

# YOU ARE HERE: A MANIFESTO

*Eileen A. Joy*



*for Aranye Fradenburg: the work is to keep moving,  
but also to keep living*

The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real. It is the same with an act of love. . . . The authentic and pure values—truth, beauty and goodness—in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same act, a certain application of the full attention to the object.

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 1952), 119.

PROLEGOMENON: A MENTAL HANDOUT

Imagine a piece of paper, completely blank, except for a small black dot directly in the center. And then a small arrow pointing to the dot, and next to that, the phrase is written, "You Are Here." Strictly speaking, the dot is where you are. Paraphrasing Italo Calvino's short story, "All At One Point," which describes the time before the universe expanded, when all of matter was concentrated in a single point, and everyone and everything, in the words of the narrator, "was packed in there like sardines,"<sup>2</sup> every point of each of us coincides with every point of everyone else in a single point, which is where we all are. There is nowhere else. The idea of distance, or separation, or estrangement, is a dream. Which is not to say we should not mind the gaps.

IDEATION WITHOUT BODIES/THE DROWNED WORLD

The strangest thing is that I am not at all inclined to call myself insane, I clearly see that I am not: all these changes concern objects. At least, that is what I'd like to be sure of.

from the notebooks of Antoine Roquentin<sup>3</sup>

In J.G. Ballard's short story, "The Overloaded Man," the main character, Faulkner, is "slowly going insane."<sup>4</sup> In a nutshell, he's become dissatisfied with life in general, and having quit his job, he waits impatiently for his wife to leave every morning so that he can engage in a certain daily secret ritual. Living in a development called "the Bin"—a "sprawl of interlocking frosted glass,

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<sup>2</sup> Italo Calvino, "All At One Point," in *Cosmicomics*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 43 [43–47].

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: New Directions, 2007), 2.

<sup>4</sup> J.G. Ballard, "The Overloaded Man," in *The Best Short Stories of J.G. Ballard* (New York: Picador, 1995), 112 [112–124].

white rectangles and curves, at first glance abstract and exciting . . . but to the people within formless and visually exhausting”<sup>5</sup>—Faulkner is eager to dematerialize his surroundings. Sitting on his veranda each day, he engages in a process of intense visualization, turning the entire field of recognizable “objects” in his view into “disembodied” forms, leading to a randomized, geometric “cubist landscape.”<sup>6</sup> Unknowingly following some of the thing-logics laid out by Bill Brown in his 2001 essay, “Thing Theory,” Faulkner reduces the world to thingness, where “things” denote both the “amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject” (things as the “anterior physicality of the physical world”) and also the ways in which the world always exceeds our ability to apprehend it (things as “sensuous” and “metaphysical” presences that exceed their “materialization as objects or their mere utilization in objects”).<sup>7</sup>

As in the bricolage technique of the Surrealists, which Brown refers to in his essay, Faulkner operates a variety of “cut-out switches” that sever objects from their always already “tenuous” hold on reality and thereby crafts what he believes is an “escape route” from a world he finds tedious and “intolerable.” But Faulkner also believes, perhaps perversely, that “it was pleasant to see the world afresh again, to wallow in an endless panorama of brilliantly colored images. What did it matter if there was form but no content?”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as the verbs of Ballard’s story suggest—deleting, blotting, switching off, repressing, vanishing, obliterating, eliminating, erasing, stripping, reducing, demolishing, etc.—what Faulkner is really doing is

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<sup>5</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 115.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Autumn 2001): 5 [1–22].

<sup>8</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 116.

deleting the world and all “traces of meaning” from that world, until even the cubist shapes he has reduced it to also begin to

lose their meaning, the abstract masses of color dissolving, drawing Faulkner after them into a world of pure psychic sensation, where blocks of ideation hung like magnetic fields in a cloud chamber. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, he also discovers that, in addition to his surroundings, his own body, which “seemed an extension of his mind,” has vanished as well. That is, until his wife shows up and starts screaming at him and he decides to “dismantle” her as well, “erasing all his memories” of her “motion and energy,” and turning her into “a bundle of obtrusive angles.”<sup>10</sup> And yet, what he precisely *cannot erase* is the motion of her body fastening onto his, at which point he decides to “smooth and restrain her, molding her angular form into a softer and rounder one.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, he strangles her to death.

As it turns out, even when you visually “dismantle” and erase the world and all of its “objects,” including persons, they still retain their insistently sensuous and metaphysical thingness and demand your attention. Bodies continue to press in, even your own. And what Faulkner ultimately seeks is

pure ideation, the undisturbed sensation of psychic being untransmuted by any physical medium. Only thus could he escape the nausea of the external world.

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<sup>9</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 118.

<sup>10</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 123.

<sup>11</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 124.

And so, seeking “an absolute continuum of existence uncontaminated by material excrescences,” he drowns himself in a shallow pond at the far end of his garden while looking up at the “blue disk” of the sky,<sup>12</sup> which he believes is somehow the only space freed of materiality. The sky is teeming with materiality, of course. The world remains, and Faulkner himself, even as a dead body, is still enmeshed with that world, and with his own body (he *is* his body), which cannot really be obliterated—at least, not by Faulkner *thinking* it away. Another way of putting this might be to say, even when you are dead, you are still *here*.

In another story by Ballard, “The Concentration City,” Franz M., a physics student who lives at 3599719 West 783<sup>rd</sup> Street, is obsessed with trying to leave the City, which is comprised of seemingly endless buildings and streets and is “as old as time and continuous with it.”<sup>13</sup> Although even just one sector of the City is “one hundred thousand cubic miles,” Franz M. is convinced that somewhere beyond an outer boundary there is endless “free space” and he attempts to traverse the entire length of the City in one direction on a high-speed train in order to find a limitless Outside that he believes must exist. But through some trick of time-space curvature that is built into the train tracks he only ends up back where he started, with no time having elapsed, even though he was gone for three weeks. Although Franz M. continues to doggedly insist, even while being carted off to the psychiatrists, that the City must have “bounds,” the City itself fills up all of time and space and cannot be traversed, or even imagined, as some sort of totality that could be crossed beyond. For the reader, as for Franz M., this is supposed to feel like a nightmare.

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<sup>12</sup> Ballard, “The Overloaded Man,” 124.

<sup>13</sup> J.G. Ballard, “The Concentration City,” in *The Best Short Stories of J.G. Ballard*, 19 [1–20].

YOU ARE HERE/THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

I guess that this must be the place,  
I can't tell one from another.  
Did I find you, or you find me?  
There was a time before we were born,  
If someone asks, this is where I'll be, where I'll be.

The Talking Heads, "This Must be the Place"

In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett mentions Hent de Vries's idea of the "absolute" as an "intangible and imponderable recalcitrance" that points to

a something that is not an object of knowledge, that is detached or radically free from representation, and thus nothing at all. Nothing but the force or the effectivity of the detachment, that is.<sup>14</sup>

Important to note here is that while this "absolute" may be radically detached from our world and systems of knowledge, it has also somehow come loose from that very same world and systems of knowledge, and therefore, it is both gone, yet also *still here*. In some systems this "absolute" could be God, but more importantly, for De Vries, it marks a place, or a *Thing*, which has "loosen[ed] its ties to existing contexts." Similar to the "thing-power" that Bennett articulates in her book, De Vries's notion of the absolute "seeks to acknowledge that which refuses to dissolve completely into the milieu of human knowledge," but whereas De Vries conceives of this absolute as an epistemological limit on *human* knowing that also *hovers*, recalcitrantly,

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

“between immanence and transcendence,” Bennett wants to return matter (“things”) to a more “earthy, not-quite human capaciousness” in which things would be released from their “long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism.”<sup>15</sup>

Thinking of Ballard’s two stories again, we might say that they both take up different forms of De Vries’s version of the completely detached and *non*-earthy absolute (both characters are trying to literally *loosen* themselves from their respective worlds), and both stories also illustrate the anxiety and despair brought on by a desire to either inhabit the absolute position (which, ultimately, is never human, or let’s say, liveable) or to somehow cross beyond it, to believe that there must be an Outside (an exterior) that would unfold or unfurl somehow from a more locally-positioned world contained by our mapping devices, which is to say, our minds, as well as our satellites. Without this Outside, we feel trapped, hemmed “in”—although strictly speaking, if there is no Outside, there is also no Inside. There is only here, and to quote the Talking Heads, “this must be the place.”

With Timothy Morton, I believe that “there is no definite ‘within’ or ‘outside’ of beings”—for example, every time you breathe in oxygen you are inhaling “a by-product of the first Archæan beings (from 2.5 billion years ago back to an undefined limit after the origin of Earth 4.5 billion years ago)” and the “hills are teeming with the skeletal silence of dead life forms”—but as Morton also reminds us, we can’t really “get along without these concepts [of inside and outside] either.”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, if we’re going to formulate any sort of ethics that takes interdependence and coexistence (or what Morton terms “coexistentialism”) seriously, as

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 39.

Morton argues, we're going to have to dissolve "the barrier between 'over here' and 'over there,' and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside."<sup>17</sup> And while we may certainly be *in something*—following the physicist David Bohm's idea of the "implicate order,"<sup>18</sup> everything might be *folded* into everything else—nevertheless, this is a something, or a *someplace*, "that has no center or edge," and there can never be "a background against which our thinking makes sense."<sup>19</sup>

There is still separation and difference, however, and this is an important point. As Morton puts it, "all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially," and while there is no authentic zero-point of origin or "specific flavor" for any one being (no absolute uniqueness)—"evolution jumbles bodies like a dream jumbles words and image"<sup>20</sup>—nor is there any way to hold the life and non-life distinction in place, nor can we hold the human and non-human distinction in place, nor is consciousness necessarily intentional or even "superior" ("sentience" may be the lowest, and not the highest, function implicit in evolu-

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<sup>17</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> On David Bohm's thinking on the implicate, enfolded order of the universe, see David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980) and "The Enfolding-Unfolding Universe and Consciousness (1980)," in *The Essential David Bohm*, ed. Lee Nichol (London: Routledge, 2003), 78–138.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Morton, "Materialism Expanded and Remixed," conference paper presented at "New Materialisms," Johns Hopkins University, April 13–14, 2010: 11 [1–17]; <http://www.scribd.com/doc/25830212/Materialism-Expanded-and-Remixed>.

<sup>20</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 66, 65.



tion),<sup>21</sup> and evolution itself may be pointless. Nevertheless, as Morton also asserts,

We can't in good faith cancel the difference between humans and nonhumans. Nor can we preserve it. Doing both at the same time would be inconsistent. We're in a bind. But . . . . The bind is a sign of an emerging democracy of life forms.<sup>22</sup>

Subjectivity may ultimately be a bottomless void, but saying that there is no coherent “something” there (with mappable contours and limits) is not the same thing as saying there is “nothing” there at all. Cadging from Morton, something is always “seeping through.”<sup>23</sup> Further, every object I encounter, including persons (human and nonhuman), in Steven Shaviro’s words, both draws me “into extended referential networks whose full ramifications I cannot trace” and also “bursts forth” in its singularity, “stun[ning] me in excess of anything that I can posit about it.”<sup>24</sup> So, for me, the trick in going forward now, as regards an ethics of interdependence, or co-implicated dependence, also means becoming *more*, and not less, human. The

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<sup>21</sup> On this point regarding sentience as a possibly “lower” achievement of evolutionary biology, see Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 72. I would also point those interested in this idea to the work of Rodney Brooks, who directs the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at M.I.T., and to his influential paper, “Elephants Don’t Play Chess,” *Robotics and Autonomous Systems* 6 (1990): 3–15.

<sup>22</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Shaviro, “The Universe of Things,” symposium paper presented at “Object-Oriented Ontology,” Georgia Tech. University, April 3, 2010: 7 [1–18]; <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=893>.

human is also an inescapable *here*, a someplace, and not a no-place.

A TEXT IS A SENTIENT OBJECT/OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR/YOU ARE CLOSER TO ME THAN IT APPEARS/THE PAST IS CLOSER THAN IT APPEARS/YOU DO NO SERVICE TO HISTORY BY KEEPING IT BEHIND YOU/I WISH WE COULD GO ON TALKING LIKE THIS BUT I HAVE TO MOVE BEYOND THE TITLE OF THIS SECTION

. . . contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it's capable, if it can).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>25</sup>

I want to turn now to the question of how literature might have anything to do with any of this and, following the thought of Jane Bennett, I want to say something like: Texts are objects that possess vibrant materiality; they are “quasi forces” that possess something like “tendencies of their own.”<sup>26</sup> They possess thing-power, and as much as they are able, they strive, in the words of Spinoza, to “persist in existing.”

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett describes “vibrant matter” as objects that are “active” and “earthy” and which possess a “not-quite-human capaciousness” (*Vibrant Matter*, 3). This is to ultimately think objects outside of their traditional roles “as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert” (vii) and to invent (dream?) for objects a lively ontology of “vital materiality” in which things “act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” outside of human will and human designs (viii).

Texts are, in some sense, *alive*, while at the same time they are, even while produced by humans, utterly inhuman. No matter how many people—that is to say, characters—you put into a text, they still come out flat and dead. By which I mean, those aren't really people. Anna Karenina doesn't really exist and the only reason she feels alive to you when reading Tolstoy's novel is because you animated her through a technique we humans are particularly good at—I think of it as a felicitous form of “lying to ourselves.” In addition, Michael Witmore reminds us that,

Our work with narratives puts us in touch with forms of reduction or compression that are every bit as diagrammatic and so (potentially) inhuman as those who study the compression algorithms of physics or planetary biology. The key for us is the way in which narratives of human action introduce counterfactual ideals—impossible, limiting, but also operative and effectual—that are immanent in the objects we study, not simply projections of the creators or interpreters of those objects.<sup>27</sup>

So, literary characters are potentially inhuman (ciphers, even) although we often treat them as if they are fully human (they're more like symptoms, as well as

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Witmore, “We Have Never Not Been Inhuman,” in *When Did We Become Post/human?* ed. Eileen A. Joy and Craig Dionne, special issue of *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 1.1-2 (2010): 213 [208–214]. For a glimpse into Witmore's work with the forms of compression present in early modern literary texts, especially Shakespeare, see his weblog *Wine Dark Sea*: <http://winedarksea.org/>.

transitive signifiers, of the human<sup>28</sup>). They possess something of the qualities of Bruno Latour's *actant*—in Graham Harman's words, "a force utterly deployed in the world" which is on the same ontological footing as everything else, including us. As Harman writes of Latour's thinking on actants, if everything is on the same ontological footing, "this ends the tear-jerking modern rift between the knowing human subject and the unknowable outside world, since for Latour the isolated Kantian human is no more and no less an actor than are windmills, sunflowers, propane tanks, and Thailand."<sup>29</sup> Again: you are here. So is everything else. There is nowhere else to go.

I am recalled to the biennial meeting of the New Chaucer Society in Siena, Italy in July 2010, when Aranye Fradenburg delivered her moving plenary lecture, "Living Chaucer,"<sup>30</sup> where she argued that "the

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<sup>28</sup> On the idea of traveling and transitive signifiers and their "living on"-ness within the corpus of medieval literature and in contemporary life, as well as the ways in which they enable intersubjective formations between various actors, alive and dead, located in the past and present (with some formations more psychologically unsettling and dangerous and historically damaging than others, and some more affectively sustaining and effectual for progressive change), the entire oeuvre of Aranye Fradenburg is indispensable; see, most recently, Aranye Fradenburg, "(Dis)continuity: A History of Dreaming," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, eds. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Frederico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 87–115, from whence I culled this essay's dedicatory line.

<sup>29</sup> Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 14.

<sup>30</sup> This lecture has since been published: L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 41–64. I cite here my (perhaps imperfect) notes from the Siena meeting in July 2010 in order to remain faithful, if just for the momentary purposes of this essay, to the bodily presence of Fradenburg and my memory of her words and

experience of narrative is a rapprochement with another mind,” that we share with an author like Chaucer a kind of intersubjectivity in which it is not always easy to tell where the self (his, ours) ends and Otherness (Chaucer, us, his characters, language, signifiers, etc.) begins. Let’s take this another step further and say that the experience of narrative is also a rapprochement with a “persisting object” that uses humans as an activation device, a sort of on-switch. We might tentatively qualify literature as a ‘quasi-object’ that is neither entirely an object nor either fully a subject but is nevertheless *in the world* as a ‘constructor of intersubjectivity’ in which the ‘we’ of any given moment is made in the “bursts and occultation’s of the ‘I’”<sup>31</sup> as texts are shuttled back and forth, over vast stretches of time, between shelves and tables and readers and other texts which may be, in Serres’s terms, only “stations and relays.” Who can tell when a text, or a reader, is ‘it’ and when it is an ‘I’ (or a ‘we’)? As Serres also writes, we don’t know whether quasi-objects, which are also quasi-subjects, “are beings or relations, tatters of being or ends of relations. By them, the principle of individuation can be transmitted or can get stuck.”<sup>32</sup> Put another way, we might say, following Latour, that a literary text, like the quasi-object, like ourselves, is “simultaneously real, discursive, and social,” belonging “to nature, to the collective, and to discourse,” and “bearing the traces of Being that are

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arguments as she was delivering this lecture, and to the further thoughts she sparked in me at that time—a “shared mental experience,” in Fradenburg’s own terms (“Living Chaucer,” 43).

<sup>31</sup> Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Larry R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 227.

<sup>32</sup> Serres, *The Parasite*, 227–28.

distributed everywhere among beings.”<sup>33</sup>

We might think, also, of literature as a kind of *living* and open signaling system, an endlessly looping reel-to-reel tape-feed (even when interrupted by static, worms chewing on the wires, bad translators, fire, and floods), that could also be described, as Fradenburg suggested in Siena, as a “territorial assemblage,” one that enables an endless series of aparallel relations within and across various temporal zones that are, in some sense, always here with us now and also located in the Great Outdoors of a forest of textual data that may or may not always be accessible to us (or to our particular questions).<sup>34</sup> The human body is itself a time capsule of all previous bodies, just as texts are time capsules of all previous writing, and the “junk”—whether junk-DNA or spilled ink in the margins, is always with us. Nothing is ever lost, although if Harman is right, everything is always withdrawing from everything else. Again: you are here, but a part of you is also somewhere else. It is the same with texts. Although, strictly speaking, that “somewhere else” is also here. You can’t get away from here, and the exits of the universe are locked.

According to Harman, all objects in the world—which can be armies, persons, ants, chalk, earthworms, raindrops, stones, etc.—are always in retreat from each other, always withdrawing, and every possible relation between any two objects is also an object. While Harman doesn’t deny reciprocity and symbiosis and even celebrates them, he insists on a “weird realism” whereby no one real object could ever really “touch” any other real object. Nevertheless, there are sensual

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<sup>33</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 64, 66.

<sup>34</sup> On this point, see Michael Witmore, “The Ancestral Text,” *Wine Dark Sea*, May 9, 2011, <http://winedarksea.org/?p=979>.

relations, and he uses the term “allure” to describe the distance between any real object and the qualities that stream out of it, constituting the sensual object with which we engage. As he puts it, “Whereas real objects withdraw, sensual objects lie directly before us, frosted over with a swirling, superfluous outer shell.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, real objects can only “touch” other real objects by way of a sensual object, a “vicar of causation,” as it were, that leads to ever more new objects being formed—in other words, new relations. Furthermore, and this is the really important implication of Harman’s thought for me in thinking about how this might help us to formulate a speculative realist literary studies, “we do not perceive insofar as we merely exist, but only insofar as we are pieces of larger objects composed of us and other things.” And it is in what Harman calls “the molten inner core” of these larger objects where sentience takes place, “as the perception of sensual objects.”<sup>36</sup> For Harman sentience is happening all the time between all sorts of objects, and—who knows?—maybe even stalks of wheat and bricks “encounter” each other in some fashion in some sort of wheat-and-brick assemblage mediated by a sensuous vicar, which could be a person, or an ant, or a moonbeam.

In Harman’s speculative realism, “the world is packed full of ghostly real objects signaling to each other from inscrutable depths, unable to touch one another fully.” And yet, the “side-by-side proximity of real and sensual objects is the occasion for a connection between a real object inside an intention”—for example, *my* desire to be absorbed by these objects—

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<sup>35</sup> Graham Harman, “On Vicarious Causation,” *Collapse*, Vol. II: Speculative Realism (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007), 179 [171–205].

<sup>36</sup> Graham Harman, “On Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense,” *Parallax* 16.1 (2010): 107 [96–109].

and another real object lying outside it. In this way, shafts or freight tunnels are constructed between objects that otherwise remain quarantined in private vacuums.<sup>37</sup>

Literary criticism, especially in medieval studies but really in any-studies of texts that are, in some sense, already-there (i.e., historical), might be reimagined as a networks of sensuous object relations within which a more capacious yet still bounded (feeling) sentience might take place—"bounded" in the sense of: everything was here, and then we arrived, and now we're all here. Start digging, but remember, we can't get out of here. Tunnel away all you want, for, as Harman says,

We do not step beyond anything, but are more like moles tunneling through wind, water, and ideas no less than through speech-acts, texts, anxiety, wonder, and dirt. We do not transcend the world, but only descend or burrow towards its numberless underground cavities—each a sort of kaleidoscope where sensual objects spread their wings and colors. There is neither finitude nor negativity in the heart of objects.<sup>38</sup>

SO, HERE'S THIS PLAN I HAVE

Those who care only to generate arguments almost never generate objects. New objects, however, are the sole and sacred fruit of writers, thinkers, politicians, travellers, lovers, and inventors.

Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation"

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<sup>37</sup> Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," 187, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," 193.



So, what now? As regards medieval studies, literary studies, the humanities under the aegis of new speculative realist, object-oriented, and post/humanist<sup>39</sup> work that encourages us to develop better and more ethical styles of collectivity?

Step One might be following Julian Yates's suggestion (and I think this is a step scholars such as Jane Bennett, Stacy Alaimo, Myra Hird, Noreen Giffney, Rosi Braidotti, Graham Harman, Levi Bryant, Sarah Franklin, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Freya Mathews, Timothy Morton, Cary Wolfe, Jeffrey Cohen, Karl Steel, and many others are mightily engaged in at present): to force the "solipsistic human *Dasein* . . . to idle and to listen or try to listen to the figurative chatter, songs or screams of the countless non-human actors whose manufactured declensions fund the networks that wrote the 'human' as self-identical being."<sup>40</sup> The human being, but also the humanist, as slow recording device. Think of the experimental artist Douglas Gordon who slowed down Hitchcock's *Psycho* to 24

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<sup>39</sup> By placing the backward slash between 'post' and 'human' (post/human), I mean to denote a state of historical affairs by which, although we may have witnessed a certain dissolution of the liberal humanist subject as the world's sovereign meaning-maker, as well as the emergence of new non- and quasi-human 'intelligent' technologies, such as cybernetics, robotics, and bioinformatics that may supersede us, while we have also gained new insights into the fact that the 'human' has always been unstable, contingent, hybrid, accidental, other to itself, 'animal,' etc. ('we have never been human'), nevertheless, the human is always left open as a productive question, both *there* and *not-there* at once.

<sup>40</sup> Julian Yates, "It's (for) You; or, The Tele-t/r/opical Post-human," in *When Did We Become Post/human?* ed. Eileen A. Joy and Craig Dionne, special issue of *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 1.1-2 (2010): 225 [223–234].

hours.<sup>41</sup> Or the sound artist Lief Inge who stretched out Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for 24 hours.<sup>42</sup> Or Longplayer, a piece of music started in 1999 that is designed to go on playing for a thousand years, and whose chief "listening post" is a lighthouse in London?<sup>43</sup> Something like that, only tuned in to the nonhuman, while also recognizing that these endeavors would still constitute human follies. But these would be follies borne out of a love, and not a capricious and careless use, of the world.

Step Two would be to recognize that everything is a person of some sort and to start forming alliances and "personnel services committees" and special packet-switching stations with as many self-objects and literary-objects and other object-objects as possible in order to build a larger and more capacious and "stranger" sentience that could then form a sort of autopoietic system that might take better account of how, in Morton's words, "[e]verything is [already] intimate with everything else."<sup>44</sup>

This will require a Step Three as well, which probably really comes before Step One: self-donation, making ourselves hospitable so that things and events can take place in and with and around us, so that the world can happen *to us* for a change. The fact of the matter is, we're already "occupied," so let's make it official now with a sign posted out front that says,

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<sup>41</sup> See Lee Ferguson, "Douglas Gordon's Stunning 24 Hour Psycho," CBC News, September 13, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/tiff2010/2010/09/douglas-gordons-stunning-24-hour-psycho-update-screens-at-tiffs-lightbox.html>.

<sup>42</sup> See Kyle Gann, "Norwegian Minimalist Raises Beethoven's Molto Adagio Bar," *The Village Voice*, 10 Feb. 2004, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2004-02-10/music/norwegian-minimalist-raises-beethoven-molto-adagio-bar/>.

<sup>43</sup> On Longplayer, see <http://longplayer.org/what/overview.php>.

<sup>44</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 78.

“Hello, Everybody!” Related to this: making room, like a broom of the system, for the initial starting conditions of spontaneous acts of combusive generosity and impossible unconditionalities. Making space, without liens, for the arrival of strangers whose trajectories are unmappable in advance.

Step Four: making new objects, giving birth to things, radical acts of coupling and natality and hetero-queer reproduction. Until you can’t make things anymore. That’s when you drop dead. But don’t worry . . . you’ll always be with us, by which I mean: with me. I’ll never forget you and I trust you’ll do the same for me. I’m talking to you but also to Sparkles, one of my many creaturely companions, the hawthorn outside my study window, the red berries budding on the hawthorn, the pebbled glass of the window itself, my favorite wine glass, all the random notes and letters rustling on my desk, and the imaginary pen I write my imaginary books with that will never get published, all the lives I’ll never live but experience in literature, all the friends met and unmet, behind and up ahead in the future(s) we dream and play at together. We’ll designate mourners and record their grieving, then play it on an endless feedback loop machine that has a one-thousand-year battery. In other words, we’ll keep writing. Some call this literature. Or medieval studies. Or the humanities, which need to get more, and not less human.

But this will also entail, contra to but also with our tears and our ultimately frail efforts at projects of *memento mori*, better developing what Simon Critchley has called “the experience of an ever-divided humorous self-relation,” where we would work to find ourselves “ridiculous,” to see ourselves from the outside, and to “smile”—humor as “a powerful example of what we might call the human being’s eccentricity with regard

to itself.”<sup>45</sup>

In the end, this what ethics is all about: Slowing down, paying better attention to what is close at hand and always already intimate with us—which is everything—welcoming the Other, not taking ourselves too seriously, and working together to add something of beauty to the world, which is always more than truth could ever calculate or bear.

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<sup>45</sup> Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 86.