Object-Oriented Philosophy and Deconstruction: Realism in the work of Graham Harman and Jacques Derrida.

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Declaration of Authenticity

I, the undersigned, Niki Young declare that this thesis is my original work, gathered and utilised especially to fulfil the purpose and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university. I also declare that the publications and archival material cited in this work have been personally consulted.

Niki Young

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Abstract

Twenty-first century continental philosophy has witnessed a rising interest in rekindling questions related to philosophical realism after a long period of being chastised as a dogmatic and outmoded philosophical position. This interest can be largely attributed to the emergence of a relatively recent and broad philosophical movement known as "Speculative Realism," which includes Graham Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy." One of the principal targets of Harman's philosophy is the work of Jacques Derrida, who he criticises for propagating a staunch anti-realism framed in terms of a "linguistic idealism" which holds that there can be no possible access to extra-linguistic reality. In this dissertation, I analyse the issue of realism in the work of Harman's Object-Oriented Philosophy and Derridean deconstruction, in order to offer the following twofold contribution to knowledge; first, I provide a novel analysis and reassessment of Harman's philosophy framed in terms of two pairs of "negative" and "positive" theses pertaining to the nature of "objects" broadly construed. Second, I offer a Derridean rejoinder to the Harman's anti-realist critique of deconstruction, and I argue for the claim that by using the resources internal to deconstruction, the former's thought can be reconstituted as a novel and dynamic speculative form of realism. This dissertation is the first full-length work to analyse Jacques Derrida's work in relation to Graham Harman's, and calls for the revaluation of both philosophies.

Contents

Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, continental philosophy has witnessed a renewed interest in questions related to philosophical materialism and realism, in part due to the rise and eventual heterogeneous splintering of a novel philosophical movement which came to be known as "Speculative Realism." The latter got its label from a 2007 Goldsmiths conference entitled *Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop* (see Brassier et al., 2012). Graham Harman (1968–) was one of the four original speakers,[1] and is to date also the movement's most prolific and ardent promoter through his particular form of Speculative Realism dubbed "Object-Oriented Philosophy." In spite of their differing views on the nature of reality, all Speculative Realists may be said to share a joint commitment to the steadfast critique of a specific form of contemporary anti-realism which Quentin Meillassoux dubs "correlationism." The latter refers to the tendency in post-Kantian thought to transform all meditations concerning the nature of a mind-independent reality into questions about our *epistemic access* to the real, thereby reducing philosophy to what goes on *between* thinking and being (Meillassoux, 2008).

It would not be an understatement to say that the work of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) has borne the brunt of this criticism by being portrayed as representing the epitome of continental anti-realism, with Harman constituting one of his most forceful opponents. For the latter, Derridean deconstruction represents a strong form of "correlationism" in the form of a "linguistic idealism" which discounts the very possibility of an independent reality in favour of a perpetual meditation on "books" (see for instance Harman, 2012e, p. 96; 2014d, p. 106), and a continuous 'gliding across the surface of signification' (2013a, pp. 282). This characterisation of Derrida's work most certainly represents a well diffused interpretation of the thinker upheld both by many of his supporters and detractors alike.

In view of such claims and the theme of this dissertation more generally, it would then be important to raise the following questions: first, what is the nature of the contemporary turn to realism, and how does it relate to the classical theses of realism? Second, what are the main claims of Harman's "Object-Oriented

[1] The other three speakers were Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Quentin Meillassoux.

Philosophy," and how does it critique Derrida's alleged anti-realism? Third, how does Derrida's work stand in relation to the realist/anti-realist debate more generally, and Harman's critique more specifically? Would it also be possible to show – contra Harman – that a realist position can be inferred from Derrida's thought? All these questions may in turn be subsumed into the following more general research question: what is the nature of the relation between Deconstruction and Object-Oriented Philosophy with regards to the question of realism? In this dissertation I shall endeavour to provide a definitive answer to these questions by first offering a reworked interpretation of Harman's dynamic philosophy in light of his critique of Derrida (Chapter 3-6), so as to then use this reading in order to provide my specific *realist* reassessment of Derrida's work in relation to that of Harman (Chapters 7-10). More specifically, I shall show how Derrida's development of notions such as the *trace* and *différance* may be fruitfully read as providing the grounds for a novel and dynamic form of Speculative Realism.

It may be noted that the relation between Derrida and realism has recently been tackled in a limited number of works (see for instance Bryant 2014; Caputo 2002; 2009; Marder 2008; 2009; Norris, 2007; 2014; Wight, 2007), and a small number of authors have also written about the relation between Derrida and "Speculative Realism" in general (see for instance Basile, 2018; Goldgaber, 2020; Gratton, 2013; 2014; Hägglund, 2011c; Shakespeare, 2014). I am of the view that these works are forceful to the extent that they move away from mainstream characterisations of Derrida as an idealist or anti-realist "intellectual obscurantist" who infamously claims that there can be "nothing beyond language." Nevertheless, none of the works published to date provide an *in-depth analysis* of the relation between the work of Derrida and that of Harman. Thus, my goal is to fill this gap in knowledge as follows: first, I shall endeavour to analyse Derrida's relation to realism through the work of Harman in particular. Second, I shall provide an analysis of the relation between the work of Derrida and that of Harman. Finally, I shall evaluate how the philosophies of Harman and Derrida stand in relation to each other, and whether this can possibly give rise to new ways of looking at their respective philosophies.

Through this analysis I aim to put forward and defend my specific thesis that Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" offers a powerful and novel form of

realism, and also provides the necessary impetus for a re-evaluation of Derrida's philosophy. Nevertheless, I shall also claim that his (anti-realist) reading of the latter thinker also admits of an alternative *realist* interpretation. My original contribution to knowledge in this dissertation shall be threefold: first, I shall provide a novel reinterpretation of Harman's work structured in terms of what I call his "negative" and "positive" theses on the real, which he in turn interprets in terms of "objects" broadly construed. Second, I shall show how Derrida's philosophy may also be read in terms of his own specific (yet implicit) "negative" and "positive" claims on the real. Finally, I shall bring Derrida's work into dialogue with that of Harman in order to show that their respective philosophies may both be read as advancing original yet differing forms of Speculative Realism.

In light of these assertions and the aims of this work more generally, this dissertation shall develop as follows. In Chapter 1, I shall formulate a working definition of realism which is pertinent to this work overall, while in Chapter 2, I shall relate this definition to the contemporary critique of "correlationism" alluded to above. To elaborate, Harman is emphatic in his claim that Derrida is a staunch "correlationist" anti-realist, who reduces the real to a differential play of surface effects constituted by linguistic signifiers. Further to this, he also asserts that one can only portray Derrida as a realist by thwarting its meaning to suit their needs (2013c, p. 22). Nevertheless, it is also true that the meaning of "realism" is notoriously difficult to pin down, and this fact in turn requires both an analysis of its meaning as well the examination of its relation to the contemporary critique of "correlationism" put forward by the Speculative Realists.

Chapters 3-6 shall then deal with Harman's philosophy and his critique of Derrida. As its name suggests, Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" is premised on the claim that "objects" – broadly construed – form the basis of the real. He distinguishes between two kinds of objects, namely real and sensual ones and – as I have already suggested above – in this work I shall reinterpret his thought on each of these in terms of what I call their "negative" and "positive" features. The former entails the claim that an object refers to anything which cannot be "undermined" into nothing more than its constituent pieces, "overmined" into its relations and effects, or both simultaneously ("duomining"). Harman's "positive" claims on objects are in turn based on the idea that each and every "object" in his specific

sense must essentially be both *unified* (or self-identical) and *autonomous* from the specific context within which it inheres. In Chapter 3, I shall offer an in-depth analysis of the "negative" features, and I shall also relate this reading to Harman's evaluation of Derrida as a "linguistic idealist" who "overmines" the real into nothing more than a series of linguistic effects. In Chapters 4 and 5, I shall then deal with Harman's take on the "positive" features of *real* and *sensual* objects respectively, and I shall do this by framing his analysis in light of his novel reading of phenomenologists Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. I shall also use the latter analyses in order to further articulate Harman's critique of Derrida as an anti-realist. In Chapter 6, I shall then provide my own reading of Harman's views on the nature of space, time, essence, and *eidos,* and I shall also frame this analysis in relation to his specific take on the problem of interaction between different objects. I shall here also summarise the thrust of Harman's anti-realist reading of Derrida. This shall be done in preparation for the forthcoming chapters dealing more specifically with Derrida's thought.

Chapters 7-10 shall in turn offer my specific Derridean rejoinder to Harman's anti-realist reading of the thinker, where I shall advance the claim that the former's thought may also be interpreted to contain his own specific yet implicit "negative" and "positive" claims on the nature of the real. Chapter 7 shall deal with the latter claims, and I shall argue – contra Harman – that Derrida's critique of the "metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism" in fact entails the *realist* view that the real cannot be reduced to presence, whether this is understood in terms of the self-presence of a thing or its presence to consciousness. In Chapters 8 and 9, I shall then develop what I believe to be Derrida's implicit *positive take* on the real characterised in terms of a number of "aconceptual concepts" such as the *trace* and *différance* or, for short, the "*différantial trace.*" In Chapter 8, I shall show how Derrida discovers and mobilises the latter notions through his deconstructive reading of Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure, in order to then generalise their specific implications towards a positive account of the real. In chapter 9, I shall then push the findings of the previous chapter further by showing that these aforementioned notions may be read to imply a novel and powerful form of Speculative Realism on Derrida's part. In Chapter 10, I shall then bring the findings of the previous chapters together by specifically framing my Derridean-inflected

form of Speculative Realism in relation to that of Harman. I hope to convince the reader that both Derrida and Harman's forms of Speculative Realism are based on the shared commitment to the claim that the real is composed of an irreducible plurality of emergent singular entities. Nevertheless, I shall also show how their respective philosophies contrast to the extent that Harman's thought is premised on a model of *non*-relational ("autonomous") and "unified" entities which *pre-exist* said differences, while Derrida's realism rests on a relational and differential view of the real which discounts the possibility of an utterly "self-identical" or "unified" entity *a priori*.

The philosophical achievement of this thesis overall shall be to bring Derrida's deconstruction into dialogue with the emergent twenty-first century schools of thought of Object-Oriented Philosophy and Speculative Realism in order to show how the former's thought can be considered as a philosophical ally to these movements. More precisely, my final claim shall be that Derrida's thought is in fact, and contrary to all appearances, *allied* to Harman's (and to Speculative Realism more generally), and this is to the extent that it implicitly offers a vibrant and unique speculative form of realism grounded on the generalisation of a differing-deferring movement imposed by the structure of what he calls the "*différantial trace*."

Chapter 1: Towards a Working Definition of Realism

In "The Current State of Speculative Realism" (2013c) and elsewhere, Graham Harman asserts that adopting an explicitly realist philosophical position has always been a viable option for philosophers working within the analytic tradition, but not for those within the continental one. For this reason, he remarks that his first major work entitled *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (2002) was one of the first and few explicit proclamations of realism in recent continental philosophy (2013c, p. 22). This claim in turn stems from the fact that for Harman (2013a, p. 73), continental philosophy has, since Kant, portrayed the realism/anti-realism debate as a "pseudo-problem" hardly worthy of any attention (see for instance Husserl, 1969, p. 12; Heidegger, 2000, pp. 249-250), and in so doing has moved progressively towards more extreme forms of implicit anti-realism. Further to this, Harman has also often remarked that this anti-realist tendency within continental philosophy reaches its zenith with the work of Jacques Derrida, and that those willing to defend the latter as a realist often do so 'by bending the meaning of the term "realism" to signify what Derrida was doing all along' (2013c, p. 22). Harman is here referring to thinkers such as John D. Caputo, who, in his estimation, characterise Derrida as a realist insofar as they postulate a "real" existing only as a "negative" excess beyond our human ways of knowing the world (see, for instance, Caputo, 2002). It is for this reason that he sometimes dismissively refers to such alleged realist views '[realisms] of the remainder' (2020b, p. 47). These claims shall have to remain provisional for the time being, as they will be further investigated throughout the course of this work. However, it must be pointed out that such characterisations of Harman's own work as realist and of Derrida as an alleged anti-realist seem to presuppose a well-defined understanding of what the term "realism" means.

It is certainly true that Derrida uses the term sparingly and with a sense of reservation. This claim is further evidenced in the work of Peter Gratton, who notes that the awareness of the fleeting and shifting character of the term might be what causes Derrida to be guarded about the use of the word, and claims that Derrida often puts the term "reality" in quotation marks in order to 'note its shifting meaning in different contexts' (2013, p. 85). Contrastingly, Harman frequently explicitly proclaims his adherence to realism, and has also often asserted that the meaning of

the term is straight-forward and, thus, fairly easy to delineate (2015a, p. 235). This claim, however, conflicts with other instances when he suggests that the term is often subject to great misunderstanding and controversy. In *Tool-Being* (2002), for instance, Harman states that '"realism" will always be a loaded term that awakens dozens of misconceptions' (2002, p. 120). Relative to such claims, it may therefore be argued that the meaning of "realism" is in actual fact not as uncontroversial as it may seem, and that there is no universal agreement about the right way to characterize it. One would thus need to stipulate exactly the sense in which the word "realist" is being used because it seems to be rather empty and futile when not properly contextualised and defined.

Relative to this, the aim of this chapter shall not be to deliver a taxonomy of the various meanings of "realism," or to attempt to provide an exhaustive historical survey of the realism/anti-realism debate, for this would be beyond the scope of this work. Rather, my goal here shall be to identify a *working definition* of realism which would be suitable for the task of the present study. This goal shall in turn be achieved through a consideration of Lee Braver's characterisation of realism as outlined in his acclaimed work entitled *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (2007). I have chosen this particular account of realism over other possible characterisations since I believe that it presents a comprehensive definition of realism which is designed to be broad enough to capture the main possible theses of any realist position. In light of this consideration, the present chapter shall then proceed by specifying a working definition of realism through the review and assessment of each of the components of what Braver calls the "Realism Matrix," in order to then isolate those features which shall be deemed necessary for the characterisation of realism as understood throughout this dissertation.

1.1: Braver's "Realism Matrix"

As the subtitle of Braver's book would suggest, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (2007) presents a rigorous attempt to construct a historical survey of what he deems to be the most prominent forms of anti-realism in continental philosophy. In order to do so, he first starts by isolating the essential component features of all possible realist doctrines and organises them under the

rubric of what he terms the "Realism Matrix."[2] Braver lists the six interrelated (yet separable) component-parts of this "Realism Matrix" as follows: Independence, Correspondence, Uniqueness, Bivalence, Passive Knower and Realism of the Subject.

Each of these components shall in turn act as the basis for the analysis present in this section, and I shall here proceed as follows: in the first subsection, I shall consider the core metaphysical claim of realism, namely the Independence thesis. In the second subsection, I shall then analyse the three epistemological claims of realism included in Braver's "Matrix," namely the Correspondence, Uniqueness and Bivalence components. Finally, in the last section I shall examine Braver's last two components, namely the Passive Knower and Realism of the Subject components.

1.1.1: Realism and the Independence Component

The first thesis of realism listed by Braver is the Independence component (2007, p. 15), which in turn involves the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent world. Braver borrows this first criterion for a definition of realism from Hilary Putnam, who in turn argues that a realist must in the first place be committed to the fact that 'the world consists of some *fixed totality* of mind-independent objects' (Putnam, 1981, p.49). This first criterion is generally the one many would recognise to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for any realist position. There are however others who claim that this description alone is necessary but *not* sufficient for a definition of realism. Harman, for instance, suggests that the term "realism" in philosophy may, in the first instance, necessarily be taken to involve the 'commitment to a world existing independently of the mind' (2015a, p. 235), and he also often asserts that Derrida's alleged anti-realism precisely denies this minimal thesis of realism. Nevertheless, Harman also disagrees that such a criterion is sufficient for an account of realism. This is due to the fact that it defines reality as that which is independent of *the mind alone*. Contrastingly, he argues that any robust realism must also be committed to the independent existence of diverse real entities, and that the latter 'must be real not

[2] He also lists and elaborates on the six contrasting anti-realist theses. Nevertheless, I shall here focus exclusively on the realist ones, since it seems to me that the former are simply the antitheses of the latter.

just apart from' the human mind, 'but apart from each other as well' (2011d, p. 55).[3] Naturally, emphasising these independence claims of realism does not entail that epistemic issues are unimportant for an account of realism. Rather, it implies that the various questions related to truth and semantics are ultimately separable from – and thus extrinsic to – the metaphysical claims which stand at the core of realism.

From the outset, it must be noted that Braver's Independence criterion is in actual fact composed of two interrelated claims, namely the *existence* and *independence* theses of realism. It then follows that the minimum condition for being anti-realist about some entity or fact X is the denial of at least one of the following claims: that X exists or that X is mind-independent. Michael Devitt points out that the importance of the existence dimension lies in the fact that it serves to identify 'the entities that are the subject of the dispute over independence' (2013, p. 103), for it is possible to deny the existence of many entities ranging from naturally occurring and man-made objects, to social entities, scientific postulates and imaginary figures. By way of an example, adopting an eliminative materialist position towards the mind necessarily entails the claim that mental states are ultimately eliminable and reducible to brain states. As a result, such positions would qualify as anti-realist with regards to the mind, and this is to the extent that they deny that the latter exists altogether. Nevertheless, Devitt is also right to assert that it is more common for anti-realists to deny the independence component of realism (2013, p. 103). This denial of mind-independence is most prominently manifested in the various forms of philosophical idealism. For instance, George Berkeley famously held that objects are nothing but "ideas," and it therefore follows that they depend on human minds for their existence.

This difference between existence and mind-independence may be further emphasised by referring to Maurizio Ferraris' distinction between "constitutional" and "representational" dependence (see Ferraris, 2015a, 2015b). Ferraris argues that many anti-realists would want to dodge charges of outright Berkeleyan (subjective) idealism. For this reason, they frequently affirm the *existence* of some formless residue or ungraspable negative "excess" existing beyond the mind.

[3] As I shall show in Chapters 3-6, this shall constitute the core of his specific form of realism dubbed "Object-Oriented Philosophy."

Nevertheless, while this unstructured excess is not *constituted* by the mind, it is nevertheless *representationally* dependent on the mind (i.e. it is *not* mind-independent), insofar as it is the latter that gives it structure. The anti-realist thus often affirms that 'reality is there,' but that it is nevertheless simply an 'undifferentiated *chora* which is modelled by the subjects, who become constructors of phenomena' (2015b, pp. 32-33). In this way, reality is therefore 'granted existence [i.e. constitutional independence], but not [representational] independence' (2015b, p. 33). With this distinction in view, it may then be argued that the realist must not only be committed to the claim that reality exists, but that it also does so mind-independently; in other words, they must hold that it is *neither* constitutionally *nor* representationally dependent on humans.

Relative to this, the notion of mind-independence would appear to be highly problematic. This is because it seemingly excludes an innumerable swath of things which one intuitively takes to be real; for instance, man-made objects, social entities, as well as minds themselves cannot be said to be mind-independent if one defines this term in a restricted sense. Thus, it is my view that a characterisation of what is meant by mind-independence needs to be broad enough to make room for the possible commitment to the reality of many possible kinds of entities. To elaborate, the criterion of mind-independence might be understood only as a commitment to the mind-independence of natural objects such as trees, rocks, organisms, ecosystems, planets, galaxies and so forth. In this sense, natural objects may be characterised as real insofar as they are 'independent of the *existence* of the human mind' (DeLanda, 2013, p. 71, emphasis added) insofar as they would still exist even if minds never did. However, a realist might also want to include the mind-independence of human artefacts and social entities such as money, tools, organisations, cities, and so forth into their list of real entities. In this case then, one would have to define mind-independence as independence 'from the *contents of the mind*', in the sense that 'social entities may have internal dynamics that are objective but poorly understood by the human mind' (DeLanda, 2013, p. 71). A critic might possibly object that artefacts and social entities are ultimately human creations, and are, therefore, necessarily mind-dependent. However, as Harman rightly notes, this possible objection

> conflates two entirely different issues; whether or not humans were involved in the causal origins of a thing, and whether or not that thing is independent of the human understanding of it […] while on a causal level it is obviously true that human society [for instance] was constructed by humans, this does not entail that human society is equivalent to what humans say or know about it. (2015b, p. 139)

Nevertheless, including natural entities and man-made entities in the definition of mind-independence might still not be exhaustive enough, since it might possibly exclude the option of being a realist about the past, time, space, causality and so forth. For this reason, it would be fruitful to adopt the following general characterisation of mind-independence provided by Richard Sebold: 'mind-independence of *x* […] boils down to the requirement that belief/thought/concept *p* (where *p* concerns *x*) does not entail *p*' (Sebold, 2014, p. 14). In other words, and formulated as broadly as possible, some *X* may be very generally understood to be mind-independent if it is not *exhausted* by its representational properties.

It must then be asserted that this first component constitutes what I believe to be an indispensable prerequisite for realism, and would thus necessarily have to be included in the working definition of realism adopted throughout this work. Furthermore, as one shall be able to note in the subsequent chapters, this fundamental thesis shall act as the core thesis of a group of contemporary realist thinkers grouped under the name of "Speculative Realism." While they share innumerable disagreements on the proper way to characterise this independent world, all of them nevertheless share a common commitment to a mind-independent world existing beyond the human-world relation. It is however my view that Braver's definition of Independence is not well-suited for the ends of this work. This is because this account of the realist seems to be based on the assumption that realism necessarily entails reductionism, and that a realist must therefore believe that everything is reducible down to a "fixed totality" of its component parts. I therefore agree with Richard Sebold's claim that a realist must not necessarily be committed to a "fixed totality" of objects, for it would very well be possible to be a realist and at the same time hold non-reductive views which treat the emergent features of the world and the individual entities populating it as genuine realities rather than being merely features of human epistemic limitations (2014, p. 43). As shall become evident from the chapters dealing with Harman and Derrida throughout this work, this particular non-reductive and non-totalising view of the real shall prove to be crucial for my particular reading of both thinkers. To

elaborate, received opinion characterises Derrida's work as a staunch denier of mind-independent reality, with many – Harman included – taking his infamous claim that "there is nothing outside the text" as conclusive proof of his belief that the real is constitutionally and representationally dependent on humans or, more specifically, language. Throughout this work, I shall have occasion to challenge this specific representation of his work. More specifically, I will show that both Derrida and Harman may in fact be read as offering a view of the real which is premised on the mind-independent existence of a multitude of emergent entities which are irreducible to a foundational static whole (see especially Chapters 3, 7 and 10).

1.1.2: Correspondence, Uniqueness and Bivalence

Following Putnam's claim that realism necessarily involves a view of truth as correspondence between mind and world (1981, p. 49), Braver argues that the second component of the "Realist Matrix" is what he terms the Correspondence thesis. Unlike the metaphysical claims which characterise the Independence component, the Correspondence aspect involves the claim that for the realist truth must involve some form of correspondence between 'something on the side of the mind or language and something on the side of the world' (2007, p. 15). There have been philosophers who have argued that this component is essential to realism. John Searle, for instance, holds that the standard notion of truth as correspondence defines the very relationship between thought and reality, and claims, furthermore, that the aim of "postmodernism" in continental philosophy has precisely been that of undermining the traditional notions of correspondence, truth, objectivity and reality (1993, p. 56-57).

As has already been noted, there are philosophers who choose to subordinate the epistemological issues related to truth and meaning to metaphysical ones concerning existence and mind-independence. Nevertheless, there are also thinkers who wish to do away with these claims of realism altogether and instead characterise realism in terms of claims about truth and language. For example, Michael Devitt (1997) notes that many philosophers within the analytic tradition respond to the claim that realism is primarily about the belief in the existence of a mind-independent world in two ways; first, some might argue that this definition of

realism is 'true but boring.'[4] Other philosophers might however choose to take the reverse route by claiming the definition to be 'controversial and very likely false' (1997, p. 14). In spite of these two otherwise opposing responses, Devitt accurately notes that they each may be said to share a common claim; both argue that the aforementioned "Independence" claim of realism is to be reformulated into questions regarding the nature of meaning and truth-conditions, and are thus both guilty of putting the 'semantic cart before the realist horse' (1997, p. 4). Furthermore, it can be argued that there are definite parallels between the treatment of realism propagated by some contemporary analytic philosophers Devitt describes here, and that of their continental counterparts. It may very well be claimed that much twentieth century continental philosophy is often portrayed by both proponents and detractors as having moved away from metaphysics by reformulating its classical problems into questions related to language, discourse and meaning, and more generally – under the influence of Immanuel Kant – to issues about the "conditions of possibility" for knowledge.[5]

It may however be argued – and even Braver concedes this[6] – that subscribing to the thesis that there exists a mind-independent world does not necessitate the commitment to the correspondence theory of truth, for one may still be an ontological realist without constraining themselves to a particular epistemic thesis concerning the nature of truth. This assertion is in turn evidenced with reference to examples from the philosophies of two contemporary self-proclaimed realists, namely Harman and Quentin Meillassoux.[7] In "Time Without Becoming" (2014), Meillassoux asserts that some definition of truth as correspondence between thought and being is necessary to realism, and even asserts that one of the principal

[4] In response to such claims however, Devitt interestingly points out that the ontological thesis of realism is anything but obvious, and is quick to assert that an important school of philosophy – namely idealism – dismisses this "classical" definition of realism. As one shall be able to note later on, this response is of special importance to the task of this thesis, given the Speculative Realists' claim that the whole history of post-Kantian continental philosophy is characterised by its commitment to implicit forms of idealism (1997, p. 14).

[5] This is most certainly the position many would attribute to Derrida's philosophy, but in this dissertation I seek to challenge such a reading by arguing that Derrida may in fact be read as a realist (see Chapters 7-10).

[6] For Braver 'there is no relation of logical entailment between the metaphysical and epistemological components; reality can be mind-independent, while truth could be coherence or verification or aletheia or what have you' (2007, p. 16).

[7] Technically, Meillassoux classifies his philosophy as materialist, and distinguishes it from realism. However, Meillassoux also claims that 'every true materialism has to stand the charge of realism; because it is indeed a realism' (2016, p. 133).

moves of continental anti-realists was the attempt to reject and replace the conception of 'truth as adequation' (2014, p. 17).[8] Contrariwise, Harman (2015b, p. 127) claims that Meillassoux's realism – or, more accurately, materialism – emphasises a 'knowledge-centred brand of realism,' while his own position involves an ontological version of realism – or what he calls "infra-realism" (Harman, 2015b) – without tethering the latter to an epistemological claim about something like correspondence. An assertion closely related to that of Harman has also been made by Devitt, who in turn argues that 'the correspondence theory of truth needs to be disentangled [from realism]: it is in no way constitutive of [metaphysical] *Realism* nor of any similarly metaphysical doctrine' (2013, p. 104).

In light of this, it may then be argued that some might want to correlate some notion of truth to realism, such that they might not want to rule out the possibility of correspondence from realism *a priori*. Nevertheless, I hold that it would not follow that realism must necessarily be defined in terms of a commitment to correspondence, for there are thinkers who are committed realists, but who nevertheless deny correspondence. For instance, throughout the present study, I shall progressively develop the claim that Derrida and Harman put forward different forms of realism. Nevertheless, I shall also show that both of them criticise the possibility of direct correspondence between thought and being. Therefore, I ultimately hold epistemological questions to be important yet separable from the metaphysical weight of the realist claims, and it would then follow that I shall not consider this criterion to be a necessary component of realism as understood in the present study.

Braver argues that the third component of realism is the Uniqueness claim (2007, pp. 17-18). This component of Braver's matrix involves the view that there can be one and only one True description of reality. This view is once again taken from Putnam, who in turn assumes this third component to be a direct consequence of the first two; for Putnam, if a realist is to commit themselves to the existence of a mind-independent world and to the claim that truth consists in correspondence, then they must necessarily accept that there can ultimately be only one 'true and

[8] It is important to note that in saying so, Meillassoux does not want to go back to naïve realism. Rather, he wishes to redefine adequation in terms of mathematical claims about the absolute (Meillassoux, 2014). This claim shall in turn be fleshed out in the subsequent chapter.

complete description of 'the way the world is'' (1981, p. 49). In response to this, I have already argued that a realist may very well choose to assert the existence of a mind-independent reality without necessarily needing to interpret truth in terms of correspondence. However, unlike Putnam, I am also of the view that even if one were to accept that both Independence and Correspondence are necessary for realism, the Uniqueness component would not necessarily follow. This is due to the fact that one may very well be committed to the existence of a mind-independent world and to the idea of truth as correspondence, while at the same time arguing for the claim that epistemic tools are not infallible and thus allow for multiple possible descriptions of reality. This specific view is supported by Hartry Field (1982, pp. 553-555) who maintains that realism does not necessarily involve a commitment to the Uniqueness claim. He further argues that this claim caricaturises the realist as a person who is naively unaware of the fact that our conceptual schemes are not perfect mirrors of reality. For Field, the realist may then legitimately accept that language is an imprecise tool for characterising the world without necessarily needing to hold the belief that the world depends on our minds or postulates. For instance, in the chapters that follow, I shall progressively show that both Derrida and Harman's realism emphasise this aforementioned sort of epistemic "fallibilism" (see especially Sections 9.2.2 and 3.2 respectively). In view of such claims, I therefore maintain that the question of whether or not there could be such a thing is secondary to the issue of independence. As a result, I also hold that the Uniqueness component is not to be deemed necessary to the characterisation of realism undertaken in this work.

Braver argues that the fourth component of his Realism Matrix is Bivalence. Braver derives this component from Michael Dummett, one of the most prominent anti-realists within the analytic tradition. Dummett argues that the characterisation of realism as a metaphysical thesis is deeply misleading, and that the realism/anti-realism debate is ultimately a debate about the meaning of a particular class of statements. He, therefore, characterises realism as 'a semantic thesis' which necessarily 'involves acceptance […] of the principle of bivalence, the principle that every statement is determinately either true or false' (1982, pp. 55-56). Braver in turn argues that the Bivalence component is understood to follow from the previous three components. His argument may be roughly stated as follows: since

a realist must hold that a statement is "verification-transcendent," that is, that it is held to be true or false by virtue of some reality which is antecedent to it, it follows that the statements which aim at expressing this prior reality must therefore be determinately either true or false, independently of whether they can actually be verified (2007, p. 21).

Kenneth F. Rogerson supports this prioritisation of semantics over metaphysics by claiming that if a realist wants a theory of meaning, then their only option would be to adopt the notions of correspondence and bivalence (1994, p. 48). His argument may summarily be presented as follows: if a realist is to hold the thesis of mind-independence, then they must hold that statements must be true or false by virtue of the way the world is. For the realist, truth is derived from facts, and, thus, any alternative notion to correspondence (and by implication bivalence) cannot possibly do. Yet Rogerson pushes his claims even further by arguing that a realist would not only want a theory of meaning, but, further, that they must have a theory of truth. He claims that realists must presuppose some theory of truth if they wish to argue for their position. It follows from this that for the realist to be able to claim that "objects exist mind-independently," for instance, they must necessarily hold that the statement is true, and, for them to do so, they must in turn accept bivalence and correspondence (1994, p. 54).

In spite of such claims, it would however be possible to criticise such a characterisation of realism for its conflation of metaphysical and semantic issues. Such characterisations of realism and bivalence have most notably been steadily critiqued by Devitt, who declares that such renditions of the realist position diminish the primarily metaphysical commitment of the realist. He argues that realism is first and foremost a metaphysical claim and that one ought not to proceed from semantics to metaphysics. Rather, the realist should 'put metaphysics first' (2013, p. 113). Similarly, Gideon Rosen claims that realism always starts off 'as a metaphysical picture,' and that, as a result, it would be a 'substantive *assumption* that a semantical thesis like bivalence can go proxy for [realism]' (1995, p. 603, emphasis added). In light of such claims, and in view of the fact that the Correspondence and Uniqueness components have already been questioned as necessary components of realism, it would then be possible for me to further assert

that the Bivalence component shall also not form a constitutive element of my working definition of realism undertaken in the present study.

Throughout this work, I shall thus maintain that issues related to the Correspondence, Uniqueness and Bivalence claims are to be distinguished from the Independence claim, and that the latter is the necessary condition for realism. It may be further noted that anti-realists have often discredited realist claims by moving from epistemic issues to the rejection of metaphysical claims. This assertion may be substantiated by making recourse to Devitt's elucidation of the typical anti-realist argument against realism (2013, p. 106-107). He articulates the latter as follows:

> (1) If the realist's independent reality exists, then our thought/theories must mirror, picture, or represent, that reality.
> (2) Our thoughts/theories cannot mirror, picture, or represent the realist's independent reality.
> (3) So, the realist's independent reality does not exist. (2013, p. 106)

Devitt argues that the thrust of the anti-realist argument lies in denying the possibility of thoughts acting as mirrors of things. From this the anti-realist then goes on to erroneously conclude that what those thoughts supposedly mirror does not really exist. Devitt further affirms that many prominent thinkers within the analytic tradition interrogate the possible truth or falsity of the second premise, only to assume the first one without question. However, by claiming that epistemological realism is not correlated with ontological realism, Devitt is thereby asserting that the first premise is in actual fact false. The root of much analytic anti-realism thus lies in the conflation between ontological and epistemological issues.

One can in turn note an interesting parallel between the anti-realist argument Devitt notes in the work of some analytic philosophers and the anti-realist logic which Harman imputes to Derrida (Harman, 2013b, pp. 197-198). For the sake of comparison and convenience, Harman's case against Derrida may be characterised as follows:

(1) For Derrida, realism relies on presence (of the thing to thought), or what he terms the notion of a "transcendental signified."[9]

[9] For Harman, Derrida 'thinks that all ontological realism automatically entails an epistemological realism according to which direct access to the world is possible' (2013b, p. 198).

(2) The aim of Derrida is to "deconstruct" presence.[10]

(3) Therefore, Derrida is a linguistic idealist who denies the existence of an independent world.[11]

Harman is therefore arguing that Derrida is guilty of conflating the epistemic issues of realism with its metaphysical claims (premise one), and he therefore asserts that Derrida's purported efforts to eliminate the possibility of unmediated access between thought and thing (premise two) necessarily lead him to an uncompromising anti-realism (conclusion). To be sure, and as I shall show below, Harman also argues that the real cannot be accessed directly. Nevertheless, in his view, Derrida unnecessarily throws the baby out with the bathwater by maintaining that this lack of direct access must necessarily entail the denial of a mind-independent reality. I must here emphasise that I disagree with Harman's assessment of Derrida, and this is for the following reasons: firstly, while I concur that Derrida critiques certain forms of (naïve) realism, in Chapters 7-10 I shall seek to show that it does not follow that he rejects realism *tout court*. Second, Harman seems to assume that the "deconstruction" of presence entails its rejection, while I shall claim that this is not the case. More specifically, In Chapters 7-10 I shall in fact argue for the claim that Derrida's critiques of presence and "dogmatic" forms of realism are advanced in the service of a novel and dynamic form of realism based on the claim that the real is defined in terms of a form of difference, and that this is in turn to be understood as the antithesis of presence. Given the scope of the present chapter, I shall however reserve any further discussion on these two points for Chapter 7 below (see also Chapters 8-10).

1.1.3: Realism and the Subject

Returning to Braver's "Realism Matrix," it may be noted that its fifth component involves what he names the Passive Knower component. According to Braver, 'in order to be a realist who thinks there is any chance to attain correspondence truth about the world, there must be a way for the mind to reach reality as it is' (2007, p. 21). Interestingly, Braver goes on to note that 'Kant's anti-realism begins from his

[10] Harman (2013b, p. 197) claims that, for Derrida, the deconstruction of the "transcendental signified" is ultimately the deconstruction of naïve realism.

[11] For Harman, 'Derridean deconstruction is an uncompromising *antirealism*, despite the strange and growing fashion of calling him a realist' (2013b, p. 197).

rejection of any such access, since all contact with the world bears the imprint of mental activity' (2007, p. 21). Braver's inclusion of this component is then clearly directed *against* Immanuel Kant's account of knowledge presented in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, who is considered by Speculative Realists to be the father of continental anti-realism. As is well known, Kant's first *Critique* signals a self-styled "Copernican Revolution" within philosophy. Kant sees his revolution as the overcoming of rationalism, empiricism and scepticism through the establishment of a new relationship between the subject and object. After Kant, knowledge is no longer seen to conform to its object. Rather, it is the object which is deemed to conform to knowledge; it is the active power of the transcendental subject which brings objects to life (1998, p. 110). Thus, as Braver notes, the mind for Kant is more 'like a factory than wax or a mirror' (2007, p. 36). For this reason, Maurizio Ferraris points out that for Kant 'there is a single world for the self that perceives it, that takes account of it, that remembers it, and that determines it through the categories' (2013, p. 3).

To this, a critic might object that Braver's inclusion of this component seems to rely on a fundamental conflation between our experience and what exists independently of it. However, Braver notes that by claiming that the subject is active with respect to knowledge, Kant is not merely suggesting that 'our faculties contribute to experience' but is formulating the stronger claim that it is the very existence of transcendental subject which brings the (phenomenal) objects of knowledge into appearance. For Kant, even if the existence of a "noumenal" world may be deduced from the fact that something must be the cause of sensibility, the "thing-in-itself" which is beyond the bounds of possible experience remains inaccessible, and thus means 'nothing to us' (Braver, 2007, p. 40-41).

As with the other components of his "Realism Matrix", it is clear that Braver does not hold this fifth component alone to be the sufficient condition for asserting that one is a realist. It may however be claimed that the idea of an active knower is not antagonistic to philosophical realism. At first glance this claim may seem rather counter-intuitive, especially given that many seem to regard Kant's idea of an active knower to lie at the heart of much contemporary anti-realism. The view that the active knower and realism are compatible is exemplified in the work of Harman (2009a) when he argues that *direct* access to the world is *impossible*, such that the

real can only be grasped obliquely. More specifically, following Bruno Latour, Harman claims that 'every relation is a translation,' and thus maintains that the human mind is always necessarily active with respect to what is known (2009a, p. 79). Furthermore, in the chapters dealing with Derrida below, I shall also claim that his philosophy is premised on a similar rejection of the "passive knower" component to the one offered by Harman (see especially Chapters 7 and 10). The claims made here shall be further substantiated and fleshed out throughout the course of the following chapters. However, for the time being, it suffices to argue that while it might be true that the Passive Knower component could be one way of assessing realism, it would not necessarily follow that all realisms have as a requirement a passive knower. For this reason, I shall not consider this specific component as essential for the definition of realism as understood in this work.

Braver's sixth and final component of his realism matrix is the "Realism of the Subject" component. Braver borrows this final component from Kant. According to Braver (2007), Kant accepts the Uniqueness component of realism since he argues that the order perceived in the (phenomenal) world is essentially stable and universal. However, Kant also rejects the Passive Knower component since he claims that the (phenomenal) world is essentially representationally dependent on the mind. As a result, Kant is claimed to advance the following line of reasoning: if the subject is active with respect to knowledge, and if the perceived order of the world is stable, unchanging and (intersubjectively) true, it would follow that there must be a stable subject who must act as the basis of such order (Braver, 2007, p. 49).

It may however be argued that being a realist or an anti-realist about the subject does not preclude the possibility of realism *tout court*, and that it would be quite possible to be an anti-realist whilst simultaneously believing in the stability of the subject (or vice-versa). Richard Sebold (2014) expresses this qualm perfectly when he claims that the Realism of the Subject component

> does not appear to hold for just realists, as it may be consistent or even necessary with certain idealist philosophies including, according to some interpretations, Kant himself. Moreover, one could be an anti-realist about some substantial self while believing that external objects are how they are independent of us. This is less a mark of realism than a particular domain about which one can be a realist or anti-realist. (2014, p. 45)

In agreement with Sebold, I am of the view that the Realism of the Subject component does not constitute a necessary condition for claiming that one is a realist, and shall, thus, not be *constitutive* of realism in the sense proposed throughout this work.

1.2: A Working Definition of Realism

In conclusion, I shall proceed from the above considerations of Braver's "Realism Matrix" to the formulation of a working definition of realism as it shall be understood in the present study. As a reminder, Braver's matrix involves the following criteria: (1) Independence, (2) Correspondence, (3) Uniqueness, (4) Bivalence, (5) Passive Knower and (6) Realism of the Subject. Throughout this study, I shall take "realism" to primarily entail the commitment to the first of these theses. In other words, my working definition for any realism shall require the commitment to the claim that reality is neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on the human mind, and hence that it exists mind-independently. However, and as is clear from the above, I shall not consider the rest of the criteria to constitute the *sine qua non* criteria for realism. To be sure, I am of the view that any realist must be committed to the idea that a mind-independent reality can, in some way or another, be thought or discussed. In other words, I follow Harman in claiming that 'a true realist would have to talk about the relations between entities apart from our surveillance of them' (2008, p. 129). I nevertheless hold that the realist need not shore up this commitment with theses 2-6, for it would very well be possible to claim that the real can be thought indirectly or allusively, thereby rejecting the assertion that truth lies in correspondence, and that there must therefore be one complete description of reality which is determinately true or false. In other words, like Harman, I believe the latter criteria to be 'propositions about *how knowledge operates*, not about *reality itself*,' and that they therefore 'define a specific *theory of knowledge* that no *realist ontology* is obliged to defend (2011d, pp. 53, 54, emphasis added. See also DeLanda and Harman, 2017, pp. 38, 41-48). For instance, in the following chapters I shall argue against Harman's anti-realist reading of Derrida by showing that the latter's work may be read as containing a realist impetus. Nevertheless, I shall also claim that Derrida, like Harman, believes that the real can only be *indirectly thought* and *not directly known*.

In order to summarise the thrust of what has been discussed here, in what follows I shall understand "realism" to involve two distinct and ultimately separable claims; first, the *core thesis* of realism shall be understood to involve a commitment to the existence of a mind-independent world which is thus neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on humans. Secondly, "realism" shall also be held to involve the claim that this mind-independent world is to some extent either thinkable, describable, or knowable, even if this need not be characterised as absolute or in terms of correspondence. In view of these criteria, and in relation to the general aim of this dissertation more generally, I would like to quote Harman at some length when he complains that many realist defenders of Derrida 'reverse the usual meaning of realism' rather than arguing for the claim that 'Derrida must, contrary to all appearances, be read as a firm believer in a world independent of human access' (Harman in Harman, Cox, and Jaskey, 2015, p. 105). In view of this, the specific working definition of realism presented in this chapter is important to the task of this dissertation overall since it establishes a baseline definition of realism which many realists – Harman included – would accept, and it therefore also presents a standard through which one can judge Derrida and Harman's specific thought on the question of realism. With this definition in view, it would then be possible to note at the outset that the main contribution of this thesis overall shall be the development of the claim that both Derrida and Harman are in fact – and against much received opinion in the case of the former – committed to a realist view defined in terms of these two criteria, and that they are therefore both firm believers in "world independent of human access." Furthermore, and as I shall show throughout the course of the following chapter, the characterisation of realism adopted in this work is closely aligned to the realist position adopted by a number of contemporary continental philosophers grouped under the umbrella term of "Speculative Realism." This assertion shall in turn serve as the theme of discussion for the subsequent chapter, which shall deal with the latter group's critique of contemporary forms of anti-realism which they dub "correlationism" and the "philosophies of human access."

Chapter 2: Realism and Continental Philosophy

As I have argued throughout the course of the previous chapter, realism shall be primarily understood in this work as an ontological or metaphysical doctrine which commits the realist to the belief that objects, laws, events or states of affairs exist mind-independently, or at least independently of the *contents* of minds. This, therefore, means that they are neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on humans; that is to say, they are 'not constituted by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories or languages' (Devitt, 1997, p. 15). Additionally, I also hold that the realist must also be committed to the claim that the workings of the real are in some form or another thinkable. Nevertheless, it shall treat epistemological issues related to the attainment of *knowledge* of the real as significant but ultimately separable from the realist's core ontological commitment to the existence of a mind-independent world.

The affiliation between the working definition of realism just described and the overall project of the Speculative Realists has already been briefly pointed out towards the end of the last chapter. This association may in turn be evidenced by referring to Peter Gratton, who argues that realism 'means a belief that there is a world independent of our minds or cultural beliefs.' He further asserts that the latter sense of realism (expressed in Braver's first "Realism Matrix" component discussed in Chapter 1 above) 'is different from epistemic realism, which posits the belief that we can *know* this independent world,' and points out that 'both of these uses [are] at work in the Speculative Realists' (2014, p. 15). My aim and scope in the present chapter shall therefore be to tie this particular characterisation of realism to the work of a contemporary realist philosophical movement which came to be known as "Speculative Realism." This analysis is important for my goals in this dissertation, and this is for the following reasons: firstly, this movement – of which Harman is a founding member – has to a large extent been responsible for the revival of questions related to realism in contemporary continental philosophy. As a result, understanding its general assessment of contemporary philosophy helps to shed light on the stakes of the realism/anti-realism dispute today. Secondly, it also serves to show why all the Speculative Realists see contemporary philosophy as

marred by anti-realist tendencies, and it therefore highlights Harman's reasons for his critique of Derrida as a staunch anti-realist.

The loosely demarcated "Speculative Realist" movement gets its name from a conference named *Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop*,[12] held at Goldsmiths University in April 2007. The speakers – and original members – were Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassoux, even though the influence of Speculative Realism has since spread well beyond the work of these respective thinkers. It would be important to note from the outset that there are important and fundamental differences between the works of the various thinkers that are often grouped under this broad umbrella term. For this reason, many have since questioned the existence of such a movement (see, for instance, Brassier, 2014), leading Harman to proclaim that he remains the only one amongst its four original members to still be fully committed to using the term (2015c, p. 80). Nevertheless, the existence or status of such a group need not be a source of concern for the present study. As Harman correctly asserts, the realism/anti-realism debate has now gained more prominence in continental philosophy after a long period of being dismissed and criticised as a "pseudo-problem" (2013a, pp. 72-73; 2013b, pp. 22-23). This fact, in turn, ought to attest to the impact and influence of this otherwise varied group of thinkers. Thus, what is of interest for the purposes of this present chapter is how "Speculative Realism" contributes to the contemporary continental realism/anti-realism debate, and what all its proponents share in common. In this context I wish to emphasise that I shall here neither be dealing with the positive views of each of the thinkers associated with the movement, nor will I concentrate on their individual conflicts. Instead, I shall exclusively focus on what its main proponents understand to be the main shortcomings in contemporary philosophy with respect to the question of realism.

Speculative Realists may be characterised as a radically heterogeneous group of 'rival philosophies' (Harman, 2015e, p. 401), who may nevertheless be said to share the following three fundamental philosophical commitments: first, all the Speculative Realists attempt to move beyond the anti-realism which they claim

[12] For a transcript of the original Speculative Realism Workshop, see Brassier *et al.*, 2012. For a general survey of the movement's genesis and its various positions, see Harman, 2015c, pp. 77-81 and 2018c respectively.

to have been the implicitly dominant dogma of (continental) philosophy at least since Kant. Second, all of them claim to offer a form of "anthropodecentric" philosophical perspective which rejects the view that the human subject ought to have priority in philosophical analyses. Finally, and perhaps most prominently, all of them share a common commitment to the critique of what Quentin Meillassoux (2008) terms "correlationism," even if not all of them agree about what constitutes its negative effects. For this reason, Harman asserts that 'to be a Speculative Realist is to be opposed to correlationism' (2013a, p. 5), which has in turn been understood by Speculative Realists as a 'name for any contemporary opponent of realism' (Meillassoux, 2014, p. 9). Each of these commitments shall be addressed in more detail throughout the course of this chapter. Harman (2002) further uses the term "Object-Oriented Philosophy" to identify his own specific form of Speculative Realism, even if his term actually pre-dates the latter.[13] Like the rest of the Speculative Realists, Harman seeks to critique correlationist philosophies, and what he calls the "philosophy of human access."

The project of the Speculative Realists has, in turn, largely been branded as a direct opponent to the work of Derrida's deconstructive project, since the latter has been characterised most prominently by Harman, but also by the overwhelming majority of the Speculative Realists, as deeply anti-realist in its scope and persuasion. For this reason, in the introduction to *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, Bryant, Srnicek and Harman characterise Derrida as representing the epitome of anti-realist idealism when they claim that 'with Derrida the mediation of language becomes all-encompassing, as the phenomenal realm of subjectivity becomes infested with linguistic marks. Throughout this process, any possibility of a world independent of the human-world correlate is increasingly rejected.' (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman, 2011, p. 4). It may certainly be argued that Derrida himself sometimes seemingly lends credence to such an interpretation when he claims that realism and other closely related concepts are ultimately 'modifications of logocentrism' (Derrida, 1981, pp. 64-65). Nevertheless, such interpretations would most certainly warrant further verification and analysis, as shall be done in subsequent chapters (see Chapters 7-10). As has

[13] The term "Object-Oriented Philosophy" was originally coined by Harman himself in 1999, while the inception of "Speculative Realism" did not happen until the year 2007.

already been pointed out, the aim of the current chapter shall be to investigate how the general definition of realism presented in Chapter one relates to the problems which the Speculative Realists identify within the history of philosophy. In light of this aim, the scope of the present chapter shall be to give a general description of this contemporary turn to realism, and how this is seen by its proponents to differ from the rest of the continental tradition. What has been marginally presented throughout this introductory section shall therefore be further supported and expanded throughout the course of this chapter. To this end, in this chapter I shall proceed as follows: First, in Section 2.1, I will briefly analyse the contemporary turn to realism in light of Immanuel Kant's "Copernican Turn." This shall then be followed by the general analysis of Meillassoux's "correlationism" (Section 2.2) and Harman's "philosophies of human access" (Section 2.3). Finally, Section 2.4 shall present the implications of these considerations on the realism/anti-realism debate.

2.1: Kant's Correlationist Revolution

As has already been pointed out in the introductory section above, the respective works of the various Speculative Realists are united in their critique of what Meillassoux (2008) terms "correlationism." In his seminal text entitled *After Finitude* (2008), Meillassoux maintains that correlationism represents the 'central notion' of all continental philosophy since Immanuel Kant's famed "Copernican Revolution" (2008, p. 5), even if he has also suggested elsewhere that its roots can already be found in the works of Berkeley[14] and Hume[15] (Meillassoux, 2016). Before further elaborating on the features of correlationism, it would then be worthwhile to briefly consider the features of Kant's philosophy which are most relevant to the work of the Speculative Realists, such that the polemical term which unites them may be placed in context.

[14] In "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition" (2016), Meillassoux lists Berkeley as the 'inventor of the argument of the correlational circle' (2016, p. 132). He further argues that Berkeley is the father of a broader "Era of Correlation" insofar as Berkeley holds that 'it seems pointless to ask what things are, since no mind can ever apprehend them' (2016, p. 118).

[15] In *After Finitude* (2008), Meillassoux lists Kant as the founder of correlationism. In "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," Meillassoux however suggests that David Hume is actually the one who 'inaugurates the properly correlationist form (a sceptical form, in fact) of the 'correlational circle'' (2016, p. 191). Unlike Berkeley, Hume 'no longer deduces that all reality is spirit' but nonetheless maintains 'that we can no longer extract ourselves from the sphere of impressions and ideas, and that the thing in itself must remain irreducibly unknown to us' (2016, p. 191).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998), Immanuel Kant asserts that metaphysics during his time had become a 'battlefield of endless controversies' between rationalist dogmatism and empiricist scepticism (1998, p. 99). Faced with this situation, Kant aimed to rescue metaphysics by guiding it into 'secure course of a science' through a self-styled 'Copernican Revolution' in philosophy (1998, p. 106). For Kant, the revolutionary spirit of Copernicus is not exhibited in his discovery of heliocentrism, but rather in his reformulation of the relationship between subject and object through the claim that the idea that the sun revolved around the earth was a matter of appearance rather than truth. Similarly, Kant sees his own revolution in philosophy as overcoming both dogmatism and scepticism through the establishment of a new relationship between the subject and object. For Kant progress in metaphysics can only be made if knowledge is no longer seen to conform to its object. Rather, it is the object which is deemed to conform to knowledge:

> Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all our attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through the concepts that would extend our cognition have […] come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition. (1998, p. 110)

The upshot of Kant's "revolution" may then be partially characterised in terms of the idea that the mind does not conform to knowledge, but rather the other way around: knowledge is always a matter of synthesis between experience and reason. As has already been asserted in the previous chapter, Kant also argues that the mind is not passive with respect to what is known. Rather, it is the "transcendental subject" which brings the objects of (phenomenal) knowledge to the fore. Kant's "turn" thereby dissolves all ontological issues in philosophy, and replaces them with the *transcendental* inquiry into the conditions of possibility for the experience of objects. As a consequence of this, Kant argues that the mind only has access to the way things appear to the "transcendental subject" rather than the way they are in and of themselves, independently of experience. He therefore argues that 'all our intuition is nothing but a representation of *appearance*,' and therefore goes on to claim that 'the things that we intuit are *not in themselves* what we intuit them to be' (1998, p. 185, emphasis added).

In light of these claims, Harman (2015c, pp. 3-4) notes that the thrust of Kant's "Copernican turn" may be summarised in terms of two core theses which are of special interest to the Speculative Realists as well as to the present study. The first consequence may be called the "thesis of finitude," and refers to the idea that the "things-in-themselves" cannot be known, given that human experience can only be limited to the appearances of things (phenomena), rather than to the way they are independently of one's access to them (noumena). The second consequence may be termed the "anthropocentric thesis." It refers to the idea that philosophy must first analyse the conditions by which humans can *know* the world rather than attempting to make any claims about the way the world is independently of humans. For the Speculative Realists, philosophy after Kant makes it impossible to analyse substance, since thinking gets limited to the investigation of the relation between thought and being. By implication, Kant disallows all forms of realist claims, insofar as they represent mere "speculative" efforts which necessarily fail insofar as they fall beyond the bounds of all possible human experience. In so doing, Kant's "transcendental turn" concerns itself solely with what Levi R. Bryant calls the 'mechanisms through which beings are manifested to us,' thereby replacing all inquiry into the nature of being with a 'transcendental anthropology' which concerns itself solely with the conditions of human access to being (2011, p. 36). It may then be stated that epistemological realism responds to Kant's emphasis on finitude. Hence, as the title of Meillassoux's *After Finitude* suggests, the latter may be said to object to the epistemological anti-realism in Kant, characterised by a sceptical approach which emphasises the *limits* of *human knowledge*. Ontological realism, on the other hand, is the response to Kant's problem of anthropocentrism. For ontological realism – of which Harman is one particular proponent – the world and its contents are always more than what humans may think or say of them, and therefore emphasises the aforementioned *independence* thesis of realism (see Chapter 1). In light of these claims, and in view of the claims made in the previous chapter, it is useful to reiterate that even if these two senses of realism can go together, it does not follow that one must necessitate the other.

Further to this, the Speculative Realists allege that the consequences of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" have not actually stopped with Kant, but have rather made their way 'through the continental tradition, taking hold of nearly every

major figure from Hegel to Heidegger to Derrida' (Bryant, Srnicek & Harman, 2011, p. 4). Thus, the Speculative Realists want to claim that, in following Kant, the overwhelming majority of subsequent continental philosophers have focused on the limits and scope of human knowledge, and in so doing have rejected all talk of a world independently of humans as naïve, and therefore ridiculous and 'unworthy of serious discussion' (Harman, 2013a, p. 73). This shared view of the Speculative Realists is in turn typified in Ray Brassier's claim that 'for all their various differences, post-Kantian philosophers can be said to share one fundamental conviction: that the idea of a world-in-itself, subsisting independently of our relation to it, is an absurdity. *Objective reality must be transcendentally guaranteed*' (2010, p. 51, emphasis added). The Speculative Realists agree that, considered as a whole, the consequences of Kant's "turn" are to be considered highly problematic. This is due to the fact that they trap philosophy in a lacuna of "correlationist" anti-realism to the extent that they disallow all and any possible speculation concerning the nature of reality independently of the human.

In spite of their shared commitment to a mind-independent reality, it would nevertheless be necessary to point out that they also accept that after Kant's critique of dogmatism, a defence of a robust form of realism ought not to imply a return to naïve, or dogmatic, realism (Meillassoux, 2014, p. 19). Thus, the Speculative Realists are not enemies of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" insofar as none of them *simply* reject its consequences *tout court*.[16] For instance, it may be noted that Meillassoux's primary misgiving with Kant's "turn" lies in the emphasis on finite human *knowledge* and its inability to directly access the "absolute." Contrariwise – and as shall be noted in detail throughout the subsequent chapters – Graham Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" primarily rejects Kant's aforementioned anthropocentric thesis, and he does so by generalising and radicalising the latter's thesis of finitude (see especially Chapter 4).

2.2: Correlationism as a Contemporary Form of Anti-Realism.

In light of what has been presented in the previous section, it may then be asserted that the Speculative Realists see Kant's "critical turn" as a claim that all

[16] For a detailed and highly informative analysis of the aspects of correlationism rejected and maintained by each of the Speculative Realists, see Morelle, 2012.

philosophical assertions must only take place with reference to human experience. Under this analysis, Kant is characterised as imposing on subsequent philosophy a twofold prohibition; first, he forbids any possible "speculative" inquiry into the nature of a mind-independent reality. Second, Kant disallows any attempts to move beyond the finite bounds of human cognition. Against the limitations imposed upon philosophy by Kant and his "correlationist" successors, Speculative Realism presents a sustained and dynamic attempt to speculate about the nature of the real 'without having to shore up that commitment to realism with some sort of pragmatism on the one hand, or transcendentalism on the other' (Brassier, 2012, p. 320). Thus, it may be asserted that all Speculative Realists share the common interest of moving beyond Kantian and post-Kantian anti-realism in order to rekindle an interest in speculation and realism through a critique of "correlationism" (Meillassoux, 2008), even if they do not all share the same qualms with Kant's position.

The task of the present section shall therefore be to further analyse the meaning of this highly impactful yet controversial term. Before proceeding to do so however, some preliminary qualifications are in order. First, it has already been pointed out that all Speculative Realists hold correlationism to be problematic. Nevertheless, their proposed interpretations, responses and critiques of it are varied and often mutually exclusive. Given this fact and the aims of this dissertation more generally, the present section shall regrettably have to leave most of Meillassoux's distinct path beyond correlationism aside, in order to focus on providing an outline of the general features of correlationism which are relevant to the specific aim and scope of this work. Furthermore, it should be noted that, in his 2016 work entitled "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," Meillassoux explicitly distinguishes between two senses of correlationism, namely "the Era of the Correlate" and "correlationism" in a strict sense (Meillassoux, 2016) The distinction is important, especially given that Meillassoux claims that Harman's realism still belongs to the "Era of the Correlate." Nevertheless, given that the aim of this chapter is to show what all Speculative Realists understand by anti-realism, the current focus shall be on the *strict* sense of correlationism, while Meillassoux's critique of Harman shall in turn be reserved for Section 5.3.

In the opening pages of *After Finitude* (2008), Quentin Meillassoux proclaims that philosophical realism has been increasingly and more forcefully rejected as naively dogmatic since Immanuel Kant's critical turn, and further claims that this is because 'the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of *correlation*' (2008, p. 5). Meillassoux in turn defines "correlationism" as follows:

> By 'correlation' we mean [1] the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. [2] We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. [3] Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism. (2008, p. 5, numbering added)

It may then be possible to further explicate the definition above by breaking it down into three distinct yet interrelated claims. The first claim (1) indicates that correlationism refers to any philosophical position which (implicitly or explicitly) asserts that it would be impossible to express what being might be like independently of thought or vice-versa. As Paul J. Ennis points out, Speculative Realists understand 'transcendentalism, phenomenology and postmodernism' to be correlationist insofar as all of them lay emphasis on questions of human access to being, rather than being itself (2011a, p. 4). Meillassoux further asserts that, at its most basic level, all correlationism rests on an argument he calls the 'correlationist circle' (2008, p. 5. See also Section 2.2.2 below), which may in turn be formulated thus: against the realist's allegation that one can make positive claims about the nature of being as it exists independently of thought, the correlationist would claim that the realist is essentially guilty of circular reasoning, since there can be 'no X without givenness of X, and no theory of X without a positing of X', such that X 'cannot then be separated from this special act of positing, of conception' (Meillassoux, 2012, p. 409). The correlationist therefore insists that one can only have access to the *relation* between thought and thing, rather than the "thing-in-itself." Furthermore, as Peter Hallward points out, Meillassoux claims that all correlationist philosophies

> posit some sort of fundamental mediation between the subject and the object of thought, such that it is the clarity and integrity of this relation (whether it be clarified through logical judgement, phenomenological reduction, historical reflection, linguistic articulation, pragmatic experimentation or intersubjective communication) that serves as the only legitimate means of accessing reality. (2011, p. 135)

It would however be important to point out that, for Meillassoux, the correlation between the subject and object – or mind and world – represents but one form of correlation. He insists that correlationism can take various forms including those of the 'subject-object, consciousness-given, noetico-noematic correlate, being-in-the-world, language-reference, etc.' (2016, p. 119). From these examples, it can be ascertained that Meillassoux does not argue that correlationism relies on just the subject/object dualism or on representationalism. Rather, correlationism is present in innumerable thinkers in 20th century philosophy, even those who attempt to think outside the correlationist circle. For example, he holds that philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (2000) have notably criticised representationalist models, but only in order to adopt a more 'originary correlation' which insists on the '*co-propriation* […] of man and being, which he calls *Ereignis*' (Meillassoux, 2008, pp. 7, 8).[17]

Following from the first claim, Meillassoux's second claim (2) outlined above emphasises that, for correlationists, the relation between 'thinking and being' is 'unsurpassable,' such that it would be impossible to move beyond the strict boundary limits of the correlation in order to speak of things as they are independently of the way they are given. As a result, Speculative Realists maintain that thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault allegedly classify as correlationist philosophies insofar as they deride the realism/anti-realism debate as a 'preoccupation of mediocre thinkers' (Harman, 2013a, p. 72), insisting instead that knowledge can only be limited to what goes on *between* thought and being. Following Ray Brassier, it would however be important to note that the correlationist never *explicitly* denies that something might exist beyond human access, or 'that our thoughts our utterances *aim at* or *intend* mind-independent or language independent realities.' Rather, every correlationist 'merely stipulates that this apparently independent dimension remains internally related to thought and language' (2010, p. 51). In so doing, they therefore endorse a "quietist" attitude

[17] As I shall show in Chapter 4 below, Harman in fact only *partly* disagrees with this specific characterisation of Heidegger. More specifically, he agrees with Meillassoux that Heidegger limits philosophical thought to the correlation between thinking and Being, but is nevertheless also a "correlationist *realist*" to the extent that he deems Being to be independent of thought.

toward the question of what reality might be like in and of itself, independently of its relation to the human.

For Meillassoux, the definitive assertion of the correlationist is thus that 'to be is to be a correlate' (2008, p. 28, italics removed), and its ultimate claims rest on the supposition that any elaboration of 'exteriority' is always essentially 'relative […] to consciousness, a language, a *Dasein*, etc.' (2012, p. 409). This claim may in turn be elucidated by considering the following example; in *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1969), Edmund Husserl maintains that both philosophical realism and idealism are 'in principle absurd', insisting instead on the inseparable relation between 'the noetic and the noematic, *between the experience and the correlate of consciousness*' (1969, pp. 12, 263, emphasis added).

In this second claim, Meillassoux is therefore emphasising that correlationism is not simply a "relational" position. In other words, it does not argue for the rather evident claim that one must relate to the world in order to gain access to it (Bryant, 2015, p. 47) for in this sense, every philosophy – whether realist or correlationist – must essentially accept that it would be impossible to know or think something without relating to it. The correlationist claim can then be said to differ from the realist one in a very important way: the correlationist asserts that whatever can be thought or known must be indexed back to a knower, such that it is impossible to think or know anything about objects as they are in themselves, independently of how they appear in their relation to a subject. It is for this reason that Meillassoux (2008, pp. 5, 7) claims that the "co-" in "correlationism" (like the phrase "always already" which is often present in Derrida's work) constitutes the 'grammatical particle that dominates modern philosophy' (2008, p. 5), insofar as it is designed to fend off the possibility of stepping outside and beyond the limits of the correlation.

Finally, the third claim (3) implies that correlationism represents the implicitly dominant anti-realist dogma of Kant and his successors. Correlationism, as understood by the Speculative Realists, represents a prevalent, implicit, yet specific form of idealism which disavows realism by primarily negating its mind-independence component (see Chapter 1). To this, one may possibly object that many thinkers are not anti-realists since they do not *explicitly* deny the existence of

anything outside of thought and, true enough, many thinkers who Meillassoux takes aim at have often explicitly attempted to avoid idealist interpretations of their work. Derrida, for instance, has often unambiguously expressed his frustration with readers who misinterpret his work as a flat-out idealist denial of all referents. Derrida's interview with Richard Kearney (1984a) provides a representative example of such statements, when he proclaims that

> I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language […] Every week I receive critical commentaries and studies on deconstruction which operate on the assumption that what they call 'post-structuralism' amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words – and other stupidities of that sort. (Derrida, 1984a, p. 123)

In response to such claims however, the Speculative Realists would insist that such attempts to fend off charges of idealist anti-realism do not quite cut it. For most of the Speculative Realists, but especially for Harman, Derrida's work is exemplary of an unrepentant anti-realism insofar as his deconstructive project leaves us trapped within the unsurpassable correlation between 'language and being' (Bryant, 2015, p. 46), thereby denying any possibility of speculating about a world beyond the language-reference correlation. Against this view, in Chapters 7-10 below I shall put forward and develop the claim that Derrida's work also admits of alternative interpretations. It is also worth noting that correlationism is not an explicit Berkeleyan or Hegelian idealism, but is rather an implicit idealist form of scepticism, which disavows realism by primarily denying its *mind-independence* rather than *existence* component (see Chapter 1).

2.2.1: Correlationism and Idealism

As has been noted, the latter two claims of correlationism indicate that, for Meillassoux and the Speculative Realists more generally, the commitments of the correlationist exposes 'every variety of correlationism […] as an *extreme idealism*' (2008, p. 18, emphasis added), insofar as it rests on the assumption that one cannot represent something without the act of representation, thereby transforming the "in itself" to "the in itself, but only *for us*." Furthermore, and as shall be noted in detail below, this same claim may also be observed in Harman's treatment of the "philosophies of human access." Harman asserts that 'the skeptic immediately flips into an absolute idealist, since the phrase 'things in themselves' is emptied of all possible meaning, and is just another way of saying 'things for us'' (2011c, p. 66).

The fact that correlationists – like Harman's "philosophers of human access" – are associated with forms of 'extreme idealism' (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 18) or 'absolute idealism' (Harman, 2011c, p. 66) is however not uncontroversial. In an interview with Graham Harman, Meillassoux concedes that the term "idealism" is 'loaded with ambiguity', and he also further concedes that 'there are numerous correlationists who refuse to be recognized as idealists' (2015c, p. 164). As I have already briefly shown above, Derrida may most certainly be counted as one of such thinkers. This somewhat ambiguous move from correlation to outright idealism has therefore earned Meillassoux – and Speculative Realism more generally – a great deal of criticism by authors such as David Golumbia (2016), Peter Gratton (2014), Peter Hallward (2011) and Dan Zahavi (2016) amongst others. It may then be useful to briefly consider this move, as well as a representative sample of its criticisms. In an essay which is otherwise highly critical of Speculative Realists, for instance, Dan Zahavi (2016) concedes that 'the Speculative Realists are certainly right in their assessment of how widespread correlationism is' (2016, p. 299), but he also maintains that it is both 'controversial' and 'historically incorrect' to maintain that thinkers such as Heidegger and Husserl are flat out idealists (2016, p. 298).[18] This claim is, in turn, also reiterated by Peter Gratton (2014). Echoing Peter Hallward's (2011) critical assertion that correlationism wrongfully conflates epistemological conditions with ontological claims, Gratton (2014) points to the difficultly of justifying how the statements of correlationism can be said to lead to a 'crude idealism.' He argues that it is most certainly possible to maintain that 'such and such are the epistemological or linguistic conditions for knowledge' without having to commit oneself to the ontological claim that 'things in the world "depend" on thinking for existence' (2014, p. 47).

A possible response to such critiques may in turn be given by considering Louis Morelle's exposition of Speculative Realism, especially insofar as it clearly illustrates the modifications which correlationism brings to idealism (see Morelle, 2012). He points out that Meillassoux's insistence on the "unsurpassable" character

[18] It is worth noting in passing that this is *not*, in fact, Harman's true position. As I shall note in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, Harman's particular assessment of Heidegger and Husserl is much more complex than Zahavi lets on here, and that his reading of Harman is misguided.

of the correlation (in claim number two above) is intended to emphasise how correlationism *refines* the main idealist thesis. It may be argued that absolute idealism reduces everything to a "single origin" in the form of "ideas" or "Geist." Correlationism, on the other hand reduces everything to a 'dual relation […] from which escape is impossible' (2012, p. 243), irrespective of whether such relation is construed in terms of the subject-object, *noetico-noematic*, language-reference, Dasein-Being correlation and so forth. Thus, Morelle notes that this refinement of idealism in correlationism is designed to protect the correlationist from metaphysical realism, but it does little to alter the basic idealist thesis, insofar as correlationism reduces 'every real being to being dependent on the relation to an originary ground, which is itself […] reduced to an anthropological determination (whether experience or language)' (2012, p. 243).

It is precisely for this reason that Meillassoux describes 'consciousness and language' as the two 'principal 'media'' of twentieth century philosophy; such "media" present thought with an unsurmountable impasse, such that all philosophical claims can only ever be restricted to the appearance of things as they manifest "to us" in consciousness and/or language, rather than how they actually are *in themselves* (2008, p. 6). As Harman points out, for a correlationist

> there are *two* real entities: human and world. But they exist only in permanent rapport with one another. There cannot be real things-in-themselves lodged outside the human mind, because if we are thinking about them then we are *thinking* about them, and hence they are no longer independent of thought. (2009a, p. 163)

He therefore asserts that 'any philosophy that requires thought to be one ingredient of any situation is correlationist as long as it is not outright idealist' (Harman, 2013a, p. 232).

2.2.2: The Correlationist Spectrum

Quentin Meillassoux maintains that correlationism comes in various shades of grey. In *After Finitude*, he essentially distinguishes between the weak model and the strong model of correlationism, and further subdivides the latter into two (2008, p. 30). In *Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (2015c), Harman accurately characterises this treatment of correlationism in terms of a spectrum. The idea of a "Correlationist Spectrum" in turn seems to be a suitable way of representing Meillassoux's claims, since it clearly differentiates between the most common

forms of correlationism, yet also illustrates that the thinker is not simply committed to limiting the forms of correlationism to just these two.

Against the naïve form of realism, weak correlationism makes the claim that it is impossible to achieve knowledge of things-in-themselves. Weak correlationism – like all other forms of correlationism – affirms what Meillassoux calls the "correlationist circle," an argument which insists that one may never claim to know the in-itself without falling into self-contradiction. For Meillassoux (2008, p. 29), the weak correlationist thus defeats the naïve realist's faith in the apprehension of the things-in-themselves by claiming that it is impossible to separate what is posited from the act of positing it. Meillassoux names Immanuel Kant as an exemplar of such a position[19] (2008, p. 30). As has already been argued in section 2.1 above, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998), Kant maintains that one can never know things-in-themselves, since human knowledge is limited to what Kant called "phenomena." As has further been shown, the gist of Kant's "Copernican revolution," for the Speculative Realists, is exemplified in the claim that philosophy ought to focus on things as they are knowable, rather than attempting to engage in futile speculation about the nature of things as they are independently of human knowledge. Nevertheless, for Meillassoux (2008, p. 31), Kant qualifies as a weak correlationist insofar as he maintains that it would be possible for humans to think certain qualities of the "in-itself";[20] for instance, Kant maintains that it is possible to think that the things-in-themselves exist, and that they are non-contradictory. The following passage from Kant's preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* exemplifies Meillassoux's claim: 'even if we cannot cognize these same objects as things in themselves, we at least must be able to think them as things in

[19] Relative to the claim made here, it would be interesting to note that Harman's interpretation seems to differ from that of Meillassoux. Harman argues that 'what Meillassoux calls "weak correlationism" does not accept the argument of the correlational circle at all, since weak correlationism finds no contradiction in thinking what is beyond thought, and only denies any claim to *know* it. The thing-in-itself is perfectly conceivable for weak correlationism' (2015b, p. 131). Nevertheless, what Harman finds problematic about the weak correlationist is the anthropocentric emphasis on the human-world relation alone. This claim shall be discussed at great length in Chapters 3-6 below.

[20] It would be interesting to note that Meillassoux (2008, p. 35) is sceptical about the 'miraculous operation' by which Kant moves from the world as it is 'for us' to the properties of the 'in itself.' As shall be noted later, this illustrates that Meillassoux is in actual fact convinced by the claims which strong correlationism levels against its weaker counterpart.

themselves. For otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears' (1998, p. 115).

For Meillassoux (2008, p. 5), "strong correlationism" is a more forceful form of correlationism which in turn constitutes the implicitly dominant model of all post-Kantian philosophy. Unlike its weaker cousin, strong correlationism relies on what Meillassoux calls the "correlationist two-step." Meillassoux himself names Wittgenstein and Heidegger as strong correlationists (2008, p. 41), even if it may be argued that the charge equally applies to varieties of post-structuralism, post-modernism and phenomenology amongst many other possible examples. Thus, it may certainly be argued that Derrida fits into the mould of a strong correlationist for Meillassoux. Like the aforementioned form of (weak) correlationism, the argument of the "correlationist two-step" begins with the affirmation of the "correlationist circle," which – as has already been shown – insists on the 'inseparability of the act of thinking from its content' (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 36). However, unlike weak correlationism, the strong variant involves the further 'belief in the *primacy of the relation* over the related terms' (2008, p. 5, emphasis added). The strong correlationist model sees thought and world as so tightly interwoven together that it would be completely impossible to imagine one without the other. In other words, and as Peter Gratton points out, for the strong correlationist 'reality and human beings go together like conjoined twins: where you find one, you find the other' such that it 'rules out of bounds any discussion [or thought] of "reality" *as it is* outside of human access' (2014, p. 16). For instance, and as has already been asserted, Kant argues that it is possible to think that things-in-themselves are non-contradictory. Contrastingly, the strong correlationist responds that just because non-contradictory entities are unthinkable "for us," it does not follow that they are impossible "in themselves." In summary, Meillassoux claims that the strong correlationist differs from its weaker variant insofar as it maintains that 'not only that it is illegitimate to claim that we can *know* the in-itself, but *also* that it is illegitimate to claim that we can at least *think* it' (2008, p. 35); things-in-themselves, in other words, can *neither* be known *nor* thought. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, for instance, Wittgenstein asserts that one 'could not *say* what an 'illogical' world would look like' (2002, §3.03, §3.031), further maintaining that 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (2002, §7).

Additionally, Meillassoux further distinguishes between two kinds of strong correlationism. The first form of strong correlationism identifies itself as an heir to the Kantian project, and seeks to 'uncover the universal conditions for our relation to the world' (2008, p. 42). The second form of strong correlationism however dismisses the possibility of such universal conditions as an antiquated remnant of metaphysics, insisting instead that the relation is '*itself finite*, and hence modifiable by right' (2008, p. 43). Meillassoux claims that such a position is most prominently represented in the works of various post-modernists. It may be asserted that Derrida would most certainly qualify as the latter sort of strong correlationist for Speculative Realists. This claim may in turn be substantiated with reference to Steven Shaviro's claim that Derridean 'deconstruction remains at least negatively correlationist when it claims that there is no outside-the-text, […] no realm of being entirely outside, or independent of, the infinite play of language or textuality' (Shaviro, 2014b, p. 7). For Shaviro – and the overwhelming majority of the Speculative Realists – Derrida's work 'radicalizes and completes the Kantian project of turning reason back on itself in order to expose its own unavoidable illusions' (2014b, p. 9), and is thus guilty of an 'uncompromising *antirealism*' (Harman, 2013b, p. 197) in the form of a very strong correlationism. As I will show in the chapters dealing with Derrida below, I have good reason to doubt that this characterisation of his work represents the final verdict (see Chapters 7-10). Given the scope of this chapter however, such claims shall have to remain provisional for the time being, since they shall be further adequately addressed and assessed in due course.

2.3: The Philosophies of Human Access

Meillassoux's analysis of correlationism outlined above may in turn be compared to what Harman names the "philosophies of human access".[21] In "Another Response to Shaviro" (2014a), Harman proclaims that his phrase 'philosophy of human access' is an 'inferior version' of Meillassoux's term, and thus claims that it can 'simply replace [his] own 'philosophy of access,' which [he] traded in for 'correlationism' immediately after reading Meillassoux's book for the first time in

[21] In this work, the phrase "philosophy of human access" shall be used instead of the abbreviated version 'philosophy of access', since the former specifies what Harman sees as the central problem of philosophy since Kant.

April 2006' (2014a, pp. 41-42). Harman thus asserts that Meillassoux's term is superior to his own, and this is for two main reasons. First, he claims that Meillassoux's term is more 'crisp, snappy and memorable' than his own. Second, Harman claims that it 'leaves its target no escape' since 'it fully grants that the correlationist is not an idealist in the strict sense, but is obsessed instead with a *correlation* that includes a world-pole no less than a mind-pole' (2014a, p. 41).[22] Given Harman's assertions, one may rightly question why I would here choose to tackle Harman's term independently of Meillassoux's. My twofold response to this possible query is as follows: first, it may be argued that Harman keeps using the term independently of Meillassoux's correlationism in order to emphasise his own position, as well as his specific differences from Meillassoux. Furthermore, and as I shall show below, Harman's term "philosophies of human access" seems to me to be more illustrative of his own specific misgivings with regards to the major figures of continental philosophy.[23] This section shall therefore treat Harman's "philosophies of human access" as related but not completely congruent with Meillassoux's correlationism.

In *The Quadruple Object* (2011c), Graham Harman describes the "philosophy of human access" as the 'tacit or explicit credo of a now lengthy tradition of philosophy' which begins with Kant and German Idealism, but continues to this very day (2011c, p. 61). Harman (2011c, p. 65) further defines it as a form of anti-realism which rests on a simple argument of the following form: against all proclamations of philosophical realism, the philosopher of human access (implicitly or explicitly) asserts that in order to think anything as unthought means to think it. Therefore, the claim that one can think the unthought clearly constitutes a contradictory claim, for it is impossible for one to think the unthought without actually thinking it.[24] Like the correlationist, the philosopher of human access therefore privileges *human access* to the world by claiming that 'human experience

[22] Harman therefore argues that Meillassoux's term is designed to 'pre-empt the usual response of those who claim that they are not idealists: Kant is not an idealist because he refutes idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, phenomenology is not idealism because intentionality aims at an object outside itself, Heidegger is not an idealist because *Dasein* is always already immersed in the world' (2015c, p. 80).

[23] In the present chapter, I am mainly focusing on the similarities between the critiques of Harman and Meillassoux. For my specific analysis of their differences, see Young, 2020.

[24] This argument may in turn be compared to Meillassoux's idea of the "correlationist circle" described above.

includes the totality of legitimate philosophical content' (Sparrow, 2014, p. 115). As a result, Harman asserts that the philosophy of human access is a form of anti-realism which restricts 'philosophy to operate only as a reflective meta-critique of the conditions of knowledge' (2005a, p. 42), and thereby prevents philosophy from being able to speculate about the nature of the world independently of the human access to it. Stated differently, he is therefore of the view that any robust realist philosophy must be both able and willing to discuss entities in the world as well as their relations, while the main problem with "access philosophies" is that they reduce entities and their respective interactions 'to the conditions by which humans witness these relations' (2011c, p. 64). Harman (2011c, pp. 65-66) further claims that the basic line of reasoning of the philosopher of human access outlined above yields two possible conclusions, and names these the weaker and stronger inferences.

Like all philosophies of human access, the "strong access" version begins with the premise that one cannot think what is unthought, and goes on to conclude from this that 'there really is *nothing* outside the human-world coupling' (2011c, p. 65), thereby denying both the existence and mind-independence components of realism. Harman regards the philosophy of George Berkeley as a perfect exemplar of such a position, and names Slavoj Žižek as its contemporary supporter. Harman however claims that the "strong access" version may be easily refuted with the following argument (2011c, p. 65): while one may concede that the claim that 'the thought of X cannot exist without the thinking of X' constitutes a tautological claim, it would nonetheless be illegitimate to conclude from this – as the strong access philosopher does – that X itself does not exist. Harman therefore objects to the "strong access" philosopher with the claim that such thinkers illegitimately move from a tautological claim that 'there is no thinking without thinking' to the non-tautological conclusion that 'there is no being without thinking' (2011c, p. 65). He further argues that the weakness of the "strong access" version has led many to refute it, opting instead to turn to what can be referred to as the "weak access" position.

While the strong access version involves the 'absolute claim' that there is nothing outside of thought, the weak access version opts for a more philosophically guarded 'sceptical position' which maintains that one may never know whether

something does indeed exist outside of thought. For Harman, the 'weak access' argument may be sketched out in the following fashion: like the strong access version, the weak access argument starts by making a tautological claim that 'there cannot be any thought of X outside of thought.' The weak access philosopher then uses this tautology to derive the following inference: since there is no thought of X outside of thought, it follows that to attempt to think X as unthought immediately turns X into a thought. As a result, the weak access philosopher treats a statement such as 'unthought object outside of thought' as literally devoid of all meaning, since they treat the statement 'X outside of thought' as synonymous to 'thought of X outside of thought' (2011c, pp. 66-67).

Harman claims that Derrida is paradigmatic of such a weak access view in the form of an implicit linguistic idealism which putatively argues that 'there can be no hidden proper depth of things that the meaning of words is attempting to signal' (2005a, p. 124). As shall be noted in greater detail throughout the forthcoming chapters, Harman holds that Heidegger's account of "withdrawal" can be deployed towards the development of a realist ontology (see also Harman, 2002). He nevertheless holds this to be impossible in the case of Derrida. As far as Harman's interpretation is concerned, Derrida is said to destroy any possible realist claims by denying any 'depth' to things 'beneath the play of signifiers' (2013a, p. 218), thereby effectively claiming that Derrida denies the existence of a mind-independent reality.

A strong parallel between "correlationism" and the "philosophy of human access" may then be noted. As I have already claimed above, Meillassoux insists that all correlationism destroys the literal meaning of realist claims by supplementing them with the addendum "for us." As a result, he insists that the difference between the correlationist and the idealist becomes almost unrecognisable. Similarly, Harman maintains that the 'weak access' position is identical to that of the 'absolute idealist,' insofar as they essentially understand 'things in themselves' to mean 'things for us' (2011c, p. 66). Thus, for Harman the philosophy of human access is like correlationism insofar as it represents a deeply anti-realist philosophy in the form of an implicit idealism which holds that 'whatever structure there is in the world has to be transcendentally imposed or generated or guaranteed' (Brassier, 2012, p. 309).

Nevertheless, I must also emphasise that Harman's realist response to the weak access philosopher ultimately varies significantly from Meillassoux's treatment of the correlationist. Meillassoux essentially regards the "correlationist circle" as a powerful argument which can only be *refuted* from within. Harman rightly points out that, for Meillassoux, 'to posit X as non-posited is an obvious pragmatic contradiction, and no realism is worthy of the name unless it avoids this pitfall' (2009a, p. 165). Contrariwise, Harman (2011c, p. 66) believes that the argument of the "weak access" philosopher is not a convincing argument, and thereby not a true problem which one ought to show sympathy towards. Rather, Harman views it as a fallacious argument and a 'sad degeneration from a robustly realist attitude' (2009a, p. 164) which needs to be thrown out or *refused*. Furthermore, Harman argues that all philosophies of human access seem like an 'indefensibly narrow […] claustrophobic honey trap' which are 'both inadequate and false' (2011c, p. 62), and therefore asserts that 'the philosophy of human access ought to bore everyone by now' (2011b, p. 219).

For Harman, the philosophy of human access – which he claims to find its most prominent expression in Derrida – is representative of idealist anti-realism due to its anthropocentric drive to reduce 'reality to the tiny portion of it directly available to humans' (2011c, p. 64). In so doing, this 'central philosophical orthodoxy of the past two centuries' has disparaged 'all talk of autonomous objects' (2005a, p. 124), and has thereby turned philosophy away from ontological questions surrounding the nature of things themselves. Harman thereby claims that all philosophies of human access are corrupt insofar as they reduce all ontological statements to an epistemic qualification. Furthermore, they also treat the human epistemic relation to the world on higher footing than every other form of relation. He therefore boldly asserts that philosophy since Kant and his progenitors has rejected every form of realist speculation with the assertion that any statement concerning a world which exists independently of humans is ultimately a claim which is made by humans (Harman, 2011c, p. 63).

Opposing all such philosophies of human access, Harman asserts that the main task of philosophy ought not to be the description of 'access to objects,' but should rather aim to analyse 'objects themselves' (2005a, p. 190). Against the *anthropocentric* trend exhibited in all Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies of

human access, Harman therefore wishes to 'oppose the long dictatorship of human beings in philosophy' (2002, p. 2). As I shall show in the following chapters, his critique of the philosophy of access, and his move to realism shall thereby consist in developing a realist ontology which 'removes the question of synthesis altogether' (Brassier, 2012, p. 316). The critical elaboration of how Harman goes about doing so shall in turn be the subject of Chapters 3-6 below.

2.4: Concluding remarks

From the above, it may then be summarily argued that the various correlationists and philosophies of human access hold that the world is not necessarily *constitutionally* dependent on humans, insofar as humans do not literally create the world. Rather, both entertain the view that the world is '*representationally* dependent' (Ferraris, 2015a, p. 3, emphasis added) upon humans (thereby denying its mind-independence), since humans are said to model the world by imposing some structure on it, such that it is impossible to get outside this said structure in order to speak of what the world might like in itself.

Relative to this, it may therefore be possible to briefly consider the most salient features of what has been asserted throughout the course of this chapter. In summary, the most fundamental position of all Speculative Realists is that anti-realism can be defined in terms of correlationism and the philosophy of human access, which are in turn understood to represent the tacit canon of almost all Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies. Such philosophies disallow all talk of autonomous reality, existing apart from human beings. In doing so, they are said to lead to a staunch anti-realism in the forms of scepticism, anthropocentrism and (an implicit) idealism. Contrary to all forms of correlationism and philosophies of access, the Speculative Realists call for a renewed interest in the development of a robust realism achieved through speculation. Against the Speculative Realists' assessment of Derrida as a "strong correlationist" or "weak access" philosopher – and hence an anti-realist – in Chapters 7-10 I shall progressively develop the claim that Derrida's philosophy may in fact be read in terms of a form of Speculative Realism. However, in Chapters 3-6, I shall first show how Graham Harman's specific type of Speculative Realism – what he calls "Object-Oriented Philosophy"

– develops a form of realism centred on the unity and autonomy of individual objects, and how he casts his own views against those of Derrida.

Chapter 3: Setting the (Third) Table

As I have already briefly asserted towards the end of the previous chapter, Harman's own specific form of realism seeks to reject both correlationism and the philosophy of human access, through the development of an "object-oriented" form of Speculative Realism which understands objects to be "the root of all philosophy" (Harman, 2014b). It is this emphasis on objects which commits Harman's approach to a novel form of Speculative Realism; his form of philosophical realism does not only argue that 'realism is the true path of philosophy' but also further proclaims – unlike the rest of the original Speculative Realists – that this realism ought to be understood in terms of 'autonomous individual entities' (Harman, 2011d, p. 59). For this very reason, he claims that 'to be a Speculative Realist, all you have to do is reject correlationism for whatever reason you please' (Harman, 2013a, p. 6), while emphasising that to be an "object-oriented" philosopher, one would need to further hold – as well as defend – the idea that 'individual entities of various different scales are the ultimate stuff of the cosmos' (Harman, 2013a, p. 6).

Harman himself describes his philosophy in terms of a "quadruple" ontological model based on tensions between the real and the sensual, as well as between objects and their qualities. Nevertheless, throughout the chapters dealing specifically with his work below (Chapters 3-6), I shall explicate his philosophy in terms of what I shall dub Harman's "positive" and "negative" features of objects. My reasons for adopting this specific model are twofold: first, I am of the view that it is a novel and useful way to get to the thrust of his philosophy. Second, this specific manner of characterising his philosophy shall facilitate the analysis of his relation to Derrida, as well as my Derridean-inflected response to Harman provided in Chapters 7-10. The explication of Harman's "quadruple object" model specifically shall be the subject matter of chapter 6, while the current chapter shall focus on the analysis the negative features of objects (criteria 1 and 2 above). This inquiry is important to the aim and scope of this dissertation overall since Harman essentially characterises Derrida as an "overminer" of objects whose rejection of unity and autonomy entails a staunch anti-realism, even if he also concedes – with some reservation – that Derrida's critique of classical metaphysics is directed at the critique of certain forms of undermining (Latour, Harman and Erdélyi, 2011, p. 73).

In light of what has been briefly outlined here, as well as the concerns of this work more generally, the current chapter shall therefore proceed as follows: First, I shall present a detailed outline of Harman's "negative features" of objects, and I shall frame this in relation to his discussion of various figures from the history of philosophy. Second, I shall link these "negative features" to the discussions of realism outlined in the previous two chapters. In what follows, I shall explicate the relation between the negative features of objects and the problems which Harman attributes to Derrida's thought. Finally, I shall briefly explicate the positive features of objects in light of the position outlined throughout the course of this chapter, as well as in preparation for the following chapters.

3.1: Undermining, Overmining, Duomining: Three Anti-Object Approaches

It may be noted from the outset that Harman uses the word "object" in a somewhat technical sense, such that it need not refer only to simple, natural or man-made objects. He rather uses the term in an exceptionally broad sense, and understands it to include anything from real entities such as 'diamonds, rope, and neutrons' to entities such as 'armies, monsters, square circles, and leagues of real and fictitious nations' (Harman, 2011c, p. 5). Furthermore, Harman even contends that objects which have existed in the past but no longer do so, ideal entities such as those of mathematical theories, as well as events such as earthquakes, concerts, parties and avalanches may also be regarded as objects in the sense he proposes (2011c, p. 7). Nevertheless, by regarding all aforementioned entities as objects in their own right, he does not mean that entities such as Peter Pan, Popeye, Pi, and Pinocchio are as real as pens, pies, pots, and pans. Harman's ontology may then be said to be "flat" (rather than "hierarchical"), insofar as he does not distinguish *a priori* between natural and artificial or social entities. In other words, like Bruno Latour (1991), Harman may be said to propose a 'levelling of all natural and artificial things' (2009a, p. 215). Nevertheless, unlike thinkers such as Latour and Manuel DeLanda, Harman adopts a *quasi*-flat ontology, insofar as he distinguishes between two kinds of objects, namely *real* objects and *sensual* objects (2009a, p. 215).[25] As shall be clarified throughout the subsequent chapters, Harman understands the former as objects which 'have an interior,' while the latter are said to only 'exist on the

[25] This point is neatly summarised by Ian Bogost's dictum that 'all things equally exist, yet they do not exist equally' (2012, p. 11, emphasis removed).

interior' of some other entity (2009a, p. 215), whether human or otherwise. Stated more precisely, Harman's ontology does not proclaim 'that all objects are equally real', but rather holds that 'they are equally *objects*' (2011c, p. 5). Given this rather overwhelming list of what counts as an object in Harman's sense, one might venture to ask what would be the conditions of "objecthood" within Harman's schema. Relative to this query, and on my specific reworked analysis of his thought, I have narrowed such conditions to the following four criteria:

(1) objects cannot be *undermined* into their constituent parts; or/and

(2) *overmined* into their current or possible relations.

(3) Objects are *unified*, since any object is understood by Harman to be 'one thing despite its numerous qualities and effects and the various roles it can play in different contexts' (2014b, p. 238). Additionally,

(4) Objects are *autonomous*. A real object may be said to be autonomous in the sense of being independent of 'its qualities, its parts, its moments, it relations, its accidents, or its accessibility to humans' (Harman, 2011a, p. 39). Furthermore, even if Harman claims that sensual objects do not 'have autonomous existence outside their presence in the experience of some other entity' (2011e, p. 178), as is the case with real objects, they can still be understood as somewhat autonomous insofar as they are relatively independent from 'any of the accidental features through which they become visible' (Harman, 2011d, p. 59) at any given moment.

I hold that these four interrelated criteria may be said to represent the cornerstone of Harman's approach. Further to this, the first two criteria may be termed the negative features of objects, insofar as they describe what an object *is not*. Correspondingly, the last two criteria may be dubbed the positive features of objects to the extent that they characterise the quiddity of all objects.

As I have has already briefly specified in the introduction above, Harman insists that any truly realist philosophy must essentially be "object-oriented;" in Harman's view, contemporary philosophy needs to veer away from its purported fixations with incessant subject-obsessed analyses of 'consciousness and written words,' in order to turn 'towards an ontology of dogs, trees, flames, monuments,

societies, ghosts, gods, pirates, coins and rubies' (Harman, 2011d, p. 52). Yet he has often asserted that the history of philosophy (and science) is to a very large extent replete with "anti-object" positions. Such philosophies reject the very idea of individual objects by insisting that they are nothing but defunct metaphysical residues which ought to be destroyed (2011a, p. 22).[26] Harman (2009a; 2011a) further dubs such positions as 'radical philosophies' (2009a, p. 154), etymologically tracing the word "radical" back to the Latin term "*radix*" or "root." For Harman (2011a, p. 24), all forms of radical philosophy can therefore be said to be "reductionist," insofar as they reduce the multiplicity of objects to a single underlying cause. Further to this, it may also be noted that this radical form of reductionism is not unidirectional; such "radical philosophies" are said to strip objects of their deserved status in philosophy by either "undermining" them in favour of their constituent parts, or "overmining" them in favour of their givenness, actions or relations.

While undermining is a view which tends to be popular with the natural sciences as well as in philosophies which are alleged to have a 'certain realist flavour' (Harman, 2011a, p. 24), overmining is usually more popular amongst philosophies which are often explicitly sympathetic to anti-realism such as idealism. Indeed, Harman believes overmining to be the more common philosophical strategy, and thus names it the '*central dogma* of continental philosophy' (2011a, p. 24, emphasis added). As shall be shown below, Harman seeks to oppose all overmining and undermining forms of "radical" philosophies, in favour of what he dubs a "weird" form of realism which insists that objects are 'neither of these two extremes, and irreducible to both' (2011a, p. 24; 2013d, p. 42). In light of these claims, the task of the present section shall therefore be to clarify

[26] Harman (2011c, pp. 5-6) does concede that he is not the first philosopher to propose a theory of individual objects, when he claims that various philosophers such as Aristotle and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, as well as – more controversially – Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger have already provided such a philosophy. Nevertheless, Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" may be said to vary from all of these positions, insofar as – unlike the former two thinkers – it does not limit the definition of an object to some relative permanence (Leibniz) or natural kind (Aristotle), and – unlike the latter two – rejects the idea that an objects exist as some 'correlate' of an intentionality (Husserl) or *Dasein* (Heidegger). Such characterisations of objects has in turn led many philosophers to understand philosophy's major role as involving the analysis of the correlation between thought and being, i.e. the analysis of how representation becomes (im)possible (Bryant, 2011, pp. 14-16).

and analyse Harman's forms of radical philosophies, in order to further explicate the importance of these two terms to his overall philosophical project.

3.1.1: Undermining: Objects are "Too Shallow"

Graham Harman applies the term "undermining" to any sort of philosophy which maintains that objects do not constitute the definitive basis of all reality, since they are ultimately nothing more than an epiphenomenal figment of some deeper underlying Reality. In an essay entitled "On the Undermining of Objects," Harman gives an extensive list of philosophical approaches which may be said to undermine objects:

> Undermining occurs if we say that 'at bottom, all is one' (holism) and that individual objects are derivative of this deeper primal whole. It happens if we say that the process of individuation matters more than the autonomy of fully formed individuals. It also happens when we say that the nature of reality is 'becoming' rather than being, with individuals just a transient consolidation of wilder energies that have already moved elsewhere as soon as we focus on specific entities. There is undermining if we appeal to a pre-objective topology deeper than actuality, or if we insist that the object is reducible to a long history that must be reconstructed from the masses of archival documents. (2011a, p. 25)

From the quote above, it may then be noted that "undermining" is the name Harman gives to all types of philosophical approaches which maintain that objects do not constitute the fundamental feature of all reality, but are rather a mere 'surface effect of some deeper force' (2011c, p.6), understood as some "primal whole," "emergent *process*," "flux and becoming," or "historical genesis." Harman contends that every undermining philosophy adopts a critical attitude towards objects, maintaining instead that they are nothing but a fictitious *aggregatum* or epiphenomenon subservient to some deeper stratum, process, or fundamental reality which constitutes them.

For Harman (2013a, p. 86), undermining philosophies are as old as the discipline of philosophy itself, with their philosophical roots planted firmly in the varied theories of the ancient pre-Socratics. It is for this very reason that he asserts that 'Western Philosophy has an eliminativist legacy in the form of an undermining origin that is difficult to shake' (2013a, p. 88). Relative to this, it may be noted that in making such a claim, Harman is essentially iterating a claim originally made implicitly by Aristotle in his analyses of his predecessors. Aristotle had already pointed out that the early philosophers endeavoured to attain knowledge of the world around them by postulating some fundamental element 'of a *material* kind'

out of which all things are derived and to which all things return. He further noted that they held this ultimate material element to be 'the only principle of all things' (Aristotle, 1969, p. 80). As Jonathan Barnes points out, the pre-Socratics generally held that the variety of entities, events and phenomena present in the cosmos must ultimately be '*reduced* to order, and the order made *simple'* (2001, p. xix, emphasis added). Thus, the activity of the first philosophers consisted in the attempt to organise and explain the universe by appeal to some more fundamental layer. In this context, Harman points out that the idea of a governing principle was in turn understood in one of two possible ways: either as a foundation made up of discrete fundamental units, or as a monistic, unarticulated mass.

The first way in which the pre-Socratics approached the idea of a governing principle was by understanding reality as fundamentally made up of some 'root physical element' (Harman, 2013a, p. 86); pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus and the Atomists (Leucippus and Democritus) disagreed over which element – water, air, fire or atoms respectively – should be taken to be the root of all reality. Nevertheless, all these thinkers essentially agreed that their preferred fundamental element was responsible for all the seemingly diverse entities which populate the universe. For Harman, all such philosophers are exemplary of underminers, insofar as they hold objects to be *nothing more than*[27] a constituent root physical element, and therefore ultimately dissolvable at best – or eliminable at worst – into their constituent parts. He further insists that the undermining spirit of the pre-Socratics still lies at the heart of contemporary scientific and philosophical forms of reductionism and eliminativism.[28] In Harman's view, this form of undermining remains 'the dominant method of physics' as well as that of philosophies inspired by the sciences (2016a, p. 8). He adds that undermining is 'not only still respectable, but in some circles almost obligatory' (2013a, p. 87), insofar as the orthodox view of contemporary physics – as well as that of philosophies inspired by physics – holds objects to be reducible

[27] It seems as though Harman holds the phrase "nothing more than" to be the formulaic assertion of all forms of radical philosophies (Harman, 2013d).
[28] It would be interesting to note that Harman does not seem to distinguish between ontological reductionism and eliminativism, insofar as he ultimately sees both as underminers of objects in favour of their constituent parts.

to nothing more than 'ultimate particles, fields, strings, or indeterminate "matter"' (2016a, p. 11).

Following Sarah De Sanctis and Vincenzo Santarcangelo (2015, p.104), it would also be interesting to note that even classical metaphysical and scientific forms of realism count as underminers for Harman, insofar as the former may be said to believe that 'there is one true reality beyond the specificity of objects' whereas the latter claim that the only real entities are the most fundamental particles (2015, p. 104). Even if many would intuitively assume scientific and metaphysical realism to support the realist clause of mind-independence, Harman (2011a, p. 39) argues that their position is not quite realist enough. This is due to the fact that, in his view (2011c, p. 141), both reduce objects to nothing other than their 'real qualities,' and further view such qualities to be commensurate with their empirical and/or mathematical modelling. Such models are in turn understood by Harman to be merely 'oversimplified mathematical fictions' bearing 'little resemblance' to the entities they supposedly describe (2010d, p. 20).

In addition to the aforementioned form of undermining, Harman identifies a second pre-Socratic form of undermining consisting of a 'monism of a single lump universe' which essentially treats 'reality as fundamentally *one*' (2009a, p. 159; 2011c, p. 8), rather than being made up of discrete microphysical particles. He further holds this second undermining method to be more extreme in that it treats even the above-mentioned notion of a discrete root element (or elements) as too shallow, insisting instead on some unarticulated 'unified mass from which all things emerged' (2013a, pp. 86-87). The ancients said to champion this view are Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Parmenides and Pythagoras. Anaximander, for instance, believed that everything was originally gathered within a single unarticulated lump he called "the unbounded" (*apeiron*). He held that *apeiron* produced a generative source which separated itself from the unbounded and produced the four opposites – namely hot and cold, and dry and wet – which in turn produced everything. Harman asserts that Anaximander saw *apeiron* as 'belonging to the future' (2013a, p. 87), insofar as he maintained that "Justice" (*dike*) would eventually return all opposites back to *apeiron*. It may further be noted that Harman holds this second "holistic" form of undermining to be more insidious, insofar as he deems contemporary philosophy to be 'riddled with such theories' (2013a, p.

88). Harman elsewhere names philosophers such as Heidegger, Levinas, Bergson, Nancy, Deleuze, Simondon and Badiou as contemporary heirs to such an undermining form (see, for example, Harman, 2011d; 2012b; 2013a; 2013d; 2016a).

On the basis of what has been specified up to this point, it may then be summarily stated that undermining positions come in two basic forms; objects are either derivative of a more primal unarticulated whole, or of an identifiable substrate made up of discrete units. It is for this reason that Timothy Morton essentially articulates undermining as the idea that all objects are either 'swallowed up by larger objects' (holism) or 'broken down into smaller objects' (fundamental units) (2013d, p. 45). Harman argues that all undermining philosophies are problematic for the following two main reasons: firstly, he claims that all undermining philosophies are 'depressingly two-layered' insofar as they insist on a lone gap between some 'rumbling [holistic] unformatted blob' or 'heterogeneous-yet-continuous [individualised] plane' on the one hand, and a reducible or eliminable surface layer of entities on the other (2011d, pp. 62-63). Harman complains that in both these cases, the focus is on the 'vertical causation between depth and surface' rather than the 'horizontal' interaction between fully-formed individual entities (2011d, p. 64). Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, all forms of undermining are essentially deemed unable 'to account for emergence' (2013d, p. 47). In other words, undermining philosophies are ultimately unable to explain why a single monistic lump or a limited number of pre-individual units would 'blossom into a landscape of highly specific individual beings' (2011d, p. 61).

Relative to such objections to undermining, one may raise two possible queries: firstly, one may follow Jane Bennett (2012) in questioning whether it would be possible to argue both for the existence of individual objects and their diachronic emergence through some deeper process or substratum. Secondly, one might need to inquire into Harman's definition of the term emergence, given its loaded meaning, and historical susceptibility to mystical connotations. Harman responds to the first of these queries in the negative by claiming that thinkers who steer a middle way between individuals and their underlying substratum inevitably

end up lapsing into a holism whereby objects are actually treated as derivative.[29] For Harman, all holists therefore 'start off by *assuming* that everything is connected to everything else' (2016b, p. 39), while his particular philosophy entails the view that 'not everything is connected' to everything else (2013a, p. 259). A response to the second query would in turn require a more detailed explication. It would be possible from the outset to distinguish between two senses of emergence, namely epistemological or conceptual emergence, and ontological emergence. Epistemological emergence may be defined as the idea that emergent features of objects are 'the result of the limited abilities of people to predict, to calculate, to observe, and to explain' (Humphreys, 2006, p. 191), while conceptual emergence refers to the idea that 'emergent features [are] the product of theoretical and linguistic representations of the world' (Humphreys, 2006, p. 191). On the other hand, ontological emergence may be said to refer to the idea that some object X is '*objectively irreducible*' to its constituent pieces (DeLanda, 2011, p. 3, emphasis added). It is clearly the latter sense of emergence which Harman has in mind when he argues that an object has 'an autonomous *reality* over and above its causal components' such that causal explanations do not automatically rule out ontological existence (Harman, 2012b, pp. 7-8). This explains why Harman defines emergence as the grouping of entities together such that they form 'a larger compound entity *per se*' (2016a, p. 8). Such a compound entity is in turn understood as having a relative ontological independence from its 'constituent pieces or histories' (2016a, p. 9), as well as being ontologically irreducible to them. Harman seems to hold this view for at least three reasons: First, he notes that a given object X 'as a whole has features that its various component particles do not have in isolation' (2012b, p. 7). Second, he argues that it may very well be possible to imagine that some object X were 'composed of different elements' at different points in time, without it being a completely different object altogether (2013d, p. 50). Harman (2013d) coins the neologism "countercompositionals" to describe this feature of objects. Finally, he agrees with DeLanda in claiming that objects are characterised by "redundant causation" (Harman 2012b, p. 8; DeLanda, 2006, p. 37). The latter, in DeLanda and

[29] In fact, Harman holds Jane Bennett's position to be exemplary of such a situation (see Harman, 2014c, p. 98; Harman, 2016b, pp. 34-35). I have reason to disagree with Harman's equation between relational views of the real and holism. Nevertheless, I shall reserve this critique for Chapter 10 below.

Harman's formulation, refers to the idea that many parts of an object can be removed, added or replaced without impacting the ontological status of the object as a whole. For Harman (2010c, p. 15), emergence therefore refers to the idea that objects are *units* which unify their pieces together in such a way that this new entity generates new qualities which are not present in its parts. To be sure, while Harman does concede that 'all entities are composite […] rather than being simple and indivisible' (2012b, p. 8), he also argues that this does not automatically imply that 'only the *smallest* things are real' (2012b, p. 8). An object for him is *not just* an aggregate but a *sum total* of parts, and this in turn implies that it is an individual *unit* in its own right.

3.1.2: Overmining: Objects are "Too Deep"

As has already been shown, Harman argues that undermining philosophies reduce things "downwards" by claiming that objects are 'too *shallow* to be the truth' (2010a, p. 772), insisting instead that they are '*nothing more than*' that which constitutes them (2013d, p. 43). In other words, undermining philosophies deny that new entities emergence as individual *units* over and above their component parts. It may certainly be argued that, for Harman (2013d), both undermining and overmining are essentially two different yet often complementary forms of reductionism. However, overmining philosophies reduce objects 'upwards' rather than downwards by insisting that they are 'too *deep* to be the truth' (2010a, p. 772). Overminers essentially claim that objects are nothing more than their evident 'qualities, events, actions, effects or givenness to human access' (2011a, p. 24). For the overminer, 'everything is just a social construction, or a language-game, or a verb-like event rather than a noun-like object, or a network of things that are reducible to their effects on other things' (2013a, p. 278). Thus, instead of reducing objects to their constitution, overminers essentially reduce objects to their more manifest qualities, relations, givenness, or effects, irrespective of whether these are understood as human-world relations (as happens, for instance, in the "social constructionism" often attributed to Derrida) or inter-object relations (as is typical with philosophies of Bruno Latour and Alfred North Whitehead).

Timothy Morton appropriately names (Berkeleyan) idealism as a classical example of this mode of reasoning, insofar as it holds that objects only exist insofar

as they come 'into the purview of the more real entity', namely Mind or Spirit (2013, p. 45). Nevertheless, given that Harman takes overmining to be the '*central dogma of our time*' (Harman, 2011d, p. 71, emphasis added), it would follow that it stretches far further than the obvious case of subjective idealism. In light of this, it may then be claimed that, for Harman, diverse forms of correlationism, empiricism, and a position he names "relationism" are all guilty of overmining objects. It would then be useful to further discuss such instances of overmining, in order to emphasise Harman's position.

Since the notions of "correlationism" and the "philosophies of human access" have already been discussed at some length in the previous chapter, it would be unnecessary to further discuss it here. For the purposes of the current chapter, it would however be interesting to point out that correlationism is understood by Harman to be a form of overmining insofar as the move of the various correlationists – at least as articulated by Meillassoux – is to reduce things "upward" to the *relation between* 'thinking and being' (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5). For correlationists objects are 'either eliminated completely or reduced to a flickering real thing-in-itself that may or may not be hidden behind our awareness, depending on whether you prefer Kant, the German Idealists, or some other version of their position' (Harman, 2014b, p. 242). Given this claim, it may then be noted that Meillassoux's term "correlationism" is designed to critique various forms of overmining philosophies which reduce the real to what is given, or what Harman calls the "sensual" or "intentional" realm. Nevertheless, Meillassoux's articulation of correlationism has little to say about undermining and – as shall be noted below – duomining.

Harman (2011c, p. 141) claims that various empiricist[30] positions also "overmine" objects of experience into a bundle of perceptible qualities – or what Harman calls "sensual" qualities. He often names thinkers such as Hume and Locke as exemplary of this mode of reasoning. In *An Essay Concerning Human*

[30] It would be interesting to note here that there is a difference between empiricism and realism, even if the two terms are sometimes conflated. J.L. Mackie (1990) rightly points out that 'empiricism would try to identify any substances of which we can have knowledge with the collection of readily available features, and to confine the meaning of words to nominal essences' (1990, p. 204). Further to this, Mackie also points out that it is precisely on 'empiricist grounds that Berkeley holds that [Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities] cannot be drawn at all' (1990, p. 204).

Understanding (1998), Locke famously claims that the mind's inability to imagine how simple ideas derived from sense impressions 'can subsist by themselves' leads to the assumption that there must be 'some *substratum* wherein these do subsist, and from which they do result' (1998, pp. 176-177). Yet if one were to properly examine the notion of substance understood in separation from perceptible qualities, it would become apparent that the concept turns out to be a mere 'supposition of he knows not what' or 'confused idea' (1998, pp. 177-178). As a result, Harman interprets Locke as using such phrases 'with a sarcastic tone' (Latour, Harman and Erdélyi, 2011, p. 39). For Harman, Locke – like the rest of the empiricists – essentially holds that what is normally called an object is nothing more than a nickname for some definite list or bundle of qualities.

Harman's characterisation of Locke however may be contested. In J.L. Mackie's reading of Locke, for instance, Mackie claims that Locke in actual fact did believe that 'there is such a thing as substance' over and above the manifest qualities, even if it were not possible for anyone to 'get nearer to it' (1990, pp. 75, 76). On Mackie's reading, Locke seems to contemplate the possibility of using the word "gold," for instance, with the '*intention of* referring to [the] internal constitution' or "real essence" of a thing, even if most people do not know – and may never know – what this internal constitution may be when using the word[31] (1974, p. 178, emphasis added). What is especially interesting to note is that Mackie (1974, p. 179; 1990, pp. 93-100) argues that this way of looking at the use of names anticipates Saul Kripke's notion of a proper name as a "rigid designator" (Kripke, 2003). Nevertheless, Mackie (1974, p. 179) also asserts that Locke contemplates the possibility of using substance-terms in the way suggested, yet ultimately rejects the possibility on the basis of the fact that humans lack such ideas. Locke thus ultimately maintains that a 'substance-name' ought to be attached to the *nominal essence*[32] of a thing. This would in turn 'go naturally with a *phenomenalist*

[31] Interestingly, Mackie (1974, p. 178-179) even claims that it is because people use the word 'gold' with this intention, it would be possible to contemplate what are known as 'counterfactuals'; if one were to imagine something having the same real essence of gold, but different qualities, then one might say that gold might not possess such qualities. Nevertheless, if one were to contemplate the possibility of some *X* which possessed the same qualities as gold but with a different real essence, the one might say that the entity *X* is not gold.

[32] The term nominal essence refers to 'either the characteristics by which we recognise something as a piece of gold […] or our complex idea of this set of characteristics' (Mackie, 1974, p. 178). Mackie (1990, p. 86) argues that Locke distinguishes the real essence from nominal essence of a

metaphysics that made the *superficial appearances of things ontologically primary*' (Mackie, 1974, p. 180, emphasis added). In agreement with Harman, it may however be definitely asserted that Locke's characterisation of substance as one 'knows not what' does in fact lead subsequent thinkers such as Berkeley (1982, pp. 29-30) and especially Hume (1978, p. 220) to ridicule the idea of some "thing" beyond or beneath its manifest qualities, and thereby mistakenly took the 'objects of experience as things in themselves (as almost everyone does)' (Kant, 2015, p. 45). More recently, Bertrand Russell has also supported this line of reasoning when he claims that 'what would commonly be called a 'thing' is nothing but a bundle of coexisting qualities such as redness, hardness, etc.' (Russell, 1995, p. 97).

Harman is of the view that other forms of overmining are also to be found in the so-called "relationisms" of thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead[33] and Bruno Latour.[34] The misgivings Harman has with "relationism" may be illustrated with reference to the early work of Bruno Latour, especially given Harman's claim that Latour 'comes closest to the ideal object-oriented hero' (Harman, 2009a, p. 156).[35] Even if Harman admits that Latour sometimes seemingly lapses into 'correlationist moments' (2009a, p. 125), he nonetheless praises Latour for his rejection of the correlationist claim that entities exist only 'for humans', and for defending the Kantian notion of "things-in-themselves" – as Latour puts it in *The Pasteurization of France* (1993), the 'things in themselves lack nothing' (1993, p. 193). Nevertheless, Harman (2009a, p. 124) also maintains that Latour replaces "correlationism" with a milder "relationism" in which objects are said to 'exist only for other things and never in their own right' (2016b, p. 34). While Latour envisages the world as made up of a countless diversity of individual human and non-human

thing in order to attack the scholastic notion of *knowable* 'substantial forms'. Locke essentially argues that the scholastics had confused the nominal essence of a thing with its real essence, and were therefore 'pretenders to a knowledge they had not' (Locke, 1998, p. 291).

[33] For an analysis of the similarities and differences between Harman's philosophy and that of Whitehead, see Harman, 2014a. For a Whiteheadian critique of Harman, see Shaviro, 2011, 2015.

[34] For an extensive analysis of the similarities and differences between the work of Bruno Latour and that of Graham Harman, see Harman, 2009a (especially pp. 99-228) and Latour, Harman and Erdélyi, 2011.

[35] Interestingly, Harman (2007a, p. 32) also argues that Latour's 'irreductionist' position essentially rivals that of Derrida. For Latour (1991) and Harman alike, Derrida essentially reduces everything to 'truth effects', such that talk of 'the real existence of brain neurons or power plays would betray enormous naiveté' (Latour, 1991, p. 6). Maurizio Ferraris makes a similar claim in his *Introduction to New Realism*, when he asserts that for Derrida 'even heartbeat and breathing are socially constructed' (Ferraris, 2015b, p. 7).

"actors" or "actants," he nonetheless defines them solely in terms of their relations, such that 'nothing is real unless it has some sort of effect on other things' (Harman, 2011c, p. 12). Latour asserts this quite explicitly when he claims that 'there is no other way to define an actor but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the focus of attention' (1999, p. 122). Thus, even if Harman praises Latour – as well as Whitehead – for his willingness to discuss inanimate relations, he nonetheless rejects Latour's (1991) claim that things are only '*quasi*-objects,' insofar as 'a thing's existence consists solely in its relation with other things. An object is exhausted by its presence for another [i.e. its relations], with no intrinsic reality held cryptically in reserve' (Harman, 2011c, p. 12). Through his critique of Latour, Harman does not wish to deny change or the fact that objects enter into relations. Nevertheless, his reservation with philosophies such as those of Whitehead and Latour mainly lies in the fact that they focus excessively on relations between entities, holding that there are only 'concrete events, deployed in specific relations with all other things' (Harman, 2010b, p. 8). Such philosophies may not be correlationist, insofar as they do not assert the primacy of the human-world relation. Nonetheless, Harman contends that their overemphasis on relations pays the price of having to 'discount the existence of entities outside their effects' (2010b, p. 7). Thus, "relationism" shares with correlationism – and pragmatism – the belief that objects are nothing but 'bundles of dynamic relations' (Harman, 2014b, p. 242), even if the former does not confine such relations to that between the human and the world. Stated more concisely, against this overemphasis on relations Harman affirms that objects must be viewed as the basis of all relations, rather than being the product of such relations (2010b, p. 70).

In Harman's view, the major problem with all aforementioned overmining philosophies lies in their ultimate inability to explain change; the perspective that things are exhausted by their relation to a subject or to all other things must imply that change is at worst illusory or at best underminable (2013d, p. 47). Thus, he claims that if overmining were correct, then 'there should be no residual reservoir of force anywhere in the world that could cause instability in the current state of things' (2011d, p. 64). Against overmining, Harman therefore argues that an object

is never 'identical with how it is encountered by any other object, by the sum total of such encounters, or even by the sum of all possible encounters' (2011d, pp. 64-65). Seconding Harman, Levi Bryant (2011) points out that if objects were only made up of their 'relations to other objects' – or what Bryant calls "exo-relations" – it would follow that 'nothing would be capable of movement or change' (Bryant, 2011, p. 68). Thus, Bryant goes on to argue that Harman's 'object-oriented' perspective requires the supplementation of "exo-relations" with "endo-relations," that is, with an inquiry into 'the internal structure of objects independent of all other objects' (2011, p. 68). This claim shall in turn be duly investigated throughout Chapters 4-6. Before proceeding to the next section, it is however worth noting that Harman is here arguing that a relational account of the real inevitably leads to a *relational holism* of surface effects. I however question whether this is necessarily the case, since one may very well hold that an entity exists in relation to other entities, without necessarily concluding that everything is wholly intertwined everything else. Such claims shall be duly investigated in relation to Derrida's philosophy in Chapter 10 below, where I shall argue that the latter's position entails a decidedly processual and relational view of the real, but without lapsing into a relationist holism.

3.1.3: Duomining: A "Beast with Two Backs"

On the basis of the claims made above, it may be noted that Harman treats undermining and overmining as two contrasting reductionist approaches. Nevertheless, he also asserts that 'it is rare to find undermining or overmining strategies in isolation' (2016a, p. 11). This claim in turn indicates that both positions are not quite mutually exclusive, but are rather '*parasitical* off one another,' and often use one another 'as a *supplement'* (2011d, p. 66, emphasis added). Harman (2011d) provides the following examples to substantiate his view: those who believe in a monistic lump must, for instance, also claim that there *seemingly* are specific entities, even if they are treated as a 'supplemental illusion or surface-effect' (2011d, p. 66). If on the other hand, an overmining strategy is adopted, then such positions might sometimes assert the existence of 'some invisible and unknowable remainder from which the actual things somehow vaguely emerge' (2011d, p. 66), even if they also have very little to say about such an "unknowable remainder." Further to this, he claims that undermining and overmining sometimes

join forces in a simultaneous 'two-faced reduction' which he dubs "duomining" (2016a, p. 11). Given that Harman clearly asserts that the two positions outlined above are indeed actually often parasitic supplements to one another, one may then rightly question why he would not simply choose to articulate his position in terms of duomining alone. A possible response to such a query would be the following: while undermining and overmining rely on each other as *supplements*, differing from each other in terms of 'which layer they think is of primary interest for philosophy' (2011d, p. 66), duomining positions '[do] not just supplement one of these procedures with the other,' but can rather be said to combine '*both simultaneously*' (2011d, p. 67, emphasis added). For Harman, glaring examples of duomining are to be found in diverse forms of materialism.

Harman names materialism as the 'hereditary enemy' of his own position (2011c, p. 13). He stresses that his "object-oriented" approach may best be described as a form of 'realism without materialism' (2011a, p. 40, emphasis removed), and thereby emphasises the all too often overlooked distinction between materialism and realism. Duomining tendencies are perhaps most prominent in forms of scientific forms of materialism. For Harman, scientific materialism *simultaneously* undermines objects with the claim that 'ultimate particles, fields, strings, or indeterminate "matter" [constitutes] the ultimate layer of the cosmos' (2016a, pp. 11-12), and overmines objects by arguing that 'mathematics can exhaust the primary qualities of this genuine layer' (2016a, p. 12). Harman holds that Meillassoux's brand of "Speculative *Materialism*" is also guilty of duomining, insofar as the latter holds that 'the primary qualities of things are those which can be mathematized [overmining]' while also insisting that 'numbers point to some sort of "dead matter" whose exact metaphysical status is never clarified [undermining]' (Harman, 2013d, p. 46). In his view, Meillassoux's specific brand of materialism maintains that 'reason *ought* to be able to attain the direct presence of the thing' (Harman, 2013c, p. 25), and identifies its 'primary qualities with the mathematizable ones' (Harman, 2013c, p. 25). Thus, as Meillassoux himself puts it, his form of materialism is in actual fact a '*matherialism'* (2016, p. 154, emphasis added). Harman therefore claims that materialism treats the object as a 'two-time loser,' insofar as it postulates a fundamental 'material substance [undermining]' which is nonetheless also ultimately 'expressible through qualities [overmining]'

(2014b, p. 243). Given such claims, Harman concludes that duomining positions are particularly problematic, insofar as they combine the problems of both undermining and overmining, and the benefits of none. In "Undermining, Overmining, Duomining" (2013d), he asserts that – like all forms of undermining – duomining reduces things downwards to some more fundamental substratum, whilst simultaneously – much like overmining – also assumes that 'reality is commensurable with our human understanding of reality' (2013d, pp. 47-48). Understood in this latter sense, Harman maintains that materialism turns out to be more sympathetic to idealism than realism, insofar as it substitutes 'the permanent mystery of what things are with a dogmatic *definition* of what they are' (2015e, pp. 404-405).[36]

With reference to the aim and scope of the current work, it is interesting to note that Derrida mounts a somewhat similar critique of certain forms of materialism. In *Positions* (1981b), Derrida states that he has only sparingly used the notion of "matter" in his works, and adds that this is not due to 'some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation' (1981b, p. 64). Rather, Derrida asserts that

> the signifier "matter" appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a "transcendental signified." It is not only idealism in the narrow sense that falls back upon the transcendental signified. It can always come to reassure a metaphysical materialism. (1981b, p. 65)

To be sure, Derrida does claim that insofar as "matter" is understood as a 'radical alterity,' then his work may indeed be considered materialist (1981b, p. 64; 2000, p. 154). But materialism – at least in the sense understood by Harman here – constitutes anything but such a 'radical alterity'. In actual fact, it does exactly the opposite, given that Harman characterises materialism as making reality commensurate with thought.

[36] It may be noted in passing that Harman is not alone in equating materialism – at least in the sense outlined here – with idealism. For instance, Bruno Latour (2007) shares the view that materialism in its recent forms became a form of idealism; Latour's qualm with the latter lies in the fact that materialism 'takes the idea of what things in themselves should be—that is, primary qualities—and then never stops gawking at the miracle that makes them "resemble" their geometrical production in drawings' (2007, p. 139). Similarly, Heidegger has also often characterised materialism as a form of "ontotheology," insofar as it reduces the meaning of Being to a being understood in terms of 'matter and force' (1957, p. 207).

It may also further be noted that in this specific context Derrida couches his interpretation and critique of materialism above in linguistic terms, and 'in relation to philosophical oppositions' (1981b, p. 64). It may nevertheless be seen that this critique comes close to that of Harman, insofar as both thinkers forcefully deny the possibility of some direct, unmediated "*logos*" which acts as the anchor to a direct access to being. Nevertheless, and as shall be noted, Harman ultimately differs from Derrida insofar as his rejection of materialism shall be made in the name of a "substantial formalism" which emphasises the *absolute* "vacuum-sealed" nature of *discrete* entities, while Derrida would certainly reject the notion of "substantial formalism" as tied to what he calls the "metaphysics of presence" (see especially Chapters 4, 7, and 10). Harman argues that objects have a certain individual structure above and beyond their constitution, and are thus 'best viewed not as matter, but as hidden and definite forms' (Harman, 2016b, p. 30). Nonetheless, and as I shall argue at some length in chapter 4 below, Harman uses the term "form" in a highly specific sense, taking it to refer to an individual object's "infrastructure" which acts as 'a surplus beyond any access' (2016b, p. 30).

3.2: Undermining, Overmining and Duomining as Forms of Knowledge

As has been illustrated in the previous section, Harman maintains that humans attempt to gain *direct* access to things around them – and thereby reduce them to our modes of knowing – by 'looking downward' in order to understand what they are made up of, or by looking 'upward' towards their effects on humans and/or other entities (overmining), or both simultaneously (duomining) (2013d, p. 42). Given this assessment, Harman argues that both undermining and overmining strategies – and, by implication, duomining – are ultimately 'kinds of [direct] knowledge about things' (2016a, p. 7). By making such claims, Harman implies that all claims to a *direct access* to the real are ultimately forms of "philosophies of human access" (discussed in chapter 2 above), insofar as they subordinate the reality of objects to what can be straightforwardly discerned about them, or their more evident traits. In doing so, they are said to substitute 'a loose paraphrase of the thing for the thing itself' (2016a, p. 7). In making such claims, Harman does not wish to claim that scientific progress and knowledge are useless or outright false,[37]

[37] In spite of his critique of undermining and overmining, Harman concedes that they 'are not wrong in all cases' and that they have indeed been 'perfectly good instruments of enlightenment in many

even if some of his own earlier statements sometimes give credence to such an interpretation. Rather, Harman (2016d) concedes that the various forms of mining are ultimately how 'we attain knowledge of the world,' and even affirms that 'without such knowledge the human race would face a miserable collective death' (2016d, p. 178). In spite of this, Harman however also emphasizes that this does not automatically imply that 'knowledge *exhausts the reality of the world, or that it is the only worthy means of gaining access to that world*' (2016d, p. 178, emphasis added). Harman ultimately asserts that many disciplines – such as art, architecture, literature and philosophy – are not forms of direct knowledge, yet still have 'considerable cognitive value' (2016a, p. 12). For Harman, the real of philosophical realism is therefore not to be understood as a form of direct knowledge, but must rather involve some form of oblique speculative cognition.

In making such claims, Harman is therefore creating a strict distinction between the epistemological and ontological claims of realism (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, he clearly argues in favour of the latter, but *against* the former 'knowledge-centred brand of realism' (2015b, p. 127), which he claims can be found explicitly in the work of thinkers such as Meillassoux (2008; 2016) and Brassier (2010), as well as in forms of so-called "naïve" and "scientific realism." Object-oriented thought may then be said to combine an ontological form of realism with an epistemic form of *anti-realism* which emphasises finitude in arguing that the real can never be completely commensurate with what are ultimately human all too human forms of conceptual schemes (Bryant, 2011, pp. 26-27).

As is clear, Harman's object-oriented approach therefore advocates 'a real that somehow flies under the radar of knowledge', which he in turn dubs 'Infra-Realism' (2015b, p. 127). Furthermore, and in a rather counter-intuitive move,

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cases' (2013a, p. 89). Harman forcefully makes his point with the help of the following examples: 'if we show that the morning star and evening star are simply two different appearances of Venus, we have undermined the false distinction between them. If we discover that disease is caused by germs rather than by wretchedness or moral turpitude, then we have undermined the unjust stigmatisation of the poor. If someone eventually unifies relativity with quantum theory, their status as perplexing separate wings of modern physics will be undermined' (2013a, pp. 89-90). Similarly, 'if we discover that there is no such thing as witches or possession by demons, and determine that these are false entities unjustifiably unifying a variety of surface appearances, then this is a case of overmining. If we establish that there are in fact seven different psychological disorders that used to be mixed together under the name "melancholia" or "hysteria," then we have made progress in debunking inadequate older terms' (2013a, p. 90). Therefore, Harman does concede that 'elimination is certainly part of the arsenal of enlightenment' (2013a, p. 90).

Harman actually maintains that 'insofar as mainstream realism holds that reality can be converted to knowledge under the right conditions, it is actually a *flagrant form of idealism*' (2015b, p. 127, emphasis added). He additionally claims that his version of realism is superior to other forms insofar as it

> retains the worthy "realism" while adding the important caveat that we are dealing with a real located beneath all knowledge-claims, and indeed beneath all access to it at all. Just as virtue is never reached by Socrates's or Meno's various statements about it, so too the black hole, Higgs boson, copperhead snake, and *Pinus strobus* family of coniferous trees remains a permanent surplus beyond all of our claims to know them at any given moment […] If the slogan of realism is "there is a world, and it can be known," the motto of Infra-Realism is "there is a world, and it cannot be known" […] the human predicament is both to be and not to be in a state of wisdom. (2015b, pp. 139-140)

He further argues that his "Infra-Realism" does not entail an extreme form of epistemological relativism according to which 'all viewpoints on everything are equally valid', but rather emphasises a form of epistemic 'fallibilism' (2015b, p. 140). Thus, thinkers such as Meillassoux would insist that any rejection of "correlationism" can only proceed through the rejection of finite human knowledge. Contrastingly, Harman's realism rejects all philosophies who claim that reality is commensurate with what humans can know about it. It follows from this that, for Harman, the real of realism can be *indirectly* cognised but not directly known, since all claims to direct knowledge inevitably turn out to be forms of "mining" (2016a, p. 7).

In this context, it is useful to briefly emphasise the major differences between Harman and Meillassoux with regards to their misgivings about "correlationism" and the "philosophy of access." Meillassoux's term specifically targets the tendency in post-Kantian philosophy to think of human *knowledge* as *finite*. As a result, his specific "positive" realist – or, more accurately, materialist – view entails that the "absolute" or "great outdoors" is *directly* knowable (see Meillassoux, 2008; 2012; 2014; 2016). Contrastingly, Harman's own term is designed to critique the idea that reality is commensurate with what humans can know of it. Unlike Meillassoux, he therefore emphasises "indirect" or "allusive" ways of thinking the real, but without actually reducing the latter to knowledge (see Chapters 4-6). As a consequence of this difference, I therefore hold the critique of "correlationism" to be narrower than that of the "philosophies of human access," and I do so for the following reason: Meillassoux term "correlationism" may be said to exclusively critique specific forms of "overmining" which prohibit *direct*

knowledge to a mind-independent reality. Contrastingly, Harman's term "philosophies of human access" includes *all forms* of 'mining,' insofar as the latter describe any attempt to reduce reality to direct knowledge (see also Young, 2020).

The claims being made here may in turn be seen as having two fundamental implications: first, Harman's position further hints at the difference between object-oriented variants of realism, and so-called "naïve" forms of realism. While naïve forms of realism argue that reality exists outside thought (ontological claim) and that one can know this reality through some form of correspondence (epistemological claim), object-oriented forms of realism must claim that reality exists outside the mind, but that it is only accessible through 'indirect, allusive, or vicarious means' (2016a, p. 17). Furthermore, it would be interesting to note that Harman may be seen as actually radicalising a "weak" form of correlationism (2015c, p. 183; 2016d, p. 240). For Harman, Kant was right to claim that there are such things as "things-in-themselves" which can be thought but not known. In Harman's view, Kant's mistake was to view this inaccessibility of things-in-themselves as an exclusively human predicament, thereby remaining within the bounds of correlationism. In so doing, he ignored the fact that 'any relation fails to exhaust its *relata*' (2016a, p. 29). In sum, Harman may then be said to affirm and radicalise the Kantian thesis of finitude, insofar as his speculative form of realism ultimately involves turning the Kantian notion of finitude against itself (rather than simply rejecting it *tout court*), transforming it in turn into a positive feature of the real. Relative to such claims, Harman emphasises that his notion of things-in-themselves beyond any access does not entail some form of "otherworldly" entities. Rather, he seeks to emphasise immanence to the extent that he holds '*this* world' to be replete with infinite levels of autonomous things-in-themselves. Nevertheless, his position also challenges philosophies of immanence such as those he attributes to thinkers like Deleuze and Latour, insofar as such thinkers hold that 'what is currently expressed in the world is all the world has to offer' (2016a, p. 33). Harman holds such positions to be forms of "overmining," stating that if a thing were nothing more than its relations, change would be impossible since 'there would be no surplus behind its current state of affairs that would promote the emergence of anything new' (2010b, p. 33). This claim shall in turn be further expounded

throughout the forthcoming chapters, along with the possible merits and shortcomings of such claims.

3.3: Derrida as an Overminer of Objects?

The present section shall briefly contemplate Harman's assessment of Derrida in light of his critique of different forms of 'mining,' even if it shall have to be somewhat partial, given that the relation between Harman and Derrida shall be further considered and expanded throughout the subsequent chapters. To begin with, Harman seems to acknowledge that both he and Derrida share the belief that 'further progress [in philosophy] requires coming to terms with what Heidegger saw' (2013b, p. 196). Stated more precisely, both Harman and Derrida can be said to support Heidegger's qualm with the history of philosophy as "ontotheology," defined here as the repeated attempt to '[set] up one privileged entity as the explanation for all others: whether it be water, atoms, perfect forms, substance, god, monads, subjectivity or power' (Harman, 2010d, p. 20). As Heidegger puts it in the opening pages of *Being and Time*, 'the Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity. If we are to understand the problem of being, our first philosophical step consists in […] not defining entities as entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entity' (2000, p. 26).

In this respect, it may also be noted that Derrida's overall work seeks to question 'the major determination of the meaning of Being as *presence*, the determination in which Heidegger recognized the destiny of philosophy' (Derrida, 1981b, p. 7). What has been argued here would of course require further elucidation (see Chapters 7-9). But for the purposes of the current chapter, it would suffice to note that in agreement with both Heidegger and Derrida, Harman's critique of undermining, overmining and duomining seeks to undercut any attempt to reduce being to presence.

This is however where the similarity between Derrida and Harman ends, at least in the latter's assessment of the former. As shall be shown in greater detail throughout the course of the subsequent chapter, Harman's original yet counterintuitive reading of Heidegger characterises the latter as essentially attempting to undercut presence by 'pointing to the thing outside all context' (2013a, p. 281). Contrastingly, Harman argues that Derrida 'condemns all claims

to depth in favor of a constant *horizontal* gliding across the *surface of signification*' (2013a, p. 281, emphasis added). It follows from this that, in Harman's (2013a, p. 282) assessment, Derrida remains a stereotypical example of a "*strong* correlationist" and "overminer" of the social constructionist/linguistic idealist kind, where linguistic "signifiers" are said to act as the primary medium of correlation between thinking and being. In Harman's view, Derrida follows the rest of the strong correlationists in limiting philosophy to what goes on between thinking and being, characterising the idealism/realism question as nothing but a false problem, and thereby adopting (at best) an agnostic attitude towards the nature of the real. For Harman, what one gets with Derrida is therefore an incessant 'gliding across the surface of signification', which eliminates things-in-themselves by maintaining – *à la* strong correlationism – not only that they cannot be known, but also that they cannot be thought. Thus, while Harman characterises Heidegger as favouring an undermining form of holism, Derrida is said to overmine objects by treating them as mere effects of our linguistic habits. I however disagree with this interpretation. More specifically, in the chapters dealing with Derrida below, I shall show that this admittedly diffused characterisation of the thinker is not final, and that his work opens itself up to an alternative "Speculative Realist" analysis which in many ways runs counter to Harman's interpretation (see Chapters 7-10).

3.4: Conclusion: Unity and Autonomy

On the basis of the claims made throughout the course of the present chapter, it may then be summarily noted that "undermining" refers to philosophies which hold that all objects are "reducible downwards" to what constitutes them. Contrastingly, "overmining" refers to those philosophies which hold that objects are "reducible upwards" to their more evident outward manifestations, effects, and features. Furthermore, "duomining" refers to all philosophies which are said to both undermine and overmine objects concurrently. Against such tendencies, Harman claims that objects are not their parts, and are not derivative of a more primordial holistic *plenum*. Furthermore, it is also claimed that objects are not their qualities, relations (and actions) or givenness to a human subject. In short, and at least on a preliminary level, it may then be argued that something counts as an object in Harman's sense as long as it is not '*exhausted* by undermining or overmining

methods, though of course these methods often yield fruits of their own' (2016a, p. 41).

Even if Harman recognises that all objects are made up of further parts – i.e. further objects – and that objects enter into relations, he also maintains that it would not follow that objects are simply *equivalent* to their parts or actions and relations. Objects may then be said to have a *autonomy* from their parts or relations; against undermining, Harman claims that objects emerge through interactions between different objects, such that he envisages a cosmos composed of many different 'layers and levels' of objects rather than just one, with 'each of them having a certain autonomy from what lies below' (2014b, p.244), i.e. their component parts. Furthermore, contra overmining, Harman maintains that objects also have a certain 'autonomy from what lies above' (2014b, p. 244), such that no object is reducible to its effects, manifestations or use. Summarily, Harman therefore insists that

> objects are built of pieces, yet they are something over and above those pieces. Objects enter into relations and events, and yet they always hold something in reserve behind those events. Any attempt to make contact with an object, whether through theory, praxis, or sheer causal interaction, will not be able to grasp its full reality. (2014b, p. 245)

Further to the claim that objects are autonomous from what lies above and below them, Harman additionally maintains – in agreement with Leibniz (1997), and against empiricist "bundle of qualities" theorists – that all objects are unities, such that it would be impossible not only to gain full knowledge of an object, but 'even to make *partial* contact with' said object (Harman, 2014b, p. 245). The task of the next chapter shall therefore be to further elaborate on Harman's explication of the aforementioned positive features of objects, in light of his overall project as well as in relation to the work of Derrida.

Chapter 4: Real Objects as Unified and Autonomous

While the previous chapter sought to provide an account of what I have called Harman's "negative" features of the object, the present one shall in turn seek to articulate Harman's "positive" take on the unity and autonomy of real objects. My goals in the present chapter are twofold: first, I seek to provide an account of the way in which Harman uses his modification and generalization of Heidegger's famed "tool-analysis" as a launchpad for his account of the unity and autonomy of real objects (sections 4.1-4.4). Second, I also show how Harman uses this articulation of real objects to critique Derrida's thought (section 4.5). These aims are important to the task of this dissertation more generally since they illustrate Harman's specific understanding of real objects, and this shall in turn facilitate the analysis of how he uses this account to critique the overall position which he imputes to Derrida. It should however be noted that I shall not engage here in a critical Derridean response to Harman's evaluation at this stage, since this task shall be reserved for Chapters 7-10 below.

Harman's account of the unified and autonomous real objects takes flight through an unorthodox revisionary reading of Martin Heidegger's seminal "tool-analysis," presented mainly in section 15 of *Being and Time* (2000). In his book *Tool-Being* (2002) and elsewhere, he uses this analysis to develop 'an improved understanding, not of *Heidegger*, but of the concept of *tool-being*' (2002, p. 15), the term he sometimes uses as a synonym for real objects. As I shall show below, Harman's reading of Heidegger provides the former with the 'resources to restore [real] objects to their full status' (2002, p. 233). With this in view, it must be underlined at the outset that Harman's reading of Heidegger is fairly unconventional and idiosyncratic. In fact, he often emphasises that he seeks to treat the "tool-analysis" as a 'thought experiment' (*inter alia* 2011c, p. 36; 2013a, p. 263; 2014d, p. 27), using it to establish a number of inferences which in the last instance turn out to be decidedly unlike those of any orthodox reading of Heidegger, and possibly unlike those of Heidegger himself.[38]

[38] Harman's unorthodox reading of the Heidegger's work has led some to criticise it as an intentional misapprehension (see for instance Wolfendale, 2014). Nevertheless, it is my contention that any *a priori* dismissal of his reading risks missing what is most powerful about his particular position, and it is this aspect that I intend to highlight in this chapter.

In view of the above, and in keeping with the aims of the current chapter and this work more generally, the scope of the present chapter shall not be to assess the accuracy of Harman's reading of Heidegger. While I hold that this understanding is original and productive, focusing too strictly on his relation to Heidegger would distract from the overall aim of this chapter. Instead, I shall here seek to develop my claim that Harman does two things with the "tool-analysis"; first, he radically *modifies* Heidegger's difference between "readiness-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*) and "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*), articulating them in terms of a *radical* difference between the "autonomy" of objects themselves, and their relational context of involvement respectively. Second, he *generalises* the aforementioned modification to include all inter- and intra-object relations. This modification and generalisation of Heidegger shall however also lead Harman to a "vacuum-sealed" or "monadological" model of objects which in the last instance opposes both Heidegger's overall philosophy and, as I shall show below, that of Derrida as well (2002, p. 228. See also Chapters 7-10).

4.1: Modification I: Autonomy as "Readiness-to-Hand"

In a number of works dealing with Heidegger's thought,[39] Harman reads the latter's analysis of "tools" or "equipment" in Being and Time (2000) as providing a 'counterpoint to [Edmund] Husserl's extreme form of idealism' (2010c, p. 3). He claims that the thrust of Heidegger's "tool-analysis" is to be found in the latter's insistence that entities are only rarely encountered explicitly as phenomena, or what Heidegger calls "present-at-hand" (vorhanden). On the contrary, entities principally exist in the mode of being "ready-to-hand" (zuhanden), where they are implicitly relied upon rather than explicitly noticed. Paraphrasing Heidegger (2000, p. 99), Harman (2002) emphasises that in the mode of being "ready-to-hand", entities – or what he calls "tool-beings" or "real objects" – are "withdrawn" from direct presence. By way of a classic Heideggerian example, as a carpenter uses their hammer, the implement itself is not encountered as an ostensive physical mass with a number of properties. On the contrary, as long as the hammer functions correctly, it recedes from presence as it becomes part of their "concernful" engagement, with

[39] Harman's most sustained reading of Heidegger may be found in *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (2002). For a more condensed version of this reading see *inter alia* Harman, 2005b; 2010c; 2011c; 2011e; 2013b; 2013f; 2015d; 2016c; 2018b.

the carpenter implicitly relying on it while more explicitly expending their energy toward building a shed.

The analysis above has in turn frequently been understood as a description of practical human devices, defined 'in terms of human skills for using them and the human practices […] in which they are involved' (Blattner, 1994, p. 186). In such readings, Heidegger is interpreted as a "weak transcendentalist" for whom '"being" is a transcendental framework which is not constitutive of entities but only of the "as what" entities are encountered' (Philipse, 2007, p. 180). I am of the view that this standard interpretation of Heidegger is well warranted, and that the author himself also gives credence to this account when he emphasises that the aforementioned "withdrawal" of tools from presence is not a feature of isolated entities, but is rather related to the way each implement occupies a specific place in a holistic system of references or "significations" (*Bedeutungen*) (Heidegger, 2000, p. 97). For Heidegger, entities thereby seem to gain their "being" – i.e. their meaning – *differentially*, through their involvement in a holistic contextual network of interrelationships – what he calls the "in order-to" (*umzu*) (2000, p. 97) – and ultimately 'for-the-sake-of' (*worumwillen*) *Dasein's*[40] own being (2000, p. 116). In light of this, it would then seem as though Heidegger offers a 'thoroughly *relational* theory' which discredits the idea that an implement can be viewed as an individual 'self-sufficient unity that shifts between contexts' (Harman, 2002, p. 23). For his part, Harman welcomes Heidegger's emphasis that entities are primarily absent (or "withdrawn") from direct experience. Nevertheless, he also insists that this reading ultimately harbours two objectionable consequences which he claims misrepresent Heidegger's own breakthroughs, even if he also concedes that such views are sometimes endorsed by the latter himself (*inter alia* Harman, 2002, p. 19; 2011c, p. 35).

The first unsavoury ramification is exhibited in its overemphasis on *Dasein's* use of implements. True enough, Harman concedes that Heidegger sometimes claims that the 'human *use* of objects is what gives them ontological

[40] "Dasein" denotes Heidegger's term for the kind of being possessed by humans, i.e. the kind of 'entity which each of us is himself' (2000, p. 27).

depth' (2002, p. 17).[41] Nevertheless, he also claims that this view perpetuates a "correlationist" prejudice exhibited in the anthropocentric emphasis on human involvement (2002, pp. 19, 104-105). In response to this, Harman upturns this interpretation of "readiness-to-hand" by arguing that "withdrawal" is unrelated to the practical use of implements (2002, p. 20, 227; 2016c, p. 84). Instead, he (2002, p. 21) contends that humans are only able to "use" that which is "ready-to-hand" because every entity – or "real object" – is 'sincerely engaged in executing itself' (2002, p. 220), and is thereby irreducible to – and hence "withdrawn" from – its relation to *Dasein*. Harman illustrates this point nicely as follows:

> At this moment I am relying on countless items of equipment including floor, sunlight and bodily organs. These tend to be invisible to me unless they malfunction. But the point is not that I am "using" them: the point is that I can only use them because they are real, because they are capable of inflicting some blow on reality. (2009c, p. 111)

Stated differently, for Harman the being of an entity, "tool" or "object" primarily lies in its *independent existence* rather than its use value (2002, p. 20), such that he takes "readiness-to-hand" or "withdrawal" to refer to the *autonomous being* of all "real objects" in themselves, rather than taking it to refer to limited class of technological implements usually categorised as tools, or to the way humans use such things. In short, Harman is here taking cue from Heidegger's own assertion that "readiness-to-hand" describes '*the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorically*' (2000, p. 101), and he insists that '*being itself is readiness-to-hand*' (2002, p. 128), and that the object *in itself* is not simply present (2002, p. 16); 'to be a tool,' argues Harman, 'is to be autonomous, independent, deep, withdrawn from any access' (2013a, p. 266).

The second objectionable consequence of the abovementioned understanding is its "holism," exhibited in Heidegger's alleged tendency to privilege a deeper layer of being defined by a holistic "ontological" system of interrelated implements over the supposedly derivative "ontic" realm of individual entities (2011c, p. 35). Harman (2013a, pp. 258-259, 267; 2015d, p. 126) notes that Heidegger's "ontological difference" – namely the difference between beings and Being – wavers between the following two meanings throughout the latter's works;

[41] Harman partly blames this interpretation on an ambiguity contained in Heidegger's account of equipment; sometimes Heidegger emphasises that equipment is that which 'is said to withdraw from all human view.' Nevertheless, at other times he also emphasises that equipment can only be said to 'belong to a system of [human] meaning' (2002, p. 126).

sometimes, Being is treated as that which is "withdrawn" from all presence, while at other times it is characterised as that 'which is deeper than any *specific* entity' (2013a, p. 258). While Harman salutes the first sense, he nevertheless maintains that the second reveals Heidegger's aforementioned bias towards "undermining holism" insofar as it characterises Being as fundamentally one (2011c, p. 35. See also Chapter 3 above).

For his part, Harman (2002, pp. 81, 171) reads Heidegger against himself by insisting that the real force of the "tool-analysis" is in truth to be found in 'the victory of *autonomous objects* over their *relational fusion in a system*' (2009a, p. 140, emphasis added). To be sure, Harman acknowledges that entities are reliant on each other, and that everything is encountered *by humans* "for-the-sake-of" *Dasein* (2013a, p. 266; 2007b, pp. 64-65).[42] Nevertheless, he also stresses that the overemphasis on relationality misses the crucial fact that, for Heidegger, tools can "break" from their supposedly seamless role in a current network of relations (2002, pp. 34, 43; 2010d, p. 19; 2013a, pp. 259, 266). In Harman's view, the fact that a "tool" can reconfigure its current relations – or even its sum total of relations – must necessarily mean that an individual object harbours a 'non-relational surplus' beyond its current or possible relations (2013f, p. 193). He holds that if objects were relationally constituted, then it would be impossible for their relations to be disrupted, and thus change would be impossible. By way of an example, if a carpenter's hammer were constituted purely by its relations – to *Dasein* or other entities – it would never "break" out of these relations in order to enter new ones, insofar as its being would be exhaustively expressed in its current relation to other things.

Harman therefore questions relationality – and holism more generally – by probing into the conditions of possibility for the "surplus" exhibited by individual entities. In keeping with his critique of "mining" philosophies (see Chapter 3 above), he disqualifies the possibility that this surplus is to be accounted for in terms

[42] To be sure, Harman (2002, pp. 29-35) does not deny that everything encountered by *Dasein* appears "for-the-sake-of" the latter. What he does deny however is the fact that the "for-the-sake-of" is something exclusively human. Rather, Harman affirms that the "for-the-sake-of" is present in all entities insofar as 'equipmental totalities undergo extensive alteration depending on what organism encounters them' (2002, p. 30).

of an entity's relation to *Dasein* (2002, pp. 33-34),[43] or in terms of its potentialities, capacities, or functions and effects (2002, pp. 228-229; 2009a, pp. 128-129; 2010b, p. 10). For Harman all such instances entail viewing an object exclusively 'from the outside' (2002, p. 228), thereby "overmining" it to its various relations to or effects on *Dasein* or other entities. In view of such preclusions, Harman abductively infers that the source of the "surplus" must be present in distinct objects and hence that what *absolutely* "withdraws" from presence are *individual* entities rather than a relational totality. This characterisation of the individual nature of "tool-beings" shall require further analysis, as shall be done in the following sections. Nevertheless, at least on a preliminary level, it may be noted that to say that a "real object" is "ready-to-hand" or "withdrawn" for Harman means that 'no relation' to *Dasein* or – as shall be shown below – any other entity 'can possibly exhaust [its] reality' (2002, p. 227).

4.2: Modification II: "Presence-at-Hand" as Relational Presence

As has been asserted in the previous section, Harman goes against standard interpretations of Heidegger when he contends that "readiness-to-hand" is utterly unrelated to the practical *dependence* of tools on *Dasein*. As a matter of fact, he claims that the situation is the contrary; "readiness-to-hand" – or "tool-being" – is taken to refer to the *autonomy* ("withdrawal") or *independence* of all individual real objects from *any possible form* of direct presence. For Heidegger as for Harman, entities are predominantly *not present* to experience and are only explicitly noticed when they "fail" or "break" in some way. Rephrasing Heidegger, Harman states that when a tool "breaks" 'its unobtrusive quality is ruined' such that 'there occurs a jarring of reference, so that the tool becomes visible *as* what it is' (2002, p. 45). In other words, the "failed" tool suddenly flashes into prominence and reverses from absolute absence ("withdrawal") to a mode of presence which Heidegger calls "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*). For instance, as I type at my desk, the laptop itself is not objectively present to me, since I implicitly rely on it to accomplish the task of writing my dissertation. While it works the laptop is therefore discreet.

[43] Harman notes that, for Heidegger, there would be no individual objects if there were no 'human being to *identify* them as such […] It is only I, almighty Dasein, who am able to institute cracks into this totalizing machinery' (2002, p. 33). Nevertheless, Harman argues that this position is untenable due to its inability to explain 'why the world itself is not articulated into objects, but then somehow human experience *is*' (2018c, p. 103).

However, if the laptop were to suddenly crash it would quickly become noticeable in its conspicuous presence.

Harman acknowledges that Heidegger uses "presence-at-hand" polysemously rather than simply taking it to refer to the limited instances when a tool literally malfunctions. For example, he notes that the latter also uses "presence-at-hand" for occasions when an entity is encountered in 'normal everyday perception' or 'explicit theoretical awareness' (2011c, p. 52; 2016c, p. 83). For the sake of illustration, if I were to stare at my laptop in a moment of existential dread or try to understand its complex workings, then the laptop becomes conspicuous even if it functions normally, since I am no longer tacitly relying on it in order to complete the task of writing this chapter. Nevertheless, Harman claims that all said instances of "presence-at-hand" share a common attribute, namely all speak of occurrences when an entity is registered in its *relational presence* – i.e. in terms of its manifest (or what Harman calls "sensual") qualities – to an onlooker rather than "withdrawing" from such presence (2009a, p. 141). In light of this, it may be noted that he effectuates a further modification of Heidegger's notion of "presence-at-hand," understanding it to include all instances of what the latter calls the "as-structure" (2002, p. 68), namely 'the seeing of a thing *as* such and such' (Harman, 2015d, p. 123).[44] Harman expresses this point nicely as follows:

> the visibility of Heidegger's "broken tool" has nothing to do with equipment not being in top working order. Even the most masterfully constructed, prize-winning tools have to be regarded as "broken" as soon as we consider them directly; the broken/unbroken distinction does not function as an ontic rift between two different sorts of entities. (2002, p. 45)

In light of this, it ought to be noted that Harman further breaks with the aforementioned interpretation of "readiness-to-hand" as referring to the practical dependence of entities on *Dasein* (2002, pp. 114-127; 2011c, p. 42).[45] While he concedes that there is 'some truth to [the] dependence of theory on praxis' (2016d, p. 187) and that the practical use of tools is 'more transparent' than explicit theoretical behaviour (2016c, p. 87), he nevertheless maintains that such details overlook the fact that the practical use of tools – no less than theory or simple

[44] It ought to be noted that Harman is aware that his claim runs counter to Heidegger's own self-interpretation since the latter does not seem to level all instances of the "as-structure." For Harman's account of this matter, see 2002, pp. 78-79, 219.

[45] An extended analysis of Harman's critique of such interpretations of Heidegger may be found in Harman, 2002, pp. 103-127, 164-180. For a more concise interpretation, see Harman, 2011c, pp. 40-44; 2013a, pp. 270-272.

perception – necessarily involves apprehending an entity through some form of interpretive schema, i.e. in its *relation to Dasein* (2015d, p. 123). Thus, stated more precisely, the thrust of Harman's novel reworking of Heidegger lies in the claim that "tool-beings" withdraw from *both* theoretical and practical comportment, such that the difference between "readiness-to-hand" and "presence-at-hand" is not synonymous to the difference between practical and theoretical behaviour as is often maintained, but is rather related to the difference between the autonomous – and hence the *absolutely non-relational* – reality of "tool-beings" and the *relational* "present-at-hand" content of *both* practical *and* theoretical comportment (2013a, p. 107).

Nevertheless, Harman also takes such claims a step further when he argues that what counts for perception, theory and practice is also true of any modality of relation more generally. Against Heidegger's attempt to distinguish and rank different forms of human comportment, Harman boldly claims that the "as-structure" cannot support any distinction of gradations between theoretical and practical activity (2002, pp. 68-69). This, for him (2002, p. 79), is due to the fact that any modality of "presence-at-hand" unavoidably involves encountering an object "as" something – i.e. in its relation to a perceiver – such that anything that comes into presence only exists 'in relation to us' (2009a, p. 141) as a mere "sensual" 'translation' of its withdrawn being (2016c, p. 84). Furthermore, Harman emphasises that what is registered in its relational presence is not the object's "tool-being" itself, since the latter defined by its unconditional "withdrawal," that is, its radical absence. In other words, for Harman, 'the thing "as" thing [i.e. in its relational presence] is not the same as the thing itself [i.e. the "tool-being"],' since the latter 'can never be openly encountered' (2002, p. 69). Thus, while Harman does not wish to efface the difference between diverse modalities of relation, he nonetheless emphasises that all relations – including theory, praxis, perception, and even self-relation[46] – are ultimately translations. But if translations are never direct or symmetrical correspondences between the relator and related – i.e. can never bring the "tool-being" into direct presence – then this must imply that all relations

[46] For Harman, 'Dasein's understanding of its own being occurs only through the lens of the as-structure' such that 'it does not have direct contact with its own being, but can understand it only "as" this being' (2002, p. 127).

are 'privative' (Cogburn, 2017, p. 27), insofar as an object's "tool-being" perpetually resists being recuperated into any of its possible translations.[47]

In summary, it may then be argued that Harman maintains that "real objects" or "tool-beings" are "withdrawn" from any of their relational "present-at-hand" profiles (or what Harman calls their "sensual qualities"), such that "tool-beings" can never be 'identical with human knowledge, handling, touching, tasting, or hatred of them' (2015c, p. 137). Harman effectuates a levelling of "presence-at-hand" into relationality more generally; 'presence,' argues Harman, 'always means presence *for* someone' or – as shall be shown below – 'something' (2016c, pp. 84-85), such that "presence-at-hand" is 'always relational to the core' (2009a, p. 141). It would then follow that any form of presence for Harman turns out to be a form of 'simulation' or 'ghostly energy' drawn from an *absent* yet executant "real object" (2002, pp. 69, 220). In short, it may then be stated that for Harman (2002, pp. 4-5) *presence* turns out to be *after*-effect.

4.3: Generalisation: "Withdrawal" as an Intra-Objective Feature

As I have shown above, Harman's path to the autonomy of real objects proceeds through an unorthodox but productive modification of Heidegger's "tool-analysis." For Harman (2018b, p. 169), there exists a *complete schism* separating the non-relational *absent* "real object" and its relational "present-at-hand" or "sensual" profiles. Furthermore, it can be noted that the latter may be said to be simultaneously both bound and separate from an underlying "real object." They are bound to it insofar as sensual qualities are always "emitted" or "emanated" from an underlying object (Harman, 2011c, p. 49). Nevertheless, they are also separate from a real object because there is, in Harman's view, a *total* disjunction between the

[47] Relative to this, it can be noted that the metaphor of "translation" often used by Harman as a synonym for relation is especially apt, given his claim that what counts for non- or pre-linguistic experience is also characteristic of linguistic activity. In this way, Harman (2014d, p. 51) seeks to subvert the distinctive role accorded to language in much contemporary philosophy by treating it as yet another modality of relations more generally. To be sure, Harman (2005a; 2018b, p. 204) does emphasise the crucial differences between literal and figurative language, yet a full analysis of this difference shall be reserved for chapter six below. For the purposes of the current chapter, it would however suffice to note that Harman holds literal language to be 'an oversimplification,' since it 'describes things in terms of definite literal properties' (2018b, p. 37, emphasis removed), whereas real objects always exist in excess of such properties. In short, Harman argues that literal language is like all other forms of relation to the extent that it is characterised by a gap between absence ("tool-being") and the "present-at-hand" (or what Harman calls "sensual") profiles through which the absent object signals into the realm of experience.

withdrawn real object and its (relational) sensual qualities (2002, pp. 68-69); whilst it is certainly true that there is a reliance on a real object's relational qualities, it is also true that these qualities are not equivalent to the being of a real object itself. In other words, there is, for Harman, an '*absolute* difference between the modes of tool and broken tool' (2002, p. 219, emphasis added), even if this difference does not imply a "two-world" rift 'between two different sorts of entities' since 'reversals between these two modes constantly occur' (2002, p. 45; 2016c, p. 83). Stated as precisely as possible, Harman's "real object" may then be said to be 'a subterranean force' which *never* becomes directly present, but which nevertheless simultaneously 'also acts to summon up some explicitly encountered reality' (2002, p. 26).

In light of the reading above, it may be noted that Harman challenges Meillassoux's aforementioned construal of Heidegger as a "strong correlationist," opting instead to interpret him as a '*correlationist realist*' (2009a, p. 179. See also Chapter 2 above). More specifically, Harman praises Heidegger as a (qualified) realist to the extent that the latter argues that Being (*Sein*) 'withdraws from all attempts to grasp it' (2008a, p. 199). Nevertheless, he also claims that the latter cannot be considered a realist in a '*bona fide* sense' (2015a, p. 238), since he also perpetuates a standard post-Kantian "correlationist" anthropocentric assumption that sees Being as "withdrawing" exclusively from *Dasein* (2016c, p. 92). Harman does concede that it is not 'especially difficult to find philosophies that,' like Heidegger, 'make room for something [existing] 'beyond' the given' (2018a, p. 204)[48]. He nevertheless also insists that 'it is not enough to say that there is something deeply inaccessible *to humans*' since one 'must also account for what happens when one non-human object meets another' (2018a, p. 204).[49] In this context, he introduces the following "litmus test" for realism:

[48] Harman (2018a, p. 204) cites Kant's "things-in-themselves", Schopenhauer's "will", Levinas's "Other" and Lacan's "Real" as examples of such philosophies.

[49] In light of this claim, it may be noted that the "mind-independence" thesis of realism (discussed in Chapter 2 above) is in Harman's esteem a necessary condition for realism but not a sufficient one. This is because he holds that both theses of "mind-independence" as well as "mind-dependence" are overly anthropocentric in their tacit assumption that the singular gap – or lack thereof – between human and world is to be regarded as the 'privileged relation for philosophy' (2017, p. 28). Similarly, Harman also holds that epistemology is also too limited insofar as it focuses exclusively on the human-world relation (2013a, pp. 165-166).

> Of any philosophy we encounter, it can be asked whether it has anything at all to tell us about the impact of inanimate objects upon one another, apart from any human awareness of this fact. If the answer is "yes," then we have a philosophy of objects. […] If the answer is "no," then we have the philosophy of access, which for all practical purposes is idealism, even if no explicit denial is made of a world outside of human cognition. (2005a, p. 42)

For his part, Harman seeks to carry out a speculative (and decidedly post-phenomenological) move beyond this "idealist" limitation in Heidegger and post-Kantian philosophy more generally. He does so by essentially generalising his peculiar reading of the "tool-analysis" to a point which, by his own admission, Heidegger himself would never concede (2011c, p. 44). More specifically, Harman *upholds* and *elevates* the aforementioned "weak correlationist" thesis of finitude outlined in Chapter 2 – namely the thesis that all human experience is limited – when he insists humans can never directly relate to objects in itself – i.e. in its "tool-being" – since we can only ever encounter partial "present-at-hand" translations of them (2015c, pp. 182-183; 2016d, pp. 240-241). Relative to this, it may be noted that Harman is sometimes accused of either dismissing Kant *tout court* (Cole, 2015) or of simply repackaging Kant's notion of the unknowable "thing-in-itself" into a form of "negative theology" of the object (Johnston, 2013). I however claim that neither of these critiques hold true. More specifically, Harman does not simply dismiss Kant because he retains two fundamental Kantian theses, namely that of finitude and the idea of the "withdrawn object" or "thing-in-itself." Nevertheless, he also decidedly moves beyond the anthropocentric thesis of correlationism – and hence beyond Kant and Heidegger – by generalising finitude, transforming it from a negative human limitation to a positive feature of the real. This generalisation of finitude involves the claim that "real objects" are not only autonomous or "withdrawn" from humans, but rather also from each other. More precisely, he claims that finitude is not a peculiar attribute of human consciousness,[50] but is rather a feature of relations more generally, to the effect that any encounter between two real objects A and B is also finite, with the first object (A) encountering only a "present-at-hand" relational distorted "translation" of the other object (B), and vice-versa (2011e, p. 174; 2016c, p. 84).

[50] In his introductory book to Speculative Realism (2018c), Harman claims that 'the thing-in-itself escapes us not because we are humans who think, but because we are *entities that relate*, just like fire relating to cotton or raindrops to a tin roof' (2018c, p. 94)

For Harman, 'the realm of presence-at-hand is [therefore] not the product of human sensation, but of *the perspectival stance of any entity whatever*' (2002, p. 224), to the effect that 'the real [ontological] distinction' is not to be found in the "onto-taxonomical"[51] rift 'between thought and nature, but between objects in themselves and objects as caricatured by others in their relations' (2016d, p. 241).[52] By way of an example, Harman's claim is that when humans relate to cotton, they necessarily do so by translating it in a finite "present-at-hand" human manner; for instance, they relate to it "as" something used for cleaning or as part of a theory about botany. Nevertheless, Harman (2012c) also insists that this fact also holds true for the relation between fire and cotton for instance, such that when fire interacts with cotton or causes it to burn, the former only relates to the latter by translating it in limited terms which might be relevant to it but not to humans, insects, or rocks. Thus, he states that 'fire encounters *the flammable*, not the individual concreteness of this cotton […], and in that respect cotton and fire withdraw from each other no less than they do from us' (2013g, p. 252).

Relative to the example above, it may then be noted that Harman's chief speculative claim is that the very nature of "real objects" in themselves is defined by their withdrawal or autonomy from any possible relation into which they may enter. Thus, unlike "weak correlationist" and "strong correlationist" thinkers who postulate a *correlation* between human and world, Harman's "object-oriented" position postulates a gap separating *any* two real objects. This generalisation of his reading of the "tool-analysis" in turn has two important and far-reaching consequences: First, rather than endorsing the panpsychist[53] claim that everything is conscious, Harman effectively asserts that human awareness represents but one instance of relationality more generally. On my reading, Harman may therefore be said to adopt a *quasi*-flat ontology of objects (see Chapter 3 above), but an entirely

[51] The term "onto-taxonomy" is defined by Harman (2016a) as any philosophical position which postulates an '*a priori* modern split between human beings on one side and everything else on the other' (Harman, 2016a, p. 5). For Harman, such thinkers are guilty of propagating a "taxonomic fallacy," namely they uphold the unwarranted assumption that 'the amazing traits of one specific being' must automatically make it 'ontologically different in kind from all other beings' (2016d, p. 230).

[52] In this respect, it can be noted Harman's "real objects" may be favourably compared to the Kantian notion of noumenal "things-in-themselves", with the exception that for the former entities are not only "things-in-themselves" for humans, but also for one other (Harman, 2017).

[53] For an account of the differences between Object-Oriented Philosophy and panpsychism, see Harman, 2010c, pp. 14-15; 2011c, pp. 118-123; Mickey, 2018, p. 297.

democratic ontology where relations are concerned; for Harman 'all relations are on the same ontological footing as the human-world relation' (2011d, p. 55)[54] to the extent that, by virtue of being relations, they are all necessarily translations. Second, for Harman (2002, pp. 221-222), the insistence that all objects withdraw from each other implies that inanimate causal interaction itself must also be treated as yet another species of relationality, given his assertion that 'causal reaction is always only a response to a *limited* range of factors in the causative entity' (Harman, 2002, p. 223). Stated differently, causality is for Harman yet another case of relationality more generally since it – like all other forms of relation – '[involves] relations of separate terms—terms never adequately deployed in their current relations, or in any possible relations for that matter' (2011b, p. 221).

From Harman's perspective, the assumption of much contemporary philosophy is that relations and causation are a given. In some cases – as is the case with "mining" philosophies – it is even held that objects are nothing more than their relations to us or to each other. In contrast, Harman argues that relations are a *result* rather than a given, since a real object always exists autonomously from its present and possible contexts or external relations. Through his notion of object-object "withdrawal", Harman therefore seeks to move away from the "philosophies of human access" (discussed in Chapter 2 above) in order to 'reestablish some sense of depth of objects *apart from all relations*' (2005a, p. 73, emphasis added). This emphasis on the autonomy – and hence "withdrawal" – of all "real objects" from their interrelations in turn leads Harman (*inter alia* 2002; 2012c; 2018b, p. 150) to question how it is possible for real objects to influence each other to begin with: 'if objects withdraw from all relations,' as argues Harman, one 'may wonder how they make contact at all' (2012c, p. 193). By way of an example (Harman, 2013a, p. 260), given Harman's claim that fire translates cotton into its own "present-at-hand" simulation rather than encountering it directly, it would be necessary to raise the question of how the real fire can ever cause the absent real cotton to burn to begin with. Harman articulates his point clearly as follows:

> Real objects withdraw from all human access and even from causal interaction with each other. This does not mean that objects engage in no relations (for of course they relate), but

[54] In many places, Harman (2008a; 2011d; DeLanda and Harman, 2017, pp. 28-29) has noted the phrase quoted here as one which should supplement Braver's six possible theses of realism discussed in Chapter 1 above.

> only that such relations are a problem to be solved rather than a starting point to be decreed, and furthermore that these relations must always be indirect or vicarious rather than direct. (2013b, p. 188)

I hold that Harman's take on the problem of indirect or "vicarious" causation marks one of the cornerstones of his Object-Oriented Philosophy. Nevertheless, further inquiry into the nature of this mechanism requires additional analyses of Harman's philosophy, and shall thus be reserved for chapter 6 below. In keeping with the scope and aim of the current chapter, it may however be summarily noted that Harman's particular reading of the "tool-analysis" leads him to discover the inherent autonomy of all "real objects" insofar as he postulates a fundamental chasm separating any two real objects; one which is 'inherent in the nature of things' rather than being 'generated by the peculiarities of the human mind' (2005a, p. 83).

4.4: Real objects and Real Qualities

The task of the current section shall be to provide an explication of what he means when he argues that entities are unified. In light of this goal, it should then be noted that Harman's aforementioned critique of "mining philosophies" (see Chapter 3) essentially precludes the possibility that an object can be pieced together from a bundle of sensual qualities or real parts: to reduce an object to its sensual qualities or effects is to "overmine" it, while reducing it to its real parts would constitute a case of "undermining." This exclusion in turn allows Harman to abductively infer that an individual "withdrawn" object must consist of a specific "formal unity" (Harman, 2002; 2005a), rather than being a mere collection of qualities or parts. It however ought to be noted that Harman uses the latter term in very specific ways. He strives to move away from the idea that philosophy ought to be about creating neologisms, preferring instead to borrow terms from the history of philosophy and give them an unexpected and novel twist. It may be noted that the use of "form" performs two main functions in Harman's philosophy: first, it distances his own position from that of "duomining" forms of materialism which reduce an object to both its parts and manifest traits (see Chapter 3 above. See also Harman, 2002, pp. 292-293; 2014c; 2016b). Second, it emphasises that "real objects" always have a highly unified structure (2014c, p. 96), even if the latter is not to be understood as a universal Platonic form or Aristotelean *genera*. Rather, his use of the term is intended in the sense of 'medieval substantial forms, which were organized and

structured' but nevertheless 'not directly knowable' (Harman, in DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 19).

Harman's "real objects" or "tool-beings" are therefore not only autonomous but also unified. On my reading, this latter assertion contains three far reaching ramifications: first, his take on unity sheds further light on its relation to autonomy; for Harman (2018c, p. 105), it is precisely because real objects harbour a unified yet withdrawn structure which cannot adequately be recuperated in any relation that the object withdraws from any attempt to render it present. The untranslatable unity of the object thus explains, for Harman (2009a, p. 299), the "surplus" or "excess" exhibited by individual entities, and their capacity to break from given contexts and enter new ones. Second, the claim that an object is unified implies that it is essentially self-identical, even if he claims that this is not to be conflated with notion of self-presence[55] (Harman, 2013a, pp. 248-250; 2013b, p. 198). In other words, the refutation of holism necessarily entails upholding the principle of identity, according to which an object 'is what it is' independently of 'its interactions with anything else' (2013a, p. 254). Identity, for Harman, therefore suggests that an object is always 'deeper than its relations and effects' (2013a, p. 255).[56] He contrasts this view to that of Derrida, which he claims denies self-identity in favour of a 'chain of differences' in which 'everything will be everything else' (2013b, p. 198). It may be noted in passing that I disagree with this characterisation. More specifically, in the chapters dealing with Derrida (Chapters 7-10), I shall show that the latter's work entails a differential – and hence relational – view of the real which nevertheless does not "overmine" entities into nothing more than their relations or surface-effects of "language." Finally, for Harman (2002, pp. 228, 247), the unity of the object is said to define its *actuality*, by which he means its reality rather than

[55] Harman (2002, p. 127) precludes the possibility of self-presence on the basis of the fact that self-relation – like any other form of relation – must necessarily occur through a "present-at-hand" translation. As a result, Harman upholds self-identity but – following his thesis of "withdrawal" – claims self-presence to be impossible.

[56] On my reading, Harman's position here may be interpreted as contrasting with some of the other proponents of Object-Oriented Ontology: both Levi R. Bryant and Timothy Morton essentially claim that the tension between the real and the sensual implies the rejection of self-identity. Thus, Bryant holds that an object is always '*self*-othering' (2011, p. 85, emphasis modified), while Morton (2013) claims that objects essentially violate the law of non-contradiction. In contrast with both these views, Harman holds that the real object is always self-identical, independently of its (sensual or relational) manifestations to another entity. Stated differently, for Harman the difference between the real object and the sensual qualities is *not* a difference internal to the object (2009a, p. 157).

its effects. This actuality in turn consists of a "withdrawn" and hence presently unexpressed "surplus" which accounts for the possibility of change at the level of the real. Such claims in turn indicate that Harman (2011e, p. 176; 2016e, p. 470) adopts a temporally "presentist" ontology which approaches objects and change synchronically rather than diachronically (2018b, p. 167. See also Chapters 6, 7 and 10 below). He claims that the overemphasis on diachronic processes over actual entities rob the latter of their reality, transforming them into nothing more than a temporary state in a more general process of becoming (2014d, p. 51; DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 77). Process centred ontologies are therefore said to reduce 'what is currently actual to the transient costume of an emergent process across time, and makes the real work happen outside actuality itself' (2009a, p. 129). Against such "process-oriented" ontologies, Harman's "object-oriented" ontology may thus be said to 'endorse a model of non-relational actuality, devoid of potential, but containing reserves for change in so far as it is withheld from relations' (2009a, p. 299).[57]

Notwithstanding, Harman (2011c, p. 49) also argues that an object cannot simply be a vacuous "unity" lacking peculiarity. Drawing inspiration from Leibniz (1997, pp. 252-253),[58] he claims that if objects were devoid of specific qualities at the level of the real, they would in consequence be utterly indistinguishable and interchangeable. From this fact, Harman deduces that there must exist a "tension"[59] between an object's withdrawn unity ("real object") *and* equally withdrawn "real qualities" which are nevertheless 'shaped by the object to which they belong' rather than being 'mobile universals' bestowed upon it relationally (2011c, p.101). Furthermore, he notes that such qualities may be said to simultaneously belong and differ from the object; they belong to it insofar as an object is never devoid of

[57] Relative to this, it may then be noted that Harman upholds this "non-relational model" of self-identical objects because he claims that it represents the only possible way to account for change. In Chapters 7-10, I shall however show that Derrida's work may be read as offering a *relational* model of entities which nevertheless allows for the possibility of change.

[58] In spite of his agreement with Leibniz on this particular point, it ought to be noted that Harman differs from him in many other ways. For instance, one important way in which Harman differs from Leibniz is in the latter's claim that the real qualities are constituted by a monad's 'relational mirrorings of other things' (Harman in DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 108). For a further analysis of this claim see Harman, 2002; 2011b, pp. 221-224; 2005a, pp. 77, 83.

[59] The word "tension" is used by Harman in a technical sense to describe the 'simultaneous closeness and separation' (2011c, p. 108) between objects and their respective qualities. It serves to indicate that an object always maintains a loose relation with its own qualities rather than being constituted by them.

specific qualities (2013a, p. 62). Nevertheless, they also differ from it insofar the unity of the object 'endures (within certain limits) even when [its] qualities are altered' (2005a, p. 94).

In light of the above, it may be noted that Harman often emphasises the affinity between his real objects and classical theories of substance found in the Aristotelian tradition (2002, p. 2). At least four similarities emerge: first, both Aristotle and Harman use the term "first substance" (*prote ousia*) and "real object" respectively to refer to the unity and autonomy of individual entities (Harman, 2002, p. 270; Harman, 2012b, p. 11; *inter alia* Aristotle, 2002, pp. 144-146). Second, both argue that each "real object" (Harman) or "primary substance" (Aristotle) has its own *constitutive* structure as opposed to an accidental form, or Platonic universal (Aristotle, 2002, pp. 24, 126, 206; Harman, 2002, p. 270; 2012b, p. 11; Harman, 2013g, pp. 247-248). Third, Harman (2013a, p. 281) points out that Aristotle (2002, pp. 145, 148) intermittently pre-empts his account of autonomy when the latter argues that primary substances 'can never be adequately expressed in a *logos'* (2012b, p. 11. See also Aristotle, 2002, pp. 145, 148).[60] Finally, like Aristotle (2002, p. 148) – but unlike Leibniz (1997) – Harman holds that individual substances are not immutable but rather subject to change and destruction (2002, p. 284; 2005a, p. 85).

In view of such similarities, Harman readily affirms that his philosophy may in a sense be read as 'a weirder version of Aristotle's theory of substance' (2011c, p. 93). Nevertheless, his use of the adjective "weird" ought not to be underestimated, since there are two crucial ways in which Harman diverges from classical theories of substance: first, Harman rejects the claim that substances are directly knowable through reason (*logos*). For instance, Aristotle sometimes claims that substance is 'equivalent to the *logos'* (Harman, in Brassier *et al.*, 2012, p. 383. See also Aristotle, 1986, pp. 203, 208), a claim which exists in tension with other times where he asserts that primary substances are unknowable. Contrariwise, and as has already been noted, Harman's "real objects" are withdrawn from any form of direct presence, to the effect that they cannot be positively known, whether

[60] Harman himself notes that this claim runs counter to 'popular belief' (2012b, p. 11) about Aristotle's views.

through direct adequation or some other form of representational mechanism. Second, and more importantly, Harman questions the rigid distinction between natural substance and artificial aggregate postulated by Aristotle and Leibniz.[61] In his view (2011b, p. 220; 2013g, p. 247), such theorists erroneously conflate the unity of substance with its simplicity when they claim that a true substance is unified and therefore cannot be composed of further parts. This assumption, for Harman, is questionable for two main reasons: first, it grants the status of substance to certain privileged entities at the expense of others. Second, it creates a "two-world" theory containing one fundamental layer of substance and another derivative layer of relational aggregates.

For his part, Harman rejects both these hypotheses. Against the first, he (2005a, p. 76; 2010c, p. 4; 2014b, p. 240; 2016a) insists that his "real objects" include entities such as sharks, iPhones, the Obama Administration, Lake Michigan and the Dutch East India Company, given that all such entities fit his specific criteria for objecthood, namely they cannot be "mined" into their constituent pieces or their effects, and have a certain unity over and above their pieces and autonomy from their relations (see Chapter 3 above).[62] Against the second repercussion, Harman asserts that every "tool-being" is paradoxically 'concurrently *both*' (2011b, pp. 223-224) substance and aggregate, such that the aforementioned difference between "tool-being" and "broken tool" does not represent a "two-world" distinction between two exclusive levels of reality. This claim is significant, and therefore warrants further elaboration.

As has been shown, Harman claims that there is a sense in which 'no substance has any parts at all' since an object is a unity rather than an aggregate sum of parts (2005a, p. 93). Nevertheless, he also argues that every object is in

[61] For reasons of space, and given the limitations imposed by the scope of this chapter, I am unable to give a full account of Harman's interesting relation to Aristotle and Leibniz. For an analysis of Harman's relation to the former see Salem, 2017; Harman, 2013g. For an analysis of his relation to the latter, see Harman, 2011b.

[62] It is true that this vast variety of objects has led some to critique Harman for being "ontologically liberal" (Wolfendale, 2014; Morelle, 2016), defined as a position 'that aims to confer a positive ontological status on a wide range of objects, including those […] which do not fit the commonsense criteria of materiality or substantiality that usually serve to qualify for existence' (Morelle, 2016, p. 454). While I agree with the claim that Harman is "ontologically liberal", I also maintain that this is a virtue rather than a vice, since it constitutes a better option than the *a priori* elimination of certain classes of entities.

another sense also composed of parts and is therefore a '*multiplicity* that is also somehow *one'* (2005a, p. 96, emphasis added). In other words, an object is always fashioned from what Harman calls 'domestic relations' between its component parts (2009a, p. 135), but nevertheless also '*unifies* [them] into an emergent reality which has genuine [real] qualities of its own' (2010c, p. 15, emphasis added). Harman draws an 'absolute distinction' between an object's "domestic relations" and its "foreign relations" (2009a, p. 135). The former refers to the relations which are necessary for an object's existence, while the latter refers to the extrinsic relations which objects enter into (2009a, p. 135). Nevertheless, he claims that a real object is not exhausted by either its "domestic" or "foreign" relations; an object is always (relatively) ontologically independent of its "domestic relations" insofar as it *emerges* over and above its constituent parts. It is also ontologically independent of its "foreign relations" insofar as it can reconfigure its alliances with the objects it relates to (2009a, pp. 135, 188). Thus, Harman argues that all relations – whether domestic or foreign – must ultimately be external to their terms (2009a, p. 188). By way of illustration, an individual hammer withdraws from its external relations with other entities, and therefore acts as a 'substance with respect to its surroundings' (2002, p. 171). Nevertheless, the hammer is itself also 'a relational composite of its internal elements' (2002, p. 171). This, for Harman, in turn means that the hammer itself 'is not located at the basement of the universe at all, since a layer of constituent pieces swarms beneath it, another layer beneath that one, and so forth' (2011c, p. 112), to the effect that all "tool-beings" are 'decomposable into further tool-beings *ad infinitum*' (2002, p. 279). Furthermore, he adds another important twist to this account by further claiming that 'if every entity is already made up of a set of relations' then it would also follow that 'every relation is also *ipso facto* a new entity' (2002, p. 260). Thus, he essentially claims that 'when two [real] objects enter into genuine relation', the relation itself generates a new real object which 'has an identity and a depth that belongs to neither of its parts, and which is also irreducible to all of its current effects on other entities, or to the knowledge we may have of it' (2005a, p. 85). A full explication of Harman's understanding of the conditions of possibility for a "genuine relation" shall require further analysis of Harman's philosophy, and shall therefore be reserved for chapter 6 below.

It is therefore evident from the above that Harman argues for an infinite regress of objects, such that the previously established "gap" or difference between "tool" and "broken tool" does not represent a "two-world" distinction between one layer composed exclusively of substances and another one exclusively of relations (or aggregates). Rather, he offers an '*infinitely*-tiered' model (Harman in Harman, Cox and Jaskey, 2015, p. 108) in which the actual world is an open system 'made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects' (2005a, p. 85).[63] Further to this, it ought to be noted that the parts contained on the inside of an object, insofar as they are real, are also withdrawn from each other. As a result, Harman's take on the problem of causality briefly alluded to in Section 4.3 above does not only hold for inter-objective relations, but also for intra-objective ones (2012c, p. 218).[64] This aspect of Harman's philosophy shall be discussed in Chapter 6 below.

4.5: The Real and the Critique of "Ontotheology"

In the previous sections, I have outlined Harman's understanding of real objects; his principal claim is that the world is composed of unified real objects which are defined by their radical *absence*, and which exist in constant "tension" with both their sensual and real qualities. In view of such a claim and the goal of this chapter more broadly, the present section shall seek to accomplish two tasks: first, it briefly analyses how Harman's articulation of the autonomy and unity of real objects relates to his understanding of Heidegger's critique of "ontotheology" (see also Section 3.3 above). Second, it shall articulate how Harman uses his understanding of "ontotheology" towards a critique of Derrida. Before proceeding to take these goals to task, I however wish to qualify that my aim here shall be to describe – rather than assess – Harman's evaluation of Derrida, and that the assessment of Harman's critique shall be reserved for Chapters 7-10 below.

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[63] It may be noted that Harman advocates an infinite regress of objects as the only possible alternative to two other models of reality which he regards as untenable, namely those that postulate a finite regress of objects – namely classical substance theorists – or no regress of objects at all – namely the "philosophies of human access" (Harman, 2002, p. 293). Furthermore, this infinite regress of objects does not necessitate an 'infinite progress' (2013g, p. 252) toward holism since 'there is nothing forcing substances to enter into combination with other substances' (2013g, p. 252).

[64] Harman states that 'at the centre of everything there lies a world of elusive objects torn apart in two directions by two separate rifts in being. A thing is divided from all presentations of itself, but is also divided between its own unity and multiplicity. In both directions, some sort of vicarious causation is needed' (2005b, p. 97).

In *Tool-Being* (2002) and elsewhere, Harman (2002, p.16) affirms that his account of the real effectuates a revival of a speculative form of metaphysics[65] which nevertheless both *overcomes* and *extends* the critique of "ontotheology" or the "metaphysics of presence" as advanced by Heidegger and pursued by Derrida (Harman, 2013a, p. 10. See also Chapter 7). Relative to this, and as has already been asserted in chapter 3.3 above, it may be noted that Harman (see *inter alia* 2002, p. 5; 2005a, p. 74; 2007b, p. 54; 2010d, p. 20; 2011c, p. 47; 2013a, p. 10; 2016c, p. 91) consistently defines the critique of "ontotheology" exclusively in terms of the objection that

> metaphysics has always been a metaphysics of *presence*. One specific kind of being has been elevated to the level of being itself, set down as the *foundation* for all others […] The privileged entity is always described as *directly present to the mind, or at least the world.* This means that in principle it can be described by a known list of features. (2013a, pp. 9-10, emphasis modified)

In passing, I hold that the above characterisation is accurate yet partial, since it tends to understate certain temporal concerns associated with Heidegger and Derrida's critique of presence.[66] I shall have occasion to treat such issues in greater detail below (see Chapter 7). Nevertheless, in view of the aims and scope of the present chapter, I shall provisionally assume Harman's characterisation above.

It may then be noted that the "ontotheological" account of Being is seen as problematic by both Heidegger and Derrida (as well as Harman) insofar as it illegitimately sets up a particular ("ontic") being as the immutable basis of all Being, and further understands such a being to be fully present to thought and hence directly discernible. For instance, in *Of Grammatology* (1997), Derrida lists the

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[65] On my reading, the sense in which Harman uses the term metaphysics here is equivalent to that used by Kasimir Twardowski (1977), who writes that 'metaphysics is a science which considers all objects, physical – organic and inorganic – as well as mental, real as well as nonreal, existing objects as well as nonexisting objects […] what we here mean is expressed by the venerable definition of metaphysics as the study of being [*Seienden*] as such' (1977, p. 36). Unlike Meillassoux (2008), Harman therefore seems to use the terms "metaphysics" and "speculation" interchangeably (Sparrow, 2014, p. 143).

[66] On my reading (to be expounded on in Chapter 7 below), both Heidegger and Derrida suggest that the critique of the metaphysics of *presence* is inseparable from the critique of the metaphysics of the *present*. For instance, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the metaphysics of presence understands the Being of beings 'with regard to a definite mode of time—the '*Present*'' (2000, p. 47). This claim is echoed in Derrida's insistence that 'from Parmenides to Husserl, the privilege of the present has never been put into question' (1984, p. 34). For both thinkers, the metaphysics of presence therefore favours not only presence in the sense of a present-Being, but also 'presence as point of the now or of the moment' (Derrida, 1997, p. 19). While Harman concedes that Heidegger and Derrida appeal to time as an escape from presence, he nevertheless also downplays this aspect of their critique of presence. For an analysis of this issue, see especially Chapters 7 and 10.

Platonic idea of 'presence of the thing to sight as *eidos* [form]' and the Aristotelian idea of 'presence as substance/essence/existence [*ousia*]'[67] as two ways in which thinkers throughout the history of philosophy have characterised Being in terms of presence (Derrida, 1997, p. 13). It is most certainly true that Harman characterises real objects as "substantial forms," but only if this is understood in the qualified sense outlined above: unlike Platonic forms and Aristotelian substances, Harman insists on an infinite regress of "withdrawn" – and therefore *absent* – real objects (2013a, pp. 9-11. See also Section 4.4 above). In this way he claims to effectuate a leap beyond "ontotheology;" for him, the real object can '*never* become present' insofar as it is by definition 'withheld from any attempt to relate it' directly (2005a, p. 86). Further to this, Harman (2013a, p. 10) also insists that his position not only overcomes but also extends the critique of "ontotheology" by essentially locating "withdrawal" at the heart of real unified *individual* entities, thereby rejecting the "correlationist" 'assumption that the gap between Dasein and the world is the sole philosophically significant rift' (2005a, p. 74).

Additionally, Harman (2013a, pp. 10, 244; 2013b) acknowledges that the critique of presence is often – misguidedly in his view – conflated with the critique of self-identity and mind-independent realism and further claims that this view is erroneously attributed to both Heidegger and Derrida when in fact it ought to be attributed to the latter alone.[68] He (2005a, p. 116; 2009a, p. 222; 2013a, p. 11; 2013b, pp. 197-198) argues that the conflation between presence and realism is most prominently displayed in Derrida's mistaken assumption that rejecting the possibility of direct access to the world necessarily implies the rejection of the existence of a mind-independent world. To be sure, and further to what has been claimed above, Harman agrees that there cannot be any direct access to reality

[67] In passing, it is worth noting that Derrida's interpretation of Aristotle here is not uncontroversial (see, for instance, Baldwin, 2008, p. 108; Heinaman, 1981), and also runs counter Harman's views as outlined above (see 4.4 above).

[68] To be sure, Harman (2002, p. 126; 2008a, p. 206; 2009a, p. 140-141; 2016c, p. 84) recognises that Heidegger also refers to the notion of an '*independent* physical substance' as another instance of "presence-at-hand." He further claims that this critique has led many to the unwarranted assumption that the latter's critique of presence is in actual fact a critique of mind-independent realism. Harman nevertheless rejoins that to *define* an entity as a substance with a set of physical attributes does not imply mind-independence in the least, since any definition of an entity in terms of its manifest properties reduces the being of a thing to whatever qualities one may have access to, and consequently to its presence for an onlooker. Thus, Harman argues that Heidegger's critique of "independent substance" is not a critique of realism, but of the notion that entities can be simply reduced to their *relational presence* to a perceiver.

(2009a, p. 222). Nevertheless, he also maintains that this claim does not further necessitate the alleged Derridean denial of an independent reality. Harman therefore counters the view which he imputes to Derrida in the following manner: he begins by defining presence in relational terms; as may be recalled, for Harman something can only be regarded as present '*to* [or *for*] something or someone' (2013a, p. 244). Based on this, he asserts that the 'critique of ontotheology' in actual fact necessarily 'requires realism' (2009a, p. 222), insofar as any critique of presence entails 'that something always *escapes* presence' (2013a, p. 10). From such claims, he concludes that the object-oriented 'model of individuals with real constitutions outside our interactions with them' remains the only possible path beyond the metaphysics of presence (2013a, p. 11).

On the basis of such claims, Harman asserts that presence can be averted in two possible ways: the first "object-oriented" way of countering presence is by insisting on a fundamental chasm separating reality from relation. This approach, as has been shown, is committed to the claim that all forms of presence are simply relational "translations" of an underlying 'absent real object that can never appear in the flesh without becoming something other than it really is' (2018b, p. 201). In short, Harman's Heidegger-inspired model seeks to overcome presence by pointing to an autonomous and unified real object, even if he (2013a, p. 219) acknowledges that this claim runs counter to many readings of Heidegger, as well as the latter's own self-interpretation.

Harman in turn contrasts this first way of overcoming presence with a second one which he attributes to Derrida. In Harman's view, Derrida's rejection of presence is decidedly anti-realist, insofar as the latter scorns any notion of identity and autonomy as nothing more than a naïve 'traditionalistic sham' which 'remains a prisoner of logocentric Western metaphysics' (2014d, p. 105; 2018b, p. 202). Alluding to the now (in)famous Derridean assertion that "there is nothing outside the text," Harman claims that this manifest Derridean disdain for realism masks a "linguisticist" prejudice in which 'everything is caught up in a chain or system of [linguistic] differences […] with nothing 'deep' hidden behind it' (2018b, p. 203). Harman's assessment of Derrida is thus unequivocal and builds on the aforementioned critique of the latter as an "overminer;" in contrast to Harman's aforementioned "depth model" of reality, Derrida is said to offer an anti-realist

"surface model" in which 'we slip, slip, slip away *horizontally* into a multitude of other [linguistic] contexts, so that the thing itself not only never appears […] but never exists at all' (2018b, p. 203). While I hold that Harman's model of "withdrawal" presents an innovative take on the issue of "presence," I nevertheless disagree with his assessment of Derrida here. For the present moment, and in view of the aims of this chapter, my assessment of Harman's critique of Derrida as well as my own alternative reading of the latter's thought shall have to be postponed for Chapters 7-10 below.

4.6: Concluding Remarks

The present section seeks to briefly summarise the most salient features of Harman's account of unity and autonomy in the realm of the real. As has been shown, all real objects may be said to have two fundamental "positive" features, namely unity and autonomy. The former indicates that each real object harbours an irreducible "formal unity" and thereby maintains a loose or "tense" rapport with both its real parts and qualities as well as its relational (or sensual) qualities. The claim that an object is unified therefore indicates that a real object is not constituted by a mere "bundle" of real or sensual traits, even if an object is never devoid of qualities and vice versa (Harman, 2018c, p. 97). Autonomy in turn signifies that all objects are "withdrawn" from their respective relations rather than being constituted by them. The account of withdrawal has two interrelated implications; first, it indicates that there is, for Harman, a "gap" or "tension" separating all real objects from their relational profiles or "sensual qualities." In other words, as has been shown, Harman modifies and generalises Heidegger's "tool-analysis" in the service of a decidedly post-Heideggerian and anti-correlationist philosophy which sees objects as existing autonomously from each other as well as their own parts. Second, autonomy indicates that all real objects are radically withheld from any possible form of *direct* contact. This second implication in turn leads Harman to the problem of "indirect" or "vicarious" causation, namely the problem of how real change is possible to begin with given the radical mutual withdrawal of real objects. He in turn claims that the 'important clue as to how to solve the vicarious causation problem' (2018c, p. 97) comes to him through Husserl's phenomenology and his discovery of sensual objects. In view of this, the next chapter shall therefore be

dedicated to Harman's reading of Husserl, while Chapter 6 shall provide an account of Harman's vicarious causation problem.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, it would however be important to highlight that my account of Harman above harbours three implications which are crucial for the overall aims of this work: firstly, his account above argues that any *relational* account of entities must necessarily lapse into a "relationist" *holism* in which entities are utterly interwoven, thereby precluding the possibility of change. Secondly, he views the fact that an object can break from its context as a clear sign that it is *completely independent* of it. Thirdly, Harman argues that real objects must necessarily be defined by a specific self-identity, and that anything less than this would amount to either a relational "overmining" or the "linguistic idealism" which he imputes to Derrida. While I salute Harman's dynamic account, I nevertheless question whether every relational philosophy necessarily entails holism, and whether "withdrawal" must inevitably imply *absolute* autonomy and self-identity. In view of the limitations imposed by the aims of the current chapter, I shall further investigate Harman's claims by offering an alternative reading of Derrida to the one he provides. More specifically, in Chapters 7-10 I will show that the latter may in fact be read as implicitly developing a form of Speculative Realism which is premised on a differential and relational account of the real, but without committing to an absolutely autonomous and self-identical view of entities or slipping into ultra-relationist holism.

Chapter 5: Sensual Objects as Unified and Autonomous

In the introductory section to Chapter 3, I claimed that Harman puts forth a "quasi-flat ontology" which distinguishes between real and sensual objects. The aim and scope of the current chapter shall be to elucidate the sense in which Harman's sensual objects can be understood to be unified and autonomous. This account is important for my analysis of Harman since his articulation of the sensual proves to be crucial in order to explain the possibility of indirect interaction between otherwise "withdrawn" entities. This oblique or "vicarious" account of relations shall be detailed in Chapter 6 below. Furthermore, the present analysis is also important to the task of this thesis overall since it explicates how Harman further critiques Derrida as a "linguistic overminer" who reduces the reality of the world to a surface play of qualities. Since Harman's account of unified and autonomous sensual objects is chiefly developed through his reading of Edmund Husserl, I shall proceed by focusing on Harman's interpretation of this thinker.

Harman (2015d, p. 121) is right to point out that both Husserl and Heidegger regard the realism/idealism dispute as a "pseudo-problem" (see for instance Husserl, 1969, p. 12; Heidegger, 2000, pp. 249-250), and in so doing both ultimately remain committed to varying forms of "correlationism" and "philosophies of human access." He nevertheless also emphasises a crucial difference between the two thinkers; as has been shown above, Harman's reading of Heidegger reveals a fundamental rift between withdrawn "real objects" and the relational profiles ("sensual qualities") through which they manifest. Through this admittedly unorthodox reading, Harman therefore discovers in Heidegger a "withdrawn" real object which he claims remains absent in Husserl's thought. As is well-known, Husserl's phenomenological project takes flight by "bracketing" (*einklammern*) or "suspending" (*epoché*) possible questions concerning mind-independent reality in order to focus on the description of what is given in direct experience (*evidenz*) (*inter alia* 1969, pp. 99-100). For Harman, this decision turns out to be a mixed blessing: on the one hand, he claims that Husserl's position reveals him to be an unambiguous idealist[69] who, unlike Heidegger, completely

[69] It is my view that Harman here uses the term "idealism" as a synonym for "strong correlationism" or "weak access philosophy" (see Chapter 2 above). To be sure, many – including Husserl (1969, p. 100) himself – have denied that Husserl is an idealist. For instance, Dan Zahavi argues that Husserl

disregards the real world (Harman, 2005a, p. 25; 2013a, p. 262. See also Chapter 4 above). On the other hand, Harman observes that Husserl's manoeuvre also bears its own fruits, since it allows the latter to take the realm of phenomena seriously rather than simply dismissing it as a mere epiphenomenon (2011c, p. 22). In so doing, he is led to the important discovery of a different sort of object which is completely overlooked by Heidegger (2013a, 262), namely the intentional or sensual object.

Like Harman's evaluation of Heidegger above, it will be noted that his reading of Husserl is a creative yet idiosyncratic one. Rather than offering yet another hermeneutic analysis or commentary on Husserl, he uses the latter's fundamental intuitions to derive a series of claims which ultimately deviate from Husserl's own self-understanding.[70] On my particular reading, Harman's analysis of Husserl may be seen as proceeding in much the same way as that of Heidegger (see Chapter 4 above); he first starts by providing a modification of certain aspects of Husserl's phenomenology, and then goes on to generalise his findings to include all objects. In view of this, the current chapter shall develop as follows: In sections 5.1 and 5.2, I shall show how Harman develops a productive reading of Husserl's notions of "intentional objects" and "intentionality" respectively by zeroing in on some aspects which are often overlooked by both his proponents and detractors. In Section 5.3 I shall then examine how Harman expands this account into a new understanding of "sincerity" and generalises it to include all forms of inter-objective relations. In section 5.4, I shall then analyse Harman's analysis of Husserl in relation to his critique of Derrida, before finally (in section 5.5) summarising the current chapter. The analysis undertaken below is central to the task of this dissertation overall, and this is for the following reasons: first, as shall be evident by the end of this chapter, Harman's analysis of the unity and autonomy of sensual objects constitutes one of the main dynamics of his "object-oriented" thought, and it also provides him with the solution to the question of "vicarious" or "indirect" causation touched upon towards the end of the previous chapter (see also Chapter

does not reduce the world to a mental construction but rather simply insists on the 'interdependence and inseparability of mind and world' (2019, p. 28). This is true enough. Nevertheless, if "idealism" is understood in the sense I propose here, then it may be argued that Zahavi in actual fact affirms what he sets out to deny.

[70] Since my work concerns Harman not Husserl specifically, I shall proceed by analysing *Harman's reading* of Husserl, and how this reading leads to his understanding of the sensual.

6 below). Second, Harman also relates his reading of Husserl – and the sensual more generally – to his assessment of Derrida (see especially Sections 5.4 and 6.5 below), and it is for this reason that the present analysis shall prove to be indispensable in order to understand his qualms with deconstruction, and for my Derridean-inflected rejoinder to Harman's appraisal of the thinker (see Chapters 7-10).

5.1: The Sensual Object and its Qualities

Harman's account of the positive features of sensual objects proceeds predominantly – yet not exclusively[71] – through his analysis of Husserl's phenomenology in *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005a) and summarised in a number of other texts (*inter alia* 2008b; 2011c; 2012f; 2013f; 2018b). It is often claimed that the entry into Husserl's phenomenology is the concept of "intentionality," which the latter adopts (yet heavily modifies) from his teacher Franz Brentano. In his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1995), Brentano memorably claims that the mental, unlike the physical, is

> characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object […] or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes [or "contains"] something as an object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. (1995, p. 88)

For the purposes of the present study, two important claims may be derived from the citation above: first, for Brentano, the distinguishing feature of the mental is intentionality. The latter may be generally defined as the idea that every mental act is always directed at – or "presents" (*vorstellung*)[72] – some object broadly understood. Second, Brentano's use of the term "intentional *inexistence*"[73] indicates that an intentional act aims at some "object" or "content" which is *contained* in the mind. It is worth noting that Brentano seemed uninterested in the question of mind-

[71] Harman also (yet to a lesser extent) draws inspiration from a group of thinkers he dubs the "carnal phenomenologists" (namely Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alphonso Lingis). See Harman, 2005a.

[72] Brentano identified three classes of mental acts, namely "presentations", "Judgments" and "relations of feeling." Nevertheless, he held that all three ultimately had their basis in "presentations." The latter is in turn taken to refer to 'that part of any mental process which brings something before the mind' (Moran, 2007, p. 45). Thus, it can be said that, for Brentano, every mental act *presents* – or "brings before the mind" – some object/content.

[73] The word "inexistence" is derived from the Latin verb "in esse", meaning "to be in." Thus, the object of a conscious act is immanent (i.e. "inexists") to the mind (Moran, 2007, p. 48).

independent reality and used the terms "object" and "content" imprecisely and interchangeably. This unclear use of such terms in turn led his student Kasimir Twardowski to explicitly distinguish between the object and content of "presentations" (*vorstellungen*) (1977, pp. 1-2, 7, 16 and *passim*). On Harman's account, Twardowski held that contents are always *immanent* to the mind, while the object intended lies *outside* it 'in the real world' (Harman, 2009a, p. 192).

On my reading, it is at the intersection between Brentano and Twardowski that Harman situates his specific account of Husserl. In Harman's view (*inter alia* 2009a, pp. 191-195; 2016e, pp. 460-463), Husserl follows Brentano in disputing Twardowski's claim that the object of an intentional act subsists mind-independently.[74] Nevertheless, Harman also characterises Husserl as a unique "*object-oriented* idealist" (2011c, p. 20; 2011d, p. 58; 2016e, p. 460, emphasis added). This is insofar as he does not simply reject Twardowski's object/content distinction, but rather transposes it into the 'immanent sphere of consciousness' (Harman, 2011c, p. 23). In doing so, Husserl is said to notice an important tension which is overlooked by Heidegger (Harman, 2013a, p. 262), namely the 'duel between object and content *within*' experience (2013a, p. 43). This claim requires further elucidation and may be framed in light of Husserl's polemic against what is known as the "bundle theory" of objects.

As is well known, the "bundle theory" put forward by empiricists such as Hume states that experience is primarily furnished with disparate qualities or sense-data which are later bundled together through habit. Similarly, both Brentano and Twardowski are said – at least in Harman's view (2009a, pp. 153, 194, 198, 280; 2016e, pp. 461-462) – to exhibit aspects of this empiricist bias insofar as they see experience as composed of "presentations" or bundles of "content," which Harman takes to be synonymous to "qualities." Contrastingly, he argues that Husserl's fundamental breakthrough lies in turning such claims on their head (2005a, pp. 23-24; 2009a, p. 136, 194). Rather than seeing experience as furnished with sense-data, the latter insists that intentionality is primarily directed at a cohesive intentional

[74] For Harman, Husserl's phenomenological *epoché* prohibits any talk of a mind-independent reality which is not "always already" correlated to an intentional act. In this respect, Husserl is said to miss Heidegger's insight that there exist real objects which are, by and large, "withdrawn" from direct presence (Harman, 2013a, p. 262. See also Chapter 4 above).

object through its manifold varying intentional contents (see, for instance, Husserl, 2001a, p. 271); for Husserl (2001b, p. 167), an intentional act is founded on "object-giving" or "objectifying acts" insofar as it aims at a unified *intentional* – or "sensual"[75] – *object* rather than "presentations" or "bundles of qualities." For Husserl as for Harman, it is therefore the *sensual object* which shapes its various qualities not vice-versa (Harman, 2005a, p. 27; Husserl, 2001b, p. 99).

To be sure, Harman (2005a, pp. 24) follows Husserl in emphasising that what intentionality[76] aims at is a *unified* object which is nevertheless only *partially* given in perception through specific sensual profiles or "adumbrations" (*Abschattungen*) – the equivalent of Harman's "sensual qualities" (see Chapter 4 above). Both however insist that such adumbrations remain aspects *of* the same underlying unified intentional object. This fact, for Harman (2013a, p. 262), indicates what Heidegger seems to have overlooked in Husserl. While Heidegger identifies the difference between a real object and its sensual qualities (see Chapter 4 above), he nevertheless misses the fact that such qualities are always bound up with an underlying sensual object in experience. Stated differently, Harman is here combining the insights gained from his specific readings of Heidegger and Husserl when he insists that 'sensual qualities serve two masters' (2011c, p. 77); they "emanate" from both a real object (Heidegger) and a sensual one (Husserl). Such claims may be substantiated by way of the following example: as I experience a hammer before me, I never encounter all its aspects at one go. Rather, I grasp it from a particular distance, angle, and in a certain light, such that rotating it in my hand reveals more of its varied profiles. Nevertheless, these shifting facades of the hammer remain profiles of what I experience as the *same* hammer. This unified

[75] Harman substitutes Husserl's "intentional object" with "sensual object" for two specific reasons: first, in order to emphasise that the object of which Husserl speaks does not admit of any transcendent reality, but rather only exists as the correlate of an intentional act. Second, in order to emphasise that Husserl locates the tension between a sensual object and its qualities within experience (2009a, p. 136).

[76] Harman recognises that Husserl distinguishes between inner perception (or introspection) and outer perception (Harman, 2005a, p. 27, 258; Moran, 2007, p. 115). He further rightly states that the latter holds that 'total overlap between what I intend and what I directly perceive […] is possible in cases of' inner perception (Harman, 2005a, p. 27. See also Husserl, 2001b, p. 86). Harman nevertheless insists that Husserl's claim 'is unconvincing, since I do not coincide with myself in introspection any more than I coincide with the being of a crocodile when seeing it' (2005a, p. 27). As I have already stated in Section 4.2 above, Harman is of the view that any and every relation (including self-relation) is a *translation* and is thus unable to make reality directly present.

object *in my experience* thus always in some sense precedes yet also exists in tension with its manifold qualities.

In view of the above, it may then be claimed that Harman's "sensual object" may be said to be unified insofar as each is experienced primarily as the same object in spite of the varying profiles through which it is disclosed. The series of sensual qualities taken together are therefore not equivalent to the sensual object (Harman, 2011c, p. 31), since the latter is said to *unify* the former in such a way that it both '*precedes* and *shapes'* them (2008b, p. 6, emphasis added),[77] imbuing them with its own particular "style" (2005a, pp. 55-58, 171).[78] Nonetheless, the "sensual object" also persists within each aspect only as an "*ideal* unity" connecting its series of profiles (*inter alia* Harman, 2005a, pp. 25, 136; 2009a, pp. 151, 180), rather than existing mind-independently as a real object. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005a) Harman summarises his reading of Husserl outlined above as follows:

> Despite Husserl's claim that the object is "not [just] a reality in consciousness," he never allows himself to place it in an actual physical universe, for fear of letting naturalism back into philosophy through the side door. The only remaining alternative is to praise the object as an "ideal" unity, one that lies outside any of its partial sensual profiles even while trying them all together […] Stripped of its objectivity, though obviously more unified than the separate appearances that announce it, the [intentional or sensual] object is trapped in a difficult position. It is irreducible to its series of appearances, yet it exists outside of them only as an ideal principle, not as something truly independent. (2005a, p. 25)

It is therefore evident that "sensual objects" – unlike their real counterparts – do not "withdraw" from presence. Rather, Harman claims that they are in some sense 'always already present' insofar as exist *solely* as relational correlates of an intentional act (2009a, p. 195). On my reading, Harman often stresses this point for two main reasons: first, he does so in order to challenge what he sees as "realist" misinterpretations of Husserl because intentional objects, for Harman, '*remain purely immanent,* and must not be confused with the real forces unleashed in the world' (2012f, p. 19, emphasis added). Second, he seeks to emphasise a disparity

[77] In this context, Harman insists that a sensual object 'has a unified and basically ineffable effect on us, one that cannot be reduced to any list of traits' (2012c, pp. 214-215)

[78] Harman borrows the term "style" from the work of Merleau-Ponty (Harman, 2005a, pp. 45-58). He uses it to emphasise how the sensual qualities of a given sensual object are 'permanently subordinated' to the latter (2005a, p. 48). The object thus precedes the qualities, such that each of the qualities are "styled" by the objects to which they belong. Harman often emphasises Merleau-Ponty's observation that 'the black of a pen and the black of an executioner's hood are different even if their wavelength of light is exactly the same' (2008b, p. 6).

which he deems to have been ignored by Husserl, namely that between the "withdrawn" real objects and the relationally constituted sensual ones.

A critic might nevertheless question my reading here in the following manner: if sensual objects do not "withdraw" in the same way as their real counterparts, then in what sense can I claim that they are also autonomous? It is my view that such objects may be said to be autonomous in the sense that they are not equivalent to any of the profiles ("sensual qualities") through which they are experienced at any given point in time. Stated differently, for Harman the sensual object is 'both *always* and *never* present' (2012f, p. 32); it is always present insofar as it only admits of a relational or intra-intentional existence (Harman, 2005a, p. 197), and it is also never present in the sense of lying 'at a *deeper* level of perception than' the manifest sensual profiles which "encrust"[79] it any point in time (2012c, p. 195). Sensual objects are therefore not autonomous in the sense of being "withdrawn" from presence. Rather, their relative autonomy comes from the fact that they are layered with various qualities which allow for the experience of the sensual object while simultaneously differing from it. In other words, Harman claims that the 'streak of realism at the heart of Husserl's idealism' consists in his claim that sensual objects are

> *autonomous* from any *specific* way in which they might appear; their surface-effects can be varied almost at will without the object losing identity. In that sense, these intentional objects must be incorporated into any genuine realism, not just annihilated as lamentable examples of "manifest images." While the sensual objects of human experience do not have the same sort of autonomy and independent power as real objects, they are something that must be reckoned with by any rigorous philosophy. (2011d, p. 58)

5.1.1: Sensual Objects and Real Qualities

Through the reading of Husserl outlined above, Harman discovers a dynamic and productive tension between sensual objects and their respective qualities *within* experience. A sensual object is unified and irreducible to its sensual qualities, since the latter can shift freely without altering the object in the least. In other words, the sensual object is itself 'both one and particular' (2009a, p. 201), even if its variable qualities are many. Nevertheless, Harman also claims that sensual objects – like

[79] Harman uses the term "encrustation" in order to emphasise how a given sensual object never appears independently of its sensual qualities.

their real counterparts – cannot be 'empty poles of unity' (2011c, p. 27), for otherwise each experienced object would be indistinguishable from every other if all its sensual profiles were subtracted. Harman (2011c, p.32; 2016e, p. 462) claims that Husserl notices this much when he maintains that, through a process he calls "eidetic variation," it would be possible to strip away all the accidental features of a given object until one arrives at an "eidetic intuition" of an object's essential features. The latter in turn differ from the "sensual qualities" of an object insofar as they belong to it essentially rather than accidentally. For Harman (2005a, pp. 30-31, 2011c, pp. 27, 29; 2011e, p. 175), the "eidetic features" of an object are 'specific intuitive properties' which are needed for a particular sensual object to be individuated in experience (2005a, p. 28), even if he also insists that the sensual object is not itself reducible to the sum total of its eidetic features (2009a, p. 154, 200; 2011c, p. 24, 27, 28). Stated differently, a sensual object may be characterised as 'something less than' both its sensual and essential qualities (2009a, p. 151; 2011c, pp. 29-30): it is less than its sensual qualities insofar as the latter can shift without affecting the unity of an experienced object. It is also less than its essential ones insofar as a sensual object 'deploys these qualities in a certain specific way' (2011c, p. 29).

It will then be useful to identify what I take to be three important differences between Husserl and Harman on the issue of "eidetic features." First, and most crucially, Husserl does not place the "eidetic features" of an object in a "withdrawn" real realm. In Harman's view, it would have been impossible for Husserl to differentiate the real and the sensual without betraying the core of his own philosophy, namely the phenomenological *epoché*, since the latter prohibits all possible talk of a mind-independent reality (Harman, 2011c, pp. 24, 25, 28; Sparrow, 2014, pp. 120-121). Contrastingly, for Harman the "eidetic features" correspond to the aforementioned *real* qualities of a real object (see Chapter 4.4 above), insofar as they simultaneously belong to a sensual object 'as components of its eidos' and also inhere in a real one (2011c, p. 77). Stated differently, for Harman a sensual object exists only as the correlate of an intentional act, but nevertheless paradoxically also possess real qualities which ultimately 'exist whether we are aware of them or not' (2018b, p. 159). Second, and on a related note, Husserl maintains that the "eidos" of a given object could in principle be

grasped intellectually (rather than sensibly) in what Husserl calls "categorical intuition" (Harman, 2011c, p. 27; 2016e, p. 59). Harman however rejects this assertion, understanding it to be a remnant of the 'rationalist fallacy' which overlooks the gap between the real and the sensual (2018b, p. 156) and therefore assumes that reality could in principle be apprehended directly through our all-too-human modes of access (2009a, p. 203; 2011c, p. 28; 2018b, p. 156). He counters such claims by insisting that a sensual object *indirectly* points – or "alludes" – to its underlying real qualities, while Husserl claims that the "eidetic" features of an object pertain to that object qua the correlate of *an intentional act*. Nevertheless, insofar as the latter are real rather than sensual, they are "submerged" or "withdrawn" beneath the realm of the sensual and are thus indirectly inferable even if they remain incapable of direct presence.[80] The real qualities therefore constitute the "thisness" of an object; they are always '*tacitly* present' insofar as a given sensual object 'occupies our attention' (2009a, p. 202, emphasis added), even if they can never be brought into *explicit* presence. In *The Quadruple Object* (2011c), Harman poetically summarises such claims in the following manner:

> The necessary qualities of a sensual object are sunk beneath its surface like the hull of a Venetian galley, invisible to the observer who is dazzled by the flags and emblems covering the ship, or the music played on its deck by captive singers and drummers. Though the hull is submerged, it remains vital for the seaworthiness of the ship. (2011c, p. 29)

Finally, unlike Husserl, Harman insists that the "real qualities" of an object are not universal Platonic essences but are rather always particularly instantiated in relation to the individual (real or sensual) objects to which they belong (2005a, p. 153; 2009a, p. 206; 2011c, p. 30. See also Section 4.4 above).

5.2: "One and Two": On the Ontological Status of the Intentional Relation

Through the reading of Husserl outlined above, Harman discovers unity and autonomy within the sensual realm. As has been shown above, a sensual object may be said to be unified insofar as it binds its various qualities into a coherent whole, and autonomous to the extent that it cannot be reduced any of its specific profiles.

[80] Harman emphasises that for the most part, experience does not normally distinguish between a sensual object and its essential features. He claims that this distinction only happens in intermittent moments through the experience of what Harman calls "allure" (2012c, p. 207). The latter shall in turn be discussed in chapter 6 below.

The sensual object – like its real counterpart – is then paradoxically both one and many, insofar as there exists a "tension"[81] between a unified sensual object and its multifarious qualities (Harman, 2005a, p. 29).

In addition to this, Harman zeroes in on a second paradox at play in Husserl's analysis of intentionality. As is well known, Husserl describes intentionality as an *a priori* "correlation" between two poles, namely an ego or act (*noetic*) pole and its corresponding object (*noematic*) pole (Husserl, 1969). Harman in turn notes that this intentional relation may be said to be paradoxically 'both one and two' (*inter alia* 2008b, p. 7; 2009a, p. 210; 2010c, p. 9; 2011e, p. 177; 2012c, p. 197). On the one hand, intentionality is "one" to the extent that it is not primarily composed of two distinct poles which are then *retroactively* brought together. Rather, it binds or "correlates" both the subjective and objective poles into a cohesive whole from the start (Harman, 2005a, p. 22, 29. See also Husserl, 1969 *passim*; 2001b, p. 98). Harman calls this the "adhesive" function of intentionality (2005a, p. 22), and correctly notes that this aspect represents Husserl's critique of the traditional division between subject and object. On the other hand, intentionality is however also "two" to the extent that the double poles of the relation do not coalesce into a seamless block without parts. Rather, the two sides of the relation clearly remain distinguishable (Harman, 2005a, pp. 22, 29; 2012c, p. 197). Harman calls this aspect of intentionality its "selective" side (2005a, p. 22), insofar as it works to bring to the fore – or "select" – specific sensual objects while allowing others to fade into the background. While it is true that there may be many distinct sensual objects which are "contiguous"[82] in any experience, it is nevertheless also true that intentionality is always directed at specific objects at any given point in time (Harman, 2005a, pp. 22-23, 29-30; Sparrow, 2014, pp. 118-119). In this way, Harman asserts that 'intentionality not only fuses subject with object in a single moment of presence—it also offers a very *specific* presence, a life that varies from moment to moment' (2005a, p. 22). In "On Vicarious Causation" (2012c), Harman summarises and illustrates this dual nature of intentionality using the following

[81] The reader is reminded that Harman here uses the word "tension" in a technical sense in order to describe a relation of 'simultaneous closeness and separation' (2011c, p. 108) between an object and its respective qualities.
[82] The term "contiguity" is used by Harman to describe the way in which 'the various sensual objects in an intention lie side by side' (2012c, p. 199).

example of his encounter with a (sensual) pine tree: 'in a first sense, my encounter with a pine tree is a unified relation; we can speak of the encounter as a whole, and this whole resists exhaustive description. But in another sense, I clearly do not fuse with the tree in a single massive lump; it remains distinct from me in the perception' (2012c, p. 197). This dual status of the intentional relation in turn leads Harman to make a significant claim which decidedly departs from Husserl's own position. In Harman's own words, the relation clarified above 'gives the strange result that in my intention of a tree, *we both inhabit the interior of a total intentional relation*' (2012c, p. 197, emphasis added). On my particular reading, Harman's complex claim here is best clarified by situating it between his reading of Brentano and Husserl.

As previously stated, Brentano maintains that the object of a mental act is contained in (or "inexists" within) the mind. Husserl however questions this idea. He drops Brentanean terms such as "containment" and "intentional inexistence," and continually rejects the claim that intentional objects are immanent to the mind (Husserl, 2001b, 97-100. See also Sartre, 1970, pp. 4-5).[83] Simultaneously, Husserl is however also adamant that an intentional object is constituted only as the "correlate" of an intentional act, such that it does not admit of any real mind-independent reality. Husserl's intentional object thus attains a problematic status: it does not reside in the real world (and thus exists only as an *ideal* unity as specified above), but at the same time is not simply "contained" in the mind. On my reading, Harman's position is to be situated at the intersection between this reading of Brentano and Husserl. Like Husserl (but not Brentano), Harman argues that a sensual object is not contained in myself *qua* perceiver, since the latter 'cannot be simultaneously the whole of the relation and merely half of it' (2011e, p. 177). Nevertheless, like Brentano (but unlike Husserl), Harman does not simply dispense with the notion of "intentional inexistence."[84] Instead, he asserts that the sensual object 'is contained [i.e. "inexists"] not *in me*, as idealism thinks, but in the joint object composed of myself and the [sensual object]' (2018c, p. 114-115). Stated

[83] For Harman, if Husserl denies immanence, it is only because he also rejects the idea of a transcendent world to which the term "immanence" might be opposed (2010c, p. 8).

[84] Harman states that 'Brentano was right to speak of intentional objects as having 'intentional inexistence', an existence on the interior of something else' (2009a, p. 207). Nevertheless, he claims that Brentano was also wrong to assume that 'this inner space is the inside of the human mind' (2009a, p. 207).

differently, Harman ultimately deviates from both Brentano and Husserl by asserting that the intending "real I" and the intended "sensual tree" (to keep with the example above) are both *contained* (or "inexist") on the interior of a larger intentional relation taken as a whole (Harman, 2005a, p. 202; 2012c, pp. 199, 210; 2018c, pp. 114-115). He affirms that this total relation is a new object in its own right (2010c, p. 9; 2011e, p. 177). This is because it satisfies the criteria for objecthood discussed above, namely "unity" and "autonomy."

It is worth noting that Harman describes this total relation as "asymmetrical," insofar as it is composed of a *real* object (the "I" in the example above) in '*direct contact* with a *sensual* one' (2011c, p. 74, emphasis modified. See also 2012c, p. 198). Furthermore, he dubs this direct yet asymmetrical contact "sincerity."[85] It may be objected that Harman's choice of this term is questionable due to the fact that it might be philosophically and ethically loaded. I however hold that this should not be of much concern, since Harman simply uses the term specifically as a placeholder in order to refer to the fact that an intentional relation always features a 'proximity without fusion' between a real object and a sensual one (2007c, p. 24). Harman asserts that sincerity is omnipresent in experience (2002, p. 43; 2005a, p. 135), insofar as one is constantly engaged with or captivated by some specific sensual experience rather than another:

> Everyday life is laced with sincerity through and through, in the sense that I am really doing right now whatever it is that I am doing—delivered over to that activity rather than to any of the possible others that might be imagined […] The sincerity that we invest in an object, the energy with which we take it seriously, deflects all complicating peripheral [sensual] actors from the inner sanctum of the object. (2005a, pp. 135, 183)

Harman's use of "sincerity" is here designed to subvert the primacy attributed to conscious perception or representation (2005a, pp. 35, 190; 2012c, p. 205); it seeks to emphasise how the *real* "I" – *qua* "real object" – is constantly caught up in its own sensual experiences, with the unified intention serving 'as the theater of my sincerity without being identical to it' (2012c, p. 199). Stated differently, for

[85] Harman borrows the term "sincerity" from the work of Emmanuel Levinas (see Harman, 2005a, pp. 34-44). On my reading, Harman often uses the terms "intentionality" and "sincerity" interchangeably, with the former appearing more frequently than the latter throughout his works. Yet I choose to retain the difference between the two terms as a convenient way of emphasising his drastic reformulation (see below) of the phenomenological notion of "intentionality" (2005a, p. 135; 2012c, p. 205).

Harman "sincerity" thus constantly envelops the intending *real object* as a whole such that it

> leaves no room for transcendence or even distance: a horse seen in a valley several miles away still touches me directly insofar as I witness it. Distance lies not in the sphere of perception, where everything brushes me directly with greater or lesser intensity, but only between the mutually exclusive real objects that lie beyond perception. (2012c, p. 210)

Before proceeding further with Harman's analysis, it would be important to emphasise that "sincerity" does not name the bond between two *real* objects, but rather refers to the 'relation of two distinct elements [one real and the other sensual] inside a larger one' (2012c, p. 210). The question of how a sincere relation can be converted into a relation between two real objects shall be reserved for the next chapter, where I discuss Harman's notions of "allure" and "vicarious causation." In the meantime, the subsequent section shall seek to show how Harman pushes his notion of "sincerity" beyond the sphere of the human and into an inter-objective one.

5.3: Sincerity as Intra-Objective

In the opening pages of *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005a), Harman claims that a revival of phenomenology cannot be effectuated 'through external rituals of compliance with Husserl's vocabulary,' but must rather involve extending "sincerity" in such a way that '*it covers the entirety of the things themselves*, thereby freeing us from the growing staleness of the philosophy of human access' (2005a, p. 23, emphasis added). In the present section I therefore seek to examine how Harman effectuates this radical extension of fundamental phenomenological insights. Relative to this, it may be noted that Harman's major – yet far from exclusive – point of contention with the phenomenological notion of "intentionality" is that it intrinsically retains the anthropocentric or "onto-taxonomic"[86] biases of "human access" and "correlationism." This, for Harman, has two consequences: first, it grants objects no independent reality beyond their presence (or possible future appearance) to consciousness (2005a, p. 25; 2011c, p. 22). Second, it characterises "intentionality" as a *distinctive* trait of human (or perhaps, and at best, animal) minds alone (2008b, p. 6). Harman's radical move

[86] The reader is reminded that the term "onto-taxonomy" refers to the assumption of an '*a priori* modern split [or more primal "correlation"] between human beings on one side and everything else on the other' (Harman, 2016a, p. 5). See also Section 4.3 above.

beyond such prejudices in turn involves the refusal of the phenomenologist's assumption that 'there is no intentionality in the physical realm' (2009b, p. 275). More positively defined, Harman's own "object-oriented" move involves the radical assertion that "sincerity" is 'an ontological feature of objects in general' (2012c, p. 205) such that it belongs to the *intra-objective* sphere:

> whereas the usual [Brentanean] model of containment seems to exclude anything other than animal sentience from the title "intentional," the new model we propose ["sincerity"] is open to *any entity whatsoever*. *Every object is intentional*, because every object enters the inside of its own relations, its own overriding master-objects. (2005a, p. 202, emphasis modified)

In sum, if "intentionality" is for the present provisionally defined as referring *exclusively* to the intentional (cor)relation between the (human) mind and its object, and "sincerity" is taken to imply *any* real object's absorption with a sensual one, it may then be stated that Harman's move entails viewing "intentionality" as a narrow modality of "sincerity" more generally. In "On Vicarious Causation" (2012c), Harman substantiates his claim with the following example; he invites the reader to imagine glass marbles sitting on top of a table, and then proceeds to ask 'whether they as real objects encounter the table-surface as a sensual one' (2012c, p. 206). The answer, for Harman, is undoubtedly in the positive. He asserts that the marbles may be said to be 'sincerely absorbed' in the specific context of 'sitting on the table' rather than, say, rolling across a marble floor (2012c, p. pp. 205-206). Furthermore, he emphasises that the marbles themselves must encounter the table as a unified *sensual object* rather than a *real* one (2012c, p. 206), and this is for the following reasons: first, given Harman's thesis of withdrawal (see Chapter 4 above), they could not possibly encounter the real table itself since this is by definition not directly accessible to the marbles. Second, his system precludes the possibility that the marbles encounter only the sensual qualities of the table, since the latter are for him inevitably bound to an underlying object. Harman further claims that in this situation, a marble is 'capable of distinguishing between the table and the contiguous relational environment' (2012c, p. 206), even if this does not involve any human faculty of judgement. The marble is also said to confront the table independently of its accidental sensual qualities even if it also 'probably registers these features in some way as well' (2012c, p. 206). In view of this, Harman maintains that

> all real objects inhabit a landscape of sensual ones, a playground whose fluctuations enable new real connections to arise. Some of these fluctuations are a mere domestic drama, while others provoke new relations from the outside. But whatever is special about human cognition belongs at a more complicated level of philosophy than these sensual objects, though it must be expressible in terms of them (2012c, p. 207)

This specific *generalisation* of "sincerity" – along with the generalisation of "finitude" above – have been met with a number of objections. I shall here briefly focus on what I see as the two central representative critiques – namely those of Meillassoux (2016) and Brits, Gibson, and Ireland (2016) – as a means towards further investigating Harman's generalisation of "sincerity."

In Section 2.2.0 above I briefly pointed out that Meillassoux accuses Harman of belonging to what he dubs as "the Era of the Correlate." I shall here revisit this critique in more detail. In an essay entitled "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition" (2016),[87] Meillassoux elaborates on his idea of "correlationism" (see Chapter 2 above) by distinguishing a strict sense of correlationism from the broader "Era of Correlation." He subsumes the abovementioned "weak" and "strong" forms of correlationism (see Section 2.2.2 above) under the rubric of "correlationism in the strict sense." The broader "Era of Correlation," on the other hand, is defined as consisting of two opposite movements, namely "correlationism in the strict sense" and "subjectalism." He in turn defines the latter as a move which seeks to absolutize 'thought itself' or 'certain remarkable traits of thought' (2016, p. 119). In view of the generalisations above, Meillassoux then claims that Harman's philosophy belongs to a "panpsychist"[88] form of subjectalism, insofar as his '*refusal of anthropocentrism*' ultimately leads to an

> *anthropomorphism* that [consists] […] of seeing in every reality (even inorganic reality) subjective traits whose origin is in truth all human; for it goes no further than, by means of a human imagination, *to vary the experienceable traits of our always human existence by degree and in this way place the result of this doubly anthropomorphic operation in all things*, and all that according to a scale ranging from most to least. (2016, p. 116, emphasis modified)

[87] An unofficial yet often quoted version of this paper has been circulated online without the permission of the author. I shall here restrict my analysis exclusively to the official published version of the essay (see Meillassoux, 2016).

[88] It ought to be noted that Meillassoux uses the term "vitalism" rather than "panpsychism" throughout the essay. Nevertheless, and as Harman rightly points out (DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 87), Meillassoux seems to use the two terms interchangeably. For this reason, I prefer to retain the use of the term "panpsychist" since – like Harman (2013c, p. 24) – I believe it to be a more accurate reflection of what Meillassoux is imputing to Harman.

In response to this critique, it may be noted that Harman's explicit position on the issue of "panpsychism" is somewhat variable.[89] Nevertheless, I want to claim that his ultimate (implicit) position is that panpsychism is right in what it rejects yet wrong in what it affirms. To elaborate, panpsychism may be broadly defined as the view that 'all things have a mind or a mind-like quality' (Skrbina, 2007, p. 2). If expressed this way, then Steven Shaviro would be right to claim that panpsychism provides an alternative to the 'human exceptionalism' attributed to thinkers associated with the "linguistic turn" (2015, p. 21), and may also be seen as a 'countertendency to the anthropocentrism, and the hierarchical ontologies, of dominant philosophical dogmas' (2015, p. 20). In this manner, Harman and panpsychism are united in what they *want to reject*, namely the wish to grant humans – or certain human attributes – an exceptional ontological status (*inter alia* Harman, 2009a, p. 212; 2014d, p. 28; 2017, p. 255; Shaviro, 2015, p. 22). Nevertheless, in rejecting anthropocentrism, panpsychism also *affirms* – to use Skrbina's definition again – that all entities possess a "mind" or "mind-like" attributes. In seeing the mind as omnipresent in the universe, panpsychism may then indeed be seen as the anthropomorphic flipside of anthropocentrism (Harman, 2010c, p. 12). This is the thrust of Meillassoux's critique outlined above, but I claim that he is incorrect to ascribe this "anthropomorphic" aspect to Harman. More specifically, when Harman asserts that the intentional relation explicated above is to be generalised to include all entities (2009b, p. 275; 2013c, p. 24), he does not wish to affirm that the "experienceable traits" of our cognition belong to everything. In other words, he does not claim that all entities are sentient, think, or have a mind.[90] Rather, his claim is that some human attributes – such as thought or language – are in actual fact more complex evolutionary by-products of a basic form of the intentional relationality described above (*inter alia* Harman, 2009a, p. 212; 2009b, p. 281; 2010c, p. 12). While Harman acknowledges that human

[89] At times Harman seems to hint at an affinity between his own position and that of panpsychism (see, *inter alia* Harman, 2008b, pp. 4-5; 2009a, pp. 212-214; 2013c, p. 24; 2014d, p. 28). At other times, he implicitly or explicitly distances himself from panpsychism (see, *inter alia* Harman, 2005a, pp. 83-84, 220, 242, 244; 2010c, pp. 12-15; 2011e, p. 177; 2012c, p. 206; 2013g, p. 265; 2017, p. 255; DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 87), or expresses the wish to drastically modify the position into an alternative one which he calls "polypsychism" (see, *inter alia* Harman, 2008b; 2011c, pp. 118-123).

[90] In "The Consequences of Panpsychism" (2015), Shaviro – who, unlike Meillassoux, is sympathetic to panpsychism – makes a similar move to Meillassoux when he (wrongly) imputes this position to Harman.

experience might be different in degree to that of other entities, he also insists that it would be mistaken to think that this difference *in degree* necessarily implies a difference *in kind*.[91] He instead suggests that one should focus on a more 'rudimentary meaning of sincerity' as the 'contact between a real object and a sensual one' since this highlights the fact, for Harman, that all entities are capable of making direct contact with sensual objects (2012c, p. 205. See also 2005a, p. 130; 2018c, p. 114).

In a second – and somewhat related – critique advanced by Brits, Gibson, and Ireland (2016), the authors claim that Harman's ontology not only fails to surmount the aforementioned problem of "correlationism," but also *confirms* one of the central features, namely the thesis of "finitude." The authors then claim that Harman goes on to 'dogmatically' transpose finitude 'beyond the bounds of the human to bestow it naively upon everything,' thereby transforming a 'negative epistemological claim about the human subject' into a 'positive, though untenable, metaphysical claim about the object' (2016, p. 14). In response to this, I claim that such a critique relies on two hypotheses; first, it rests on the (Meillassouxian) assumption that the main problem with correlationism is finitude, and that overcoming the former is tantamount to the rejecting the latter. Second, it supposes that Harman's generalisations are "naïve" and "dogmatic" rather than speculative. I however claim that both these assumptions are disputable, and shall provide a response to each. In response to the first assumption, and as stated earlier (see Section 2.1), the problem of "correlationism" rests on a *combination* of two fundamental propositions, namely finitude and anthropocentrism. While every correlationist is indeed committed to *both of these theses simultaneously*, it does not follow that accepting and radicalising one of them automatically commits a thinker to correlationism *tout court*. It is most certainly true that in Meillassoux's specific formulation, finitude is targeted as the most problematic of the two consequences. Nevertheless, this is not true for Harman, who sees anthropocentrism or "*human* access" as its most contentious aspect (see Chapter 2 above). In other

[91] Harman rejects "onto-taxonomical" positions which start off with the assumption that human beings are 'so utterly different in kind from everything else that they deserve an utterly different ontological category of their own' (2016a, p. 98). Against such a supposition, Harman argues that any 'distinction between them must be *earned* rather than smuggled in from the seventeenth century as purported self-evident truths' (2016a, p. 98).

words, it is clear that the two thinkers accept correlationism as a problem, but disagree about its most damaging feature (Harman, 2013c, p. 25; 2017). As I have already argued above, Harman sees "finitude" as unsurpassable due to the fact that an object can only relate to another by "translating" the latter into its own terms. Nevertheless, Harman's endorsement of this position does not automatically make him a correlationist, since he manifestly rejects the second correlationist thesis, namely anthropocentrism (*inter alia* Harman 2013c, p. 25; 2017). I therefore disagree with Brits, Gibson and Ireland and claim that Harman does in fact move beyond correlationism by transforming finitude or "withdrawal" into an inter-objective feature of the real, thereby rejecting anthropocentrism.

In response to the second assumption, I claim that Harman's method represents a *speculative* – rather than "dogmatic" or "naïve" – form of realism resembling Whitehead's method of "descriptive generalization" (Whitehead, 1985, pp. 10-11. See also Harman, 2009a, p. 169; 2015b, pp. 141-142).[92] Like Whitehead, Harman's object-oriented approach starts off by articulating a number of general principles[93] and then proceeds to speculatively test the extent to which they can be generalised. Harman's anti-correlationist method, in contrast to that of Meillassoux, thus proceeds through a *refusal* rather than a strict *refutation* of what is called "correlational circle."[94] To elaborate, against "naïve" realism, Harman accepts that it is impossible to know reality directly, given his claim that all direct knowledge can only be a form of "mining" (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, he also rejects the claim that cognition of a mind-independent reality is either direct or futile.[95] Rather, he argues that it is possible to indirectly allude to such a reality without rendering it directly present (*inter alia* 2010a, p. 789; 2013c, p. 25; 2014d, p. 46; 2017, p.

[92] This method consists in developing a number of concepts and 'stretching the original meaning of [these] words' in such a way 'that they become applicable to a far wider domain' (Van Der Veken, 2000, p. 326. See also Whitehead, 1985, pp. 10-11). In passing, it is also worth noting that the same method can be detected in the later work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Van Der Veken, 2000).

[93] On my reading, these general principles are the "four criteria for objecthood" (see Chapter 3), the "thesis of finitude" (see Chapter 4) and the "thesis of sincerity" (see above).

[94] In this context, Harman often approvingly quotes Whitehead's claim that 'a system of philosophy is never refuted; it is only abandoned. The reason is that logical contradictions, except as temporary slips of the mind […] are the most gratuitous of errors; and usually they are trivial. Thus, after criticism, systems do not exhibit mere illogicalities. They suffer from inadequacy and incoherence' (Whitehead, 1985, p. 6). Thus, Harman essentially *refuses* the correlationist circle on the basis of its inability to account for large swathes of our everyday experience.

[95] In this context, Harman often quotes the position of Adrian Johnston (2013), who argues that one either accepts direct knowledge of reality or falls into the trap of an endless facile form of "negative theology" (Harman, 2016a, p. 31; 2018b, p. 62; Johnston, 2013, p. 93).

260; 2018b, p. 170), and often likens this idea to the original Socratic formulation of philosophy (*philosophia*); 'the term *philosophia* […] famously means not "wisdom" but "*love* of wisdom." The real is something that cannot be known, only loved.' He nevertheless insists that the impossibility of direct knowledge 'does not mean that access to the [real] is impossible' altogether but 'only that it must be *indirect*' or "allusive" (2012b, p. 12. See also Chapter 6 below).[96] For instance, Harman claims that the autonomous existence of real objects can be indirectly *deduced* from the fact that an infinite number of (sensual) relations to a given object can never be equivalent to the object itself. For the same reason, since all other entities are never equivalent to the sum total of their relations to each other, it is also possible to infer that they equally "withdraw" from one another (2009b, pp. 260-261). Harman is worth quoting at length on this point when he claims that:

> The thing-in-itself is something we *deduce* from the fact that […] no number of views of a house suffice to add up to a house. Nor would any number of *causal impacts* with the house add up the house. On this basis I deduce that I have no access to the thing-in-itself, that my wife has no such access, that Lucy in the primeval Awash Valley did not, and that every animal, bacterium, fire, cotton ball, and asteroid in the history of the cosmos has no had access to the thing-in-itself. (2020a, p. 105)

In other words, and stated as precisely as possible, it may be argued that what allows Harman to accomplish the generalisation of withdrawal is essentially the indirect *speculative inference* of finitude, that is, the *deduction* of the fact that all relational "sincerity" – which Harman applies broadly to all objects – must be finite in nature.

5.4: Is Derrida a (Limited) Husserlian?

Given my account of Harman above, and in view of the aims of this dissertation more generally, it would be useful to briefly inquire into the question of how Harman's reading of Husserl relates to his assessment of Derrida. In this respect, the reader is reminded that on Harman's reading, Derrida and Heidegger may both be said to critique the "metaphysics of presence" or "ontotheology." Nevertheless, Harman argues that the Derridean response to "metaphysics of presence" is decidedly different from Heidegger's since the latter rejects presence by pointing

[96] In my view, Harman's method may also be fruitfully compared to that of Heidegger who, in the opening pages of *Being and Time*, suggests that philosophising essentially involves the clarification of something with which one is already in some sense acquainted (2000, pp. 27-28).

to a "withdrawn" reality, while the former allegedly denies that the latter exists altogether (see Chapter 4). This specific analysis of the supposed difference between the two thinkers in turn leads Harman to argue that Derrida is to be read as a direct successor to Husserl rather than Heidegger (2014d, p. 107); but this is to be understood only in the restricted sense that Derrida is portrayed as joining Husserl 'in decisively *rejecting the thing-in-itself* in a way that Heidegger never fully does' (2018b, p. 203, emphasis added). In spite of this, Harman nevertheless asserts that Derrida ultimately also parts ways with Husserl. This is insofar as the former abolishes the very idea of a Husserlian sensual *object* 'in favour of a collection of *differential sensual qualities*' (2018b, p. 205, emphasis added).

To my knowledge, Harman never explicitly elaborates on what he means by the specific claim that Derrida is exclusively committed to "differential sensual qualities." I am however of the view that he might here be referring to the fairly diffused reading of Derrida as a thinker of language who claims that a specific word or "signifier" is constituted exclusively in terms of its relation to further signifiers. A standard representative example of such a reading of Derrida is found in John D. Caputo's example of a dictionary (Caputo, 1997): if one were to look up the meaning of an individual word in a dictionary, its definition would consist of a number of further related words (or qualities), which would in turn refer to other words, and so forth. Thus, there is an infinite regress of definitions, such that one never steps "outside the text" 'into a mythical, mystical "thing in itself" outside of language' (1997, p. 100). When Harman describes Derrida as being committed only to a "play" of "differential qualities," it seems to me that he is therefore reiterating the "linguistic idealist" reading of Derrida discussed earlier. Essentially, he is claiming that for Derrida there is no such thing as a mind-independent reality, because the so-called "outside of the text" (the real) is in fact both constitutionally and representationally dependent on the "text," that is, on linguistic conventions. Additionally, Harman is also implying that Derrida discounts the singularity of entities in favour of a mélange of differential qualities. In short, he is of the view that Derrida *overmines* reality into a "differential play" of linguistic signifiers, and that he is therefore a *strong correlationist* or *weak access* thinker (see Chapters 2 and 3 respectively).

This account raises a number of important issues which are especially pertinent to the theme of this dissertation. While I do not deny Caputo's claim that Derrida offers a differential view of signs, it would nevertheless be important to question whether the claim that words do not directly capture the real amount to the staunch linguistic idealism which Harman imputes to Derrida. In other words, does the latter actually reject the very idea of a real, and is it really the case that deconstruction leads to a direct denial or "quietism" with regards to the workings of a non-correlated real? My answer to such a query is decidedly in the negative. Against Harman's specific interpretation, I shall therefore argue for the claim that Derrida in fact provides the resources for a dynamic and novel form of "Speculative Realism" which nevertheless runs counter to Harman's unified and autonomous view of objects. In view of the limitations imposed by the current chapter, I shall however reserve the more thorough analysis of my position on Derrida for Chapters 7-10 below.

5.5: Concluding Remarks

In view of the above, in this section I shall very concisely recapitulate the central claims made throughout the course of this chapter in preparation for the forthcoming ones. As has been shown, and by his own admission (2005a, p. 30), Harman's reading of Husserl proceeds through an attempt to transform and radicalise two tensions or paradoxes present in the latter's phenomenological account, namely the tension between a sensual object and its qualities and the idea of an intentional relation as both one and two. While Harman follows both Heidegger and Derrida in insisting that 'reality should not be reduced to its visible presence' (2005a, p. 22. See Chapter 4 above), he nevertheless also parts ways with these thinkers in two ways: first, contrary to Derrida – or rather, in contrast to *his specific interpretation* of the latter – Harman favours objects over the loose "differential play" of qualities. Secondly, contrary to his take on Derrida and Heidegger, Harman follows Husserl in asserting that the experience of individual entities is not a 'not trivial or "ontic" [distraction] to be junked in favour of their underlying ground' (2005a, p. 22).

Through his reading of Husserl, Harman thus derives the idea that experience is fundamentally "sincerely" involved with sensual objects rather than

disparate qualities. Each of these sensual objects may be positively defined as *unified* to the extent that it is not composed of a mere aggregate of sensual qualities, and *autonomous* in the sense that it relatively endures changes in the sensual qualities which "encrust" it at any given point in time. It has also been noted that such objects are also said to possess real qualities, even if the latter remain "submerged" from direct view. Furthermore, it has been argued that any intentional relation between objects is to be characterised as an asymmetrical *unity* "containing" a real object in direct and *sincere* contact with a sensual one. What Harman calls "sincerity" is undeniably a relationship, and it does indeed consist of a real object in direct contact with a sensual one. Nevertheless, and as has already been argued above, Harman is of the view that a sincere relation is itself not (yet) causal. To be sure, Harman emphasises that such "sincere" relations may intermittently be transformed into "vicarious" *connections* between two real objects, with the latter serving as the sole 'engine of change in the world' (2012c, p. 212). The analysis of such a "vicarious cause" or "connection" shall be the subject of the following chapter, where I shall also summarise and analyse the thrust of Harman's critique of Derrida.

Chapter 6: Tensions, Intersections and Vicarious Causation

In previous chapters (Chapters 3-5), I have progressively elaborated upon what I have called Harman's "negative" and "positive" theses on the object. I hold that this particular characterisation of Harman's work is useful for two reasons; first, I am of the view that it clearly highlights the thrust of his thinking, since this is centred on the notion of objects as unified and autonomous. Second, my specific articulation shall facilitate the analysis of how his work compares and contrasts with that of Derrida. More specifically, in the chapters dealing with Derrida below (Chapters 7-10), I shall progressively develop the claim that his work contains an implicit differential and relational account of the real which counters Harman's unified and autonomous view of objects, but without lapsing into the "relationist holism" which the latter imputes to such positions. Nevertheless, while my specific reading of Harman can most certainly be inferred from his work, the author himself articulates his position differently in terms of four poles composed of two kinds of objects and two kinds of qualities (2009a, p. 216; 2010c, p. 16; 2011c; 2014c, p. 107; 2014d, p. 29; 2017, p. 264; 2018b, p. 160). For instance, in "Global Finitude" (2017) Harman asserts that his philosophy

> [distinguishes] between *two different kinds of objects*. *Real* objects are those that exist apart from any observer or any other entity that might encounter them, while *sensual* objects are those that exist only in the experience of some other entity […] In turn, there are also *two kinds of qualities*: the real and the sensual again. This gives us the basic stock of elements from which [Object-Oriented Philosophy] is built. We have real and sensual objects […] and real and sensual qualities […] That gives us four basic permutations of objects and qualities. (2017, p. 264, emphasis modified)

According to Harman, this "quadruple"[97] model in turn yields four possible kinds of "tensions" between objects and qualities (namely time, space, essence and *eidos*), as well as five different sorts of "relations" (namely containment, contiguity, sincerity, connection and none) between objects.[98] Such tensions and relations shall

[97] Harman's quadruple structure is broadly inspired by his interpretation of Heidegger's own "fourfold" (*das Geviert*) model developed in later works such as "The Thing" (Heidegger, 2001). Nevertheless, I shall here confine myself to Harman's own model, given that it departs in many ways from that of Heidegger and may thus be read independently of it. For Harman's reading of the "fourfold" see Harman, 2002, pp. 190-204 and *passim*; 2011c, pp. 82-94; 2016c, pp. 93-98.

[98] Harman (2011c, pp. 114-115, 125-128, 131-135; 2018b, pp. 161-163) also speaks of three "radiations" and three "junctions." The former concern the relation between qualities, while the latter are related to the relation between objects. Nevertheless, I shall here focus exclusively on the "tensions" given that these constitute the cornerstone of Harman's analysis of change.

be discussed in detail below. Further to this, Harman's thesis of "withdrawal" necessarily entails that any two real objects cannot possibly encounter and affect one another directly (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, he also insists that such objects must simultaneously also be capable of *indirect* interaction and influence, for otherwise change would never occur and 'every object would repose in its own inanimate universe' (2005a, p. 1). This simultaneous possibility of direct withdrawal and indirect interaction in turn leads Harman to the idea that real objects must 'touch without touching' through a process he dubs "vicarious causation" (2005a, p. 215; 2012c, p. 220; 2018b, p. 150). In passing, it is worth noting that Harman contrasts this willingness to discuss interactions between objects with Derrida's philosophy. He claims that the latter follows the rest of the post-Kantian tradition (see Chapter 2 and 3) in adopting a quietist attitude towards the real world, beings and their interactions and that he 'writes only about books, never about things' (2014d, p. 106. See also Harman, 2005a, p. 26; 2009a, p. 26; 2012e, p. 96; 2014d, p. 106).

In light of the above, my aims in the current chapter shall be twofold; first I shall offer a detailed account of the different sorts of tensions, relations and "vicarious" causal mechanism identified by Harman. This account is important for the overall task of this dissertation, since it shall allow me to tie the findings of the previous chapters together, thereby directly exposing how Harman's approach leads to his critiques of Derrida before offering my own Derridean-inflected response in Chapters 7-10. Second, I shall assess the scope and implications of his analysis of change in preparation for the forthcoming chapters dealing specifically with what may be called a Derridean-inflected *differential* – rather than "object-oriented" – form of "Speculative Realism." In keeping with these goals, this chapter shall proceed as follows: first, in Section 6.1 I shall provide an analysis of the "tensions" between objects and qualities listed above. Second (in Section 6.2), I shall then briefly consider what Harman identifies as the five relations between objects. In Section 6.3, I shall then provide an analysis of Harman's take on the problem of causation between discrete objects before I consider (in Section 6.4) the implications of his analysis of "vicarious causation." Finally, Section 6.5 shall summarise the main critiques which Harman raises against Derrida in preparation for the chapters that follow, where I shall offer my specific Derridean rejoinder to

Harman by articulating the former's work in terms of a Speculative Realism based on a processual account of difference and relation.

6.1: Four Tensions Between Objects and Qualities

As already stated above, Harman's ontology is constructed out of a fourfold model composed of two kinds of objects (namely real and sensual ones) existing in tension with their own respective (real and sensual) qualities. The term "tension" is intended to highlight the fact that each object supports a loose relation with its own respective qualities, such that it is concurrently both bound to them yet also maintains a certain distance from them (Harman, 2011c, p. 108). Harman locates the following four tensions between objects and their qualities: first, through his reading of Heidegger's "tool-analysis" (see Chapter 4), he derives the tension between a "withdrawn" – and hence autonomous – real object and the respective sensual or relational qualities it "generates" or "emanates." Second, following Leibniz, Harman argues that each real object's *being* is defined by its *unity* or *self-identity*. Nevertheless, he also claims that a real object exists in tension with a set of individuating real qualities which account for its *distinctiveness*. Third, through his account of Husserl (see Chapter 5), Harman establishes that sensual qualities cannot be a mere bundle of "sense-data", but rather exist in tension with a *unified* sensual object, even if the latter only endures within the "experience"[99] of some intending entity. Finally, once again drawing inspiration from Husserl, Harman claims that each sensual object indirectly "alludes" or points to its own specific real qualities, even if the latter remain perpetually "submerged" from direct view. Harman sees each of these tensions as constituting 'the root of time, space, and what [he calls] essence and eidos' (2018c, p. 97). The aim of the present section shall thus be to elucidate each of these tensions.

6.1.1: Essence and *Eidos*

For Harman (*inter alia* 2008b, p. 11; 2010c, p. 15; 2011c, p. 101), the *essence* of an object is produced through the tension between a unified real object and its

[99] In passing, it is worth recalling that Harman uses terms such as "experience" metaphorically to describe 'encounter of a real object with a sensual one' (2018b, p. 114), and often emphasizes that it would be a mistake to equate his understanding of experience with sentience (*inter alia* 2011c, p. 69; 2018b, p. 114). Thus, experience here is taken to be synonymous to what has earlier been called "sincerity" (see Chapter 5).

variety of real qualities. The term is thus used to identify tension between 'unity and duality *in the heart of real things*' in themselves (2011e, p. 176, emphasis added). In this context, it is important to emphasise at the outset that Harman marks a strict distinction between his own commitment to essences and more classical – namely Platonic – forms of essentialism (2002, p. 173. See also Morton, 2013, p. 44). On the one hand, the latter are generally committed to the view that reality is primarily composed of *universal* essences, and that such essences can (at least in principle) be adequately *known* by humans. On the other hand, Harman's "essentialism" serves to emphasise that each object is an integral *unit* – in the sense of an Aristotelian "first substance" (*prote ousia*) – with an inherent structure. Yet his commitment to real essences comes with two important provisos: first, Harman insists that such essences are not universal and intransient but are rather individual and capable of change and annihilation (DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 55. See also Section 4.4). In other words, Harman maintains that the real is composed entirely of individual and self-identical entities. Second, he argues that the essence of a real object remains "withdrawn" from direct view, such that its existence can only be deduced but not directly encountered (Harman, 2011e, p. 176).[100] It is therefore clear that Harman rejects both theses of classical essentialism.

It is true that many "post-modern" thinkers have exhibited an unwavering antagonism towards essentialism. Derrida, for instance, has often claimed that the notion of an essence is intimately related to the history of what he calls "logocentrism," which he in turn deems to 'support the determination of the being of the entity as presence' (1997, p. 12. See also Derrida, 2002, p. 353). I shall have occasion to discuss such a claim in great detail over the course of the following chapters dealing with Derrida's philosophy (see especially Chapter 7 and 10). For the purposes of the current chapter it would however suffice to note that, for Harman (2018b, p. 159), such a critique is only successful if one accepts that essences can be adequately known – i.e. be made "present" – directly, a possibility which he expressly denies. In other words, he claims that "logocentrism" does not pose a problem for his specific form of essentialism, since the Derridean

[100] Following Leibniz, Harman asserts that the 'many-featured essence must be there […] or all [objects] would be exactly the same, which they are not' (2010c, p. 15. See also Section 4.4).

"logocentric" critique is aimed at the *epistemological* hypothesis that essences 'could somehow be delivered to us *in person* in order to serve as normative criteria' (Harman, 2002, p. 173). In spite of this defence on Harman's part, I am of the view that Derrida would still critique this view of essences, since he would claim that it remains committed to the idea that entities are ultimately identical to themselves. As I shall show below, Derrida's philosophy entails the *a priori* rejection of such a position, even if I also think that this does not imply anti-realism on his part (see Chapters 7-10).

The terms "essence" and "eidos" are often treated as synonyms. Nevertheless, Harman distinguishes between the two and, following Husserl, understands the latter to be produced as a tension between a *sensual* object and its *real* qualities (2018b, p. 159). The difference between "essence" and "eidos" may then be said to run as follows: while the former points to the tension between 'unity' and 'peculiarity' at the level of the *real*, the latter refers to a similar tension at the level of the *sensual and real* (2009a, p. 200). The notion of "eidos" thus performs the function of naming the 'strange fact that a sensual object (which exists only as the correlate of our paying attention to it) nonetheless has real qualities (which exist whether we are aware of them or not)' (2018b, p. 159).

Harman emphasises that an object's "eidos" – much like its "essence" – cannot be known *directly* (2009a, p. 203; 2010c, p. 16). He nevertheless claims that it can be *indirectly* hinted at or "alluded" to (2011e, p. 176).[101] One specific way in which he deems this to be possible (at least for humans) is through the use of proper names. To explain this possibility, I shall follow Harman in briefly comparing his position to that of Saul Kripke (2003), in order to then show how the former sees such a view as antithetical to that of Derrida. Like Harman, Kripke rejects Frege and Russell's hypothesis that a proper name such as "Richard Nixon" is equivalent

[101] Harman has sometimes hinted at the fact that 'theoretical labor can disassemble or reverse-engineer the bond between' a sensual object and its real qualities (2010b, p. 63; 2011c, p. 104). He (2018c, p. 122) has also recently asserted that his future work shall seek to address this possibility in detail. Nevertheless, given that such a process has not yet been developed, it shall not be considered in this work.

to a definite list of qualities (Kripke, 2003, pp. 27-29, 31-32).[102] Instead, both Harman (2005a, p. 28; 2009a, pp. 175, 200-203) and Kripke (2003 *passim*) maintain that a proper name functions as what the latter calls a "rigid designator" insofar as it fixes a reference by pointing or alluding to a specific object with particular individuating traits (even if such traits are not directly present in perception).[103] Kripke's "rigid designator" – like Harman's "eidos" – thus names a particular "cognitive" or "sensual" object 'with *a particular and fixed structure*, which coordinates and sponsors *a particular "it" meaning* and particular, variable and multiple, property meanings' (Spikes, 1992, p. 349, emphasis added).

Kripke's views – and, by implication, Harman's – have in turn been characterised as providing a robust form of realism which counters Derrida's philosophy (see, for instance, Norris, 1983, pp. 154-155; Rorty, 1980; Spikes, 1987; Harman, 2018b, pp. 198-209). For instance, in his recent work (2018b), Harman argues that Derrida moves too hastily from the premise that 'we never reach some final thing that shines in 'luminous presence'' to the conclusion that 'everything must [therefore] be a sign' (2018b, p. 206). He therefore chastises Derrida for not considering the "object-oriented" alternative 'that signs do have an ultimate signified whose nature is precisely *not* to become present' but which can nevertheless be alluded to using 'a proper name referring to something deeper than all surface attributes: as in the theory of names as 'rigid designators'' (2018b, p. 206). To be sure, I am of the view that this particular reading of Derrida admits of alternative interpretations, and shall have occasion to further explain my claim in

[102] It is worth noting in passing that Harman (2012a, p. 380; 2014d, p. 51; DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 62) laments Kripke's disappointing "scientistic" assumption that an object's essence – or what has here been called its "eidos" – is to be equated with its 'physical structure' (2012a, p. 380). Nevertheless, the extent to which this holds true for Kripke has not remained uncontested. For instance, Michael P. Spikes – correctly, in my view – denies that Kripke upholds such a position since, for the latter 'we can […] understand [the object's] meaning *without making use of any or all of its essential properties*' (Spikes, 1988, p. 22. Punctuation modified and emphasis added) (See also Kripke, 2003, p. 53).

[103] On this point, Spikes (1987, pp. 303-304; 1988, p. 23) is right to note that prevalent readings of Kripke present the "rigid designator" as pointing to a *real* object rather than an intentional one, even if he (1987, p. 304; 1988, p. 22) also questions such a reading. Harman's actual position on this matter is also unclear, for he (2005a, pp. 28-29) sometimes seems to claim that a proper name points to a specific *sensual object with specific features*, while at other times he (2002, pp. 126, 213; 2005a, p. 199) asserts that it points to a *real* object. It seems to me that the former option is more consistent with Harman's – and perhaps Kripke's – general views and I shall therefore retain this interpretation in my work. I should also note that the author has recently asserted that my specific interpretation here is indeed the correct one (see Harman, 2020b, p. 264).

the forthcoming chapters (see Chapters 7-10). Given the scope of the current chapter, I shall however at present stop at this brief consideration of Harman's claims against Derrida.

6.1.2: Space and Time

For Harman, space is fashioned through the tense relation between real objects and their sensual qualities. He refutes both the Newtonian interpretation of space as an absolute container and the Leibnizian view that treats space as a system of relations (2005a, p. 249; 2010c, p. 17; 2011b, pp. 227-228). Instead, he argues that space involves 'both relation *and* non-relation' (2011e, p. 176). On the one hand, space would not exist if all objects were seamlessly interrelated: 'if the whole of space […] were relational, all objects would be sucked into these relations entirely and could not be carved up into districts in any way at all. Sheer relation without barricades and boundaries would mean the pure totality of *apeiron*, and this is not what experience shows us' (Harman, 2005a, p. 249). This claim in turn implies – at least for Harman – that whatever object is "in" space is "withdrawn" from direct access and 'ensconced in its own private place' (2018b, p. 158. See also Chapter 4). It is in this sense that space is *non-relational*. On the other hand, the fact that each object 'belongs to the same spatial arena' as another simultaneously also implies that each 'is positioned at a *determinate* distance' relative to another (2018b, p. 158), and is thus also *related* to it in some loose way. In this manner, space also becomes a site of relation. In short, space simultaneously names the *place* 'where things meet' and where they 'stand at a distance from each other' (2016e, p. 459), such that objects are said to *pre-exist* their (spatial) relations.

Harman's notion of space has in turn been interpreted by thinkers such as Gratton as involving a fissure '*within the object* between the object-in-itself and its sensuous qualities' (2014, p. 97, emphasis modified). While such a reading definitely holds true for fellow "object-oriented" thinkers Levi Bryant and Timothy Morton (Bryant, 2011; Morton, 2013), I claim that it is to some extent incorrect insofar it does not represent Harman's particular position. Gratton's claim is incorrect to the extent that for Harman specifically, space does not inhere primarily *within* the object, but rather occurs *between* the space that separates one real object from its relations, i.e. from the sensual qualities which exist *only in relation* to

another intending object. For Harman, there is a sense in which the real object itself – when considered apart from its sensual qualities – is 'subspatial' (2016e, p. 459), "withdrawn" from any direct form of contact. Simultaneously however, and as I have already argued in Section 4.4 above, Harman does not distinguish between simple substances and complex aggregates. Rather, he maintains that a real object is at once both unified and internally fashioned from "domestic relations" between its component parts. This fact in turn entails that spatial relations also occur on the inside of a real object, since this "spacing" constitutes the only way in which the parts of objects can be internally differentiated.

Harman notes that it has become common practice to treat space and time as belonging to an inseparably intertwined continuum (2016e, p. 467). Nevertheless, in direct opposition to Derrida (see Chapters 8-10), he chooses to divorce the two by claiming that the latter is forged through the tension between a *sensual* object and its respective *sensual* qualities (2011c, p. 100. See also Chapter 5). Time, for Harman, is said to involve a 'sense of change within stability' insofar as the experience of time's "flow" is only possible because a unified sensual object endures beneath its faintly ever-shifting surface qualities (2016e, p. 466. See also Harman, 2009a, p. 217; 2011e, p. 176; 2018b, p. 158). As he puts it 'there would be *no sense of time* if we could not experience streets or plastic bottles under subtly shifting conditions from one instant to the next. The *feeling that time is flowing* along is in fact *a sense of* the swirling play of accidents on the surface of slightly deeper intentional objects' (2009a, p. 217, emphasis added).

As the above claim clearly indicates, Harman sees time as unfolding *exclusively* at the level of "experience" rather than the real (*inter alia* 2009a, p. 217; 2010c, p. 17; 2018b, p. 158); the caveat, of course, being that he defines "experience" – or "sincerity"[104] – as an inter-objective property (see Section 5.3). This implies that his account of the real is modelled upon a philosophy of time dubbed "presentism" (Harman, 2011e, p. 176; 2016e, p. 470). Put as simply as possible, the term signifies the view that 'everything (temporally locatable) that there is exists now' (Noonan, 2013, p. 219). "Presentism" therefore denies that there

[104] As I mentioned in the last chapter, Harman uses this term in a very specific sense to refer to a real object's direct contact with a sensual one.

is a temporal dimension to the real itself, and it seems as though Harman interprets himself as espousing such a position when he claims that

> according to the object-oriented model *only the present exists*: only objects with their qualities, locked into whatever their duels of the moment might be. In that sense, *time seems to be illusory*, though not for the usual reason that time is just a fourth spatial dimension always already present from the start. Instead, *time does not exist simply because only the present ever exists*. (2011e, p. 176, emphasis added)

The above quote thus emphasises that Harman is a self-proclaimed *anti-realist* with respect to the reality of time: 'if we consider time as belonging to the real itself, then', claims Harman, 'I guess I'm *not* a realist about time' (DeLanda and Harman, 2017, p. 124). Thus, the essence of the real object is said to remain unaffected by time (2005a, p. 215), to the effect that time '*changes nothing*' (2005a, p. 252, emphasis added).[105] As I shall show below, Harman's account of change is thoroughly "synchronic," in that it is related to a "spatial" change between objects. It may also be noted that this view constitutes one of the major differences between Harman's "object-oriented" approach and what may be dubbed Derrida's "difference-oriented" thought. I shall have occasion to discuss this issue at length in Chapters 8-10 below, where I shall show that Derrida – *pace* Harman – holds space and time to be inextricably intertwined.

It might be questioned whether Harman is right to claim that he is an anti-realist when it comes to "real time." Should one take his word for it? I have reason to think otherwise. More specifically, *against* Harman's self-interpretation I want to claim that his philosophy in actual fact contains an *implicit* take on real time. As I shall show below, Harman is of the view that every new object can only come into being through a "connection" (see Section 6.3). He further claims that when such a "connection" is established 'its history […] remains *inscribed* in [the real object's] heart, where its components are locked in a sort of kaleidoscopic duel' (2012c, p. 208, emphasis added). If this is conceded, then it would follow that the real *past* of the object is formed by the *trace* of all the previous "connections" *inscribed* into its core, even if – following his critique of "undermining" – the object itself is not

[105] Fellow "object-oriented ontologist" Timothy Morton has a different account of real time. For him, 'the [sensual] appearance of an object is that object's *past*, while the [real] essence of an object is the *future* of the object' (2013, p. 102). As compelling as this interpretation sounds, it must however be emphasised that it is *not* Harman's specific position.

simply reducible to the sum total of its connections. Additionally, Harman's rejection of "relationism" and "holism" discussed earlier entails that a real object retains a surplus beyond its current relations and effects (see Chapters 3 and 4). As a result, it is possible to claim that the real *future* of the object may be characterised by the "withdrawal" which accounts for the "surplus" or possibilities exhibited by the object. It may therefore be concluded that the real *present* – i.e. the object in its "actuality" – may be described as being constituted by a tension between an object's "history" and its openness to future possibilities, even if it is itself not simply *reducible* to either its past or future.

My interpretation notwithstanding, it may be noted that Harman's self-proclaimed "anti-realist" account above has been critiqued by both opponents and supporters of his position (Gratton, 2013; 2014, p. 98-107; Kleinherenbrink, 2019a, pp. 200-205; 2019b; Wolfendale, 2014, pp. 188-199). For instance, Peter Gratton (2013; 2014) views Harman's philosophy as a form of "metaphysics of presence" which is diametrically opposed to Derrida's philosophy (see Chapter 7). For him, the latter is read as arguing for a robust form of *temporal realism* (2013; 2014, pp. 201-216). Contrastingly, he claims that Harman's objects exist in a perpetual *present* which shields them from the passage of time. From this, Gratton infers that Harman's objects are therefore incapable of change and alteration (2013; 2014, pp. 98, 99). As I shall show below (see especially Chapters 9 and 10), I concur with Gratton that the issue of time represents one of the major points of contention between Derrida and Harman.[106] Nevertheless, I disagree with Gratton's assumption that Harman's "presentism" entails that real objects are unchanging, for his critique harbours the implicit assumption that the ontology of change necessarily involves the *diachronic* production of difference *over time*, a claim which holds true for Derrida but not for Harman. Contrary to what Gratton claims, I therefore hold that Harman's objects do indeed change, even if such alterations do not require time. Against Gratton, and as I shall explicate below, it may be argued that Harman offers a *synchronic* ontological account of change which involves disturbances in the loose and unstable spatial network of relations between

[106] This claim requires a more thorough analysis of Derrida's position. For this reason, and given the limited scope of the current chapter, I have chosen to elaborate on this issue in the chapters dealing with Derrida's philosophy.

objects, rather than assuming time to be a necessary ingredient for the production of difference (see DeLanda and Harman, 2017, pp. 122-123; Harman, 2018b, pp. 166-167). Stated differently, change for Harman occurs when "spatial" relations – discussed above – are disrupted through a process of causal connection which Harman calls "vicarious causation." What Harman calls "space" – understood here as the "tension" between a real object and the sensual qualities it "emanates" – thus comes to occupy a central role in his theory of "vicarious causation" by having the sensual qualities act as the exclusive catalysts of real change in the world (2005a, p. 164; 2016e, p. 468). Such a process shall be the subject matter of Section 6.3 below. Before doing so however, in the next section I shall briefly articulate the five sorts of object relations identified by Harman.

6.2: On the Relations Between Objects

Along with the four "tensions" described above, Harman identifies the following five relations unfolding between objects of different kinds: sincerity, contiguity, containment, no relation and connection (see Harman, 2012c, pp. 199-200; 2018b, pp. 114-116). Since I have implicitly drawn upon most of these relations previously, the task of this section shall be to explicitly yet summarily articulate the first four of these relations. This shall be done in preparation for the forthcoming section, which shall in turn deal with Harman's understanding of the fifth form of relation – namely "connection" – as the basis of change and causation.

Harman's notion of "sincerity" has already been dealt with at some length in the previous chapter. In brief, it speaks of the relation which holds between a real object and the sensual ones it constantly contends with. As may be recalled, what phenomenology calls "intentionality" is for Harman a form of "sincerity," even if the converse does not hold (2005a, p. 135). This is due to the fact that he gives the latter term a wider inter-objective scope, thereby subsuming intentionality into a modality of sincerity.

In following, the abovementioned relation dubbed "contiguity" defines the manner in which diverse sensual objects populate the same intentional space at any given point in time (2012c, p. 199; 2018b, p. 114). Their relation is portrayed in this manner insofar as such objects do not impinge on one another directly but are rather only connected via the "experience" of some intending real object. In

Guerrilla Metaphysics (2005a), Harman appositely summarises this point as follows:

> Instead of saying that the various side-by-side elements of perception are related, we will say instead that [sensual objects] are *contiguous* or *adjacent* […] The almonds, juices, and dried apricots on the table at sunset appear as contiguous within my perception, and do not immediately fuse into some separate new object — or at least not for perception. The elements on the interior of an object are contiguous rather than related in the strict sense. (2005a, p. 195)

Harman in turn further distinguishes between the two relations just described and a third one dubbed "containment" (2012c, p. 199). The latter refers to the way in which an intentional relation taken as a whole enfolds or "contains" the sincere relation between a real object and a sensual one. Stated differently, if in "sincerity" a real object X contends with a sensual object Y, then "containment" describes the loose synthesis comprising a third term, a new total object Z inclosing both X and Y. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the relationship between X and Y contained within Z is not one of contiguity but is rather asymmetrical insofar as the scenario depicts a real object in *direct contact* with a sensual one.

From the notion that real objects "withdraw" or exist independently of their relations, Harman advances the speculative claim that there may very well be objects which bear absolutely no relation to any other entity. Harman (*inter alia* 2009a, p. 214; 2010c, p. 15; 2010e, p. 107; 2011e, p. 177; 2016a, p. 42) sometimes describes such objects as 'sleeping' or 'dormant' ones insofar as they exist 'despite not yet (or not ever) influencing anything else' (2018b, p. 229). This fourth non-relational sort of "relation" is in turn used by Harman to critique "relationism," namely the view that an entity is entirely defined by its relations (2012c, p. 200. See also Section 3.1.2).

Of the four relations briefly discussed here, it can be noted that none may be defined as causal in Harman's sense. In his view, only the still-to-be-discussed relation dubbed "connection"[107] can serve as the genuine 'engine of change in the cosmos' (2012c, p. 212), insofar as he sees this relation as the only one capable of

[107] In a more recent work entitled *Immaterialism* (2016a), Harman uses the biological trope of "symbiosis" as a synonym for "connection." In this work, I shall however use the latter term exclusively in order to avoid confusion.

indirectly linking two *real* objects. The intricacies of such a relation shall be discussed in the subsequent section.

6.3: On the Problem of Change and Affect

Harman's "object-oriented" approach is premised on the fundamental intuition that all real objects are autonomous from each other, to the effect that all forms of direct contact are precluded from the outset. Nevertheless, he concurrently holds that the necessity of change and alteration entails that they must also be capable of affect, for otherwise every entity would simply inhabit its own perpetually secluded realm (2005a, p. 2). This paradox of simultaneous "withdrawal" and influence in turn leads Harman to raise anew the question of causality and interaction between discrete substances: 'if objects exceed any of their perceptual or causal relations with other objects, […] the question immediately arises as to how they interact at all. More concisely; we have the problem of nonrelating objects that somehow relate' (Harman, 2005a, p. 91. See also Harman, 2012c, p. 193).

This assessment in turn often prompts Harman to articulate his own take on the problem of causality in historical terms, placing his own views between two positions; the "occasionalism" of thinkers such as Malebranche, and what he dubs the "scepticism" of philosophers such as Hume and Kant (*inter alia* 2009a, pp. 35,112-116; 2010c, pp. 5-6; 2010e, pp. 100-101; 2012a, pp. 373-375; 2012c, pp. 218-219; 2018b, pp. 164-165). The former may be broadly defined as the view that discrete substances do not possess causal powers, such that they cannot 'interact directly, but only by passing through God' (Harman, 2011c, p. 71).[108] Stated differently, the occasionalists recognise the inherent problem of interaction between discrete substances. Nevertheless, they go on to solve the problem by positing God as the only possible causal mediator. Contrastingly, Harman holds that scepticism – which in his view constitutes the more prevalent contemporary view on causality – represents an inverted form of occasionalism to the extent that it bestows all

[108] The position is most explicitly associated with a narrow group of seventeenth century French thinkers (most notably Nicolas Malebranche), but in actual fact dates back to the Ash'arite and Māturīdite Muslim schools in the tenth century (Nadler, 2012). By defining occasionalism in this manner, Harman gives the term wider scope and takes it to include any position which postulated some divine being as the sole mediator between substances. In this way, Harman includes the positions of thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz as implicit heirs to occasionalism (2011b, p. 214; 2012a, p. 374; 2014d, p. 26; 2018b, p. 164).

causal powers to the human mind rather than God (2011c, p. 72; 2018b, p. 112). Thus, while occasionalists isolate God as the sole causal mediator, the sceptics confer this mediational authority to "customary conjunction" (Hume[109]) or mental categories (Kant).

Harman's alternative phenomenology-inflected[110] model of causality simultaneously preserves and rejects aspects of both occasionalism and scepticism: it preserves the mediational aspect present in positions just described (*inter alia* 2005a, p. 91, 174; 2010c, p. 10; 2012c, p. 190), while also rejecting the recourse to an almighty entity – whether it be God or humans – operating as the locus of all possible interaction (*inter alia* 2009b, p. 257; 2010c, p. 6; 2012a, p. 375; 2012c, p. 185). Instead, and as I shall show below, he proposes a more "local" or "democratic" solution by insisting that '*any* entity' is able to function as an intercessor between two objects (2009b, p. 259). Harman thus puts forth a model he dubs "vicarious causation" intended to serve as a novel solution to the issue of causal relations between discrete entities.[111] Stated as summarily as possible, "vicarious causation" entails that two real objects only "connect" indirectly – hence "vicariously" – through a *local* "third term" acting as both a local mediator for relations and a relational medium within which interaction occurs (Harman, 2019). Furthermore, he essentially claims that such causal relations are established when "sincerity" is episodically transformed into a mediated "connection" between two *real* objects via a mechanism dubbed "allure." In view of such declarations, it follows that explicating Harman's theory of causality first involves analysing the differences between "sincerity" and "allure."

[109] Nadler (2012, pp. 165-188) has very persuasively shown that Hume's analysis of causality is heavily influenced by the occasionalist tradition.

[110] Harman sees "Object-Oriented Philosophy" – and hence his account of causation – as 'the inevitable mutant offspring of Husserl's intentional objects and Heidegger's real ones'. Further to this, he claims that these two philosophies can ultimately be understood as 'present-day heirs of Hume's contiguous impressions and ideas (Husserl) and the disconnected objects of Malebranche and his Ash'arite predecessors (Heidegger)' (2012c, p. 202).

[111] This account was initially extensively detailed in his book *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005a). Nevertheless, he has since offered a number of modifications to this account (*inter alia* Harman, 2009a, pp. 210-211; 2010e, p. 104; 2012c), and it is for this reason that my analysis here shall not restrict itself exclusively to this work.

6.3.1: On the Difference Between Sincerity and Allure

As has already been discussed in Chapter five, Harman is of the view that ordinary relations consist of real objects in "sincere" or direct contact with sensual ones. As I have shown, in situations of sincerity, the sensual object is "fused" to two kinds of qualities (namely real and sensual) in such a way that the difference between the sensual object and its qualities is not noticed at all (Harman, 2005a, pp. 150-151. See also Harman, 2011c, pp. 102-103). It is worth reemphasizing two important details about sincerity: first, the sincere relation between a real object and a sensual one is for Harman itself always already infolded or "contained" on the interior of a unified total relation taken as a whole. Second, Harman claims that the sensual qualities of an object also "emanate" from a "withdrawn" real object (2011c, p. 77; 2016e, p. 471. See also Chapters 4 and 5). Nevertheless, he (2014c, p. 107) holds that in situations of sincerity the sensual qualities are associated with a sensual object rather than pointing to a "withdrawn" real one.

Harman in turn differentiates the aforementioned instance of sincerity from what he calls "allure." To be sure, he is of the view that the former must already be present before the latter can take effect; 'a more rudimentary form of contact ["sincerity"] must always be present before deeper contact ["allure"] is made' (2010b, p. 50). Sincerity is thus 'a kind of pre-contact […] from which all [connection] must emerge' (2007c, p. 26). Nevertheless, he maintains that the two differ insofar as "allure" names a '*special* and *intermittent'* mechanism which unsettles the flow of the ordinary state of things (2005a, p. 142, emphasis added). Allure, for Harman, involves an aesthetic[112] effect which differs from "sincerity" insofar as it consists of a double activity (2011c, p. 104; 2012c, p. 221): first allure produces a disturbance (or "fission") of the routine bond (or "fusion") between a sensual object and its sensual qualities (2005a, pp. 143 and *passim*; 2012c, p. 215). Thus, in this first instance, allure interrupts sincerity by producing an 'interference […] in the usual relation between a concealed sensual object and its visible symptoms', thereby creating 'a strife between an object and its own [sensual]

[112] Harman defines the term "aesthetics" broadly to refer to any 'separation of an object from its qualities' (2013a, p. 221). As I shall show below, Harman grants "allure" the power to explicitly perform such a separation. In this way, he therefore equates allure with aesthetics and claims that "aesthetics is first philosophy" (*inter alia* 2007c; 2012c, p. 221; 2018b, p. 260).

qualities' (2005a, p. 150). Second, the sensual qualities previously associated with a sensual object are then *lured* towards the "withdrawn" real object in such a way that they subtly *allude* or point to its being, but 'without making its inner life directly present' (2012c, p. 215). In other words, the second activity of allure consists in its ability to present one real object to another *in its absence* through the medium of sensual qualities which fill in for its absence. Thus, Harman argues that allure names

> *the presence of objects to each other in their absent form*. […] While allure has no hope of ever getting us closer to the objects themselves, it can unleash objects that had been largely muffled in their relations with us, and can translate already recognized objects into more potent form. *Allure is the fission of sensual objects, replacing them with real ones*. (2005a, p. 246, emphasis added)

On Harman's account, the double mechanism just described allows for one real object to indirectly (or "vicariously") establish a link with another via the medium of sensual qualities alluding to a real object. In this way, "allure" trans-*forms*[113] the relation dubbed "containment" into an *emergent* 'unified whole' (2012c, p. 208), a new object in its own right composed of a mediated "connection" between two real objects. Crucially, Harman maintains that this "compositional" sense of causation expresses its principal meaning (2010c, pp. 13, 14; 2018b, p. 167). He further claims that what one normally understands as causality – namely one thing exerting influence on another – is in actual fact nothing more than a secondary derivative situation in which a new "connection" retroactively affects its own components.[114] For Harman,

> The meaning of causation is not just that one thing affects another. Instead, causation is primarily a matter of *composition*: gold's ultimate cause is its inherent form, but otherwise it is caused more by the atoms and molecules internal to it than by the far-off supernova in which it was forged. A corollary of this is that, whenever something seems to be caused by an "event," the event needs to be interpreted as having formed a new object – however briefly – that had retroactive effects on its pieces then detaching themselves from the new object an resuming an independent existence. (2018c, p. 113)

Harman provides plenty of examples of the mechanism of allure in human experience, suggesting in turn something analogous to be at work in causation itself (2005a, pp. 216, 219). For reasons of space, I shall here briefly focus on one

[113] I have chosen to write the word in this manner in order to emphasise the fact that for Harman 'every genuine relation *forms* a new object' (2010c, p. 13) with a new structure which is irreducible to the sum total of its parts.

[114] Following DeLanda (2006, p. 34), Harman (2010c, p. 13; 2010e, p. 106; 2013g, p. 234; 2018b, p. 163) claims that one of the marks of an emergent whole is its ability to retroactively affect its parts.

example of allure, namely metaphor.[115] For Harman (2005a, pp. 107, 108), the literal use of the word "cypress" or "flame" in everyday language directs one's intention a particular sensual object with specific qualities. In this way, he likens normal linguistic use to perception to the extent that both 'seem doomed merely to point at the inner execution of things […] without ever reaching full intimate union with their being' (2005a, p. 107). However, the situation is somewhat different in the case of metaphor. Harman claims that a metaphor such as "the cypress is a flame"[116] suddenly brings two previously unrelated objects into proximity in such a way that flame-qualities (or predicates) detach from the flame-object and are grafted onto an underlying cypress-object (the subject). A metaphor therefore coerces a listener 'to live executantly a new object' which is 'neither quite tree nor quite fire, but a vaporous hybrid of both' (2005a, pp. 109, 107).

Further to this, it is possible to illustrate the workings of the mechanism just described by making recourse to Harman's oft-cited example of fire burning cotton (*inter alia* 2005a, p. 170; 2008b, p. 4; 2012e, p. 103; 2013g, p. 256; 2017, p. 255). From the thesis of "withdrawal" it follows that when fire burns cotton, the former does not encounter the being of the latter (i.e. the real cotton) in its unalloyed presence. Rather, the fire encounters a "sensual" deputy displaying the qualities which are relevant to it – its flammability for instance. Intermittently,[117] the 'proximity without fusion' which Harman dubs "sincerity" allows for the sensual qualities of cotton to allude to its withdrawn reality in such a way that a new

[115] The case of metaphor represents only one example of allure in human experience. Other examples include the experiences of charm, humour, beauty, tragedy and disappointment (2005a, pp. 212-213 and *passim*). Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Harman's original and dynamic analysis of metaphor deserves lengthier treatment than the one offered in this short paragraph. Nevertheless, I have here kept this exposition brief due to the fact that a more detailed analysis would lead this work too far into the details of Harman's aesthetic theory. For a detailed analysis of his theory of metaphor, see Harman, 2005a, pp. 101-116; 2018b, pp. 59-102; 2018c, pp. 116-122.

[116] Harman often uses this example borrowed from José Ortega y Gasset's famed essay entitled "An Essay in Aesthetics by Way of a Preface" (1975). It is also worth noting that Harman's general understanding of metaphorical language is also heavily influenced by this thinker (see Harman, 2005a, pp. 101-110; 2018b, pp. 66-80)

[117] In view of this, and as the following quote illustrates, it would be important to highlight that "connections" are only established rarely in Harman's view: 'fire is always making some sort of contact with the accidents of neighboring entities, yet this causes something to happen only when it uses those accidents to find some way to affect the object underneath. *This happens relatively rarely, and much contact leads nowhere. In short, causation does not instantly occur as soon as two objects are in proximity*' (2009a, p. 220, emphasis added).

emergent third object ("burning cotton ball") is formed (2007c, p. 24). Once this *emergent* connection is established, this new total object is then able to affect the "essence" – understood here as a tension within the real (see Section 6.1) – of its respective parts. The event called "burning" is thus, for Harman, nothing more than the *ex post facto* effect of a joint "connection" between fire and cotton through which the flammable qualities of fire are grafted onto the object cotton (2009a, p. 220).

6.3.2: On the Core Features of Vicarious Causation

Harman often explicitly describes "vicarious causation" in terms of three core features, claiming that all causality is necessarily vicarious, buffered and asymmetrical (*inter alia* 2005a, p. 224; 2009a, p. 147; 2010b, pp. 48-51). I however hold that this list can be broadened to include three further principal characteristics, since for Harman causation is also alluring, binary and aesthetic. I shall briefly summarise each of these features before I go on to analyse the main implications of Harman's theory in the ensuing section. Causality is vicarious and alluring in the sense that real objects can only interact by proxy through the mediation of sensual qualities acting as deputies alluding to an absent real object (Harman, 2012c, p. 200). Causality is buffered insofar as sensual qualities inhibit the direct contact between real objects (2009a, p. 221). Causation is in turn asymmetrical in two interrelated ways; firstly, because a real object originally interacts with a sensual object rather than a real one (2012c, p. 200). Secondly, because Harman claims that mutual influence between two real objects is not the result of reciprocal interaction, but rather 'a special case of two simultaneous *one-way relations* in which two objects happen to relate to one another *independently'* (2010e, p. 96, emphasis added). In light of the second sense of asymmetry, it can then be seen that causation is also binary in the sense that interaction occur exclusively between two objects (2009a, pp. 208-209), such that in instances 'where more than two objects seem to be in relation […] there will either be a slow accretion of pairs of terms, or a central term that related independently with each of the others' (2010e, p. 106). Finally, causation is also aesthetic in two interrelated senses; first, to the extent that Harman confers all causal impetus to the sensual surfaces of things (2012c, p. 195). Second, causation is also aesthetic to the extent that Harman identifies the mechanism of allure with an aesthetic effect which is able to split an object from its qualities, using

the latter to allude to a real one. From these two senses, it may then be seen that Harman uses the term "aesthetics" to broadly refer to the loose relation which he posits between each sensual object bears to its respective qualities (see for instance Harman, 2017, p. 263).

6.4: Implications: On the Nature of Change

The model of "vicarious causation" just sketched represents the thrust of Harman's understanding of the problem of interaction between discrete objects. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005a), Harman asserts that his model is not intended to be 'an answer to all ills, an oracle among theories.' Instead, his aim is 'push an idea' – namely the claim that objects "withdraw" from relations – 'as far as it can go' in order to assess its fundamental consequences (2005a, p. 89). In keeping with Harman's approach, I shall here briefly focus on what I take to be the three fundamental and interrelated implications of Harman's account of causality and change. I do this in order to pave the way for the analysis of the relation between Harman and Derrida presented in the forthcoming chapters, where I shall show that one of the major differences between the two thinkers lies in the difference between a punctuated and gradualist model of change respectively (see especially Chapter 10).

First, Harman's "vicarious" model entails that all real change occurs *sporadically* (2012c, p. 291; 2016a, pp. 15, 47). Refusing both the claim that objects are defined by an immutable essence or by an interminable flux imposed by time, Harman insists that objects do in effect change but only for a very limited number of times throughout their existence. For Harman, vicarious connections – which, it must be remembered, constitute the only type of relation capable of effectuating change at the level of the real – are thus *occasional* occurrences, while most *perceived* change is in actual fact merely cosmetic, occurring along the tension which Harman dubs "time."

A second implication of Harman's system may in turn be deduced from the first; if one accepts his claim that causal "connections" are indeed rare, then it would follow that a given object either changes drastically in quantum leaps or not at all (2005a, p. 177). Harman's philosophy therefore articulates a punctuated model of change which rejects the gradualist model implied in philosophies of becoming as

well as process philosophies (Harman, 2016a),[118] and this fact can most clearly be gleaned through his example of changes throughout one's lifespan:

> We change as people either by putting on masks and costumes that hide the fact that nothing has changed, *or* by entering into combination [i.e. establish "vicarious connections"] with new things that make us something different from what we were. […] If the usual alternative is that we either have no fixed identity but are in a constant flux of becoming, or that we remain as an unchanging soul from conception to death, I would suggest instead that we change on a *finite* number of occasions, so that I am no longer the same person as at age five, but may be the same person I was last year or the year before. Transformations in life would be real, but rare. (2015f, p. 16)

Harman's example above clearly suggests that there is no gradual continuity between Harman aged five and the current Harman, and the same must be true for all other sorts of real objects (given his endorsement of "flat ontologies"). Rather, there is Harman aged five, followed by a sudden quantum leap (or "connection") through which he changed irrevocably into something other than a five-year-old.

The third and final implication of Harman's system is that change occurs synchronically rather than diachronically. One of the major upshots of "vicarious causation" is the "compositional" model of causality according to which objects only change by forming connections which then have retroactive effects on their parts. Thus, as has already been suggested, Harman adopts a causal model according to which change only occurs through the reordering of networks of connections between already existing objects rather than by changing over time. This claim is what makes Harman a self-proclaimed *anti-realist* with respect to real time.

The three implications considered here in turn provoke a number of pertinent questions; for instance, to what extent is Harman's compositional model of intermittent change the only possible alternative to the postulation of eternal essences or incessant flux? Following Arjen Kleinherenbrink (2019a, p. 203; 2019b), one might also question why changes – i.e. "vicarious connections" – can only be radical and intermittent. In other words, if it is admitted that objects can

[118]Harman (2014e) distinguishes between "process philosophers" (such as Latour and Whitehead) and "philosophers of becoming" (namely thinkers such as Bergson and Deleuze). He characterizes both as essentially "relationist" insofar as they characterize entities in terms of their relations. Nevertheless, he also holds that there is one major difference between the two: "process philosophers" tend to 'emphasize change over stasis' by essentially characterising individual entities as events (2014e, p. 232). Contrastingly, the "philosophers of becoming" take processes a step further by characterizing entities as mere epiphenomenal derivations 'of a more primordial ["pre-individual"] dynamism' (2014e, p. 232).

(and indeed do) change, then might it be the case that they do so both radically and gradually? Finally, one might wonder whether a model which sees change as involving difference over time necessarily amounts to a holistic denial of individual objects as Harman seems to suggest. Rather than venturing a response to each of these questions, I shall keep them on hold in order to consider – in Chapter 10 – how the implications and questions raised here can shed light on a proposed Derridean response to Harman, as well as the differences between the two thinkers. However, before doing so, the following section shall identify the main criticisms which Harman raises against Derrida in relation to the articulation of the "object-oriented" system presented in the preceding chapters.

6.5: Revisiting Harman's Derrida

The previous chapters focused on giving a thorough analysis of the central theses driving Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy", while the current one focused on providing an analysis of his understanding of causality and change. Over the course of these chapters, I have also periodically pointed to a number of Harmanian criticisms of Derrida. In view of the aims of the present work, the task of this section shall be to explicitly identify and provide an abridged rundown of these criticisms in preparation for the chapters that follow. In this way, the present section shall serve two purposes; first it shall act as an epilogue to the previous chapters, insofar as it shall tie what has been previously discussed to the overall theme of this work by summarising the points of contention which Harman raises against Derrida. Second, it shall serve as a prologue to the forthcoming chapters which shall deal with a proposed Derridean response to the critiques levelled against the thinker by Harman.

To date Harman has produced a handful of somewhat lengthy direct critiques of Derrida but has also frequently both explicitly and implicitly referred to his ideas in passing (2005a, pp. 110-116; 2013b, pp. 195-199; 2018b, pp. 198-209). Nevertheless, it would be an understatement to say that his assessment of Derrida has hardly been positive. While he does concede that Derrida has 'a cogent philosophical case to make' (2018b, p. 199), he nevertheless also states that he has never found the latter's philosophy to be 'compelling or even especially fateful' for philosophy (2018b, p. 199). This is because Harman's crucial and final adjudication

is that Derrida represents the culmination of the anti-realist thinking which he sets his whole philosophy against.

It may then be noted Harman raises a number of peripheral critiques of Derrida related to his evasive and unnecessarily lengthy prose style (2005a, p. 110), the inability to explicitly commit to a philosophical position (2005a, pp. 110-111), and his alleged tendency to relegate philosophy to what can basically be called textual commentary at the expense of objects themselves (2005a, p. 26). Nevertheless, such evaluations mask what Harman sees as more fundamental (and serious) difficulties underlying Derrida's thinking. In view of what has already been stated in the chapters above, I have narrowed such criticisms to the following three claims: First, Harman claims that Derrida erroneously associates the critique of self-presence with the critique of realism, essentialism and self-identity. In other words, he is here suggesting that Derrida rejects the "unity" and "autonomy" of real objects. In Harman's view, this error in turn relies on Derrida's mistaken amalgamation of the ontological and epistemic theses of realism. More specifically, for Harman, the critique of presence – known as "ontotheology" or the "metaphysics of presence" – is ultimately related to the *epistemic* notion that reality could (in principle) be equated with our knowledge of it, while realism entails the *ontological* thesis that entities exist and that they do so mind-independently – or "autonomously" more generally in Harman's case. Second, and in spite of Derrida's own protestations on the matter, Harman insists that the former is an unequivocal "idealist" – better known as a "strong correlationist" or "weak access" philosopher and hence[119] an "overminer" – insofar as he adopts an (at best) agnostic attitude towards mind-independent reality and sees language as the primary bond or correlation between thinking and being. Derrida's now (in)famous claim that "there is nothing outside the text" is further evoked as a testament to his flagrant idealism. This, for Harman, also testifies to an anthropocentric or "onto-taxonomic" drive to restrict philosophy to a more primal human-world correlation. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, Harman sees Derrida as anti-Heideggerian – at least if one subscribes to Harman's interpretation of Heidegger – to the extent that he does not

[119] This inference from "strong correlationism" to "overmining" can be made here given Harman's insistence that all instances of the former are equivalent to instances of the latter, even if the converse does not hold.

recognise the "withdrawal" of individual unified objects beneath the sensual realm (see Chapter 4). For Harman, this fact in turn aligns Derrida closely with Husserl (see Chapter 5), who may be regarded as an idealist in the sense that he tacitly rejects the notion mind-independent reality. In spite of this, Harman states that Derrida is also unlike Husserl to the extent that he does not recognise unified sensual objects beneath the "play" of "differential sensual qualities."

Having summarily established the fundamental points of contention which Harman raises against Derrida's claimed anti-realism, the following chapters shall in turn be dedicated to providing a possible response to these critiques. More specifically, in the following chapters, I shall progressively develop the specific claim that there is an implicit Derridean "Speculative Realism" at work in the latter's thought, even if this specific view of the real shall counter Harman's in many ways, most notably on the issues of space, time, finitude, self-identity and *absolute* autonomy (see especially Chapter 10). To be sure, my specific intention shall not to be deride Harman's assessment of Derrida, for it ultimately represents a relatively diffused standard interpretation of the thinker. Neither will I attempt to present Derrida as an "object-oriented" theorist *avant la lettre*. Rather, what I seek to demonstrate is that alternative readings to the "anti-realist Derrida" interpretation proposed by Harman are also possible and indeed plausible. Stated more precisely, in the chapters that follow I aim to counter Harman's assessment of Derrida by showing how a specific (speculative) form of realism can be inferred from a more positive reading of the latter's philosophy, even if such a reading might diverge from Harman's specific form of "Speculative Realism" as well as many standard interpretations of the thinker.

Chapter 7: On Logocentrism and the Metaphysics of Presence

In the previous chapters (Chapters 3-6) I sought to provide a novel reading and analysis of Harman's particular form of Speculative Realism defined in terms of two "negative" and "positive" features of objects. As a reminder, the former criteria involve the claim that an object can neither be "undermined" into its constituent pieces or "overmined" into its relations and effects. The latter involve the argument that any object is positively characterised in terms of unity and autonomy. I have also connected this to Harman's critique of Derrida as a "strong correlationist" and "overminer" of objects – and the real more generally – into nothing more than linguistic effects.

In view of the general aim of the present work, in the chapters that follow I shall turn to an analysis of Derrida's philosophy in relation to the realism/anti-realism debate more generally, and Harman's philosophy and critique of Derrida more specifically. Relative to this, and as Martin Hägglund points out, it may be stated that the relatively recent continental interest in realism and materialism has diminished the significance of Derrida's work, insofar as the latter has generally been portrayed as being 'limited to questions of language or as mortgaged to an ethical and religious piety' (2016, p. 36).[120] As I have shown above, such an interpretation is clearly reflected in Harman's view that Derrida's thought 'has nothing in common with philosophical realism,' defined as the view that there exists a mind-independent reality which can be thought yet not known directly (2018b, p. 202. See also Chapters 2-6).[121]

This outright rejection of Derrida's work has in turn led thinkers such as Jonathan Basile (2018) to argue that Harman – as well as others originally associated with Speculative Realism – has intentionally misread deconstruction in order to promote his own agenda and supposedly novel ideas. Unlike Basile, I

[120] As I shall show in the following section, this interpretation of Derrida as either a thinker of language – and hence a linguistic idealist – or as concerned with an ethics of "Other" is common in both realist and anti-realist interpretations of Derrida respectively.

[121] It is worth noting that Harman's particular realist version is additionally committed to autonomous and unified objects (see Chapters above). Nevertheless, the latter commitments are not constitutive of the necessary conditions of realism, for someone like Manuel DeLanda, for instance, is indeed a realist even if he replaces unified "objects" with heterogeneous "assemblages" (see DeLanda, 2016; DeLanda and Harman, 2017).

however hold that the ideas put forward by Harman are indeed innovative rather than simply being "wilful misreadings," and that his critique of Derrida is crucial insofar as it provokes a reassessment of the latter's relationship to realism. It is also my contention that the single greatest achievement of Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" lies in its insistence that realism must not simply content itself with proclaiming the radical alterity of a mind-independent world, but must also address the possibility of thinking the workings of such a world independently of the human. I am of the view that Harman's critique of Derrida is cogent insofar as it definitely represents one possible (and well-established) way to read him. Thus, instead of dismissing Harman's critique, I shall seek to provide an alternative reading of Derrida to the one he proposes, and I intend to show that the latter's work contains resources which may be fruitfully employed towards the development of a novel realist project. More specifically, my overall aim in what follows shall be to progressively develop the claim that Derrida's philosophy in actual fact provides the resources for thinking the workings of a real as non-correlated to the human, even if these shall turn out to vary drastically from Harman's – and possibly from Derrida's own self-interpretation. Before proceeding to do so, I must however stress that my reading of Derrida in this work is a consciously selective one, and this is meant in two senses: first, I must underline that I do not plan to offer a holistic analysis of all of Derrida's texts. Rather, I aim to support my reading of the latter by focussing mainly on "early" works such as *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), *Of Grammatology* (1997), *Writing and Difference* (2002), *Positions* (1991b), and *Margins of Philosophy* (1984c), even if I will also draw on some of his later work where relevant. My reasons for doing so are threefold; firstly, because Derrida is almost always read as an anti-realist in relation to these earlier works. Secondly, I want to show that traces of a certain realist analysis of Derrida can be deduced from the very beginning of his thought. Thirdly, I have chosen such works because I do not want to focus on the "ethico-political" concerns present most explicitly in his later work.[122] Furthermore, my reading is also selective in the second sense that I shall not seek to lay claim to having the final word on Derrida's true intentions (if

[122] There is a question as to whether Derrida's later concerns depart drastically from those of his earlier ones. It may definitely be argued that there is a difference or shift in concern, but that nonetheless his meditations on issues related to politics and ethics can already be inferred from his earlier works. See for instance Derrida, 2005b, p. 39; Derrida, 2019, p. 11.

that is even possible). Nor do I wish to claim that a proper reading of Derrida would reveal him to have been a staunch realist all along or an "object-oriented" thinker *avant la lettre*. Instead, I will show how some of Derrida's ideas can be read in such a way as to show that a speculative form of realist ontology can be *inferred* from his work. In the current and following chapters, I shall therefore seek to extrapolate the implications of Derrida's thought for realism in relation to Harman's critique.

In keeping with this aim, in this chapter I shall proceed to specifically analyse Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics in light of the realism/anti-realism debate more generally, and Harman's qualms with Derrida more specifically. As Timothy Morton points out (see also Section 4.5 above), new realisms such as those of Harman seek to rework phenomenology 'within a post-Derridean thinking,' with the latter being understood specifically in terms of a *furtherance* of Derrida's critical evaluation of the "metaphysics of presence" (2012, p. 235). Nevertheless, I have already shown above that Harman reads Derrida's articulation of, and path beyond, the "metaphysics of presence" as decidedly anti-realist in its scope and persuasion. In this chapter, I aim to offer an alternative assessment to that of Harman by showing that Derrida's critique of metaphysics in the first instance entails a "negative" realist claim, in the sense that it tacitly involves the commitment to the view that the real *is not* characterised by presence broadly conceived. In order to do so, I shall proceed as follows; I will first provide a context for my analysis of the thinker by offering an overview of some of the more prominent realist and anti-realist readings of Derrida, so that I can later situate my work in relation to such characterisations (Section 7.1). In following, I shall analyse what Derrida means by the terms "metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism" (Section 7.2). I shall then proceed to examine his critique or "deconstruction" of metaphysics (Section 7.3), before finally evaluating the implications of what has been discussed for Harman's critique of Derrida, as well as the latter's views on what the real is not (Section 7.4).

7.1: Realist and Anti-Realist Interpretations of Derrida

It would be possible to note at the outset that situating Derrida's work in the context of the realist/anti-realist debate has not been his primary preoccupation, despite his efforts to distance himself from extensive "anti-realist" characterisations of his

work (see for instance Derrida, 1984a, p. 123; 1990, pp. 136, 148; 2005a, p. 96; Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, p. 76). Such attempts have however done little to dissuade a large number of thinkers from reading his philosophy as clearly situated on the side of anti-realism and idealism. One need not look too far for examples of such statements; for instance, William P. Alston – like Harman – claims that Derrida endorses a variant of "linguistic idealism" (2002, p. 14), while Hilary Putnam holds that for Derrida the very idea of a mind-independent reality is untenable (1992, p. 108). One of the most extensive representative anti-realist readings of Derrida to date has arguably been provided by Lee Braver in *A Thing of this World* (2007). In this influential work, the author claims that Derrida equates the critique of the "metaphysics of presence" with the rejection of realism pure and simple (2007, pp. 434-442), and that the now infamous Derridean slogan that "there is nothing outside the text" amounts to the affirmation that 'we cannot get outside thoughts, systems, [or] ideas' (2007, p. 443). Braver concedes that this does not amount to a pure "subjective idealism" on Derrida's part, since the latter does not deny that something *might* exist beyond language (2007, p. 446-447). He nevertheless claims that Derrida negates the *mind-independence* claim of realism through the assertion that what we presume to be "reality" is ultimately both constitutionally and representationally dependent on "signs" (2007, p. 450. See also Chapter 1). In short, and even if Braver does not use the term, it is clear that he reads Derrida as a *strong* correlationist. As I have shown above, while this form of correlationism does not deny that the real might exist, it nevertheless claims that there is no way to *know* or even *think* it (see Chapter 2).[123] In essence, most anti-realist interpretations of Derrida rest on the assumption that – for better or for worse – his thought traps us in an endless sea of linguistic signs, where there is nothing left for us to do but dive in.

In contrast to such interpretations, there are also thinkers who read Derrida as a realist of sorts. For instance, Peter Gratton claims that Derrida seeks to use his specific reading of texts in order to develop a model of *real time*, namely a form of temporality that is not correlated to the human (2013; 2014, pp. 10, 201-216). I am

[123] Harman agrees with this specific characterisation of Derrida, as is clear both from his critique of the latter outlined above as well as from the explicit claims made in his review of Braver's book (Harman, 2008a).

of the view that such a reading is fruitful to the extent that it does not simply characterise Derrida's work as a wholesale idealism, but nevertheless contend that it is too limited. While I agree with Gratton on the crucial role of time in Derrida's philosophy, I also hold that it also does not suffice to argue that he is committed to a realism of time, for it assumes too narrow a definition of realism – at least if considered in light of what has been outlined above (see Chapters 1 and 2), as well as the criticism of Derrida put forward by Harman. Furthermore, Timothy Mooney (1999a) has also characterised Derrida as an "empirical realist." While interesting, this account nevertheless tethers "realism" to a positive account of *experience* in Derrida's work rather than the *ontological* question related to the existence of an independent reality. For this reason, it falls beyond the scope and aims of the current work.

To my knowledge, the most sustained *explicit*[124] analyses of Derrida's realism have arguably been provided by John D. Caputo, Michael Marder, and Christopher Norris. Caputo (2002; 2009) – accurately, in my view – rejects the idea that Derrida's work immerses us in a linguistic iron cage (2002, p. 38; 2009, pp. 51, 67, 68-69), and instead interprets the latter as a "*hyper*-realist." The prefix "hyper" may in turn be said to perform two tasks; first, it emphasises that Derrida departs from classical essentialist theories of substance and truth which emphasise an unmediated congruence between thought and Being (2002, pp. 42, 49, 50-51; 2009, pp. 51, 62).[125] Secondly, he nevertheless also claims that the prefix highlights Derrida's commitment to the absolute 'transcendence of the other' whose 'alterity is constituted by excess' (2002, pp. 48-49), even if such an "alterity" need not be human or even alive (2009, pp. 52, 59, 60-61). On his reading, Derrida endeavours to keep the singularity of the other inaccessible (2002, pp. 41, 45, 46, 55-56) as something which '*surpasses my horizons*, that even *shocks* or *traumatizes me*, that

[124] It is worth noting that there are thinkers who seem to push their interpretations of Derrida in the direction of (speculative) realism. For instance, John Caputo claims that Martin Hägglund reads Derrida as a 'kind of proto-Speculative Realist' (2014, 476-477). Nevertheless, I have not considered Hägglund's work in this specific section, and this is for two reasons; first, to my knowledge, the latter has never characterised Derrida as a realist, let alone a "Speculative Realist." Second, against Caputo's reading, Hägglund has repeatedly argued that Derrida must be understood as advancing a *logic* rather than an *ontology* or a *realism* (Hägglund, 2008; 2011a, p. 265; 2011b, p. 135; 2016, pp. 38-39; Hägglund and King, 2011, pp. 61-62).

[125] In passing, it is worth noting that Harman's specific theory of substance does not entail the inference that there is an unmediated access to reality. See Chapter 4 above.

overtakes and brings me up against what is *not* me, what is *otherwise* than me' (2002, p. 48, emphasis modified). Caputo's interpretation of Derrida is interesting insofar as it does not characterise the latter's work as a mere linguistic idealism or social constructionism. Nevertheless, by characterising the real as something that "resists," "shocks," or "traumatizes" the *human*, it ultimately provides little more than what Harman would rightly call a 'realism of the remainder' (2020b, p. 45). This is insofar as it defines the Derridean "real" solely as a negative residue exceeding our grasp, and thereby stops short of developing a more positive account of how entities which constitute the real interact with each other independently of humans (see Harman, 2020a, p. 12, 167; 2020b, pp. 29-30). For this reason, in the chapters that follow I shall seek to supplement Caputo's reading with such an account.

Another detailed realist interpretation of Derrida has been provided by Michael Marder (2008; 2009). In his work *The Event of the Thing: Derrida's Post-Deconstructive Realism* (2009), he boldly claims that Derrida's entire *oeuvre* is dominated by a noticeable interest in the notion of the "thing" (2009, p. xv). The elaboration and analysis of this claim is thorough and would require a lengthier treatment than the one possible within the confines of the current work. For the purposes of the current section, it would suffice to note that Marder's overall interpretation hinges on the idea that Derrida's notion of the thing is unlike 'any of the tradition's realisms' (2009, p. 135)[126] insofar as it subverts both the 'pre-Kantian innocent illusion of objectivity' (2009, pp. xii, 135-136) as well as the Kantian insistence on the thing as a transcendent "otherworldly" noumenon (2008, p. 51; 2009, pp. 19, 136). Instead, he argues that Derrida's 'thing 'is' a fold effectuated and inhabited by *différance* […] which lets it abide in its non-identity and otherness to itself' (2009, p. 17). This "différantial" nature of thing is what allows for its 'impossible arrival' (2009, p. 4), that is, its resistance to and excess beyond '*my intentional grasp*' (2008, p. 52, emphasis added). Furthermore, Marder claims that Derrida's "post-deconstructive realism" entails that the 'non-identity [of the thing] with itself renders it interchangeable with any other thing and with the other of the

[126] Throughout the book, Marder does not explicitly outline what he understands "traditional realism" to entail. Nevertheless, judging by the overall content of the book, it would be sensible to assume that he takes such realisms to be committed to (a) "naïve" or direct realism (b) the thesis of mind-independence (c) the principle of identity and non-contradiction.

thing (the athing)' (2008, p. 58. See also Marder, 2009). Marder's view of "differentially constituted" things shall inform my analysis of Derrida throughout the coming chapters. Nevertheless, I have three specific points of contention with Marder's realist reading of Derrida; first, he characterises the Derridean thing as an 'absolute alterity' (2008, p. 58; 2009, p. 104) and thus, like Caputo, remains limited to the consideration of things in their excess beyond the *human grasp alone*. Second, as shall be evident from my analysis below, I disagree with his claim that a "non-identical" notion of the thing implies that "every thing is interchangeable with any other thing." Instead, I shall argue that Derrida's philosophy leaves room for the thought of singular and irreducible existents (see especially Chapter 10). Third, as Christopher Stokes (2010, p. 114) points out, Marder reads Derrida solely on the latter's own terms, thereby stopping short of situating his ideas in relation to the work of other thinkers such as the "Speculative Realists." It is precisely such shortcomings that I seek to address and respond to in the pages that follow.

Christopher Norris has also done much to dispel anti-realist readings of Derrida. His interpretation is often aimed against thinkers such as Richard Rorty, who see Derrida as a playful post-modern rhetorician out to dispense with the philosophical categories such as those of "reality" and "truth" (1987; 1992). Against such interpretations, Norris insists that 'there is no excuse for the sloppy misreading of Derrida that represents him as some kind of transcendental solipsist who believes that nothing really 'exists outside the written text' (1987, p. 142). Norris instead insists that Derrida ought to be read as a realist, both in relation to truth and the existence of the external world. With regards to the former, Norris argues that Derrida does not dismiss a *certain understanding*[127] of truth (2014, p. 23). Rather, his work seeks to 'discover the anomalies, aporias, logical dilemmas, or hitherto unlooked-for complications of sense that an orthodox approach has expelled to the margins of commentary or beyond.' (2014, p. 26). For Norris, such an endeavour cannot proceed without the prior epistemically realist 'commitment to the classical requirements of bivalent logic right up to the stage where that logic confronts an insuperable block to its continued application or a textual aporia that

[127] This qualifier is necessary since Norris concedes that Derrida mainly critiques "logocentric" or representationalist models of truth conceived in terms of an unmediated access to Reality (2014, p. 29).

cannot be resolved by any means at its disposal' (2014 p. 26). In short, rather than dismissing truth *tout court*, Norris sees Derrida as pushing the limits of 'conceptual and logical precision' (2014, p. 28) in order to develop a new yet unorthodox logic (2014, pp. 34, 37. See also my discussion in the following chapters).[128] With regards to the existence of an external world, Norris emphasises that Derrida has never denied its existence (1987, p. 147). He further argues that the latter is to be read as a 'transcendental realist'[129] who '[maintains] the vital distinction between ontological and epistemological issues' (1997, p. 86). Furthermore, Norris (2007, pp. 290-291) points out that Derrida resituates the meaning of "realism" in such a way that it comes to be understood in terms of the '*ethical* challenge' provoked by the openness towards a 'radical alterity (that of the other *person*)' which 'intrinsically exceeds, eludes or transcends our habituated modes of perception and knowledge' (2007, p. 291, 290).[130] I am again sympathetic to Norris's rejection of "post-modern rhetorician" characterisations of Derrida, and I also concur with his insistence that the latter's work exhibits a certain rigor and logic. I am however of the view that the "ethical" re-definition of realism which Norris attributes to Derrida cannot be accomplished without deforming the meaning of the term in such a way that it ultimately becomes too far removed from what I would normally consider "realism" to entail, namely the commitment to the existence of an independent reality whose workings can at least be thought (see Chapter 1 above).

Given the above readings, it is clear that there seem to be two main lines of thought in thinkers who have to date explicitly analysed Derrida's work in relation to the realism/anti-realism debate. On the one hand, anti-realist interpreters of Derrida tend to characterise his work in terms of "linguistic idealism." According to such thinkers, Derrida is of the view that there is a primary correlation between human and world, and that both are in turn simply effects of language. On the other hand, those who read Derrida as a realist often read him in terms of a "realism of

[128] For a rigorous critique of Norris's claims regarding Derrida's account of truth, see Shain, 2018.
[129] Norris here uses the term "transcendental realism" in the sense used in the "Critical Realism" of Roy Bhaskar. As Wight points out, this kind of realism is committed to three fundamental principles; first, is an "ontological realism" which insists on the independent existence of the objects of a certain discourse from said discourse. Second, such a realism is committed to "epistemological relativism" which insists that epistemological claims are not absolute, but rather contingent upon specific contexts. Finally, there is the commitment to "judgement rationalism" which argues for the possibility of judging between superior and inferior accounts (2007, p. 202-203).
[130] For Derrida's response to Norris's interpretation, see Derrida, 2005a, p. 96.

the Other," where the "Real" is something that is excessive and perpetually suspended. In so doing, they leave Derrida with no way to speak of the world in the absence of humans. In the chapters that follow, my aim is to offer an alternative interpretation to such characterisations (Chapters 7-9), and I shall frame this reading in relation to Harman's critique of Derrida (Chapter 10). Against anti-realist readings of Derrida such as the one put forward by Harman, I shall claim that a (speculative) realism can in fact be derived from the former's thinking, even if this shall turn out to be a specific form which differs from standard "naïve" or "direct" forms of realism. Furthermore, against the negative "realism of the Other" interpretation, I shall also show that his work can be construed as offering a more "positive" take on the status of the real (see Chapters 8-9). By the end of this analysis, I hope to persuade the reader that Derrida's philosophy offers more than both a "linguistic idealism" and a negative realism of "alterity" and "excess." More specifically, I aim to show that Derrida's work can be read as implicitly proposing a unique yet unconventional form of *Speculative Realism* without lapsing into a pseudo-realism of "alterity" or "excess."

7.2: Evaluating Derrida's Critique of Metaphysics

Having assessed a representative sample of realist and anti-realist readings of Derrida, the current section shall consider the latter's valuation of metaphysics so as to then frame it in light of the realism/anti-realism debate. In his seminal work entitled *Of Grammatology* (1997), Derrida asserts that 'the history of metaphysics is the history of a determination of *being as presence*' and that 'its adventure *merges* with that of *logocentrism'* (1997, p. 97, emphasis added). This claim in turn indicates that he essentially – yet not exclusively – associates the theme of "metaphysics" with two interrelated notions, namely "the metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism." On my reading, the fact that Derrida describes the relation between the two in terms of the latter "merging" with the former suggests that the two notions are at once both entwined yet also separable. Nevertheless, these two are often treated as synonymous. Against such an assumption, in this section I shall argue that the two are both related and distinct, and that the term "metaphysics of presence" may be read as having broader implications which are necessary for my specific reading of Derrida. In view of this, in this section I shall consider Derrida's assessment of the two terms in order to later assess them in light of realism.

7.2.1: The Metaphysics of Presence

In spite of the complex differences between Heidegger and Derrida, it may be noted from the outset that Derrida builds on Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as "ontotheology"[131] when he characterises the history of Western philosophy in terms of what he dubs the "metaphysics of presence." The latter expression refers to the way in which this tradition has from its outset been characterised by an unwavering desire to determine Being itself (2002, p. 353) as well as the '*meaning* of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word' (1997, p. 12, emphasis modified). That is to say, the history of metaphysics for Derrida consists in the sustained attempt to determine an absolute "centre" or fixed foundation which would in turn provide a fundamental source of stability on the basis of which "reality" can be mastered and contained (2002, p. 353). In this way, the entire history of Western metaphysics is said to have essentially (mis)represented that which may be *really* said to be as *present* broadly understood (Derrida, 1997, p. 12; 1984d, p. 47; Flax, 1990, p. 196)

In following, it is important to note that "presence" in the sense used throughout Derrida's works may be conceived in terms of two inextricably intertwined fundamental registers. First, presence may be grasped in a specifically *spatial* sense. Throughout his works, Derrida consistently critiques philosophical positions which characterise being in terms of *immediate* and *unmediated* proximity to oneself or another, as well as in the (related) sense of occupying an undivided and fixed origin or point (*inter alia* Derrida, 1973; 2002). This meaning of presence is in turn interwoven with a further second sense. More crucially for the task of the present work, presence may also be cognised in the *temporal* sense of calling upon the *now*, namely a singular moment in time. As I have already argued above (see Section 4.5), Harman understates the temporal aspect inherent in Heidegger and

[131] Throughout his work, Heidegger describes Western metaphysics as 'both ontology and theology' or "onto-theo-logy" (2002, p. 54). On the one hand, metaphysics is an *ontology* to the extent that it attempts to identify the most basic kind of being (Heidegger, 2002, p. 70). On the other hand, metaphysics is also a *theology* to the extent that it attempts to give an account 'of the totality of beings as such' by explaining their being in terms of a 'supreme, all-founding being' (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 70-71). Like Derrida, Heidegger sees such thinking as essentially problematic due to its *foundationalist* desire to master, predict, and control Being, thereby reducing it to a fully *present*, a-temporal, and unalterable origin which can be grasped in its totality by a self-present reflecting consciousness (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 70-71; 2008, pp. 312, 316-317).

Derrida's critique of presence.[132] Contrastingly, I hold that this temporal dimension is crucial to their specific critical evaluation of metaphysics. To elaborate, in *Being and Time* (2000), Heidegger emphasises that ontotheological thinking erroneously comprehends 'entities […] in their Being as 'presence'', and therefore understands them 'with regard to a definite mode of time—the '*Present*'' (2000, p. 47). After citing Heidegger approvingly on this point (see Derrida, 1984d, p. 31), Derrida argues that the whole history of Western metaphysics has always granted unequivocal privilege to the present (1984b, p. 16; 1984d, p. 34; 1997, p. 19), and always sought to determine that which is not present as subordinated to a modality of the present. In other words, that which has now passed (the "past") is understood as that which is *no longer present*, while that which is still to come (the "future") is ultimately that which is *not yet present* (1984d, pp. 34, 60). Thus, if Derrida seeks to "deconstruct" the metaphysics of presence, and if the latter is understood in relation to the temporal mode of the present then, as I shall show below (see Chapters 8 and 9), it follows that Derrida's critique of traditional metaphysics necessarily – yet not exclusively – entails the critique of the temporal present; as Levi Bryant points out, much of Derrida's critique of presence 'revolves around the nature of time and what must be the case for succession to occur' (2014, p. 72).[133]

This twofold understanding of presence may also be understood to entail further implications. Following Simon Skempton (2010, pp. 5-8), it may be noted that Derrida often qualifies the term "presence" with at least three other closely related terms such as fullness, simplicity and substantiality or (self-)identity.[134] His critical evaluation of presence thus implies the critique of some being which is unadulterated, complete, self-sufficient and exclusive in the specific sense of ring fencing – and thereby excluding or effacing – anything which is supposedly other

[132] Relative to this, it must be noted that I have also already argued above that Harman's specific critique of presence, as well as his account of objects and change, does not in fact require real time (see Section 6.1.2).

[133] In this context, it ought to be noted that Derrida insists that the concept of time has always *necessarily* been associated with the temporal *present*. Thus, since his thinking of "time" seeks to move 'beyond the determination of Being as presence,' it therefore 'cannot be a question of something that still could be called *time*.' (1984, p. 60). I shall develop these claims in chapter 8 below.

[134] On "fullness" see for instance Derrida, 1997, pp. 8, 40, 71. On "simplicity" see Derrida, 1997, pp. 66-67. On the notion of "substance" see Derrida 1984d, pp. 33, 40; 1997, p. 12. It is worth noting that Skempton's point here is also iterated by Simon Morgan, who points out that 'in Derrida's writing […] presence is the watchword for a thinking which remains invested in the idea of the self-identity, self-continuity, or self-sufficiency of a being' (2010, p. 103).

than itself. In other words, it includes the critique of some existing being which is objectively present, self-identical and defined by its proper essence and identity (Derrida, 1997, pp. 68-69, 70; 1984b, p. 24).[135] It may be noted in passing that there is a strong relation between the notion of identity and the temporal sense of presence outlined above. As Martin Hägglund points out, the metaphysics of presence essentially subsumes 'time under a nontemporal presence in order to secure the philosophical logic of identity' (2008, p.16). In other words, the definition of a being in terms of self-identity can only be accomplished as well as grasped if it is fixed and thereby immune from the passage of time (see Chapters 8 and 9 below).

What has been noted up to this point may be reinforced by making recourse to examples drawn from Derrida himself. Throughout his works, Derrida cites the following ways in which the metaphysical tradition sought to found and determine Being in terms presence: the self-presence of a self-certain conscious subject (1973; 1997, pp. 12, 97), objectivity in the form of ideality or "eidos" (1973, pp. 53, 99; 1997, p. 97; 2002, p. 353), presence as an ultimate and fixed "transcendental signified" or (more generally) God (1997, p. 71; 2002, p. 353), the determination of some entity as present in the *here* and *now* (1997, p. 12), and presence as self-identical substance (*ousia*), essence (1997, p. 12; 1984d, pp. 33, 40), or form (1984c, pp. 158, 172). As may be noted, all such examples are instances of the broader determination of Being as presence in all the senses described above. Relative to this, it may be recalled that, contrary to Derrida, Harman defends a *particular version* of the notions of substantiality, essence and self-identity, and he also claims that Derrida's denial of the latter implies a staunch "linguistic idealism" which denies mind-independent reality *tout court*. While I agree with Harman that Derrida rejects identity as a remnant of the metaphysics of presence, I nevertheless disagree that this entails anti-realism and I shall have occasion to show why this is the case below.

[135] One may rightly object with the claim that Derrida's critique of identity and propriety often takes the form of a specific critique of *subjectivity*, and the 'deconstruction of presence *accomplishes itself* through the deconstruction of *consciousness'* (1997, p. 70, emphasis added). This is true enough. Yet I see no reason to restrict such a critique exclusively to consciousness and subjectivity, especially because Derrida ultimately sees the latter as one specific expression of a more *general* historical characterisation of Being as presence (see Derrida, 1997, p. 12; 2002, p. 353).

7.2.2: Logocentrism

As I have shown, Derrida argues that the metaphysics of presence consists in the elevation of presence, and in the determination of Being as such in terms of presence. Additionally, he argues that metaphysical thinking also grasps the latter as a fully present foundation which can – at least in principle – be represented *immediately*[136] by way of the *logos*. Understood etymologically, this ancient Greek term translates directly to "word," but nevertheless also carries with it a vast array of interrelated connotations which include terms such as thought, account, reason, or logic. It thus may be taken to refer to the idea of the Truth about Being *itself*, and the latter – like the *logos* – is in turn understood to be fully present, fixed, and eternal (Derrida, 1997, p. 3). One can therefore interpret this as the fundamental reason for Derrida's description of the metaphysics of presence as "*merging*" with what he calls "*logo*centrism" (1997, p. 97), a label used by Derrida to emphasise the way in which the tradition accords centrality to the *logos* as a privileged way of accessing reality. For Derrida, Western metaphysics is also essentially equivalent to the 'epoch of the logos' (1997, p. 12).

The two terms "metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism" are often treated as synonymous, yet I propose that they can also be read as being related to the extent that they support one another, but ultimately distinguishable to the extent that the former is broader than the latter in its scope. To elaborate, the two are correlated to the extent that they can be described as mutually reinforcing one another; because the metaphysical tradition understands whatever may be said to be as present (and hence fixed), it assumes that language, reason, thought and so forth is at least in principle able to exhaustively portray it. This assumption, in Derrida's view, is in turn said to '[*support*] the determination of the being of the entity as presence' in the broad sense described above (1997, p. 12, emphasis added). In addition, I am also of the view that the two expressions may be differentiated as follows: the "metaphysics of presence" may be construed as referring *broadly* to the equation of Being with presence. It is my contention that this can in turn can be understood *ontologically* in terms of some fixed self-identical being or *epistemically* in terms of presence to a reflecting consciousness.

[136] The term "immediate" may here be understood both in the spatial sense of "unmediated" and in the temporal sense of the "immediacy" of the present.

"Logocentrism," on the other hand, can be read more *narrowly* as emphasising the special role of the *logos* – i.e. of reason, speech, and logic – in the apprehension of a present Being, and with the attempt reduce the latter to what is immediately presented to a self-present consciousness in the present moment in time. This last claim requires further elaboration.

In its drive to deliver the real in its entirety to thought, Western metaphysics[137] *qua* logocentrism has, from its very inception,[138] attempted to organise thinking in terms of a stable logic of binary opposites such as those of presence/absence, speech/writing, inside/outside, one/many, natural/artificial, original/copy, literal/metaphorical, real/imaginary and human/animal. Nevertheless, Derrida also points out that this sort of thinking is not simply innocuous, but rather structured in terms of a "logic of exclusion,"[139] and a 'hierarchical axiology' (1990, p. 93) or 'order of subordination' (1990, p. 21): first, logocentric thinking assumes that the meaning of one of the terms in any of the aforementioned dichotomies automatically excludes the other. For instance, in the case of the presence/absence dichotomy, if something is (present) then it must by default omit what it is not (absence). Second, the first term in each of the dualisms just listed is privileged over its opposite due to its presumed proximity to the values generally associated with presence in the sense described above.[140] In his seminal text *Limited Inc.*, Derrida therefore summarises this mode of thinking in terms of

> the enterprise of returning "strategically," ideally, to an origin or to a "priority" held to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others, it is *the* metaphysical exigency, that which has been most constant, most profound and most potent. (1990, p. 93)

[137] By "Western metaphysics," Derrida does not simply mean the specialised branch of philosophy. Rather, he is of the view that this form of logocentric thinking also pervades our everyday language and thought. See Derrida, 1981b, p. 19.

[138] Derrida sees this thinking as one which pervades Western thought in general ever since its inception through Plato's distinction between essence and existence.

[139] As Gary Gutting points out, this "logic of exclusion" depends on the classical logical principles of identity (A=A) and non-contradiction (it is not the case that something is both A and not-A) (2001, p. 293).

[140] The values I refer to here are those of unity, self-identity and identity more generally, spatio-temporal presence, and so forth. In short, all the values pertaining to the broad sense of presence described in the previous section.

Derrida's argument here may be better illustrated using the opposition between speech and writing, especially since he views this specific dichotomy to be a 'particularly revelatory *symptom*' of a *more general* and *pervasive* metaphysical reliance on presence (1981b, p. 7, emphasis added). I must nevertheless emphasise that this illustration shall remain somewhat partial in view of the fact that I shall discuss this matter in greater detail throughout the course of Chapter 8 below. Derrida claims that logocentrism is closely allied to what he calls "phonocentrism" (see for instance 1997; 1981b),[141] a mode of thinking which privileges speech and voice (*phonè*) due to its 'absolute proximity' to *presence*, namely to reality or "being itself," as well as to the 'meaning of being' and the 'ideality of meaning' (1997, p. 12). He argues that philosophers as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Saussure, and Austin have unavoidably[142] portrayed speech as that which is closest to what Derrida calls the "transcendental signified," determined throughout the tradition in terms of 'sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing' (1997, p. 11). Writing, on the other hand, is seen by the tradition as the excluded "other" of speech, a mere ancillary or "supplementary" imitation of the latter based on the *absence* of the thing, the speaker, and their intentions or thoughts.

In view of the example just recited, one may follow Lee Braver in asserting that "phonocentrism" – like "metaphysics" (understood in a Derridean sense) more generally – provides an orthodox dogmatic '*realist* explanation of the transcendental conditions for the possibility of meaning' (2007, p. 436): it begins with the assumption that there is, prior to language, a fixed and determinate (i.e. a "self-present") reality. Speech is then accorded exceptional prestige in its capacity to bring its object into direct presence, while writing is seen as derivative due to its status as a mere external imitation of speech (see Braver, 2007, pp. 436-437; Derrida, 1981a, p. 191). It may then be deduced that Derrida critiques the "naïve"

[141] In the translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak suggests that both logocentrism and phonocentrism are related to 'centrism itself', namely the 'human desire to posit a "central" presence at beginning and end' (Spivak in Derrida, 1997, p. lxviii). Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that, for Derrida, "logocentrism" is specifically present in the Greek and European traditions, while "phonocentrism" is more global (Derrida, 1984a, p. 115).

[142] I stress this word in order to emphasise that for Derrida this privilege accorded to speech corresponds to the tradition's (at times implicit or unconscious) reliance on metaphysical thinking (see Derrida, 1997, p. 7).

realist account of language according to which meaning functions by having words (or "signifiers") directly correspond to a pre-determined fixed object or "transcendental signified" broadly understood (1981b, pp. 64-65). Contrastingly, and as I shall develop in the subsequent chapter, for Derrida meaning operates by means of a complex open system composed of a weave of differentially constituted strata which he often refers to as the "text."[143] The latter is in turn said to constitute the *sine qua non* condition for any possible experience including that of the "real" (1997, p. 266), hence his now (in)famous claim that '*there is nothing outside the text*' (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) (1997, p. 158). Many – Harman included (2008a, pp. 208-209; 2018b, p. 49) – have understood this as a frank admission of "linguistic idealism" and concomitantly "correlationism" on Derrida's part. Nevertheless, I hold that this claim sustains more than one possible interpretation, one of which is the following: while it may certainly be understood to entail the critique of the assumption that language can directly and transparently access some self-present reality (Derrida, 1981b, pp. 64-65; Gratton, 2013, pp. 85-86), Derrida often emphasises that he does not take the term "text" to mean "language" in a narrow sense. He claims that 'the concept of text or of context which guides me embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history […]: as I understand it […], the text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference—to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other' (1990, p. 137).

In other words, Derrida's claim can be understood to mean that 'there is nothing outside the *context*' (1990, p. 136, emphasis added), with the latter *including* reference to reality, the world and so forth. This in turn suggests that, for Derrida, it is possible to make claims about the world, whilst also bearing in mind that such assertions are unavoidably provisional and context-dependent, and hence necessarily subject to alteration (1984a, p. 123; 1990, p. 136-137. See also Caputo, 2009, pp. 68-69; Preiser, Cilliers, and Human, 2013). Their various differences notwithstanding, Derrida's claims may here be understood to roughly *corroborate*

[143] A critic might reply that I am here falling prey to Harman's assessment of Derrida by focusing on issues of meaning or "language." However, my account of Derrida below shall not in fact be limited to questions of meaning. Instead, I seek to show that the position that Derrida unfolds in relation to systems of "signs" can be expanded to questions of realism (see especially Chapters 8-9).

Harman's general *rejection* of naïve epistemic realism and "all-or-nothing" claims to knowledge, as well as his emphasis on fallibilism and the mediational nature of "experience." Relative to such observations, the question of how Derrida's claims above stand in relation to Harman's critique of the latter must however still be further explored, as I shall do in Section 7.4 below.

7.3: Deconstruction and the "Closure" of Metaphysics

As I have shown above, Derrida critiques metaphysics for its emphasis on presence, and for its binary thinking which essentially operates on the basis of a powerful logic of exclusion. Nevertheless, he also insistently asserts that the above described "metaphysical" thinking (in his specific sense of the term) is inescapably inscribed within the very fibres of Western thought, and that it would therefore be impossible to simply do away with the implicit logocentric thinking inherent within its texts and language more generally (1981b, pp. 19, 24; 2002, p. 354). In other words, for Derrida there cannot therefore be a *direct* 'transgression' or 'simple landing into a beyond of metaphysics' (1981b, p. 12), since every purported move beyond such language must necessarily be effectuated *through* language, which in turn necessarily (if implicitly) carries with it the very "metaphysical" presuppositions one is attempting to do away with (1997, p. 158; 1981b, p. 12; 2002, p. 93). It is for this reason that Derrida prefers to speak of the "closure" (*clôture*) of metaphysics rather than its "end" (1984a, p. 111. See also Heidegger, 2008), and is also the reason for his scepticism about what he describes as Heidegger's "nostalgic" attempt to retrieve a pre-Platonic non-ontotheological discourse (See Derrida, 1981b, pp. 10-11; 1984a, p. 110; 1984b, p. 26; 1997, p. 22; 2002, pp. 354-356). In light of this, Derrida therefore insists that

> there is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (2002, p. 354)

As a result, Derrida stresses that he does not wish to simply abandon metaphysics, and that it is not even possible to do so given what has been just claimed (1981b, p. 6. See also Gratton, 2014, p. 208). Instead of an outright rejection, he therefore proposes a "reinscription" and "displacement" of metaphysical concepts in order to gradually produce new modified ways of thinking (1981b, p. 24). For Derrida, the interrogation of metaphysics and its reliance on presence would thus have to

proceed *through* metaphysics – rather than occurring *in spite of* it – via what may be cautiously described as a "strategy" he dubs "deconstruction."

It is worth noting that "deconstruction" is a notoriously difficult term to pin down, not least because Derrida states that it is not a "proper name" with a fixed essence which subsists independently of the particular contexts in which it appears (1990, p. 141; 1991, pp. 270, 272, 275). For this reason, it can never be exhaustively specified. Yet in spite of this, and in the first instance, he does provide clues on how deconstruction is *not* to be understood. For instance, he claims that it 'is not a method' or an "-ism", in the sense that it does not offer a strict methodology or formula that one applies 'from the outside' onto a given text (Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 9. See also Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, p. 4; Derrida, 1991, p. 273; 1999, p. 65). He also asserts that deconstruction is neither a form of relativism, nor is it destructive or nihilistic (1984a, p. 124; 1990, p. 146; 1995, p. 212; 1999, pp. 77, 78; 2007, p. 271), but is rather a way of paying special attention to the 'implications' and 'historical sedimentations' inherent within language (2007, p. 271). In other words, it seeks to expose how a particular textual '"ensemble" was constituted and to reconstruct it to this end' (1991, p. 272). These "negative" statements shall be further explicated in a moment in light of Derrida's more "positive" claims on deconstruction. For in spite of his reservations about the possibility of positively defining the term, there are also instances where Derrida asserts that there exist 'general rules' or 'procedures' of deconstruction, even if he also warns that such rules are 'taken up in a text which is each time a unique element and which does not let itself be turned totally into a method' (1995, p. 200). More specifically, he describes the latter as involving a "double gesture" or "double science" (1981a, pp. 4-6; 1981b, pp. 6, 41-42, 59, p. 329; 1990, p. 21).

He describes the first "gesture" as one of *overturning*. As I have already specified above (Section 7.2.2), Derrida claims that the texts – and, more broadly, the language – of Western thought are organised in terms of a "violent hierarchy" of oppositions in which one term is privileged over another due to its perceived proximity to the values of presence (1981b, p. 41). In the first instance, deconstruction is an *immanent* critique in that it intervenes within a specific text in order to show how its structure is predicated upon such an oppositional hierarchy (see Derrida, 1984a, pp. 111-113, 116). It seeks to expose, by means of the

particular text itself, how this supposed hierarchical order is necessarily unjustifiable and thus betrays itself in spite of the author's explicit intentions. In other words, it aims to uncover a strain between what an author explicitly says and what his text implicitly uncovers (1997, p. 158), in order to expose 'the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity' within a given text (Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 9). Derrida claims that such tensions are already inevitably present within a specific text, hence the reason why he insists that deconstruction is not a method but rather somewhat more like an "event" or that 'which happens and which happens *inside'* a given text (Derrida, 1995b, p. 17, emphasis added. See also Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 9). The uncovering of such tensions in turn leads to a reversal or "overturning" of the oppositional order in which the supposedly privileged pole of a given opposition is in fact shown to achieve its value from its supposedly excluded other (1981b, p. 41).

Nevertheless, Derrida is also careful to emphasise that deconstruction does not stop at overturning oppositions, for this would amount to a "neutralisation" which would in fact still function within the confines of the either/or binary structure which deconstruction sets out to question (1981b, p. 41; 1981a, p. 6). For this reason, Derrida argues that deconstruction's second "gesture" is one of *displacement*. More specifically, deconstruction *concurrently* also brings into force 'a new "concept" […] that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime' (1981b, p. 42). He underscores that the latter is not to be thought of as a simple "synthesis" of a previous opposition. Rather, this new "aconceptual concept"[144] is said to 'inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganising it, *without ever* constituting a third term' (1981b, p. 43), thereby resisting being "reappropriated" into the deconstructed opposition (1981b, p. 59).

A more specific illustration of Derrida's deconstructive "double gesture" shall be provided in the following chapter. In view of the above, and in keeping with the scope of the current chapter, it may be noted that deconstruction is "parasitic" on texts in that it operates *within* the structure of a particular

[144] In *Limited Inc.* (1990), Derrida describes this new "concept" as an 'aconceptual concept' insofar as it is 'heterogeneous to the philosophical concept of the concept, a "concept" that marks both the possibility and the limit of all idealization and hence of all conceptualization' (1990, p. 118). In view of the limits imposed by the scope of the current section, Derrida's reasons for such claims shall be clarified in Chapter 8 below.

philosophical text. Yet this fact does not entail that Derrida is simply producing "textual critiques" as Harman suggests, or that his work merely remains within the boundaries of the text being deconstructed. For in fact, he describes the deconstructive "double gesture" of overturning and displacement as involving both *a historical reading* of a specific text and a *speculative gesture* respectively (Derrida in Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, pp. 65-66). Derrida readily states that every form of 'radical critique' such as deconstruction must in the last instance also be 'motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not' (1984a, p. 118). Thus, deconstruction operates within the "tension" between a reading of the history of philosophy which seeks to remain faithful to 'the preservation of something that has been given to us' and the simultaneous speculative gesture which seeks to uncover 'heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break' (Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 6). Thus, following Kevin Hart, it would be possible to argue that Derrida contests the metaphysical reliance on presence 'by attending closely to those places where a text differs from itself, yielding glimpses of alternate ways of viewing [or *thinking*] *reality* than those afforded by the tradition that has dominated the west in one way or another' (2015, p. 33). Such a claim in turn gives rise to the question of whether this *speculative* gesture can be interpreted as a unique form of *realism*. In Chapter 9, I shall have occasion to show that my specific yet admittedly unconventional response to such a query is in the positive, even if Derrida's form of "Speculative Realism" shall turn out to oppose Harman's in many ways (see Chapter 10). With all of the above in view, the time has come to more explicitly situate the above-described Derridean "deconstruction" of metaphysics in relation to the realist/anti-realist debate.

7.4: Evaluation: The Critique of Metaphysics in light of Realism

Having discussed Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics at some length, the aim of the current section is to focus on its assessment in light of the realism/anti-realism debate. In view of this objective, it is worth reminding the reader that this work understands "realism" to entail the following: first, the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality and, second, the view that the workings of the latter are at least *thinkable* as non-correlated to human access (see especially Chapters 1 and 2 above). As has already been argued, Harman claims that Derrida denies both these theses, thereby emphasising the latter's alleged anti-realism. Such an

interpretation is undeniably widespread, and is upheld by a significant number of proponents and detractors of Derrida.[145] In what follows, I shall however develop the claim that Derrida's critique of metaphysics just outlined in fact allows for alternative readings to the one proposed by Harman.

In following, and as I have already briefly stated above, it is most certainly true that Derrida's critique of metaphysics entails the questioning of a "direct" or "naïve" form of realism. This is due to the fact that the latter is seen as reducing the real to what can be grasped by our concepts and categories, thereby excluding that which does not fit into such narrow schemas (see Shakespeare, 2009, pp. 155-156; Wight, 2007, p. 204). In this respect, Derrida is right to expresses caution about interpretations of the real as the attribute of something 'objective, present, sense-able or intelligible' (2005a, p. 96), and to insist on the fact that the 'thing itself' perpetually escapes our grasp (1973, p. 104; 1997, p. 266). In my view, such claims can be fruitfully compared to Harman's rejection of the various ways in which thinkers have attempted to reduce the real to presence.[146] Yet I have already shown that Harman would deny this similarity, claiming that Derrida's critique of metaphysics masks a "linguisticism" or "linguistic idealism" which "overmines" the real into an endless sea of signs. On this reading, Derrida therefore rejects the possibility of thinking the real because he effectively denies that the latter exists altogether, thereby allegedly conflating the *epistemic* and *ontological* claims of realism (see especially Chapter 1 and Sections 3.3, 4.5, and 6.5).

Nevertheless, I hold that such a reading admits of alternative interpretations, not least if one considers Derrida's own self-description regarding "linguistic idealist" interpretations of his own work. For instance, he laments the fact that deconstruction – and, more specifically, the statement that "there is nothing outside the text" – has often been understood to entail that there is nothing but language, and that the latter constitutes a perpetual prison house from which escape is strictly impossible. On the contrary, he claims that the deconstruction of "logocentrism" is

[145] To cite just two representative examples, Rene Wellek claims that Derrida traps us in 'a prison house of language that has no relation to reality' (1983, p. 2), while Andrew Cortens laments Derrida's 'simply crazy' putative assertion that we '*make* the world(s!) we inhabit by adopting this or that mode of description' (2002, p. 54).

[146] I am here referring to his rejection of "mining" philosophies (Chapter 3), the critique of "philosophies of human access" (Chapter 2), and to his emphasis on finitude (Chapter 4).

effectively directed *against* the "linguistic idealist" assumption that it is possible to reduce everything to language (1984a, p. 123; Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, p. 76). Understood in this manner, the critique of "logocentrism" may in fact then be interpreted to constitute a 'search for the "other" and the "other of language"' (Derrida, 1984a, p. 123). Thus, Derrida asserts that 'the deconstruction of logocentrism and linguisticism […] have always come forward *in the name of the real*, of the irreducible reality of the real' (2005a, p. 96). In other words, and as Caputo affirms, deconstruction does not reduce the 'world to words without reference,' but rather actively seeks to affirm 'the irreducible alterity of the world we are trying to construe' (Caputo in Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 52). If one assents to the claims being made here, as I do, it would then be possible to state that at the heart of Derrida's critique of logocentrism lies not the "overmining" of a mind-independent reality, but the *epistemic* critique of the idea that the latter can be reduced to presence, whether this is understood in terms of the self-presence of a thing or its presence to consciousness (see Norris, 1987, p. 18). What Derrida effectively denies is the possibility of *directly* representing the real (Flax, 1990, p. 196; Keller, 2002a, pp. 17-19), since the attempt to do so necessarily reduces the latter 'to what can be present to consciousness and hence becomes its equivalent' (Flax, 1990, p. 196. See also Wight, 2007, p. 204). Thus, if Michele Marsonet is right to claim that realism's primary target is the 'anthropocentric stance which identifies reality with our (limited) knowledge of it' (2012, p. 32), then Derrida may very well be understood as propagating this form of realism. His position here concerning the nature of the real in itself also further entails the unambiguous rejection of a correlationist form of "overmining" which attempts to make the real commensurate with (human) forms of access.

Crucially, a critic of this specific reading might nevertheless counter that the commitment to the "real" as the "other" of language might still leave Derrida open to the charge of "*strong* correlationism" or "*weak* access" philosophy.[147] It might be recalled that such positions do not rely on the explicit denial of a mind-independent reality. On the contrary, they often do postulate some undefined "excess" beyond human access, and nonetheless insist that it is impossible to *know*

[147] Both Meillassoux and Harman classify Derrida as a "strong correlationist" and "weak access" philosopher respectively (see Chapter 2).

or even *think* it as non-correlated (see Chapter 2). Thus, an anti-correlationist or anti-access philosopher such as Harman might still claim that the postulation of an "other" beyond human access ultimately does nothing to absolve Derrida of *strong* correlationism, for the latter still remains committed to the claim that language, texts, and so forth constitute an *inescapable* correlate.

Against this possible critique, I would however advance the following rejoinder: it is most certainly the case that Derrida *begins* by accepting the *weak* correlationist thesis that our access is inevitably mediational in nature (see Chapter 2). This claim may in turn be understood to resonate nicely with Harman's notion that all modalities of human relation are always (already) "translations."[148] In other words, *like* Harman, Derrida accepts and emphasises the thesis of finitude according to which the real cannot be *directly* and exhaustively known.[149] Contrary to Harman's views on Derrida, I however hold that even if the latter's philosophy is *premised* on the acceptance of finitude, this does not in itself commit Derrida – any more than it does Harman – to the *strong* correlationist inference that *thinking* the workings of a real independently of human access is strictly impossible, and far less to the idealist conclusion that there is literally nothing beyond language. To be sure, I recognise that Derrida seeks to overcome the traditions of metaphysics and ontology due to their reliance on presence.[150] Bar a few exceptions,[151] many have concurred with Harman's assumption that since Derrida equates classical metaphysics and ontology with presence, and since Derrida critiques presence, there can therefore be no place for them in Derrida's thinking. Nevertheless, and despite Derrida's own possible self-interpretation on the matter, the question must necessarily still arise as to whether his work might offer an alternative realist ontological or metaphysical positions which allow for the *thought* of a *non-correlated real* which is not characterised by presence. My response to this query

[148] For a rich discussion of the "translational" in Harman and Derrida, see Shakespeare, 2014, pp. 87-88.
[149] As I have shown in Chapter 4 above, Harman generalises the thesis of finitude at the level of inter-objective relations. In Chapter 10, I shall claim that Derrida also generalises finitude, but that the latter's form of generalisation shall turn out to be different to Harman's.
[150] Like Heidegger, Derrida holds that the "*ontos*" has, throughout the history of the West, been determined in terms of presence. Furthermore, like Levinas, he is also of the view that traditional ontology relies on presence to the extent that it favours the Same over the Other.
[151] For examples of thinkers whose work is more open to ontological or metaphysical interpretations of Derrida's thought, see, for instance Bracken, 2002; Flax, 1990; O'Connor, 2011; Wight, 2007.

is in the positive. More precisely, I do not wish to portray Derrida's whole *oeuvre* as characterised by the explicit intent to directly formulate a new realist ontology as Harman's is. Rather, I want to show that his philosophy is not antithetical to a realist characterisation insofar as his critique of the metaphysical tradition outlined above may be read as harbouring implicit yet powerful consequences for a specific realist ontology. This claim requires further justification.

As I have already shown above, Derrida critiques the idea of "presence" understood in the *epistemological* sense of having language act as a transparent mirror of the world. Many – Harman included – only recognise this dimension of such critiques and often frame the issue of the "metaphysics of presence" exclusively in relation to issues of language. Nevertheless, I hold that this can also be interpreted in terms of broader ontic and ontological concerns. In view of my discussion above, and following Kevin Hart (2015, p. 32-33), it would be possible to claim that Derrida's critique of metaphysics also brings together the critique of another two senses of "presence": first, there is the *ontic* sense of some entity's fixed presence in space and time. Second, there is the *ontological* sense which includes the characterisation of Being as indifferently present. Thus, if Derrida sets out to deconstruct "metaphysics" for its reliance on presence, and if presence is to be understood in the threefold sense just outlined, it then follows that Derrida's deconstruction includes the critique of all these three senses of presence. More specifically, I am of the view that Derrida's critique of logocentrism comprises the critique of the epistemological sense of presence, while the critique of the metaphysics of presence can by understood to comprise broader ontic and ontological critiques of presence.

Stated as precisely as possible, I therefore disagree with Harman's claim that Derrida's work only offers an epistemic critique of presence which as a consequence "overmines" the totality of what we call reality into language. Rather, I hold that his critique of metaphysics may be understood to take effect at both the epistemological and ontological levels. I would then hold that Derrida may be interpreted as displaying a distinctive interest in ontological issues (see Flax, 1990, pp. 188-196; Wight, 2007, pp. 204-206), and this is to the extent that his critique of metaphysics subtly harbours a powerful albeit "negative" ontological claim that *Being* is itself irreducible to presence, while *beings* are irreducible to self-present

entities fixed in space and time. I am here using the term "negative" in the same sense in which I use it in the case of Harman's negative theses (see Chapter 3). In other words, I am claiming that Derrida's critique of traditional metaphysics outlined above entails an implicit description of what the real *is not*, namely self-present and defined by fixed essences or identities. Relative to this, it is worth noting that Harman accuses Derrida of conflating identity with realism and denying both. While I concur with Harman that Derrida denies self-identity and essentialism, I nevertheless disagree that a staunch anti-realism necessarily follows from this and shall explain this claim in more detail throughout the course of the forthcoming chapters.

7.5: Conclusion

Harman accuses Derrida of propagating a form of "linguistic idealism" which "overmines" the real into language. Furthermore, he also claims that Derrida's denial of self-identity and essences entails the rejection of an independent reality. Contrary to Harman's reading, I have however advanced the claim that Derrida's deconstructive critique of traditional metaphysics may also be interpreted to implicitly contain the "negative" *realist* thesis that the real is *not* present, whether *in and of itself* or to *direct knowledge* and representation.[152] Furthermore, I am of the view that these "negative" ontological claims are best understood in relation to what I see as his more "positive" views on the nature of the real. As I will show below, the latter is related to what I shall characterise as Derrida's *speculative* endeavour to *indirectly* "invoke" or "evoke" a 'real that is not a subset of the human' (Wight, 2007, p. 206. See also Flax, 1990, pp. 195-196). With this in view, in the next chapter I seek to develop the claim that Derrida can be read as (tacitly) constructing a form of "positive" yet non-classical metaphysics grounded[153] in

[152] Nevertheless, I do not wish to claim that Derrida sees the real as purely *absent* either, for this would turn out to be 'an other presence' which simply lies elsewhere (Derrida, 1984d, p. 38). For this reason, and as shall be specified in the following chapter, what I interpret to be Derrida's "positive" claims on the real shall necessarily entail the complication of the binary opposition between presence and absence, rather than simply holding that the real is *absent* as Harman does (see Chapter 4).

[153] I here follow Catherine Keller in differentiating the notion of a "ground" from that of a "foundation." As she points out, the latter amounts to the idea of a fixed and self-present bedrock critiqued by Derrida. On the other hand, the former can be read more fluidly as an attempt to hint at a non-correlated real without turning 'the dense ecology of that which precedes and supports us into a substructure, substratum, and substance' (Keller, 2002b, p. 68).

difference. Furthermore, my specific account shall be innovative in that I shall frame such a view in relation to Harman's work and his critique of Derrida.

Chapter 8: Derrida and the Real I: On the Development of the Différantial Trace

In the previous chapter, I have argued that the Derridean deconstruction of metaphysics affords more than the fairly prevalent "linguistic idealist" reading advanced by thinkers such as Harman, insofar as his work may be read as advancing the claim that the real is itself *not* fundamentally characterised by presence broadly understood. Furthermore, in a seminal early essay entitled "Différance" (1984b), Derrida asserts that this metaphysical 'determination of Being as presence or as beingness […] is interrogated by the thought of [what he dubs] *différance*,' which he in turn relates to other soon to be discussed cognate terms such as the "*trace*," and "*arche-writing*" (1984b, p. 21). In this chapter and the next, I shall progressively develop my claim that such terms are *expandable* well beyond the concerns related to language and signification within which they are habitually framed. More specifically, I shall further challenge Harman's reading of Derrida as an anti-realist by arguing that the latter's development of such "aconceptual concepts" (see Chapter 7) may be read as an attempt to evoke a more "positive" *speculative* account of the real alluded to towards the end of the previous chapter.

It may then be noted that Derrida first discovers and develops the notions of *différance* and cognate supplemental terms through a deconstructive reading of Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure.[154] For this reason, in sections 8.1 and 8.2 I shall focus on Derrida's deconstruction of these two thinkers as largely presented in his seminal texts entitled *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), and in the first part of *Of Grammatology* (1997) respectively. In this context, it is worth emphasising that my specific aim in these sections shall not be to engage in an extensive exegetical consideration, nor will I contemplate the question of whether Derrida's specific reading of these thinkers is correct. Instead, I shall seek to use such a reading in order to tease out Derrida's *broader claims* related to the aforementioned "aconceptual concepts" in order to then show – in the forthcoming chapter – that they can be expanded towards a fruitful and powerful realist analysis

[154] These concepts also appear sporadically in *Writing and Difference* (2002), which was published in tandem with the works dealing with Husserl and Saussure. I however focus on these two thinkers since I am of the view that their deconstruction provides the most explicit formulation of the development of these notions, as well as offering a typical iteration of the deconstructive "strategy."

of the thinker's early work. I must also further point out that my treatment of Derrida here shall be narrower in its scope than that of Harman,[155] and my reasons for doing so are twofold: in the first instance, I have chosen to work on these two specific texts since it is through them that Derrida first explicitly develops a series of "concepts" and strategies which would then go on to form the cornerstone of his entire *oeuvre*. In the second instance, it is these two particular texts – and especially *Of Grammatology* – that are often framed as advancing a "linguistic idealism." While I concede that, at first glance, these works do *seem* to be limited exclusively to issues related to "signs," I also hold that Derrida focuses on these matters because he believes them to be a 'particularly revelatory symptom' of metaphysics *more generally* (1981b, p. 7). Thus, in this chapter and the next, I shall progressively seek to further develop my case against "linguistic idealist" readings of these texts by showing that Derrida does in fact *begin* by explicitly analysing issues pertaining to writing, language, and difference, but always as a *means toward* gaining broader access to issues related to metaphysics (see O'Connor, 2011, p. 4), as well as to his own positive take on a *non-correlated real*, even if he often does so implicitly.

In Section 8.3, I will then proceed to briefly summarise the main thrust of my account of Derrida presented throughout this chapter in preparation for the forthcoming chapter, which shall in turn discuss and develop my claim that Derrida's work may be read – possibly against his own explicit self-interpretation – as a novel form of *Speculative Realism*. With all this in view, two further caveats must however be introduced at the outset; first, I must iterate that in this chapter and the next, I shall not advance the claim that his *express* intent has always been to formulate a new form of (speculative) realism. Rather, in what follows I shall locate *traces* of a Derridean *non-correlated real* which I believe to be contained within his aforementioned early works. Second, in these chapters I shall also not be primarily concerned with whether my analysis reflects Derrida's final intentions, and this is for two reasons; first, Derrida himself insists that one must think *beyond him* in order to fruitfully understand him (1998, p. 57). Second, I follow Martin McQuillan when he claims that 'the future of deconstruction lies in the ability of its

[155] I felt that this was necessary due to the fact that Harman's work is not as widely read or understood as that of Derrida, and thus a more holistic approach would be necessary in order to get at the specifics of his position.

practitioners to mobilise the tropes of Derrida's texts into new spaces and creative readings' (McQuillan in Kirby, 2016, p. 48). This "creative displacement" of Derrida's work is precisely what I intend to develop in what follows.

8.1: Deconstructing Husserl: On the Trace, Difference, and Time

Derrida discovers and develops *différance* and other related "aconceptual concepts" through a deconstructive reading of Edmund Husserl in an early text entitled *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), first published in 1967 in tandem with *Of Grammatology* (1997) and *Writing and Difference* (2002). This specific text shall feature as the primary focus of the present section. I must however restate at the outset that I shall here neither be concerned with the correctness of Derrida's overall evaluation of Husserl, nor will I tackle his early analyses of the thinker as a whole,[156] as this would fall beyond the scope of the present chapter. Instead, my objective is to focus on certain elements of this specific work in order to highlight their implications for the specific realist reading of Derrida I am proposing.

It may then be recalled that Husserl's phenomenological project rests on the attempt to setup an indubitable foundation for philosophy by "putting out of play" or "suspending" (*epoché*) all speculation regarding the *real* empirical self and the transcendent *reality* of the world in order to focus on the *ideal* essence (*eidos*) of an intentional object as given in direct experience (*evidenz*). In view of this brief account, and in spite of his denigration of the realism/idealism dispute (Husserl, 1969, p. 12),[157] one may discern a twofold idealist inclination in Husserl; first, he veers towards idealism to the extent that he brackets the real in favour of the ideal. Second, his foundationalism is setup through a focus on the essence or *ideal* structures of consciousness and its corresponding objects (the "noetic-noematic correlate"). Such are also the reasons why Derrida ultimately regards Husserl as the most 'most modern, vigilant, and critical form' of "metaphysics of presence"

[156] It may be noted that the ideas found in *Speech and Phenomena* can be detected in germ in Derrida's early "pre-deconstructive" works such as *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (2003b) and his Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* (1978), as well as in his essays "Form and Meaning" (in Derrida, 1973) and "'Genesis and Structure' in Phenomenology" (in Derrida, 2002). Nevertheless, my decision to focus specifically on this work is justified by the fact that it is in it that he first *explicitly* develops notions such as *différance*, *trace*, *supplement*, and *arche-writing*, together with the strategies which are associated with "deconstruction."

[157] As I have already claimed in Chapter 5 above, Husserl's "*epoché*" sought to move beyond the realism/idealism dispute. In spite of his own attempt to sidestep this issue, I nevertheless concur with both Derrida and Harman that Husserl ultimately veers towards idealism.

(1981b, p. 5). This is insofar as he attempts to isolate a pure *immanent* realm through which being is made coextensive with its *immediate presence to a self-present consciousness in the present moment* (see Chapter 7).

In *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), Derrida challenges such an idealist endeavour through the deconstruction of Husserl's analysis of "signs" undertaken in the First Investigation of his *Logical Investigations* (2001a). As Derrida emphasises in the introduction to the work in question, he focuses on Husserl's treatment of the sign because it ultimately masks more fundamental *general* metaphysical presuppositions related to presence permeating his entire thought (1973, pp. 3-5), and the Western metaphysical tradition more generally (1973, p. 6. See also Derrida, 1981b, p. 5). Thus, while Derrida *begins* by tackling issues narrowly related to Husserl's treatment of "signs," I also contend that this is in actual fact done with a view to a *more general* analysis which reaches beyond this particular sphere. I shall develop this claim in what follows.

8.1.1: Sign and Presence: On Self-Identity.

In the first volume of the *Logical Investigations* (2001a), Husserl's first investigation – which bears the title of "Expression and Meaning" – opens with a section devoted to a number of "essential distinctions" between *two* kinds of "sign," namely "indications" (*Ausdruck*) and "expressions" (*Anziechen*). An indicative sign, claims Husserl, is essentially *mediational* or *relational* in the sense that that it serves to "motivate" or point a "thinking being" from one *given* or *present* object or state of affairs to another *non-given* or *absent* one (Derrida, 1973, pp. 27-28; Husserl, 2001a, 184). For example, Husserl speaks of how fossils serve to indicate the existence of ancient beings, or how a flag indicates a nation. For reasons which shall become more evident in Section 8.2 below, he also associates indications with *written* marks (2001a, pp. 184).

Contrastively, expressive signs may be described as signs *of* something, insofar as they are directly animated by the *presence* of a speaker's intention to mean (Derrida, 1973, p. 18; Husserl, 2001a, p. 187) and are also linked to a phenomenological 'pre-expressive stratum of lived experience or sense' (Derrida, 1973, p. 19). While Husserl concedes that both expressive and indicative signs produce signification, he nevertheless also claims that only expressive signs are

strictly speaking meaningful since only they express an essential "sense" (*Sinn*) and "meaning" (*Bedeutung*) (Derrida, 1973, pp. 32, 38).[158] Husserl links this meaningfulness of expressive signs to *speech* given its perceived proximity to "living" *intention* (*vouloir-dire*)[159] of a speaker (Husserl, 2001a, p. 187. See also Derrida, 1973, p. 18, 32); speech, for Husserl, is roused by an '*ideality* which does not "exist" *in the world*,' and thus entails the 'effacement of the *sensible body*.' Indicative signs are however limited by the *real* 'body of the sign' as well as 'that which is indicated, [namely] an existence in the world' (Derrida, 1973, pp. 33, 77, emphasis added).

In spite of the presumed association between expression and speech, Husserl nevertheless claims that all communicative discourse is in fact *inexpressive*, and this is for the following three reasons: first, for communication to take place, expressive signs must be employed indicatively in order to *point* a listener to the internal thoughts of the speaker or to some entity or state of affairs in the world, thereby serving what Husserl calls an "intimating function" (2001a, pp. 189-190). Second, there exists an essential *absence* or *finitude* in the case of intersubjective communication, and this is insofar as one's access to another's lived experience can only be grasped in a *mediated* manner through the use of indicative signs. Contrastingly, Husserl claims that one's own internal acts are *immediately present* to them (1973, pp. 34, 39). Finally, communication is indicative to the extent that it requires a speaker to abandon the inner sphere of *ideal* meaning and set forth into the *real* world by virtue of having to communicate with others who have no direct access to the speaker's internal states (1973, p. 38).

All indication is then said to '[take] place whenever the sense-giving act, the animating intention, the living spirituality of meaning-intention, is not fully present' i.e. becomes *mundane* (1973, p. 38). Contrarily, expression entails a 'pure active intention […] of an act of meaning (*bedeuten*) that animates a speech whose

[158] In Husserl's thought, the term "meaning" (*bedeutung*) refers to an ideal "object" to which a specific sign points, while "sense" (*sinn*) refers to a subjective stratum of "pre-expressive" experience. See Cisney, 2014, pp. 72-73.

[159] I here use the term "intention" in the dual sense of "meaning to say" (*vouloir-dire*) and "intentionality" in the sense of "directedness towards an object" (see Chapter 5). For Husserl, one's "meaning to say" is *intentionally* directed at an *ideal* object (*noema*), which in turn subsists in a (*noematic*) "outside" which is not equivalent to "the world." Derrida therefore translates "*Bedeutung*" into "*vouloir-dire*" in order to emphasise that, on his reading, Husserl posits an absolute proximity between thought and speech.

content (*Bedeutung*) is *present* […] *to the self in the life of a present* that has *not yet gone forth from itself into the world, space, nature*' (1973, p. 40, emphasis added). Summarily stated, and in view of the above, one may note that Husserl therefore repeats a longstanding metaphysical prejudice by associating indication with the *real* (or mundane), with absence, and the *finite*, while simultaneously also linking expression to *presence*, (transcendental) "life," and the *ideal*. This in turn may further be said to repeat a "logocentric" prejudice which prioritises the latter at the expense of the former (see Chapter 7 and Section 8.2 below).

In view of the above, Derrida notes that if it were the case that indication and expression were not strictly separable, Husserl's entire undertaking would be compromised, given that his project is premised on the *idealist* endeavour to isolate an *ideal* realm where the subject's relation to the *real* world and to others is suspended (1973, p. 42). Husserl responds to this predicament by conceding that indication *accidentally* contaminates expression in communication. Nevertheless, he also maintains that this fact remains merely external to the *essence* of expression. He therefore seeks out a sphere where the latter is no longer contaminated by indication, and eventually locates such a space in what he calls "solitary mental life" or the "interior monologue":

> As [the] contamination [of expression by indication] is always produced in real colloquy […], we have to ferret out the unshaken purity of expression in a language without communication, in *speech as monologue*, in the completely *muted voice of the "solitary mental life"* (*im einsamen Seelenleben*). By a strange paradox, meaning would isolate the concentrated purity of its *ex-pressiveness* just at that moment when the relation to a *certain outside* is suspended. (Derrida, 1973, p. 22, emphasis modified)

Husserl therefore claims that in what he dubs the "interior monologue" one reaches a realm of *pure* expression, and this is for the following reasons; first, in soliloquy meaning is *immediately* present to intuition, such that there is no longer the need for any indicative mediation. In soliloquy, the subject's relation to the real world and to an other – i.e. to a "certain *outside*"[160] or *absence* – is suspended; one thus only needs to "represent" or "imagine" oneself communicating with themselves in the *immediate* presence of speech (1973, pp. 43-44, 48-49); 'In imagination,' Husserl claims, 'a spoken or printed word *floats before us*, though in *reality it has*

[160] Derrida specifies that this is a "certain outside" because he wants to contrast the transcendent outside of the real world he is referring to here from the outside of the intentional object (*noema*) which, as I have already specified in Chapter 5 above, is in actual fact neither in the world nor in consciousness.

no existence' (2001a, p. 191, emphasis modified).[161] Second, and relatedly, in soliloquy there is no need to indicate anything since the subject is '*immediately present* to [themselves] in the *present instant*' (1973, p. 48, emphasis added). Stated differently, in the interior monologue, mental acts no longer require mediation since there exists an immediate presence of self to self at the "blink of an eye" (*im selben augenblick*) (Derrida, 1973, p. 59; Husserl, 2001a, p. 191), i.e. in the *self-identity of the now or instant*. In the interior monologue, I do not relate to myself as I would to a transcendent other, since my own internal states are *immediately* present to me (1973, pp. 41-42).[162]

It may then be noted that this idea of the punctual instant evokes the two aforementioned senses of the "metaphysics of presence" (see Section 7.2.1); there is a *space of proximity*, i.e. the immediate presence of self to self (self-identity) and to an ideal "object" in soliloquy, which is in turn experienced *temporally* in the *present instant*. It is also worth emphasising that there is, for Derrida, an intrinsic relation between the metaphysical understanding of time, presence, and identity; in sum, what *is* must necessarily be *present* and therefore immune from the passage of time and finitude. Since time entails becoming and otherness, then anything which is self-identical must therefore subordinate time to presence (see Hägglund, 2008; Derrida, 1984d). The thrust of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena* consists in the deconstruction of Husserl's claims on the nature of the "now," and its relation to self-identity. It is my view that this contains important implications for a certain realist reading of Derrida I seek to provide (see Chapter 9), since I shall later show how the latter implicitly generalises the conceptual tools developed through his deconstruction of Husserl into a more positive take on the real. I shall therefore go on to examine Derrida's analysis in more detail.

[161] It should once again be noted that Husserl is here evoking a "logocentric" opposition between reality (namely "indication" or "real communication") and representation (namely "expression" or "represented communication") (see Chapter 7).

[162] For Husserl, communication necessarily involves a relation to others and to a world, which in turn necessitate the mediation through the physical side of the sign and "analogical appresentation." Derrida insists that 'the relation with the other as nonpresence is thus impure expression' (1973, p. 40) and in expression 'the physical event of language there seems absent' (p. 41). It is also worth noting that in "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida praises Husserl's recognition that every transcendent entity – whether human or otherwise – is an 'irreducible alterity' (in Derrida, 2002, p. 155).

8.1.2: On Time, the *Trace*, and *Différance*.

Husserl's association between pure expression and soliloquy relies on the assumption of self-identity, namely a temporal punctual present and a spatial presence of self to self (Derrida, 1973, p. 60). Derrida's deconstructive move will come down to showing that this supposed identity and presence is internally divided by difference (*différance*) and the trace of otherness, which in turn embody the antithesis of presence (1973, p. 61). This deconstruction proceeds by locating an irreducible tension between two claims within Husserl's own work, and it in this manner that Derrida first discovers his seminal notions of *différance* and the *trace*. In order to do so, he turns his attention towards Husserl's analysis of time and the "living present" in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1964). I shall provide a brief summary of Husserl's account before considering Derrida's response.

In this work, Husserl claims that experience consists of a "primal impression" which constitutes the fixed "source-point" or present "now-point" whereby the 'immanent Object [*noema*] begins to be' and towards which a conscious act (*noesis*) is directed (1964, p. 48). Simultaneously however, he also insists that the "lived experience" of change would not be possible if experience were simply rooted in a series of discrete "now-points" (1964, p. 70). This idea is clearly exemplified in his insistence that the experience of an "object" (*noema*) such as a melody, for instance, may only take place if one experiences a *phasing* pattern of *interconnected* notes, rather than a string of disconnected ones. He therefore insists that the "present" is "thicker" than the "now-point" in the sense that it necessarily '[includes] *temporal differences*' which are organised in terms of a tripartite structure of retention, primal impression, and protention (1964, p. 60, emphasis added). To elaborate, Husserl argues that the experience of anything that endures may only take place in relation to the *unthematic* "retention" (or "primary remembrance") of a phase which has just elapsed as well as the "protention*"* (or "primary expectation") of an immediately successive phase. Thus, while any act of perceiving an immanent object begins with the aforementioned "primal impression," the latter is nonetheless subject to a continuous modification into newer phases of the object with older "impressions" being constantly constituted as retentions of previous "now-points":

> every actual now of consciousness […] is subject to the law of modification. The now *changes continuously* from retention to retention. There results, therefore, a stable *continuum* which is such that every subsequent point is a retention for every earlier one […] *Constantly flowing*, the *impressional* consciousness passes over into an ever fresh *retentional* consciousness. (1964, pp. 50-51, emphasis modified)

The aforementioned "primal impression" is thus understood by Husserl only as an '*ideal limit*,' and this in turn implies that there ultimately exists a *continuity* between that which is retained ("retention") and that which is actual ("primary impression") (1964, p. 62). As Hägglund correctly points out, Husserl himself argues that 'the being of any moment' cannot be self-identical since it is ultimately 'nothing but its own becoming past and becoming related to the future' (2008, p. 60). Crucially, and for reasons which shall become apparent below, Husserl claims that retention implies the manner by which a moment just elapsed is *implicitly* still retained within any specific given phase (1964, p. 64). For this reason, he essentially marks a strict distinction between retention and imagination or ordinary recollection ("secondary remembrance"), which in turn involve the active re-presentation (*Repräsentation*) or recollection of an object through memory (see Husserl, 1964, pp. 57, 69-71).[163]

Derrida in turn responds by emphasising what he sees as an irreconcilable tension within Husserl's account just outlined; on the one hand, Husserl challenges the classical metaphysical account of time[164] by admitting to the impossibility of a "pure instant." He does so through the claim that an impression is necessarily bound to a "constantly flowing" *non-perceived*[165] horizon of retentions and protentions (Derrida, 1973, p. 62). Yet on the other hand, he also argues that Husserl's account seeks to ground experience on the basis of 'the self-identity of the now as a [foundational] "source-point"' (1973, p. 61. See also Husserl, 1964, p. 52). Derrida maintains that this prioritisation of the undivided unity of the "now" essentially

[163] As Husserl puts it, in contrast to Brentano, '*primary rememberance* is *perception'* whereas 'recollection, like phantasy, offers us mere presentification' (1964, p. 64).
[164] In "Ousia and Grammē," Derrida repeatedly emphasises that throughout the history of Western thought, time is understood in terms of the *present*, such that the 'past and the future are always determined as past presents or as future presents' (1984d, p. 34). As I shall show below, Derrida responds to this characterisation of time by thinking of the latter as something that is constituted by a fundamental difference (différance) which precludes presence (1997, p. 166).
[165] Husserl calls this retention the 'antithesis of perception' (1964, p. 62). '*perception and non-perception continually* pass over into one another' (1964, p. 62). Temporal objects thus 'spread their content *over an interval of time*' (1964, p. 61).

repeats the aforementioned metaphysical privilege given to presence throughout the history of Western philosophy (1973, pp. 61-64).[166]

For his part, Derrida questions this privileging of the present by turning Husserl's own claims about the nature of time-consciousness just described against himself. In order to explicate this claim, it should be recalled that Husserl maintains that in soliloquy there exists an immediate self-identity and self-presence at the "blink of an eye" (*im selben Augenblick*). Nevertheless, Derrida counters that, by Husserl's own admission, this supposed identity is in fact necessarily subject – and hence strictly tied – to a continuous modification by the structure of retention and protention which in turn acts as the condition of (im)possibility for any supposed "present;" this structure is, to quote Derrida, '*indispensably involved in its possibility*' (1973, p. 64, emphasis added). In light of this, and against Husserl's explicit intent to secure a foundation in the form of presence, Derrida then claims that

> As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, in the zone of primordiality common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into the *blink of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink, and it closes its eye. (1973, p. 65)

In summary, Derrida is here declaring that the retentive-protentive "temporal" structure allows for the admission of that which is non-present into any hypothetical self-identical "moment," since the latter can only possibly come to be and endure on the basis of that which is decidedly other than the supposed purity of the instant, and which in turn precludes its very possibility. As a result, Derrida claims that Husserl's attempted categorical differentiation between retention ("primary memory") and reproduction ("secondary memory") cannot be sustained, given that both are ultimately continuous modalities of "nonperception" (1973, p. 65).

[166] This reliance on presence is made explicit in Husserl's *Ideas I*, where he describes the now-point as a "punctual" '*form that persists through the continuous change of content*' (1969, p. 218). This description of the "now" as an ever-present form which subsists through the continuous change of matter (or "content") in turn recalls the Platonic distinction between form and matter which in turn constitutes, according to Derrida, the inception of the metaphysics of presence.

Crucially for the purposes of the present work, it is in this context that Derrida first introduces his seminal notions of the *trace* and *différance*. I shall thus quote the relevant passage at some length before moving on to its analysis:

> Without reducing the abyss which may indeed separate retention from re-presentation, without hiding the fact that *the problem of their relationship is none other than that of the history of "life" and of life's becoming conscious*, we should be able to say that their common root—*the possibility of re-petition in its most general form*, that is, the constitution of *the trace in the most universal sense*—is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but *must constitute it through the very movement of [différance] it introduces*. Such a *trace* is—if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed—*more primordial than what is phenomenologically primordial.* (1973, p. 67, emphasis modified)

It may thus be noted that Derrida maintains a continuity – rather than identity or contrariety – between recollection ("re-presentation") and retention. Nevertheless, he also claims that their mutual condition of possibility lies in the more "primordial" general structure of "re-petition" which he dubs *the trace*. The latter in turn concomitantly institutes and precludes presence through a "movement" of *différance.*[167] Put another way, Derrida is suggesting that any "present" – be it that of identity or self-presence – can only *endure* through the active *production* of a difference or "spacing" between any purported specific "moment" and the *trace structure* – qua synthesis of "retention" and "protention" – which inscribes that which is other than the "now" within it *a priori* (1973, p. 85). It is for this reason that Derrida employs a metaphor of inscription, namely "protowriting" – or "arche-writing"[168] – to describe the structure of the *trace* and *différance* (1973, p. 85. See also Section 8.2 below). Relative to this, it would be important to make two remarks regarding Derrida's relation to Husserl and Harman respectively. Firstly, it may be noted that Derrida's notion of the *trace* differs from Husserl's notion of "retention" in one important respect; the latter understands "retention" to involve a form of 'becoming-past of what *has been present*' whereas the former argues that the *trace* is itself constituted through another *trace* (and so forth), such that the latter names a '*past* that has *never been present*' (1984b, p. 21, emphasis added). This is due to the fact that a *trace* is, for Derrida, itself constituted through another *trace*, and so forth. For reasons of space, I shall further elaborate on this important point in

[167] Derrida associates the *trace* and *différance* with "time." Nevertheless, since "time" represents 'that which is thought on the basis of Being as presence,' and if *différance* and the *trace* name the antithesis of presence, then the latter no longer belong to 'something that could be called *time*' in its colloquial sense (1984d, p. 60. See also 1997, p. 166).
[168] For an analysis of "arche-" or "proto-writing," refer to Section 8.2 below.

Section 9.2.2 below. Secondly, it may also be noted that this account problematises Harman's claim that Derrida denies self-identity on the basis of his rejection of self-presence, for in fact I hold that the converse is the case. More specifically, and as I have shown, Derrida rejects the possibility of a self-identity on the basis of his notion of the *trace* and *différance*, and it is this fact which in turn *implies* the impossibility of self-presence not the other way around.[169] In Chapter 9 below, I shall claim that Derrida generalises the implications of these ideas beyond the narrow issues of "signs" into a broader take on the nature of the real. These claims are therefore important to the task of the present study, and thus require a deeper analysis of the *trace* and *différance*. In view of the limitations imposed by the current section, I shall however postpone its analysis for Chapter 9 below.

8.1.3: Towards a Realist Reading of *Speech and Phenomena*(?)

In view of the above, I shall now consider what I interpret to be the twofold challenge to idealism which Derrida effectuates in *Speech and Phenomena*. First, he may be said to challenge idealism by arguing that the structure of the *trace* "opens up" any supposed form of presence to that which is other than it, and this fact in turn precludes the possibility of a non-relational, immanent, or "monadic" sphere of "presence" and self-identity (1973, p. 68). As I have shown, Derrida's claim is that "identity" or "presence" is in fact predicated upon an antecedent – and hence *mind-independent* – "*différantial trace*" of a *non-presence* which alters and contaminates it from the outset. In this context, it is worth noting that this is one of the main reasons for Derrida's declaration that any supposed self-presence, self-relation, or "auto-affection"[170] can only come about through mediation, which in turn contaminates any supposed "blink of the eye." For Derrida, the *trace* structure necessarily entails that self-identity – and, by implication, self-presence – can only come about through that which Husserl tries to exclude from the latter, namely difference, time, finitude, absence, and alterity (see Derrida, 1973, Chapter 6). Contrary to Husserl, Derrida therefore insists that self-presence cannot be

[169] It is worth emphasising in passing that Harman in fact *agrees* with Derrida's rejection of self-presence (2009c, p. 32. See also Section 4.3), even if he argues that there is no relation between self-identity and self-presence.

[170] Relative to this, it is worth noting in passing that, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes "auto-affection" as a 'universal structure of experience common to 'all living beings' (1997, p. 165). This in turn hints at the fact that this notion is not to be understood as pertaining exclusively to *human* subjectivity.

predicated on self-identity, since the latter is precluded *a priori* by the structure of the "*différantial trace*" (see Hägglund, 2008, pp. 66-67, 88).

Such assertions, in my view, already contest a specific form of idealism, since Derrida's account of Husserl challenges the claim to an ideal and purely immanent subjective sphere. Nevertheless, in view of the account of realism given above (see Chapters 1 and 2), it may be argued that this would not be enough to fend off "strong correlationist" or "weak access" critiques of the thinker. For this reason, my specific claim is that Derrida also offers a second and more powerful challenge to idealism. To elaborate, in the analysis above I have suggested that the *trace* – and, by implication, *différance* – is constitutive of self-identity in experience, such that it is both antecedent to the latter and acts as the condition of possibility for its emergence (Derrida, 1973, p. 68. See also the block quote cited above). Yet this account might seemingly support Harman's aforementioned characterisation of Derrida as an anti-realist "philosopher of access" or "strong correlationist" who is only interested in issues pertaining to signification and subjectivity. In the remainder of this chapter and the next, I shall however challenge this reading by progressively developing the claim that the account of the *trace* and *différance* just detailed is in fact one particular iteration of a more general speculative thought concerning the structure of the real. I however wish to emphasise that by making such claims I am not in fact suggesting that Derrida believes reality to be subjectivity or experience writ large, for this would certainly qualify as a "correlationist" idealism. Instead, I am maximising Derrida's own assertion that 'all reality has the structure of a *differential trace*' (1990, p. 148), and that the latter is "more primordial than what is phenomenologically primordial," such that subjectivity and experience – due to their being constituted by the "*différantial trace*" – emerge out of this broader anterior (and hence mind-independent) structure. In other words, I claim that Derrida deconstructs Husserl's analysis of experience and "signs" in order to extrapolate the broader workings of the "*différantial trace*" and its fissuring of any identity more generally. In this way, the overall thrust of Derrida's account of Husserl may be said to constitute the de-essentialisation of identity more generally by replacing it with an antecedent "*différantial trace*." I am aware that such claims would require a more thorough analysis of Derrida's relation to realism more specifically, and the "*différantial*

trace" more generally, and I will do just this in Chapter 9 below. I shall however momentarily postpone this examination in order to first consider a further elaboration of these themes in Derrida's reading of Ferdinand de Saussure, where the former's generalisation of the "*différantial trace*" is made more explicit.

8.2: Deconstructing Saussure: On the Nature of (Arche-)Writing

While the previous section dealt with Derrida's reading of Husserl in view of his discovery of the "*différantial trace*," the current section shall focus on Derrida's deconstruction of Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of the "sign," presented in the second chapter – entitled "Linguistics and Grammatology" – of his seminal work *Of Grammatology* (1997), which can in turn be read as a supplement to the account of Husserl analysed above. It may be then stated at the outset that Derrida's assessment of Saussure is as follows: On the one hand, he argues that, like Husserl, Saussure's analysis of the "sign" bears the symptoms of more fundamental metaphysical assumptions through the privileging of speech over writing due to its perceived proximity to self-present meaning and thought (1981b, pp. 19-21; 1997, p. 33-39. See also Section 8.2.1). On the other hand, he claims that Saussure also provides the resources for a rethinking the concept of "writing" in a broader sense (1981b, p. 18; 1997, pp. 29-30).

In what follows, I shall analyse each of these claims in greater detail by focusing on elements of Derrida's reading which are most pertinent to my specific analysis. As with Husserl, I shall here develop the claim that Derrida pursues a seemingly narrow analysis of the Saussurean "sign" with a view towards broader insights related to the nature of *différance* and associated infrastructural terms. Furthermore, I will also show how the latter notions are expandable beyond the confines of a narrow linguistic understanding.

8.2.1: Saussure on Speech and Writing

In his *Course in General Linguistics* (2005), Ferdinand de Saussure sets out to study language in terms of a system of signs (*langue*), rather than focusing on the particular linguistic units (*parole*). He argues that language is essentially a system of signs, and that each sign is composed of a "double-sided unity" of two elements; the "signifier" or "sound-image" and the "signified," namely its corresponding

image or concept (2005, pp. 65-67). I shall have more to say about this shortly. For the moment, it however suffices to note that Saussure reserves this terminology exclusively for verbal signs and not written ones, insisting that the latter should in fact be excluded from the study of linguistic systems (Derrida, 1997, p. 31; Saussure, 2005, pp. 24-25). This is due to the fact that he identifies an alleged "natural bond" or relation of immediacy between the spoken word and the intended (signified) sense. Contrastingly, writing is said to serve an external and unnatural function, namely that of representing a spoken signifier. In spite of this exclusion, Saussure nevertheless also devotes a fair amount of attention to writing in his work (see Derrida, 1997, p. 52). Derrida questions the motivation for such an effort, suggesting that it might be related to the fact that Saussure does not simply regard writing as innocuous. Rather, he deems it as "dangerous," since it is said to *disrupt* the assumed "natural bond" between the spoken word and its signified sense (1997, p. 34). In sum, Saussurean linguistics actively relegates writing to the outside of a structurally closed internal linguistic system (1997, p. 33). In this way, he treats writing in a restricted "empirical" sense – or "phonetic writing" – as the mere "sign of a sign" (Derrida, 1997, pp. 29-31; Saussure, 2005, pp. 24-26); writing is, for him, the (graphic) signifier of a (spoken) signifier, such that it is said to be twice removed from its signified sense (Derrida, 1981a, p. 110).[171]

It would be important to note that, for Derrida, this methodical marginalisation of writing is however not unique to Saussure. Rather, it is said to mask a broader metaphysical prejudice related to presence prevalent throughout the entire philosophical tradition (1997, pp. 33-39). As I have already shown in Chapter 7, Derrida argues that the Western tradition has always strived for foundations in the form of presence. In this case, he repeatedly shows throughout his early works that thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss, Austin, and – as has been shown above – Husserl have consistently characterised speech as being founded on and intimately bound to the immediate self-presence of thought, sense, or even the thing itself (1997, p. 11). As a result, writing is then characterised as 'a body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos' (1997,

[171] One may immediately note that this characterization of writing as the "sign of a sign" is reminiscent of the treatment which Plato accords to writing in the *Phaedrus* (2005). See also Derrida, 1981a.

p. 35).[172] One can thus immediately note that Saussure's assessment of writing – like the rest of the tradition – is premised on a "logocentric" logic of inclusion and exclusion, making use of oppositions such as those of the natural/unnatural, ideal/worldly, life/death, presence/absence and inside/outside (1997, pp. 11-13, 17-18). Following the tradition, Saussure correlates speech with the first of each of these binary terms, and writing with the second (see Chapter 7). In spite of this explicit denigration of writing, Derrida nonetheless also argues that Saussure implicitly provides the resources for the questioning of the metaphysics of presence, and the rethinking of the notion of writing by virtue of two fundamental innovations; the principle of the "arbitrariness of the sign," and that of the differential constitution of meaning. The following section shall analyse these innovations in further detail.

8.2.2: On Difference and *(Arche-)Writing*

It should be noted that Derrida does not attempt to directly oppose or correct each of the aforementioned Saussurean innovations – or Saussure's position more generally – in order to produce an alternative account of "language" (1997, p. 39). Instead, in a typical iteration of his deconstructive "double gesture," he uses Saussure's own ideas against himself in order to first invert the traditional priority of speech over writing, and then produce a new displaced and more expansive understanding of difference and writing (or "arche-writing") which may be understood to mark the condition of possibility for both speech and writing in the narrow sense and beyond. A discussion of the exact status of this "beyond" shall be reserved for Chapter 9.1 below, after presenting a brief account of Saussure's theses in the context of Derrida's deconstruction.

The first of Saussure's innovations is marked by his rejection of "nomenclaturism," namely the idea that a word is simply a label for a pre-existing thing (2005, pp. 65-66). To be sure, he retains a fundamental nomenclaturist assumption when he claims that the linguistic "sign" is a psychological[173] entity

[172] Because the metaphysical tradition has always identified being with presence ("metaphysics of presence"), it has essentially setup a strict logic of inclusion and exclusion in order to secure and enforce its prejudice.
[173] By this Saussure means that a "sign" is something lodged in an individual's head in accordance with the conventional rules within which it is established (Saussure, 2005, p. 66).

comprised of a "unity" between two main elements, namely the signifier and the signified. The former refers to the 'hearer's psychological impression' of a specific sound pattern, rather than the material aspect of the sound itself. The latter in turn denotes the specific concept to which the signifier is attached, and is not to be confused with a "referent" or real thing in the world (2005, p. 66). Nevertheless, Saussure de-substantialises or de-essentialises the sign by maintaining that the relation between a signifier and its signified is "unmotivated" or "arbitrary," meaning that their relation is conventionally established by a community of speakers rather than by some purported natural connection between a sound and its meaning (2005, pp. 68-69. See also Derrida, 1997, p. 44; 1981b, p. 28). For his part, Derrida asserts that this principle of arbitrariness is at odds with Saussure's own claims for the superior status accorded to speech due to immediate relation to a signified meaning (1997, pp. 44-45). Stated differently, he claims that if there is no essential link between a signifier and a signified, then one cannot sustain the claim that speech shares a "natural bond" with meaning. As a result, Derrida asserts that the thesis of arbitrariness 'must forbid a radical distinction between the linguistic and graphic sign' and the relegation of writing 'to the outer darkness of language' (1997, pp. 44, 45). Instead, and for reasons to be detailed shortly, he argues that any system more generally – including language in both its spoken and written form – is more like "writing" understood in a new *displaced* sense.

In following, Derrida notes that Saussure's principle of arbitrariness is further sustained through a second innovation, namely his principle of difference. More specifically, Saussure maintains that the relation between a particular signifier and its signified is arbitrary because the value of a sign is in fact constituted through relations of difference. He is of the view that, at both the level of the signifier and signified, a sign is negatively defined by its differential relation to the other units within the system, in such a way that the presence and "identity" of one element tacitly requires and is predicated by its difference from others (Saussure, 2005, pp. 113, 115, 118). For instance, the value of the signifier "r-a-t" gets its value through relations of difference from "m-a-t," "p-e-t," "c-a-r" *et cetera*. Similarly, the *signified* value of the sign is not constituted by some "cat essence," but is rather defined by its relations of difference to other concepts within a particular field. As may be noted, this differential account of meaning provides a powerful critique of

identity; signs, for Saussure, are not defined by an essence or intrinsic "atomic" substance. Instead, their "identity" is constituted through their embeddedness in an anterior system of differences which simultaneously both acts as the condition of possibility for the former and prohibits its purity.

On the basis of this differential account, Derrida questions Saussure's fundamental difference between the signifier and the signified, claiming that it 'inherently leaves open the possibility of thinking a ["transcendental signified" or] *concept signified in and of itself*, a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to language, that is of a relationship to a system of signifiers' (1981b, p. 19). Instead, he asserts that if one maintains that both the signifier and signified are in fact constituted through a differential system (as Saussure in fact does), then it would follow that the signified is in some sense already 'in the position of a signifier' (1981b, p. 20). This is to the extent that Saussure himself holds that, like signifiers, individual signifieds do not exist *in vacuo*, but are rather constituted through a chain of differences from all other signifieds. Furthermore, Derrida claims that if, by Saussure's own admission, every sign is in fact differentially constituted – i.e. if every (spoken or written) sign is relationally constituted as a "sign of a sign" – then it follows that writing cannot simply be the external representation of speech as Saussure suggests, since both may be said to operate on the basis of an analogous differential system. As a result, Derrida maintains that both speech and writing (in a narrow or "empirical" sense) are themselves grounded in a displaced notion of writing which he calls an "originary writing" or "*arche-writing*" (1997, pp. 43, 46, 52, 56). The latter retains features of the everyday or "vulgar" sense of writing, insofar as it evokes that which has classically been attributed to the latter alone, namely relationality, and the preclusion of immediacy or deferment of presence (1997, p. 56).

Nevertheless, *arche-writing* also cannot be simply equated with "writing" in its "vulgar" or "empirical" sense since it suggests a broader phenomenon which is essentially *other* than both speech and writing, and thus cannot be recuperated in its entirety by "language" in the broadest possible sense. In other words, its traits are exhibited in both speech and writing (narrowly conceived) as a system of "signs," but it is itself anterior to both. More precisely, *arche-writing* names the *differential process* or "spacing" (*espacement*) by virtue of which a specific element

– in this context, a (spoken or written) sign – is constituted through its *difference* from – and, by implication, its *relation* to – that which is *other* than it (1997, pp. 56, 69). In a manner which is reminiscent of the discussion of Husserl above, Derrida is here once again evoking the notion of the *trace* when he claims that the identity of a "present" element is predicated upon the *trace* of other elements which are, to use an infamous Derridean formula, "always already" *inscribed* within each element. It is for this reason that he asserts that the differential process just described 'cannot be thought without *the trace*' (1997, p. 57, emphasis added), thereby marking a close affiliation between *arche-writing* and the notion of the *trace* (1997, pp. 46, 61).[174] Stated as precisely as possible, and in a way that is again reminiscent of the discussion of Husserl above, the *trace* here names the manner in which each specific "present" element within a system cannot exist as a self-identical or "vacuum-sealed" unit, since its supposed "identity" or "presence" is first and foremost predicated on – and hence constituted by – the trace of other "non-present" elements within a specific context. The notion of the *trace* is thus the most general name for 'that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present' (1997, p. 66). In *Positions*, Derrida summarises his thinking as follows:

> The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple [self-identical] element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" […] being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (1981b, p. 26)

Thus, for Derrida, "identity" is instituted – and simultaneously prohibited – via the *a priori* possibility of differences that are both inscribed within the temporal "parts" which constitute a "present" element (as per my discussion of Husserl above) and *between elements* within a specific field or (con)text. This account may also be said to offer another alternative way of interpreting Derrida's notorious assertion that '*there is nothing outside the text*' (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) (1997, p. 158): if the term "text" is here understood to refer to a differential and relational "interweaving"

[174] Derrida emphasises that the *trace* in fact cannot be purely originary, since an origin implies a foundation which is in turn predicated on presence and identity (1997, p. 61). I shall discuss this issue at some length in Chapter 9 below.

of elements, then the claim that there is "nothing outside the text" implies that no element exists as a self-identical unit which subsists independently of a specific differentially constituted spatio-temporal context.[175] Thus, it may be noted that Derrida once again associates this aforementioned "play" or "interweaving" of traces and differences with what he dubs "*différance*" (1997, p. 62); 'the (pure) trace,' claims Derrida, 'is *différance*' (1997, p. 62). The latter in turn names the process or "movement" which is productive of differences. As I shall show in greater detail below, the term displaces the standard notion of difference in order to combine both the notions of (spatial) difference, and that of (temporal) deferral or postponement of presence (1997, p. 66). The latter aspect of *différance* in turn introduces a diachronic element into Saussure's synchronic understanding of differences. As with my analysis of Husserl above, and in view of the scope of the present chapter, I shall here again momentarily reserve the further elaboration of these important notions for Chapter 9 below.

In following, it may then be noted that in *Of Grammatology* (1997), Derrida at times moves from a narrow "linguistic" conception of the terms just discussed to a more general understanding of the *trace* – and, by implication, *différance* and *arche-writing* – which steps beyond the narrow confines of "signs." For instance, Derrida sometimes associates the structure of the "*différantial trace*" – or *arche-writing* – with a more general organisation which '[articulates] the *living upon the non-living in general*' (1997, p. 65, emphasis added), and which is thus responsible for the progressive emergence of more complex living organisms all the way 'up to "consciousness."' He further suggests that this structure is anterior to 'the entity [*étant*],' and that the latter is in fact 'structured according to the diverse possibilities – genetic and structural – of the trace' (1997, pp. 47-48. See also p. 73). While it is certainly the case that Derrida associates the broadest expression of the "*différantial trace*" with the progressive emergence of 'original levels, types, and rhythms' associated with life in general, he also suggests that the latter is only possible on the basis of the anterior structure of the "différantial trace" which allows for the

[175] While this most definitely challenges Harman's claim for a "vacuum-sealed" object, I claim that it also does not amount to the staunch linguistic idealism which the latter attributes to Derrida, since I view these Derridean claims as applying to his broader take on the real (see Chapter 9 below).

progressive emergence of the living from the non-living (1997, pp. 70-71, 84).[176] Such claims in turn seem to imply that the "différantial trace" does not only describe a phenomenon which is constitutive of language, signification and experience more narrowly or "life" more generally, but rather also describes a broader "opaque energy" which accounts for the emergence of all these phenomena (see Derrida, 1997, pp. 65, 70-71, 84). These bold claims in turn require a deeper analysis of the degree to which such notions can be expanded, and the extent to which they can be read as implying a novel form of *realism* on Derrida's part. This shall constitute the task of the subsequent chapter.

8.3: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have begun to deal with the question of Derrida's "positive" take on the real by analysing his discovery and development of notions such as the *trace*, *différance* and *arche-writing*, or what I have sometimes surmised under the name of the "*différantial trace*" – a term which has sporadically been used by Derrida himself. It would here be fruitful to consider the most general thrust of what I have discussed above in relation to the overall aims of this dissertation. In the chapters dealing with Harman's thought (Chapters 3-6), I have argued that the latter's take on the real is premised on unified (or self-identical) and autonomous objects. Contrastingly, in the analysis above I have shown that, through his analysis of Husserl, Derrida develops the claim that self-identity is necessarily fissured by "time" understood in terms the "*différantial trace*" *qua* retentive-protentive structure. Furthermore, Derrida's evaluation of Saussure entails that an element is constituted through its *differences* from other elements within a specific context. Such assertions in turn necessarily lead to the question of how Derrida's analyses of Husserl and Saussure can be synthesised. My response to such a query is as

[176] It would be important to note that Derrida in fact simultaneously maintains a structural continuity between life and non-life, but also argues for an infinite number of specific differences – or "heterogeneous multiplicities" – between emergent living *individuals* or *alterities* (see Derrida, 2008, pp. 31, 89). Furthermore, I also hold that Derrida in fact seems to see the emergence of life as something novel. Nevertheless, this should not be taken to imply that Derrida creates a taxonomical distinction between the living and non-living, since he also argues that the more general structure of the "*différantial trace*" is in fact what characterises everything from the living to the non-living (see Chapter 9). For reasons of space, I am unfortunately unable to further discuss the important question of the "animal" and the relation between the "living" and "non-living" in Derrida's work, but the reader is invited to refer to the following works on this matter: Calarco, 2008, Chapter 4; Derrida, 2008; Iveson, 2017.

follows: for Derrida, the "being" of any element necessarily requires that it be constituted through the process of differential "spacing" (*espacement*) within a context of differences. Nevertheless, this element must not only take up place within a field of differences, but must also endure "in time" through the (differential) temporal structure of the *trace* (see also Chapter 9 below). On the basis of these claims, it is therefore clear that Derrida rejects the possibility any pure and uncontaminated identity, since an "element" within a particular field is always determined by differences rather than a "vacuum-sealed" essence on the part of the "unit" itself. Stated differently, the thrust of Derrida's overall analysis provided above is that identity is predicated on a more general displaced understanding of difference, such that there is nothing outside the context, no "monadic," "atomic" substance or identity in isolation. As I shall show in Chapter 9 below, the preclusion of a pure identity implied by the structure of the "*différantial trace*" entails, for Derrida, the minimal condition for the emergence and becoming of any entity whatsoever.

The claims advanced by Derrida in turn raise three questions which are especially pertinent to the study being undertaken in this work: firstly, what is the precise relation between Derrida's development of these "aconceptual concepts" and the "real," and what would Derrida's notion of the "*différantial trace*" entail in this specific context? Secondly, how do Derrida's general ideas compare and contrast with Harman's "object-oriented" view? Thirdly, is Harman right to conclude that Derrida is a thinker of "language" who "overmines" the real into language? I have already suggested above that my specific answer to the third question is in the negative. Nevertheless, in Chapters 9 and 10 I shall further challenge Harman's anti-realist reading of Derrida by responding to the first and second questions respectively. By answering these queries, I shall in turn be able to offer a specific Derridean-inflected speculative form of deconstructive realism based on the thought of the "*différantial trace*" as the minimal condition for any being. I will now turn to this specific task in my final chapters.

Chapter 9: Derrida and the Real II: On the Expansion of the *Différantial Trace*

In the chapters above, I have suggested that Derrida at times alludes to the *expansion* of the "*différantial trace*" and related "aconceptual concepts" beyond the narrow local instances pertaining to the nature of "signs," "language," or "experience." This possible expansion in turn raises two important questions which are of special relevance to the task of the present study in general, and this chapter more specifically: first, one may venture to ask about the extent to which these "concepts" are expandable; does the "*différantial trace*" – along with other related terms – simply describe more general conditions related to the emergence and nature of human consciousness and experience alone, or can they be understood to describe the conditions of a non-correlated real more broadly? Second, if one subscribes to the latter position, as I do, then what might this non-correlated real look like? The aim and scope of the present chapter is to provide a response to each of these queries. In Section 9.1, I shall challenge Harman's reading of Derrida by showing that the latter's thought can be understood to develop and expand the notion of the "*différantial trace*" towards the speculative thought of a real which is not correlated to human modes of access. In Section 9.2, I shall then delve deeper into the workings of the "*différantial trace*" as a movement of differing and deferring, and I shall show how it may be understood to account for the *real* conditions of possibility for the emergence and endurance of any existent. Finally, in Section 9.3, I shall summarise the thrust of the present chapter in preparation for the forthcoming one dealing explicitly with Derrida's relation to Harman on the question of realism. By the end of this chapter, I will be able to show how Derrida's philosophy is not in fact a form of "strong correlationism" or "linguistic idealism," and that it can, on the contrary, be analysed in terms of a novel and dynamic form of *Speculative Realism.*

9.1: (Quasi-)Transcendental or Speculative?

As I have already suggested above, the current study necessitates that one explicitly asks the question of how Derrida's "*différantial trace*" is to be understood. To begin answering this question, it may be noted that, until recently, Derrida's thought has most often been associated with a general "quasi-transcendental" approach which simultaneously describes and complicates the conditions of possibility for

experience broadly understood.[177] To give just one example, Henry Staten states that 'the trace structure' names 'the *transcendental structure of experience*' and that Derrida uses this notion in order to 'reinterpret the structure of *transcendental consciousness*' (Staten, 1984, p. 53, emphasis added. See also, for instance, Braver, 2007; Doyon, 2014; Gasché, 1986; Lawlor, 2002; Smith, 2003). In this context, I wish to emphasise that I do not deny that aspects of Derrida's work lend themselves to such a (quasi)transcendental interpretation, and recognise that Derrida's work offers ample textual evidence to support such readings. Furthermore, I also concede that the hitherto discussed "aconceptual concepts" may indeed be considered, for Derrida, to entail the conditions of possibility for the emergence of local phenomena such as language, consciousness and subjectivity. While I do not dismiss that this is the case, I nevertheless question whether this is the only range of application of such notions; for if one interprets Derrida's philosophy as being limited to seeking the "real" conditions of consciousness or subjectivity alone, then I claim that Harman would be correct to state that this ultimately amounts to a deflationary – and anthropocentric – view of realism, insofar as it leaves no room for thinking a non-correlated real (see Harman, 2020a, pp. 99-100). It is therefore not surprising that such an interpretation would ultimately license the various "weak access," "linguistic idealist," and "strong correlationist" readings attributed to Derrida.

In recent years, there have however been a relatively smaller yet increasing number of thinkers who have questioned the abovementioned "transcendental" interpretation by reading Derrida's expansion of the "*différantial trace*" in terms of a materialism and/or naturalism, or by supplementing Derrida's insights in the service of these aforementioned interpretations.[178] To cite a few representative

[177] To be sure, and following Catherine Malabou (2014), it may be noted that Derrida is in fact more often understood to "break" with the transcendental, but without "abandoning" it altogether. This is insofar as he simultaneously effectuates a *critique* of the transcendental while also *conserving* aspects of it. Such an interpretation may be illustrated with reference to the description of *différance* as a "*quasi*-transcendental" (Gasché, 1986). Roughly stated, under this interpretation, *différance* is said to account for the possibility of signification and hence experience. Nevertheless, since it not itself exempt from the system, it then follows that it cannot be accorded a transcendental status *tout court.*

[178] For exemplars of the former position, see Goldgaber, 2017; 2018; 2020; Hägglund, 2008; Kirby, 2014; 2016; Roden, 2006. For instances of the latter see, for example, Malabou, 2007; Wolfe, 2010. I am of the view that such are forceful to the extent that they move away from crude idealist readings of Derrida's work. Nevertheless, I do not have the space to challenge each of these readings of

examples one may, for instance, refer to Francesco Vitale's "bio-deconstructive" reading of Derrida as providing '*heuristic model*' through which one could 'interpret *living* phenomena' (Vitale, 2019, pp. 4-5, emphasis added), and Martin Hägglund's influential interpretation of Derrida as providing a logical framework for articulating the formal requirements for what he calls the "archi-materiality" of time (Hägglund, 2008). It is however worth noting that both these thinkers reject ontological or realist readings of Derrida, preferring instead to articulate their claims in terms of an "exploratory *model*" or "general *logic*" respectively (see, *inter alia*, Hägglund, 2011a, p. 265; 2011b, p. 135; Vitale, 2019, pp. 2-4). Most recently, Deborah Goldgaber's *Speculative Grammatology: Deconstruction and the New Materialism* (2020), written concurrently with the present dissertation, makes a strong case for reading Derrida as a staunch critic of correlationism, and a speculative *materialist* in his own right (2020, Chapters 2 and 5 respectively). Her ultimate conclusion that Derrida is not an anti-realist most certainly resonates with my own reading of his work. However, two important differences between Goldgaber's work and my own become conspicuous: first, her work focuses on New Materialism and Meillassoux's critique of correlationism, while my specific reading relates Derrida's work to Harman's specifically. Second, Goldgaber concentrates on Derrida's relation to the *trace* and "arche-writing" by claiming that he generalises the latter into a deconstructive form of *materialism* (2020, pp. 1, 138 and *passim*), while my own analysis below is not tethered to materialism specifically, but to realism more generally.

In following, it may also be noted that in *Derrida: Profanations* (2011), Patrick O'Connor also compellingly moves away from all aforementioned interpretations in order to argue that deconstruction expresses 'the conditions of the eventuation of reality itself' (2011, p. 168). In other words, for O'Connor, Derrida articulates a non-classical '*metaphysical* position' which can nevertheless no longer be understood to be tethered to a classical "metaphysics of presence" (2011, pp. 162).[179] In this context, it would be useful to qualify this claim by referring to

Derrida, nor would such an exercise be fruitful in view of the constraints imposed by the aim and scope of the present study.

[179] O'Connor's claim is also iterated by Joseph A. Bracken, who asserts that Derrida 'is *indirectly* constructing a *new metaphysics*' of becoming which describes the *conditions of possibility* for the emergence of any 'determinate reality' (2002, pp. 99, 96, emphasis added).

Timothy Mooney's distinction between the "classical" form of "metaphysics" with what he calls a non-classical "speculative-pragmatic metaphysics." The former is said to emphasise on elements critiqued by Derrida, namely stasis, self-present substantiality, and presence more generally (see Chapter 7). Inversely, the latter emphasises becoming, relationality, fallibility, and temporality, and thus represents a position which Derrida might very well endorse (Mooney, 1999b, p. 222; see also O'Connor, 2011, p. 162, Stocker, 2006, p. 30). O'Connor certainly seems to have the latter sense of "metaphysics" in mind when he attributes it to Derrida, and I shall also use the term in this specific sense in what follows.

My own evaluation of Derrida shares this non-classical "metaphysical" reading of the thinker. I am also of the view that the various readings briefly outlined above are forceful to the extent that they move away from the aforementioned "(quasi)transcendentalist" readings of Derrida's work. Nevertheless, as shall be evident by the end of this chapter, my specific reading also ultimately differs from all the positions outlined above in at least two ways; first, unlike all the other readings of deconstruction, my specific claim is that Derrida can be read as providing the resources for a novel form of Speculative Realism through the generalisation of the aforementioned "aconceptual concepts" of the *trace* and *différance*, even if this might not be congruent with Derrida's own explicit self-interpretation. Second, unlike all the aforementioned positions, my work shall situate this specific reading of Derrida by bringing it into dialogue with Harman's own specific form of Speculative Realism. While this task shall be reserved for the forthcoming chapter, in the remainder of the present chapter I shall develop the first of these claims further.

I shall then proceed by framing my response to the first claim in relation to Slavoj Žižek's critique of Derrida as a "failed correlationist." Žizek is worth quoting at some length on this specific point when he claims that Derrida's (2012, p. 642n28, emphasis added):[180]

[180] A similar claim is put forward by Leonardo Caffo when he claims that Derrida wavers between an anti-realist, anthropocentric 'human constructivism' and more speculative claims – in *The Animal That Therefore I am* (2008) – regarding the nature of animal experience and their *singular* existence. Like Žižek, Caffo holds these two claims to be inconsistent and mutually exclusive (Caffo, 2014, p. 67). See also Wight, 2007, pp. 206-210.

> thought oscillates in its deconstructive analyses between two poles: on the one hand, he emphasizes that there is *no direct outside (of metaphysics)*, that the very attempt to *directly* break out of the circle of logocentrism has to rely on a metaphysical conceptual frame; on the other hand, he sometimes treats writing and difference as a kind of *general ontological category*, taking about "traces" and "writing" in *nature itself* (genetic codes, etc.)

In other words, Žižek is essentially claiming that Derrida is a self-contradictory (failed) "correlationist," since he illegitimately holds both that it would be impossible to directly break out of the "correlationist circle," and that the notions of the "trace" and "writing" are generalisable beyond the bounds of the "circle." As is clear from what I have argued above, I concur with Žižek's claim that Derrida does in fact suggest that notions of the *trace* and *différance* describe an implicit broader take on the real. I also agree with Žižek when he claims that, for Derrida, there is no *direct* access to the real (see Chapter 7). In short, I therefore recognise this tension in Derrida's work. I however question whether these two claims are in fact as mutually exclusive as one might suppose, and whether upholding both would amount to the "failed correlationism" which Žižek purports it to be. My response is in the negative. More specifically, I hold that Derrida's dual position would qualify as a "failed correlationism" *only if* one assumes – as Žižek tacitly does here – that the critique of correlationism entails the claim to *direct knowledge* of the non-correlated real.[181] Nevertheless, as I have already discussed at some length, Derrida shares Harman's rejection of claims to a possible direct knowledge of the real. Furthermore, unlike Žižek, I do not in fact hold such a position to be inconsistent with a more "speculative" move which allows for the indirect thought of a non-correlated real, for this is precisely – at least in my view – what Derrida (implicitly) and Harman (explicitly) do; the real, for both, is *not knowable* but nevertheless *thinkable*. In view of this, I wish to state my position as precisely as possible by claiming that what Žižek calls a "failed correlationism" in fact turns out to be what I interpret as a Derrida-inflected form of *Speculative Realism*. This claim is crucial to the task of the present dissertation, and thus requires elucidation.

In Chapter 1 above, I argued that the minimal conditions for any positive "realism" would entail the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality, namely a reality that is neither constitutionally nor representationally

[181] It is worth noting that this is the way in which the general critique of correlationism has been framed, hence my insistence on differentiating Meillassoux's position from that of Harman (see Chapter 2 above; Young, 2020).

dependent on the mind, categories, the subject, *Dasein*, and so forth. Furthermore, it would entail that the real is to some extent also thinkable (as non-correlated) even if not necessarily directly knowable. If this working definition of realism is granted, then Derrida's claims most certainly open themselves up to their interpretation in terms of a non-classical "realism." This, I hold, is to the extent that the "*différantial trace*" and other cognate terms seem to describe the broader attempt to *think* the *real minimal conditions* for the emergence and continuity of anything that "is" or may possibly be said to "be" in the broadest sense. It may then be noted that Derrida himself alludes to this more general reading more than once. For reasons of space, it would be impossible to cite each and every one of these instances, which span all the way from his earlier works to the later ones (see Derrida, 1986, pp. 167-168; 1994, p. 40; 1995a, p. 274; 1997, p. 23-24, 47, 65,71-72, 73, 84; 2003b, pp. 87-88; 2008, p. 104). Given the task of this dissertation, it would nevertheless be fruitful to select a couple of illustrative citations and quote Derrida at some length.

To quote one particular representative example, in his dialogue with Maurizio Ferraris in *A Taste for the Secret* (2002), Derrida takes on critics and supporters who, like Harman, assume that his thought is interested in issues solely pertaining to language and "signs." In response to such characterisations, he asserts that

> The first step for me, in the approach to what I proposed to call deconstruction, was a putting into question of the authority of linguistics, of logocentrism. And this, accordingly, was a protest against the 'linguistic turn', which, under the name of structuralism, was already well on its way. The irony – painful at times – of the story is that often, especially in the United States, because I wrote 'il n y a pas de hors-texte' [there is nothing outside the text], because I deployed a thought of the 'trace', some people believed they could interpret this as a thought of language (it is exactly the opposite). Deconstruction was inscribed in the 'linguistic turn', when it was in fact a protest against linguistics! (Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, p. 76)

As is clear from the above, Derrida forcefully asserts that his thought does not seek to reduce everything down to "language" or "signs," and that the notion of the *trace* (like that of the "text" or *différance*) *is not* in fact to be understood as a "thought of language." Nevertheless, a critic such as Harman might respond that this denial on Derrida's part boils down to nothing more than an attempt to fend off charges of "linguistic idealism." I however disagree and, in view of this possible critique, it would be fruitful to consider Derrida's remarks further when he explains that

> I [Derrida] take great interest in questions of language and rhetoric, and I think they deserve enormous consideration; but there is a point where the authority of final jurisdiction is neither rhetorical nor linguistic, nor even discursive. The notion of trace or of text is introduced to mark the limits of the linguistic turn. This is one more reason why I prefer to speak of 'mark' [or trace] rather than of language. In the first place the mark is *not anthropological*; it is *prelinguistic*; it is the possibility of language, and it is *everywhere there is relation to another thing or relation to an other*. For such relations, the mark has *no need for language*. (Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, p. 76, emphasis added. See also Derrida, 2008, p. 104)

In view of the last portion of this citation, it may thus be seen that Derrida views the notion of the *trace* and *différance* – i.e. the "*différantial trace*" – as describing all relations between entities – i.e. between singular "others"[182] – irrespective of whether they are human or non-human, or whether the former is around to observe them. In other words, these notions must be understood to describe the workings of a *non-correlated* real,[183] hence his blatant assertion, in *Limited Inc.* (1990), that '*all reality has the structure of a* [*différantial trace*]' (1990, p. 148, emphasis added).

In my view, an even more forceful example of Derrida's realist expansion of the "*différantial trace*" occurs in his essay "Typewriter Ribbon" (2000), where he describes a newspaper report detailing the fossilized remains of 'two midges immobilized in amber.' Crucially, he goes on to describe both the insects as well as the inanimate amber fossil *themselves* as "archived" *traces* of an event which occurred 'fifty-four million years *before humans appeared on earth*' (2000, p. 130, emphasis added). Such instances, in my view, illustrate Derrida's more general interpretation of the "*différantial trace*" as *mind-independent* and hence *anterior* to the emergence of specific entities more generally, and life – including human life – more specifically.[184] Stated differently, if metaphysics entails the analysis of the way the world "is" rather than what exists, and if "realism" entails the commitment to the existence of an independent reality which is neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on the human, then Derrida's claims here may most

[182] As Martin Hägglund suggests, the "other" is here not to be understood in terms of a 'positive infinity' of an "Other," but rather applies to *every finite entity*, irrespective of whether the latter is 'alive or not' (2011c, pp. 116, 119). Thus, as Caputo points out, even a rock or lamp may be understood as "other" in this sense (2009, pp. 60-61), such that the structure of *différance* may be understood to describe the relation between *all others*, i.e. every singular other. I shall discuss this matter in greater detail below (See Chapter 10).

[183] I shall have occasion to discuss this matter in further detail throughout Chapter 10 below, by explicitly comparing such ideas to Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy."

[184] It is worth noting here that there is some analogy between the temporal structure of the "archi-trace" and Quentin Meillassoux's notion of the "arche-fossil," which he describes as 'a material indicating *traces* of "ancestral" phenomena *anterior even to the emergence of life*' (2008, p. 3, emphasis added). Given that my work deals specifically with Harman's version of Speculative Realism, I shall however not discuss this issue further in the present work.

certainly be interpreted as a form of "metaphysical realism." This claim must however come with two crucial caveats; first, it would be important to place the words "metaphysics," "is," and "be(ing)" in inverted commas (or "under erasure"), in order to emphasise that such terms, for Derrida, necessarily imply "presence," and that the notion of the "*différantial trace*" complicates presence through an emphasis on the processual, relational, and temporal nature of the real. Second, I must emphasise that this form of metaphysics is essentially non-classical "speculative-pragmatic metaphysics" insofar as it emphasises process and does not equate reality with "presence" broadly understood. For this reason, the form of realism being advanced here must necessarily be qualified as a speculative, non-dogmatic form of realism. The latter contrasts with more standard "classical" or "naïve" forms of realism as follows; dogmatic forms of realism uphold the view the reality exists independently of thought, and that one can know it directly. Thus, classical forms of realism entail a logocentric "metaphysics of presence" – or a "correlationism" – insofar as they equate what is real with what is given. Contrastingly, Derrida's speculative move towards the real entails the attempt to think of what a non-correlated real would be like if it were cognised in terms of the "*différantial trace*" (and related terms) rather than "presence."

In view of such claims, it should however be emphasised that Derrida's Speculative Realism does not describe a non-correlated real which simply resists the human as its "other." More specifically, it may be once again recalled that "realism," on my definition, primarily entails the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality. However, while Harman argues that such conditions represent the necessary or *sine qua non* conditions for realism, he is also right to stress that such a position is not sufficient, for any robust realism must also be able to think about interactions between entities when no human (or conscious being more generally) is there to observe them. I concur with Harman's claim here, and I am of the view that Derrida's thought does just this. In view of the scope of the current chapter, a further analysis of this claim shall however be reserved for the forthcoming chapter, where I shall analyse and compare Derrida's "difference-oriented" model of beings and their interactions to Harman's "object-oriented" one.

To summarise my claims above as concisely as possible, I am therefore suggesting – *contra* Harman's specific critique of Derrida as a "strong

correlationist" and linguistic "overminer" – that Derrida's work opens itself up to a *Speculative Realist* reading, and this is to the extent that he uses his deconstructive analyses of "signs" toward a *speculative* thought which develops and expands the notion of the "*différantial trace*" in the service of the *thought* of a *non-correlated real*. If one accedes to my reading of Derrida being advanced here, and if one also takes him for his word when he claims that "reality has the structure of a differential trace," a number of important queries follow; first, one might inquire into the precise nature of the "*différantial trace*." While I have already shown how he develops and expands the latter through a deconstructive reading of Husserl and Saussure's notion of the "sign," I have yet to frame this explicitly in relation to the real more generally, and to the status of individual entities more specifically. Second, one might also ask about the specific ways in which this characterisation of Derrida compares and contrasts with the work of Harman and his critique of deconstruction. The response to each of these queries shall be tackled below and in Chapter 10 respectively.

9.2: On the Différantial Trace

In the first two chapters, I claimed that the necessary condition for a robust form of realism entails the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent (or "non-correlated") real which can at least be thought even if not necessarily known. Within the framework of this definition, I have provided a novel reassessment of Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" based on two pairs of "negative" and "positive" theses of objects, along with an outline of his critique of Derrida as a "strong correlationist" who "overmines" the real into language or "human access." Against this reading of Derrida, I have however claimed that the latter's position may be read in terms of two claims which open themselves up to a possible "Speculative Realist" reading; first, his philosophy contains the implicit "negative" claim that the real is *not* present, whether in and of itself or to direct knowledge (see Chapter 7). Second, I have also argued that, through his readings of Husserl and Saussure, Derrida offers two *local* iterations of a double deconstructive "movement" of reversal and displacement, with the latter serving as a "positive" or affirmative move intended to generate novel ways of thinking about both the real and the relations between entities in the absence of the human (see Sections 7.3 and 7.4). I further claimed that these local iterations originally framed in relation to the

nature of "signs" may be read as a pathway into the broader development of a unique form of "Speculative Realism" defined in terms of the "*différantial trace.*" While I am aware that my reading counters many standard interpretations of the thinker, I also hold that it constitutes one possible, productive – and plausible – reading of Derrida, and that some of his own claims open themselves up to my particular assessment.

If my reading of Derrida is correct, it would then be necessary to inquire more directly into the precise nature of the real if it were to be defined in terms of the "*différantial trace*" rather than "presence." This query shall be the focus of the present section, and I shall here primarily – yet not exclusively – relate the thrust of what has been discussed above to Derrida's seminal essay entitled "Différance" (1984b), where he provides an explicit account of the general workings of this "aconceptual concept," rather than situating it in the context of the deconstruction of a particular text (see 1984b, p. 3). While Derrida here again often refers his analysis to examples borrowed from one particular system, namely that of "signs," this should not be of concern to the task of the present work given what I have argued above regarding the generalisation of such claims.

9.2.1: Differences or Identities?

Through an analysis of Derrida's deconstructive readings of Husserl and Saussure above, I aimed to show how he challenges the "metaphysics of presence" by developing the thought of a form of difference – namely the "*différantial trace*" – which both precedes and precludes "presence." If this Derridean thought is interpreted to plausibly entail the particular (albeit implicit) form of Speculative Realism I have attributed to him above, and if the real is cognised in terms of a system, "text," or ecology of interrelated "elements," then the thrust of Derrida's previously discussed analyses of Husserl and Saussure – framed in terms of one *particular system*, namely that of "signs" – may be construed more generally to challenge the classical "metaphysical" position which determines both Being and beings in terms of "presence" broadly understood (see also Chapter 7). Moreover, it may also be interpreted to contest the idea that beings which constitute Being are characterised by a specific form, essence, self-identity, or "presence" more generally.

Thus, it may be argued that a Derrida-inflected Speculative Realism would in many ways *run counter* to that of Harman to the extent that his thought implies that any "element" or *identity* is predicated upon difference, and that there is therefore no such thing as a self-identical "substance" or "vacuum-sealed" actuality; for Derrida, '*there is no simple*' *or self-isolated* '*atom*' (1988, p. 85; 1995a, p. 137, emphasis added).[185] More specifically, the notion of the "*différantial trace*" may be said to displace identity and unity with the claim that every "existent" within a system is in fact constituted through what one may call an interrelated double-difference: first, Derrida's reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* may be said to imply the claim that an element within a specific field is not self-identical, but rather differs from itself insofar as its persistence requires traces of a "past" and "future" which in turn inscribe that which is not, or that which is other, within any purported "now." Furthermore, this first characterisation is supplemented by a second and related understanding of difference through his analysis of Saussure. This analysis iterates Derrida's interrogation of "presence" or "identity" through the claim that an element within a specific field is also defined by its relations of difference from other elements within the specific context, thereby also retaining traces of other elements which it defines itself *against*. In short, and as a reminder, these two analyses may be synthesised through the claim that, for Derrida, the entities must be constituted through the process of differential "spacing" (*espacement*) within a context of differences, and must also endure through the (differential) temporal structure of the *trace.* In view of this, it may then be argued that Derrida's notion of *différance* encompasses this double-difference. This central claim requires further elucidation.

9.2.2: On *Différance* as Double-Difference.

Derrida's "neologism" replaces the "e" of the French word for difference (*différence*) with the "a" of *différance*, and in this way the latter also displaces the former. It may then be noted on the outset that the difference between the French original and Derrida's displaced term is one which can be written or read, but not spoken or heard (1984b, p. 3). As Derrida reminds us in the opening pages of

[185] Derrida's specific relation to Harman's "object-oriented" metaphysics shall be the focus of Chapter 10 below.

"Différance," the notion was originally discovered in the context of what, for him, constitutes one of the most prominent expressions of "logocentrism" and the "metaphysics of presence," namely the speech/writing opposition. Thus, the fact that the difference between the *différence* and *différance* can be written but not spoken attests to the deconstructive double movement; the displaced notion of *différance* can only be written, thereby *inverting* the traditional priority of speech over writing, i.e. of presence over absence.

In its most general formulation, *différance* is the "metaphysical name"[186] for both a genetic (or diachronic) and structural (or synchronic) 'constitutive, productive, and originary causality, a process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences' (1984b, p. 9); it names both an active and passive 'playing movement' which produces 'differences' and 'the effects of difference' (1984b, p. 11), and may therefore be understood to designate what Goldgaber and Hägglund (Hägglund, 2008, p. 19; Goldgaber, 2020, pp. 12, 137), following Derrida (1973, p. 15), dub the "*ultra*transcendental"[187] condition of possibility for the emergence, becoming, and persistence of *any existent*, or anything that may be said to "be." Two important provisos must however be introduced at the outset: first, Derrida indefatigably argues that *différance* is not to be understood as a "source" comparable to something like "God," even if the latter is understood in terms of the unknowable Being of "negative theology."[188] This is due to the fact that *différance* is productive of "different things or differences," but nevertheless does not exist and subsist as a Being 'in a simple and unmodified – in-different – present' (1984b, p. 11. See also 1981b, pp. 28, 52)[189] or absolute

[186] Derrida does not relinquish the metaphysical status of *différance*, as can be gleaned from his claim that '*différance* remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical' (1984b, p. 26).

[187] Hägglund argues that the trace – a cognate term for *différance* – names the "ultratranscendental" *logical* conditions from which nothing can be exempt' (2008, p. 19). In *Radical Atheism* (2008), he associates this with a *logic* regulating life (2008, pp. 19, 28 and *passim*). However, in a more recently published paper, he argues that this logic is expandable onto everything that is temporal […] whether it is alive or not' (2011c, p. 119). My own interpretation of the "différantial trace" bears similarities with Hägglund's latter interpretation, even if I must reiterate that my position differs from Hägglund in many ways, not least in my insistence that Derrida is to be understood as advancing a *metaphysics* rather than a *logic*.

[188] Due to limitations of space, I am unable to delve deeper into the question of Derrida's interesting relation to negative theology. For a representative sample of texts pertaining to this debate, see Derrida, 1988, pp. 84-86; 1992; Caputo, 2001; Hägglund, 2008, pp. 5-6; Shakespeare, 2014, pp. 100-123.

[189] Derrida insists that *différance* names the 'non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences' such that 'the name "origin" no longer suits it' (1984b, p. 11)

absence. It is therefore to be understood as an 'opaque energy' (1997, p. 65) which "grounds" beings, but it is not itself a transcendent Being or "foundation."[190] For this reason, he also claims that it 'cannot be *exposed'* directly, since it is only possible to reveal 'that which at a certain moment can become *present*, manifest' or 'presented as something present, a being-present in its truth' (1984b, pp. 5-6. See also 1984b, pp. 12, 14, 15, 22, 25, 26). It is only possible to catch a glimpse of its workings through the activity of specific phenomena, with "texts" constituting Derrida's most prominent and enduring exemplar. Second, and relatedly, it is worth reemphasising that the thought of *différance* should be understood as speculative rather than dogmatic. This distinction may be cast as follows: to provide a dogmatic account of the real is to claim to have a final and complete glimpse of the absolute as it really is. Contrariwise, Derrida's thought of the non-correlated real *qua différance* is speculative to the extent that it provides a glimpse of what the real must be like if it were not cognised in terms of "presence." Nevertheless, like any other speculative thought, Derrida stresses epistemic finitude and fallibility[191] when he asserts that the 'thematic of *différance* may very well, indeed must, one day be superseded, lending itself if not to its own replacement, at least to enmeshing itself in a chain that in truth it never will have governed. Whereby, once again, it is not theological' (1984b, p. 7). It should again be noted in passing that such a claim involves Derrida's resistance to "overmining," since the latter involves reducing the real to what can be directly known about it.

With these caveats in place, it may then be noted that the term is itself derived from the French verb *différer*, which in turn encompasses two distinct yet interrelated meanings. The first and more commonplace aspect is that of *differing* or "spacing." This aspect of *différance* captures the sense of difference as *non-identity* and *otherness* (1984b, p. 8). This, for Derrida, in turn contains both active and passive aspects. It is active to the extent that for differences to take place and

[190] As a reminder, I take the difference between "grounding" and "founding" to entail the following: On the one hand, to seek a *foundation* is to understand the real in terms of what Derrida would call a "present-Being," namely a fixed substratum or substructure (see Keller, 2002b, p. 68). On the other hand, to characterise *différance* as a *ground* is *not* to say that it constitutes a "present-Being" with a fixed and determinate essence (see Derrida, 1984b, p. 6). Rather, *qua* ground, différance would name a 'principle of activity' which would 'empower entities to be themselves, in effect, to make a difference in a world of individual entities' (Bracken, 2002, p. 92 ff.).

[191] In emphasising epistemic fallibility, Derrida comes close to Harman's rejection of "mining philosophies."

endure, 'an interval, a distance, *spacing*, must be [actively] produced between the elements other, and be produced with a certain perseverance in repetition' (1984b, p. 8). It is however also passive to the extent that it denotes the (passive) "spacing" separating elements from one another (1981b, p. 27). Furthermore, it is worth noting that *différance qua* "spacing" further implies a state of simultaneous relation and non-relation; on the one hand, difference entails that entities are dissimilar or distinct. On the other hand, it implies relation since for entities to be different, they must be related to that which they are other to. This in turn implies that any identity necessarily bears the *trace* of its difference from that which it is defined against, i.e. that which it is not. It is important to note that for Derrida, difference is not to be understood as a difference between two elements or entities which were previously self-identical, and which hence pre-exist their relations (1984b, p. 13). Thus, if X and Y are said to be different, this is not due to the fact that they each first have a specific essence or identity and that the two later enter into a relation (of difference). Rather, the activity of differentiation *produces* differences, and thus different things are effects of *différance* as differing (1984b, p. 11); *contra* Harman, every "identity" – that is, anything that "is" – is itself predicated upon difference for Derrida.

Nevertheless, Derrida emphasises that *différance* cannot only be understood in the first sense of "differing" or "spacing" alone, since this would negate its second related sense of *deferral* or "temporization," with the latter involving 'the action of putting off until later' (1984b, p. 8). The "a" which replaces the "e" of the French word *différence* therefore captures the sense of difference as temporal non-congruence or non-convergence, and emphasises the *diachronic* component in *différance* (1981b, p. 27). To elaborate, I have shown that whatever may be said to "be" is the effect of difference as "spacing." This would in turn imply that an existent or element in a field of differences minimally endures because it perpetually postpones or defers *both* its "proper" self-constitution as a unified or "vacuum-sealed" entity, as well as its congruence with any other element. This, on my reading, occurs for two reasons; first, Derrida's deconstructive reading of Saussure suggests that "identity" is predicated on differences, to the effect that there

is a perpetual relation of non-congruence between elements which are other.[192] More specifically, since an entity is not defined by substantiality but by difference, its endurance demands temporal repetition – i.e. the "trace structure" – insofar as difference requires that the latter be inscribed within a relational space. Second, through his analysis of Husserl, it may be inferred that any entity is "in itself" never simply self-identical or "present" (nor is it merely absent *tout court*),[193] since its persistence in "being" is predicated by a temporal 'relation to something other than itself,' namely the *trace* or 'mark of the past element' which is retained, as well as the *trace* of 'its relation to a future element' which has yet "to come" (*a'venir*) (1984b, p. 13. See also Section 8.1). This *trace* is thus 'related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and [it constitutes] what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not' (1984b, p. 13). In his essay "Différance," Derrida elaborates and emphasises this point succinctly as follows:

> An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, *every being*, and *singularly substance* or *the subject*. (1984b, p. 13, emphasis added)

It is important to emphasise that the *trace* of which Derrida speaks above is not to be understood in terms of a 'past or a future as a *modified present*' (1984b, p. 13, emphasis added). To elaborate, I have already shown that the "metaphysics of presence" has always understood time in terms of presence. In other words, the "past" and "future" were identified as modalities of presence, i.e. as the "no longer" and "not yet" present (Derrida, 1984d. See also Section 7.2.1).[194] However, as

[192] Again, I should emphasise that Derrida frames this analysis in terms of a local example taken from one particular system, namely that of "signs." Nevertheless, it is clear from the above that I hold the conclusions of this analysis to be generalisable beyond the scope of this local example.

[193] While Derrida rejects the idea of "being as presence," he also does not understand it as a pure absence either, for the latter in his view would simply constitute a form of presence found elsewhere (1984d, p. 38). Stated differently, while *différance* 'puts into question the authority of presence,' it also challenges 'its simple symmetrical opposite, absence or lack' (1984b, p. 10). This claim most definitely challenges Harman's notion of an *absolutely* absent or "withdrawn" object. I shall deal with this issue specifically in Chapter 10 below.

[194] There is then, for Derrida a deep interrelation between the determination of time in terms of the present and the "metaphysics of presence" more generally. For instance, in "Ousia and Grammē," Derrida explains that 'Being has been determined temporally as being-present in order to determine time as nonpresent and nonbeing,' and he further asserts that 'the determination of beingness (*ousia*) as *energeia* or *entelekheia*, as the act and end of movement, is inseparable from [this] determination of time' (1984d, p. 51).

Hägglund explains, the *trace structure* entails that 'even the slightest temporal moment must be divided in its becoming' since without this division 'there would be no time' to begin with. As a result, the "past" *qua* trace cannot be that which is *no longer present*, since the latter must have itself been "always already" divided by the *trace* of another *trace*. Similarly, and for the same reason, the "future" *qua trace* cannot name what is "not yet" or what "will be" present (Hägglund, 2008, p. 17). Thus, Derrida distinguishes the *trace* from all modalities of presence when he describes it as a '*past that has never been present*' (1984b, p. 21, emphasis added).

In view of the above, it may then be claimed that for Derrida, differences are both spatially produced and endure across time, which in turn indicates that *différance* is simultaneously *both* "spac*ing*" *and* "tempor*ization*." Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to think of space and time as some sort of separate and absolute cosmic containers within which differences exist. Rather, Derrida's analysis suggests that space and time are themselves relationally produced through the movement of the "*différantial trace*" as productive of "different things or differences." Derrida calls the synthesis of *différance* as spatial *differing* and temporal *deferring* "tempor*al*ization," and he further describes the latter as 'the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time' (1984b, p. 8). To elaborate, following Hägglund it may be noted that there is, for Derrida, a "becoming-space of time" to the extent that 'spatiality is characterized by the ability to remain in spite of temporal succession'; persistence thus requires *space*, in that it requires that something *takes place* in a field of differences. Nevertheless, 'space can never be pure simultaneity' such that the latter is 'unthinkable without the [temporization] that relates one spatial juncture to another' (Hägglund, 2008, 180. See also Iveson, 2017, pp. 180-181). The latter in turn names what Derrida calls "the becoming-time of space," and the claim as a whole suggests that *spatial* differences in general must always be *temporally* sustained (see Bryant, 2014, p. 79).

It is essential to consider a number of important consequences which I believe would follow from what has just been discussed. First, it may be noted that, *contra* Harman, Derrida's analysis of the "*différantial trace*" implies that the "identity" of any existent is not the product of an "essence," "self-identity," or

"vacuum-sealed *actuality.*"[195] Rather, the "being" of any existent is a continuous *work in process* 'wherein the [entity] constitutes itself as that [entity] across time and space' through a *process* of differing/deferring (Bryant, 2014, p. 72, emphasis added). Second, it should be emphasised that this opening of presence or identity by the "*différantial trace*" necessarily implies a *temporal* form of finitude which *opposes* Harman's synchronic model of finitude and "presentist" view of inter-objective relations.[196] Following Hägglund and O'Connor, it may be noted that, for Derrida, the activity of *différance* or "temporalization" necessarily involves alteration, such that every entity or "identity" is finite, subject to the passage of time (Hägglund, 2008, *passim*; O'Connor, 2014, pp. 3-4, 6 and *passim*), and therefore to its own destruction. As Hägglund puts it, the "*différantial trace*" exposes every entity to an 'an unpredictable future,' such that 'there *must* be finitude and vulnerability, there *must* be openness to whatever or whoever comes' (2008, p. 31). Thus, while *différance* speaks of the relational being of all entities, it also does not imply holism or teleology.[197] Derrida's thought of the "trace" rather involves an irreducible openness to a future, and in this way he also allows for the possibility of change; 'there is no telos or finality to any system, including *différance*,' asserts Derrida (1984b, p. 7. See also Bracken, 2002, p. 107n3; Derrida and Ferraris, 2002, pp. 20-21).[198] Furthermore, and as Levi Bryant points out, the fissuring of presence by *différance* also entails a related spatial form of finitude. If *différance* as "spacing" does in fact produce different entities, then this would create what Bryant, following Derrida (1984b, p. 8), calls a differential *polemos* in which 'every

[195] In other words, I hold that Harman is quite right to claim that Derrida rejects the notion of self-identity. However, as I shall show in the subsequent chapter, I do not concur with Harman's claim that this rejection of self-identity necessarily entails anti-realism on Derrida's part.

[196] This, as I have already emphasised above, does not in fact imply that Harman's objects exist in a "perpetual present" similar to that of the Platonic Forms. Rather, I have emphasised that Harman's model for the change and destruction of objects is based on a purely synchronic model (see Section 6.1.2). By contrasting Derrida's model to that of Harman, I am therefore highlighting the difference between two models of finitude; one based *purely* on synchrony, and the other based *partly* on diachronicity.

[197] For Derrida, '*the infinite différance is finite*' (1973, p. 102), which in turn emphasises that there is an '*infinite* activity' which 'underlies all the *finite* determinations to be found in this world' (Bracken, p. 107, emphasis added). Nevertheless, it is important to note that this infinity names what Hägglund calls a "negative infinity," namely 'a process of displacement without end' (2008, p. 92), rather than a "positive infinity" driven towards an infinity which 'is completely in itself and thereby sublates spatial limitation and temporal alteration' (2008, p. 92. See also O'Connor, 2011, p. 44)

[198] This claim on Derrida's part is especially important given Harman's insistence that relationality inevitably lapses into a "relationist holism" which discounts any possibility of change (See Chapter 3, especially Section 3.1.2). In view of the limitations imposed by the current chapter, I shall nevertheless reserve a fuller analysis of this claim for Chapter 10 below.

entity encounters other entities, its others, as *other*, as *withdrawn*' (2014, p. 87. See also Hägglund, 2008, pp. 19, 87-88). This spatial or synchronic finitude may in turn be compared to Harman's emphasis on the "withdrawal" of all "objects." Thus, Bryant's use of this specific term in this context is most definitely not coincidental. Nevertheless, as I shall show in Chapter 10 below, Derrida differs from Harman in that he does not posit an "absolute withdrawal" in order to explain finitude.

9.3: Conclusion

The thrust of the Derrida-inflected Speculative Realist analysis I have provided above entails that the "*différantial trace*" constitutes the minimal *real* conditions of possibility for the emergence, becoming, and persistence of any existent, or anything that may be said to "be." More specifically, if Harman is right to claim that a robust realism necessarily entails a speculative analysis of the non-correlated nature of entities and their relations, then these minimal conditions should definitely be interpreted as advancing a novel form of Speculative Realism on Derrida's part. Simultaneously however, unlike Harman, Derrida is of the view that every entity "is" or *persists* through spatio-temporal *différantial* relations, and it would thus follow that, for him, no entity exists in *in vacuo*, absolutely shielded or "withdrawn" from its relation to its other(s). Rather, all entities exist though a relational "play of differences" in which beings are intertwined much like a "weave" or "text-ile."

In light of all of the above, it would then be useful to briefly revisit the thrust of Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" as well as his critique of Derrida. As I have argued above, Harman is said to reject all forms of "-mining," as well as "correlationism" and the "philosophies of human access." His major claim is that there are *objects* not differences or relations, and that the former are "vacuum-sealed" to the point where their interactions can only occur "vicariously." On the basis of these fundamental tenets, Harman mounts his interrelated threefold critique of Derrida: first, Derrida is said to deny self-identity, along with everything that comes with it, namely substantiality and essence. He is also said to deny that the real exists on the basis of the fact that it cannot be known. Second, Derrida is characterised as a "weak access" philosopher or "*strong* correlationist," who "overmines" the real into effects of language and "sensual qualities." Finally,

Harman accuses Derrida of denying the "withdrawal" of entities through the insistence that everything is a play of surface-effects of language.

It is clear from the above that my reading of Derrida runs counter to Harman's "object-oriented" position, and it also confronts a number of critiques which the latter raises against Derrida. As I have shown, it is my view that Derrida is not an anti-realist philosopher who reduces everything "upwards" to differential effects of language. While I agree with Harman when he claims that Derrida rejects "self-identity," "substantiality," and "essentialism," I also hold that this does not in fact amount to the denial of a mind-independent reality on his part. Instead, Derrida may be read as a *process-oriented* philosopher who rejects the possibility that "vacuum-sealed" entities take priority over their relations. With this in view, it would however also be possible to raise further questions concerning the nature of Derrida's relation to Harman's philosophy more specifically, and the question of realism more generally. For instance; might it not be the case that Derrida propagates a variant of "overmining" which Harman dubs "relationism"[199]? Furthermore, since, for Harman, this "relationism" inevitably slides into a "holism," would Derrida's position deny individuality to entities? Conversely, does Harman's philosophy of "vacuum-sealed objects" amount to a "metaphysics of presence"? All these questions shall partly constitute the subject of the next chapter, where I shall provide a summative synthesis of everything that I have developed throughout this work by inquiring more concretely into the points of convergence and divergence between Derrida's "difference-oriented" approach and Harman "object-oriented" one.

[199] As a reminder, the latter is a position which reduces all entities "upwards" to their respective interrelations (see Section 3.1.2).

Chapter 10: On Derrida and Harman's Real

The previous chapters presented my specific reading of Harman and Derrida's respective philosophies. With this in view, the present chapter shall provide a more intricate account of the implications of Derrida's approach to the real by explicitly comparing and contrasting his position to that of Harman. Before taking on this task, it would however be useful to briefly restate the general thrust of what I have argued in the previous chapters. In those dealing with Harman's philosophy, I have characterised his "object-oriented" approach in terms of a number of "negative" and "positive" theses on the nature of the real. As a reminder, his negative theses entail the claim that the real cannot be "undermined" to its most fundamental constituents, "overmined" into its relations, or both simultaneously ("duomining") (see Chapter 3). This is in turn coupled with a more positive speculative thesis that sees the real as composed of "objects" broadly construed (see Chapters 4 and 5). On Harman's account, the latter are always said to precede their interactions, such that their respective relations can only occur "vicariously" via a third emergent entity acting as an intermediary (see Chapter 6).

The chapters dealing with Derrida's philosophy in turn offered my rejoinder to Harman's critique of the latter as an anti-realist, "strong correlationist," and "overminer." Against Harman, I have argued that Derrida's philosophy also contains traces of his own implicit "negative" and "positive" take on the real. As may be recalled, Derrida's negative characterisation of the real entails the rejection of the "logocentric" endeavour to reduce the real to knowledge, and the classical "metaphysical" association of reality with presence. Against both these tendencies, Derrida's specific yet often implicit claim is that the real is not principally present, whether in itself or to a self-present subject (see Chapter 7). His positive account in turn involves a processual and differential elucidation of the real which expands the "*différantial trace*" to include the minimal conditions of possibility for any existent broadly conceived; for Derrida, any entity *differs* and *defers* both with respect to

itself and from another, such that it only comes to be and persists through differential traces (see Chapters 8 and 9).[200]

With all these claims in view, the differences between Harman and Derrida's specific positions become immediately conspicuous; the former represents an "object-oriented" and primarily *non-relational* approach to the real, while the latter implies a "process-oriented" and *differential-relational* view of the real. With this in mind, the aim of the current chapter shall therefore be to expand on their similarities and differences, and I shall here proceed as follows: in the first subsection, I shall draw a comparison between Harman's path beyond "correlationism" and the one implied in Derrida's work. I shall show how both are similar to the extent that they claim that the real cannot be directly known, but can nevertheless be alluded to. In following, in Section 10.2, I shall then analyse their respective views on the nature of finitude, space, and time. In Section 10.3, their understanding of individual entities shall be discussed, and I will here specifically analyse the question of "individuality" in Derrida's work further by contrasting it to that of Harman. Finally, in Section 10.4, I will analyse their views in relation to what is often referred to as "the problem of the one and the many." I have already shown that Harman's philosophy is committed to a plurality of objects. In this section, I shall however also challenge Harman's reading of Derrida in two ways; first, by showing that the latter's philosophy also entails a form of pluralism of entities. Secondly, I shall argue that Derrida's differential approach to the real does not entail a holism.

The aim of this chapter shall be to underscore the achievements of this dissertation overall by further emphasising that Derrida is not the "strong correlationist" or "linguistic idealist" that Harman views him to be, and to further challenge the latter's claim that the former offers nothing more than a meditation on "books" (see Harman, 2015, p. 106; Sparrow and Harman, 2008, p. 225). Furthermore, I shall also show how that Derrida's differential and relational view of the real can be brought into fruitful dialogue with Harman's own "object-

[200] It may here be noted in passing that both Derrida and Harman are not interested in compiling a list of the kinds of things that may be said to exist. Rather, their views entail a meditation on the conditions of possibility for the being of any entity whatsoever.

oriented" thought by focusing on elements which are important for both their philosophies, namely excess, finitude, and plurality.

10.1: On Anti-Correlationism

In the current section, I shall seek to compare the manner in which Harman and Derrida respond to the "correlationist" problem outlined and discussed in Chapter 2 above. The reader is reminded that Quentin Meillassoux's characterisation of "correlationism" targets the contemporary philosophical drive to reduce the real to the transcendental conditions under which it can be experienced, thereby principally targeting the mind-independence component of realism. He further claims that this specific dogma comes in varying intensities, with the most conspicuous ones being "weak" and "strong" varieties. The "weak" version is said to emphasise what Meillassoux calls the "correlationist circle," an argument which insists that one can only have access to the correlation between thought and being. As a result, it rejects the claim that the real can be known, but also maintains that certain aspects of it can nevertheless be thought. The more diffused "strong" version on the other hand emphasises the "correlationist two-step," and puts forth the claim that reality as such can neither be thought nor known. Furthermore, in Chapter 2 I have also compared Meillassoux's critique to Harman's "philosophies of human access," a term which critically refers to any philosophical position that disallows all speculative accounts of what the world might be like independently of the human. As with Meillassoux's term, Harman's also comes in two main versions; the "strong access" version is said to deny the existence of the real *tout court*. Contrastingly, the "weak access" version does not deny the existence of the real, but rather adopts a quietist attitude with respect to the possibility of thinking the real independently of the human access.[201]

In essence, both Meillassoux and Harman claim that their respective critiques target specific forms of contemporary idealism which reduce the real to a "dual relation" between thought and being, and they attribute the "weak access" and "strong correlationist" positions respectively to Derrida. It is however clear

[201] The terms "correlationism" and "philosophies of access" have often been treated – even by Harman and Meillassoux themselves – as synonyms. However, in Chapter 2 and throughout I suggested that this difference should be emphasised, and have pointed to differences between the respective positions. For a more condensed account of the differences, see Young, 2020.

from my analysis above that I disagree with Harman and Meillassoux's overall assessment of Derrida's project. Instead, I have suggested that the latter's philosophy may in fact be interpreted as having an anti-correlationist – and hence realist – impetus which comes close to that of Harman, at least in terms of their mutual denial of any direct and unmediated access to the real. The time has come to make this comparison more explicit. In Sections 3.2 and 5.3, I have shown that Harman's "anti-correlationist" or "anti-access" position does not rely on the wholesale rejection of correlationism. Instead, Harman in fact begins by *stressing* the "weak correlationist" thesis that the "in-itself" cannot be directly known. Nevertheless, he also moves beyond the bounds of weak correlationism – and correlationism more generally – in two ways; first, he couples this rejection of direct knowledge with the claim that the workings of an independent reality can nevertheless be alluded to indirectly, thereby denying "all-or-nothing" approaches according to which the real is either directly knowable or impossible. Second, Harman challenges the anthropocentric emphasis on human finitude with a more "global" claim that all inter-objective relations are in fact also finite,[202] thereby using the local instance of human finitude as a gateway into broader speculation concerning relations between "objects" more generally.

Contrastingly, Harman sees Derrida's supposed "strong correlationist" or "weak access" philosophy as crippling insofar as it allegedly repudiates realism *a priori*; on his reading, Derrida sees realism as deeply intertwined with presence, and since the latter deconstructs presence, it follows that he rejects realism. This claim further seems to assume that to deconstruct presence or realism means to reject it *tout court*. To be sure, I concede that Derrida may be likened to Harman insofar as he deems specific sorts of "dogmatic" realism to be tethered to a certain "metaphysical" and "logocentric" prejudice. As a result, like Harman, Derrida essentially accepts the "weak correlationist" thesis that the real cannot be directly reduced to our various ways of knowing (see Chapter 7). Nevertheless, on my reading, this argument does not automatically give credence to Harman's accusation that Derrida leaves no room for thinking a non-correlated real, for as I

[202] I have dealt with the notion of finitude in Harman's work at some length in Chapter 4 above. Furthermore, I shall also expand on Derrida and Harman's understanding of this term in Section 10.2 below.

have argued, Derrida also moves beyond the bounds of correlationism in two fundamental ways (which may be seen to mirror those of Harman); first, Derrida may be said to allow for the possibility of indirectly thinking the workings of a non-correlated real, as long as one bears in mind that such claims are fallible and subject to alteration (see, for instance, Section 7.2.2). Second, and as I have shown in Chapters 8 and 9, Derrida moves beyond correlationism through what can be interpreted as a speculative generalisation of the "*différantial trace*." Such features of his philosophy may in turn be interpreted to license my reading of his philosophy as having an implicit "Speculative Realist" impetus.

In view of the above, and in spite of Harman's critique, three main points of convergence may then be noted between the "anti-correlationist" stances expressed explicitly in Harman's work, and implicitly in that of Derrida: firstly, both thinkers argue that the real is not present, whether in and of itself or to human knowledge. Secondly, and relatedly, both claim that the real cannot be known directly, thereby emphasising human epistemic finitude. Nevertheless, both Harman and Derrida are of the view that the real can be indirectly thought, even if the former often makes this claim more unambiguously than the latter. Finally, their speculative move towards a non-correlated real involves mobilising and generalising a series of local concepts in order to effectuate a more wide-ranging speculative thought of a non-correlated real. In Harman's case, this entails the generalisation of mechanisms such as those of "withdrawal," "sincerity," and "vicarious causation." Similarly, Derrida uses his deconstruction of texts in order to develop the thought of the "*différantial trace*," and generalises the latter to include relationality more generally.

These similarities notwithstanding, it should however also be clear that Harman and Derrida's take on the nature of the real varies drastically, for the former understands it to be composed of an infinite regress of unified "objects," while the latter places an emphasis on its differential and relational constitution. The next sections shall compare and contrast these two perspectives in further detail.

10.2: On Finitude, Space, and Time

I have already touched on Harman and Derrida's understanding of finitude in Section 4.3 and towards the end of Section 9.2.2 respectively. I shall here expand

on this specific motif by comparing their particular positions in greater detail. In following, it may then be noted from my analyses of Harman and Derrida above that each of them places a strong emphasis on various forms of finitude. For instance, and as suggested earlier, both concur that the real cannot be known directly and that all our knowledge claims are fallible, thereby emphasising – contra Meillassoux (2008; 2016) – what may be understood as a form of epistemic finitude. Nevertheless, in addition to this, there are also two other senses of finitude which can be understood to have ontological or metaphysical implications. The first may be named "spatial" or "synchronic finitude," and it refers to the claim that some entity is finite in the sense of not being able to make direct contact with any other. Furthermore, it may also be noted that there is also another sense of finitude which may be dubbed "diachronic finitude." This sense emphasises temporal finitude, and recalls that every entity, irrespective of whether it is "living" or not, is necessarily subject to the passage of time and hence to its coming into being and necessary eventual perishing.

It is my view that Derrida and Harman's understanding of these forms of finitude should in turn be understood to be premised on their respective take on the nature of space and time. It may be noted that in addition to epistemic finitude, Harman exclusively emphasises the first "spatial" or "synchronic" understanding of finitude in the specific sense that self-identical (i.e. "unified") objects are, for him, "withdrawn" from one other, and that all their relations must therefore be "translations" (See Chapter 4). In this context, it would be important to recall that Harman describes "space" as both relational and non-relational: on the one hand, space is non-relational since entities "withdraw" from one another but, on the other hand, objects also enter into finite "translational" spatial relations with one another. Thus, while Harman accepts that to some extent space does imply relation, he also claims that this relational aspect does not ultimately affect the (non-relational) interior of the object, since its "unity" or "identity" always precedes its alliances. Harman however discounts temporal finitude – and real time more generally – thereby creating a disjunction between space and time. To explain, I have already shown how Harman is a self-proclaimed anti-realist with respect to time, since he sees the latter as a tension between a "sensual object" and its "sensual qualities" which in turn exist only within the "experience" of a "real object." Thus, Harman's

"objects" are not – at least in his view – temporally finite, since their creation, alteration and destruction only occur through spatial "vicarious connections" rather than in or through time (see Chapter 6).[203] Furthermore, Harman persistently emphases that a diachronic model of the real such as the one I have attributed to Derrida inevitably diminishes the primacy of the individual "object," rendering it subservient to a constant temporal state of becoming.

With my previous reading of Derrida in view, it may be noted that his positions on space, time, and finitude differ drastically from those of Harman. He would most certainly see the latter's claims as symptomatic of a "metaphysics of presence," since the implication of Harman's position is that self-identical objects precede their relations to other entities (irrespective of whether they are present or absent tout court), and are also indifferent to time. Contrastingly, and as I have shown in chapters eight and nine above, Derrida's implicit take on the real implies that there can be no entity which remains self-identical and unaffected by the intertwined movement of "temporization," "spacing," and hence differentiation understood in terms of the *trace* and *différance* or the "*différantial trace*." In contrast to Harman's temporal anti-realism, a Derridean view of the real thus entails, as Peter Gratton points out (2013; 2014), a temporal realism. This is however not to be understood in the sense of an absolute dimension of time which exists independently of beings. Rather, Derrida is a temporal realist in the sense that his "Speculative Realism" implies that entities necessarily persist and change through differences over "time," and that therefore there could be no self-identical purely present (or absent) "object," and no change without "time" understood in his specific sense. Furthermore, it is worth reemphasising that Derrida's position on the nature of "time" (understood specifically in terms of the *trace*) would further entail a temporal finitude, since his view – at least in the way I have characterised it – entails that "time" opens up every being to its persistence, but also to its eventual perishing. This point may be further emphasised by making recourse to Patrick O'Connor's claim that Derrida's deconstructive thought entails that 'whatever *is*, is

[203] The claim that objects are not temporally finite does not entail the claim that Harman's objects exist in a perpetual Platonic eternal realm, as Gratton suggests (see Gratton, 2014). Rather, they are finite in the sense that they can be destroyed. Nevertheless, this destruction can only come about through a vicarious connection, such that time has nothing to do with their finitude in this specific sense.

open to dissolution irrespective of whether it is a pebble or a religious phenomenon' (2011, p. 2). More specifically, O'Connor is right to argue that deconstruction emphasises the 'necessity of temporal and spatial alteration' and that, since the latter 'implies finitude,' it follows that everything is subject to its own eventual dissolution; "time," for Derrida, 'is essential and for this reason nothing can be thought or can exist without the passing of time' (2011, pp. 4, 6. See also pp. 45-47. See also Hägglund, 2008).

I have already shown that Harman claims to subvert the "metaphysics of presence" (or "ontotheology") by characterising "objects" as constituted by a radical absence (see Section 4.5).[204] Nevertheless, Derrida's specific form of realism outlined above would reject Harman's rejoinder in two ways: first, Derrida would respond that absence remains a negative modality of presence subsisting elsewhere (see Derrida, 1984d, p. 38), hence the reason why he employs the notions of the *trace* and *différance – qua* "play" of absence and presence – as an alternative to what he perceives as a "logocentric" dichotomy between pure absence or presence. Second, Derrida would claim that Harman's thoroughly synchronic understanding of the critique of traditional metaphysics is not enough, since his own critique of the "metaphysics of presence" inherently links presence to the present, therefore introducing a temporal dynamic both to his critique of metaphysics and to his own implicit take on the real. I concur with this Derridean-inflected critique of Harman's work, at least on this specific issue, and it is for this reason that I argue that Harman's model must – in spite of his own self-interpretation – necessarily be supplemented by an "object-oriented" model of *real* time.[205] I shall discuss this issue further below.

In my view, the contrasts just discussed boil down to intrinsic differences between their respective take on the real *vis à vis* their understanding of the relation

[204] It is clear that Harman has a purely *spatial* understanding of the critique of "ontotheology" or "metaphysics of presence" when he claims that presence is always '*for* someone or something' (2016c, p. 85).

[205] Arjen Kleinherenbrink (2019b) has also recently argued that Harman's model of "punctuated" change needs to be supplemented by an "incremental" model of change. However, my argument varies from that of Kleinherenbrink as follows: the latter argues that this incremental model of time must be produced through a real object's encounters with sensual objects. Contrastingly, I argue that Harman's take on real time would involve a tension between an object's *past* "connections" and its openness towards the future ("withdrawal"). I shall discuss this "object-oriented" take on time further below.

between space, time and finitude. To elaborate, from the above it may be noted that both are similar in that they see space and time as products of relations of difference, rather than being absolute containers within which things exist. In Derrida's case, space is a product of differential "spacing" which is said to constitute differences, while time is a product of differential "temporization" which prevents anything from subsisting in the present. For Harman, space is produced by differences between objects which are said to be anterior to their spatial relations, while time entails a separate sensual relation of difference between an experienced object and its qualities.

Their respective understanding of finitude is however more profoundly dissimilar in that Harman places a lot of emphasis on spatial finitude, while Derrida emphasises both a spatial and temporal finitude to the extent that he holds the two to be inseparable. More specifically, and unlike Harman, the guiding motivation of Derrida's entire thought has always been to insist on a "co-implication" of space and time, which in turn implies that these two are not entirely disconnected dimensions of the real. This claim, in my view, forms the cornerstone of what may here be called Derrida's system, even if the latter would disagree with the use of this specific word to describe his thought. Moreover, Derrida's understanding of finitude relies on a model of the gradual production of difference (or change) over time. To elaborate, and as a reminder, the "*différantial trace*" implies that an entity's persistence would necessarily be premised on its taking up a (spatial) position within a specific field of differences. However, such spatial differences must necessarily endure by being temporally sustained. This is the reason for Derrida's previously discussed description of *différance* as 'the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time' (1984b, p. 8), and also explains his insistence on the inseparability of time and space. Contrastingly, Harman's model of spatial finitude relies on a punctuated and intermittent model of alteration through an inter-objective "vicarious connection" (see Chapter 6).

Despite Harman's own self-interpretation with regards to the nature of time, I have also argued that there is, in fact, what may be understood as a model of real time in his work, and hence a model of temporal finitude, even if the latter does not rely on the notion of temporal differentiation. On my reading, and further to Section 6.1.2, Harman's temporal account of finitude may be restated as follows: since

every object is for him the result of a "connection," and since the latter remains inscribed in the object, then the "past" may be understood to be constituted by the sedimentations or traces of all previous connections. Furthermore, the "future" of a specific object is the result of the "withdrawn" surplus which an object harbours beyond its actual relations. Thus, the "present" must come about as an aftereffect of this intersection between the "past" qua inscription and the "future" qua openness to an unpredictable future, including an object's alteration and destruction via "vicarious connections" with other objects.[206]

It may nevertheless be asked whether Derrida's own account actually contains a model of "synchronic finitude." To explain, the latter requires that different entities exist with a relative degree of independence from one another. Harman would however argue that a differential model such as Derrida's discounts different entities insofar as it inevitably slips into an "overmining" form of holistic "relationism" in which everything is indifferently everything else. As a reminder, relationism names any philosophy which sees entities as nothing more than their relations, and Harman explicitly imputes this position to thinkers such as Latour and Whitehead (see Chapter 3). One may then ask whether this is true of a Derridean-inflected realism, that is, whether the account of the real I have attributed to him leads to an indifferent relational process with no individuals. At the end of Section 9.2.2, I've already hinted that my response is in the negative. In the following sections, I shall elaborate on this aspect of Derrida's work more concretely by once again comparing it directly to Harman.

10.3: On Objects and Singularities.

Harman's general "object-oriented" position places emphasis on singular, unified, and "withdrawn" objects, each one defined by its individual essence. Harman therefore persistently employs the notion of "self-identity" and other related terms – namely substance, essence, absolute "withdrawal," and unity – in order to account for an entity's individuality.

[206] Harman himself would most definitely not accede to this interpretation of his work, since he would claim that it "undermines" the object by reducing it down to a difference between its past and future states. However, if my interpretation is conceded, then it would be possible to note that this model of temporal finitude actually comes close to Derrida's understanding of the trace structure as articulated above.

From the claims put forward in the chapters dealing with Derrida above, there is no doubt that, on my analysis, he would reject this aspect of Harman's "object-oriented" model, insofar as he would claim that it overemphasises identity at the expense of difference. Conversely, Harman would most definitely counter that Derrida prioritises differences over individuals, thereby denying that the latter exist altogether. More specifically, and even if he does not explicitly level this critique against Derrida,[207] Harman would claim that relational or differential accounts of the real such as the one I have recognised in Derrida's work entail an "overmining" form of "relationism," which in turn quickly slip into a holism whereby everything is essentially related to everything else. As a reminder, Harman's major qualm with such a position is its alleged assumption that entities are exhausted by their relation to each other. On his account, this would then not only deny individuality to existents, but would also be unable to account for change, insofar as it denies to entities the surplus required for change to happen beyond their current relations. Relative to this possible critique, it would then be necessary to raise the following query: does Derrida's differential and relational account of the real slip to an ultra-relationist holism which leaves no room for individual entities? Or, to state the problem differently, does Derrida ultimately make an implicit "onto-taxonomical" distinction between an amorphous realm of *différance* on the one hand, and an experiential realm of linguistically generated pseudo-entities on the other? Harman's critiques might very well suggest that this is the case, but my specific response to these questions is in the negative. While I have already alluded to my position on this matter in the previous chapter, I shall here develop this important issue further.

To begin to respond to these possible critiques, I hold that it is one thing to have an ultra-relationistic view of reality, and quite another to claim that individual entities cannot exist in utter isolation. I am entirely in agreement with Harman's view that the first claim constitutes a thoroughly holistic vision of reality. Nevertheless, unlike Harman, I am of the view that the second does not necessarily imply holism, but rather advances the idea that entities must be constituted in their

[207] As a reminder, Harman sees Derrida as a "strong correlationist" or "weak access" philosopher who "overmines" reality into language, thereby reducing it to its givenness to a subject. Harman therefore definitely recognises that Derrida denies self-identity, but he argues that this is due to the fact that the latter is an idealist.

"being" by difference broadly understood. To elaborate, from my analysis of both thinkers undertaken above, it is clear that Derrida's thought is diametrically opposed to Harman's to the extent that it entails the *a priori* rejection of any possible self-identical, "in-different," or *absolutely* "withdrawn" entity. Nevertheless, contra Harman, I hold that this does not entail the claim that there is no individuation *tout court*, and much less that the real is an amorphous or unified lump. To expand on this point, it may be recalled that Derrida's implicit take on the real entails that whatever may be said to *be* is so by virtue of the intertwined temporal traces of a "past" and "future," as well as the spatial differences from that which it is defined in proportion to. This "double-difference" of *différance* in turn constitutes what he describes as the 'process of scission and division' which produces 'different things or differences' (1984b, p. 9). This general claim entails that for any entity to "be," it must essentially both produce and reproduce itself – and thus maintain a certain level of discreteness – through a relational process of spatial and temporal differing/deferring which is characteristic of *différance* (see Chapter 9). The point being made here is neatly summarised by Patrick O'Connor when he explains that Derrida's thought entails

> that nothing can *be* such that all it *is* is itself; whatever is *is* divisible, and thoroughly dependent on something other. The reality of *any identity* is dependent on different times and spaces, remaining irreducibly *heterogeneous* and *minimally unified* […] All *objects* and *identities* may only be by virtue of the demarcations which separate and the potential unifications that bind them. Worlds always surpass themselves. It is their active relationality that creates reality. (2011, pp. 48, 160, emphasis modified)

O'Connor's use of "world" shall be expanded upon shortly. In the meantime, his claim above may be developed by noting that Derrida's thought of the "*différantial trace*" implies that there is, for him, a provisional "identity" to any being. The latter is however not constituted by something which subsists independently of its relations and becoming – namely an essence or absolute "unity." Rather, the minimal requirement for the "being" of every and any entity is the constant activity of differing and deferring, since it is the latter that sanctions its persistence *as* the entity in question; for Derrida, entities require the activity of the "*différantial trace*" in order to persist, and thus, as O'Connor aptly puts it, they 'remain the same only insofar as they alter' (2011, p. 160). Thus, while Derrida allows for a certain degree of individuality, he would also nevertheless insist, contra Harman, that this "singularity" on behalf of any "being" is always relative rather than absolute. The

latter claim is meant in the sense that entities are always what they are by virtue of relations of difference rather than their pure "monadic" detachment from every other entity. This also further implies that the various demarcations which separate a specific entity from another are permeable rather than rigid, thereby allowing for a necessary relationality both within and between entities.[208] For Derrida, entities must necessarily relate *a priori*, and this in turn implies that his philosophy would not require anything similar to a Harmanian "vicarious" account of causality in order to explain why or how they could relate to begin with.

This account might however raise two further important questions which are especially pertinent to the task of comparing Derrida's work to Harman's. The first of these queries may be cast as follows: if the former denies the latter's definition of "objects" in terms of an intrinsic unity or "essence," then what accounts for the "singularity" of a specific entity for Derrida? In response to this question, I am of the view that Derrida rejects the Harmanian binary choice according to which there is either an ultra-relational holism without individuality, or an ultra-monadic universe where things remain utterly discrete and "untouchable." Instead, I hold that a Derridean-inflected realism entails that entities are simultaneously both relationally constituted, but also singular. In this context, it would be worth referring once again to Patrick O'Connor's work when he suggests that, for Derrida, an entity's specificity cannot be accounted for in terms of some intrinsic "self-identity," but is rather established through the unique "position," "perspective," or "point of view" which it occupies within a specific system of relations. This position in turn constitutes what O'Connor above described as the "world" of that entity, and the use of the latter term should specifically be understood to signify something similar to an "environment" or "perspective." As he appropriately points out, 'everything from cells, to rocks, to quarks' as well as 'ants, to ants' legs, to pebbles, to electrons' may each be said to be a "world" in their own right, and this is to the extent that they each have 'their own unique perspective, relations and environments.' (2014, pp. 13, 160). In view of the latter claim, and while I concur with O'Connor's claim that entities have a "world," I nevertheless question whether this would be the right term to use, given

[208] It should here be noted in passing that this issue is related to what is known as the question of the "one and the many." I shall deal with this specific issue in Section 10.4 below.

its tendency to evoke the idea of monadic detachment. For my part, I would prefer to emphasise the term "environment," since it seems to better capture Derrida's view that entities simultaneously occupy a singular place within a specific context, but are nonetheless never wholly detached from the specific setting within which they exist. Thus, for Derrida every entity has a "world," but no entity exists in an absolute "world" of its own.

It would however be important to note that the figurative use of terms such as "perspective," "environment," "world," and "point of view" does not necessitate the claim that Derrida is a vitalist or panpsychist. Rather, such terms must be understood to suggest that everything which may be said to "be" remains simultaneously both structurally open to an otherness (broadly understood) which defines and delimits it, and also to some extent discrete within itself by virtue of the specific position it occupies. In spite of their differing views of the real, it may then be noted that Derrida and Harman both critique various forms of vitalism or panpsychism in a similar manner; rather than proceeding with the claim that everything is alive or conscious, both take the reverse route by claiming that "life" and consciousness are emergent phenomena grounded in a more "fundamental" grounding structure. As I have shown, in the case of Harman this would be the universal structure of intra-objective "sincerity," while in the case of Derrida it would be the minimal structure of the "*différantial trace*" which is productive of different "environments" in the sense above.

It would now be possible to turn to a second question raised by the account above. This may be formulated in the following manner: if "identity" is, for Derrida never absolute but rather necessarily always relationally constituted, then how might he account for what Harman dubs the "surplus" required for change to occur? Levi Bryant formulates this issue in a similar manner when he questions whether *différance* would dissolve entities into nothing but a series of 'internally related differential *relations*' (Bryant, 2014, p. 88). As a brief reminder, Harman claims that relationality inevitably slips into a relationist *holism*, and that a relational view of reality cannot explain change insofar as it views entities as *exhausted* by their relations. It is in turn for such reasons that he employs the notions of absolute "withdrawal," "absence" and "autonomy" in order to account for an excess beyond relations (see Chapter 4). It is my view that Harman's specific critique of

"relationism" here relies on the strict binary choice between absolute detachment and holistic relationism; for him, entities must necessarily either be utterly detached from other objects in order for change to occur, or they are simply nothing over and above their (holistically) intertwined relations.

As I have already suggested, I am of the view that Derrida would reject this dichotomy, as his position can account for the aforementioned surplus in two ways. First, it is my view that Derrida would account for change by supplementing a spatial (or synchronic) understanding of difference with a temporal (or diachronic) account of deference. In Section 9.2.2 above, I have argued that Derrida's development of the *trace* entails what Hägglund describes as the "negative infinity" of 'a process of displacement without end' (2008, p. 92). As I have shown above, for Derrida everything which may be said to be is fissured by a "past" which inscribes itself as a *trace* within the "present."[209] As Hägglund points out, there is a sense in which this fact restricts the possibility of claiming that absolutely anything can happen, because it entails that the temporal movement of the *trace* is '*irreversible* and dependent on a spatial […] support that restricts its possibilities.' (2011c, p. 116, emphasis added).[210] This in turn further implies that everything which "is" must have what, for lack of a better word, could provisionally be called a "history" by virtue of a sedimentation of traces. In this context, it is worth quoting Steven Shakespeare's claim that, for Derrida, individual entities such as 'rocks are never just rocks. They are structured traces, sedimentations, transformations, obstacles overcome' (Shakespeare, 2014, p. 87, emphasis added). Furthermore, I have also shown that the *trace* involves an incalculable a-teleological openness to a "future," which both allows for persistence, and which also opens up every possible existent to the possibility of its own eventual perishing, that is, its temporal finitude (see Hägglund, 2011c, p. 115). Building on Hägglund's position, O'Connor explains that, for Derrida

> Existence is finitization, transgression, violation […] This prohibits the possibility of pure self-presence since there is always a difference which makes identity differ and defer from

[209] Formulated in a more precise manner, Derrida claims that the trace is, in actual fact, itself "the trace of a trace," and it is therefore a "past that has never been present." But, by the same token, since the "present" is itself constituted in its relation to the trace structure, it is itself never actually present pure and simple (see Chapter 8).

[210] Hägglund often associates the "support" referred to here with "materiality." I however disagree with this connection, and hold that the mechanism described by Hägglund here does not in fact require a specifically *material* inscription.

> itself, and which is why, for Derrida, nothing can be *only* itself. The life of any identity or entity is subject to its own death or finitization. That an identity is always transgressed is an absolute requirement for Derrida. (2011, p. 52)

Second, Derrida may also be understood to provide another related argument for the subversion of what Harman calls "relationism" and "holism"[211] by asserting that this openness to a "future" entails that an entity can always break out of its current relations in order to enter new ones. In this context, it is worth quoting Derrida at some length when he asserts that

> a written sign carries with it a *force* that *breaks with its context*, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force [*force de rupture*] is not an accidental predicate but the *very structure* of the written text. […] by virtue of its *essential* iterability, a written syntagma can always be *detached* from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning. (1990, p. 90)

As is often the case, Derrida is here speaking about a particular system – namely that of "written" marks – and for this reason he frames his claims in relation to "signs." Nevertheless, it should be clear from my account above that "writing," for Derrida, does not mean inscription in what he would call the "vulgar" sense of the term. It is therefore possible to extrapolate the more general thrust of such assertions. Understood more broadly, Derrida is alluding to the fact that every "sign" – or, more generally, entity – always exists in a field of relations, but it also contains within it the possibility of entering entirely new contexts by virtue of a "force of rupture" which is "essential" to it. As Levi Bryant points out, it would not be possible 'for entities to break with context […] and be "grafted"' into other contexts if there were only a holistic system of 'internally related terms without *positive* entities [holism].' Furthermore, it is also be interesting to note that Bryant brings Derrida close to Aristotle – and Harman (see Section 4.4) – when he compares the Derridean position just cited to the notion of an Aristotelian "first substance" (*prote ousia*), defined here specifically in terms of its inherent capacity 'to exceed and be detachable from every context' (2014, p. 89).

It is my view that these two Derridean arguments just recited sanction the "surplus" or "withdrawal" which his system requires for the purpose of change, but without having to shore up this claim with the commitment to something like an

[211] The difference between these two terms is that the former claims that there is no excess beyond relations, while the latter entails the idea that a system is an entirely closed system. Harman relates the two, and claims that a relationism necessarily entails a holism.

"essence." Conversely, and as I have already shown, Harman would definitely not endorse Derrida's temporal account of "surplus." This is due to the fact that, for Harman, time does not belong to the real. Yet I have also already suggested that his own self-understanding on the matter of "real time" is not final, and that there is, in fact, something like a model of real time in his "object-oriented" system. As a reminder, I have argued that, for Harman, the "object" is always produced as an aftereffect of the intersection between the "past" qua inscription of past "connections," and the "future" qua openness to an as yet indeterminable future. If my reading of Harman on this specific matter is conceded, it may then be noted that Derrida's account of change and the *trace* structure just discussed comes close to the Harmanian model of "real time" that I have proposed.

10.4: On Monism and Pluralism.

Building on the issue of individuality undertaken in Section 10.3 above, the present section shall further bring this issue to bear on the associated problem of the relation between unity and plurality, or monism and pluralism.

For the purposes of the current section, and in view of the purposes of this work more generally, the aforementioned problem may be formulated in two different yet related ways; more globally, it may be said to refer to the difference between everything – that is, what is often loosely surmised under the heading of "the Universe" or "Nature" – considered as a whole (one), and the individual entities within it (many). As Cyril E. M. Joad explains, it is often claimed that the universe is 'really one, or really a unity.' Yet it also seems true that the latter is composed of multiple beings. Thus, if the first of these claims holds, then 'plurality will be in some sense an illusory appearance, and it will be necessary to explain how this illusory appearance arises' (Joad, 2009, p. 87). Understood in a more local sense, the problem may also be taken to refer to the question of whether a *specific entity* may be said to be one thing or merely an aggregate sum of many. In what follows I will discuss each of these senses respectively, and I shall also suggest that my reading of Derrida as a "Speculative Realist" offers a way to resolve this paradox through the claim that entities are both one and many.

In response to the first ("global") sense outlined above, and in light of what I have argued in the previous section and throughout, I hold that neither Derrida nor

Harman would endorse the claim that "Being" is a unity in the sense of an undifferentiated whole. To be sure, Harman's philosophy may, in a restricted sense, be understood as a form of monism to the extent that he believes that "objects" constitute the ground of reality. Nevertheless, this claim need not entail that Being is fundamentally and indifferently one (i.e. a "holism"), for he is also of the view that there are infinitely many autonomous individual objects. Harman summarises his position most pertinently in "Zero-Person and the Psyche" (2009b), when he claims that the "object-oriented" position is a 'neutral monism insofar as everything is an object,' but nonetheless also a 'radical pluralism insofar as there are countless' unified and autonomous ones (2009b, p. 279). Harman has therefore consistently argued for an "infinite regress" of objects (see Chapter 4.4 and below), but has nevertheless also rejected the idea of an "infinite progress" 'upwards into larger and larger entities and finally into some "world as a whole," since there is nothing forcing substances to enter into combination with other substances' (2013g, p. 252).[212]

Interestingly, Harman partly credits both Heidegger and Derrida for spurring his position when he insists that 'the Heideggerian-Derridean critique of presence has to be transformed into a blunt metaphysical assertion that the layers of the world never come to a close' (2008c, pp. 77-78). From what I have argued in Chapter 4 above, it is clear that Harman effectuates an expansion of Heidegger's critique of "onto-theology" in precisely this manner, but he does not do so in relation to Derrida. This is to the extent that he interprets the latter as a "linguistic idealist" who is only interested in "texts." Nevertheless, in light of my specific reading of Derrida above, I have reason to hold that the latter would also reject monism. To elaborate, on the basis of my "Speculative Realist" reading of Derrida offered above, he may be understood to endorse a form of monism only in the very limited sense that the "*différantial trace*" constitutes an 'opaque energy' which acts as the minimal condition of possibility or "ground" for anything that may be said

[212] To be sure, in the original 2007 Speculative Realism conference (see Harman, 2012a), Harman argues for *both* an infinite regress and progress of objects 'in order to avoid [the] problem of totalization' (2012a, p. 400), but from 2010 onwards he consistently argues *against* an "infinite progress" of objects (see, for instance, 2010c, p. 15; 2011e, p. 177; 2013g, p. 252). However, it may be noted that in his early conference presentation, Harman understands infinite progress to entail the *rejection* of monism, while the opposite is true of his post-2010 interpretation of the phrase. In may therefore be noted that there is no inconsistency between his earlier claims and his later ones.

to "be" (Derrida, 1997, p. 65. See also Section 9.2.2). Nevertheless, it is also clear from what I have argued throughout that Derrida's position is ultimately *not* a monism, and this is for two reasons; first, when I claim that the "*différantial trace*" acts as a "ground" for differences or different entities, I hold that this does not in fact constitute an all-encompassing monism in the sense of a holism. This is due to the fact that it acts as a "ground" for beings, but it is also simultaneously not itself a transcendent "foundation" either existing outside of specific differences or unifying them. Second, I hold that Derrida in fact also endorses a form of pluralism to the extent that the "*différantial trace*" does in effect *produce* "different things or differences." Nevertheless, it would be important to distinguish a Derridean pluralism from a Harmanian one in the following manner: for the latter, the differences between entities must be radical, and it is for this reason that he prefers to speak of *non*-relational ("autonomous") and "unified" entities which *pre-exist* said differences. Contrastingly, Derrida speaks of the "*différantial trace*" as a 'process of scission and division' which is productive of 'different things or differences' (1984b, p. 9), thereby indicating – *contra* Harman – that entities or "identities" must necessarily be produced and sustained through relation and differentiation (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Derrida's pluralist understanding of the real may in turn be further developed with recourse to Leonard Lawlor's exposition of Derrida's compelling pronouncement that 'every other (one) is every (bit) other'; '*tout autre est tout autre*' (Derrida, 1995c, Chapter 4; Lawlor, 2002, pp. 221-222). Lawlor follows Derrida in playing upon the different senses of "is" (*est*) in the latter claim, and notes that the copula may be understood in an "existential" sense or "predicative" sense. On the one hand, the former entails that 'there is no difference between anything' to the extent that every "is" is, as such, equivalent to every other (2002, p. 222). The "predicative" sense, on the other hand, implies that 'what is wholly other *is* […] wholly other than being' (2002, pp. 221-222). Additionally, Lawlor however also identifies and affirms a third possible reading which simultaneously combines both aforementioned interpretations. This last sense entails that every singular existent or other – whether human or otherwise – *is an other to every other*

(2002, p. 222),[213] such that each one harbours a degree of transcendence. Nevertheless, and as John Caputo points out, it cannot be the case that every other is *completely* other or, to use Harman's term, absolutely "withdrawn." Rather, the term "wholly other" necessarily also entails a positive relation where 'distance is the distance of someone near, not someone absent' (2009, p. 59). While Caputo mostly links this claim to inter-*subjective* relations, he also interestingly pushes this idea further by suggesting that 'every object' – whether animate or inanimate – may be understood as an "other" to the extent that it 'has its own transcendence' (2009, p. 60). While I salute Caputo's extension, I am however of the view that he remains within the bounds of the human-world (cor)relation when he argues that this transcendence is what allows objects to 'command *our respect*' and evoke a '*meaning* that *we* can't conceptualize' (2009, p. 61, emphasis added).

While I do not deny the ethical implications suggested here, I nevertheless follow O'Connor and Shakespeare in holding that Derrida's aforementioned formulation may be given an even broader "inter-objective" expression. In keeping with what has been discussed earlier, saying that "*tout autre est tout autre*" entails that for 'entities to be they must singularly persist,' and thereby retain a degree of individuality (O'Connor, 2011, p. 73). Pushing this view further, Shakespeare suggests that 'there is something of the wholly other about' each and every entity. On Shakespeare's expanded reading of Derrida, that which is other – namely each and every singular other – keeps "secrets" from every other, insofar as entities 'cannot be resolved into their relations, or into a substantial interior self-presence' (2014, p. 88). Nevertheless, Patrick O'Connor also reminds us that persistence also necessarily requires relations of difference for Derrida, and this in turn implies, contra Harman, that entities must simultaneously also be capable of 'chaining and being other' (2011, p. 73).

This "broader" discussion of the relation between unity and plurality in turn leads to the consideration of the aforementioned "local" problem. More

[213] Lawlor describes this latter formulation as an 'expression of pantheism' to the extent that it entails that an existent 'conceals spirit and therefore is a sort of divinity' (2002, p. 222). I am however of the view that one ought to be wary of this description, since it might give credence to Quentin Meillassoux's link between "fideism" and "strong correlationism" (see Meillassoux, 2008). Furthermore, it might also imply there is one entity doing the work of conjoining all different relations.

specifically, if both Harman and Derrida may in fact be (implicitly or explicitly) said to be committed to a pluralist understanding of "Being," then a problem remains regarding the nature of specific entities, namely the question of whether an individual entity is itself one or many. To state my response as precisely as possible, I hold that both thinkers see individual entities as themselves plural, even if there is a stark contrast between their respective positions. This claim requires further elucidation.

Further to my discussion of Harman in 4.4 above, it may be noted that he regards individual entities to be both unified and made up of multiple parts. To elaborate, on the one hand Harman argues that in some sense an "object" is a unity rather than an aggregate sum of parts; an object, for Harman, is always a whole which emerges through the unification of its respective parts. On the other hand, he also argues that any object must itself simultaneously also be composed of an assortment of heterogeneous parts. Thus, he argues that an object is always unified 'with respect to its surroundings' and also 'a relational composite of its internal elements' (2002, p. 171). Rather than trying to eradicate the supposed paradox of unity and plurality, Harman openly embraces it through the assertion that objects are both unified and plural. Nevertheless, it would be important to note that he holds this relation between unity and plurality to be asymmetrical. This is due to the fact that he ultimately favours the former over the latter when he argues that any "object" is, in the last instance, "self-identical" or "unified" and also relatively independent of any of its individual parts considered in isolation.

Harman would most definitely deny that Derrida' work would be of use in analysing the problem of entities and their parts, due to the fact that he believes Derrida to adopt a quietist attitude towards the real *tout court*. I nevertheless disagree with Harman on this specific issue, and claim that the Derridean-inflected realist position I have developed above also entails a pluralist view with regards to "individual" entities. To elaborate, I have already argued that, for Derrida, anything that "is" or may be said to "be" must necessarily be constituted through differences broadly conceived. It then follows that, if any one of an entity's parts "is" or "exists" in the same manner, then it too must be constituted through relation and difference. As Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*, 'the thing is itself a collection of things or a chain of differences "in space"' (1997, p. 70). It may be noted that Harman has

sporadically referred to this specific claim (see Harman, 2013b, p. 197; 2018b, p. 207; 2020a, p. 103), but he repeatedly interprets it as making a purely "linguistic" point. Under this characterisation, "the thing" would then mean "the signified concept." Nevertheless, as is clear from my reading of Derrida, it may be argued that this restricted interpretation need not necessarily hold. Thus, interpreted more literally, Derrida's assertion here may be understood to entail the claim that every entity is itself constituted through differences on its "interior." By adhering to O'Connor's metaphor of "world" discussed above, it may be argued that Derrida's thought implies that *both* an entity *and* its parts are "environments" in their own right, insofar as each of them occupies a specific place within a context or specific field of differences (2011, p. 160). Borrowing Harman's words above, it may then be argued that Derrida's position entails that any entity always acts as one thing "with respect to its surroundings" – i.e. within a specific "context" of differences – but that it is also itself a "relational composite" of differences. Given this, I disagree with Harman's claim that Derrida's thought is incapable of tackling issues related to the real due to his exclusive interest in "texts" and "language," since I am of the view that my Speculative Realist reading of Derrida may be brought to bear on the problem of the one and the many. More specifically, I claim that Derrida's path beyond the paradox also entails the view that entities are both one and many; an entity, for Derrida, may be understood as one to the extent that the process of differing/deferring is responsible for 'the *formation* of *form'* (1997, p. 63, emphasis added), and thus for the emergence and persistence of minimally structured singularities. Nevertheless, his position also entails that an entity is never purely and simply "one," since its singularity must always be developed and sustained through relations of difference. It may therefore be noted that my realist reading of Derrida could be interpreted to endorse the Harmanian claim that entities are is in some sense both one and many. Nevertheless, this relation would also be asymmetrical in Derrida's thought; he may be said to take the opposite view to that of Harman, favouring the claim that an entity is ultimately "many" due to the fact that his relational and differential view of the real denies that any entity can be "self-identical" or "unified" to begin with. In the following concluding section, I shall specifically analyse the implications of such a view for Derrida's relation to Harman.

10.5: Concluding Remarks

In the present chapter, I sought to tie together the accounts of Derrida and Harman detailed throughout this work by explicitly bringing their respective views into relief as well as by elaborating on some of their most salient accords and discords. As is clear from the above, I am of the view that Harman's "Object-Oriented Philosophy" presents a novel and captivating form of Speculative Realism. Nevertheless, I am also of the view that his reading of Derrida as an anti-realist does not represent the final word on the thinker's work. Against Harman's evaluation, I have therefore suggested that Derrida may in fact also be read as advancing an equally forceful implicit form of "Speculative Realism." It must however also be immediately emphasised that their respective views vary drastically and in non-trivial ways. This is to the extent that Harman's position is premised on the existence of discrete and hence non-relational "objects," while Derrida's position – on my account – implies the view that entities must necessarily be involved in a process of relation and differentiation.

In spite of their disparities, there are however, at least on my analysis of the two thinkers, also a number of similarities that have been drawn out between them through my evaluation above. Firstly, both may be said to be *anti-correlationist* in similar ways to the extent that they argue that the real cannot be known directly, but that it can nevertheless be alluded to or thought. Second, unlike the views of competing forms of realism such as those of Quentin Meillassoux (2008), both may be said to emphasise different forms of synchronic or diachronic finitude as part of the furniture of the real. Finally, both Derrida and Harman emphasise a real composed of a plurality of entities and perspectives, even if the latter understands these to be absolutely unified and distinct, while the former discounts this possibility of absolute "withdrawal" in favour of a differential view which nevertheless *does not* lapse into the "holistic" view of reality staunchly criticised by Harman.

In view of the above, it would then be essential to briefly take stock of what has been argued throughout the present chapter in light of its importance for the task of this dissertation more generally. The encounter between Derrida and Harman I have offered throughout this study is important since my reworked

reading of Harman's dynamic philosophy and critique of Derrida provides me with the impetus for a reassessment of the latter's work in terms of a novel form of Speculative Realism, one which is premised on the "*différantial trace*" as a real process of differentiation and deferral. In this way, and contrary to Harman's assessment of Derrida, I have shown that both thinkers may be interpreted to provide the resources for thinking a non-correlated real, that is, a real which is neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on our (human) ways of conceiving it. I have also shown that both articulate a unique model of individual entities, even if there are important differences between their respective take on individuality.

The thrust of this disparity may in turn be summarised by making recourse to the difference between subsistence and persistence. For Harman, entities may be said to sub-sist – literally, to stand beneath – in the sense that their being is unified and autonomous, and hence primarily "withdrawn" from relations. In other words, his "objects" are independent of their spatial and temporal relations, to the effect that they principally exist *sub*-spatially and *sub*-temporally (Harman, 2016e). Contrastingly, Derrida's specific *Speculative Realist* position entails that individual entities per-sist – literally, to stand through – in the specific sense that they require relations of difference and deferral in order to come into being and endure as singular beings. These claims on my part in turn tally nicely with the overall aim of this dissertation, which is to show that Harman's "object-oriented" model of entities provides contemporary philosophy with a dynamic and innovative account of the real, but that his assessment of Derrida is not final and therefore necessitates my reassessment of the latter's thought in terms of a dynamic way of reconsidering both the structure of the real more broadly, as well as entities and their interactions more specifically.

Conclusion

On the basis of the arguments put forward throughout this dissertation, the stakes of my specific readings of Derrida and Harman should be clear. In the opening chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 1 and 2), I have argued that the criteria for realism entail the commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality which is neither constitutionally nor representationally dependent on humans. Furthermore, I have also argued that any robust realism must also be committed to the claim that it is possible to think the workings of a non-correlated real, namely one which is not restricted to our specific modes of human access. This working definition was important in that it established a general understanding of the term "realism" on the basis of which it was then possible to judge Derrida and Harman's work – both on their own terms and in relation to one another – regarding the status of realism in their thought. The main contribution of this thesis is contained in the claim that *both* Derrida and Harman satisfy the conditions for realism, and that they both articulate the minimal conditions for the non-correlated being of entities and their interactions.

All standard readings of "Object-Oriented Philosophy" are framed in terms of Harman's "quadruple" system composed of two pairs of real and sensual objects and qualities. What distinguishes my specific analysis of Harman above from all available readings of his work is the fact that, in Chapters 4-6, I have provided a reworked understanding of his thought characterised specifically in terms of what I have dubbed its "negative" and "positive" theses on objects. The former entails the claim that any object cannot be "undermined" into nothing more than its constituent pieces, "overmined" into its effects and relations to the human ("correlationism") or to other entities more generally ("relationism"), or both simultaneously ("duomining"). As a reminder, Harman claims that undermining is unable to account for the emergence of singular entities, while overmining is unable to account for change. Harman's positive claims in turn entail that any object – be it real or sensual – is necessarily unified and autonomous. Both real and sensual objects are unified in the sense that they are self-identical and hence irreducible to their qualities. Furthermore, sensual objects may be said to be autonomous in the sense that they are not equivalent to particular profiles through which they are

given, while real objects are autonomous in the sense that they are primarily utterly independent or "withdrawn" from all their relations.

My specific reframing of Harman's system was useful for the aims of this dissertation for three main reasons: first, permitted me to highlight that Harman's thought takes the "object" to be the *minimal unit* of the real; for him, to be is to be an object broadly construed. Second, my characterisation stressed that Harman's objects are always self-identical, and primarily *subsist* independently of their context. Third, it has allowed me to show how Harman uses his theses on objects in order to build his "linguistic idealist" case against Derrida; he argues that the latter *discounts* the self-identity ("unity") of objects and their autonomous existence ("withdrawal") in favour of a tacit ontology based on the overmining of entities into nothing more than linguistically generated melange of sensual qualities. Harman further laments that all realist readings of Derrida are simply attempts to thwart the meaning of the term "realism" in terms of an "excess" or "alterity" beyond human access, rather than building a strong case against standard anti-realist interpretations of the thinker.

My analysis of the different realist interpretations of Derrida in Section 7.1 attests to the fact that I in fact concur with Harman on his specific claim that the vast majority of explicit "realist" characterisations of Derrida to date advanced by thinkers such as Caputo, Norris, and Marder offer what ultimately amounts to a negative "realism of the remainder." This sort of "realist" defence of Derrida does not rise up to the challenge posed by Harman's critique of Derrida, in that it does not allow for a more positive articulation of the workings of the real beyond human access. For this reason, throughout Chapters 7-10, I have argued for the claim that Derrida's thought is not antithetical to a more positive form of realism which allows for a non-correlated thought of a real itself, and that he should in fact be considered as a philosophical ally to Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology. By having advanced such claim, I did not wish to suggest that Derrida expressly pre-empted these movements, and that they are therefore nothing more than old wine in new bottles. Rather, I am of the view that the emergence of these novel forms of thought have opened up a space for my positive realist reassessment of Derrida's work presented throughout this work. More specifically, and by adopting a definition of realism which is congruent with Harman and Speculative Realism's

understanding of the term, I have been able to respond to Harman's critique by showing how Derrida can be understood to implicitly advance a novel speculative form of realism which joins Speculative Realism in challenging the anti-realist assumption that one cannot think beyond the bounds of human access or the correlation between thought and being.

I further argued that Derrida's specific Speculative Realism is also premised on his "negative" and "positive" theses on the real, and in so doing I sought to draw a parallel between his own thought and that of Harman. I claim that the "negative" thesis refers to the Derridean claim that the real cannot be reduced to "presence," whether this is construed in terms of the self-identity of any entity or its presence to the human. I have shown that such a thesis follows from his deconstructive critique of the "metaphysics of presence" and "logocentrism" respectively. Thus, like Harman, Derrida has been shown to emphasise *epistemic* finitude, namely the claim that the real cannot be directly know, that is, it cannot be "overmined" or reduced to its givenness to the human. Derrida's "positive" claims are in turn premised on his discovery and speculative generalisation of the "*différantial trace*" to include the minimal conditions of possibility for a non-correlated real more broadly, and any existent more specifically. This notion of the "*différantial trace*" names a *process* which precludes and displaces presence, since it entails that entities must necessarily come into being an persist through an interrelated double-difference: first, the minimal requirement for any entity is its self-difference, insofar as its persistence requires phasing traces of a "past" and "future." Second, any entity must, for Derrida, also be defined by its relations of difference from its others, thereby also retaining traces of that which it defines itself against. This double sense of difference in turn implies – *pace* Harman – that entities cannot be purely self-identical or autonomous for Derrida, since their "being" must be constituted by differences which are simultaneously both spatially produced and temporally sustained across "time." This in turn implies that entities are always necessarily entwined, relational, and defined in terms of their relations of difference. With all of these claims in view, it is therefore clear that Derrida's differential and relational view of the real must be seen to oppose Harman's "object-oriented" and primarily non-relational approach based on self-identity and autonomy, even if this

disagreement does not necessarily entail the anti-realism which Harman ascribes to deconstruction.

In Chapter 10, I have in turn shown that this radical difference between their respective views entailed further important differences. More specifically, I have argued that while both Derrida and Harman share a mutual commitment to finitude, excess, and singularity, the way these respective terms are understood and developed in their respective works varies drastically. With regards to finitude, I have distinguished between spatial and temporal forms of finitude. In sum, the former refers to any entity's inability to "touch" another directly, while the latter emphasises every being's openness to the passage of time. I have shown that Harman places an exclusive emphasis on the first form of finitude when he asserts that objects as utterly autonomous, and that the movement of time does not affect anything. Contrastingly, Derrida may be said to emphasise both spatial and temporal finitude to the extent that he holds the two to be inseparable; the spatio-temporal "co-implication" of *différance* implies that every entity must necessarily *persist* by being different, and that this difference must endure "in time." In following, I have argued that Harman accounts for excess and change by emphasising on the complete "withdrawal" of self-identical objects from their relations. This is, for him, what accounts for the "excess" exhibited by objects. Derrida, on the other hand, offers a relational theory which in Harman's judgement would lead to a holistic "relationism" where everything is intertwined with everything else such that change is impossible. Nevertheless, I have argued that Derrida's thought may account for the excess of entities beyond their relations in two ways; first, I have shown how Derrida's notion of the "*différantial trace*" entails that every entity is constituted by a ("past") sedimentation of traces, but that it nevertheless also opens itself up to an incalculable "future" which both allows for its persistence and change. Second, and relatedly, I have also argued that Derrida's realism asserts that entities always exist in a field of relations or "context," but that the aforementioned openness to a "future" allows for the essential capacity of any entity to break out of a particular context of relations in order to enter new ones. Finally, I have also claimed that both Derrida and Harman's thought allows for the possibility of thinking singular existents. As I have shown, Harman may be said to account for an object's individuality by virtue of his commitment to the claim that

entities are always utterly discrete and "withdrawn." In the case of Derrida, I have argued that he rejects self-identity *a priori*, and that he therefore cannot account for an entity's specificity by virtue of the latter. Nevertheless, I have also argued that Derrida's thought allows for the possibility that entities are simultaneously both relationally constituted, but also singular. More specifically, a Derrida-inflected realism entails that everything which may be said to "be" is defined by differential relations. Nevertheless, singular entities are also simultaneously relatively discrete by virtue of the specific position or "environment" which each occupies within a specific system of relations.

Regarding the above, I am therefore of the view that I have accomplished the aims set by the theme of this dissertation. As a reminder, my work sought to answer the question of the precise relation between Object-Oriented and Deconstructive forms of realism. In order to answer this query, I have proceeded in this manner: I first provided a novel reworked interpretation of Harman's dynamic "Object-Oriented Philosophy," and have framed his "anti-realist" critique of Derrida in relation to the latter. I then went on to show that, contrary to Harman's interpretations of the thinker, Derrida's thought opens itself up to its reinterpretation in terms of a novel and dynamic form of Speculative Realism. The latter rests on the claim that Derrida's work contains an implicit account of a non-correlated real rooted in a differing-deferring movement imposed by the "*différantial trace*." This movement in turn stipulates the minimal conditions for the emergence and persistence of any being whatever, and thus specifies the real conditions for a deconstructive realism.

The encounter between Graham Harman and Jacques Derrida presented throughout the course of this dissertation is, in my view, important for contemporary thought, and this is for the following reasons: first, it illustrates the precise ways in which Harman's "object-oriented" thought provides a dynamic revaluation of phenomenological thought in the service of a powerful form of realism premised on the irreducibility of individual entities which populate experience and the world more generally. Second, it explicitly articulates Harman's main critique of deconstruction, and it so doing it illustrates one prominent way in which Derrida's thought has been received by younger emerging philosophers. Third, it brings Derrida's work up to speed with newly emerging twenty-first

century philosophical movements of Object-Oriented Philosophy more specifically, and Speculative Realism more generally. Finally, it illustrates that, contrary to received opinion, Derrida's work does in fact allow for the possibility of thinking the workings of a real which is irreducible to our all-to-human ways of access, and that "aconceptual concepts" such as the "*différantial trace*" can be analysed in terms of the attempt to name the minimal conditions for possibility for the emergence of the various existents which populate our world. While I am of the view that I have successfully achieved the targets set by the general theme driving this dissertation, in my future academic research I aim to delve deeper both into the specifics of Derrida and Harman's individual realist philosophies, and in the intersection between their respective thought. In my future research, I shall aim to connect the findings of this dissertation to different disciplines such as those of aesthetics, politics, and ecology.

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