

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

Graham Harman

It is a rare pleasure to have this exchange with Tristan Garcia, whose intriguing book *Forme et objet* will soon appear in English translation.¹ Garcia has now written an amiable and insightful account of the similarities and differences between our philosophies, which in his words “provide a rare example of ways of thinking that intersect and meet at certain places and concepts, even though they derive from very different traditions and aim at very distinct goals.” I find little to disagree with in his presentation of my ideas— or of his own, for that matter. We still have ample disagreement when it comes to philosophical principles. Among other things, Garcia is right to note that my thinking is less dialectical than his. But my resistance to dialectic in ontology does not extend to its powerful presence in biography. We express our ideas best by contrast with those of neighboring thinkers, who force us to articulate what was previously left unsaid in our work. This can be a lengthy process, one that unfolds not just in conceptual space but also in biographical time: through personal meetings, series of ripostes, and even intervals of tension. I still learn much from disagreement after fourteen years of acquaintance with Bruno Latour and half as many with Quentin Meillassoux, and expect to learn no less during what I hope will be decades of communication with Garcia. The present response is merely the opening scene of a play whose end date remains unknown.

Midway through his article, Garcia expresses perhaps the central point of disagreement between our respective positions:

A noteworthy characteristic of Harman’s work is his reevaluation of the thing-in-itself. According to him, the real object always withdraws, inaccessible and in-itself. We know that this analysis is drawn from his reading of Heidegger’s tool-analysis... Yet the model I propose is different. For me, the in-itself is... the foil of *Form and Object*... In my model, a thing is always outside-itself, and is either in something other than a thing, or in another thing. But a thing-in-itself is meaningless for me. More precisely, the thing-in-itself is the figure of nonsense, what I call “compact.”

Hence the title of my response: “Tristan Garcia and the Thing-in-Itself.” Whereas Meillassoux and I simply disagree over who has the right concept of the in-itself (Meillassoux thinks it is that which can be mathematized, while for me this is a philosophical nightmare),² with Garcia there is basic disagreement as to whether the in-itself exists at all. The other differences between us perhaps boil down to this one alone. But to reach the point of seeing why, it may be useful if I briefly present object-oriented philosophy in my own words.

1. OBJECT-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHY: INSPIRATIONS AND NEIGHBORS

Garcia’s philosophy and mine share, in differing ways, the commitment to a “flat ontology” able to speak of all things equally without prematurely reducing some to others. For this reason we have a shared admiration for the Austrian School of the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Triggered by the charismatic teaching of Franz Brentano in Vienna, the Austrian School was long preoccupied with the status of objects. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology (with Martin Heidegger as its transformative crown prince) emerged in large part through Husserl’s intellectual struggle with Brentano’s brilliant Polish student Kazimierz Twardowski, whom Garcia mentions above.³ Twardowski distinguished, far more clearly than Brentano, between an *object* outside the mind and a *content* inside the mind. After a long struggle with these ideas, Husserl countered by imploding both of these terms into the sphere of consciousness, with “object” becoming an ideal enduring unit and “content” becoming a series of shifting adumbrations of objects (*Abschattungen*). The orange intended by my consciousness is not outside the mind (as it is for Twardowski) but exists as a durable core beneath the various swirling profiles of the orange as it ripens or is turned in my hand. Object vs. content is no longer a struggle between the hidden outer world and the visible world of experience, but becomes a tension within the visible itself. The method of phenomenology is to disentangle these two poles from one another, so as to gain intuition into the essential features of the orange and all other objects: those attributes that an object cannot lose without becoming something else. Heidegger should be read as giving a basically *realist* critique of this method. Though Heidegger never escapes the Kantian correlation between thought and world, both composing half of any situation we can talk about, he would not treat the orange as simply an enduring core within the visible realm. For Heidegger there is always withdrawal (*Entzug*) behind all presence, and the name of what withdraws is Being. Heidegger’s question of being must be seen as a fresh assault on the idealisms of Hegel and Husserl.⁴

Garcia’s philosophical background, unlike mine, does not lie in phenomenology. He speaks of the “analytical and dialectical” origins of his thinking, and by “analytical” I believe he means nothing less than Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which has found numerous enthusiasts among Garcia’s younger generation of French philosophers.⁵ Garcia mentions Hegel and Wittgenstein among his chief influences. Yet there are Austrian roots to Garcia’s thought about objects as well, as can be seen elsewhere in his radical defense of Alexius Meinong’s *Gegenstandstheorie* against its famous dismissal at the hands of analytic heroes Bertrand Russell and Willard van Orman Quine.⁶ In this respect, the debate between me and Garcia might be viewed less as a combat between my strange phenomenology and Garcia’s strange analytic-dialectical standpoint than a delayed civil war within the Austrian School. For whereas Garcia defends an ontology even more inflationary than Meinong’s, he claims that I betray flatness by making enduring commonsense objects more real than their specific incarnations at any given moment, not to mention more real than their own halves and thirds and even smaller portions. Or as Garcia puts it near the close of his essay:

Common sense objects populate the pages of Harman’s work: cotton, diamond, unicorns, apples, hammers, Japanese ghosts, or the European community... I think that I seek to be equal with all things, to the point of losing the common sense of things. I think that Harman seeks to account for common sense objects, to the point of not considering everything equally as objects.

Though I would hardly use the term “common sense” to describe such objects as unicorns, Japanese ghosts, and the European community, the assessment is basically correct. Garcia rightly contrasts his view with my own when he adds: “My world is populated not only with football teams, words, ghosts, falsities, golden mountains,

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

and square circles, but also and above all parts of ghost fingers, and parts of parts, and parts of these parts at time *t*, and in the following moment, and the hundred moments before, and ten seconds before that.”

Garcia is again correct in saying that “Harman’s project derives in large part from the conflict within phenomenology between Husserl and Heidegger.” Let’s return briefly to that conflict between Husserl and Heidegger, so decisive for object-oriented philosophy.⁷ Recent scientific philosophy gives Husserl a bad press due to the obvious (though oft-denied) idealism of his position. Phenomenology is grounded entirely in how entities *appear*, and this leaves only a subordinate role for the physical sciences, with their ever-increasing roster of things and natural causes outside the mind. I gladly join scientific philosophy in rejecting phenomenological *idealism* completely. Yet it would be mistaken to see Husserl as nothing but an idealist, since he is also an *object-oriented* idealist, however unlikely this combination may sound. Whereas the empiricist tradition treats objects as fictitious bundles that apparently serve as useless and deluded supports for more palpable qualities, Husserl is the first to treat objects as the *primary* ingredients of experience, and qualities as merely *secondary*. All the complaints by critics about Husserl’s idealism, however justified, overlook the tension and drama he uncovered *within* the realm of phenomena, and its internal strife between intentional objects and intentional qualities. For various reasons, I prefer the terms *sensual* objects and *sensual* qualities, and Garcia follows my usage in referring to the “sensual” in his article above. This is one tension explored by object-oriented philosophy: the duel between sensual objects and sensual qualities, and Garcia is right that I identify this tension with *time*. The experience of time is that of sensual objects remaining relatively durable amidst swirling changes in their surface aspects. If such tension did not exist, it would never occur to anyone to speak of something called time.

That brings us to Heidegger. What bothered Heidegger was the priority that phenomenology granted to presence before the mind, or “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*).⁸ In his fateful tool-analysis — first presented to students in 1919, but published only in 1927 — he showed that for the most part entities are silently relied upon or taken for granted rather than present to the mind. The fact that we are not usually conscious of our bodily organs or atmospheric oxygen does not change the fact that they were there all along, providing cryptic support for whatever is explicitly present. Reality tends to become present only when something goes wrong: when it breaks, when it turns up missing. The cosmos is a constant reversal between absence and presence, veiled and unveiled, concealed and revealed, ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. This difference between being and beings is known by the technical name “the ontological difference”; unfortunately, Heidegger uses it for two distinct purposes, leading to widespread confusion. In one sense the ontological difference means the key insight just described: there is always something deeper than phenomenal presence, something hidden that occasionally erupts into presence. But in a second and completely different sense, Heidegger uses “ontological difference” to refer to the distinction between the one and the many. Unlike the visible world with its plethora of individual beings, withdrawn being supposedly harbors no plurality.

For this reason, Heidegger’s contempt for presence often takes the form of a general contempt for individual beings. This remains true even in his later reflections on “the thing,” since one dimension of every thing for Heidegger is “earth,” and he seems to recognize one and the same earth at the basis of all his varying examples of bridges, jugs, temples, and indeed all specific entities.⁹ Without arguing the point in detail here, unified earth and unified being are philosophically untenable. What really withdraws in Heidegger’s tool-analysis are *individual beings* rather than some impossible monolithic being. And here we find another axis of object-oriented philosophy. Whereas Husserl discovered a tension between sensual objects and sensual qualities, Heidegger is concerned with a separate tension between *real* objects and sensual qualities. The real hammer is not the unyielding phenomenal core that Husserl finds lying within experience, but something deeper than any experience at all. If Husserl’s tension was identified with time, then Heidegger’s must be called “space,” since it speaks of the same interplay between relation and non-relation that we mean when speaking of space. For reasons argued in my book *The Quadruple Object*, we must also make room in our model for the other two tensions: real objects vs. real qualities (or *essence*) and sensual objects vs. real qualities (or *eidōs*). The research program of object-oriented philosophy is to explore the various tensions or gaps between the two kinds of

objects and two kinds of qualities (yielding *time, space, essence, and eidos*), and to survey the breakdown of these tensions as well (yielding *simulation, allure, causation, and theory*). Let this suffice as a quick summary both of my debt to the phenomenological tradition and my attempt to capitalize on that debt.

But phenomenology was not the first-object oriented tradition in philosophy, nor was it even alone in the twentieth century. The honor of being the first such tradition surely belongs to Aristotle's philosophy of substance, which Garcia rightly links with my own object-oriented stance. The pre-Socratic philosophers, for all their differences, were *underminers* of objects (my term) who reduced objects to that which is *less-than-objects* (Garcia's term). Mid-sized everyday entities such as tables, chairs, and trees were reduced either to basic physical elements (water, air, or atoms) or to some formless primordial lump (the *apeiron*). Plato might be taken instead for an *overminer* of objects (my term), someone who reduced them upward to that which is *more-than-objects* (Garcia's term). Individual entities were replaced by their look or form, their *eidos*, and thus individuals were regarded as more or less corrupt instantiations of a perfect form or idea. Specific horses were earthly rubbish in comparison with the ideal form of the horse. Aristotle's genius lay in countering both of these tendencies, allowing neither a downward reduction of horses to water or atoms, or an upward reduction of horses to a universal *eidos* of all horses. Instead, individual things were given the status of primary substances, while Plato's ideas were consigned to derivative status as "secondary" substances. Indeed, individual entities have enjoyed a resurgence in the history of philosophy whenever Aristotle's influence has been in the ascendant (by no means the case in our own era). The problem with the Aristotelian tradition of substance-philosophy is its tendency to privilege what analytic philosophers call "natural kinds." This can be seen clearly in G.W. Leibniz's distinction between "substance" and "aggregate," according to which a man is a substance but a circle of men holding hands is not, or a tree is a substance but the Dutch East India Company is not. This privilege of the natural over the artificial destroys all flatness in ontology, and hence all universality in philosophy. Entities such as the United Nations, the First Armored Division, and the Vodafone Corporation are not given the same status as such supposed simples as humans, horses, and trees. Another problem is Leibniz's Christianized tendency to hold that substances are immortal and cannot be produced after God's initial act of creation, an assumption obviously foreign to Aristotle himself. My position shares with Garcia's (though in very different form) the general aspiration towards a flat ontology that can account for *all* entities, not just a privileged and ultimately fictitious class of natural, simple, or eternal ones.

Another object-oriented trend in twentieth century philosophy was launched by Alfred North Whitehead, and continues today in the increasingly prominent thought of Latour. The strong point of this trend is its elimination in principle of any special role for *humans* in ontology. For Immanuel Kant, the relation between thought and world was always central: to speak of the collision of two rocks could only mean to speak of the phenomenal accessibility of this collision to a human being whose experience was defined by time, space, and the twelve categories, none of them necessarily applicable beyond phenomena to the things-in-themselves. For Whitehead and Latour this human privilege is nowhere to be found, even if some critics of Latour hold that he never fully abandons it.¹⁰ Instead, Whitehead and Latour pursue a de-humanized cosmos in which all relations between all entities are on equal footing. The human perception of a tree is no different *in kind* from a bird's or raindrop's collision with a tree, even if the human case turns out to be more intricate and fascinating. All entities are on the same plane in relation to each other, or as Whitehead puts it, in "prehending" each other. We should salute this aspect of the emerging Whitehead/Latour relational ontology, and also salute its refusal to valorize one particular type of entity such as the natural, the simple, or the eternal.¹¹ In principle these philosophies allow us to place supposed "aggregates" such as machines and international banks on the same level as plants, animals, and atoms. What object-oriented philosophy rejects in this philosophical current is its tendency to treat entities as purely relational or agential. For Whitehead, entities turn out to be nothing more than their relations; for Latour, they turn out to be nothing more than the sum total of their effects on other entities. As a result, there are no enduring things for these two philosophers, but only perishing instantaneous "actual occasions" (Whitehead) or actors that exist in one time and one place only (Latour). On this point Whitehead and Latour are closer to Garcia than to me, despite his lack of obvious intellectual debt to either. Like both of these authors, Garcia grants reality to the apple at time T_1 even though he denies reality to an apple-in-itself that would endure

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

despite wildly shifting features at times $T_1, T_2, T_3, T_4, T_5, \dots$

By now the reader should have a sense of the basic principles of object-oriented philosophy and how it resembles and differs from Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, Aristotelian philosophies of substance, and the relational philosophies of Whitehead and Latour. Thus we can return to the central point of this article: the similarities and differences between my object-oriented philosophy and the neighboring thought of Tristan Garcia. Though Garcia has already summed up the issue skillfully, I will present the topic from a slightly different angle.

2. OBJECTS AND THE COMPACT

Garcia's commitment to flatness is at first glance more radical than mine; this is especially clear from his lecture on Meinong, but is also visible in his article above. Philosophy must account for everything that exists without reducing anything to its causes, its components, its images, its effects, or anything else. Yet for me this anti-reductionism holds not for everything, but for *objects*, by which I mean unified entities irreducible to any of their specific relations, configurations, positions, or instantiations. The apple *per se* is irreducible to the apple as viewed in shadow from a distance of five meters. The reverse does not hold: the apple at five meters in shadow *is reducible* to the apple *per se*. There is a frank asymmetry here. Garcia is right to say that "our common theoretical opponent is every kind of thinking that denies objecthood to some objects," with the sole difference that I am perfectly happy to say that some things exist but still do not count as objects. They too must be included in philosophy, of course, but this does not entail that they cannot be subordinated to the object as their deeper principle. Garcia worries that this betrays the true Meinongian spirit of flatness by retaining a servant class of "sub-objects," and this point lies at the heart of our philosophical difference. After all, Garcia's call for radical flatness entails that there is "no natural ontological difference or hierarchy between different domains of animate or inanimate, thinkable or unthinkable, objects." More than this, for Garcia all *relations* are flat, to such an extent that the relation between an apple at times T_1 and T_2 is no closer than that between apple T_1 and a bulldog, dragon, or square circle. By contrast, "Harman considers that an object does not relate to its different temporal occurrences in the way that any object relates to any other object. Time [for him] is a privileged relation between certain objects— to be precise, the manifestations of the same sensual object." This is true, though I wouldn't use the term "objects" for the specific profiles of an apple. We might add that for me *space* is also a privileged relation between the same real object and its various manifestations in the sensual realm. Which leads Garcia to pose a reasonable question: "This means that [for Harman] to define the support of identity, [he] must presuppose this identity. I assume that this tree is the same tree in the spring and in the autumn to be able to construct this tree as an object in time. What warrant do I have to assume this?"

My response is that the point is demonstrated in my books rather than simply assumed, and the demonstration can easily be performed again right now. We should first distinguish between the identity of real objects and the identity of sensual ones, since the justifications are different in the two cases. Let's begin with sensual objects. Garcia's question hinges on the apparent fact that the springtime tree and the autumnal tree evidently have very different qualities, and therefore any effort to equate the two trees requires a further leap that amounts to a mere assumption. It is not even necessary to rely on a drastic contrast between spring and autumn, since we might already ask by what right I assume that the tree is the same at dawn, noon, and dusk, or when viewed from every angle of the compass or at every feasible distance. This way of looking at things puts Garcia very close to empiricism. The empiricist would say that we encounter bundles of qualities, which of course are quite specific in every case. The tree always shows a specific aspect, at a specific distance and angle, from a specific height depending on my physical size, in a specific mood, and in an exact set of specific relations to all other objects in my field of experience. For the empiricist these utterly concrete appearances are primary, and only derivatively can I infer (or assume) that one and the same apple is responsible for a series of similar appearances which recur so often that the unified "tree" is habitually taken for a familiar durable personage in the world. For Latour (an empiricist in the sense of William James rather than David Hume), the tree is derivative of its *tree-effects* rather than its *tree-qualities*. But for Latour as for Whitehead, the absolute concreteness of the tree at any instant

comes before any hypothesis of an underlying tree that can shift between numerous different times of year. The same is true of Garcia's position, whose flat ontology makes room for all the various incarnations of trees at different moments, but not for a tree lying deeper than these moments and capable of enduring from one to the next.

Yet the basic philosophical gesture of Husserl is to reverse this situation completely. For Husserl it would be phenomenologically false to say that I see varying tree-apparitions at times $T_1, T_2, T_3, T_4, T_5 \dots$ and then naively posit or assume an underlying object to link them. Instead, I look straight through the details of these appearances and directly grasp the tree as a unit, recognizing it as the same tree regardless of its shifting adumbrations. What is the justification for this privileging of intentional/sensual objects over their shifting adumbrations? The sole justification lies in the fact that this is how experience works; since we are dealing here only with sensual objects, which exist only for me the observer, experience itself is the final court of appeal.¹² In the sensual realm the empiricists are wrong to assume that the world is made up primarily of highly defined situations or phenomena and that the underlying objects in those situations are nothing more than naively posited substrata. We must admit that Garcia's motives are both clear and admirable. Object-oriented philosophy denies that a tree can be reduced either downward to its chemical composition or upward to its current use by landscapers, and Garcia holds in analogous fashion that the anti-reductionism should not stop there: we should not reduce the tree at T_1 to a mere sub-object of the tree *per se*. This position initially seems more consistent and certainly more radical than my own. But this apparent consistency comes at a price, as we will see.

Garcia's claim that we cannot assume the existence of an identical tree-object lying behind concrete manifestations might also be turned against the existence of real objects no less than sensual ones. For example, by what right can we assume that *one and the same* subterranean hammer was first working flawlessly, then missing, then explicitly broken? Why not treat these as three concretely different entities, rather than superstitiously posit a single hammer-in-itself concealed behind them all, as if in adherence to Western noun-verb grammar? A moment ago I tried to show that the unity of the *sensual* object behind numerous manifestations is experienced directly; the empiricist wish to treat the tree at times $T_1, T_2, T_3 \dots$ as separate entities linked only via assumption is based on an unjustified theoretical decision that the object must change whenever any of its qualities change. But the criterion of direct access does not also hold for *real* objects. By definition, the unity of the real object behind multiple manifestations cannot be experienced directly at any time, and therefore can only be deduced. We can state this deduction in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: if there were no hidden hammer-in-itself, but only a series of determinate hammer-manifestations, then no change could ever occur in the world. For every manifestation would already be all that it is, holding no surplus in reserve that could surge forth in a later moment and be expressed in the world. The fact that there is change in the world shows that something lies behind any manifestation (this is essentially the same argument as Heidegger's against Husserl) and is capable of manifesting differently under different circumstances.

By contrast, Garcia's position entails the denial of any hidden reservoir of the in-itself deeper than any concrete manifestation. The tree at T_1 and the tree at T_2 have no closer relationship than that between the tree at T_1 and ice cream, a black hole, or a unicorn. At first this might sound like a radical commitment to the idea that relations are external to their terms, and might therefore seem to be a celebration of individual objects on a flat and democratic plane, in sheer autonomy from each other. But Garcia's position is less flat than it seems, since it "make[s] room for neither an accessible nor inaccessible in-itself." He treats objects as *the difference* between that-which-is-in-them and that-in-which-they-are, between their internal components and their external contexts. For purposes of comparison, my own model holds that a tree is more than its molecules and less than its current appearance and use. Although Garcia initially seems to agree on this point, by making the object the *difference* between that which is in it and that in which it is, rather than avoiding both undermining and overmining (as I aim to do) he seems to perform both reductive operations simultaneously. For if a tree is the *difference* between its physical components and its current contextual position, then it will be hyper-sensitively dependent on both of these. To remove one needle from the pine tree will obviously change the "difference"

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

between the tree's parts and its environment, and the same holds true if another nearby tree is knocked down. The only way to prevent such ontological hypersensitivity is to accept a tree-in-itself midway between the two extremes that is not overly sensitive to all changes in those extremes. But by excluding the thing-in-itself from the outset, Garcia ends up with a blatantly *relational* ontology, since objects will now inevitably shift whenever their inner or outer relations shift. I have argued against relational ontology for other reasons, but Garcia might have been expected to reject it due to his initial commitment to flatness. Despite his apparent celebration of an ontology more inflationary than Meinong's, Garcia excludes an entire class of entities from his world: objects-in-themselves not exhausted by their current relations. Instead of saying that the tree *per se* and the tree at T_1 are equally real, he denies the tree *per se* altogether, thereby showing as much hostility to non-relational objects as either Whitehead or Latour.

Thus it is not entirely accurate when Garcia portrays our respective views on objects and events as if they were the same. As he puts it: "Harman and I share the idea that what one calls 'object' (or 'thing,' in my case) is primarily what every operation of the division of the world, of the real, of the cosmos, and of that which is, rests on. One may divide the world into events, but one will end up attributing to these events the same properties attributed to objects." In *Forme et objet* Garcia treats the relation between objects and events in a subtle manner, so I would not wish to oversimplify his understanding of these terms. But it seems clear that his notion of an object (as the difference between that which exists in it and that in which it exists) is a better match for my conception of an *event*, given the utter concreteness of a tree at any time T_1 . Both kinds of objects recognized by my model, the real and the sensual, are partially indeterminate with respect to their exact properties, and therefore are incommensurable with any concrete event. By contrast, Garcia's objects might better be termed "events," at least in the sense in which I use that term. The price Garcia pays for insisting that events not become sub-objects is that objects as things-in-themselves are banished from the cosmos altogether. Flatness is maintained only on the condition that every *en soi* is extinguished.

I will end this response with one observation and one minor correction to Garcia's otherwise very accurate depiction of my philosophy. Garcia is right that I have no real concept of the negative, given my lack of influence by the dialectical tradition. What is particular to Garcia's conception of the negative is that every thing exists in its opposite: the world. "Each thing—whether it is my finger or my hand or a table—is a 'thing' insofar as it is alone, that is, a *solitary* thing existing only in its negative. The table is only something, in the widest and least determinate sense, when it is comprehended in *everything that is not the table*." Here we find Garcia's vivid contrast between thing and object, around which his entire book is structured according to a twofold split in the table of contents. Thing vs. object is not a taxonomy of two different kinds of entities, but two ways in which every entity can be considered. For Garcia, the thing is solitary, alone in its contrast with everything else—the world. An object is an entity insofar as it is not solitary, but engaged in determinate relations with other objects, either comprehending or comprehended by them. Ultimately, all these objects combine into what Garcia calls the "universe" (and if Garcia is right that we both allow for an infinite downward regress of objects but not an infinite upward progress, he neglects to note the difference that I have no concept of "universe," since I do not agree that all objects combine into a single super-large object). I am not convinced by Garcia's argument that the in-itself is impossible insofar as "if there were a thing-in-itself, it could only be in-itself in the world, that is, in something other than itself. Therefore, no in-itself exists *in itself*." This argument only works if we accept Garcia's notion that the thing must have an active relation to world as its form or other, rather than this other being merely conceptually derived. And here we see further evidence of how I am less dialectical than Garcia, since the dialectic is primarily concerned with the negativity inherent in our *thought* of things, rather than the things in their own right. I see no reason to believe that things in their own right have any contact with a negative. A chair or goose has no need of "world" as its negative form or other in order to be an individual being.

But what really interests me here is the historical novelty of Garcia's idea of world. As he sees it, all things share the same world. World is the uniquely special non-thing to which all things in their solitude are related. In the history of philosophy such appeals to a non-thing or super-thing shared by all entities is usually meant to

allow that non-thing be a bridge shared by all things and letting them enter into relation with each other. This is true for instance in the occasionalist tradition, in which the impossible causal relations between things are saved only the presence of God as a universal causal mediator through which alone things come into contact. But Garcia, for perhaps the first time in the history of philosophy, makes the opposite move. For him unlike for me, objects do not mutually withdraw, and thus they have no problem making direct causal contact. Rather than the universal non-thing being a God that links the unlinked, Garcia's universal non-thing is a world that separates that which is *already* linked, walling off all things in individual solitude for the first time. I am still unsure what this world is supposed to accomplish, but there may be further twists to come in Garcia's future development of the concept.

I will end with one small point of disagreement with Garcia's presentation of my position. He writes that "Harman's real object is in-itself, and his sensual object is in what perceives it. For me, an thing is outside of itself, in the world, and an object is in another thing." Garcia's point here is to show his similarity of outlook with my own, before going on to note correctly "a kind of tonal difference" between our respective positions. However, for me the sensual object is not in the real object that perceives it, but in a larger real object that contains *both* the sensual object and the real object that perceives it. This is my attempt to do justice to Husserl's insight that intentionality is both one and two. My encounter with the sensual tree is not contained in the real object me, but in the compound object formed from both me and the tree as its components, and the real me and the sensual tree are both contained in this larger object. What this means is that Garcia's treatment of all relations as part-whole relations does not differentiate his position from my own, since I too treat the two terms of perception as parts on the interior of a whole that cannot be identified with either of them. It is true, nonetheless, that Garcia's model of part and whole comes from set theory while mine is much closer to the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, with perhaps a dash of panpsychism added (or "polypsychism," as I prefer).

Garcia states correctly that "[Harman] also never goes so far as to discuss, as I attempt to do, definitions of the human species, speciesism and antispeciesism, social classes, gender, or racialism— all kinds of discussions that concern less the 'objects' than the objective classifications applied to living things or to society." I see this less as a temperamental or intellectual distinction than as a sheer personal achievement by Garcia. Whereas the older Speculative Realists have often procrastinated, treading cautiously towards full-blown systems, the younger Garcia has simply taken the bull by the horns and given us a system in one shot. This boldness will not be the least of the lessons we learn from him.

Another crucial aspect of Garcia's philosophy is his conception of intensity, which feeds directly into his concept of time. But since this is the aspect of philosophy that I understand the least, and since I do not yet see how something can be more or less itself in a philosophy where all adumbrations are created equal, I will leave this theme for another day. Experience has taught me that the first attempts at dialogue with a neighboring philosophy never quite grasp the key differences clearly enough, so that several years are necessary for a dialogue or debate to take shape. This is why I consider the present response nothing more than an early attempt at orientation, not only for the reader, but even for myself.

GRAHAM HARMAN is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cairo, and the author of nine books, including *The Quadruple Object* (Zero Books, 2011) and *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

NOTES

1. Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet: Un Traité des choses*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2011.) An English translation by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn is set to appear in late 2013 or early 2014 in the Speculative Realism series that I edit at Edinburgh University Press. For a detailed summary of the original French version see Graham Harman, "Object-Oriented France: The Philosophy of Tristan Garcia," *continent*, Vol. 2.1 (2012), pp. 6-21. <http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/viewArticle/74>
2. See Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. For Meillassoux's view, see his already classic work Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.
3. See Kasimir Twardowski, *On the Concept and Object of Presentations: A Psychological Investigation*, trans. R. Grossmann. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.
4. See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
5. Perhaps the storm center of this tendency among the philosophical youth of Paris has been Raphaël Millière's ATMOC group (*Atelier de métaphysique et d'ontologie contemporain*) at the École normale supérieure. Indeed, it was while delivering a lecture to this group in January 2012 that I first met Garcia in person. Their amply stocked website can be found at <http://www.atmoc.fr/>
6. Garcia's April 13, 2012 ATMOC lecture on Meinong should appear in English shortly, but in the meantime a French PDF is available online. See Tristan Garcia, "Après Meinong: Une autre théorie de l'objet," listed as Séance 23 at <http://www.atmoc.fr/seances/>
7. For a lengthier account, see the opening chapters of Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011.
8. Please note that Heidegger's critique of presence has nothing to do with Derrida's, despite the misconceptions of Derrida on this point. For Heidegger, presence is countered by a reality *deeper* than its presentation or its context. But for Derrida there is no such thing as "deeper": presence is simply countered by its irreducibility to any *particular* presentation or context. Nothing exists but signifiers without a transcendental signified. Derrida's anti-realist misreading of Heidegger can be witnessed most clearly throughout Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
9. See the remarkable 1949 lecture cycle, Martin Heidegger, "Insight Into That Which Is," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. A. Mitchell. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012.
10. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. Corrected Edition. New York: Free Press, 1979, and Bruno Latour, "Irreductions," in *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. A. Sheridan & J. Law. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
11. According to most readings Whitehead distinguishes strongly between the "atomic" and the "social." See for example Didier Debaise, *Un empirisme spéculatif: Lecture de Procès et Réalité de Whitehead*. Paris: Vrin, 2006. But I remain in the minority on this point.
12. Scientific philosophy sometimes criticizes Husserl here on the grounds that inner experience is not infallible. Of course it isn't. I can mis-analyze all phenomena up to and including my own psychic life, which is precisely why the profession of "therapist" exists. But it is nonsense to suggest that the identity of an intentional object can only be determined by "transtemporal identity criteria" such as identical neural patterns activated by the tree over time, since I could be wrong in determining that these patterns are identical as well. No laboratory methodology can escape the problem. Both the perception of a tree over time and the scientific conclusion that two graphs show one and the same neural activation pattern rely on the very same ability to distinguish between an object and its adumbrations. For example, the scientist is unconcerned with the exact angle from which the neural graphs are viewed, but looks straight to the information on the graph without having to provide additional "transtemporal identity criteria" for this second act. Unless we want to demand transtemporal identity criteria for the identification of two graphs, and for ensuring that the transtemporal criteria I have in mind now are the same as those specified in our grant application ten months ago (thereby leading to an infinite regress of suspicious neural monitoring), we gain nothing at the "scientific" stage that was not already present in the initial experience of a tree. The distinction between an object and its accidents infects scientific technique every bit as much as introspection. For a prominent recent version of the scientific argument against Husserl, see page 626 (among other passages) of Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. For a detailed critique of this book see Graham Harman, "The Problem with Metzinger," *Cosmos and History*, Vol. 7, No 1 (2011), pp. 7-36.