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## Book Reviews

### Speculative Realism Is Speculative Aesthetics (Three New Books on Speculative Realism)

Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 272 pp. \$104.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 192 pp. \$60.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.

Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 216 pp. \$120.00 cloth, \$34.95 paper.

I open this review essay with a confession. Despite all recent argument to the contrary, I remain attached to a way of thinking that, to a person, speculative realists agree is wrong, bad, compromised, or inadequate. I confess: I think of myself as a phenomenologist. In other words, I am a crass and unrepentant correlationist. Perhaps predictably, I also tend to think that “correlationism” means something different from what its critics do. That said, my goal in this review essay is not to disagree with the speculative realist position in general, nor with the particular variants of those claims worked out in these three wonderful new books—Sparrow’s polemic, Gratton’s critical overview, or Shaviro’s new Whiteheadian position. I know I’m not going to convince anybody that they should love Merleau-Ponty instead of mistrusting him. And anyway, it would be quite imperious of me to try to dispel speculative realists’ epistemic illusions, since I really think we can’t know what we can’t know, and I really don’t think I know better than speculative realism.

More to the point, my argument here is that what is at issue in these three new books, and in speculative realism (SR) more generally, is precisely *not* knowledge, even if sometimes it looks like it. But just because we can’t know something, that doesn’t mean we can’t talk about it. Ultimately, if I remain unconvinced that I should give up my fascination with the much misunderstood Merleau-Ponty, I nevertheless won’t try to correct any misunderstandings about him or his phenomenologist friends. (This essay was difficult to write, primarily because my initial posture was defensive in precisely that way.) Instead, I want to try to specify why such misunderstandings might be beside the point.

To do so, I would like to turn to aesthetics, albeit in a particular way—one that resonates with Shaviro’s work (if only because his thinking on aesthetics has been so important for my own), but which also takes some distance from it. Aesthetics has

been an important question for both the negative and positive aspects of speculative realism. Everybody seems to agree—and certainly Sparrow, Gratton, and Shaviro all do—that what holds SR together as a movement or impulse (if, indeed, it does hold together) is its critique of correlationism: speculative realists share the same negative impetus, to which Meillassoux gave a convenient name. We also all seem to agree on one other thing: that the speculative realists themselves disagree intensely as to what might follow from this critique. The positive claims of various SR philosophers are mutually impossible, even bitterly opposed, and more than a few of them reject the label and the movement. I cannot offer more than a few tentative indications here, but it seems to me that the really important question is this: What are the grounds for disagreement between the speculative realists themselves?

Shaviro offers one answer to this question in his discussion of Harman. He writes that the decision between Harman's object-oriented ontology (OOO) and Whitehead's intensely relational ontology is primarily an *aesthetic* one: "Speculative philosophy has an irreducibly aesthetic dimension" (p. 43). Here I agree with him, emphatically. My thesis is that the force of speculative philosophy lies in its *specifically aesthetic* appeal. To put this another way, the reason I might want to encounter Harman's OOO or Brassier's bracing nihilism, or any of the other variants of SR, is their exhilarating aesthetic work: they allow or engender an encounter with the absolute that is beautiful or sublime—or voluptuous, fecund, terrifying, horrifying, intense, or any of the other aesthetic effects the various options in SR might generate. In Meillassoux's words, "the genuine feeling of being on foreign territory—of being entirely elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> Now, I suspect (and I might be wrong) that at least some SR philosophers, Sparrow among them, might object to my characterization that SR is engaged, at a fundamental level, in an aesthetic project. To which I can only say: Hold on; bear with me for a minute; and let's see if we can figure out how to take aesthetics seriously.

What does this have to do with the critique of correlationism? (This might be rather obvious, but I beg your patience.) Given that Meillassoux's critique of correlationism seeks an articulation of thought that is not bound by the correlation, nor oriented by anything we find within the correlation, *nothing that is in the correlation can be used to adjudicate differing claims about what is outside the correlation*. This is not only Meillassoux's position: in all speculative realist debate, to the extent that it is specifically *speculative*, knowledge-claims will never suffice as evidence for a particular claim or position. To be sure, scientific knowledge claims show up all over the place in SR debates, but I get the sense that their rightness or wrongness, what it is that they suggest we know (or, for that matter, don't know, since science is good at specifying that, too), won't actually change anybody's mind. Meillassoux himself acknowledges as much when he claims that probabilistic thinking can't get purchase on hyper-chaos. No empiricism could ever reply to such a claim, and with good reason. (As Shaviro points out, his claims about the miracles of life and consciousness are scientifically incorrect, but I'm betting that this would not, in fact, change Meillassoux's mind.)

Meillassoux is instructive here, too, because his philosophy is explicit in shifting the terrain from the epistemological to the ontological. But once knowledge is out of bounds for adjudicating competing truth claims, what is left?

As a dedicated phenomenologist, for me Sparrow's book was a bracing read. *The End of Phenomenology* consists largely in asking phenomenology to make a metaphysical commitment to his version of realism—largely influenced by Harman and Meillassoux—and finding that it cannot. To be sure, it cannot, and his reading amply demonstrates how and why. My experience of reading the book consisted in feeling

1. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2014), p. 7.

browbeaten even while conceding his major point. (I am not prepared to agree with him about the details of his readings of phenomenologists; I also do not think such disputes are likely to be especially edifying.) Because SR gets its motive force from the rejection of correlationism, it cannot come as a surprise that in such contexts, phenomenology is much abused and misunderstood, made to affirm things that it does not affirm. Yet to the extent that phenomenology takes itself to be realist—and it does!—any debate between phenomenological realism and speculative realism is bound to turn on disagreements about what realism means and what it entails. To paraphrase Sparrow, the phenomenologist will seem to be satisfied with Husserl's project as "an attractive recasting of realism's meaning" (p. 36). (That said, neither Hegel nor Husserl nor anybody else has actually managed to complete that project, since it's fucking hard to get over Kant, as everybody knows so very well by now.) Sparrow's book is persuasive in its claim that phenomenology cannot be realist in the sense that SR demands, since SR of most kinds demands that we turn away from our encounter with the world to learn about the real. Or, at the very least, SR holds that our encounter with the world has nothing to teach us about the real, since if we were to turn to the world to learn about the real, such lessons would of necessity be drawn from within the correlation.

Nevertheless, I must say that I found myself utterly bewildered by Sparrow's skeptical demand, repeated at various points, that phenomenology *prove* that it is the world that is given in perception, that the things we encounter in the world are real things, that the objects of phenomenological description are real objects. I do not know how to prove this, but I also do not know how to doubt this either. Meanwhile, Sparrow does not request that Meillassoux offer proof that hyper-chaos is real, nor that Harman prove that objects are utterly, inaccessibly, unknowably withdrawn. What could such proof look like? Indeed, it is impossible. In Sparrow's rendering, SR appears as a metaphysical commitment, made in advance, that the real is of a particular nature. Phenomenology's commitment is that we cannot know in advance what reality, and thus realism, is; we must turn to the world to discover it. These are incompatible indeed, even if they both insist on some form of realism. The dispute, if there is one, lies in the fact that these commitments—SR's advance commitment to some form of metaphysical realism, phenomenology's commitment to discover the real by turning to the world—cannot be compelled. They can be argued for, certainly. But the difference between speculative realism's metaphysical version of realism and phenomenology's perceptual version is neither epistemological (it cannot be adjudicated by knowledge) nor ontological (because ontology is what follows from these realist commitments), but rather *aesthetic*. Or, at least, these commitments share the structure of an aesthetic judgment. I will return to this in due time.

Gratton's book, meanwhile, sounds out the various options in speculative realism in a masterful, critical, humane, and generous way. There's much to admire about this book, not least his lucid and sophisticated treatment of time as both a critical theme and a positive concern for SR. But in my aim to keep this response consistent, I want to focus on one decision in particular that stands out in a subtle but crucial way. Gratton's vision of speculative realism expands beyond the "canonical" texts of the four "original" speculative realists. Alongside Grant, Gratton discusses Jane Bennett and Elizabeth Grosz. He includes a chapter on Catherine Malabou, which is surprising but nevertheless counter-intuitively productive. What these inclusions do is to show how the concerns, positions, and ambitions of speculative realism need not be driven by a pointed rejection of correlationism. To be sure, the latter is the particular concern of Meillassoux and Harman. But if we want speculative realism to include Bennett and Grosz and Malabou—and I'm well and thoroughly convinced that it is both productive and salutary to do so—then we may well have to imagine a less reactionary specula-

tive realism that is not concerned with policing and eliminating all forms of the correlation. This is not to say that Bennett's targeting of Cartesian dualism isn't related, nor Grosz's crankiness about constructionism, but these are not identical to anticorrelationism, and that matters. Nor would I contend that speculative realism should suddenly embrace Heidegger or Hegel or Derrida or Foucault—although it may mine them for resources, as some philosophers working in, or in proximity to, SR absolutely do. Rather, SR may well just have to learn to get on with the business of its positive theorizing and system building without its excessive concern with correlationism and its critique. Such a shift may threaten either the specificity or the consistency of “speculative realism,” however, since even the original four speculative realist philosophies have so little in common beyond their frustration with correlationist philosophies that it may become difficult to see how these widely varying practices of speculation could hang together, or what even would be the context for disagreements or differences between them.

As for *The Universe of Things*, I found it to be extraordinary. Unlike Sparrow's polemic against phenomenology and Gratton's careful critical explication, Shaviro's ambition is to make a new, positive philosophy, articulating a more forceful and complete version of a Whiteheadian position in SR. (I have joked with him that I agree with everything in the book except for the parts where he disagreed with phenomenology.) What is both most intriguing and suggestive in *The Universe of Things*—which is also to say, the least satisfyingly articulated—is Shaviro's claim for a *speculative aesthetics*. He argues in his final chapter that speculative realism could, or should, or maybe even must, become a speculative aesthetics. My argument in this essay is that it already is—and always has been. Now, both Shaviro and Harman have posited aesthetics as *first philosophy*. By this they mean that any ontology must turn on—or turn to—the aesthetic as the primary mode of relation between entities. They each reimagine aesthetics as the ground of ontology—explicitly in Shaviro's case, and as one dimension of objects in Harman's case. The charge of speculative aesthetics, then, is to speculate on the ways in which entities resonate with one another, attune to each other—or don't. The charge, furthermore, is to drill down into examples. How does a slime mold prehend its world? How do trees? Mushrooms? Rocks? Stars? And so on. Some of these will be more or less difficult to speculate about, and more or less illuminating to the human readers of this philosophy.

Yet we might discover another sense of the equation or equivalence: *speculative realism = speculative aesthetics*. I wish to claim that speculative realism is a fundamentally *aesthetic* practice, whose medium is *speculation*. The precise nature of speculation seems to me to be woefully underdeveloped in the literature I know on speculative realism, although I do not pretend to know it all terribly well. It is clear, however, that whatever it is, speculation is not idle imagination, nor is it fantasy, nor is it cognitive, affective, psychic, or perceptual projection. Speculation follows rules, it makes arguments, it debates and disagrees, it makes its claims in genres that appear to be truth claims about the world. It is *rational* without necessarily being *reasonable*. It is not endlessly self-reflexive. It is not bound by Kant's critical imperative. It is imperious and impatient, wanting to deal with the absolute, straining to surpass human finitude. For all that, it has its practices and modes of rigor. But this rigor is neither that of pure logic nor of mathematical proof. Speculative rigor is not enough to compel agreement. Speculative claims will never be incorrigible.

What I am arguing here is that the difference between variants of speculative realism is precisely isomorphic with the differences between phenomenology and speculative realism: these differences are specifically aesthetic in nature. No argument could suffice to disabuse me of my attachment to phenomenology (and thus to the correlation), because something in its form, style, consistency, rigor, and method so

fully captures what it feels like to be in the world for me, so thoroughly offers therapy for my insoluble problems, so clearly articulates the enigmas and aporias and fears and uncanninesses and returns home that get hold of me. Phenomenology helps me to get a purchase on my encounter with the world, and on the world itself. From Stanley Cavell we learn that at the bottom of any philosophical claim—at least of this kind, with this sort of significance—we will discover a judgment that is specifically aesthetic in structure. It cannot be demonstrated or proved; it is imperious, postulating universal assent without actually gaining it; it *can* be argued about, reasons can be given, criticisms elaborated, forms described, canons agreed upon; it attaches to the world, rather than to our experience of it; it can feel like knowledge, but it does not follow the rules of knowledge-making; it must be made in freedom. Eventually, this claim will simply look like this: “Listen: you *must* see it.”<sup>2</sup>

So if I might risk a request that speculative realists stop beating up on phenomenology (and my guy Merleau-Ponty) quite as much as they do, I hasten to add that I am not asking for an end to philosophical disagreement or rigor, since these are the exact formal means by which philosophy produces its aesthetic effects. Without certain kinds of logical rigor, figures of argument, modes of expression, styles of description, and rhetorics of disagreement, philosophy would simply cease to be philosophy. Nor am I asking for a milquetoast liberalism, a live-and-let-live pabulum. What I am asking for is the acknowledgment that the differences between phenomenology and speculative realism, and between variants of speculative realism themselves, *on their own terms*, are aesthetic: both philosophies are capable of not only acknowledging but also actively affirming the fundamentally aesthetic nature of their appeal. (This plainly aesthetic mode is part of what I take Sparrow to be mistrusting in phenomenology’s “rhetoric of realism,” which is a criticism that could justifiably be leveled at Harman’s penchant for parataxis as much as phenomenological description.) In other words, SR’s feats of speculation appeal in a way that is specifically aesthetic. From this perspective, *all* forms of speculative realism are just speculative aesthetics. This may give philosophers—and I am not one—a bit of heartburn, since there will seem to be an unspoken “merely” modifying “aesthetic” in my phrases. What Shaviro teaches us in a way that is compelling (but not incorrigible!), and what those of us who practice speculation of various kinds in relation to aesthetic objects have known for some time, is that there is nothing mere about aesthetics.

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Steven Shaviro’s *The Universe of Things* ends with a pair of telling sentences. After ticking off the names of some of the most prominent thinkers of and interlocutors for the new realisms, Shaviro notes that they alone cannot constitute the work of speculative aesthetics he envisions. “Such a speculative aesthetics is still to be constructed,” he writes. “Kant, Whitehead and Deleuze only provide us with its rudiments” (p. 156). Were this the end of the book, it would place us in the familiar philosophical territory of the call to the future, which beckons us toward incipience at the same time that it marks its formlessness. But the book doesn’t end there; it goes on for another two sentences: “Indeed, since every aesthetic encounter is singular, anything like a *general aesthetics* is impossible. And so, rather than offer a stirring conclusion, I had better

2. Stanley Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 73–96, quote on p. 90.

leave it at that" (p. 156; italics his). This is the true end, the final words of the book: "I had better leave it at that."

When I first came to this moment, after several days of intensive reading, I felt a little irritation but mostly wry amusement at Shaviro's puncturing of the inflated romantic mood of the call with a little shrug-shouldered bathos. The more I thought about it, however, the more it seemed clear that it was itself a bit of wry amusement. After all, the singularity of the encounter with the aesthetic is exactly what such a call to the future looks to preserve from the systematizing maw of general theories, very much including the one offered by *The Universe of Things* and the school of speculative realism with which it is engaged. This is not to suggest that we should take these concluding sentences as representing important pressure points in Shaviro's profoundly invigorating book. I point to them, instead, because of their startling congruence with the contemporary theoretical landscape. In their wry irresolution, those telling sentences ask us to imagine a mosaic of singular responses and their potential for systematization without collapsing the former into the latter.

The same tension characterizes the profusion of new theories and methods in the humanities and social sciences. Compared with the pinnacle of poststructural critique in the late twentieth century, the theoretical landscape today is populated by a motley crew of challenges, turns, and methods that circulate alongside symptomatic reading practices.<sup>3</sup> While bound by their oppositional stance toward past practices, these movements nonetheless emerge from distinctive originating concerns, engage a range of interlocutors, and offer widely divergent responses. They may not even share an audience. An advocate of Heather Love's thin description<sup>4</sup> may or may not be familiar with Karen Barad's agential realism<sup>5</sup>; digital humanists in the maker mode might practice something that resembles Ian Bogost's philosophical carpentry<sup>6</sup> without realizing it, while Bogost and his colleagues in object oriented ontology may or may not be aware of the tangency of their polemic to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's blistering critique of paranoid reading<sup>7</sup> in her 2003 book *Touching Feeling*. And while Bruno Latour's little essay "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern"<sup>8</sup> has become a common touchstone, the meaning of the central term is as variegated as the movements that have arisen to replace it. The profusion of new methods marks the fecundity of our moment. At the same time, it indicates a certain jittery unease. Struck in imperative mood, these methods belie the very effects of dispersion and dissemination to which they also respond. After all, critique presumably ran out of steam on its own and not just because of Latour's speech act. Yet even the least proscriptive of these methods, the ones most invested in crafting room for

3. Reparative reading, surface reading, distance reading, the nonhuman turn, new materialism, and anticorrelationism are a few of them, though more emerge all the time.

4. See Heather Love, "Close But Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41:2 (2010): 371–391.

5. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

6. See Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, Or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

8. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (2004): 225–248.

surprise and inviting in vulnerability, advocate for a new set of theoretical norms and a generalized system in which to cast them. The very profusion of named movements, then, might be understood as an intense demand for some new consensus.

It is into this conceptual milieu that Tom Sparrow, Peter Gratton, and Steven Shavro have delivered their new books. True to their moment, each conducts his engagement with speculative realism through the patient work of exegesis and field mapping, modes that ground what they seem merely to explain. This is to be expected; the field has been around long enough to warrant critical overviews. But it is also entirely typical of speculative realism's tendency toward empire building. In its revolutionary moment, this tendency took the form of naming itself the sole instigator of the turn away from critique.<sup>9</sup> In its current landed version, empire building takes the more stately and didactic mode of the chronicle.<sup>10</sup> Like a chronicle, each of these books retells the field's origin story about a small group of pioneers who gathered in London to plot ways out of the correlationist circle. And each restages the foundational position of speculative realism: the commitment to realism about the power of human knowledge structures, and the concomitant shift from questions of epistemology to encounters with the ontological. In their different ways, in other words, these books systematize the thing they all also claim doesn't really exist: an orthodox speculative realism. Yet under the cover of faithful summary, each appropriates the origin and its still-propulsive energies in order to serve its unfolding. In what follows, I will rapidly retrace the torsions these books effect and then speculate on the horizon they form when considered together.

One of the many anxieties that attend moments of profusion such as our own is the worry that the lines around established categories will blur and reveal previously hidden resonances. Tom Sparrow's *The End of Phenomenology* works against that tidal draw. Sparrow's book seeks to narrow what counts as a meaningful engagement with the real so as to exclude phenomenology, whose potential confusion with speculative realism he sees as endangering how speculative realism is understood beyond its own borders. In the introduction, Sparrow describes his task as the decisive sweeping away of the breadcrumb trail that might lead unwary readers back from Graham Harman to Heidegger or Husserl, with whom Harman frequently dialogues. This is a danger precisely because the two schools do share a commitment to the world of things. As Sparrow demonstrates, however, that similarity is only superficial. Where speculative realism asserts "that what exists can exist without the thought that represents it or the foot that boots it down the sidewalk" (p. 93), phenomenology's commitment to human consciousness and perception makes it a form of "strong correlationism" (p. 86) and therefore anathema to realism. As an account of the embodiment of consciousness, phenomenology is attuned to the rich impingement of the concrete world. In its careful recording of the impress of that surround, it argues forcefully for the inextricability of perception and reality. And therein lies the problem. The insight

9. My essay "Form/Matter/Chora" takes aim at this claim to priority made widely in their early days; see Rebekah C. Sheldon, "Form/Matter/Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism," in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 193–222. However, since that tumultuous period, it has become clear that the force and sweep of speculative realism's claims did act as an important catalyst. Through the auspices of Quentin Meillassoux's indictment of correlationism—or "the idea according to which we only have access to the correlation between thinking and being and never to either term considered apart from the other" (p. 5)—something inchoate turned bright and scalpel-sharp.

10. This is the term Gratton uses (on p. 6) to characterize his book.

that “we are engaged in, embedded in, and reliant on reality, not detached and indifferent spectators of it” suggests that “our position within the world forbids our knowledge of the world as it stands without us” (pp. 94–95). The world’s objective reality is inaccessible; thus phenomenology, for Sparrow, is not ontological at all, still less a form of ontological realism.

Sparrow’s effort is in barring the way back to past heuristics. The very confusion of moments like this one, however, also opens the opportunity to thread together ostensibly distant thinkers. Both Peter Gratton and Steven Shaviro undertake this suturing work, drawing together thinkers and schools of thought severed by the vehemence of speculative realism’s early polemics, though to different effects. These sutures are not explicitly posed as recuperations or restitutions of prior divisions but as new tangencies opened by speculative realism.

Peter Gratton’s *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects* is particularly sly in this regard. The closest to a textbook in design, its neatly labeled chapters on movements and subheadings on scholars are in the service of reassembling a surprising catalog of thinkers spanning the new realisms and the new materialisms. Gratton takes his warrant for this big tent approach from their shared critique of the linguistic, so he starts, logically enough, with Meillassoux and stays with him for some sixty pages before turning to examine the object oriented ontologists (the American wing of speculative realism, principally Graham Harman, Ian Bogost, Timothy Morton, and Levi Bryant). All of these are uncontroversial choices. It is in the following chapters that *Speculative Realism* begins mixing field histories. In “The Power of Things and the Nature of Politics” Gratton bridges Timothy Morton and speculative realist Iain Hamilton Grant to feminist new materialists Elizabeth Grosz and Jane Bennett in order to outline the common privilege given to the nonhuman after the “end of anthropocentrism” (p. 110). Following from that are chapter-length treatments of Ray Brassier, Adrian Johnston, and Catherine Malabou that center questions of meaning, subjectivity, and consciousness on the ontological implication of neuroscience. This is a wide array of people who hold diverse and not always friendly commitments. While Gratton acknowledges the oddity of this choice, his book never offers a theoretically robust explanation for it. By the conclusion, however, the purpose becomes at least a little less opaque. In “Time for a Conclusion” Gratton makes good on his introductory claim that speculative realism will only stand the test of time if it has an account of the reality of time (p. 10). He finds this temporal realism in a surprising place—Jacques Derrida, whose position in speculative realism is far more often that of the negative exemplar of correlationism at its worst. For Gratton, however, this is a misunderstanding. His Derrida is a metaphysician and a realist of the future, though in his own way and time. Gratton ends the book by staking his own “speculative gambit” (p. 216) on the monstrous unknowability of the future implicit in Derrida’s to-come.

Gratton’s argument, then, is for a kind of ecumenicalism that treats internal fissures (processes versus objects, for example) as differences of degree rather than of kind. In *The Universe of Things*, Shaviro continues an argument he has been making across his career: that the correlationist consensus has long been haunted by insurgent strains of speculative thought. The recollection of this genealogy then problematizes the binarization of epistemology and ontology that grounds anticorrelationism. Like Gratton, he uses the new thinking in speculative realism in order to posit as properly realist a concern outside its sphere: the inseparableness of knowing from being, feeling, relating, affecting, and prehending. As this last term makes clear, his primary reference is Alfred North Whitehead but he also tracks through Jamesian radical empiricism and Simondonian ontogenesis. For Shaviro, this rethinking of knowledge cuts in two directions. On the one hand, he argues in a panpsychist vein that there are modes of know-

ing that are not cognitive and that don't rely on knowledge OF something. For this he offers the moon as an example: "The moon is not a model or a representation . . . but a kind of contact-at-a-distance . . . My contact with the moon is an ongoing process of adjustment or Latourian 'translation.' That is why my encounter with the moon runs deeper than anything I can know about it" (p. 118). This aesthetic contact (or aesthesis) "happens in the first instance outside knowledge, on a level beneath the threshold of conscious perception" and "outside of any correlation" (p. 148). On the other hand, the sphere of causality is not limited to full and masterful cognitions but is an ongoing process of impingement. As he renders this point, "there are limits to our knowledge of the moon but also—and much more importantly—there are limits to our independence from the moon" (p. 137). For Shaviro, this is an aesthetic engagement, and it is the genesis of thought and action. In speculative aesthetics, Shaviro makes the space for a third member of the binary of epistemology and ontology, what he (borrowing from Kant) calls "intuitions without concepts" (p. 156)—what I might want to render as the feeling of knowing.

Shaviro's speculative aesthetics, like Gratton's temporal realism, is not orthodox. Unfaithful to the stakes that drove Meillassoux and Harman, Grant and Brassier, it responds instead to the surplus vitality that escaped those original systemizations. And so, to adapt Shaviro's telling sentences, *The Universe of Things* reminds us that anything like a general theory or a once-and-for-all systematization is undone by the singularity of every theoretical encounter, each of which will leave a trace that will iterate out in directions that cannot be anticipated. And so I had better leave it at that.

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