-storey house. On the first floor[20] people gather together to take their meals, watch television and talk. The second floor contains private chambers, bedrooms where people go to read books, listen to music by themselves, and so on. Then there is a basement; this is a special place, and there are a number of things stored here. We don't use this room much in our daily life, but sometimes we come in, vaguely hang around the place. Then, my thought is that underneath that basement room is yet another basement room. This one has a very special door, very difficult to figure out, and normally you can't get in there – some people never get in at all.... You go in, wander about in the darkness, and experience things there you wouldn't see in the normal part of the house. You connect with your past there, because you have entered into your own soul. But then you come back. If you stay over there for long you can never get back to reality.

> (Murakami, qtd in Strecher, 21)

Strecher interprets Murakami's model as follows: 'the ground and second floors represent consciousness, the physical realm, clearly enough'. The two basement levels are metaphysical (Strecher's use of the term 'metaphysical' differs wildly from OOO's), the upper basement representing memory and dreaming, the lower standing for what Strecher calls 'narrative' or the individual's core identity. Strecher goes on to add 'plumbing' to Murakami's house, an inflow and outflow of psychic data, connecting the lower basement level to what he calls '*the* Narrative', a notion analogous to Carl Jung's collective unconscious, a repository for the universal archetypes of mankind's psychological being (76). This understanding of Murakami's four-storied house leads Strecher to read the paired narratives of *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* as symbolic analogues to the conscious and unconscious mind (49), the novel a parable about the dangers of losing contact with one's collective (and cultural) unconscious, the ending, in which Boku elects to remain in the Town rather than escape with his shadow 'apocalyptic' (94).

Our reading cannot follow Strecher's, as his psychological reading and his need to make this psychology part of a universal flow in his notion of *the* Narrative or collective unconscious, is untenable in our interpretation of Murakami's aesthetics and metaphysics. To show how our reading differs, we must look again at Murakami's four-storied structure in the light of our spatialised understanding of charm.

It will be to no reader's surprise at this stage to discover that Graham Harman's OOO contains a fourfold structure in which *space* plays an extraordinarily important role. In

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[20] Note that in Japanese domestic conventions there is no *ground* floor. It is typical instead to refer to the bottom floor of a dwelling as first floor.

The Quadruple Object most explicitly, but spanning his whole oeuvre, Harman outlines his four-part model of ontology split into real objects, sensual objects, real qualities, and sensual qualities. We will reiterate certain key points for the sake of clarity. The elements under discussion here will be not the four poles themselves, but the criteria under which they are divided. For there are only two axes of division which will be of interest: the hidden / revealed and the determined / determining. For Harman's OOO, the real / sensual division is essentially a division between that which is hidden and revealed, or that which is private and public. That which is real, as will be familiar by now, is that which is hidden, withheld, irreducible beyond knowledge or praxis. The real in Harman is not dissimilar to (though with certain caveats we don't need to go into here[21]) our interpretation of Latour's black box; that which exists in the world independently of its inputs and outputs. The sensual, by contrast, is the revealed, the supremely public, that which *only* exists in expression, in perception, in translation. A sensual object or sensual quality *only* exists in a relational way; the sensual is contingent upon relation itself. Another way of parsing this is to say that the real is non-relational and the sensual is relational. The other axis is between objects and qualities where objects are determined and qualities are determining. This is to say that objects are fixed, concrete, finite, absolute, and stuck on their identity. This is true even of sensual objects which retain their finite character despite their contingency upon perception. Qualities, by contrast, are determining. This is to say that qualities are what determine, fix, separate, differentiate, and identify objects. The complexity is that since there are both real and sensual qualities and real qualities are by-definition withdrawn, it is impossible to know whether a quality attached to an object is real or sensual. In other words, one cannot be certain whether a quality is an essential defining characteristic of an object or a transient peripheral effect it is merely having on the world at a given moment. This aside, one might parse this division as follows: objects possess unity and hence identity, where qualities are a plurality which identify the objects to which they are attached. Full details of Harman's system are best illustrated in *The Quadruple Object* chapter 5 part D (78), and chapter 9 (124).

I have drawn attention to these axes of division because of how well they map onto Murakami's model of the four-storey house. Through this lens, we can see that Murakami's model also splits its four storeys along two axes, one of which is shared almost without any variation with Harman's model. The hidden / revealed, or private / public axis runs through both models unambiguously. Of the upper floors of Murakami's model, one is private (the bedrooms), the other public (the living and

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[21] Harman gives an illuminating treatment of his assessment of this period of Latour's work and his differences with it with Manuel DeLanda in *The Rise of Realism* (see 134, for example)

hosting rooms). Of the lower floors, again, one is concealed (the second basement, a room almost impossible to access and unfathomably dark even when accessed), and the other revealed (the first basement, a storage space full of relatively easy-to-access things and memories). The second axis is more difficult to identify in Murakami's model, but can be discerned when we look at the *contents* of each floor. We can see that the two upper floors contain humans, which is to say that that which is held on those floors is participating in those floors. In other words, those floors may be considered floors full of black boxes – floors full of things busily going about their business, busily being whatever it is they are in the world. These are floors where things happen, where things enter into relations with one another. The two lower floors lie largely uninhabited and ultimately do not contain any things which are active in the world. They are storage floors. In other words, these floors resemble in *interiors* of a black box, or in Harman's terminology, the interiors of objects, where a multiplicity of qualities are stored away. That these two floors are associated with memory and identity is apt, since in Harman's OOO, qualities are precisely what *identify* an object, what differentiate and determine it as what it is. Thus we can see that Murakami's two lower floors are repositories for qualities, for memories, sensations, ephemera, parts, and pieces, which is precisely how they constitute identity.

With this reading, we can remove Strecher's addition of plumbing, which now only appears necessary if we need to connect the house to other houses – a prejudice which belongs to Strecher's method which depends upon the notion of reality as constituted by language itself, and hence requires some kind of linguistic channel of communication to be open at all times for anything to meaningfully exist (Strecher, 24). It may be objected that Strecher's plumbing is necessary to allow input and output in an otherwise sealed model of existence, but within the model there is already plenty of room for the influx and export of other entities and qualities through the public first floor and first basement where it is already explicit that exchange of all sorts occurs. Murakami's four-storey house is a model of human existence in an Object-Oriented vein. The object exists in a world, privately (bedroom, as real object) and publically (living space, as sensual object). It exists in some sense refusing relation, hidden away in its own room, and in some sense deployed in relation, carrying out its business in its daily life. The lower floors store metaphysical clutter, some hidden (second basement, real qualities) and some apparent (first basement, sensual qualities). This metaphysical basement clutter lends identity to an object, but an object may not know for sure which clutter is really its identifying qualities, since even in the easily accessible first basement, we only 'vaguely hang around'; it's not as if we have an encyclopaedic filing

system down there, let alone the opacity of the second basement. Once again, the two axes at play are private / public and something in the world / something in the thing.

A curious point that bears mentioning is that Murakami envisages this model as a home, a dwelling-place. In *The Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard treats with houses, homes, and dwellings extensively, but begins from a kind of primordial home, a home of daydreams he calls 'the oneirically definitive house' (13). Such a house in Bachelard, 'must retain its shadows', which is to say they 'do not readily lend themselves to description' (ibid), a phrase immediately redolent of the Object-Oriented / Magic Realist / Benjaminian understanding of aesthetics and translation that has been the keystone of this work. The house Bachelard finds in his phenomenological method is one which refuses direct and empirical disclosure. It is a house which demands an understanding of reading and writing practice such that 'all we communicate to others is an *orientation* towards what is secret without even being able to tell the secret objectively [in the traditional subject-object sense of the word]' (13); 'we have to induce in the reader a state of suspended reading' (14). The methodological similarity here is strong enough to already make Bachelard's house interesting to us, but there are other aspects which will be useful. For, central to Bachelard's thesis is the notion that 'inhabited space transcends geometric space' (47). While Bachelard doesn't appear to intend this statement to mean any more than the notion that an inhabited space is laden with memory and lived experience which transforms it *for the (human) inhabitor*, we might mine more from this comment than Bachelard foresaw.

Recall the particular ways in which *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*'s and *Ratner's Star*'s opening elevator rides are described. The opening of the doors of the apparently extra-spatial lift which carries Murakami's Watashi is described as 'the linking of two spaces previously denied accessible continuity by means of those very doors' (6). The lift which carries DeLillo's Billy is 'deprived of the natural language of the continuous' (16). While both of these notions illustrate a transcendence of geometric space in the way Bachelard gestures towards, neither of these descriptions are suggestive of the notion that geometric space is transcended because of or in relation to the one who inhabits it. Rather, the continuity of space itself is what is called into question; the suggestion is not made that being unable to perceive beyond the walls of the closed elevator makes space non-continuous *for the elevator's riders*, but rather that space in-itself is not continuous but severed, split, and discretely apportioned according to the objects between which it forms a relation.

This reading recalls two of our phenomenologist companions in Heidegger and Levinas. Most famously in 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger develops a notion of space in which 'spaces receive their essential being from locales and not from "space"' (*Basic Writings*, 250). This notion, like Bachelard's, resists the interpretation of 'space as extensio' in which space might be described by 'a mathematical construction of manifolds', a space which 'contains no spaces and no places' (250-1). A locale is a site, a thing, for Heidegger, which gathers what he calls the fourfold of being. In gathering the fourfold, it makes room for, or preserves a space. What is important for us is that space belongs to *things* and exists *because of* things, rather than things existing *in* space. This is because, for Heidegger, 'the fundamental character of dwelling is [...] sparing', by which he means 'when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it specifically to its essential being, when we "free" it in the proper sense of the word into a preserve of peace' (246); 'when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves' (251). Thus, to be in the world and dwell amongst things is to be in a spatial relation *directed by the things themselves*. Space is something opened up, made room for, and given by and through things. The relation even to something physically far away is a spatial relation brought on by the thing itself. The coordinates of a thing and the relation between things is of the essence of things for Heidegger, not an aspect of things *in* space.

Levinas presents a model close to, but also arrayed against, Heidegger's. Levinas contends that 'dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated by relation to my dwelling' (*T&I*, 153). A few further comments from Levinas will make his point clear: 'the consciousness of a world is already consciousness *through* that world. Something of that world seen is an organ or an essential means of vision' (ibid); 'the [...] role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in its sense of commencement' (152); 'all "implements" besides their utility as means in view of an end, admit of an immediate interest' (152). For our purposes and our Object-Oriented reading, which deviates from the orthodox readings of Levinas and Heidegger, what stands out are the following points: First, like Bachelard and Heidegger, Levinas proposes a notion of dwelling, which is to say he proposes a spatial relation to the world which is not objective in the traditional sense of the term; inert, brute, calculable, extension *in* space. Space is thus that *through which* a world appears, not an empty container *in which* the world sits. A priority is given to the world and the things of the world – space belongs to these things; this is what it means for Levinas to say that 'something of [the] world seen is an organ or an essential means of vision'; things are prior to space and to dwelling. This is also how we may interpret his idea that the home is not an end, but the condition of

human activity; the things in which we dwell do not all fit into a total diagram of purposes, subordinate to usage, but are the condition for dwelling and embarking on use and purpose. This is underscored by his comment on implements, which is again reminiscent of the Magic Realist notion that things have their own faces. It is here Levinas writes most overtly against Heidegger:

> [If] in the relation with the non-I of the world it inhabits, the I is produced as self-sufficiency and is maintained in an instant torn up from the continuity of time, dispensed from assuming or refusing a past, it does not benefit from this dispensation by virtue of a privilege enjoyed from eternity. The veritable position of the I in time consists in interrupting time by punctuating it with beginnings. This is produced in the form of action.

(*T&I*, 143).

Levinas persistently objects to the notion of the human as thrown into the world as a diagram of finalities in network of potentialities subordinated to time, his reading of Heidegger's question of the meaning of being in *Being and Time*. This is why he constantly refers to things as *not* a system of ends and also why it is so important in his writing to mention things outside, transcending, and torn up from time. The long passage above makes clear this point, as well as reinforcing the idea that the I is *dependent* on its world and its things in which it dwells. The I 'lives from' (143) things, but in living from and being dependent on them, it is independent of them in 'being at home with itself' amongst them (ibid).

We have then, a conception of space developed through homes and dwellings, in which dwellings or dwelt-in-spaces transcend geometric space by retaining secrets which can only be oriented to and never disclosed (Bachelard). Things themselves make room for a space, indeed *are* space in the sense that the relation between things may be considered a thing in OOO, and things relate to one another even outside of physical reach, producing the intervening space, a zone of relation and non-relation (Heidegger). Space is also that upon which things are dependent to act in the world (making the classic Object-Oriented move of extending what Levinas limits to humans to all things). Insofar as things dwell amongst other things in the relation known as space, they 'live from' those things, each facing each other, resistant to each other, and in this friction of relation and non-relation, inhabiting a world.

How do these spatial relations play out in our texts? In *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the secret to Watashi's proficiency at information laundering and his ability to perform the technique of information shuffling is the result of surgical

experimentation and innate psychological makeup. While the process of shuffling is literally the passing of data through the shuffler's core identity (of which even they are unaware), a movement which translates the information according to a completely unknown and irreproducible ruleset, this process is repeatedly described in spatial terms as a movement from inside to outside and back, or depth to surface and back, obscurity to light and back. The difference between core identity and surface consciousness is said to be like the difference between a watermelon's pulp and rind, the work of reason like attempting to access the pulp by piercing the rind with sewing needles (113). The work of shuffling is to separate rind and pulp, and to dive from one to the other. The descent into the pulp is described as 'a sea of chaos into which you submerge empty-handed and from which you resurface empty-handed' (114). We can clearly see the logic of inside-outside here at play with the logic of the hidden and the revealed, identity and identified from Murakami's four-storey house.

But notice also that this logic takes a very specific form, repeating a metaphor touched upon at the very beginning of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*: that of the watermelon. We examined the use of the watermelon at the beginning of this chapter as a way in which Murakami's text placed a frame within a frame, disrupted the totality of a narrative image by mixing different representational registers into a 'nostalgic yet impossible pastiche of sentiments' (9). The watermelon appears as a recurring motif in the text, always concurrent with the interjection of one representational frame in another, or one *world* into another. The core identity, called a 'black box' repeatedly in the novel ['even without you knowin', you function as yourself. That's your black box' (256)], cannot be accessed willingly or known, but rather must be called up or descended into by means of stimulant sensations; smells, sounds, or visualisations; the smell of watermelons in Watashi's case (265). Watashi's core identity is in fact given a full representation in The End of the World section of the novel. Strictly speaking however, the End of the World, its Town and its characters are not Watashi's core identity as such, but a mediating form given to it, a model put together through a process not unlike film editing (262). It is a framing, a giving form to, an arrangement of, an *aesthetic* rendering of his inaccessible core identity. The novel comes to a head upon Watashi's realisation that, through a series of circumstances beyond his control, his core identity is on track to stop relating to his waking consciousness entirely, his being itself split into completely alternative and unrelated channels, the aestheticised End of the World now set to run permanently, his waking self no longer attached to any core identity, unmoored in a realm of detached sensation. In other words, the aesthetic form of Watashi's core identity is set to replace his actual core identity as the black box of his being.

This adds a weird twist to the model of space from our phenomenologists. The End of the World's Town is, as Bachelard says it should be as a dwelling place, an old place, full of old secrets, in a rural setting directly opposed to the modern urbanity which Watashi inhabits as a transient (Bachelard, 45). It is also surrounded by a foreboding woods (144-5) and is lived in the novel through a harsh winter (167). These are symbols of the non-I in dwelling in Bachelard, the winter intensifying the intimacy of the inhabitation of space (Bachelard, 40-1), the forest an immediate immensity of depth, a depth of time which stands 'before-us' as opposed to 'with-us' (186, 188). The town itself is split into halves by a river running east to west, crossed by a number of bridges. As Heidegger says of bridges: 'the banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other' (*Basic Writings*, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', 248); so too do the bridges in Boku's town cause the halves of the town to stand as halves of the same whole, coordinated around a central plaza, a pair of half circles arrayed as opposites, the north 'heavy with an air of mystery, laden with the silence of the surrounding quarter', the south 'adrift in a vague sense of loss' (*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, 37). Of note also is that the town has a deep pool at its far south border where the river reaches its terminus. This pool, though calm of surface, contains a malign, 'cursed' water which 'calls out to people', and a hidden whirlpool, not unlike a draining plughole, in its depths (121-2). This does not, however, lead to a purely negative oblivion, but is rumoured to lead to a set of caverns, 'great halls where the lost wander forever in darkness' (122).

Again, Murakami's fourfold house is at play, or rather, its key two axes are at play; the hidden / revealed axis and the identity / identifier axis. The north half of the town is analogous to the private top floor of Murakami's house with its mysteries, secrets, and relatively larger number of private households (37). The south half is analogous to the public first floor living space, home to an industrial sector, workers' quarters and a network of canals, a system of exchange, interchange, commerce, and public life (65). The forest functions as the first basement of Murakami's house, acting, as Bachelard notes, as a repository of time, of history, of memories. The deep pool and the caverns beneath serve as the town's equivalent of Murakami's second basement (the cellar is 'the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces', as Bachelard says (18)), a zone dangerous to access but nonetheless a ground upon which identity is founded, a reality we 'live from', Levinas might say.

The twist here is that Watashi only accesses his core identity, the End of the World part of his reality, through *the qualities* of things. For it is not a whole, actual watermelon

which summons him into his black boxed inner world, but rather it is a particular profile of a sensual watermelon, the scent, 'reminiscent of standing in a melon patch on a summer's morn'. Even when deliberately activating a dive into his core identity for the purpose of shuffling, this is achieved through a pre-recorded audio cue, signals set on a tape (116), completely disembodied, qualities apart from objects. In other words, it is through the faces that objects wear, the masks and facades which confront perception in the world of aesthetics and translation which Watashi is granted access to his own inner reality. It is through this comportment towards reality, not quite Heidegger's letting things be in their essence, not quite Levinas' living-from things, but a *being charmed*, a being beckoned and in a sense bewitched or cursed that one gets to participate, even unknowingly, in influencing, transforming, and acting on their core identity.

In Dreams Begins Responsibility

In *Circus Philosophicus*, Graham Harman argues for the existence of what he calls a 'dormant object'. Such an object takes no part in the world. While many networks of relations, historical, physical, imaginary, or illusory may constitute it, it itself takes part in no further relations. If we recall that in OOO all relation is characterised as aesthetic relation, a kind of indirect and allusory contact, then it will explain Harman's contention that any entity which engages in no relation, perceiving nothing, enters a perfect state of sleep (*Circus Philosophicus*, 74). *Aesthesis* means sensation or perception. Sleeping means to perceive nothing. If all relation is aesthetic, the dormant or sleeping object is that which engages in relation with nothing in the world whatsoever. Harman makes clear that this perfect sleep is not identical to the death of an object. The sleeping object does not vanish from the world as such (73). A bizarre consequence of this dormancy is that while a thing sleeps, its pieces, the very qualities which make it up, take on the role of relating to its environment on its behalf. One thinks of a vehicle sitting unused on a driveway, a computer stripped of its connection to a power source and network, a pen laying inkless in a pocket, a sword resting in its sheath. Harman goes on to argue that sleep, as withdrawal from relation, while liberating objects from reduction to a mechanistic model of all-encompassing or deterministic relationism, remains a state of *unfreedom*, a kind of entombment within one's own being; one cannot be other than one is (75). '[Even] without you knowin', you function as yourself', as Murakami has it. Harman also holds, as the obverse of this argument, that therefore an object's freedom, its capacity to engage in new realities, to act in the world, to begin anew, to have a causal effect and *change*, is dependent upon its pieces, the qualities which constitute it and upon which it relies, from which it lives

(74-5). When an object sleeps its pieces go out into the world alone, like that nostalgic scent which summons Watashi, vague recollections and sensations which take ahold of and charm, like déjà vu of something misplaced in a dream. Harman's later theory of symbiosis (that the growth, development, maturing, and *changes* in the life cycle of an object are dependent upon the key other objects which it takes as its essential parts (*Immaterialism*, 42-50)) recalls this quaint notion derived from dormancy, given voice in one of his least-read texts.

<div align="center">***</div>

Every major character in *Ratner's Star* who comes to understand the message from Ratner's Star, aka Earth, retreats from the world. Billy under his table, Endor into his hole, Softly at the finale into Endor's hole-within-hole, all of them fleeing into one or another second basement of being. What they are looking for in that darkness, lying in subterranean dormancy is precisely what is offered to the reader in the novel's closing passage. A boy, perhaps Billy, pedals a tricycle in the halo of an unscheduled eclipse. He rings the tricycle's bell:

> It made no sound, or none that he could hear, laughing as he
> was, alternately blank and shadow-banded, producing as he was
> this noise resembling laughter, expressing vocally what
> appeared to be a compelling emotion, crying out as he was,
> gasping into the stillness, emitting as he was this series of
> involuntary shrieks, particles bouncing in the air around him,
> the reproductive dust of experience.

<div align="right">(Ratner's Star, 438).</div>

This figure is entirely unsubjectivised, described in the abstract, a thing moving in the world, something participating, but whose inner life is entirely elided by the text's refusal to present it to the reader. He is a black box, something making noise, appearing to express, emitting involuntary signals from his very being. What he emits are qualities, disembodied perceptions, shades and impressions, waves of aesthetics into the ether, 'the reproductive dust of experience'. We are given to recall the reason Billy, and we as readers vicariously, were summoned, or indeed charmed into the novel to start with. A signal, a disembodied voice, something which had a face of its own which called out to us, a message from the stars, Ratner's Star, which bewitched the entire contents of this fictional narrative into a brand new reality. The flight of these characters into darkness and somnolence is not merely a flight from, but a fervent seeking. For, in a world of black boxes, where mohole-intense reality causes laws to vary from one perceiver, one aesthetic object to another, it is only in darkness, outside the 'fool's rule of total radiance' (438), that one can begin again, act in the world as

lived-from, perceive the faces in the shade and, charmed, *descend to the surfaces of fixed things*.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Just as in *Ratner's Star*'s self-reflexive star message, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* ends with Boku realising that the town, indeed, the entire world in which he resides is a world of his own making (398-9). On the verge of escape, possibly his last and only chance to depart the town with his shadow and return to what he once was, Boku elects to stay, to remain in the town at the End of the World while his shadow flees. Boku's shadow warns him: 'you will never know the clarity of distance without me' (399), but Boku is resolved. He stays searching for 'different qualities of light, different songs', to find 'the key to my own creation and to its undoing' (399) and also, to finish his dreamreading and return its result, a whole and completed mind, to the librarian with whom he has fallen in love. He is charmed by her, by the fragments and impressions of her he experiences when dreamreading, by the disembodied qualities she emits into the world, the very stuff of her being, her mind dormant, but her being free. We have already noted that Strecher reads this ending as 'apocalyptic' (94), but this is only a necessary conclusion for him since he, like Boku's shadow, believes in the critical distance of the subject, and that reality itself can only be constituted in language, in disclosure, in a frame known by a rationally distanced thinker. In electing to follow his calling, to lead his charmed life into an unknown, Boku elects to begin again, to live-from the world in which he finds himself rather than constantly pursuing a means of escape. This final commitment is *change*, causality itself, becoming something new, being prepared to never return to what he once was. This ending is apocalyptic, but not in the negative sense with which Strecher means the term – rather, it is apocalyptic insofar as it is *world ending*, or rather a form of revelation. It is new qualities of light Boku seeks, which is to say, *new worlds*. And, more than anything, he seeks to give such a new world to his newly beloved, the librarian who has been his dreamreading companion. He seeks to give her back *dreams*, the content of his dreamreading, those qualities which appear in the midst of dormancy, and from which appear the very freedom of being, the possibility of being something other, or acting in and changing the world, a fragrant light called 'Quietude itself' (369).

Missing Pieces

Missing Pieces and Onward Roads

A number of missing pieces stand out in this work thus far which will be addressed, even if regrettably in much shorter fashion than many of them deserve, here.

Firstly, if translation is such an important watchword of this work, why have I made so little mention of any actual language-to-language translation? My exclusion of translation in its typical sense is not meant to denigrate or deny the worth and value of the study of translation proper. Indeed, much might have been made of studying Murakami's use and misuse of the Japanese language, his deliberate amalgamations of genre terms, conventions, words and scripts from across the Japanese language and American and European literary traditions. Indeed, it would be far from beyond the reaches of our methodology to read Murakami's light steps between languages and literary traditions as related to his metaphysical commitments we outlined in *Kafka on the Shore* in which all parts in something are equally parts, a deliberate flattening of the differences between languages inherent to his metaphysics. Unfortunately, though this task and many others would be worthy investigations in the language-specific mechanics of Murakami's writing, I am not confident my own language skills would be adequate to fulfil this task alongside the numerous multi-lingual researchers who have already invested much time and dedication into Murakami as a member of the set of literature in Japanese specifically. This work's focus, however, has been on translation as an ontological phenomenon, as a matter of communication between all things in general, not only human things in language. Therefore, in order to avoid muddying the waters and in order to draw attention to the specifically non-anthropocentric angle of the translation we have been discussing here, I have chosen not to invest, despite its sure value, in considering translation in the usual sense here.

Secondly, what of the rest of these authors' oeuvres? Would it not have been fruitful to discuss Murakami's *1Q84* and its philosophical approach to existential solitude? Would we not have been able to discuss sleep, dormancy, darkness, and determinism in Murakami's *After Dark* and expanded our analysis? What about numerous short stories including a personal favourite of mine, *Concerning the Sound of a Train Whistle in the Night or On the Efficacy of Fiction*, which might have been used to examine and study the depth of Murakami's Magic Realist credentials and the ontological applications of his aesthetics further? On the DeLillo side, what about the vast networks of inhuman actors stretching across epochs in *Underworld*, from garbage, to art, to deserts, to baseball? Would it not have been possible to discuss the

notions of finitude extremely well with DeLillo's concern for death in *Zero K*? Would *The Body Artist* not have been an excellent site for discussing the rhythms of being and DeLillo's writing as a meditation on being-in-itself as a matter of ontological tuning rather than material embodiment? My reasons for avoiding this approach number a few. In the first place, there are numerous full-oeuvre examinations of both authors, whose venerable contributions I acknowledge and admire, but do not wish to add my own work to the long list of. But more importantly is the importance of randomness to the style of analysis necessary to the Object-Oriented approach.

It has already been made clear repeatedly that OOO deliberately refuses any gesture which subordinates an object to the role of a *mere* part in a larger whole, which does not suggest that things do not take part in larger wholes, but that a thing is not reducible to this role and is ontologically no less a thing than the whole thing in which is participates. As such, an Object-Oriented reading methodology, while not discounting the value of whole-oeuvre studies of texts and authors, must treat its texts as it treats all objects, as somehow independent of the oeuvre as a whole. This method is found frequently in Harman's own OOO writings in which the texts he uses as exemplary material are often chosen at random and simply based on nearness-to-hand. In *A New Theory of Everything* (2018), he discusses prosaic language through quotes 'chosen at random from the three books of science nearest to hand in [his] living room' (35) and goes on to select statements from books of history, from sports journalism and from the text-message log of his own mobile telephone (36). He uses the same strategy in *Dante's Broken Hammer* when discussing the style of Kant's writing: 'Having just opened [Kant's] *Prolegomena* to a random page, it took me less than thirty seconds to find a passage in the right spirit' (225). In *Weird Realism*, one of Harman's few explicitly literary books, this strategy pervades the entire work as he selects one hundred passages from Lovecraft's work for no reason other than that 'one hundred is a good round number suggesting an immense effort'. For readers of all OOO writers, the 'Latour Litany' will be a familiar cognate of this method, a list appealing to randomly assorted entities to undergird a point rather than carefully-curated examples: 'diamonds, ropes, and neutrons [...], armies, monsters, square circles, and leagues of real and fictitious nations' (Harman, *Quadruple*, 5).

What this methodology resists most powerfully is not curation and structure per se, since all rhetoric and argumentation does, of course, require some degree of curation, selection, and structuring. Rather, what is challenged here is one of the cornerstones of literary formalism which still holds sway across the basics of close-reading: the dispensation with *content*. In the terms of formalism as understood by such critics as

Amy Hungerford; the Object-Oriented approach rejects the formalist notion of the 'materiality of language', which holds that meaning forms as a complete and total unity between the text's formal internal characteristics and the impression in the mind of the reader (Hungerford, 'Postmodern Supernaturalism', 284). Again, this is not a wholesale rejection of formalism, as an Object-Oriented method accepts what Hungerford calls the 'objectness' of the text which makes it irreducible to authorial intention, socio-historical or biographical referents, or reader reception, but Harman rejects the notion that a literary work can be reduced to any relational context, either internal or external to the work, contesting the formalist notion that meaning should be derived from a text without any reference to propositional content (*Weird Realism*, 252-3). Tim Morton argues similarly that these strategies are mobilised primarily in resistance to *holism*, or rather, the notion that a literary work functions as a self-contained, self-referential whole, formally enclosed within itself (*Humankind*, 101). It should already be clear why this method is extremely important to my work, since reading in this way liberates the literary work both from the Anglo-centrism of the New Critical Canon by contesting the notion that a work must possess a totalised unity (a legacy of the Abrahamic religious context of the New Critics) and prevents the ghettoisation of literatures within their own languages and cultural contexts by prioritising *content* over form.

Given these intersections and confrontations with literary formalism, why have I not, for example, considered the work on forms and formalism of Caroline Levine, whose claims that forms constitute principles of structuration, arrangement and organisation of their parts as well as sets of portable, non-context-dependent affordances for their use match very closely with the model of OOO's objects which likewise exert a downward influence on their parts and express outward diagrams and imperatives for engagement? Indeed, given that OOO's persistent refusal of materialisms relies upon questioning whether there is such a thing at all as an unformatted pre-objective universal mush known as *matter*, preferring to argue instead that there is nothing anywhere encountered that doesn't have *form* (*Rise of Realism*, 18, 20), and equally given the importance of forms to the independent and closely-related thinker of forms, things and objects Tristan Garcia, it seems a match made in heaven. Here I will appeal to the notion of 'scientific intuition' made so much use of in my analysis of Murakami and equally to the clarion call of OOO returned to over and over again - to the things themselves (rediscovered in DeLillo as 'to the surface of fixed things' we might note). A detailed comparison of all these formal methods in a philosophical and literary context and perhaps even a full and unified new form-oriented method is of great interest to me and indeed a project I would be very keen to undertake in the future. But in a move characteristic of the aesthetics we have been examining, I have preferred not to develop

and enumerate the entirety of a method first before moving onto applying it to fixed (in this case textual) objects: A=B=C. Rather, I have sought to see the method's justification and power through its immediate engagement with the things themselves, to later reconstitute a systematic methodology or theory from the results of the experimentation; an enthymeme in rhetorical terms; scientific intuition: A=C.

And to extend the distinction between materialisms and formalisms here, why, if I have been ostensibly critical of capitalism throughout this project, have I not invested more time in exploring how our formalist method rubs up against the dialectical materialist methods so famous from the descendents and inheritors of the Hegelian and Marxist styles? Indeed I would be most excited to take up the task of an Object-Oriented reading of the epoch of Neoliberalism and its corresponding aesthetics: what alternative readings of aesthetics emerge when confronting the Frankfurt School's traditions with Object-Oriented approaches (already gestured to in Morton's use of Adorno in *Humankind*), how can the critical geographies of, for example, David Harvey, be cast new light on when re-read with an eye to non-anthropocentric logics?

And as for other non-anthropocentric logics, how might our analysis have varied had it engaged with the Object-Oriented Ontology of Levi Bryant, who develops a position which diverges from Harman's through its interest in the work of Gilles Deleuze? Or how about Tristan Garcia's metaphysics of forms, things, and objects which, like Harman's OOO (but developed completely independently of any of the main Object-Oriented positions) defends a notion of things which refer to any-and-every-thing reducible to neither what enters into a thing or what a thing enters into? And what of philosophers further afield from the continental tradition of philosophy such as Japanese thinker Watsuji Tetsuro who, in the mid-twentieth century, produced his own novel ethical philosophy responding to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in which human ethical being is linked to history and climate, or a milieu from which the being emerges and a milieu in which it is enmeshed as an actor (Robert Carter, 'Introduction to Watsuji Tetsuro's *Rinrigaku*', 5). A purely philosophical comparative survey of these writers would be a deeply interesting project in itself, let alone the additional applications which might arise in literary and other contexts.

 Such questions have burgeoned at the edge of this project and now sit as well-poised next steps for those interested in continuing the various avenues of this kind of thought.

These are just a few of the paths, or perhaps dormant objects, which have nestled in the peripheral vision and first basements of this work, beckoning. It is with relish that I look forward to pursuing them further if fair fortune allows.

The End

Things are not reducible to ends, but in the end, being amongst things is to subordinate them to ends whether we like it or not. Each thing is, on the one hand, amongst things. Each thing is, on the other hand, itself, outside the world, sleeping. When things are together, they make a world. The world is not a space-time container in which things sit, but a place and a period made by objects in relation to one another. Objects live from one another and in doing so, form a world. The world we have today is a world of many objects in certain relations with each other, some of them dependent upon one another, and some of them less dependent. How each object relates to one another, some human, some not-human, some imaginary, some real, some living, some dead, some long-lasting, some short-lived, is a matter of affect, a matter of aesthetics; the worlds things share when they live from one another.

We have tried to change this world by escaping from it to another world; by reversing this world into a previous world; by laughing at this world and hoping it will not be able to bear the shame of our merriment; by accelerating this world as if it will thereby spontaneously grow into a different world; by managing this world on higher and higher resolutions measuring smaller and smaller levels as if a key will be hidden somewhere deeper than the world; by trying to erase more and more the smaller levels of the world as if the smallest parts of the world will answer, without question, to the biggest, widest, largest actors in the world. But if the world is neither a sum; nor a container; nor a 'big actor', greater than the sum of its parts; nor a secret, operating according to some hidden formula which can be found by a chosen elect; and in fact not any kind of totality at all, then none of these hopes for changing the world will offer any efficacy. If, on the other hand, the world we inhabit (like any given world) is an object, made of the relations between certain other objects, and itself exerting its own reality on objects which it may be dependent on or not dependent on, which it may be interior or exterior to, which may be its parts or not, then it is with it as an objects and with the objects with which we share it we must remain.

Being a subject does not float humans free of the objects from which they live. Being a subject does not unmake a human an object. There is no privilege of the human which separates it from its objectivity, its finitude. If humans want to change the world, their world, then we must, at the very least, insist on a particular kind of comportment to that world as a set of objects, behaving as they do, relating as they do, being what they are as they are.

We should be anxious because anxiety prevents us forgetting we are things. Anxiety indicates that we are, in some sense, outside the world, and hence, not totalised by the world. Being outside the world means being amongst things. Amongst things, we find ourselves translated and traversed at the edges of different worlds. Some of these things summon us with the force of destiny: it is in anxiety we may take on and face down this destiny, this fate, this fatal objectivity. Embrace what you are before trying to become what you are not; things have their own faces; step inside the sandstorm, and before you know it you enter a brand new world.

We should be humourous because humour prevents us forgetting we are bound to things. Humour indicates we are, in some sense, bound to a world, and hence, not able to escape into an ether, some place other than where we are. Humour gives us a place amongst things, a stay amongst things, a rhythm, a refrain, a repetition amongst things. Humour is about lingering awhile, about the way the objects around us form a whole; not an infinite, bodiless totality, but a finite distinct reality. Humour indicates the limits of this world, indicates its rhythms and repetitions, makes it a *background, a last frontier, against and from which something emerges*. Humour indicates *what does not change*: a community, a system, a series of essential gestures or qualities, a persistence, *memory in things, uses of boredom*. If anxiety gives you your foot outside the world, humour gives you your foot in it.

We should be charmed because charm gives us new things and hence, new worlds. Charm brings out qualities and gives them their own scenes, gives things worlds which before seemed worldless, makes new things from things which before slept outside the reach of causation. When charmed by something, you follow it even if it is like a zorg, by definition useless. You are led by it even if you cannot tell where you are going, down a corridor as long as Proust, in an architecture as impossible as Escher. It is when charmed by things that new things appear, changes become possible, things pass a point of no return and enter their dark second basements. When charmed, we are intimate with things, but at the thing's beckoning. Being both outside the world and of the world, charm gives us quietude itself from in the midst of things, a new black box from total radiance, the scent of watermelons on a summer's morning.

This is the wager this work offers its reader: to change things without fleeing them or drowning in them, gripping neither too hard nor too softly, to be what we are in the world we are in and to become not what we were in a world other than what is, to go somewhere without knowing in advance where, to pursue something in good faith without in-advance calculating its outcome. Whether the reader will be convinced of

this argument I have, in good faith, pursued, is something I hope to have achieved, but something I equally am content not to, in advance, have known.

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