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GRAHAM HARMAN

**TOWARDS
SPECULATIVE
REALISM**

ESSAYS AND LECTURES

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office1@o-books.net

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Preface

This volume assembles eleven previously unpublished essays and lectures written between 1997 and 2009. A great deal happened between those two dates. In 1997 I was an obscure doctoral student at DePaul University in Chicago in the midst of a sportswriting career. Although my novel interpretation of Heidegger was exciting to many fellow students, there was nothing more to my credit than that. In early 1997 I had not yet read a word of Bruno Latour, and had only a loose familiarity with the major books of Alfred North Whitehead and Xavier Zubiri; over the following year these three authors would all play major roles in ending my career as a convinced if unorthodox Heideggerian. Until December of that year I was not even fully committed to realism, an essential part of my position ever since.

By 2009, things were rather different. By then I had published four books and traveled to fifty-seven countries. I was a veteran professor and newly minted administrator at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Perhaps most importantly, I was associated in the public eye with a small group of like-minded philosophers called the Speculative Realists, none of them remotely known to me in 1997. These days, Speculative Realism is a well-known phrase with especial appeal to the younger generation in continental philosophy. The essays and lectures found here tell my own part of the story as a champion of the “objectoriented” wing of the movement. Rather than a unified school, Speculative Realism has always been a loose umbrella term for four markedly different positions: my own object-oriented philosophy, Ray Brassier’s eliminative nihilism, Iain Hamilton Grant’s cybernetic vitalism, and Quentin Meillassoux’s speculative materialism. In some respects these positions are incompatible, but as their collective name indicates, all combine a realist element with a speculative one. By “realist” I mean that these philosophies all reject the central teaching of Kant’s Copernican Revolution, which turns philosophy into a meditation on human finitude and forbids it from discussing reality in itself. By “speculative” I mean that none of them merely defend a dull commonsense realism of genuine trees and billiard balls existing outside the mind, but a darker form of “weird realism” bearing little resemblance to the presuppositions of everyday life.

While numerous friends and well-wishers helped me to evolve from an unknown graduate student into a visible philosophical author, two in particular should be mentioned, since each is the subject of a lecture contained in this volume. From as early as 1990 it was Alphonso Lingis who kept me on the right path by example and encouragement. His strikingly realist version of phenomenology along with his stirring prose, offbeat lifestyle, and our shared background as small-town Midwestern Americans who wanted to see the world, were a great inspiration during my mostly frustrating years of graduate study. From 1999 onward I benefitted from personal contact with another genuine philosopher, Bruno Latour, whose irreverent wit and focus on specific entities were the perfect medicine for my post-Heideggerian hangover. Above all, Latour’s unmatched intellectual versatility pointed the way to new communication with neighboring disciplines. Indeed, much of my reading audience is borrowed from his own, and I have adapted to this audience in ways that feel healthy.

For each chapter I have written a brief introductory paragraph explaining the circumstances under which the piece was written. Some of them were professional failures, rejected by conferences and unappreciated by those who heard them. Others were striking successes. The point of these notes is not to dramatize my own story, but to reassure young readers about their own. My road to the present was riddled with obstacles: often self-created, but sometimes acts of sabotage by tyrants. Yet the pleasure

of writing the essays and giving the lectures was a great consolation over the years, and I hope they
have a warm and inviting tone for those who read them now.

1. Phenomenology and the Theory of Equipment (1997)

This piece was a conference paper submitted in February 1997 to the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP). The submission was rejected. Since 1991–92 I had placed the tool analysis at the center of my interpretation of Heidegger, though at the time of writing this piece I was not yet a philosophical “realist” as was the case from December 1997 onward. Also missing from this essay is my later preoccupation with the role of das Geviert or “the fourfold” in Heidegger, though this concern was already paramount from as early as 1994 when his “Einblick in das was ist”¹ was finally published in full. A few key phrases from the following paper later found their way into my first book, Tool-Being (2002).²

Few passages in Heidegger’s writings have attained as much notoriety as the analysis of equipment in *Being and Time*. It is impossible to find a summary of this work that does not make frequent reference to the vivid description of the tool and its malfunction. Still, the theme of equipment has rarely been pursued as a worthy problem in its own right. On one front, the concept of the tool is regarded as an early version of a later, fullblown meditation on the essence of technology. Elsewhere, one speaks of Heidegger’s “pragmatist” period; from there, a debate erupts as to whether or not this pragmatism has anything to do with the philosopher’s later concerns. A third camp, which includes many of the most reliable commentators, regards the tool-analysis as possessing a largely historical function, as settling of accounts with the ancient poiesis/praxis distinction. But in each of these cases the real action is assumed to lie elsewhere, in one of the more remote and complicated themes of Heidegger studies. The current paper will argue against this tendency. First, we will show that Heidegger’s account of tools is applicable not just to widely-recognized examples of handyman’s tools (hammer and drills), but to every possible entity. Second, we will suggest that *all* of the more widely admired Heideggerian themes are derivatives of the philosopher’s simple analysis of utensils. Finally, we will make a tentative suggestion concerning the development of a concrete theory of equipment.

The analysis of equipment is familiar enough that any paraphrase quickly becomes tedious. One primary mode of encounter with entities, Heidegger shows, is not that of running across entities indifferently present-at-hand for perception. When the tool is most a tool, it recedes into a reliable background of subterranean machinery. Equipment is invisible. Furthermore, tools do not occur in isolation. Their meaning is determined by their definitive role in a referential contexture, their distinctive position in this reality. The same hammer can be magnificent against soft wood, useless against metallic surfaces, and a lethal horror to many insects. In this way, the tool is what it is only with respect to the system it inhabits; there is no such thing as “an” equipment. Equipment is total, contextural. What this tells us is that equipment, insofar as it is currently in use, is never something merely present-at-hand. Some part of the physical tool may stay in view, but its action necessarily withdraws into a totality that cannot become visible *in principle*. The tool is the execution of a reality or effect that necessarily retreats behind the presence of any surface. But this reality is not merely negative, as though self-concealment were its most striking feature. The tool is a force that exists rather than not existing, a reality that has emerged into the world and set up shop. Of course in the strict sense we should speak here not of tools, but rather of a single unitary world in action. For at this point we are not yet in position to regard an individual piece of gear as anything but illusory, as a

ontic nullity with respect to its underground reality.

Let these remarks suffice to remind us of the basic features of Heidegger's innovative research concerning equipment. At the same time, we should not fail to notice that the scope of his analysis soon expands far beyond the limited number of objects normally classified as tools. Heidegger does not mean to talk about spoons and forks, as he will later point out on another occasion. Rather, every conceivable entity is nothing less than an item of equipment. No being can be reduced to its presence-at-hand. The most useless flake of stone does not escape the system of tools; the tiniest grain of sand is what it is, surging into existence and throwing its weight around. No matter how negligible these entities are, they are not without their significance, even if for most humans it is the feeble significance of "triviality". Beneath its indifferent surface every entity occupies a highly determinate position in the system of significance that forms the world. In short, the analysis of tools is concerned only incidentally with the human use of tools. Its real subject matter is the stance of entities themselves in the midst of reality. The bridge is not a bridge due to the fact that Dasein uses it; the reverse is the case. A tool isn't "used"; it "is".

It will be objected that we have already missed the central significance of Dasein in this analysis. It will be claimed that Dasein is the key, since everyone knows that *Being and Time* is compromised by the transcendental standpoint in which human being is always taken as the final standard of reference. But there is a rarely noticed ambiguity in Heidegger's use of the term "Dasein". Admittedly, the human being is not the same kind of entity as a stone. Human beings partly transcend the entities that surround them, while the rock is merely the oblivious punching bag of the forces that mass against it. In more familiar terms, Dasein is gifted with an "understanding of being". Ignoring for now the difficult problem posed by animals, the human being seems to be a unique entity in precisely this way. But there is another trait of Dasein, one that is mentioned in an even earlier passage: the fact that Dasein's essence lies in its existence. Never meant to be sized up as a "rational animal" or as the "fusion of body and soul", Dasein can only be understood in the very act of its existence. Any claim to define Dasein via some representation or eidos or by way of any external properties is incapable of living up to the task. But this irreducibility of Dasein to a representation is also shared by hammer and even by sand and rocks. We have already seen that *none* of these entities can be understood as they were simply *vorhanden*. Readiness-to-hand does not mean "usable by people", but rather "shere performance of an effect". Thus, Dasein in the second sense is *the absolute equivalent of the tool*, however counterintuitive this might seem. The distinctiveness of human Dasein has to be sought elsewhere. In addition, the fact that no entity whatsoever can be reduced to presence-at-hand means that Heidegger's famous distinction between categories and existentials is misleading. Indeed, it is the great merit of his analysis of equipment to have exploded any possible notion of present-at-hand categories. Strictly speaking, categories are an illusion.

We return momentarily from the question of Dasein to the theme of tools in general. A brief while ago we recalled both the invisibility and the totality of the tool, traits that emerged from Heidegger's own account of equipment. These features described the character of entities in themselves, the primary mode of being, and not just the way in which people encounter them. If entities were invisible and total in the strict sense, we obviously would not encounter individual beings at all. All objects would fade away into an instantaneous global action, a system without organs. But experience shows that we do encounter singular entities; life is absorbed in nothing but such specific beings: sun and melons, puppets. How does Heidegger account for this duality? The most famous place is in his discussion of the "broken tool". The working piece of equipment is unobtrusive; in contrast, the malfunctioning instrument thrusts itself rudely into view. In this new "broken" situation, we gain

view of what was previously taken for granted. Equipment is no longer a silent laborer; it has surfaced as a visible power. It is a tool which has suddenly reversed into tool “as” tool. The visible world is the world of the “as”, a tangible and volatile surface derived from a more primary dimension of being.

The realm of the broken tool is the realm of the “as”. But just as the term “equipment” could not be limited to tools in the narrow sense, so the broken tool quickly reaches beyond the strict boundaries suggested by its name. Even a rough examination will show that Heidegger begins to define virtually everything in the same way as his concept of the broken tool. Space, for example, comes to be defined as nothing other than the freeing of entities from the anonymous referential contexture, in such a way that they take on a specific unique location of their own; this leaves us with no understanding of the difference between such heterogenous realms as spatial locations and broken hammers. The same holds true for the analysis of theory. Theory is shown to be the derivative of a work-world that is already experienced in advance; in this way theory, space, and broken tool have fused together into an indistinguishable brotherhood. Additional and related concepts could easily be listed here. But these three themes are enough to suggest that the idea of the reversal between equipment and the “as” dominates a substantial portion of Heidegger’s work. Indeed, the justly praised Lecture Course 1929/30³ is misread when one accepts at face value Heidegger’s apparent claim that he is offering us a course on life-philosophy. An unbiased reading of the text will show that 1929/30 is not a course on life at all, but only an investigation of the “as”. From out of all the traditionally recognized characteristics of life (locomotion, nutrition, reproduction) Heidegger focuses only on the faculty of perception. And he does this in such a way that all of his attempted distinctions between what is human and what pertains to the animal rest upon a (finally unconvincing) gradation in the kind of “as” accessible to each species. With this remark we return to the first and most familiar sense of Dasein. Dasein as the being that has an understanding of being. It should now be clear that the perception of a broken hammer is an understanding of hammer “as” hammer; likewise, Dasein’s understanding of being is an understanding of being “as” being. But in several instances we have seen that something like the “as” can only emerge from out of a prior contexture of equipment. Thus, the supposed central problem of Dasein and its understanding is thoroughly dependent on a clearer solution of what occurs in the reversal between tool and broken tool, or tool and space. In short, the human Dasein is not a privileged entity by any means. The special features of this Dasein can only be understood from the view of the analysis of simple equipment.

We repeat: Heidegger’s central contribution to philosophy lies in his ruthless critique of presence-at-hand. And this critique is already worked out in sufficient form in his analysis of equipment. The introduction of the term “Dasein” makes sense only as an attempt to undercut any present-at-hand determination of the essence of man; Heidegger flatly tells us that this is the goal of introducing the term. Further, the question of being is rendered intelligible only as a challenge to the presence-at-hand of any object whatever. It may be wondered whether any of Heidegger’s most widely appreciated terminology (time, *Ereignis*) ever drifts out of the orbit of the war against *Vorhandenheit*. On the whole, too much honor is granted to the withdrawn status of “being” (and its successors), too much effort wasted in an attempt to penetrate back beyond all known horizons into some even deeper unthematized site, where ultimately even being itself is supposed to be lodged. In fact the key to Heidegger’s being is not its absolute concealment, but its absolute reality, its definitive action. We have argued elsewhere that despite all appearances to the contrary, the question of the meaning of being is answered very rapidly in *Being and Time*: the meaning of being is tools. This formulation can only sound dubious, even laughable, as long as we cling to our prejudices about the sense of the words “tool” and “being” in the text. But an unbiased reading of the text will show that both concepts serve

only to undercut the age-old regime of presence-at-hand. Just as being reverses into manifold being, so the unitary empire of equipment swings about into individual tool-pieces. Whether we like it or not, the two terms refer to precisely the same reality. Being is tool-being.

This will obviously be a difficult point for most readers to accept, but the constraints of time demand that we move on without more detailed argument. But in passing, we can cite further anecdotal evidence for the thesis that Heidegger's work is dominated wire-to-wire by a repetitive attack upon all that is *vorhanden*. Namely, we could call attention to the fact that the most consistent rhetorical appeal throughout Heidegger's career is not to the *Sein* that is eventually abandoned, nor to the *Ereignis* that disappears and reappears in his works. Rather, it is the spirit of the word *bloß* meaning "mere" or "merely". Choose nearly any text you please from any period in Heidegger's career, and you will find him continuing to take gratuitous stabs at his constant enemy: the continuing threat of relapse into understanding concepts in a present-at-hand sense. *Being and Time* warns us that a system of things is not a mere sum of *realia* that serve to fill up a room. (It would be entertaining to write a paper arguing that they *are* such a mere sum of *realia*.) Later, the lectures on Hölderlin's *Demosthenes* insist that the famous *polla ta deina* of the Antigone chorus does not refer to a mere pile of uncanny present-at-hand entities. Even more amusingly, the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* lecture course of 1921 points out that "the appearance of the Antichrist is no mere transient happening".⁴ If these examples are not yet enough to prove the existence of Heidegger's "one thought", they at least demonstrate that he was limited to one great joke.

It is on this note that we pause to consider the fascinating critique of Husserl presented in 1925 in *History of the Concept of Time*. The interesting thing here is not whether Husserl is outdone by his student. The critique actually acts with less potency against Husserl than against certain readings of Heidegger, insofar as these readings do not realize the astonishing concreteness of the question of being as presented in 1925. With his fruitful interpretation of the phenomenological method, Heidegger verges on rereading Husserl as a forerunner in the onslaught against all that is *vorhanden*. A crucial historical claim, especially in light of his comparison of Husserl's phenomenology with Hegel's *Science of Logic*). By interpreting the *apriori* as a title for being rather than a structure related to the intuiting subject above all else, Heidegger already reads Husserl's "phenomenon" as an *event* rather than a perception, as a real being both concealed and mirrored by its successive adumbration. Nonetheless, he regards the phenomenon as still in bondage to the primacy of representation. "The being of the phenomenon is never raised as a question." This can only mean that in spite of everything, Husserl's phenomenon is still present-at-hand.

Instead of this, the alternative is that beings are realities, actual entities (the latter term is borrowed from Whitehead). The phenomena, the things themselves, are in the act of being. There is not only concealment of the being of the things, but a real relation between this being and the visible surface of the thing. This shadowy relation ought to be reflected upon in greater detail. We have seen briefly how Heidegger's thought tends to mobilize itself around the opposition between tool and broken tool. The reality that materializes from the strife between them is composed of all manner of haloes, auras, and emergent subterranean currents. But we cannot begin to classify these divergent realities, nor even offer a rough distinction between broken tools, theory, and space, so long as we do no more than defer to Heidegger's findings on the genesis of exteriority from depth. The Grail Quest for "the possibility of possibility" is far down the wrong road, as is the assumption that the regressive movement back toward *Ereignis* would be hopelessly tainted by any philosophical contact with specific entities. What is now needed is an inverted strategy, in the name of a fresh and concrete research into the secret contours of objects: a renewed occupation with the things themselves. Moreover, this proposal is not

hypothetical. We already have in our possession the first efforts in this direction in such essays by Heidegger as “Das Ding”, “Bauen Wohnen Denken”, and certain passages of the writings on language, all of them witnessing his frantic attempt to retrieve a reflection on things: jugs, cups, shoes... A handful of important but manageable paradoxes and discoveries arise when we examine in this way the relation between a being and its being. But here we have only had the time to set the table for further analysis of equipment, in the broadest sense of the term.

2. Alphonso Lingis on the Imperatives in Things (1997)

In October 1997 Alphonso Lingis visited the Department of Philosophy at DePaul University Chicago, where I was then a doctoral student. Lingis had been my advisor as I earned a Master Degree in Philosophy at Penn State during 1990-91. On 11 October a roundtable discussion was held with several DePaul faculty members and graduate students presenting short papers in response to his work. The following was my contribution to that event, from which I was initially excluded by a powerful enemy on the faculty. In conceptual terms, this paper gives an early hint of the full-blown realism that first emerged two months later. While Lingis had argued that inanimate objects have an ethical force over us no less than humans do, I extended this claim to say that objects encounter imperatives in their own right, rather than merely providing humans with them.

It has often been noted that our encounter with other human beings displays a strange character. In the first instance the Other is a limited, specific object of the world. To this extent, his or her personality, body-type, and temperament can be considered as the net product of physical and chemical forces, easily reducible to a series of causal mechanisms. While the most extreme version of this materialism is generally held in low regard today, it can still be an interesting experiment to push this view as far as possible. Behind our most compelling thoughts, then, we imagine enzymal secretions giving rise to various brain-states. Behind our most flamboyant individual passions, we detect concealed hereditary cravings just now breaking into full bloom, or the first traces of a culture or family in a state of gradual decay. This can be done not only for our character traits, but for every last event that befalls us. The most devastating strokes of bad luck often result from trivial miscalculations; at the same time, a cynic might easily trace the rise of every friendship back to some concealed motive of utility. The ability to explain all human phenomena in terms of some indefinite set of underlying causes might be called the “depth perception” of the other.

But there is also what we might term the “surface sensitivity” toward human beings. In the words of Lingis: “the other is also *other*. To recognize the other as other is to sense the imperative weighing on his or her thought. It is to sense its imperative force...”⁵ Not merely a product of a limitless chain of causal forces, the other is absorbed in some task, acts in accordance with the imperative summoned lying before her mind, expends her energy in taking something seriously. The same is true for ourselves, since even the most hardened egotist would never imagine that he alone is exempt from the conditions of physical reality, free from the sphere of natural laws that work upon all objects equally. The person is marked then by two separate currents; the person is an object reversing into an other, an earthly force doubling up into a face. The imperative that calls me obliges me to understand the causes and grounds that unleash their energies within the world. Still, the other interrupts the movement, posits a law that commands me with an irreducible force. Amidst the realm of nature and thought, the other represents a sort of intruder.

To see the other as other, even to see myself as an autonomous agent, is to stand before an actual imperative, a sincere finality in the world that cannot be identical with the history that gave birth to it. We see the other as ordered not by biochemical laws and cultural codings, but by a task. Pierrot builds a wagon or juggles no matter whether Harlequin convinced him to do so, and no matter whether wind or fever makes him do it. The human actor is always locked in some stance toward the object surrounding him; he is immersed in this sincerity, a behavioral candor that does not escape our notice.

and that weighs on us with equal force. He is not, as Lingis puts it, a simple phosphorescent image streaking across our consciousness: “To recognize the other, Kant says, is to recognize the imperative for law that rules in the other. To recognize the other is to respect the other.”⁶ The human agent, whether self or other, has already doubled up into a surface. In this way the whole of the human real is shown to consist of two basic principles: the other regarded as the nexus of conditioning forces and energies, and the other as *sincere* or as occupied with the world that surrounds her.

We can proceed further, since this sincerity of the world contains several distinct strands. We have already spoken of the upsurge of a face of the other from the subterranean causal layers that sustain him, the emergence into the daylight of the other’s commanding imperative. This imperative is present in both the hero and the mediocrity, it is present whether she be constructing some kind of unusual device or enjoying the simple pleasure of eating fruits. The face is always a face, whatever the nobility or pettiness of what drives the other on through the years.

At the same time, the face is never just a brute fact. It casts shadows and haloes, compels us to confront it with this or that attitude, seducing us in this or that way: “The things are not only structures with closed contours that lend themselves to manipulation and whose consistency constrains us. They lure and threaten us, support and obstruct us, sustain and debilitate us, direct and calm us. They enrapture us with their sensuous substances and also with their luminous surfaces and their phosphorescent facades, their halos, their radiance and their resonances.”⁷ Luring and threatening us, laying claim to our energies in some particular way, the face is an *idol*. We began by seeing that the other reversed from a natural object, a sort of puppet under unceasing causal coercion into a vulnerable actor in the world. But we now find that this sincerity is split in half as well. For on the one hand it is the absolute fact of our being seduced by the faces of the world; on the other, it is the specific realm of lures and threats posed by those faces, the full spectrum of blessings and curses unleashed into the world by this face that also takes the shape of an idol.

The other is both face and idol. But there is still another possibility, ever present along with the first two. The idol also becomes a *fetish*, a mask no longer drifting across the world like an independent power, but now used to manipulate or enslave. In the author’s example:

The professor who enters the classroom the first day has been preceded by the legend or myth of himself which the students now see materializing before their eyes. They adjust practically to the level of his voice and to the arena of his movements; he knows they are looking at the personage and fits his person into it as he enters the room. He will use this professorial mask to intimidate them.... When in the classroom he slouches over his papers and stifles a yawn, he is not simply shrinking back into a bare anatomy moved by fatigue, he is agitating his masks disdainfully or ironically.⁸

And again, “A fetish is used to obtain something one needs or wants; it is put forth in the service of one’s fears or one’s cupidity. The idol is noble; the fetish is servile.”⁹

The imperative face, then, is by the same stroke both idol and fetish, and this is true in all instances. The pedant in the example just cited can modulate or oscillate his own self-generated caricature as much as he pleases, extending his personal dominance to a formidable degree. But even behind this jaded mask, the idol of a human face transmits its law through the air and commands a genuine response from us. Likewise, even the idolized face of a saint or a hero does not escape the inevitable fetishization of itself; human nature is too duplicitous for this. If seduction is an event, it

also always to some degree a tool used to fascinate, conquer, or even pillage the other. For this reason the phenomena entitled “idol” and “fetish” are not so much distinct kinds of masks as they are inverse dimensions of a single inescapable fate: the fate of the image in its power over reality.

So far we have been discussing several distinct aspects of the imperative face of the other. To repeat, this imperative arises by way of a reversal in which the other as an object subjected to a crushing network of earthly laws and determinations reverses into the other as an autonomous commander, by virtue of the task he confronts us with. This is the point at which Lingis takes a step that never occurs even to Levinas: the structure of the imperative, it is claimed, lies even in the things themselves. As Lingis puts it, the corporeal element of *objects* doubles into an interior motor scheme and an outward aspect, a duplication that no longer belongs to the human being alone: “When I look at the sequoias I do not focus on them by circumscribing their outlines; the width of their towering trunks and the shape of their sparse leaves drifting in the fog appear as the surfacing into visibility of an inner channel of upward thrust.”¹⁰ If this description is to be believed (and we believe wholeheartedly) then even the sequoia, that mass of semi-aware organic material, presents a face to those who encounter it.

To speak of an “inner channel of upward thrust” in the tree itself is not a metaphor, or at least not primarily a metaphor. For what we see before us in the forest is not a large patch of brown color, nor even the settled datum of a tree-object onto which we could graft personifying tendencies. Instead, amidst the elemental chaos of the forest and its iridescent gloom and its infernal insect chants, we encounter something like a tree-effect. Amidst the primitive confusion of the terrestrial landscape, we run across something with the “style” of a tree. It doesn’t have that apple look, that corn-cob feel, that soybean air about it; rather, we sense that familiar sequoia thickness and grandeur. In this way the sequoia itself becomes idolized; the tree doubles up into an idol. And like any idol, it cannot protect itself from the role of a fetish. We can see this more easily in the author’s own example of a pen, which he insists we do not encounter as a black cylindrical object, but rather as “the condensation of a somber power.” This idol-worship of the pen as an ominous force gives way just as quickly to its simple appropriation for everyday tasks, picked up and used in a facile way by those no longer attuned to its “inner channel of horizontal thrust”.

It is in this connection that the reader of these essays on the imperative encounters a remarkably fresh approach to the problem of technology. Historians of the tool have long noted that equipment externalizes human organs. The hammer prolongs the length and power of the human forearm, the telescope one-ups the eyeball, while internal combustion vehicles render obsolete the long-distance function of the legs. Given what has just been said about idol and fetish, we could say that all of these devices somehow de-fetishize the object, displace its usefulness and manipulability onto some external point, leaving behind the original object as a useless but gorgeous flower, as an orchid. “Orchids are plants with atrophied trunks and limbs, parasitically clinging to the rising trunks that shut out the sun, flowering their huge showy sex organs, awaiting the bees for their orgasmic unions.”¹¹

For this reason, perhaps far from stripping objects down into calculable reservoirs of fuel, the progress of technology is leading us toward a completely de-fetishized world, a landscape of imperative simulacra, a planet populated with orchid-like residues, phantom objects devoid of any serviceability. Lingis imagines the final stage of this process in a passage of ominous beauty: “Can you imagine at some future date the faculty of memory, reason, and decision disconnecting from the computers which it now serves, ceasing to be but an organ-for-apprehending, and, swollen with its own wonders, becoming an organ-to-be-apprehended, an orchid rising from the visceral and cerebral

depths of the cybernetic forest with its own power, rising into the sun?"¹² For us at least, much of the appeal of this unique passage lies in the fact that it reads like anything but a warning.

The object is an imperative, radiating over us like a black sun, holding us in its orbit, demanding our attention, insisting that we reorganize our lives along its shifting axes. The object is a force, and thus our valuation of it is a gift of force, and nothing like a recognition at all. This fact leads the reader toward a series of remarks on language. The phrase "how beautiful you are!"¹³ does not communicate information, but bows to your beauty or at least pretends to bow, expressing either your own seductive force or my own deceit. These evaluative terms also become especially clear, as the author indicates, in the speech of children: "bad fire", "dangerous street".¹⁴ To respond to the objects populating the earth, and to the elemental medium that supports them, is to enter into the seductive chant of insects, the realm of solar expenditure and vegetative sexualities: "Life's blessing extends over a universe of riddles and dreadful accidents."

The servile are those who face others with their faces closed off from the world, who substitute for the vulnerability of their surface the indomitable power of a fetish. But "the idol glows with its own light".¹⁵ That is to say, "the face refracts a double of itself, made of warmth and light, which speaks not messages addressed to other orders, but vitalizing and ennobling.... We expose our carnal substance to the grandeur of the oceans and the celestial terror of electrical storms.... mantras with which an idol crystallizes."

We would like to end this summary with a question. We have seen that the other is at work, devoted to her task, and that this task commands us. Our question is whether this command really arises only within the narrow confines of human representation. The upward thrust of the sequoia commanded me to see it as an object, as a durable "sequoia style" amidst the scrambled hysteria of contradictory forest objects. But is it just that reality commands me to see this tree for what it is? Or does this giant tree itself, cutting across the ether, turning toward the sun, sucking juice from the soil, not already live in the domain of the imperative? Given the vast scope of this new interpretation of the imperative, it would be hard to deny this structure to wolves and dolphins, to the zebras racing across the savanna and the ravens playing pranks with clotheslines. Even the more widely despised organisms, the ones we all join in destroying (moths, beetles, microbes) must then be governed by an imperative as well.

And ultimately, this must be true even of inanimate matter itself: would it be necessary to reinterpret causality itself as a form of the imperative in things? A possible key to answering this question can be found in other passages from Lingis's *Foreign Bodies*, with which we will bring this summary to a close. The first runs as follows: "The things have to not exhibit all their sides and qualities, have to compress them behind the faces they turn to us, have to tilt back their sides in depth and not occupy all the field with their relative bigness, because they have to coexist in a field with one another and that field has to coexist with the fields of the other possible things."¹⁶ Making room for one another in this way, objects contest each other, seduce each other, empower or annihilate each other. Commanding one another by way of the reality of their forces, the objects exist as imperatives. Like fish hunting food or dogs playing with balls, it is possible that gravel and tar, cloth and magnesium wage war against one another, compress one another into submission, command respect from one another.

The second passage runs as follows: "...as [the body] rows across waters it becomes for itself something seen by the lake and the distant shore; as it grapples with the rocks it takes on mass and weight.... But in letting loose its hold on things, letting its gaze get caught up in the monocular

images, reflections, refractions, will-o'-the-wisps, our body dematerializes itself and metamorphoses into the drifting shape of a Chinese lantern among them."¹⁷ A lantern among Aztec, eagle, sphinx, cobra, quetzal bird.

3. The Theory of Objects in Heidegger and Whitehead (1997)

This lecture was given at DePaul University on Halloween Night, 1997 to an audience containing many DePaul graduate students and faculty members Bill Martin and Angelica Nuzzo. Though I had made intermittent attempts to read Whitehead from as early as 1986, it was only during the summer of 1997 that Whitehead (and the great Spanish Basque philosopher, Xavier Zubíri) began to push me away from a largely Heideggerian standpoint. The following lecture was the first attempt to reorient my work on Heidegger under the influence of Whitehead's de-humanized ontology. The Heidegger section ends with another early hint of my quickly evolving view (inspired by Whitehead himself) that inanimate interactions display the same basic "as-structure" as human cognition. The interpretation of Whitehead offered in the second half has some unorthodox features, such as downplaying the term "societies" and treating all entities as "actual entities". But I would still be willing to defend this interpretation today.

The following lecture aims to provide a rapid but lively summary of the ontological views of Martin Heidegger and Alfred North Whitehead. It is possible that the combined work of these thinkers represents the highest point attained by first philosophy in the twentieth century. But while each of them is backed by literally thousands of admirers, these followers remain so factio-nalized, so mutually invisible, that it is rare to hear their two heroes praised with the same voice. All the same, it is not difficult to show that Heidegger and Whitehead are united in having pioneered a new *theory of objects* in philosophy, one that has not received adequate development from either camp. This claim does not imply any ultimate agreement between them on philosophical issues, any more than a shark and a squid agree by the mere fact of living in the same bay. But whatever the similarities and differences between these two key figures, it will be necessary to approach them by way of two distinct strategies; in each case there is a unique difficulty.

The writings of Whitehead openly describe the world as a theater populated by countless objects, from electrons, x-rays, rocks, flowers, icicles, comets, and animals, as well as by musicians, scientists, copper mines, monasteries, and bombs. These stock characters scattered across the planet cannot help but affect each other: they enjoy or fear, block or destroy one another. Some entities endure for millenia. Others decay quickly through the damage of radiation and collision, or through violent inner turmoil. Today's lecture will largely defend this view of reality: that of the world as a system of duelling, seducing, turbulent objects, a standpoint that can be ascribed to Whitehead in a self-evident way. But insofar as Whitehead's great systematic work *Process and Reality* is probably unfamiliar to most listeners tonight, half of the present remarks will be occupied with clarifying his major terminology.

With Heidegger the problem is quite the opposite: his basic concepts are widely familiar to most advocates of continental philosophy, to such an extent that any simple overview of terms might be regarded by this audience as tedious. For this reason, the task with respect to Heidegger is different: namely, it has to be shown that the term "theory of objects" can be applied to Heidegger's thought at all. In his works we seem to encounter only passing references to hammers, jugs, and bridges, while the real drama apparently occurs elsewhere: within the sphere of historical human Dasein and its cryptic relation to being. Here I will argue exactly the contrary point, maintaining that Heidegger's insights force nothing less than a theory of objects upon us, that the supposedly privileged questioning

human is only an interesting case of the crippling strife found even amidst soulless drops of water and dazed wild plants; furthermore, that far from requiring a detailed textual argument, this can already be made intuitively clear from the opening pages of *Being and Time* alone.

In this way, the first half of the lecture will offer a compact and unorthodox reading of Heidegger; the second, a less daring summary of Whitehead's basic intellectual position. The long-range goal of what is expressed here today is to help make room in present-day continental thought for a more audacious brand of speculative philosophy than is currently allowed.

Part I: Heidegger

If we ignore the various student theses collected in Volume 1 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, then *Being and Time* is not only Heidegger's greatest book, but his *first* book as well. If we ignore further the Introduction to this work (which was actually written after the rest), as well as the twenty-some pages on methodology that follow, we find that Heidegger's first public philosophical statement is his famous *analysis of tools*. While this fact is not of overwhelming importance in its own right, it is also no accident. In fact, it can be shown that every insight of Heidegger's philosophical career makes sense only in light of the description of equipment.

The analysis of the hammer elaborates neither a "pragmatism" nor a "priority of practical reason." In fact, the scenario of the tool in *Being and Time* has nothing to do with the human use of tools, and everything to do with the tools themselves. Walking across a bridge, I am adrift in a world of equipment: the girders and pylons that support me, the durable power of concrete beneath my feet, the dense unyielding grain of the topsoil in which the bridge is rooted. What looks at first like the simple and trivial act of walking is actually embedded in the most intricate web of tool-pieces, tiny implanted devices watching over our activity, sustaining or resisting our efforts like transparent ghosts or angels. Each of these objects executes a specific effect amidst reality. Bolts and trestles are not neutral factors but exert a definitive power in the cosmos on the basis of their particular thickness and tensile strength. Forever contending with one another, these tool-beings throw their weight around in the world, each of them ensconced in some small niche of reality.

Seen in this way, the tool has two major characteristics. The first is its invisibility. Bridge-panels and rivets do their work unnoticed, slipping away into an unnoticed backdrop while their labors are silently relied upon. Note that this is true even of equipment born in the pre-human past: air pressure condensing near our skin, or the gravity draining every object toward the cores of planets and suns. The important point is not so much that these tool-elements are *manipulated* by us; rather, they form the total cosmic infrastructure of artificial and natural and perhaps supernatural forces, powers by which our every last action is besieged. In short, the tool isn't "used"; it *is*. The work of being that makes us the tool's reality forever recedes from view. This is its first trait. The second is its *totality*. No tool operates in a vacuum; ontology allows for no action at a distance. The most irrelevant nail or square of asphalt is already shipwrecked in an environment of cement, bridge-cable, vehicles, tremors, and random vibrations. Furthermore, the bridge has a completely different reality for every entity it encounters: it is utterly distinct for the seagull, the idle walker, and those who may be driving across toward a game or a funeral. The impact of all equipment, the reality of tool-beings, is entirely dependent on its shifting position in various systems of reality.

We can see that in the first instance, the tool recedes from every possible view. What Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand is said to remain invisible except for certain special cases, the most famous case of this kind being the "broken tool". In most instances, a driver's attention is focused on the car as an integral unit, on its various uses, benefits, and drawbacks; only the damage or utter malfunction of an engine or fuel-line reminds us that the car is made of vulnerable, finite pieces. When the tool breaks, Heidegger says, we lose our simple reliance on the tool and become aware of it "as" the tool that it is. At this point an important oversight often occurs. There is a common but misguided tendency to read Heidegger's broken tool as a kind of empirical anecdote ("Have you ever noticed the

when we're using something, we usually don't pay attention to it?"). In fact, something far more radical is at stake. No matter how badly the tool breaks, no matter how deeply we dissect or analyze it, whatever emerges will *never* be the tool in its being, in the silent and faceless action through which it joins in the universe of forces. More simply put: there is an absolute gulf between Heidegger's readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. No real passage between them is possible, since the tool as a brutal subterranean energy and as a shining tangible surface are utterly incommensurable. Stated differently, the as-structure is incapable of variation or improvement. No matter how many facets of the engine we eventually unveil or catalog for ourselves, we cannot possibly draw any closer to the tool in its being than we already were.

We can also mention a second, equally common mistake made by readers of Heidegger. This is the assumption that the terms "ready-to-hand" and "present-at-hand" are meant to classify two different types of objects: the first composed of drills, chisels, or saws, the second made up of natural entities such as trees, clouds, and "useless" chunks of dirt. On one side, it is thought, handy shovels and trains; on the other side, non-human forests, caverns, and lagoons. This separation can easily be shown to be incorrect. In the first place, even officially sanctioned tools such as hammers are frequently found in present-at-hand form: as when they sit idly by, not involved in any current activity. At the same time, it should be clear that *every* entity is ready-to-hand: not in the derivative sense of "means to an end" but in the primary sense of "in the act of being", of unleashing itself upon the environment. Far from describing two kinds of entities, Heidegger's *vorhanden* and *zuhanden* describe a universal dualism found in all entities, a reversal that occurs in human beings and dogs every bit as much as in inanimate matter. Since this reversal or *Umschlag* is meant as a translation of Aristotle's *metabole*, all ontology is metontology, a valuable term that Heidegger himself abandons too quickly. All of reality, he shows, lies in a state of "metabolism" between the unchecked fury of tool-beings and the alluring facade through which alone we encounter them.

Then equipment is global; beings are tool-beings. Entities are torn between the performance of their irreducibly veiled activity and the warmth of their sparkling contours. This means that Heidegger's discussion of tools is not just a local bulletin about the breakdown of hammers; instead, whether intentionally or not, philosophy itself has been utterly redefined as the theme of tool and broken tool, the constant reversal of the concealed action of things into a sensible and exploratory profile. It can also be shown that every attempt on Heidegger's part to escape this simple and repeated dualism soon collapses back into the scenario of the tool and its malfunction.

His account of theory, for example, does no more than show us that the as-structure emerges from a prior contexture of meaning; theory is not born in isolation, but exists by uncovering the unthematic meanings in which we are involved before theoretical comportment ever appears. But unfortunately this also turns out to be true even of the most apathetic pre-theoretical stupor or of states of stunned disorientation, despite Heidegger's efforts to give theory a higher rank. Even in these cases, *Dasein* is thrown into a world that is still somehow revealed to it in such and such a way.

The same is true of space as well; for Heidegger, spatiality too only frees objects from the universal system of meaning into distinct, concrete regions. But it should be noticed that this occurs even for non-spatial reality, as when a background mood of ecstasy or despair suddenly becomes clear in our minds. Thus, even the accounts of space and theory give us only further examples of the reversal between tool and tool "as" tool, and tell us nothing unique about theory or space themselves. The progress of *Being and Time* from the hammer-analysis onward is not an expansion: it is an implosion, a devouring of all possible specific problems by the unique question of the system of tool and its breakdown into recognizable parts. Since none of these terms (broken tool, theory, space) ev

attain any real difference for Heidegger, we can use them as absolute synonyms: code words pointing back to a repeated primal duality he is unable to escape. For this reason, in addition to the “theory of tools and broken tools”, we might also call Heidegger’s thought a “philosophy of the *as*”, or “philosophy of tools and space”.

Ultimately, the same fate befalls even his concept of “temporality”, although this claim will be more controversial. To make our point, we can return to the earlier analysis of the bridge. We saw that the bridge did not exist simply as an obvious physical block; instead, its reality differed completely depending upon the specific hopes and fears of the observer. Heidegger’s term for the relation of such an observer to that which is encountered is simply “projection”. Whoever meets up with this bridge, that thing draws it into a system of meaning defined by the terminal point of their actions; projection is Heidegger’s “futuricity”, and it is found in every situation. Equally, human Dasein projects its possibilities only upon that which it already finds alongside itself; in other words, the tool-being, the tool itself, is what is past. In spite of continued misleading efforts to place the structure of temporality outside of specific things, in spite of the continued tendency of most Heideggerians to treat specific objects with as much respect as smallpox, ecstatic temporality is nothing other than the ever-present duel between the occult receding action of the tool and the radiant profile that emerges into view according to the position in reality of the observer. The bridge-effect is past, timelessly past, but it appears as a different force to reckon with for seagulls, fishermen, street vendors, and commandoes.

But now comes a subtler and more controversial point: the analysis of the temporality of the bridge actually has nothing to do with time at all. As unbelievable as it may sound, Heidegger offers us no theory of time whatsoever. We can imagine that time is suddenly frozen in its tracks, with the universe petrified forever in its current stance. Heidegger cannot prevent this thought experiment. The idea that time cannot be reduced to individual cinematic frames is not to be found in his writings, as is sometimes wrongly assumed; this is actually the view of Bergson, and marks an insight that Heidegger simply never addresses. Note that even in our imaginary situation devoid of time, even with all hope of a real future gone forever, Heidegger’s ecstatic analysis still works. Even here, every organism encountering the bridge encounters it in some specific way, confronts it with some particular projection, no matter whether tomorrow ever comes. As Levinas sees so clearly, what Heidegger gives us is not a theory of the flow of time, but an unprecedented systematic articulation of the instant. In other words, Heidegger’s objection to regarding time as a sequence of now-points is not effective against the now-points, but only against the *sequence*; as long as the “now” is not taken as an obvious present-at-hand unit, the failing of traditional theories of time has already been avoided. In sum, there is nothing in the celebrated Heideggerian theory of time except yet another version of the strife between tool and broken tool or execution and surface: between the thing in its being and the so-called “temporal” projection that deploys that thing somewhere in our awareness. Therefore, another synonym for what we have called Heidegger’s philosophy of tools and broken tools, or tools and space, would be a theory of *being and time*. And this is what is really evoked by his famous book title: the difference between the unitary system of being and its fragmentation into various objects.

Wherever he goes, however far he tries to escape, Heidegger will be haunted by the compulsive re-articulation of this awesomely radical first principle. Every effort to pass beyond it meets with immediate failure. This occurs most poignantly in his beautiful 1929/30 Lecture Course, with his attempts to provide an account of animal life. However detailed Heidegger’s accounts of specific animal experiments, however lovely his speculations on various kinds of bodily organs, there is something missing from his analysis. Namely, we see no trace of most of the features of life listed by

Aristotle in *De Anima*. Heidegger tells us nothing about nutrition or reproduction or self-induction. Only one Aristotelian feature of life is retained by Heidegger, and that *aisthesis* (perception), which explains his inability to say anything useful about plant life. And even his discussion of perception is not as detailed as it might be in the hands of other thinkers. Heidegger's interest in perception is restricted to the as-structure alone. All his attempts to differentiate between human and animal revolve around a supposed distinction between a full and impoverished version of this structure. The procedure is doomed to failure, since we have already seen that the as-structure is utterly primitive, incapable of even the least variation. There is no turbocharged version of the "as" which humans would have privileged access to. The human being is no closer to chair "as" chair than a dog or butterfly can be: for all these entities, the tool-being, the chair-effect, has withdrawn forever into the invisible kingdom of efficacy. The as-structure is a translucent middle ground, an absolute and unvarying structural skeleton of reality, and cannot also be used as a measuring stick for distinguishing between the mentality of different kinds of organisms.

Here too, it can be seen why the supposed priority of Dasein in Heidegger cannot be maintained. The distinguishing feature of this entity is said to be an understanding of its being. Dasein not only understands itself, as even paper and dust are; more than this, Dasein somehow *grasps* the being of the beings it encounters. But the notion that this makes Dasein a kind of transcendental starting point for the question of being is clearly false, even when Heidegger seems to read himself in this way. Any grasping or seeing of which Dasein is capable does not occur in isolation. All such understanding must occur through the mediation of the as-structure: being is understood "as" such-and-such; rock and scissors are understood "as" what they are rather than as something else. But the "as" exists only in its emergence from the prior reality of the thing understood: in the theater of the tool and its breakdown in the widest sense of these terms. Then the key to *Being and Time* is not the existential analytic of Dasein, which only collapses all possible moods and events into a single ambivalent point, but rather the first analysis of tool-beings.

It will now be useful to place additional weight on an important issue that has arisen several times already: the abuse of the as-structure. This structure of perception means that the tools themselves somehow become visible "as" what they are, like the broken hammer that unveils its previously hidden function. But we have said that whatever becomes visible in this way cannot possibly be the same as the tool in its effectiveness. There is nothing that could ever make the dark underground the object's secret life congruent with the perceptible hammer-apparition that now hovers before our eyes. These are incommensurable realities, different worlds. In more familiar terms, the hammer-effect can never come to presence. But not only is it impossible for the hammer itself to come to view, we also cannot appeal to the hammer itself as a regulative telos, as an ideal limit case at which our successive explorations of the hammer would at least *aim*. Even a lazy view of the bridge grasps the bridge to some extent "as" what it is, rather than simply depending upon it; we get no closer to the bridge itself even if we study it rigorously under the best-planned test conditions.

We can take an example from elsewhere in Heidegger's writings: the case of Angst, in which Dasein is said to be held out into the nothing. The problem is that Heidegger goes on to say that Dasein is *always* held out into the nothing, so that when apparently absent Angst is really only "asleep", as he puts it. But he cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that the nothing pervades reality everywhere and at all times, and also salute Angst as the experience of nothingness *par excellence*. For even Angst has no privileged relation to the nothing "as" nothing; opacity hinders the as-structure here as much as anywhere else. This is one possible and necessary way of turning the results of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena* against Heidegger's self-understanding. In any case, the

misuse of the “as” as an asymptotic approach to the things themselves is rendered completely invalid.

Heidegger often draws a distinction between *gründen* and *stiften*, the “grounding” accomplished by the thinker and the “instituting” brought about by the poet. The work of grounding should in principle be able to unearth the dark background conditions of any event, bringing them into explicit view. We have now seen that this cannot be done, that the background effect of equipment can never become visible in the least, not even approximately. For the same reason, by Heidegger’s own standards, grounding is *impossible*. For this reason, perhaps even more incredibly, truth cannot possibly be *aletheia*. Like the as-structure itself, the Janus-head of veiling and unveiling always sits still; no movement of unconcealment can ever bring us an inch closer to the tool itself in its executant reality. Whatever the champions of Heidegger’s “turn” want to say, the phrase “being and truth” tells us more about reality than the words “tool and broken tool” already told us.

If grounding is impossible, there remains only one alternative in Heidegger’s system, whether for philosophy or poetry or anything else: *stiften*, *bilden*, *bauen*; instituting, forming, building. For the moment, this alternative remains completely vague, yet it is a promising option at least in negative terms. That which is “formed” or “built” for Heidegger is usually a symbol, whether it be a knot in a handkerchief or an image in the midst of a poem by Trakl. Language as a whole is often referred to by Heidegger as a formation of symbols or signs. But before following the contemporary habit of placing the full weight of philosophy on the theme of language, we should notice other uses of *bilden* in Heidegger. The organism *forms* its organ, which is hardly a symbol in the narrow sense of the term. And even in reference to the inanimate jug, Heidegger tells us that *es bildet sich eine Leere*: “emptiness forms” in the midst of the jug.

For the moment, there is no need to discuss the positive features of this broader form of symbolizing. The important factor here is still a negative one. The symbol is not the mere evoking of ground, stationary in its immovable dualism. Every formation of a sign is different, and concrete objects are different: thus any object can only be understood as a kind of *bilden*, the instituting of an utterance of a concrete type of reality. A satellite unlocks powers that are unknown to landmines or medicines, and the book is a different medium from a sword or a carbon atom. Another way to put this is to say that objects are media, natural or artificial agents set loose into the world like wild animals: just as enchanting, and every bit as deadly.

Any object is a complex and irreducible event; like the moon, one face of the tool is darkened by the silence of its orbit, while another face illuminates and compels us with dazzling surface-effects. No object, however banal, is just the empty representative of a standing reserve of calculable presence. However naive an object might seem, it still makes its incisions into being, exploding with power at a level always escaping our view. Heidegger’s failure to zero in on this fact leads him to make several claims so easy to attack that it can seem like grandstanding to do so, and thus we must do it quickly. If we understand technology as the triumph of presence over the epochal withdrawal of being, we will have fallen back into precisely the inadequacies of the misemployed as-structure. In this case, no concrete difference between objects could possibly be regarded as anything but vulgar. It will seem like an unimportant step from the stone axe to the hydrogen bomb, or from cloned wheat seeds to millions of dead bodies. Furthermore, in terms of the history of philosophy, it will seem as if an entire roster of concepts (*eidos*, *actus*, *monad*...) were merely interchangeable epiphenomena of a growing forgetfulness of being, a regime of presence-at-hand whose transformations through the ages can only seem like an afterthought.

While Heidegger’s much-admired destruction of the history of ontology does display an awesome

sum of learning, it also contains few surprises for anyone familiar with the first three or four volumes worth of it. Like so many other Heideggerian themes, the historical destruction is actually an implosion in which the entire history of philosophy has its feet held to the fire of presence-at-hand. Heidegger's single lifelong enemy. This is why, despite Heidegger's stature in the philosophy of the twentieth century, his obvious superior as a reader of historical texts is Deleuze. For it is Deleuze who defines philosophy (interestingly enough) as a "creation of concepts", and then correctly describes these concepts as independent forces traversing and apportioning reality, cybernetic devices as noble and clean as the tigers of Bengal.

We can now bring this summary of Heidegger to a close with one very important note. Criticizing the misuse of the as-structure as a measuring stick instead of just the unvarying reality that it is, as opposed to "grounding" (which is impossible) Heidegger's other concept of founding or building is instituting. But even this alternative remains locked within the stifling horizon of the ever-present duality between the tool and its breakdown. Not a single square inch of the cosmos has been spared from the dominance of this obsessive opposition.

Only by pushing Heidegger's as-structure to its point of absolute dominance do we gain a genuine thirst for that which escapes it. And such a thing does exist: a rarely noticed second axis that cuts across the familiar Heideggerian drama of concealed and revealed, tool and broken tool. This second principle is actually dominant in Heidegger's thought as early as 1919, but to avoid a distracting detour, we can summarize it out of context as follows. It turns out that there is not only a duality between the tool and its appearance; rather, appearance itself is also torn apart by two separate currents. As becomes especially clear in *Angst*, but as is always true, there is a difference between the specific content of any perception and the simple fact that we are delivered over to that perception in all, no matter what it is. An appearance is not only the emergence of a concealed tool into concrete form; it also commands our sincerity rather than being nothing, causes us to expend our vital energy in taking it seriously. As one underrated contemporary thinker might put it: the object is not only simulation, but a seduction as well.¹⁸ But an identical split occurs on the level of the invisible tool. Rock and paper in themselves are not merely the execution of an anonymous force; their reality has a certain character or *consistency*, in the sense that we can speak of the consistency of a liquid or snow. And this is true quite apart from any perception of these objects. Already, it is easy enough to see that this second principle of division is a remote successor to the traditional gulf between existence and essence.

To repeat, there are two axes of reality for Heidegger. Part of the difficulty in seeing this stems from his indiscriminate use of the term "ontological difference" to refer to both. In any case, the result of having two first principles rather than one is that the typical Heideggerian schema of tool and broken tool is suddenly complexified. Reality is split into quadrants: the thing becomes a fourfold. Even if this weren't the same as Heidegger's own inscrutable fourfold (although in fact it is), it would still deserve to be analyzed in its own right as an inescapable feature of the reality of equipment. A further possible thesis, which cannot be developed here, is that the relation of the quadrants within the object itself make up the original form of *stiften*, a counterposing of the axes of reality along and against one another. If the fourfold defines the thing as a sort of manifold atom, the "building" or "forming" of sign-objects as described by Heidegger must somehow split the atom, so as to make the creation of new realities possible. Thus, objects might be regarded as media that somehow manage to unlock the tension within the world's quadrants.

In finishing up these prolonged remarks on Heidegger, it should be asked if the fourfold exists only for human observers, or at least only for sentient organisms. After all, inanimate objects do not real-

seem to encounter other objects “as” what they are. But in actuality they do, as can be argued briefly enough. Imagine that a three-ounce weight and a one-ton weight are both dropped from the same height onto an empty house. The smaller weight encounters the house on some primitive level “as” a barrier, as an obstacle on its downward flight. The larger weight will hardly be resisted at all, and might pick up only a couple of scratches as it smashes the house to the ground; thus, it runs up against the house “as” a contemptible pseudo-barrier. All objects encounter all other objects “as” such and such: “as” destructible, impenetrable, formidable. This is not to say that the weight is conscious of the house; it is only to say that what we call “consciousness” must involve something much more than the as-structure, which is absolutely primitive. This means that consciousness too is something that builds and is built rather than something that only grounds or unveils. Conscious awareness must be viewed as a more advanced form of perceptive machinery, inexplicable by mere reference to the “as” and its dark twin, the tool.

As a smooth transition to Whitehead, we can introduce a new term for this relation of weights and rocks and windstorms to the house: *prehension*, as opposed to explicit apprehension. Rock prehends air; fire prehends paper; Dasein prehends shovel.

Part II: Whitehead

The primary realities for Whitehead are “actual entities,” a term from which no type of object is excluded. God is an actual entity, as are people; hair and dirt are actual entities, and vague magnetic currents in distant space are actual entities as well. As such, all of them are instantaneous and definitive forces, utterly determined by their stance in the universe with respect to all other objects. But actual entities are not substances; they are not the unchanging subjects of change. This rock now and the rock an instant from now are not the same actual entity; the later rock is at best a close successor to the historical rock that precedes it. To emphasize the fact that one actual entity does not undergo adventures in time and space, Whitehead often replaces the term “actual entity” with “actual occasion”. In the strict sense there would have to be only one actual entity: the universe, in which all specific objects are locked into relation with one another.

This relation between actual entities is what Whitehead terms “prehension”. All objects prehend all others, even if in most cases the intensity of this prehension is close to zero. The rock and the glass that it smashes clearly prehend each other, as do all objects in any kind of immediate or semi-immediate connection. But equally so, the tiniest alteration in a remote corner of the universe alters, however slightly, the potentiality locked in this rock and this glass here on earth, transforms in some minute way their energy with respect to the world as a whole. Entities affect other entities. The ontological effect of a distant event on this rock-object here is only apparently an action at a distance. In metaphysical terms, there is no distance; reality is a plenum, in which every slightest oscillation of a grain of sand redefines the structure of objects millions of light years away. This openness of entities to one another, this saturation of beings with windows, means that consciousness is only a special case of experience. All entities have mental as well as physical life. “The philosophy of organism abolishes the detached mind”, he tells us, the phrase “philosophy of organism” being Whitehead’s favorite name for himself. The sensationalism of Hume, Kant, and others is rejected, since sense-data are regarded as an arbitrary and narrow restriction of the field of experience, of objects relating to one another by way of prehension.

In all prehension, three factors can be found: the actual entity, the entity it prehend, and the “how” of this prehension. This “how” takes the shape of what Whitehead calls “eternal objects”. Taken together, actual entities and eternal objects make up all that exists; everything else is said only to clarify the interaction between these two realities. An actual entity such as a star is the site of innumerable forces, the locus of an absolute effect mirrored in all other beings. But other entities do not encounter the star in quite this way. Rocks, comets, plants, and humans each “objectify” the star differently, encounter it in some specific and limited way that does not exhaust the full of its reality. The full content of an actual entity is irrelevant to the other entities, which limit it to a specific site in their experience, however minimal this may be. This occurs by means of the eternal objects, which Whitehead regards as the rough equivalent of the Platonic forms. Only one entity can have the same real essence, the same absolute actuality of being what it is. But many entities have the same *abstract* essence: many entities are green or noisy or bear the forces of physical causation within themselves. There is no permanent substance, but *forms* are permanent: hence the name “eternal objects”, which simply expresses the identity of these ideas in the objectification of utterly different actual entities. The forms or ideas an object has of other objects show the specific way in which other things enter

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