

Abstract for Action and Delay Symposium.30-31 May 2014.

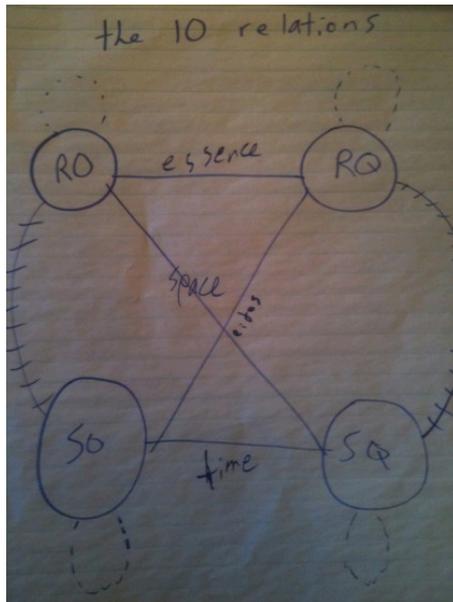
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Algorithmic Offsets and Irreducible Formulas.

As Buster Keaton edges his way around the walls of Becket's Film covering the potentially offensive gaze of objects, I can't help but feel that much more is at stake than the negation of the odd goldfish or parrot. Although it is now almost impossible to liberate this film from Deleuze's subsequent critique of it in *Cinema One*, I want to re-read Becket's Film in terms of the agency of *objects* so that we might reconsider both the nature of the time-based schema and its implications for sculptural practice. My intention is not to critique Deleuze but rather to use aspects of the movement-image as a way of furthering our understanding of objects and our engagement with them.

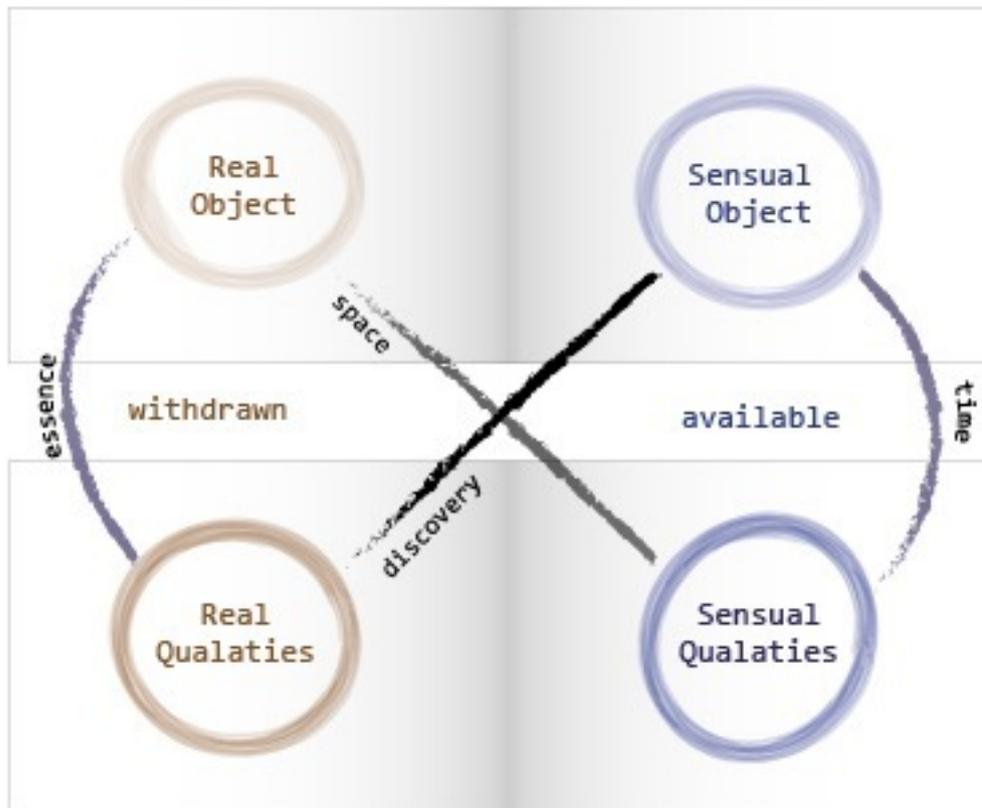
The use of the term *object* here is admittedly a little confusing as I am simultaneously drawing into consideration the temporal status of the sculptural *object* and the metaphysical *object* of Speculative Realism. I do this so that we can begin to rethinking the way that materiality is constituted not as the property of an object but as a result of a shared agency between objects.

While this notion of a co-constituted materiality is not articulated as such by Speculative Realists like Graham Harman, it is clearly at the root of his analysis of *objects* that I will use as a model for this paper.



As much this sketch of Harman's *quadruple object* appeals to my romantic artistic sensibilities it requires some unpacking so that we can understand how Harman ontologically breaks down the *object* and defines key elements that he suggests constitute both material and immaterial *objects* – with humans being just another object.

object

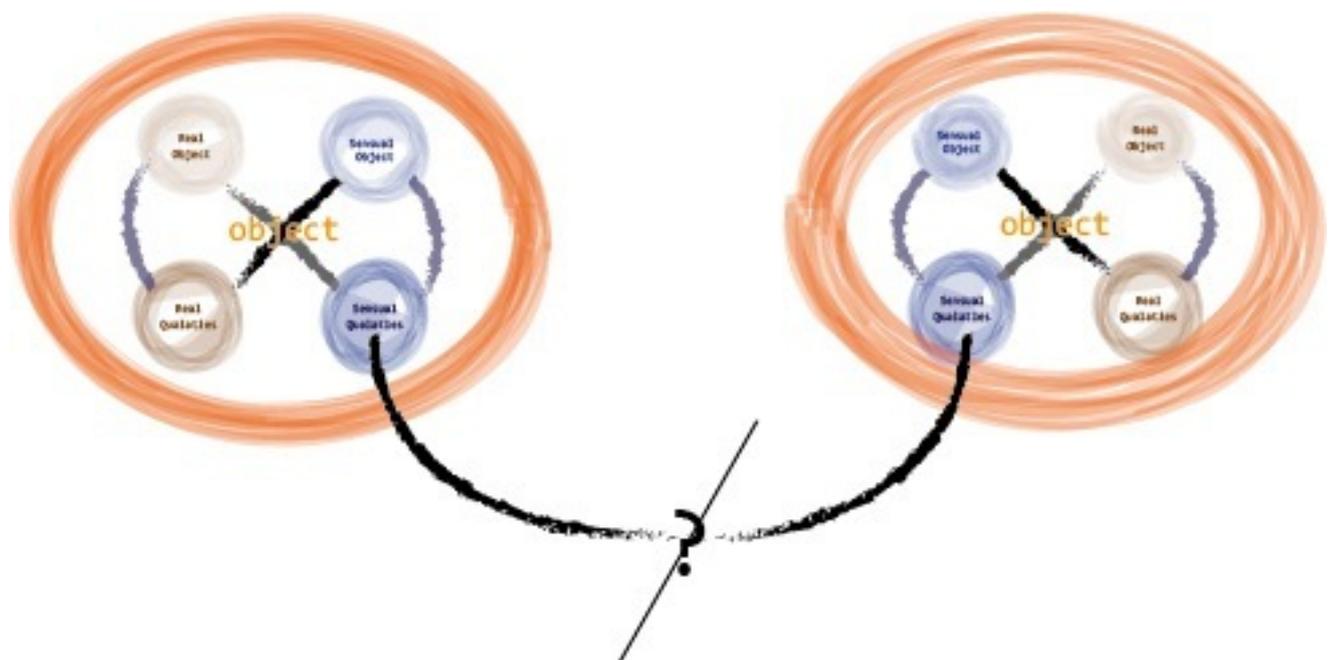


While Harman's *objects* seem quite content within the structure he lays out, there seems to be no clear articulation of a method through which these *objects* interact. Harman's *objects* seem isolated - totally withdrawn from the world and other objects to which they are never directly knowable. (Harman, 2013, p.176)

So my purpose of outlining Harman's *object* schema is to provide some sort of framework for exploring how *objects* interact with each other rather than remaining isolated and locked in stasis (Harman, 2011, p.130). Effectively I want to consider just how Buster Keaton's character 'O' ever manages to engage with the goldfish and the parrot.

It is not the connections between the various parts of Harman's objects

that I find problematic, rather it is intentional relations between objects that seem irreconcilable without recourse to some unspecified element that exists outside of this *ontography*. Reliance on some form of occasionalism seems too easily dismissive of the problem and fundamentally correlational by nature. So when Harman talks about resolving the tension between objects through some sort of *fusion*, he really brings us no closer to understanding how that contact is initiated.



Without such intentionality we seem to be left with a bunch of things wafting around but totally unable to engage with, perceive off, or be perceived by each other. For such an encounter would only be possible if an object were to reveal its *sensual qualities* - something that according to Harman, only another object can do (Harman, 2013, p.60)!

Such causal impotency would result in a solipsistic world in which

nothing outside itself is knowable and certainly one in which no *real* interaction between objects might occur. But without regressing into the nothingness of Harman's *fusion*, Bennett's *vitality*² or Meillassoux's *ancestral time*³, I want to try and resolve the problem of intentionality within Speculative Realism by focusing on time and space, for it is these that Harman problematizes as the cause of tension within objects. (Harman, 2011, p.126; Bennett, 2010, p.8; Meillassoux?)

Time for Harman appears to be as paradoxical as Zeno's arrow that once launched can never reach its target by definition of having to travel half the distance first. The arrow like Harman's object is inevitably separated from its target by ever divisible increments. It passes through space but not through a time of seemingly endless duration. Suspended in this way the arrow is a motionless object at rest in every instant of its flight - a freeze-frame in the narrative of movement.

Objects then, like the cat in Becket's *Film*, are again stuck in a moment of endless duration. (Show loop of cat) Incapable of moving beyond the frame they occupy, they seem destined to endlessly repeat themselves as they withdraw inwards within their own frame of action? But clearly the moment we are seeing in Becket's *Film* is not the static moment of a single frame rather it is cinematic instant - a immobile instant within a mobile section of duration (Deleuze, 1986, p.8).

Although such a sequence is not the focus of Deleuze's analysis of this film it clearly illustrates the relationship between the movement image and Zeno's paradox. Like the movement-image the arrow becomes itself only in a "bloc of space-time" that makes space a kind of retrospective construct (Deleuze, 1986, p.68). Once the arrow moves towards the target we are able to draw a line backward in time towards its previous position. In this way the arrow-object occupies two

places at the same time. In order that we can understand its movement the arrow-object establishes a geometry that both separates it from, and binds it to, the schema (Deleuze, 1986, p.13). Space-time appears as a geometry in which time is conceived of as a point, rather than a line in a way that parallels the construct of a point vector in which movement is defined by start and end points, rather than by the line-duration itself.

Aspects of this geometry are found in my recent work 32Bit Catch in which a ball is thrown against a wall and caught again thirty-two times. The video starts with a blank wall defined by the optically distorted corner towards the left of the screen. Only when an arm enters the frame on the right of the screen are we aware that the video is in slow motion. The arm is shown disembodied by the framing of the camera - it is an arm, not a specific arm. The body it belongs to is never declared and we never confront its subjective perception. Gradually the hand holding the ball primes itself to throw. In the moment preceding the release of the ball the video cuts - we hear a dull thud and the ball is suddenly hitting the wall on the left and bouncing back. Until now the video has been silent. No sooner has it bounced back than the video cuts again, and suddenly the ball is back in the disembodied hand. Each thirty-two frame segment is repeated thirty-two times, punctuated by the sound of the ball hitting the wall.

Initially 32-Bit Catch may seem to be in contradiction with Zeno's paradox as the vector has been edited out. All we are shown is the ends of the vector - the arrow at the beginning and end of its path. We never actually see the ball in flight along its trajectory - rather we are shown the points of contact between the ball and body and between the ball and wall.

However once the ball hits the wall for the first time we draw a line backward in time to its last known position in the hand. Movement outside of each '*bloc of space-time*' is constructed by joining the dots. Each *bloc* of film seems to operate as '*mobile section of duration*' which changes the duration of the whole (Deleuze, 1986, p.8). Not only do we understand the relationship between the hand throwing and the ball bouncing but we construct a new duration of the whole from these actions.

In fact when the hand finally stops throwing the ball and disappears from the screen we are surprised - there is no apparent reason why this cycle should be interrupted. The bounce and the throw might endlessly reciprocate each other - each projecting the trajectory of the ball back to the action of other. In the continuity of this *montage* each becomes its own past and future as it coexists in the moment of the image. In this bidirectional projection of itself the catch/bounce movement-image has become "inseparable from the before and after which belong to it" (Deleuze, 1989, p.38).

But my purpose here is not to explore this work in relation to the movement image, rather to use it as conduit for considering how the movement-image as an object⁵ that is inseparable from its before and after, might assist in addressing the inaccessibility of Harman's sensual objects.

Considering 32 Bit Catch as an action rather than a film, the parallels to Zeno's arrow will already be apparent. But is it also possible to see an action-of-intent projecting both forward in time from the ball towards the target, and backward in time along the vector to the hand. It is as if the ball, the wall and the hand were exerting influence over each other beyond their boundaries as physical objects. They seem to

overlap and produce inter-subjective secondary subjects; the ball-body and ball-wall.

This inter-subjective gesture is realized not in the literal grasping of the ball, but in the agency exerted beyond the point of contact. As the ball bounces off the wall back towards the body, the arm anticipates it. It reaches beyond itself - not in the physical sense of reaching out for the ball, but in the projection of itself forward in time into the trajectory of the ball. In this way the body is ahead of itself in time and open to 'a future with no present to speak of' (Massumi, 2002).

As Massumi acknowledges, it is Deleuze who opens up this connection between the body and its position, specifically when he breaks down the movement image and specifies the affection-image as occupying 'the interval between incoming perception and outgoing action; it is, one might say, in the interval itself' (Deleuze, 1986). Each inter-subjective action, like Deleuze's movement-image, is a moment that is past itself as soon as it comes into being.

Developing Deleuze's Bergsonian *preformism*, Massumi extends the reading of the *image* into a relational process of becoming in which an object⁶ 'does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition...' (Massumi, 2002, p.4). Rather than trying to understand how static objects can connect, Massumi proposes process as the primary condition of being.

In drawing out attention away from the ball-body / ball-wall '*blocs of space-time*' Massumi reverses the point vector construct as definitive of movement, in favour of the line-duration as determinate of position. Objects then like the movement-image are in a constant state of becoming. But unlike the movement-image which projects into time to

construct movement, movement itself - the relations between objects, creates inter-subjective objects.

Nathanial Stern clarifies this when, following Massumi, he defines objects as events. In developing an argument for the *Implicit Body*, Stern posits the body as constituted by its relations with subjects, subjects that it cannot quite reach.⁷ Like the movement image the *Implicit Body* is, for Stern, always in a state of becoming in which both subjects and objects are inter-given - existing only as in-process relations with others that themselves are in-process. Although Stern reportedly finds Speculative Realist principles self defeating his position aligns with Harman's *sensual-objects* that 'exists only insofar as some perceiver is occupied with' them (Stern, 2014; Harman2013, p.60).

It is then Sterns implicit body that we see in ØForm a 2011 work in which a Kinect is used to track the spatial coordinates of the artist's hands in order to generate realtime 3D forms within CAD software. As the artists hands enter the capture space and initiate a form on the screen it becomes evident that this is not like like modelling clay⁸ - the normal spatial alignment of the body with materials is estranged. Offset by software algorithms, position is no longer determined directly by the location of a hand in space but by the relative distance between the hands. Similarly scale is dissociated from action by using screen coordinates to define x y dimensions. The intense concentration required to over-ride the bodies spatial schema is evident as the artist struggles to re-learns spatial relations.

But this is not so much an exertion of agency by the on-screen form over body, as the body has no direct access to the form. The form is withdrawn from it by the computational process. The body reaches out not towards the shapes appearing on the screen but to the algorithmic

objects that offset it from the form. Both the body, screen and algorithm are *objects* in this sense.

Not only is the on-screen object in a process of becoming, but both the body and algorithmic object become themselves in the schema of the work. All three objects are inter-given instantiations that yield and demand of each other to contrive the materiality of the work. But the algorithm doesn't stop there because each new inter-subjective object becomes its own object in Speculative Realist terms. So we now have at least six objects in the work.

But by the same mind-numbing logic we must then consider the possibility of a body/screen-body/algorithm-object and so on to infinity or oblivion which ever comes first! While I would rather not go their right now the point is that even such exponentially⁹ generative inter-subjective actions do not exhaust their subjects. As Harman explains - an object is not exhausted by its relations with other objects which it is always in excess of itself as it reaches out to the world.

Yet neither object, body or the algorithm collapse inward under this infinite load that threatens to deplete them of everything that they are. It is hard to imagine what would result if this were to happen - possibly through some chain reaction an object with the density of a black-hole would suck everything into it? So real-objects are apparently as irreducible as they are inaccessible - only part of them having been made available through the sensual object. This is why Harman says "being is that which withdraws" (Harman, 2013, p.267). Like the moving-image objects withdraw themselves from the present as they constantly throw themselves forward into the future and backwards into the past.

We cannot reduce the on-screen form to the action of the body and algorithm as it is its own object.

In the same way the body cannot be reduced to the algorithm that through its role the inter-subjective action constitutes it in the moment. It is the action-in-the moment that brings the sensual-object into the present and makes it available. Like Sterns inter-subjective Implicit Body, it is movement that reconciles the inter-connectedness of real-objects and propels the object beyond the moment of its existence to break down the “irreducible formulas: real movement concrete duration” (Deleuze, 1986).

It seems then that objects rather than being locked into themselves might be like *movement-image blocs* that are brought into contact with the whole by actions that cannot be separated from the objects itself. Action in this sense is not something that is applied to objects like gravity, but rather something that is integral to the nature of objects themselves. Constituted by inherent actions that position them beyond where they are, objects seem not to need any externally directed intentionality as they are already engaged with other objects ahead of themselves.

Rather than being like irreducible black-holes of intent, *objects* might be more like inexhaustible supernovas that algorithmically make available the sensuality of objects to each other.
