Finally it is important that I thank all the people who have contributed to the development of *Speculations*. My utmost thanks goes to Thomas Gokey who designed the issue and all its formats. Without Gokey's hard work it is quite possible that the journal might have launched much later than it has. I have learned quite a bit from reading Peter Gratton's experiences as an editor and he has been immensely helpful in making me feel that this project was possible. Since the speculative realist blogosphere contains a longer list of names than any sane person is likely to read I want to extend a broad thanks to the *speculative realist community*. All of them have contributed to this journal at one point or another and without them no audience for its contents would exist!

Paul Ennis,
Dublin, 2010
ennis.paul@gmail.com

Science-Laden Theory

Outlines of an Unsettled Alliance

Fabio Gironi

School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

"What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call thought, that we must make it the model of the whole universe? Our partiality in our own favour does indeed present it on all occasions: But sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion."[1]

What is speculative realism? Many readers of this journal will already have a more or less precise understanding of the defining traits of this movement, while other—perhaps more sceptical—readers will want to get a better grasp of what the fuss is all about. My aim in this paper is not so much to give a definite answer to this question, but rather to propose a sketch of the causes, conditions and the network of actors which has led to the generation of such a diverse—and at times seemingly contradictory—philosophical trend.

It is certainly hard, if not downright impossible, to try and clearly discern this network now, when still involved in its historical unravelling, but this is meant to be an exercise in self-reflection, not a historical enterprise. Only time will tell how long speculative realism will remain in play. In the meantime, we could adopt a Latourian methodology (given that Latour is often referred to as a fundamental influence on the development of at least a certain 'splinter group' of the

movement) for discerning actors operating within networks of translations in order to outline how speculative realism—as an assemblage—has so far gained momentum, thanks to its explicit and implicit alliances. My guiding thesis here is that the movement grew as it was fuelled by a certain necessity, internal to continental philosophy as whole, to confront itself with the growing epistemological prestige, metaphysical strength and even popular appeal of the natural sciences. The way in which I will sketch this picture will be somewhat allusive, but—as a partial justification for my lack of rigour—I believe that the current, protean state of the movement, (and indeed its questionable unity) justifies this approach.

Speculative What?

At this moment in time—an extremely fugacious one given the speed with which the movement is evolving—the interested newcomer can only discern a number of elements loosely bound by a set of family resemblances, mainly expressed in recurrent nomenclature such as 'anti-correlationism,' 'objects,' 'non-human,' 'reality' and of course 'speculative.' It might be useful, if slightly scholastic, to go back to the first public appearance of the term 'speculative realism,' in the title chosen for a conference which effectively marked the 'coming out' of the movement, and which has already acquired the status of a landmark event. On the 27th of April 2007 a conference entitled 'Speculative Realism' was organized at Goldsmiths College in London. The participants were Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux.[2] Before examining the content of the conference, let me quote Harman's disclosures about its *title*:

> Meillassoux never chose to rename his position speculative realism, which is merely an umbrella term for four very different philosophical positions (Meillassoux's, Ray's, Iain's, and mine). The history of the term "speculative realism" is fairly simple. We needed a title for the Goldsmiths workshop in April '07, and it was suggested that we simply adopt the term "speculative materialism" from Meillassoux's book as

> a group name. But I pointed out to Ray that I'm not a materialist—in my view materialism always veers toward idealism, because it always reduces objects to a fairly shallow set of discernible and humanly accessible properties. No appeal to the Marxist spirit of liberation can redeem materialism from its miserably flawed metaphysical attitude (here I'm speaking only for myself; my three colleagues are to some extent materialists, each in his own way). Nonetheless, I told Ray I'd be willing to go along with "speculative materialism" if there were nothing better. But then Ray came up with "speculative realism" as a solution. It still seems like a reasonably good term to me (it's caught on fairly well in the blogosphere), but it only has value as a deliberately vague umbrella under which all four of us can huddle. By no means should it be seen as Meillassoux's new term for his own position; he's still quite attached to the phrase "speculative materialism," I believe. "Speculative realism" was a compromise between four people, nothing more'.[3]

The term 'speculative realism',[4] therefore, is from the start characterised as being a provisional alliance between at least two similar yet distinct positions, a term that today—three years later—has perhaps already exhausted its utility.[5] Looking at the conference announcement itself can offer some insight regarding the content of this term. I quote here in full:

> Contemporary 'continental' philosophy often prides itself on having overcome the age-old metaphysical battles between realism and idealism. Subject-object dualism, whose repudiation has turned into a conditioned reflex of contemporary theory, has supposedly been destroyed by the critique of representation and supplanted by various ways of thinking the fundamental correlation between thought and world.
>
> But perhaps this anti-representational (or 'correlationist') consensus—which exceeds philosophy proper and thrives in many domains of the humanities and the social sciences—hides a deeper and more insidious idealism. Is realism really so 'naïve'? And is the widespread dismissal of representation and objectivity the radical, critical stance it so often claims to be?
>
> This workshop will bring together four philosophers whose work, although shaped by different concerns, questions some of the basic tenets of a 'continental' orthodoxy while eschewing the reactionary

> prejudices of common-sense. Speculative realism is not a doctrine but the umbrella term for a variety of research programmes committed to upholding the autonomy of reality, whether in the name of transcendental physicalism, object-oriented philosophy, or abstract materialism, against the depredations of anthropocentrism.[6]

Taking this text as a preliminary guideline, it seems legitimate to assume that the minimum common denominator of any philosophy that can be christened 'speculative realist' could be summarized in a reaffirmation (which can be formulated in various ways) of the autonomy of reality (which is implicitly a rejection of the commonplace assumptions of much of recent continental philosophy). What I would like to do here is to think about what led philosophy to this place. Whence this feeling regarding the necessity of returning to the question of independent reality? And how did speculative realism spread so fast if not by addressing and thematizing some concerns which were already present in the members of what now is its active community? A number of answers could be thought of. Here I will merely try to propose how, within speculative realism itself, a number of techno-scientific conditions have led to different approaches and problems.

The Copernican Revolution, in Colour

The most obvious place to look, when seeking a condition[7] for this new philosophy, is to direct our attention to the developments of the natural sciences in the last forty years, both in terms of their dramatic internal growth (the elaboration of successful new theories or promising new research projects) and external public engagement (the increased interest amongst broader society in the results of science). My contention is that these two elements, by shaping the last decades of western intellectual history, have indirectly contributed to the re-emergence of realism as a philosophical trope.

Within speculative realism, a science-friendly attitude is explicitly associated with the rejection of a certain kind of (post-critical, human-centred, phenomenological—in a word—correlationist) philosophy: see for example Ray Brassier's

demand that science be taken seriously, since

> [t]aking as a given the empirical fact that all philosophical attempts to define conditions of possibility for scientific thought have proved to be dismally unsuccessful, we conclude that these failures are a matter of principle rather than empirical circumstance, and that it is the presumption that philosophy is in a position to provide a transcendental footing for science which must be abandoned. There is no first philosophy. Consequently, although relatively autonomous *vis a vis* science, philosophical ontology can neither ground nor disregard the ultimately physical description of the universe provided by the natural sciences.[8]

Or, take Graham Harman's claims about the dullness of philosophical literature, as opposed to the *speculative* range of scientific texts:

> pick up a random book of recent physics and you will find dazzling speculation on all manner of things: the creation and destruction of the universe, the existence of parallel worlds, chance and necessity, hidden spatial dimensions, time travel, and two-dimensional holograms that delude us into believing in three....We have reached a point where I, a passionate reader of philosophy, prefer any section in bookstores *except* philosophy...[P]hilosophy has become *boring*.[9]

And, of course, the entire argument against correlationist thought in Meillassoux's *After Finitude* is another such example, which hinges upon a precise dating of 'ancestral phenomena' such as the origin of the universe, something which has only been possible through (relatively recent) scientific techniques. So, rather than a contemporary philosophy flat-lined by the phenomenological climate,

> it was science that made it meaningful to disagree about what there might have been when we did not exist, and what there might be when we no longer exist—just as it is science that provides us with the means to rationally favour one hypothesis over another concerning the nature of the world without us.[10]

The authority of contemporary science is fuelled by its achievements. The extraordinary experimental success of the Standard Model of particle physics and of the description of quantum mechanical interactions between those particles, the observational data confirming the Big Bang theory and the age of the universe, as well as the discovery of its accelerating expansion (not to mention more speculative hypotheses/research programs such as those linked to the Multiverse and String Theory), are momentous results that have been achieved in less than half a century. Such a massive scientific output[11]—concentrated in such a relatively short time-span—has had an enormous cultural impact outside laboratories and observatories, largely thanks to the increased resources dedicated to public outreach from the scientists' side. Whether because of their eagerness to share the revolutionary discoveries of their discipline, or for the more pragmatic realization that general public interest aids the acquisition of governmental and private funding; natural scientists have come to represent intellectuals in close contact with the public.

Following this increase in public engagement with science in the last decades we have witnessed pieces of scientific equipment raise, possibly for the first time,[12] to the status of cultural icons and sources for entertainment and awe. A solid example of this is the Hubble Space Telescope (HST), whose huge impact on physical astronomy since the early 1990s is matched by its impact on the 'general public', providing us with an unprecedented peek into the far universe via a dazzling series of images of distant galaxies and nebulae making their way onto the front covers of hundreds of magazines. Pictures of these astronomical objects, immensely far in both space and in time, have offered us a whole new understanding and visual grasp of the term 'things in themselves'.[13] By opening up a space beyond 'the moon, the outer planets, and the icy Oort Cloud with its stagnant mist of dim future comets' the Space Telescope[14] has allowed us to probe deeper into the fabric of the universe while at the same time imposing upon us the humbling acknowledgement of our myopia, since

'beyond the gaze of these instruments are sites more distant than these, some of them grimmer than the plains of Hell'.[15] So strong has the cultural impact of the HST been, that the 20th anniversary of its commissioning (24th of April 2010) has been celebrated with full-page articles in several major newspapers around the globe, commemorating its 'birthday' with a selection of its most iconic images accompanied by words of praise for this overworked piece of technology.

And the HST is only the most iconic of an army of such instruments: we have enjoyed the sunset on Mars thanks to the images from the Mars Exploration Rover, we have peered at the distant Earth through the rings of Saturn when receiving the images from the Cassini probe and we have observed the aeons-old first light of the universe thanks to the WMAP satellite. Moreover, it is thanks to the discoveries granted by the data received from less iconic but equally successful probes, that our vocabulary has extended to include terms like 'expanding universe', 'black hole', 'dark matter', 'dark energy' and 'exoplanets', concepts that soon proved fertile new metaphors for philosophers—and speculative realists.[16]

It is well known how speculative realists call for a return to the true meaning of the Copernican Revolution, against the Kantian hijacking of this term. If, according to Meillassoux it is due to 'a sense of desolation and abandonment which modern science instils in humanity's conception of itself and of the cosmos'[17] that we are forced to face the contingency of thought and therefore to rethink the priority of human access, it appears that no cultural force has managed to present more powerfully to humankind as a whole the disconcerting vastness of the 'great outdoors' than the last forty years of physical sciences, particularly astronomy.

To substantiate this claim, I would like to take a brief historical excursus. In his *Earthrise*, historian Robert Poole explains how the famous Earthrise picture taken in 1968 by the crew of the Apollo 8 mission (showing the planet rising from the lunar horizon), and its even more popular 'Blue Marble' successor, taken in 1972 by the astronauts of the Apollo 17 (showing the planet in its full spherical appearance) were ap-

propriated and diffused in popular culture by the dominant ideologies of the time. In a complex network linking such different forces as the technical constraints of the Apollo missions, cold-war era political interests, the amazement of the first astronauts seeing the planet from above, and the LSD-fuelled rise of 1970s hippie counterculture, the first images of planet Earth ended up as bearing an unprecedented meaning. In particular, Poole argues that

> [t]he famous Apollo 17 'Blue Marble' photograph appeared in December 1972, just in time to supply the environmental movement with its most powerful icon. It was, however, the Apollo 8 image of December 1968 that had started it all off. Both images owed much of their instant power to the way they tapped into a ready-made agenda: in the case of the 'Blue Marble' it was the eco-renaissance; in the case of Earthrise it was 'Spaceship Earth'. What happened over the years in between was that natural metaphors for the planet began to take over from technological ones.[18]

Hence 'Blue marble', according to Poole 'the single most reproduced image in human history',[19] was fruitfully assimilated by contemporary culture, and at the same time produced a feedback effect, fuelling the amazement for a living planet, and shaping a holistic attitude which subsequently appropriated the 'Gaia' hypothesis as a scientific proof of the life-cycles of the global organism that Earth was. The picture from outer space, even if showing the fragile beauty of Earth, effectively *increased* the intrinsic value of the planet, so that the focus of the environmental movement (and of the emergent New Age spirituality) which adopted the photograph as a graphic reminder of the wonders of our planet, 'was not "wilderness" or "nature" but "the environment", with humankind very much in the picture',[20] a humankind now seen as never before as the lucky inhabitants and custodians of a natural marvel, strikingly alive in an empty, dark, and colourless space.

Let us try to compare the 'Blue Marble' picture, and its effect on the cultural unconscious, with another, more recent picture of our planet. On the 14th February 1990, the Voyager

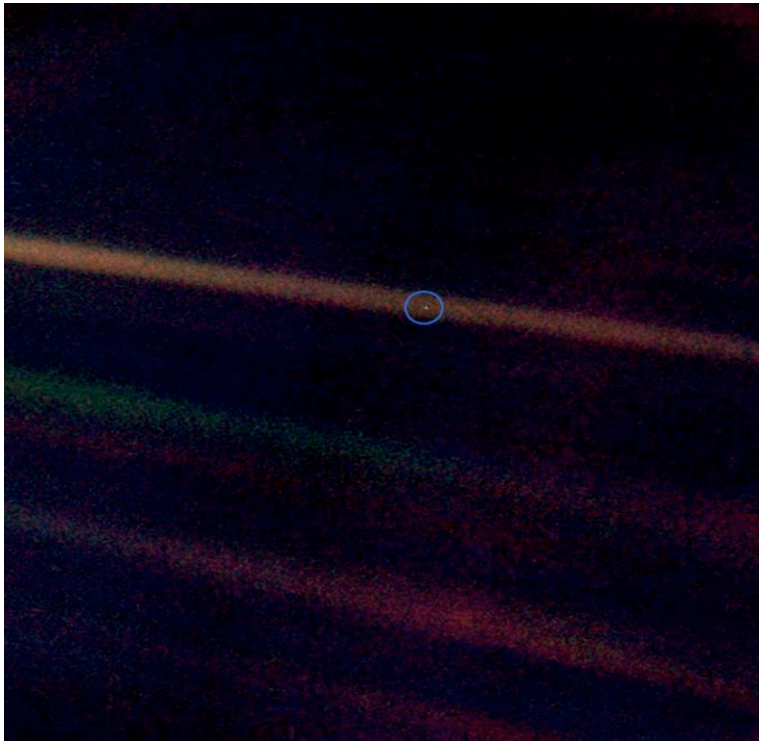
The 'Blue Marble' picture. Credit NASA.

probe, having completed, the main part of its mission in its first 13 years of interplanetary flight, was instructed to turn its camera around, and to take a picture of Earth from a distance of approximately 6 billion kilometres. The alive, dynamic planet that in the early 70s was shown in its blue marble glory was now, in the famous words of Carl Sagan (the man responsible for convincing NASA to take the picture and for its successive popularization),[21] a 'pale blue dot', a handful of pixels on a background of black nothingness.

The Earth, which thirty years earlier had been a glorious

'Blue Marble' was now shown as a '*pale* blue *dot*'. If this picture did not directly slide so glamorously into the popular media and in popular culture it is not only because of its inferior intrinsic aesthetic value, but also because of the radically different social climate of the early 90s. And yet, I believe that we can fruitfully look at the 'pale blue dot' picture as having as strong a cultural significance as its predecessor. Indeed, where to find a better, more powerful representation of the true meaning of the Copernican Revolution—as we are reminded by Meillassoux—than in this 'pale blue dot' picture, sent as a faint electromagnetic signal by an unmanned probe, from a distance where no human had ever, or has since, reached? If humanity could previously be seen as the privileged custodian of a sacred cosmic gem, it was now merely dwelling on a infinitesimal speck of dust, a planet whose awe-inspiring face was now irresolvable, irrelevant, disfigured. If the coloured face of the planet dominated the 'Blue Marble' picture, it is the featureless cosmic space which dominates this second picture, a space where the Earth, and the environment it hosts, is but a mere point floating across an arbitrary set of coordinates.[22] Science delivered the photographic evidence of the—at best—provincial placement of our planet, a graphic memento that there is much more to the universe than our 'world' (both in the sense of a correlationally defined existential space and in the sense of our material planet), a picture that indeed in its coarse immediacy strikes a powerful blow to the 'pathetic twinge of human self-esteem'.[23] The philosophical trope of 'otherness' itself was now to be revised: from the otherness of a human neighbour to that of a nonhuman, utterly alien,[24] external reality.

Eight years after the 'pale blue dot' picture, physical cosmology delivered some even more stunning results: the empty, cosmic space, through which our planet, our solar system and our whole galaxy is wandering, is not only expanding but accelerating in its expansion.[25] The discovery of this increasing rate of expansion effectively sanctioned the fate of the universe to be one of cold dissipation, and thus created the possibility for a passage like the following to appear in a



The 'Pale Blue Dot' picture. The Earth is in the centre of the superimposed circle. Credit NASA.

philosophy book not merely as a thought experiment, but as a factual truth to be philosophically appraised and exploited:

> sooner or later both life and mind will have to reckon with the disintegration of the ultimate horizon, when, roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion (10^{1728}) years from now, the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated the fabric of matter itself, terminating the possibility of embodiment. Every star in the universe will have burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsed matter. All free

> matter, whether on planetary surfaces or in interstellar space, will have decayed, eradicating any remnants of life based in protons and chemistry, and erasing every vestige of sentience—irrespective of its physical basis. Finally, in a state cosmologists call 'asymptopia', the stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles. Atoms themselves will cease to exist. Only the implacable gravitational expansion will continue, driven by the currently inexplicable force called 'dark energy', which will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness.[26]

If, to quote this important passage once again, contemporary philosophical thought needs to engage with 'the sense of desolation and abandonment which modern science instils in humanity's conception of itself and of the cosmos',[27] it is because of such scientific narrations of the fate of our universe, holding today such a powerful social and cognitive authority and offering us a 'speculative opportunity'.[28] By exposing the cosmic irrelevance of humankind and its dwelling place and by denouncing the contingency of its existence as subordinate to random cosmic caprices, science has set the scene for the development of a new metaphysical revolution consisting in a new 'blow to human narcissism, where man is dethroned from his position of centrality in the order of being and situated in his proper place as one being among others, no more or less important than these others'.[29]

Networked Techno-Capitalism

The extensive cultural impact of these scientific results has been magnified to a global scale thanks to another kind of revolution, a digital one, and its omnipresent product, the Internet, which opened up human experience from space to cyberspace. In an interesting turn of events, given the origins of the Net in Tim Berners-Lee's work at CERN, the Internet itself allowed for the message of the renewed Copernican Revolution to sift into public consciousness by making recent scientific knowledge ubiquitously available in the form of readily accessible digital information. And just as it has circulated the content of science among the public, the Internet has played a crucial role in the dissemination of speculative realism among the philosophical community.

The scientific 'community' experienced an exponential enlargement when scientific work became accessible to the interested layperson through dedicated websites and, especially, through the new phenomenon of blogging scientists. Similarly, one of the most significant phenomena directly linked to the rise of speculative realism in the philosophical scene is its resilient online proliferation mainly in the form of blogs.[30] From the academic point of view, this is nothing short of a revolution: blogs (many of which are run by graduate students) have taken over the role of a kind of 'pioneering secondary literature', commenting and expanding on traditional publications, virtually in real-time; a phenomenon which completely restructures the usual temporal structure of publication and feedback, as well as the very formation and organization of ideas.[31] This phenomenon is the inevitable effect of the translation of philosophical production into the network of information that constitutes our everyday reality.[32] Thanks to blogs and bloggers, speculative realism went viral.[33]

It is a pleasing irony that the philosophical movement that focuses on the importance of nonhuman entities is—so far—the one that owes most to nonhuman entities for its diffusion and reproduction.[34] Indeed, if the cognitive revolution that the hyperlinked structure of the internet produced is at times condemned as guilty of producing a superficial way of thinking, increasingly unable (especially in the younger generations) to concentrate linearly on a single, unified object of thought,[35] I think that we can draw a comparison between the flattened (and networked) informational landscape and the flattened (and networked) ontological plane which object oriented philosophy (one of the main 'forms' of the speculative realist movement) advocates, where a possible encounter of the two would provide an excellent tool for thinking 'hyperlinked phenomena'. While the generational gap[36] between yesterday's great figures of continental philosophy (Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Foucault, as well as Badiou as the last of his generation), and today's speculative realists is widened by, in

the first place, the gestalt shift produced by information and communication technologies, yet another force is contributing to the intellectual distancing from the past decades: the political status quo of the western societies.

Today's young philosophers have to confront themselves with what Mark Fisher has defined 'Capitalist Realism', the general feeling of inevitability regarding the capitalist structure, the 'widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it'.[37] Even if aiming to find new ways to counteract it, this new generation has formed its intellectual commitments *within* this climate of political staleness, therefore developing a radically different set of expectations (and hopes) *viz.* social change and revolution. As Fisher has commented 'we've now got a generation of young adults who have known nothing but global capitalism and who are accustomed to culture being pastiche and recapitulation'.[38] If one recognizes how Fisher's analysis is isomorphic with Jameson's theorization of postmodernism and late capitalism, it is clearer how for this new generation of (blogging) philosophers to overcome the immobilism of capitalism means to break free from the logic of postmodernity and to re-theorize the world *starting from* this lack of hope—from a world where (capitalist) ideology has taken an undefeatable form which is at the same time petrified and plastic, replacing reality with referent-less simulacra—in order to then move towards a retrieval of a lost reality-in-itself.[39] It is through the technological structure of capitalist society itself that the new philosophical current has reached out to, and linked together, like-minded individuals eager to re-ground philosophy by theorizing from the primacy of reality itself. But what does this reality look like?

A Flat World or a Cold World?

Dominic Fox, reflecting on the state of 'dystopia' which characterizes contemporary western capitalist society, has defined our predicament as a 'Cold World', that

> world voided of both human and metaphysical comfort. This cold world is the world made strange, a world that has ceased to be the 'life-world' in which we are usually immersed and instead stands before us in a kind of lop-sided objectivity. It is a world between worlds, a disfigured world.[40]

On the other hand, from the object-oriented side of speculative realism, Levi Bryant has described us as living in a world

> pervaded by objects of all kinds....Whether we are speaking of technological objects, natural objects, commodities, events, groups, animals, institutions, gods, or semiotic objects our historical moment, far from *reducing* the number of existing objects as alleged by reductive materialisms, has actually experienced a promiscuous proliferation and multiplication of objects of all sorts. Moreover, this proliferation has caused massive upheaval and transformation all throughout planetary, human, and collective life.[41]

In contrasting these two passages I want to indicate how any contemporary attempt to reactivate realism, and indeed speculative realism as a philosophical view grounded on this desire, bears a certain intrinsic, genetic, schizophrenia. If on the one side it powerfully denounces the narrow view of the correlationist philosopher, and thus forces philosophy to open its field to the multiplicity of non-human objects which surround us, on the other it carries the burdensome knowledge that this flat world is an uncanny and desolate place, cold, glacial (in Meillassoux's words), supremely *indifferent*. And this is why the speculative realist movement is able to accommodate both a tendency for the celebration of the richness of reality (well exemplified in the rhetorical power of the so-called 'Latour litanies')[42] in order to found a new—and ontologically richer—philosophy, and a tendency to embrace this barrenness, towards a philosophy which pushes the human to recognize the nihilism of being and of meaning which underlies the world, as a 'speculative opportunity'. It is the tension between the *desolation* and the *richness* of the Real, which gives rise to either a *barren* or a *promiscuous* ontology.[43]

To turn our philosophy away from the human-world relation can lead to a thought whose aim is to make the rest of the

world 'more real' (as in the Latourian motto), but can also focus our attention on a world which exhibits coldness to human concerns, thus confronting thought with its own facticity. It is only a matter of where one desires to place the emphasis: the same world of independent *Dinges-an-sich* can be seen as flat just as it can be seen as glacial. Indeed, this ultimately is the underlying reason for the gradual emancipation of object-oriented ontology from other positions in the speculative realist spectrum, since the former—following Latour—aims at achieving ontological flatness (or a 'democracy of objects') by denying the quintessentially modern split between nature and culture and pursuing real interactions between real objects *everywhere*, against any attempt to place (reduce)[44] reality squarely on the side of nature. As Bryant clearly puts it, Object-Oriented Ontology 'agrees that the natural sciences investigate reali*ties*, but it vehemently rejects the thesis that these realities are exhaustive of being or reality'.[45]

In a way, both the object-oriented side and the 'natural-reductionist' sides agree that we have never been modern. However, if the former group wants to uphold this position, and recognize the project of modernity as an (ontological) impossibility, the latter wants to return to the true (and philosophically misunderstood) meaning of the Copernican Revolution, and to engender an 'Enlightenment redux' (in the somewhat sarcastic phrasing of Alberto Toscano) by seeking being—and the conditions for our *thought* of being—in the inanimate matter scientifically described by mathematical formalisms.[46] The two positions correspond to two different philosophical approaches to the natural sciences.

Indeed, having carved this line of differentiation across the speculative realist spectrum, certain 'varieties' of speculative realism can become objects of the question: what is left for philosophy to do? In the case of Meillassoux, Simon Critchley, in his review of *After Finitude*, answered this question in a rather dramatic way, claiming that

> [i]t would seem that philosophy is not just Locke's under labourer to science, but a handmaiden to mathematics. That is, once the obfuscations and errors of correlationism have been philosophically refuted,

> once we accept that the world as it is in itself is the same as the world for us, once we grant to mathematics the task of providing a correct ontology of nature, then philosophy becomes totally useless. The task of an ontology of nature passes to scientists and mathematicians and the philosopher, having written his suicide note, quietly slits his wrists and reclines in a warm bath.[47]

Whether or not this picture is accurate, we can oppose this possibility of philosophy's demise latent in Meillassoux's (*viz.* mathematics) and in Brassier's (*viz.* naturalism) work with the object-oriented position in order to highlight radically different engagements with science. The 'object-oriented' philosophical project does not open up spaces for the question of survival of philosophy to emerge since—even after having, with Harman, diagnosed contemporary philosophy as chronically boring—it can (indeed, it *must*) clearly state that the task is to claim back *for philosophy* all that has been unwittingly left to the natural sciences, a confinement which has had the effect of leading philosophical work into increasingly sterile pastures:

> [f]or several centuries, philosophy has been on the defensive against the natural sciences, and now occupies a point of lower social prestige and, surprisingly, narrower subject matter. A brief glance at history shows that this was not always the case. To resume the offensive, we need only reverse the long-standing trends of renouncing all speculation on objects and volunteering for curfew in an ever-tinier ghetto of solely human realities: language, texts, political power.[48]

Hence for Harman, and for object-oriented philosophy as a whole, the task of philosophy is to discuss the real in its entirety, avoiding both its confinement in the epistemic confines of the 'human ghetto' and its subordination to an all-powerful, reductionist, science. In a recent comment on the work of Ray Brassier, Harman made this very clear: 'I [don't] think Brassier is an anti-correlationist anymore: he's gradually become pro-*science* at the expense of pro-real (the two are not the same)'.[49] And indeed Brassier recently recognized a divergence between his work and that of other speculative

realists on the grounds of scientific naturalism

> Harman espouses a Latour-inspired 'democracy of objects' according to which science has no particular cognitive authority when it comes to discriminating between reality and appearance and no object can be said to be any more or less real than any other....I think it safe to say that neither Grant, nor Harman, nor Meillassoux shares my commitment to epistemological naturalism, or my sympathy for 'reductionist' accounts of subjective experience.[50]

Thus, from a common interest in the (real) world delivered to us by science, at least two diverging ontologies emerge: one aimed at contrasting subjective or linguistic idealism and any kind of correlationism by granting being to every object that 'resists' or that 'makes a difference', and considering it in its withdrawn being irreducible to its relationships with other such objects, regardless of the presence of humans; the other aimed at reducing 'folk', epiphenomenal conceptions of 'beings', founded on human experience (arguably including the category of 'objects' itself) to their naturalistically (or mathematically) expressible fundamental features. The saying 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' describes well the link between the speculative realists. However, to identify this enemy precisely seems to be a tricky business, since we cannot always safely invoke the spectre of correlationism, and since different ontological commitments will make it hard to delineate what or who counts as an enemy. If it would perhaps be more correct to say that the common enemy is *any form of antirealism,* it is precisely in the evaluation of what counts as 'real' that speculative realists diverge.

If, in light of this fragmented picture, the umbrella term 'speculative realism' seems increasingly inappropriate, if not downright misleading, I still believe that it is possible to identify a general trait shared by all the participants in this movement. This collective interest in a return to realism—surprising, if we consider the recent history of continental philosophy, and the unflattering nickname of 'naïve' attached to it—can be explained in at least two ways. First, it can be interpreted as a

systematic, large-scale philosophical reaction to the 'irruption of the Real' into our familiar correlationist world, as experienced by our society in the wake of the enormous amount of observational data gathered from the unfathomably large scales of the universe and the unfathomably small scales of particle physics. Secondly, and at more conscious level, the return to realism is a reaction against the identification of philosophy with 'world-denying constructivism' which we inherited from the troublesome years of the Science Wars.[51] At the heart of the last two decades of continental philosophy lurks a desire to disentangle (and here more than anywhere else the work of Badiou was seminal for speculative realism) the concepts of 'truth', 'reality' and 'universality' from the post-metaphysical ban. A reality in-itself which, having been banned by transcendental idealism and phenomenology first, became the open target of postmodernism and social constructivism later. This historical dismissal allowed science to claim privilege on 'reality'; and yet, what for science was a reason for pride, to 'postmodern' eyes was a weak spot, so that science could be identified as the naïve—and yet powerful—cousin to be debunked. This is the attitude against which speculative realism is an internal philosophical reaction.[52] In claiming this, I am not reducing speculative realism to a paltry, utilitarian acknowledgement that science cannot be beaten and that it should therefore be befriended, for indeed it is in the choice of position *viz.* science that the speculative realists part ways.

The point is that speculative realism builds on the experience of the failure of postmodernity—as the most recent form of continental philosophy as a whole—to reckon with science, and presents itself as taking place, from the beginning, in a scientifico-philosophical hybrid field. Indeed, we can trace back the developments of these ideas to 2005, when the journal *Angelaki* published two special issues on 'Continental Philosophy and the Sciences', itself a follow up of a homonymous three-day international conference held at the University of Warwick in late 2003, four years before the speculative realism movement took shape. In the edito-

rial introduction of the first issue, Damien Veal observed that

> [w]hile Continental philosophers typically pride themselves upon their in-depth knowledge of the history of philosophy, and while it is obviously true that they often have a far richer and more nuanced understanding of the canonical texts of that history than their analytic colleagues, this history is only very rarely read against the backdrop of parallel developments in the history of the sciences.[53]

The effort was therefore to finally recognize the magnitude of this oversight, and to commence, for historians of philosophy, a careful rediscovery of the links between great figures of continental philosophy and the scientific world around them and, for the philosophers, a humbling process of reconciliation with contemporary science.[54] Miguel De Bestegui well summarized the spirit of this enterprise by claiming that

> [p]hilosophy need not shy away from the challenge of science. Yet the challenge in question is a challenge for philosophy. It is a challenge that, if taken up, makes philosophy richer. If philosophy becomes richer in the process, it is by remaining philosophy. It remains philosophy to the extent that it develops an eye for what science itself cannot see, and yet discloses. It is concerned to disclose the being of the phenomena science analyses. The question regarding the being of phenomena is the question of philosophy. It cannot be developed, however, independently of science. Philosophy is neither within nor outside science. It traverses it. The questions it puts to science are not the questions of science. Yet the answers to such questions can be found only in and through a certain mode of engagement with science.[55]

Here we witness a careful statement (interestingly imbued with a Heideggerian flavor) of the necessity for continental philosophy to confront the 'challenge' of science, but a challenge that will allow it to *remain philosophy* through the demarcation of a transversal field of competence, within which to rightfully reclaim its theoretical ambitions, and return as an informed player in the contemporary intellectual scene. It is by looking at this shared feeling, by highlighting this

will to respond to the call for renovation and hybridization of continental philosophy, that we can perhaps identify the most common trait of speculative realism: the will to *speculate*, to bring philosophy forth, to use the scientific challenge as a springboard for stretching philosophy out of its self-generated borders.

Third Cultures

It can be argued, then, that the speculative realist tendency to—adventurously—move philosophy away from any analysis about reality which keeps, as a constitutive moment, the presence of human consciousness/thought and bring it closer to the ambitions reserved to scientific thought, can be seen as a first *philosophical* attempt to fill the gap between the 'two cultures', and to create a 'third culture', in the meaning that C.P Snow gave to the expression,[56] indicating a group of 'literary intellectuals' getting in touch with scientists and discussing common ground about human-independent realities.

This 'third culture' however, would be somewhat late. By and large, the most powerful after-effect of the Science Wars for the scientific establishment has been the increased emancipation (or alienation) of natural scientists from 'the humanities'. Indeed, one of the most interesting intellectual creations of the last decades is a self-proclaimed 'third culture' whose development benefited from the massive commercial growth of the Internet in the 90s, and whose main expression is to be found in the *Edge* website (www.edge.org), the central hub for a large group of academics and entrepreneurs to publish short essays and debate with each other over scientific and cultural topics.[57] The Edge Foundation Inc., as we read on the website

> was established in 1988 as an outgrowth of a group known as The Reality Club. Its informal membership includes of some of the most interesting minds in the world. The mandate of Edge Foundation is to promote inquiry into and discussion of intellectual, philosophical, artistic, and literary issues, as well as to work for the intellectual and social achievement of society.

However, the 'third culture' embodied by the participants of the *Reality Club* discussions is significantly different from the one envisioned by Snow. Let me quote from the founder and mastermind (and 'cultural impresario') behind *Edge* John Brockman's, description of this 'third culture' that *Edge* aims to embody:

> The third culture consists of those scientists and other thinkers in the empirical world who, through their work and expository writing, are taking the place of the traditional intellectual in rendering visible the deeper meanings of our lives, redefining who and what we are. Although I borrow Snow's phrase, it does not describe the third culture he predicted. Literary intellectuals are not communicating with scientists. Scientists are communicating directly with the general public
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> ❧
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> The wide appeal of the third-culture thinkers is not due solely to their writing ability; what traditionally has been called "science" has today become "public culture."
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> ❧
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> Throughout history, intellectual life has been marked by the fact that only a small number of people have done the serious thinking for everybody else. What we are witnessing is a passing of the torch from one group of thinkers, the traditional literary intellectuals, to a new group, the intellectuals of the emerging third culture. [58]

Edge has indeed managed to include in the list of its regular discussants an outstanding number of scientists, a group which includes all 'those that matter' (including several Nobel prize-winner) in diverse disciplines such as physics, biology, economics, mathematics, psychology, informatics and neuroscience, and a number of science-friendly philosophers from the analytic side.[59] What this means is that through initiatives like the *Edge* lobby, the scientific establishment aims to completely bypass 'literary intellectuals' (a category which I take to include continental philosophy): these 'traditional' figures are painted as out of fashion, quaint, unable to communicate with the public, since public culture now means 'science'. So

scientists have broken out of their arcane labs, dismissed the white coats and come out to the public,[60] which recognizes them today as the 'new cool',[61] while philosophy, especially in its continental form, is seen as, by and large, *useless* and intellectually *irrelevant*.[62]

Is it a coincidence that today we find philosophers who reject entire sections of their own tradition, who (if in a provocative spirit) label most recent philosophical publications as 'boring' and that more generally, and substantially echoing Brockman's claims, find the most interesting philosophical questions in scientific publications? Does it mean that philosophers covet the same epistemic status of their techno-scientific colleagues, and that they feel deprived of their role as public intellectuals?

If such a claim might be hasty, what I think is indeed the case is that continental philosophy, as a whole, is going through an internal restructuring of beliefs, surely caused by the changes in our society but also deeply motivated by a necessity to propose an intellectual production capable of doing constructive work and of having an—albeit indirect—practical purchase on social change.[63] Paraphrasing Marx (and doing an injustice to Derrida)[64] one could say that continental philosophy now feels that it is not enough to deconstruct the world, but that it is time to find a metaphysical ground from which it can be changed.[65] And the main channel through which this renovation of philosophy is to be accomplished is that of a new regard towards the natural sciences (just as Badiou's philosophy grounds the possibility of change into a mathematical ontology) those sciences that recent (critical) continental philosophy has so far dismissed because of—in Harman's words—'fear and arrogance', ultimately caused by an 'inferiority complex'.[66]

Now, if my argument so far is at all sound, the ultimate challenge for speculative realism—and for philosophy as a whole if this movement is indeed a product of our *zeitgeist*—is to clarify its position in the historical dialectic between the natural sciences and whatever responds to the name of 'humanities' (a term which clearly appears increasingly

unfit to designate any philosophy that aims at overcoming the strictures of anthropocentric thought).[67] A new kind of philosophy—whose label as 'Post-Continental' is defended by John Mullarkey[68]—is attempting to place itself at that juncture between the radical science-skeptical positions that preceded it on one side and the danger of losing any identity and being swallowed whole by empirical science on the other. Recently, Harman has claimed—refuting some accusations of being dismissive of science—that

> I am not 'dismissive' of science. I love science. What I am dismissive of is *the notion that science can replace metaphysics*. Or rather, I think that the metaphysics lying at the basis of the science worship found in some sectors of speculative realism is a weak one and needs to be, if not 'eliminated,' then at least severely improved. [69]

while, on the other hand, Brassier is happy to embrace even the worst (in the contemporary philosophical climate) of the characterizations, that of scientism:

> since the indiscriminate use of this epithet as a blanket term of abuse by irate phenomenologists convicts of 'scientism' anyone who takes it on scientific trust that the earth orbits around the sun, or who believes in the existence of black holes and neutrinos—notwithstanding all phenomenological evidence to the contrary—, then we can only plead guilty as charged. If 'scientism' simply means refusing the obligatory subordination of empirical science to transcendental philosophy, then by our lights, there is not nearly enough 'scientism' in contemporary philosophy.[70]

If, in the face of this possible fusion of the 'two cultures', philosophy is to conserve an identity this means retaining the possibility of doing metaphysics, while rejecting its post-critical vetoing. This will be possible by either constructively challenging its scientific reduction or by rejecting the 'phenomenological stalemate' by injecting more scientism into philosophical speculation. Along the way we must carefully avoid the opposite reactions to the common 'inferiority

complex' of philosophy which can take the shape of either an arrogant dismissal of science, or of a shamed and somewhat craven apology for philosophy's blindness to the power of science. Consequently, it seems that the question that 'speculative realism' attempts (variously) to give an answer to (and in fact *to be* an answer to) is: how could a 'new philosophy' be built through a mature relationship of mutual exchange with the natural sciences? If the development of these questions has to remain the task for a work to come (or already in progress), what I hope to have delineated in this paper, are some forces in the cultural network in which a new generation of philosophers—whether we call it a post-continental or a speculative realist one—is today developing. For the time being, my suggestions here are merely speculative.

NOTES

[1] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1779]), 24.

[2] The complete transcript of the conference is available in the third volume of the *Collapse* journal, the editorial board having organized the conference itself.

[3] From a blogpost comment, retrieved at http://leniency.blogspot.com/2008/06/correlationism-ha-ha-ha.html

[4] Note, however, that the term was already present in Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*, where he declares his attempt to 'define the rudiments of a speculative realism'. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. (London: Palgrave, 2007), 31.

[5] Brassier recently claimed that 'given that we don't agree that philosophy must be "speculative" or about what "realism" entails, the expression "speculative realism" has become singularly unhelpful' (http://www.ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html).

[6] *Collapse* Vol.III, 306

[7] I use the term echoing its Badiouian employment, where Badiou—unsurprisingly one of the philosophical figures who has exercised a good deal of influence on several actors in the 'speculative realist' camp—holds that philosophy needs to acknowledge its dependence on extra-philosophical conditions (his 'generic procedures'), and its debts to intellectual debates which are not, nor cannot be, included in the rubric of 'philosophy'.

[8] Ray Brassier, *Alien Theory: the Decline of Materialism in the name of Matter*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2000), 19.

[9] Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 148,149.

[10] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: an Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. (London: Continuum, 2008), 114.

[11] Here we could also mention the equally captivating results from the biological sciences such as the success of the Human Genome Project, or the recent developments in the ever more promising—albeit still somewhat immature—field of neurobiology.

[12] I am here excluding the Apollo missions which led to the human landing on the Moon in 1969. The massive impact that they had on the public imaginary was primarily fueled by socio-political interests who largely overshadowed the scientific value of the missions. The complex network of actors involved in the space race was ultimately ideologically employed to celebrate *human* (national) prowess.

[13] Evaluating the role of computer graphics in recent science-fiction cinema Levi Bryant recently argued that '[t]hese images only become possible with the emergence of CGI technologies allowing for the production of entirely new and unimaginable images. Would it be an exaggeration to suggest that cinematic technologies such as this have played an important *role* in the rise of the anti-humanisms that have characterized the last few decades of philosophy? Does not cinema fundamentally challenge the *Urdoxa* of lived phenomenological experience by de-suturing the image from the constraints of the body?' (http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/05/03/cinema-and-object-oriented-ontology/). My argument here is similar: if cinematic technologies have been able to play such a role, scientific technologies (and their 'products') certainly have played a similar role.

[14] A similar argument—both in terms of popularity and in terms of probing unknown spaces (minus the pretty pictures)—could be made for the Large Hadron Collider and the inordinate amount of attention that it received from the press. The particle collider, one of the most expensive and complex projects of international cooperation, has become more than a scientific experiment by turning into a cultural icon, a powerful actor shaping the understanding of scientific research by society in general. The monumental physical size of the machinery is accompanied by equally momentous expectations regarding the discoveries that will produce, often presented as being of immediate interest of the whole of humankind, making of the collider a huge 'microscope' for the entire human race.

[15] Harman, "Space, Time, and Essence: An Object-Oriented Approach," in *Towards Speculative Realism*. (Winchester, UK: Zer0 Books, 2010), 141 (forthcoming). Interestingly, the flyer for the Goldsmiths' workshop, as reproduced in *Collapse* volume *III*, contains two images: one is the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation as pictured by the WMAP satellite, the other a computer modeled map of the large-scale distribution of dark matter in the universe obtained by elaborating data from the Hubble Space Telescope and the XMM-Newton spacecraft.

[16] See, for example, Levi Bryant: 'In some respects, dark matter is the perfect exemplification of object-oriented ontology, especially in its Harmanian formulation. For Graham [Harman] all objects are vacuum packed and withdraw from one another. Dark matter and energy are perfect examples of this thesis. We only encounter it, in my formulation, through the differences it produces in other things' (from http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/09/30/dark-matter-and-energy/). See also Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 184 employing a black hole as a paradigmatic example of a non-relational, withdrawn object, since 'we never see the black hole or have direct access to anything about it'.

[17] Meillassoux *After Finitude*, 116.

[18] Joseph Poole, *Earthrise: how man first saw the Earth*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 159.

[19] *Ibid*., Fig. 18.

[20] *Ibid*., 158.

[21] Indeed, the *locus classicus* for an interpretation of the 'pale blue dot' picture is Sagan's 1994 public lecture at Cornell University. Let me cite his oft-quoted words: 'Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known' (in Dawkins, *The Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing*, 395).

[22] Note also how the spiritual tone of environmentalism has today exhausted its momentum. The concept of Nature as a harmonious and seamless Whole has been criticized by Žižek who, in his recent 'Unbehagen in der Natur. Ecology Against Nature' essay argues that 'what we need is ecology without nature: the ultimate obstacle to protecting nature is the very notion of nature we rely on', a concept that presents a false picture of a self-sufficient and peaceful theatre for a purpose-laden evolution. On the contrary, Žižek argues that 'the important realization to be made, is the one repeatedly argued by Stephen Jay Gould: the utter contingency of our existence. There is no Evolution: catastrophes, broken equilibriums, are all part of natural history; at numerous points in the past, life could have turned towards an entirely different direction' so that for today's humanity "terror" means accepting the fact of the utter groundlessness of our existence: there is no firm foundation, a place of retreat, on which one can safely count. It means fully accepting that "nature" does not exist.' Slavoj Žižek, "Unbehagen in der Natur. Ecology Against Nature." 2009. Available online at: http://www.bedeutung.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10:zizek-unbehagen-in-der-natur&catid=6:contents&Itemid=16).

[23] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, *xi*.

[24] As an attestation to this shift from the 'other' to the 'alien' see for example Brassier's doctoral thesis titled *Alien Theory* as well as Bogost's forthcoming *Alien Phenomenology*. As I have argued elsewhere, the ethical implications of these new ontological and phenomenological positions—the opening of otherness to nonhumans, to aliens to the human world—are some of the most pressing and interesting challenges for speculative realism.

[25] I refer of course to the famous discovery of the 'accelerating universe' through the observation of distant type Ia supernovae, and the associated recovery of the Einstenian 'cosmological constant' into the 'dark energy' hypothesis. See Reiss *et al.* "Observational Evidence from Supernovae for an Accelerating Universe and a Cosmological Constant." *The Astronomical Journal*, 116:3, 1998: 1009-1038, and Perlmutter *et al.* "Measurements of Ω and Λ from 42 high-redshift supernovae." *The Astrophysics Journal*, 517, 1999: 565-586.

[26] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 228.

[27] Meillassoux *After Finitude*, 116.

[28] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, *xi*.

[29] http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/01/12/object-oriented-ontology-a-manifesto-part-i/.

[30] It is not clear whether or not the explosion of a philosophical blogosphere will facilitate the accessibility of philosophical work to non-professional philosophers (and indeed increase the *interest* in the discipline as a whole) as it did in the case of scientific disciplines. According to the figures of the Alexa Traffic Rank (Alexa.com being the most popular website for internet statistics and rankings) a popular scientific blog like *Cosmic Variance*, run by Caltech particle physicist Sean Carroll gets five (or more) times more hits per day than some of the most visited philosophy blogs.

[31] In a recent interview, Mark Fisher (a blogger himself) made a similar point: 'look at the way that Speculative Realism has propagated through blogs. Originally coined as term of convenience for the work of the philosophers Ray Brassier, Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant and Quentin Meillassoux, Speculative Realism now has an online unlife of its own. This isn't just commentary on existing philosophical positions; it's a philosophy that is actually happening on the web' (http://www.readysteadybook.com/Article.aspx?page=markfisher). For a general panorama on the academic blogosphere—and its issues—see part two of the recent study published by *The Immanent Frame* (the blog about religion and secularism of the US-based Social Science Research Council) at http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/religion-blogosphere/religion-blogosphere-2/.

[32] I am thinking here of the work of Luciano Floridi and his idea of an 'Infosphere'—constituted by the totality of informational entities and their mutual exchanges and relations—which is not merely superimposed over a pre-existing reality but that constitutes a completely new ontological horizon. See Luciano Floridi, *Philosophy and Computing: an Introduction*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1999) as well as his website http://www.philosophyofinformation.net/. It seems to me that to interface Floridi's ontology of information and Latour's actor-network-theory would produce a most exciting and fertile comparison, and a hybrid tool to evaluate the *philosophical* meaning of the speculative realist presence online.

[33] Note, this is not a judgment of merit. The viral diffusion of speculative realism has produced positive as well as dismissive or fiercely negative responses. Nonetheless, the phenomenon is still unprecedented for a philosophical school. In his review essay of *After Finitude* Arun Saldanha comments that '[j]udging from the philosophical blogosphere [Meillassoux] is not alone in feeling the need for a return to Grand Philosophy'. See Arun Saldanha "Back to the Great Outdoors: Speculative Realism as Philosophy of Science." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol 5, № 2 (2009), 309, available online at http://www.cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/118/272. How often do we see in a journal article a direct reference to the 'philosophical blogosphere'? Whatever the content of Speculative Realism and whatever the reactions to it might be, I still think that this is novelty is significant. I should also say that, of course, it is a fact of history that the Internet achieved widespread diffusion in the second half of the 1990s, steadily growing after that. This means that no 'new' philosophical school could have used the Internet as a mediator, simply because there was no Internet to be used. On the other hand, I believe that Speculative Realism (in its various forms) thrives on the Internet because it has reached a particular kind of responsive audience, and not merely for its being 'timely'.

[34] For a brief history of the first diffusion of Speculative Realism on the blogosphere, and an evaluation of the central role played by the Internet, as a nonhuman actor, in this rapid diffusion see Levi Bryant's 'A Brief Actor-Network-Theory History of Speculative Realism', at: http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/11/20/a-brief-actor-network-theory-history-of-

speculative-realism/.

[35] See, for example, Nicholas Carr's well known 2008 article on *The Atlantic*, titled 'Is Google Making Us Stupid?' (Carr 2008) and his forthcoming *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010). Note that, his positive assessment of the philosophy blogosphere notwithstanding, Mark Fisher can also be said to be in substantial agreement with Carr. He claims that the younger generations are 'too wired to concentrate' and that '[t]he consequence of being hooked into the entertainment matrix is twitchy, agitated interpassivity, an inability to concentrate or focus.' Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative? (*Hants: Zer0 Books, 2009), 24. More than that, Fisher goes as far as suggesting that the structure of the internet essentially recalls the plasticity of capitalism, since capitalist reality 'is akin to the multiplicity of options available on a digital document, where no decision is final, revisions are always possible, and any previous moment can be recalled at any time' (*Ibid*., 54). I think that this parallel casts an unfairly gloomy light on an instrument—the Internet—whose open structure has certainly engendered new phenomena of digital indifferent individualism, but that presents no *inherent* connivance with capitalist rule, and that in fact can as well be one of the main mediators for the formation of that new kind of political agency that Fisher calls for.

[36] Taking the 'Speculative Realism Aggregator' (an aggregator website that links to a series of blogs related to speculative realism) as a crude sample, we can already see that eleven of the twenty-two blogs listed there are run by under-30s (mainly graduate students on their way to a PhD) while the rest (mainly teaching academics) are mostly under-45s (unfortunately, and probably significantly, there isn't a single female blogger in the list). There are some ironies: for all its shifting of focus away from the human, this development of SR has given people access to the philosophers involved in it *as human beings* which is equally unprecedented, unless one was to be a close disciple of a given philosopher. Moreover, as always is the case with Internet phenomena, one must remember that its virtual space often tends to replicate real-life hierarchies: for all its—undoubted—democratization of philosophical discussion, and its lending its space to the voice of whomever wants to join in, the 'marketplace of attention' (I borrow the term from James G. Webster [see Webster in Turow and Tsui, *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.]) that is the philosophical blogosphere—where the commodity exchanged is the attention (and time) of the reader—remains largely dominated by the individuals who are 'someone' in the real world, so that the amount of traffic (via hyperlinks) to a particular blog cannot be claimed to be completely independent from who the blog owner is. Having said this, I am too much of an Internet enthusiast to give a negative balance to the online speculative realist scene. These observations notwithstanding, the blogging philosophical environment presents undeniable advantages: it grants an unprecedented level of grassroots diffusion of ideas, it allows for a rapid and productive dialogue, and it forces the user to encounter direct exposure to possible critiques.

[37] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 2.

[38] http://ww.readysteadybook.com/Article.aspx?page=markfisher/.

[39] Interestingly, note that particle physicist Brian Cox—an overnight celebrity in the UK thanks to his leading role in the hugely popular series of documentaries on recent astronomical discoveries titled 'Wonders of the Solar System', produced by the BBC—diagnosed the surge in popularity that science is today enjoying to the diffused cynicism induced by the financial crisis that hit the markets in 2008. According to Cox '[a] growing appreciation of the low-cost, high-value and good old-fashioned solidity of science and engineering relative to finance has, I believe, contributed to the new public mood....There is a desire to look at the tangible world of science and engineering to replace the perceived smoke and mirrors of the financial sector' (from *The Guardian G2*, 13th April 2010, p.6). At the same time, Cox often employs his fame to publicly stress the necessity for the UK government to increase the budget for science. The message seems thus to be: 'the banks will steal your money while Science will give you hard—and yet *wonderful*—facts', and the impressive investments in producing high-value series of science-related documentaries (as the BBC successor of Cox's 'Wonders': 'A Story of Science') can indeed be seen as contributing by displaying science's prowess. Without questioning the importance of *both* the scientific and the 'humanistic' endeavors, is bitterly ironic to note how, in an economic system where the flow of money seems to decide the fate of our universities (and our philosophy departments, as recent events testify of) the resources that scientists can mobilize to amaze and thus modify the public opinion (and vicariously, the policy makers) dwarf the less rutilant pledges for intellectual independence by humanities scholars, quaintly unable to produce prime-time TV contents.

[40] Dominic Fox, *Cold Wold: The Aesthetics of Dejection and the Politics of Militant Dysphoria*. (Hants: Zer0 Books, 2009), 4.

[41] http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/201%1/12/object-oriented-ontology-a-manifesto-part-i/.

[42] A term coined by Ian Bogost, a 'Latour litany' is any list of objects/actors in the world, aimed at giving an expressionist sample of the lavishness of the non-human world. For example 'washing machines, snowstorms, blades of grass, satellites, gods, pots, paintings, laws, horseshoes and engines' is a Latour litany. Bogost has created a litany generator, or 'Latour litanizer', availlable at: http://ww.bogost.com/blog/latour_litanizer.shtml.

[43] Incidentally, the charge of ignoring the richness of reality has been indeed moved against Meillassoux. Arun Saldanha argues that Meillassoux's collapse of the distinction between formal and theoretical ends up excluding entire sections of reality, and consequently entire branches of science. According to Saldanha what remains under-analyzed in Meillassoux's work is the 'intrinsic *excess* of reality over the mathematizable and the representable' so that his 'desire for mathematics...risks abstracting from the physical and social reality, becoming quasi-esoteric at worst, reductive at best'. For Saldanha '[i]f Meillassoux's speculative system is to become a realist ontology of and

for all the sciences, including those that expose power, the unconscious and social difference, its reliance on mathematical reductionism will have to give way to a rigorous appreciation of the *richness* of contemporary scientific knowledge, particularly perhaps of biology' (Saldanha, "Back to the Great Outdoors," 320).

[44] Note however that scientific reduction does not necessarily entail a reduction of the 'number' of entities, but rather indexes a reduction to a naturalistic plane, where what gets eliminated are 'folk' representations.

[45] http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/01/30/nick-live/. But see also Ian Bogost, in the context of his 'layperson' answer to the question 'What is Object Oriented Ontology?': 'In contemporary thought, things are usually taken either as the aggregation of ever smaller bits (scientific naturalism) or as constructions of human behavior and society (social relativism). OOO steers a path between the two, drawing attention to things at all scales (from atoms to alpacas, bits to blinis), and pondering their nature and relations with one another as much with ourselves' (http://www.bogost.com/blog/what_is_objectoriented_ontolog.shtml).

[46] In a surprising twist, however, from this split we can witness a recrudescence of the problem of materialism and idealism. As it has been observed (by Harman and Bryant on their respective blogs) a scientifically informed reductive materialism has to face the problem of matter. But of what matter are we talking about? What fundamental level of materiality is chosen as final referent of the theory? Doesn't materialism, by referring to a vague substrate, or a position upholding the primacy of (human) practice end up as lopsided form of Idealism? If so, the entire purpose of anti-correlationism is defeated.

[47] Critchley 2009, np.

[48] Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation." *Collapse* Vol. II, 2007, 174.

[49] http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/gratton-interviews-ennis/. See also Bryant, claiming that 'while all the speculative realists and the object-oriented ontologists have a healthy respect for the sciences and think that they reveal something real and genuine about the world, it has never been the position of us object-oriented ontologists that the objects investigated by the sciences exhaust the real....The physical objects investigated by the sciences are for OOO a subset of the real, not exhaustive of the real' (http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/11/04/realism-epistemology-science-and-scientism/). Note that the irreductionist position refuses physical reductionism (undermining of objects) and linguistic/ideological reductions (overmining of objects). Since, as Bryant explains 'where the eliminative materialist dissolves all objects in atoms and neurons, the eliminative idealist or linguist dissolves all other objects in language or human concepts' (http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/05/06/relationism-and-objects/#comment-26024).

[50] Ray Brassier, "Against an Aesthetics of Noise." Interview with Bram Iver for *Transitzone*, 2009. Available online at http://www.ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html.

[51] If the radical constructivist thesis is now out of fashion in philosophical circles, we should keep in mind that the 'outer world' tends not to be so up to date with philosophical trends, recent and less recent. For many, if not most, exponents of the scientific community 'continental philosophy' still loudly resounds with postmodernism, relativism and world-denial.

[52] In this very issue of *Speculations* Ian Bogost discusses this point regarding his own experience, and observes that 'I was certainly exhausted with philosophy. By the letter of my training (all my degrees are in philosophy and comparative literature), I'm really a philosopher rather than a media theorist, even though I'm really only known as the latter. Part of that exhaustion came from disgust: a sense that philosophy and theory didn't really care about the world at all, but only exclusive clubs of academic esoterics. In that respect, I don't think it's an accident that the return to realism comes at a time when the academy (and particularly the humanities) are in crisis....in order for humanism to reenter the world that it has forsaken, isn't a strong dose of realism a requirement?' (p. 116 this volume).

[53] Damian Veal, "Editorial Introduction." *Angelaki*, 10:1, 2005: 2.

[54] Interestingly, concluding his introduction, Veal acknowledges that '[i]t was Ray Brassier's unyielding insistence upon the uncircumventible significance of the sciences for philosophy during the course of countless protracted conversations some years ago which ''roused me from my dogmatic slumber'' and thus provided a considerable source of initial inspiration for this project' (*Ibid*., 19).

[55] Miguel De Bestegui, "Science and Ontology." *Angelaki* 10:2 (2005): 121.

[56] In his 1963 essay 'The Two Cultures: a second look' in C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*. (Cambridge: Canto, 1998).

[57] Edge isn't only an online community, but the bonds between members are strengthened by annual, exclusive, dinners. For details, see http://www.edge.org/documents/dinners/dinner_index.html.

[58] http://ww.edge.org/3rd_culture/

[59] Phenomena like *Edge* deserve a much deeper sociological analysis than I can offer here. I think it is necessary to note, however, that in these projects there is an overtly *political* purpose. Quoting again from Brockman's manifesto: 'America now is the intellectual seedbed for Europe and Asia. This trend started with the prewar emigration of Albert Einstein and other European scientists and was further fueled by the post-Sputnik boom in scientific education in our universities. The emergence of the third culture introduces new modes of intellectual discourse and reaffirms the preeminence of America in the realm of important ideas (http://ww.edge.org/3rd_culture/). The third culture—admittedly, largely composed by scientists with left-wing (or, to be more contextually correct, *democratic*) sympathies—presents itself as the best of American intellectual production, as the veritable *intelligentsia* of the country and of *the world*.

[60] Consider the explosion, in the last decade, of books of 'popular science',

bringing exciting new discoveries from the scientific community to the general public.

[61] Allow me to make a popular culture reference (which would perhaps shroud me in a aura of Žižekian depth): one of the most successful TV shows of the last years, both in the US (where it is produced) and in several other countries, is *The Big Bang Theory*. As any sit-com, the show has been carefully packaged to appeal to a large audience, and yet the main characters are young theoretical physicists or astronomers, in other words *geeks*. Of course, their geeky antics are often used as comic material, mainly due to their lack of social skills, but I think the show demonstrates an interesting ideological twist by presenting people in the 'hard sciences' as being prominent enough in our society to appeal at a large enough audience. The point is trivial, but can we imagine a TV show named *The Principle of Non-Contradiction*, portraying a group of philosophy PhD's struggling with their daily life while drawing propositional logic on their whiteboards or discussing the ontological status of their table? I'm sure it would be hilarious to other philosophers, but what about the general public? And yet, is the general public more skilled in string theory than it is in process metaphysics? No, but it doesn't matter. The casual viewer doesn't 'get' the physics jokes more than it would 'get' a philosophy one (which is why the character of the scientifically ignorant —and, unsurprisingly, *female*—Penny was introduced, to allow the non-geeky public to identify with someone). The show works because first, there is a relatively higher percentage of academics (and graduate students) in the hard sciences than there is in almost any other discipline, second, because 'geeks' are not perceived as social outcasts anymore but a socially recognized group, and because, third (and mainly) the non-scientist, non-geek general public now accepts that somehow 'science is cool'. As I've already observed, this phenomenon is not limited to the US, as the success of BBC's recent *Wonders of the Solar System*, and of its unashamedly 'geeky' protagonist, Brian Cox can testify.

[62] And, as more cynical commenter would observe, less *profitable*. Why would you invite, for example, an old French communist philosopher to your dinners when you can have at your table representatives of the higher echelons of Google, or Bill Gates? Why would a University want to maintain low-return 'literary' departments when they could make twice the profit out of the research output of an industrial engineering or a chemistry program?

[63] Going back to the problem of materialism, classical materialism of the Marxist variety could be defined as a position essentially concerned with practical social change, where the *matter* is physical, social labor. I should emphasize that—for object-oriented philosophers who are not ready to make any concession to correlationist thought—the practical dimension of *human* social action might be *derived from* a non-correlationist ontology, but not be *employed as* a criterion for the construction of such an ontology, in order to avoid any privilege given to the human-world relation over the real object-real object relation. This problem has also been considered by Grant, who claimed that '[t]he idea that it is possible to invoke a diminished realm, as it were, for matter and to condemn whatever does not fulfill the economic, teleological purposes of certain types of agents to a sphere of

"merely crude matter", where it has absolutely no effects whatsoever, where it's left to one side of the philosophical and the political problem, seems to me a recipe for disaster' (Grant in Brassier *et al.* "Speculative Realism", *Collapse* Vol. III 2007: 360).

[64] Which is justified by the all too hasty identification of all the postmodern evils with the term 'deconstruction'. For a defense of the logic of deconstruction against accusations of being incapable of proposing political change see Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), and for a powerfully argued differentiation between Derrida's deconstruction and the more constructivist-relativist trends of 'postmodernism' see Christopher Norris, *Against Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction and Critical Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

[65] Something should be noted however: the contemporary popularity and social impact of scientists is largely due to the union of the communicative skills of the most pedagogically gifted among them with the intrinsic authority that the 'scientist' holds in our society. Concretely, this means that public lectures by prominent scientists are often crowded, and that books of so-called 'popular science' are—by comparison with the average philosophy book— bestsellers. This is the case because scientific discoveries and theories are a description of the world, which, once purged from their more heavy-going mathematical formalism, can be turned into more or less compelling narratives. Could, or should, philosophers aim at a similar 'double register' of publications both technical and popular?

[66] Graham Harman, "Some Preconditions of Universal Philosophical Dialogue." *Dialogue and Universalism* Vol. 1-2, 2005: 168. Harman explains that 'The fear arises from the great success and public prestige of the natural sciences, whose results begin to pile up so rapidly that no non-specialist can easily keep abreast of the latest developments in more than a few of its dozens of branches....For this reason, it [philosophy] wants to set up a special transcendental preserve that science cannot touch, a zone that science cannot possibly outflank since it will contain the very "conditions of possibility" to which any science will have to be indebted. Science will be exposed as a set of propositions to be appraised by a theory of reference, or as a Machiavellian power game to be unmasked' while 'the arrogance of critical philosophy is visible as well. After renouncing all claims to speak of the world as it really is, philosophy begins to convince itself that its tiny ghetto is better than the stars and seas and deserts beyond. The philosophy of language dismisses the findings of brain chemists; Heidegger makes the sweeping claim that science does not think. Philosophy has nothing more to tell us about rocks, insects, comets, or souls? "Well, good riddance anyway. It's your own fault for expecting us to discuss these things. How naive you must be." Specific philosophical questions about objects are thrown to the empirical sciences with an attitude of smug affrontery, just as sour milk is left behind the garage for the stray cats to lick up. Fear and arrogance: these are the two classic symptoms of an inferiority complex' (*Ibid.*).

[67] For a clinical and unforgiving diagnosis of the 'sordid state' of the humanities, whose only possible cure is identified in a radical reshaping of

ontological commitments, accompanied by an opening to the richness of the outside world, see Ian Bogost's blogpost at http://ww.bogost.com/blog/the_turtlenecked_hairshirt.shtml. The issue of the rejection of the human sphere has been a delicate one for speculative realists, having to defend themselves from accusations of anti-humanism. As a very rough guideline, I think it would be fair to claim that the 'object-oriented' faction, operating under the guideline of a ontological 'democracy' (to place all objects, *including* the human, on the same ontological plane) would not subscribe to Brassier's (*Alien Theory*, 17) eliminativist position when he claims that '[t]here is no longer any room within the bounds of a univocally physical natural order for a special category of putatively trans-natural being called 'human'.

[68] Mullarkey writes that 'I defend this title of "Post-Continental Philosophy"... as both an assessment of the current transitional state in which Continental thought finds itself with respect to its theorization of science in particular and immanence in general, as well as a caution against thinking that such an engagement could ever be a straightforward evolution'. John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: an Outline.* (London: Continuum, 2006), 3.

[69] http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/ennis-responds/. If an open-minded scientist would agree with Harman here, as Roberto Trotta does when he claims that '[t]he only thing we can ask from science is to provide us with a logically-consistent, experimentally observable, predictive narrative of a model of reality. Apart from that, in order to interpret this model, to delimit its applicability, we need another form of discourse which necessarily sits beyond the methodology of science itself' (Roberto Trotta, "Dark Matter: Probing the Archefossil." *Collapse* Vol.II, 2007: 168-169), there are other philosophers (not necessarily related to the *speculative* realist movement, but still involved in the construction of a *realism*) who are more skeptical of a metaphysics not grounded on science. See for example James Ladyman, proponent of a 'ontic structural realism', who argues that 'we should stop trying to interpret physics in terms of objects of some kind...I have...recently come to despair of many philosophers' inability to escape the manifest image, and their insistence on trying to do metaphysics with categories like object and intrinsic property, which I now see as anthropomorphic in the sense that they are a projection of how the everyday world of our experience is conceptualized. Scientists, especially physicists, have moved on, and it is time that metaphysicians tried and at least catch up' (James Ladyman, "Who's afraid of Scientism?" *Collapse* Vol. V, 2009: 140). Tellingly, at a recent conference at the University of Dundee, Scotland, Graham Harman delivered a paper directly attacking James Ladyman's (and Don Ross's) variety of scientific realism, coherently with his general rejection of any reductionist or eliminativist project since 'the problem with eliminativism, as I see it, is that it makes no room for real objects at all. Its sense of realism is that of scientific realism, and so there isn't any concept of withdrawal there. The difference between real and unreal, for that position, is simply a difference between real *images* and scientific *images*. It is a mere metaphysics of images, despite all its huffing and puffing about reality' (http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2010/05/09/shaviro-with-an-interesting-twist/).

[70] Brassier *Alien Theory*, 22.

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Blogs

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Graham Harman's Blog - http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/

Speculative Realism Aggregator - http://www.bogost.com/speculativerealism/

Thinking Against Nature

Nature, Ideation, and Realism between Lovecraft and Shelling

Ben Woodard

European Graduate School (EGS)

Introduction

"Science, already oppressive with its shockig revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world."[1]

"The ideal world presses mightily towards the light, but is still held back by the fact that nature has withdrawn as a mystery."2

Despite statements regarding its fundamental impossibility, the philosophy of nature stands as a metaphysical project not only worth pursuing, but also critical to complete. This task requires not only the resurrection of a dead philosophical form but an issuing of a challenge to post-modern restrictions on thought and existence (which have remained couched in the comfortable obscurity of the term materialism) in order to interrogate the foreclosure of the relation between being and thinking resulting from the widespread limitations of correlationism, the dominant mode of contemporary philosophy. As defined by Quentin Meillassoux: "Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another."[3] In addition,