

FORM AND OBJECT

A TREATISE ON THINGS

TRISTAN GARCIA

Translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn

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Form and Object

A Treatise on Things

Tristan Garcia

Translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn

EDINBURGH
University Press

For Patrick, my father, and Antonio, my grandfather

Forme et objet: Un traité des choses by Tristan Garcia © Presses
Universitaires de France, 2010, 6, avenue Reille, F-75014 Paris

English translation © Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn, 2014

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road
12 (2f) Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

www.euppublishing.com

Typeset in 11/13 Adobe Sabon by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire,
printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 8149 5 (hardback)
ISBN 978 0 7486 8150 1 (paperback)
ISBN 978 0 7486 8151 8 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 0 7486 8152 5 (epub)

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Acknowledgements

To Agnès, who I thought about and who thought about me. This book was born of ten years of intellectual and affective companionship with her.

To my parents, Monique, Denis, Patrick, and Domenica, who taught me to think;

to Antoine;

to Rose;

to Yves.

I deeply thank the following for their works, which have influenced this book, and for their personal or professional assistance which allowed me to write it:

Quentin Meillassoux, Sandra Laugier, Francis Wolff, and Alain Badiou.

I also thank my professors, Patrick Dupouey and Michel Nodé-Langlois.

For all the lively discussions with children, adolescents, and adults who made their way into these pages, this book owes much to Benoît Anceaume, Julie Rainard, Alice Boussicaut, Flore Boudet, Élodie Fuchs, Mathieu Bonzom, Arnaud Despax, Vivien Bessières, Martin Dumont, Ivan Trabuc, Élise Dardill, Martine Robert, Martin Fortier, and Benoît Caudoux.

Translators' Introduction

As a novelist, Tristan Garcia has received widespread recognition and awards, including the *Prix de Flore*. But it is his most recent philosophical work, *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses*, that secures his place as one of the most significant systematic philosophers in contemporary France.

Garcia's philosophical prose is lucid, in general presenting no special problems for the translator. However, a few key technical terms and phrases are so central to his system that any non-idiomatic English translation would invariably mislead the reader. Thus, explaining our translational choices requires some presentation of the system itself.

In English, 'comprehension' almost always denotes an epistemic state where one or more people *understand* some object or proposition. But this is *not* the case with respect to Garcia's use of '*compréhension*'. For Garcia, one object comprehends another object whenever the second object can be said, *in any way*, to be contained in or encompassed by the first object. The closest English language usage occurs in mathematical set theory, where an axiom of comprehension defines new sets in terms of the properties of their members. But even the set-theoretic notion is merely one instance of Garcia's broader concept. Consider:

Comprehending is having something inside itself. Comprehending is also comprehending an element by being a set; comprehending one quality by being a substrata of qualities; comprehending someone by appreciating or paying attention to this someone; assimilating a way of thinking or an idea; having a part when one is a composite; or comprehending a temporal, historical, or evolutionary moment in a longer timespan. (i.iii.i, §14)¹

The idea of comprehension is of central import to Garcia's system for two reasons. First, for Garcia being is nothing other than the inverse of comprehension:

Being is *being comprehended*. Comprehending is *being been* [*être été*].
The active sense of one is the passive sense of the other. (i.iii.i, §3)

Second, combining this view of being with Garcia's liberal account of comprehension yields a rich ontology where anything that has a determination is something.

In Book I, Part I, Chapter I, Section 15 Garcia produces a set of strikingly original arguments for ontological liberality. He considers in detail six distinct strategies that metaphysicians typically employ to deny that some putative kind of thing is really an object: logical, linguistic, epistemic, cultural, religious, and moral/political. Each strategy denies that something has what Garcia calls a 'minimum-of-whatness' (i.i.i. §16), that is, a minimum determination.² Thus, for each case he opposes the claim that a particular category does not pick out objects by attending to how determinations are made within objects of that category. For example, in response to the logician who denies that there are true contradictions, Garcia notes that we can differentiate contradictory entities; the squared circle is necessarily circular while the non-white white is not.

If he is successful at blocking a priori attempts to banish whole kinds of entities from the realm of objects, Garcia must still fight the type of reductionism that attempts a posteriori to explain away one kind of entity in terms of another. Such explanatory violence often proceeds from below, trying to reduce an object to the entities that compose that object:

Reductionism reduces what things are to what composes these things. Physicalist or materialist reductionism reduces things to the matter that composes them. Evolutionary or naturalist reductionism reduces a living organism to the evolutionary processes of which the living organism is a result. (i.iii.ii §11)

Or they can proceed from above, explaining away the object in terms of things that the object helps compose:

Other types of reductionism capture the chain of being from the other direction, and reduce a thing to what it is, that is, to what it is

in. Social reductionism reduces a social element to its function in the social whole. Historical reductionism reduces a historical event to the history within which it obtains its place. (i.iii.ii §II)

Following Graham Harman's usage,³ we can say that Garcia's system is an instance of 'object-oriented ontology' because his central ontological operations are motivated by the attempt to understand what objects must be like if they are to resist reduction from below and from above. Unlike Harman, though, Garcia actually defines the objectivity of an object in terms of this very resistance.

A thing is nothing other than the difference between *that which is in this thing* and *that in which this thing is*. Unless one guarantees this double sense, there are no thinkable things. Every reductionist who claims to deduce that which this or that thing is from that which composes this or that thing only succeeds in dissolving the very thing that they claim to account for. (I.)

Articulating the way this double sense plays out with respect to objects of human interest (beauty, truth, goodness, death, etc.) will be the central motif of Book II. However, before engaging in regional ontology, Garcia's differential model of being must immediately face a question. If an object is the difference between that which it comprehends and that in which it is comprehended, can an object comprehend itself?

The negative answer to the possibility of what Garcia calls 'compactness' (*le compact*) is deceptively simple. If an object just is the difference between that which comprehends it and that which it comprehends then nothing can comprehend itself. 'Difference' here is like subtraction. Since, *prima facie*, there is no difference between an object and itself,⁴ an object for Garcia is just the difference between that which the object comprehends and that which comprehends the object, so a self-comprehending object would subtract itself from itself and be nothing.

This answer is deceptively simple because while there are clearly no compact objects in Garcia's ontology, 'compactness' also names a tendency towards which some things move. And Garcia enumerates central instances of this tendency: philosophers trying to think of things as 'in themselves', the shy person's attempted withdrawal into herself, the saint who would merge

with the universe, the introspective psychologist pursuing a perfect kind of self-consciousness, and so on. Objects tend towards the compact, but never reach it, because doing so would result in annihilation.

Readers of Book II will find out just how much of the human condition rests on this impossibility. Indeed, it is so central that Garcia uses the concept to articulate his anti-reductionism.

Reductionism consists in refusing to consider the irreducibility of that which is a thing to that which it is.

The cost of reductionism is the conception of a compact point. (i.iii. ii §11)

Reductionism effaces the difference between that which is comprehended and that which is comprehending, rendering the object itself, which is this difference, nothing.

After articulating the negative grounds for rejecting reductionism, Garcia still must construct a positive metaphysics that explains how objects resist their own annihilation. At the very outset of this task he must confront two more categories at opposite ends of being: no-matter-what and something-other-than-a-thing. These are the most technically demanding concepts in the book.

Translation is difficult here because (just as Heidegger did with ‘*Nichts*’) Garcia uses the French phrase ‘*n’importe quoi*’ in both a quantificational (‘for any x’) sense and in a more name-like sense (analogously to Heidegger’s ‘the anything’). Failure to attend to the way this is licensed by his ontology will lead the English reader to see inconsistencies in the text that are not there and also miss the philosophical depth of Garcia’s discussion.

The English language reader will be prone to think there is a contradiction in part because, on the one hand, Garcia claims that something can never be no-matter-what – that nothing can be no-matter-what. For example:

Something is never no-matter-what. I could not find something in the world which would be no-matter-what. (i.i.i §9)

That nothing is no-matter-what means that there does not exist any object, event, god, or idea that would be ‘no-matter-what’. (i.i.i §10)

But then, on the other hand, no-matter-what can be something:

Nonetheless, no-matter-what is not nothing. On the contrary, no-matter-what – that is to say, ‘equally this *or* that *or* any other thing’ – is something. (i.i.i §13)

Garcia is saying both that no-matter-what is something and that nothing is no-matter-what. And he continues:

From this we can claim that it is incompatible to be something and to be no-matter-what. Everything which is not no-matter-what is something. (i.i.i §16)

Again, how can one simultaneously maintain (1) that it is incompatible to be something and to be no-matter-what, and (2) that no-matter-what is something?

To answer this question we must go back to Garcia’s concept of comprehension. For Garcia, any object that includes another *in any way* can be said to comprehend that other object. Thus:

The first major consequence of interpreting ‘being’ as the inverse of ‘comprehending’ derives from the product of an ‘antisymmetric’ relation. It may seem that being is the sign of a symmetric identity relation: if *a* is *b*, then *b* is *a*. No! Being is antisymmetry par excellence: if *a* is *b*, then *b* cannot be *a*. Being means nothing other than this unidirectionality [*ce sens unique*]. (i.iii, p. 124)

By carefully attending to comprehension’s antisymmetry we can show the seemingly contradictory claims to be consistent.

First, consider the claim that nothing is no-matter-what. Here, take ‘nothing’ in the quantificational sense and no-matter-what as name-like. Thus, all things are such that they do not enter into the no-matter-what – or, equivalently, all things are such that the no-matter-what does not comprehend them.

Given that being is being comprehended, and that this is antisymmetric, if nothing is no-matter-what, then (for Garcia) no-matter-what is not nothing. This means, quantificationally, that no-matter-what is something.

Now let us recover our pre-Carnapian innocence and think of the quantificational phrase ‘something’ as name-like. To make this as clear as possible, talk of ‘the something’. Then to say that no-matter-what is something is to say that no-matter-what

enters into the something and that the something comprehends no-matter-what.

So let's consider the claim that no-matter-what is something with 'no-matter-what' understood quantificationally. Then, to say that no-matter-what is something is to say that anything is something, or as he sometimes puts it 'anything can be something'. Like Meinong, or perhaps more so, when Garcia says 'anything' he really means *anything*.⁵ For Garcia, any existent or nonexistent, possible or impossible, imaginary or real, consistent or inconsistent thing is a thing.

But why should one accept this aspect of Garcia's ontology? Remember that for Garcia to be is to be determined. From this, everything that he says about the no-matter-what follows logically. All one must do is consider an entity that lacks all determination, and note that lacking all determination is itself a determination. For Garcia, the no-matter-what names precisely this determination of lacking all determination. Consider a representative passage:

When this clementine is something, it is not that clementine or something else. No-matter-what, we have said, is this *or* that *or* its opposite *or* something else. No-matter-what is something, anything.

A clementine is not this *or* that *or* its opposite *or* anything else. It *matters* that a clementine be something, that is, that it can be this or that, but that it absolutely cannot be this or that or anything else. If a clementine is no-matter-what, then it is not a matter of a clementine. (i.i.iii §7)

For a clementine to be something it must be determined in some way, but no-matter-what's only determination is that it lacks all determination.

In order to articulate what is arguably the most resolutely anti-reductionist metaphysical system in the history of thought, Garcia puts forward the bold Meinongian claim that anything (no-matter-what) is something. While critiquing specific forms of reductionism inconsistent with this claim, he argues that all that is necessary for being something is possessing some determination. But then what about the concept of just being anything? For this concept to be maximally inclusive it must lack any determination whatsoever. But 'lacking any determination whatsoever' is itself a determination. So it would seem to both lack and possess determinations.

One might say that this no-matter-what is itself thus a contradictory entity, but Garcia's model of being provides a way out of the paradox. Consider all of the things that lack all determinations. By describing the collection in this way, we provide a determination, so everything in this 'collection' is both determined and not determined. So, on the assumption that this is a contradiction we should reject, we now know that nothing is in this collection. But now we have a 'thing' such that nothing is (in) this thing! Moreover, this thing is something, as it has a determination, being the collection of all things that have no determination.

Enthusiasts of mathematical set theory will recognise here the sense in which no-matter-what, qua thing, is similar to the empty set. However, the derivation (which one can fully formalise using an unrestricted second-order comprehension axiom)⁶ of this object is, as far as we know, entirely original with Garcia.

With all of this on the table, we can see how Garcia's radical anti-reductionism thus rests on two key claims: (1) no-matter-what can be something, and (2) an object is just the difference between that which it comprehends and that which comprehends it. But if this were the end of the story, Garcia's ontology would easily fall prey to the traditional problem faced by relationist metaphysicians such as A. N. Whitehead, Bruno Latour, and the British Hegelians (Bernard Bosanquet, F. H. Bradley, and J. M. E. McTaggart). Simply put, if the identity of an object depends on its relations to other objects, then one or two things typically follow. The first danger, presented as a virtue by Whitehead and Latour,⁷ is that the metaphysics is inconsistent with an object being the same object through any kind of change. Consider Garcia's differential model as applied to the translators of this book. When we first entered the swamps of Louisiana, new things comprehended us. But then if we are merely the difference between the objects that compose us and those things that comprehend us, we became new objects the first time we were subject to the stare of a preternaturally still alligator lurking among the bald cypress knobs.

The second danger, presented as a virtue by the British Hegelians,⁸ is in tension with the first. If the first danger is that the ontology is committed to too many objects existing (the translators prior to moving to Louisiana and the translators in Louisiana as separate objects), the second is that the ontology is only committed to one object. For, if the identity of every object is determined by its relation to all other objects, whose identity is also determined by

their relations to everything else, then the only thing with intrinsic properties is the totality of these relations.

Garcia's claim that each thing is alone in something-other-than-a-thing is his third most important just because its truth, along with his philosophy of time, helps one navigate between the Scylla of Whitehead's actual occasions and the Charybdis of Bradley's absolute. While objects just are differences, for Garcia these very differences are independent things alone in the world.

To be in the world is to be outside itself in something-other-than-a-thing. Every thing enters, as an object, into a manifold of 'big things' [*grosses choses*]: relations, domains, definitions, determinations, sets, and so on. Every thing always belongs to these big things with other objects. But insofar as every thing enters into things, it also enters into something-other-than-a-thing – into that which is not a thing, which we shall call the world. The world is not a reality that pre-exists things, of which one could say that the world is this or that. The world is nothing other than what every thing enters into equally. The world is what enters into nothing. (i.i.iii)

We will not try here to assess whether Garcia's gambit is successful.⁹ Rather, we just note that its success would represent a fundamental advance in the history of metaphysics, a relational ontology which is both non-holistic and such that objects remain self-identical over time.

Why does Garcia call his world something-other-than-a-thing? As with no-matter-what's similarity to the empty set, we must again consider mathematical set theory. Garcia's world is just like a 'proper class' in some versions of set theory¹⁰ in that while things can be members of it, it cannot be a member of anything. But why is this? Since Garcia explicitly defends inconsistent objects, the normal mathematical reason that the set of all sets leads to contradiction via Russell's Paradox is not enough.¹¹ No, the real problem is that a set of all sets would be a member of itself (since it is a set that contains *all* sets), and thus be compact. Since an object is just the difference between that which it includes and that which includes it, the set of all sets would actually be nothing.¹²

Book II is largely an extension and application of the ideas of Book I's pure ontology, developing regional ontologies of an astonishing number of discrete kinds of objects. In the context of

what we've said here, two things should be noted. First, Garcia's attempt to avoid the Scylla of Whitehead's actual occasions is dependent on the philosophy of time articulated in Book II. Second, the manner in which the differential ontology is embodied in these kinds ends up obliterating the dialectic between Nietzsche and Hegel that philosophers such as Andrew Bowie find to have been reiterated over and over again in contemporary continental philosophy.¹³ If Garcia is successful, then we have principled grounds for refusing final Hegelian syntheses without in any way giving in to Nietzsche's anti-metaphysics. One must try to explain a phenomenon such as adolescence from below, following the history of biological explanations. One must also try to capture it from above, with progressive sociological myths involving adolescence and the adolescent. But adolescence itself actively *resists* its own compactness, its own annihilation through reduction, and one cannot understand adolescence itself unless one understands the history of this resistance.

While Garcia must introduce other productive technical concepts (particularly that of intensity) to make sense of the full range of topics discussed in Book II, the resistance predicted by the differential model is a constant. And the contradictions that result between explanations from above and below, and from successive explanations trying to catch up with the object's resistance, are never resolved. *Pace* contemporary Nietzscheanism, this has nothing essential to do with our epistemic or conceptual limitations, real as those may be. That is, objects *really are* such agents of resistance. But as readers of Garcia's Coda will come to realise, it is not clear whether there is any consolation here. There is never a Hegelian synthesis. Nor could there be . . .

Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
June 2013¹⁴

With the exception of the notes that follow, all notes are Garcia's own unless otherwise indicated in brackets. Garcia's sources were checked with their English-language originals, or translations when available. Some translations have been modified. All translated citations that did not have English translations at the time of writing are the translators' own. French terms occasionally appear in brackets in the body of the text, and certain terms and phrases

were corrected or clarified at Garcia's request. Bilinguals may consult the original for comparison.

Notes

1. We read '(i.iii.i, §14)' as 'Book I, Part III, Chapter I, Section 14'. With one exception, each chapter in Book I begins with numbered sections, followed by one to three sections of commentary. The chapters in Book II do not begin with numbered paragraphs, and are divided into named sections. So '(i.i.iii)' will cite material in the post-numbered commentary in Book I, Part I, Section III, and '(ii. ii.A)' will cite material in Book II, Chapter II, Part A. For material in the Introduction we use '(I.)'.
2. As with the example of a clementine that follows, Garcia makes this point very clearly elsewhere. See Garcia's 'Crossing Ways of Thinking: On Graham Harman's System and My Own'.
3. See especially Harman on over- and undermining in the opening sections of *The Quadruple Object* as well as the discussion of speculative realism and object-oriented philosophy in the translators' own 'Actual Qualities of Imaginative Things: Notes Towards an Object-Oriented Literary Theory'. Garcia explicitly mentions Harman in the Introduction and then discusses his philosophy much more extensively in 'Crossing Ways of Thinking: On Graham Harman's System and My Own'.
4. We would be remiss if we did not note that this is a little too quick. In Chapter XII of Book II, Garcia's account of beauty allows things to be more or less themselves, with the beautiful object being maximally itself.
5. However, it should be noted that Garcia distances himself from Meinong and various neo-Meinongian currents. See Garcia's 'Après Meinong. Une autre théorie de l'objet'.
6. The translators do this rigorously in 'Garcia's Paradox', presented at the 2013 Notre Dame *Translating Realism* conference. Second-order versions of the standard natural deduction introduction and elimination rules are required. For example, the derivation from the fact that an arbitrary object lacks all determinations ($\forall P \neg P(b)$) to the conclusion that it does have a determination $\exists P(P(b))$ is simply an instance of second-order existential introduction.
7. For a rather profound discussion of this point with respect to Latour, see Harman's *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. In 'Object-Oriented France: The Philosophy of

Tristan Garcia', Harman explicitly raises the worry with respect to Garcia.

8. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* is perhaps the canonical text arguing in this fashion. Much of what is still called 'deconstructionism' in American humanities departments is just Bradley's arguments about the individuation of objects applied to word meanings.
9. Again, we note Harman's worry about whether Garcia is successful. The issues are deep, and as we go on to remark above, crucially involve the interplay between Garcia's philosophy of time and the formal model of things alone in the world.
10. NBG (Neumann-Bernays-Gödel) set theory quantifies over proper classes. However, even in the more standard Zermelo-Fränkel set theory, sentences with free variables must be (meta-linguistically) thought to name proper classes. For a withering critique of both forms that has strong overlap with Garcia's defence of true contradictions, see Graham Priest's *In Contradiction* and *Beyond the Limits of Thought*.
11. To be clear, Quine's 'New Foundations' has a universal set and is probably consistent. However, if Priest's arguments against the restriction strategies of standard set theory are valid they would also apply against the kind of type-theoretic restrictions in set theories of this type. In this context, one must also consider the tradition of non-well-founded set theory, which avoids Russell's Paradox via restricted comprehension while still allowing sets to be members of themselves.
12. There are real opportunities for the ambitious formal ontologist here. Since Garcian objects are in part determined by the things that comprehend them, a Garcian set theory would be inconsistent with the standard axiom of extensionality (cf. Nicholas Goodman's 'A Genuinely Intensional Set Theory'). In addition, one would need to look at formal accounts of mereology, since on the issue of unit sets not being identical with their members, versus the way mereology treats join, Garcia's comprehension is much more mereological. There are axiomatisations of mereology where the join relation is irreflexive, antisymmetric, and (unlike set-theoretic membership) transitive, exactly as is Garcia's comprehension. A successful formalisation would capture the important truths of comprehension, and also shed light on the relation between standard set theories and the new intensional mereology. We don't know whether the formalism would need to be dialetheist just because it is possible to be a dialetheist, but (analogous to the manner in which one might

view glut semantics, perhaps via a guerilla reading of Priest's notion of classical recapture) to avoid substructuralism by taking true contradictions to impose pragmatic restraints on the use of consistent formalisms.

13. See Bowie's *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*. Recent English language philosophy that genuinely enters into Habermasian dialogue with the German Idealists follows Bowie in critiquing recent philosophy as mere recapitulations of Nietzsche's complaints, but *pace* Bowie are not ready to consign metaphysics to the wide Sargasso Sea of positivism and phenomenology. See especially Iain Hamilton Grant's *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* and the object-oriented Hegel developed by Robert Stern in such works as *Hegel, Kant, and the Structure of the Object* and *Hegelian Metaphysics*.
14. We would like to thank Ridvan Askin, Eric Bjella, Graham Bounds, Levi Bryant, Emily Beck Cogburn, Jenny Daly, Paul John Ennis, Tristan Garcia, Patrick Gamez, Fabio Gironi, Graham Harman, Adrian Johnston, Carol MacDonald, Rebecca Mackenzie, Raphaël Millière, Louis Morelle, Leah Orth, and Dawn Suiter. Orth served as Cogburn's research assistant during the summer of 2012 and helped check the initial translation of the book's Introduction. Beck Cogburn, Garcia, and Harman each read and annotated complete drafts. Daly, MacDonald, Mackenzie, and Harman have been helpful and attentive throughout. Garcia himself has been unfailingly helpful and solicitous. An unexpected source of joy has been just how much philosophy we have personally learned from Harman and Garcia while thinking through their responses to our missives concerning the translation. Our greatest hope is that this is reflected appropriately both here and in what follows.

Series Editor's Preface

Tristan Garcia's *Form and Object* is one of the most promising works of systematic philosophy to emerge from France since the turn of the century. Thanks to the heroic labour of translators Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn, we are able to publish an English version of this sophisticated book soon after its original appearance in French, late in the autumn of 2011.¹

A brief biographical introduction will help set the stage for the treatise itself. Garcia was born in Toulouse on 5 April 1981 to academic parents, but spent his formative years in Algeria. His philosophical originality blossomed early in a manner that led him to difficulties in the conservative French academic system; only later did Garcia find a handful of supporters, with Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux most prominent among them. Later, he wrote his doctoral thesis under the formidable Sandra Laugier. Yet Garcia was already prominent as a literary figure before his public breakthrough as a philosopher. His 2008 debut novel *La meilleure part des hommes* won the prestigious Prix de Flore, and was later translated into English as *Hate: A Romance*.² Since that celebrated entrance, Garcia's literary career has continued alongside his already prolific philosophical output, which began early with a little-known treatise *L'Image*, which appeared in 2007.³ In 2011 Garcia published *Nous, animaux et humains*, a surprising work on a surprising topic: Jeremy Bentham. That was followed just months later by *Forme et objet*, an astonishing achievement for a philosopher of just thirty years old.

Form and Object consists of two parts – or 'Books' as Garcia terms them. Book I (entitled 'Formally') might be described as an austere formal ontology of everything that is. The difficult terrain of this first book is made easier by Garcia's lucid, friendly, modest

style of prose. He uses the term ‘thing’ to describe whatever is in some way. While this sort of ‘flat ontology’ has been familiar since the time of Alexius Meinong (1853–1920), Garcia has argued elsewhere that Meinong’s supposed flatness is not flat enough.⁴ He has also claimed that my own distinction between real and sensual objects does not do justice to the initial flatness of reality.⁵ For Garcia, each thing is equally solitary with respect to that which it is not: namely, the world. But if the thing is whatever exists without respect to anything else, we can also speak of *objects*, or entities insofar as they are composed of other objects and enter into the composition of further objects. This process continues until we reach the universe, which unlike the world is a ‘big thing’ composed of all the things that are. The object is neither that which is in it, nor that in which it is, but rather the *difference* between these two extremes. Garcia holds that there is no thing-in-itself outside this difference, since this would make the thing ‘compact’, his central polemical term (which is luckily the same word in English as in French). After a painstaking analysis of such terms as ‘thing’, ‘object’, ‘world’, ‘universe’, and ‘form’, Garcia concludes that such analysis is necessary but ultimately not very rich. For this reason, as if he were purposely reversing the order of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic*, Garcia turns to a reflection on numerous concrete shapes of human and cosmic existence.

In this spirit, Book II (entitled ‘Objectively’) is a more reader-friendly progression through various specific topics. Here the distinction between the ‘formal’ (which pertains to thing/world) and the ‘universal’ (which concerns object/universe) is the engine of Garcia’s dialectic, propelling him through sixteen chapters that lead seamlessly from one to the next, discussing such themes as time, life, culture, art, history, gender, and economics.⁶ Central to Book II is Garcia’s tantalising concept of ‘intensity’, by virtue of which an object can be more or less intense, meaning more or less *itself*, despite the ostensibly non-judgemental flatness of Garcia’s earliest pages.

Though Garcia occasionally speaks of his debt to Speculative Realism, he is considerably younger than the Generation X founding figures of the Speculative Realist current. Indeed, Garcia can be viewed as the first ‘Millennial’ philosopher in the continental tradition, or even the first ‘post-Speculative Realist’. His vast reading and cognitive elegance add up to a book that will be read widely

throughout the Anglophone world and might even create a school of its own.

Graham Harman
Ankara
August 2013

Notes

1. Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 2011).
2. Tristan Garcia, *Hate: A Romance* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).
3. Tristan Garcia, *L'image* (Paris: Atlande, 2007).
4. See Garcia's April 2012 Paris lecture, 'Après Meinong: Une autre théorie de l'objet', available online at <<http://www.atmoc.fr/seances/>> (last accessed 15 September 2013). Scroll to the bottom of Séance 23 and click 'Texte de l'exposé' for a PDF file.
5. Tristan Garcia, 'Crossing Ways of Thinking: On Graham Harman's System and My Own', *Parrhesia* 16 (2013), pp. 14–25.
6. For a summary of these rich discussions, see Graham Harman, 'Object-Oriented France: The Philosophy of Tristan Garcia', *Continent* 5.1 (2012), pp. 6–21.

Introduction

Our time is perhaps the time of an epidemic of things.

A kind of ‘thingly’ contamination of the present was brought about through the division of labour, the industrialisation of production, the processing of information, the specialisation of the knowledge of things, and above all the desubstantialisation of these things. In Western philosophical traditions, things were often ordered according to essences, substrata, qualities, predicates, *quidditas* and *quodditas*, being and beings. Precluding anything from being equally ‘something’, neither more nor less than any other thing, thus becomes a rather delicate task. We live in this world of things, where a cutting of acacia, a gene, a computer-generated image, a transplantable hand, a musical sample, a trademarked name, or a sexual service are comparable things. Some resist, considering themselves, thought, consciousness, sentient beings, personhood, or gods as exceptions to the flat system of interchangeable things. A waste of time and effort. For the more one excludes this or that from the world of things, the more and better one makes something of them, such that things have this terrifying structure: to subtract one of them is to add it in turn to the count.

This work was born from a feeling which it simultaneously attempts to uphold, illustrate, and rationally respond to: there are more and more things. It is increasingly difficult to comprehend them, to be supplementary to them, or to add oneself to oneself at each moment, in each place, amidst people, physical, natural, and artefactual objects, parts of objects, images, qualities, bundles of data, information, words, and ideas – in short, to admit this feeling without suffering from it. The goal of this work is to bring those who do not yet share this feeling to admit it, and to propose to those who already admit it a way of ridding oneself of it. This

involves the construction of a new model of the division of things – of things around us, of things in us, and of us among things.

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This treatise is for those of us who love things, but who struggle in the face of their accumulation. It aims to put a thought to the test: a thought *about things* rather than a thought *about our thought about things*. Whoever expects philosophy to teach them something about knowledge, consciousness, or individual and collective subjectivity more broadly, must be forewarned: they may be disappointed. Here we will return as little as possible to this way of thinking. However, this doesn't mean that we will abstain from it altogether. By entering into this work, the reader must agree not to immediately ask for its conditions – in other words, by asking: Where does an object come from? By whom and how? By what right, in what culture, and by what cognitive processes? If the model of things described in the following pages is valid, it ought to be retroactively applicable to any subject, consciousness, and condition of thinking, provided one has the patience to judge it at the end and not at the beginning.

Philosophies of intentionality, consciousness, language, and action that try to address our relations to things fail insofar as they begin by establishing a relation aimed at objectivity. The goal of objectivity is soon abandoned and never attained. For whoever believes that thought commences by aiming at the 'things themselves' always ends up eclipsing things, which were the ends, and siding with this movement of thought, knowledge, and action, which were merely the means.

By beginning this way, whoever bets on thinking primarily about our knowledge or consciousness of things produces an object of thought that they identify with a relation. Henceforth, on this view, each thing that will be an object of thought can only be recognised if it resolves itself within the relation. Just as Konrad Lorenz's geese are 'imprinted' – in the early ethological sense of the term – by the first living creature they see as a maternal object, philosophers who begin with human thought are imprinted by this method. What these philosophers primarily assume as an object of thought will forever remain the form of this object. This will be the imprint of what philosophy can and ought, if it is consistent, to accept consequently as being 'something'. It would be absurd to believe that philosophy could make its primary object conscious-

ness as ‘consciousness of’, and consequently to discover ‘things themselves’ other than as given by, for, and with the consciousness of these things, henceforth *imprinted* in it.

Therefore, it is in our best interest to initiate a way of thinking that attaches itself to things – rather than to this or that type of relation directed at things – in such a way that desire, will, mind, or subjectivity can be conceived as objects. A thought about things, marked at its birth by the imprint of objectivity, will no longer recognise anything except things. For this way of thinking, a subject is always an object, though that object may be a determined, modified, or intensified object.

The question is therefore: is it better to begin by thinking about our access, which will never have access to things, but only to our conditions of access, or to begin by thinking about things, which, if we do not want to cheat, obtains the thinghood in every possible mode of subjectivity?

The second solution deserves our approval for at least three reasons.

First, we have been incapable of doing otherwise, since we are caught reflecting on things from adolescence. Everything that proves to be a thing appears to us behind the mask of its thinghood. But this reason only holds a posteriori – and only because we have reluctantly entered a certain state of mind. This reason is singular.

Second, our time is plagued by the metaphysics of access. The twentieth century – to which this treatise in some way proposes to bid adieu – was a period of theorising our methodological *access* to things, rather than theorising about *things* as such. For example, our theories of methodological access talked about formal language and ordinary language; the phenomenology of consciousness and the phenomenology of perception; the opening of being; the structure of the unconscious and the structure of myths; normativity and processes of subjectivation; self-reflection and critical consciousness. But the pendulum was bound to swing the other way. This reason is historical. While writing this treatise, such a historical shift was not always acceptable, and will not endure, since we must also think about the conditions of givenness and of the representation of things. This historical reason is only a particular reason.

Third, we must understand that by initially thinking about things we are not prevented from conceiving of our thought,

language, and knowledge as things equal to things thought, said, and known. On the other hand, by initially thinking about our relations to things, we systematically fail to accomplish our original goal, the things themselves; this way of thinking loses its objective en route and falls short of its target. Its sole objective is to give a descriptive account of our methods of aiming at things through consciousness, language, representation, or action. But by thinking about things, we make no promises that we cannot keep, whereas a second-order thought about our thought about things, for example, promises an access to things that it ultimately denies the existence of. To the extent that philosophies of access exchange objects for conditions of their enunciation, things become estranged from their own composition as objects. This is a universal reason.

Personal, historical, and other arguments lead some to first consider that which is ‘something’, rather than the position, production, or formation of this ‘something’.

Does this treatise present a defence of ‘realism’, since it considers things rather than our access to these things? If one thinks that reality consists merely of possible, impossible, imaginary, or virtual kinds of things, then I think we can answer negatively. No preference is given here to any one special kind of thing, since each kind is neither better nor worse than another kind. *Real* things do not matter to us here. *Real things* matter to us – and, for this reason, other kinds of things as well.

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Our project finds common ground among those who are developing an ‘object-oriented metaphysics’, abandoning what Graham Harman calls ‘philosophies of access’,¹ and who are interested in a ‘flat ontology’ of things.

In Manuel DeLanda’s rereading of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, the idea of a ‘flat ontology’² was used to describe theories that do not order worldly entities hierarchically – either in accordance with the substantiality of entities, or based on transcendental principles – but that attribute an equal ontological dignity to each individuated thing. Like in some of Éric Chevillard’s novels, every difference between things – an atom, a dead person, a tree trunk’s roundness, a football team, the laws of gravitation, or a half of the word ‘word’ – systematically involves intensive differences, subject to variation.

In fact, we begin this treatise with an investigation of a flat ontology, or the possible ontology of a flat world, where things are devoid of any kind of intensity. The world explored in Book I is the world in which any thing, *sensu stricto*, is equivalent to another thing. Relativists will not breathe easy in this world. This book's central claim is that no classical determination – including the property of being non-contradictory, of being individuated, or of having identity or unity³ – is contained in our concept of the most unrestricted, emptiest thing and in the most formal possibility of a 'thing'. We consider as inessential all that may characterise a thing until we have properly identified what defines it as a thing, and not as a *consistent* thing, *individual* thing, or *one* thing. We thus aim at neither the being of unconditioned things,⁴ nor at that of undetermined things, but rather at the being of *de-determined* things.

Our approach goes to extremes to prove that it is possible to describe the non-trivial qualities of a world of things lacking all qualities. Once the possibility of a description of such a flat world of de-determined things is accepted, we must still prove its necessity, or at least its utility.

The goal of this de-determination is to have at one's disposal a cross-sectional plane of every container and every order which maps the topography of the physical, biological, animal, and human universe; artefacts; artworks; economic networks of production, exchange, and consumption; class, gender, and age differences.

This flat world must make use of necessary divisions, of a differential plane in relation to which the concrete relations of everything that has a determined content could be thought, questioned, and judged.

In short, our project attempts to generate a formal world of de-determined things. But it does not in the least aestheticise or consider this formal world as a refuge of ontological solitude independent of the modern and democratic accumulation of objects. We must understand that only the possibility of considering the flatness of things will enable us to locate ourselves among values, intensities, classes, order and chaos, the maelstrom of everything that inter-comprehends itself inside out [*s'entre-comprend sens dessus dessous*] – all that we comprehend and all that comprehends us. The cross-sectional plane of things without qualities is the final life preserver we cling to as we drown in the flood of

all that accumulates, submerses us, continually replenishes the horizons of knowledge and action, and moves us away from the world, from the totality of what is, which we dare not and know not how to imagine.

Since we have the impression that there are too many things (to see, know, or take into account), our thought, life, and actions become paralysed by the apprehension of objective complexity. This impression overflows with factors, networks, and relative positions which divide, intersect, overlap, and contradict each other, like so many injunctions that one cannot follow by simply remaining faithful or coherent (to whom? to what? one hardly knows any more).

The formal plane of thought enables us to cut short all episodic, experiential, or enacted accumulation through simplicity; its impoverished surface makes possible *this* or *that* as ‘something’, neither more nor less.

Unlike the ‘flat ontologies’ proposed thus far, we do not restrict ourselves to a plane of individuated and non-hierarchised entities, having recourse to the concepts of ‘interaction’ or ‘emergence’ to explain the appearance of totalities and organisational structures. We combine our *formal* ontology of equality with an *objective* ontology of inequality.

If this treatise presents an ontology of a flat world, its sole aim is to then propose an encyclopedia and topography of the universe and objects, of practical problems of division, and of the valuation of cosmological, biological, anthropological, cultural, artistic, social, historical, economic, and political domains. Far from concluding with a description of a formal world where differences between things have been reduced to zero, this book aims to assemble a description of a flat world of things that can match the antagonistic reconstruction – between universalism and relativism – of the magnitudes, values, depths, variations, and interests of present objects, accumulated endlessly, and contested by several methodological approaches.

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In hindsight, these contemporary theoretical problems first appeared to us chaotically and in isolation: the status of the ultimate components of matter and the ultimate form of the universe; the alternative between presentism and eternalism in ontologies of time; the emergence of life; the conflict between vitalism and

biochemical reductionism; evolutionary theory's division of life into species; and the difference between human and other animal species (dissolved by naturalism in the particular and strengthened by humanism in the universal). We can add to these contentious issues – the division of matter, life within matter, animality within life, and humanity within animality – the conflicts concerning the division of humanity's artworks, artefacts, and organisms into intensities, values (beautiful, true, and good), classes (of origin, of ideas, of social interests), genders (masculine and feminine), and ages. How does one divide a persistent thing or something becoming into different objects? How does one refrain from turning these objects into substances, making them compact, as if they existed in themselves? Conversely, how does one not dissolve them into pure eventuality,⁵ potentiality, or becoming? Quite simply, how does one retain *things* – neither too closed on themselves, nor too transient?

We understand that the problem is always the same: that we divide cosmological space-time, the evolution of life, humans, and other animals; that we wonder what distinguishes artworks from other objects; that we classify things according to their value, gender,⁶ or time. We must determine whether the concept of things is still possible – things which neither solidify into substances nor vanish into pure potentiality.

How should we proceed?

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The challenge of this book is to be neither determined by a positive content nor structured by an analytic or dialectical method.

The price to pay for this approach is that it may be judged to be naïve, simple, and fallible, built upon no positive knowledge, adhering to neither humanity nor society, neither history nor nature. The argument does not arrange the universe of all things according to an eminent object which would comprehend them all together. Instead, it seeks its own architecture. It does not put forward a satisfactory explanation, a narrative where *everything* organises itself humanly, naturally, socially, historically, and so on. Here, in the last instance, things will never lie in a household altar of this kind – without actually being an entirely vacuous narrative.

Articulated by no logic, admitting neither the law of non-contradiction nor the a priori conditions of rationality, our

argument may also risk seeming to an analytic philosopher, unconscious, inconsistent, without infrastructure, or as refusing to admit what is implicitly its own infrastructure.

Lastly, we refuse to dialectically arrange contradictions. For a dialectician, our theory may appear to go nowhere, to sink into relativism, to make everything and anything possible, to prove to be inconsistent and, worst of all, flat, since it does not hierarchise things formally.

In the last analysis, our theoretical compass will be the conviction that *no thing is reducible to nothing*, which resists both analysis and dialectic. Such a proposition means both that no thing can be absolutely reduced to nothingness – because that thing is dead, past, false, imaginary, nonexistent, or contradictory, for example – and that no thing is absolutely reducible to any other thing. Every analytic reduces the possibility of being something to some logical, rational, or pragmatic conditions. Every dialectic reduces the possibility of being something to its mediation by another thing. Instead, we demonstrate our commitment to that solitary something in each thing that can never be reduced to anything else. This irreducibility is the ‘chance’ of each thing, and the ground for dismissing both analytic and dialectical ways of thinking. We reject ways of thinking that reduce things exclusively to natural, social, or historical things.

We are situated, and hope to situate the reader, in light of this single idea: we must be aware that no thinkable thing can be reduced to nothing, and that thought itself cannot reduce anything to nothing.

This book tries to retain the ontological *chance* of each thing by considering each disposition of things as a direction of the circulation of being, justifiable so long as it is neither impossible nor makes itself impossible.

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In order to clarify this idea, we represent possible distribution channels of being.

The first model consists in conceiving of being as circulating from things which do not exist by themselves: predicates and accidents. Let us allow the quality of an entity to be represented by an arrow projecting being, which the quality has, onto the being of an entity that the quality describes. If I aim at the being of some redness, the texture of denim, and some cut or pattern in

the form of an hourglass, I can imagine three arrows carrying the being of redness, the being of denim, and the being of the form of an hourglass towards a fourth arrow: a dress which is red, denim, and in the form of an hourglass. And yet the dress is not predicated on anything, while the redness, denim, or form of an hourglass are predicated on the dress. The dress directs the circulation of being into itself, into its *self*. At the end of its flight, the arrow of the dress aims at nothing other than itself. In this substantial model of the distribution of being, the being of some secondary entities flows towards the being of primary entities which flows in a closed channel. Being's channel is blocked by the in-itself, which acts as a necessary buffer against its circulation. A thing, in the strict sense, is thus constituted by the distribution channel of a self-sustaining being, and of beings sustained by this primary being. These qualities are like tributaries of a river – substance – flowing towards its own ocean and its own source. In this essentially ancient and classical way of dividing things – from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel, and implicit in Confucianism and Samkhya – there is clearly a hierarchisation between what is carried towards something other than itself and this other thing which serves as its ontological support, supporting its proper being.

The second model consists not in distributing being substantially, but vectorially. One thus conceives of trajectories of being, identified with events, facts, powers, intensities, or intentionality.

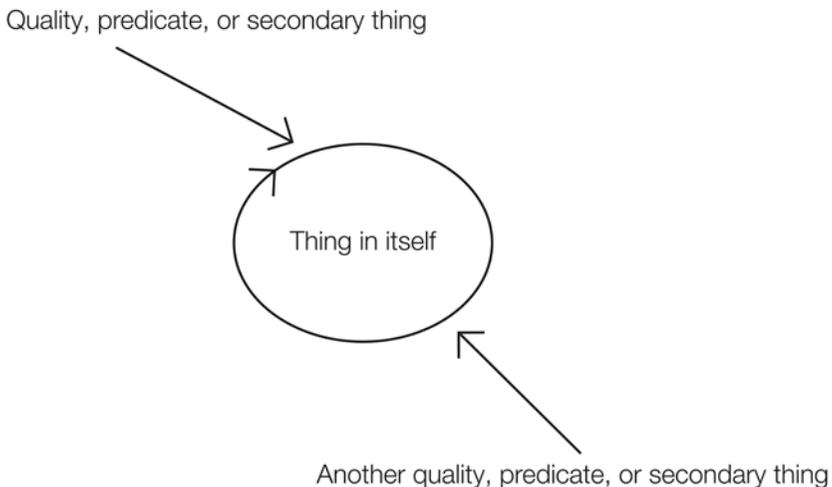


Figure 1: The substantial channel of being

These vectors of being are primary. They carry, support, and displace being, but without ever obtaining an end point or objective consistency. In such a representation, what is in the world is not identity but difference, trajectory, becoming, a continuous projection of being which never leads to a compact being, closed upon itself. There is no in-itself. Being is never like the flight of a boomerang. Nothing is self-contained or sealed. The ontological plane is open and extends through flows, forces, and becomings. To account for the apparent existence of things, of identifiable and re-identifiable stable entities, this model views the possibility of determining figures at the intersection of different trajectories. These figures are sealed, like the sides of a triangle made of plumes of transient smoke emitted from three aeroplanes scanning the sky. An observer may have the impression of perceiving a triangle in the sky, a determined figure inscribed in the conjunction of three different events or trajectories. In this essentially contemporary vectorial model (found in certain Nahua philosophies of Mexico, Nietzsche, Bergson, and evolutionary theory), things are considered as secondary effects, constructions, or illusions at the intersection of several events or vectors of being.

Every epistemic domain – from cosmology to sociology (which divide spatio-temporal events or individuals into domains) and from biology to psychology (which define species within evolving processes or subjects among effects, actions, and reactions) – tends to secretly rely on models of the circulation of material, social, biological, or psychological being.

But every epistemic domain must not and cannot have anything *except* substantial ontologies and vectorial ontologies.

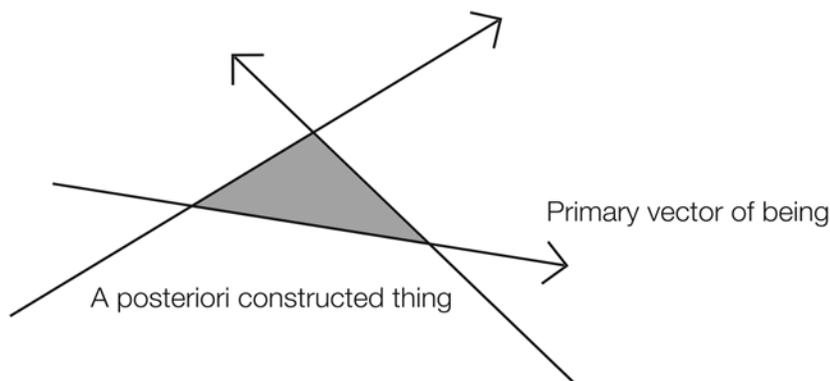


Figure 2: The vectorial channel of being

Each division of things is accompanied by the development of some distribution channel of being. And if we want to divide things in a flat world in order to section off the accumulation of objects (which prevents us from being and from comprehending the world), we must find a non-substantial and non-vectorial way of allowing the being of things to circulate. Substantiality tends to compact being in the final stage of its process, overdetermining self-saturated things or things in themselves. The pure eventuality of the vectors of being tends to dissolve and disseminate being, and transforms things into effects, illusions, or secondary realities. Our concept of a thing fits neither the first nor the second model. The first produces a thing which is too much of a thing, which is 'compact', while the second generates a thing which is not enough of a thing, which is only a construction or ephemeral projection. Our aim is the following: to conceive of a model that is neither too strong nor too weak, and to represent things that are really in the world without being in themselves.

The only solution consists in constructing the following trajectory: being enters into a loop wherein being is not projected in itself, but cast outside itself. In our model, an arrow points inside to a circle – a thing – and then from this circle a second arrow points outside.

Being comes inside a thing and being goes outside it. A thing is nothing other than the *difference* between being-inside [*l'être entré*] and being-outside [*l'être sorti*]. Accordingly, the channel of being is never blocked. Inside a thing, a thing is never itself. A thing is not in itself, but outside itself. Nonetheless, being is not eventually 'pollinated' by vectors, but has an objective end-point. Things correspond to the circle indicating the gap, difference, and inadequacy between the entering arrow and the exiting arrow, and are inscribed or *imprinted* in the world.

To reinscribe things in the world is to situate them outside themselves (as substances) and outside us (as subjects). It is to arrange them outside themselves (their self and ourselves) in the world. The price to pay for this arrangement is a circulation of being that systematically distinguishes two senses [*sens*] of things: *that which is in a thing* and *that in which a thing is*, or that which it comprehends and that which comprehends it.⁷

Take, for example, a block of black slate, a random rectangular sample taken from a site of continental collision. Few people will deny that this block is a thing. One can of course point out that it

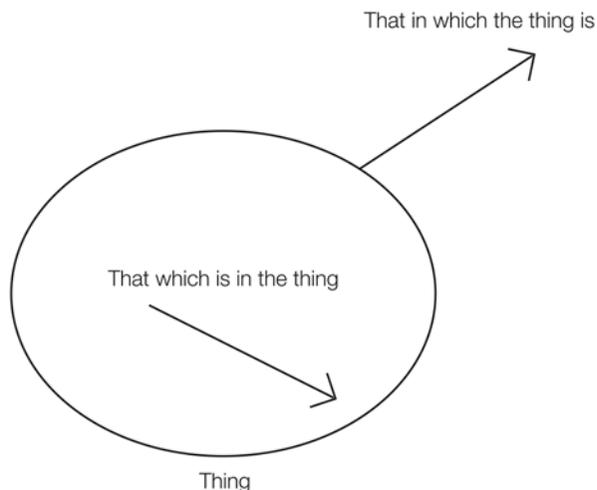


Figure 3: The thingly channel of being

is necessary to have an active subjectivity to divide or distinguish this block of matter lying on the ground of dusty soil, in order to perceive it as such. But this slice of black slate possesses certain qualities of cohesion and of solidity that allow one to dissociate it from its environment, handle it, transport it, and consider it quite simply as ‘something’. What is it composed of? It contains quartz, clay-like minerals, mica, some traces of feldspar. And all these components themselves have a certain atomic structure. But in a wider sense, they also enter into the constitution of the rock as ‘thing’: its rectangular form, the irregularities of its surface, the porphyroblasts coated with pyrite, its sombre color, its delicate texture, its weight, its fragility, and all the primary or secondary qualities by which we can recognise the black slate.

We say that this is *all that is in this thing*, all paths of being that lead to the constitution of this black slate in my hand.

Yet, *that in which this slate is* can never be inferred from *everything that is in this slate*. From everything which composes it, I will not obtain the slate’s location in the world, the relations in which it inscribes itself, the fact that it is now in my hand, the function of a weapon that it can exercise if someone attacks me, its place in the landscape or in the series of slate pieces scattered alongside this valley. That which it is, this unique thing which exists in the world, and I hold in my hand, is outside itself. The slate can in fact enter into the composition of the side of a mountain, a roof, or a

collection of rocks. As a whole, it then becomes a part of another thing, and it is no longer a question of *that which is in the slate*, but of *that in which this slate is*.

A number of things are in this black slate. The black slate on its own can enter into the composition of a number of other things. Therefore, the black slate is not in itself. It is not a substance on which various qualities are predicated – for example, its weight or its colour. No more is it an ephemeral entity, not existing in itself, constructed by my thought, senses, or action, from events or becomings (some variation in the matter's density, some effects of geological transformation, a trajectory of luminous rays). No, the black slate is a relation, inscribed in the world, between the being that enters the world and the being that goes outside it, and that enters in turn into another thing (into the soil, landscape, classes of other objects, my perception, or the world in general).

A thing is nothing other than the difference between *that which is in this thing* and *that in which this thing is*. Unless one guarantees this double sense, there are no thinkable things. Every reductionist who claims to deduce that which this or that thing is from that which composes this or that thing only succeeds in dissolving the very thing that they claim to account for. We attempt to accomplish the exact opposite of this: to guarantee things as invaluable differences embedded in the distribution channels of being of the world. To complete our task, we set out to discover the meaning which circulates among things, between that which composes them and that which they compose, inside or outside us, with or without us.

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This meaning that we call for, and that thought seeks, is not salvation. It is not the possibility of holding onto the essential, necessary, or genuine self after the end of life, or in our damaged social existence.

Some ways of thinking seek salvation. Here we seek to redeem nothing: not the soul, not personhood, not the body, not thought, not a community, not the proletariat. A thing among things, this treatise attempts to save neither me nor you; between things there is no salvation whatsoever.

The meaning we seek is not reducible to a mere signification, a language game, a body of practices, or a normative system. Whoever calls for a semiotic meaning of things or a return to the

description of their signification, to the ways in which we name or make use of things, or to our linguistic, social, or cultural practices will be disappointed. The promise of thought is not kept. I seek a meaning of things outside us, and I have returned to what takes place between us.

Salvation is the hope of situating oneself outside things (escaping annihilation, death, oblivion, inauthenticity, alienation, reification). Signification is the disappointment of never managing to abstract things from the relations that we maintain with them. Salvation situates us outside of things, while signification precludes things from being situated outside of us.

I do not wish for the salvation of my soul, my body, human beings, my ideas, or my individuality. I do not ask for the (linguistic, cultural, historic) signification of things – our way of referring ourselves to them, of constructing their significance, of using them, of exchanging them, of making them significant among us, for us, and by us. No, I simply search for a meaning of things, whether this is the meaning of me, of you, or of a piece of black slate.

In truth, this meaning – neither completely existential nor completely semiotic – is simply the possibility of passing from one thing to the other. It is the possibility and necessity of never being reduced to a thing that would be nothing else, that would be in nothing else, and that would not exist in and by itself – whether one calls that matter, nature, history, society, God, or an individual. As if one could reduce the black slate to being nothing but a material thing or a natural thing or a social thing. As if one could then consider matter, nature, or society as things outside appearances, absolute, remaining in themselves. This ghost of ‘compactness’, which will be the adversary of our whole adventure of thought, will only disappear on one condition: for each thing to make sense, it must have *two* senses. Nature or history as things contain many things (first sense), but they are contained by things other than themselves (second sense).

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If one wants to formulate this undertaking in a single equation, it would be this: how do we obtain universality and maintain the sense of relativity at the same time? The price of this twofold commitment both to universalism and to the sense of relativity will be the abandonment of ecstatic becoming and of self-saturated things. In Book I, we must conceive of things emptied of them-

selves, without identity and de-determined. In Book II, we must conceive of things replenishing each other and ordered encyclopedically. Therefore we must learn to see double, formally and objectively, so that thought advances through a formal step and an objective step.

The structure of the treatise shows us how we can consider these two steps. Setting aside the Coda, which marks the collapse of the whole, the entire treatise is carried out in two books, which complement and respond to each other in sixteen chapters. The first book's formal system demands some confidence from the reader, for it is deliberately devoid of references or citations from the history of philosophy, although it tackles classical questions (for example, the One, the Whole, Being). This book combines affirmative and numbered propositions and full-page argumentation alongside descriptions of the flat world. The second book's objective system is based on first book's forms, but it puts them to the test in connection with various determined and ordered objects – structures of the universe, an individual's death, definitions of life, animality, art, and the economy – by adopting a more discursive style, strengthened by explicit and much more common references.

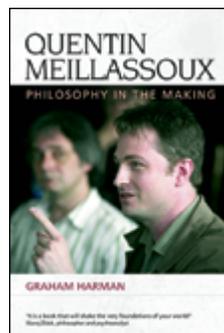
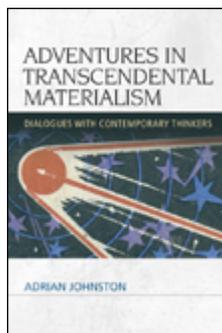
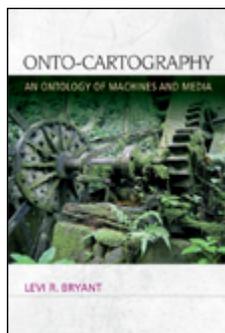
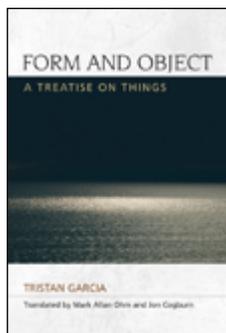
Whether your way of spontaneously relating to things is *formal* or *objective*, you are free to read this treatise in one way or the other to give meaning to the progress of philosophy.

Notes

1. In other words, ways of thinking that recognise 'that philosophy can be concerned only with our access to things' (Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, p. 123). Quentin Meillassoux prefers to speak of 'correlationism' to describe the theoretical primacy accorded to the *relation* between thought (or any other directed position: consciousness, perception, intuition, Merleau-Pontian 'flesh') and its correlate, to the detriment of each side of the terms in relation. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*.
2. Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, p. 47.
3. The entire treatise strives to refute W. V. O. Quine's famous slogan, 'no entity without identity' (W. V. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, p. 23). It also seeks to refute Leibniz's claim in his letter to Arnauld that 'what is not truly *one* being is not truly *one being* either' (G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 86). The aim

of this book is to actively demonstrate, through the construction of a coherent model, that there can and must be something less determined than such an *identifiable* entity or than being *one*: each ‘thing’ as it is ‘alone in the world’, and not comparable or compared with other things. Therefore, we maintain that solitude is less than unity and identity, and that it does not imply acceptance (any more than refusal) of the law of non-contradiction.

4. In the German idealist tradition – for example, early Schelling – to be unconditioned is to be what cannot be transformed into a thing. The thing (*das Ding*) is conditioned (*be-dingt*) by something other than itself.
5. [Translators’ note: We translate the French neologisms ‘*évènementialité*’ and ‘*évènemential*’ as ‘eventuality’ and ‘eventual’ (comparable to ‘substantiality’ and ‘substantial’), to be distinguished from ‘eventuality’ and ‘eventual’. They should be understood in the sense of ‘pertaining to events’ rather than in the sense of contingent, possible, or probable future events or outcomes.]
6. [Translators’ note: The French ‘*genre*’ may be translated in a variety of ways, depending on the context: (1) as ‘genus’, often in mathematical, scientific, or philosophical contexts; (2) as ‘gender’, in both the grammatical sense and in the sense of the relations between the masculinity and femininity of persons; (3) or as ‘genre’, in aesthetics, arts, and letters. The occurrences of ‘*générique*’ are translated most often as ‘gendered’, though occasionally as ‘generic’.]
7. [Translators’ note: We have rendered the French ‘*sens*’ most often as ‘sense’, but also in some cases as ‘meaning’, and rarely as ‘direction’. Readers should also note that Garcia distinguishes ‘*sens*’ from ‘*signification*’. Garcia’s correspondence with us has undoubtedly helped to clarify these matters, and we have tried to maintain consistency as much as possible at Garcia’s request.]



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