

# On the Use and Abuse of Objects for the Environmental Humanities: Recent Books in Object-Oriented Ontology and Ecotheory

Anthony Paul Smith, Department of Religion & Theology, La Salle  
University, United States

This review essay examines three recent works of ecotheory, *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* (edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, and Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, all of which attempt to make use and deepen the philosophical project of object-oriented ontology (OOO). After an overview of the place of OOO within contemporary philosophy and its general principles, the essay posits that there is a unidirectional relationship between OOO and ecotheory (inclusive of scientific ecology). Since the practitioners of OOO discussed in this essay all claim that their work is philosophically realist in orientation, this failure to engage and mutate their philosophical work according to scientific ecology bears witness to the inability to fully break from anthropocentrism. At a deeper level this failure acts as a symptom for a wider failure to break from the colonial episteme that goes unexamined by OOO. Making use of Hortense Spillers's conception of "pornotroping", the essay offers a reading of various author appeals to love, erotics, and sadomasochism that argues this same colonial episteme of anti-Blackness structures OOO's understanding of the object. While presenting a general critique of OOO's interventions into ecotheory, the essay also calls for a deeper engagement and centering of scholarship in Black Studies and Queer Studies, particularly from an Afro-pessimist and anti-social perspective.

In the scientific journal *Ecology* Alfred George Tansley introduced the term “ecosystem” in his 1935 polemical article “The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms”. His initial conception of the ecosystem helped clear away the philosophical debates between materialists and idealists that had determined the scientific study of ecology up to that point by framing the interpretation of scientific data and which had at times even distracted from empirical research projects. The subject of Tansley’s criticism was the white South African ecologist John Phillips who in a series of four articles had attempted to defend a version of philosophical holism for ecology. This holism was behind a vulgar form of vitalism that held sway in ecology through the work of the American Fredric Clements and, to a lesser degree globally but very importantly for Phillips, Jan Christian Smuts who was a white South African scientist, military general, Prime Minister, and early advocate of apartheid. Tansley’s polemic emerges from a deep annoyance at Phillips’s constant appeals to authoritative figures, including Tansley amongst them next to Smuts (whose rank as General is always given in Phillips’s writing), with less attention given to the nature of the scientific evidence. We might say that what Tansley objected to was the philosophical rather than scientific focus of Phillips’s work.<sup>1</sup>

This episode in the history of the science of ecology is fascinating for a number of reasons. For our purposes here it is telling how researchers in environmental philosophy, and related fields like ecotheology, so rarely engage with it, either in its specifics as an episode in epistemology or in the ways that ecologists have been wrestling with philosophical issues since the inception of the discipline. Such debates are uninteresting to the philosophers and theorists of ecology who orient their works according to philosophical disciplinary concerns. All too often authors simply cherrypick from the science or, even more often, cynically appeal to the environmental crisis alone. What is passed over in silence regarding the Tansley-Phillips episode is telling and it is telling that it is allowed to remain unthought for philosophical engagement with ecology. Here we find silence

---

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the ecosystem concept, the relationship between Tansley, Phillips, Clements, and Smuts, as well as an ecological scientist’s reading of the philosophical issues at play see Golley, *A History of the Ecosystem Concept in Ecology*, 8-34.

about the colonial episteme that conditioned the emergence of the ecosystem concept and other ecological forms of thought have only obliquely been investigated, usually by historians for whom philosophical and other theoretical questions are not their focus.<sup>2</sup> While I am not claiming that questions of colonial reason are unimportant to researchers in the environmental humanities more generally, I am claiming that to date the most popular, driving and self-consciously avant garde philosophical ideas touch on these issues only as tangentially and cynically as they engage with the scientific literature of ecology.

Object-oriented philosophy or object-oriented ontology (often abbreviated as OOP or OOO) is one such claimed avant garde framework for rethinking fundamental philosophical and theoretical issues in the study of the environment. Yet, as I will argue, OOO is seriously afflicted by the problem of blindness to the colonial episteme and so is unable to help researchers engage with the science of ecology more rigorously nor help them engage more critically with the colonial and anti-Black elements of ecology and environmental thought more generally.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Amongst other works, I have found these of particular importance: Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*; Anker, *Imperial Ecology*; Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*; Cronin, *Changes in the Land*; and Radkau, *Nature and Power*. Almost all are historical in shape and their theoretical importance is in their use of certain theories, usually broadly Marxist or world system theoretical, rather than the construction of new theoretical lenses. It is interesting to note that questions of colonial power are often more pressing for those in the environmental humanities who engage with religious and Christian theological studies, albeit usually in non-confessional ways. For example see Bauman, *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics*, whose work builds in part on suggestions made by the process theologian Catherine Keller regarding ecology and political power.

<sup>3</sup> I recognize that a fuller treatment is needed of the colonial episteme and the centrality of anti-Black racism within that episteme than I have offered here. Such work is beyond the scope of a review essay such as this one and would require a deeper excavation of the archive I have only touched on early ecological research and its social and political conditions. Such work is a longterm goal of my own research and I suspect many others who have awakened from the Eurocentric paradigm of environmental philosophy. While the presence of feminist and postcolonial environmental thought is often held up as proof of the environmental humanities attention to these issues, I have found such engagements to be oriented around postcolonial and queer positivity, where nature is shown to be better

OOO is perhaps the most “successful” strand of philosophy to emerge from the constellation of thinkers collected under the general term “speculative realism”. To name OOO as the most successful does not necessarily mean it is the most successful as philosophy, because it is unclear if philosophy can be successful in any straightforward sense and when considering success from an ecological perspective it becomes even less clear. After all, if we were to measure it in terms of major departments of philosophy endowing chairs in OOO or even hiring in junior positions, then anyone would be hard pressed to name OOO as a success since to my knowledge there is not a single one in the major departments of the Anglophone world. Most boosters of OOO practice outside of philosophy departments, none are found within the recognized power centers of institutional philosophy, and while that is not an argument for its theoretical failure it does mean that OOO has failed to achieve academic philosophical recognition. To be named as a success requires recognition and in requiring recognition success then requires something outside of philosophy’s pure act and manifestation. When I claim that OOO has perhaps been the most successful I simply mean that it has become the most recognized spinoff of speculative realism (though arguably the political outgrowth known as “accelerationism” is jockeying to overtake it). Anyone naming a philosophical project as a commercial success would probably have a very poor understanding of the kind of money that most major commercial projects require or even the kind of money that a successful scientific project pulls down at universities throughout the world. A scene of philosophers arguing over the commercial value of Sellars versus Latour would be hilarious if it wasn’t so

---

understood as “queer” rather than “straight” and from indigenous cosmologies. Work done in what I consider to be more challenging forms of Queer theory and Black studies—by which I mean negative and pessimistic modes of theorizing—has been, to the best of my knowledge, almost entirely absent from discussions. My own understanding of the centrality of anti-Blackness to the colonial episteme that continues in new ways in a postcolonial era is largely dependent upon the work of Afro-pessimist theorists and scholars of Black religion. This literature is vast but see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Hartman and Wilderson, “The Position of the Unthought”; Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre*; Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death”; Sexton, “Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word”; Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*.

sad. But sometimes it is important to be sad, to speak with the sobriety of sorrow, and to tell it like it is. So let us consider this success, let us consider this recognition, and ask what is so sad—so drenched with pathos—about a successful philosophy in the world while the earth is rapidly shaking off the effects of such human forms of success.

Graham Harman, the founder of this school of philosophy, has a distracting habit of retracing its history throughout his own writings. As a former journalist perhaps he knows the value of getting ahead of the story and writing the narrative you want to see, but it often comes across as expressive of a narcissistic self-importance that distracts from approaching the philosophical work in itself. Take as an example a footnote in “Gold”, his contribution to *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* (2013), where he corrects a claim he made in an earlier essay of his. He tells us that instead of coining the term “object-oriented philosophy” on September 11, 1999, a search of his computer files shows that he instead had used the term in 1997.<sup>4</sup> Such a detail might be important for a future history of OOO and its mutations; indeed, one gets the sense that Harman fully expects that such a history will be warranted and, even more than that, such a history will be *demanded*.

Assuming with Harman that there will be some human future that includes a graduate student in the history of philosophy interested in a history of OOO, let us further assume they are curious about the use of OOO in the environmental humanities. This historian would likely need to take special note of the transition from blog discussions on the internet to the arrival of OOO in books published by university presses, which is undoubtedly a form of institutional recognition. While there are some alternative presses like Punctum Press, Zero Books, and Open Humanities Press which began to publish some of this work in its early phases of reception, other presses soon realized that there was a market for these works. Today one would find that the center of OOO and speculative realism publishing has shifted and now the main publisher of work in speculative realism is Edinburgh University Press with Harman acting as series editor and so as gatekeeper to the brand. But it has been the University of Minnesota Press that has proved the most fruitful home for OOO inflected work in the environmental humanities, first with

---

<sup>4</sup> Harman, “Gold”, 120n1.

the appearance of *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* (2013) which contains some of the first peer-review publications on OOO and environmental theory. Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) provides a more sustained narrative of what he sees as the importance of OOO for environmental theory. In contrast to the salesman-like enthusiasm of Harman and Morton we find Jeffery Jerome Cohen's *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (2015) laying out a more workaday use of OOO through a concentrated study of stone that traverses the literary, the geological, the personal, and the scales in-between. It is also important to note that while Morton is explicit in taking on the mantle of OOO, Cohen is far more ecumenical and is happy to draw concepts from schools of thought that explicitly conflict with key concepts in OOO, namely contemporary process thought. Arguably Morton's work also contains these contradictions, but they are disavowed or quickly dismissed as when he claims that processes and networks are also objects.<sup>5</sup>

Process philosophy and actor-network theory, broadly understood such that everyone from Whitehead, Deleuze, Bruno Latour, and Jane Bennett (whom Cohen makes the most use of) are understood to be a part of the discussion and are often upheld as the main productive philosophical antagonists for OOO.

With this field now defined, the purpose of this review is then to evaluate the value of OOO for the environmental humanities on the basis of these major contributions. There will be a special focus on questions that are broadly "philosophical" due to the grounding of ecotheory in an avowedly philosophical orientation. By this term, though, we may simply understand the underlying conceptual assumptions and viewpoints that frame other work done broadly in the humanities. While both Morton and Cohen are scholars of literature by training, they are quite explicit about the desire for their work to be philosophically important as well. If such philosophy is done through the analysis of medieval literature, as in the case of Cohen, then that simply is the medium through which a more general understanding of ecological reality is given. This implicit ontology is made explicit in the three books (the edited collection *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*, Cohen's *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, and

---

<sup>5</sup> See Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 118.

Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*) through reference to the general principles of OOO.

I will begin with an overview of these ontological principles. I will then examine if such principles direct these works in specific ways regarding the concepts they aim to investigate. Sadly, in my analysis, they do not except in rather limited ways. I then turn to a discussion of the undertheorized question of race in these books, specifically as given shape by theorists of anti-Black racism, to show how OOO as represented in these texts persists under anti-Black structures rather than analyzing those structures in the powerful ways that they must be.

## Principles of OOO

Despite some internal debates there is a general consistency regarding what constitutes OOO in the three works under review. In his contribution to *Prismatic Ecology*, Harman summarizes the two main principles of his object-oriented philosophy this way, “(1) objects have genuine reality at many different scales, not just the smallest, and (2) objects withdraw from all types of relation, whether those of human knowledge or of inanimate causal impact.”<sup>6</sup> Morton says much the same thing in less abstract but paradoxically less clear language: “(1) No realism is tenable that only bases its findings on ‘ontic’ data that are pregiven. This would be like thinking with prepackaged concepts—it would not be thinking at all. (2) Idealism, however, is unworkable, since there exist real things whose core reality is withdrawn from access, even by themselves.”<sup>7</sup> A common claim in OOO is that this creates a “flat ontology” or a “democracy of objects” in Levi Bryant’s reworking of the system. Morton too makes this claim triumphantly in the early part of his book, though later we are told that OOO is not so foolish as to be totally indiscriminating. Even if “OOO doesn’t claim any object is ‘more real’ than any other” it nonetheless “does discount some objects”.<sup>8</sup> These objects are called “sensual objects” in Harman’s work and refer to the way objects appear for other objects. This would include the object known as the human. These sensual objects

---

<sup>6</sup> Harman, “Gold,” 106.

<sup>7</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 118.

are distinct from “real objects”, objects which have part of their being in withdrawal and so are necessarily foreclosed to sensual or casual relation.

Without directing any analysis to this distinction, Cohen also characterizes OOO as a flat ontology, though without the clear antipathy towards sensual objects. For him this flat ontology arises from the loss of a privileged position formerly held by human beings over the rest of the world. We also find a similar two-point summary of the principles of OOO, “the philosopher Graham Harman argues that no two objects can fully interact (all touch is mediated, and thus all causation is indirect or vicarious), and that objects always withhold a part of themselves from every relation (we never possess access to a thing in its entirety).”<sup>9</sup> All three authors go on to claim that these principles make OOO a specifically “realist” form of philosophy. Cohen summarizes this shared position, “Object-oriented philosophy is a form of realism (it attempts a careful account of the autonomy and materiality of the world and is not satisfied with analyses that disperse things into language, as if human words had sovereign power). Yet its realism is *weird*, meaning that this world is not reducible to common sense, the evidence of the mind, or other modes of imposing human order.”<sup>10</sup> This so-called “weirdness” of OOO is what makes it amenable, in Cohen’s view, to being thought alongside of various ways of approaching stone in the Middle Ages since the realism present in that era is also weird to us today.

As a pure philosophy OOO enters into a number of debates explored through the particular language game of disciplinary philosophy. At this level OOO offers a number of seemingly attractive claims that may translate to the general level. First, like Husserlian phenomenology, it provides a philosophical defense of the integrity and reality of objects we engage with in the everyday, while avoiding what is taken to be the idealism of such phenomenology. Objects have reality at all levels of composition. Harman elsewhere argues against “undermining” and “overmining”

---

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 45. Cohen’s emphasis on materiality appears to mark out a major difference between he and Harman, since Harman’s OOP is presented as anti-materialist in its orientation. See Harman, “I am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must Be Destroyed”. Owing to Cohen’s attempts at ecumenicalism I am unsure if this his attempt to modify OOO or a misunderstanding of the tenants of the theory.

objects, which is really an argument against reductionism and structuralism respectively.<sup>11</sup> Let us take one object, a human being. OOO would claim that the human is not simply reducible to genetics nor is the essence of a human being to be found in some social structure or as species-being. At each of these levels the objects encountered are real and none ultimately more real than the other, even though in terms of their usefulness their sensuous qualities may matter more. So that a geneticist will need to understand the reality of a gene more than a public health expert will need to, in the same way she may need to understand the way such genetics impacts at the level of general social structure. Neither of these levels, however, erases the human as a “medium-sized object,” as Harman terms our interaction with everyday objects. Indeed, at each level, the realness of the object is withdrawn from any interaction with it. There is undeniably an opening here for a certain romantic aesthetic. There is something beyond relation, something irreducible about every object. Thus a human being retains a certain kind of majesty as object, it retains a certain kind of occluded beauty. It is just that everything else does too.

Harman’s own foray into thinking ecologically is, to the best of my knowledge, limited to his contribution in *Prismatic Ecology*. This volume marks an interesting approach to an edited collection of essays. Because of the prevalence of association between the color green and environmentalism, each contributor was invited to take a different color and theorize how ecotheory might be understood through a new prism. Harman’s chapter is entitled “Gold” and traces various ways that gold manifests as an object, both in terms of its reality and in terms of its sensuousness. His investigation captures in truncated form the general shape of OOO engagements when it enters into dialogue with questions in environmental theory and ecology more generally. That is, these investigations tend to focus on the questions of scale or level. So Harman traces the prehistoric manifestation of gold, the ahistorical chemical composition of gold, and the very historical human obsession with the element. Despite Cohen’s remark that OOO may be “*too precise*” for understanding the messiness of stone, Cohen’s investigation of stone

---

<sup>11</sup> See Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 7-19.

itself looks a great deal like Harman's historical overview.<sup>12</sup> It is in these analyses that we begin to see the truly limited import of OOO on environmental work. Work in the environmental humanities arguably already accepts the principle of irreducibility as demonstrated in Harman's work, as evidenced in the many works that historicize attempts at scientific objectivity. So it would appear that OOO is limited to encouraging a focus on objects outside of a human-dominated relation or a recognition that objects in the environment need not interact with human beings to be meaningful or real.

## **No Relation: OOO and Environmental Theory**

The limited import of OOO is perhaps most on display in Cohen's *Stone*. However, that *Stone* manifests the limitations of OOO for environmental theory should not be taken as a wholesale criticism of the book. Cohen's book is written in a rich style that moves nearly seamlessly between readings of medieval texts and contemporary eco-theories as well as between these scholarly discourse and personal reflection. The Archimedean point that brings all these discourses together is the figure of stone. Cohen describes the book as a thought experiment to detect "liveliness" in the most mundane of substances.<sup>13</sup> Here a certain productive inconsistency emerges. On the one hand, stone is described as and investigated by Cohen as "alien" and specifically "inhuman", communicated even by the subtitle of the book (*An Ecology of the Inhuman*).<sup>14</sup> Such an alien nature or strangeness is lauded as one of the benefits of speculative realism's claimed "weirdness", as we have already seen. At the same time, this weirdness takes place in the midst of very mundane white, middle-class family scenes (a reality I highlight here not to dismiss Cohen *ad hominem*, but because these scenes are given pride of place by Cohen himself in his book). The "liveliness" of the inhuman is presented within the scene of the familial. Interleaving the various "lively" aspects of inhuman stone (love, temporality, force, and life itself) are excursions that usually focus on some memory of a shared experience with his children while visiting various historical

---

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 2.

sites that include The Holocaust Museum, other holocaust memorials, and Stonehenge.

Cohen's work is clearly concerned with thinking in a way that is committed in a limited sense to anti-racist principles. This manifests most clearly in his considerations of stone in light of anti-Semitism. The effects of the long murderous racist program of anti-Semitism is memorialized in stone or the setting of stones upon tombstones throughout the book. Such a concern is not merely intellectual for Cohen as he reflects back upon the question of how much larger his family might be without the deaths of untold scores in the camps of Nazi Germany's "Final Solution". While looking upon a memorial for this lost future he declares, "Stone holds life."<sup>15</sup> Yet, some might see here a certain contradiction with the specifically realist character of OOO (and the other philosophies/theories deployed in *Stone*), as well as the specific character of ecological thinking generally. After all, Cohen himself tells us that the ecological project is partly one of thinking beyond anthropocentricity.<sup>16</sup> Even at the same time as one thing that appears to emerge from ecological thinking is a limited defense of anthropomorphism against anthropocentrism. In *Stone* that means displacing the human from the center of the universe, such that the liveliness of stone may be approached by human understanding but never ultimately captured by it. Arguably in Morton's *Hyperobjects*, discussed at more length below, there is a kind of negative anthropomorphism that remains anthropomorphic nevertheless. In short, a hyperobject is "too large" for human understanding, but only through a kind of attempt to think these objects according to an anthropomorphic timescale.

This minimal political argument is the real import of OOO for *Stone*. Cohen's intellectual promiscuity means that, while he is disposed to make general use of the principles of OOO regarding the autonomy of objects and the reality of their various scales, he is also equally inclined to make use of process theories and actor-network theory. Seemingly without concern for the contradictions between these systems, where one fails Cohen simply uses the other and vice versa. This is a refreshing engagement with OOO as well as a refreshing concern for questions of race, however limited to the Jewish experience so that it is unexplored analytically

---

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 195-97.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 9.

and only surfaced at the level of the personal (which, by the principles of OOO, is no less real, but is perhaps less useful for others to pick up on for analytical work). Cohen emphasizes the OOO position on the ultimate autonomy of objects, including in terms of their political force, that nonetheless enter into limited and local relations with human beings. Regarding the implicit political philosophy of OOO he writes, “An object-oriented mode of inquiry does not make political reading impossible, but by detailing the power of things illuminates why they might be essential (if not necessarily compliant) partners in processes of cultural transformation.”<sup>17</sup> Following Morton’s remarks in *Hyperobjects*, referenced throughout *Stone*, it is Cohen’s explicit hope that such an object-oriented inquiry might help us human beings learn to “share the world” with the inhuman.<sup>18</sup>

Such a desire is laudable and Cohen’s investigation of the liveliness of stone is often interesting and sometimes even intoxicating. However, it isn’t particularly ecological in focus. Despite the claim to a certain inhumanness of stone and the common rejection of “correlationism” found in speculative realism, the inhuman liveliness of stone is investigated through the literary productions of past human beings. Of course, Cohen argues that these literary productions reveal ways of thinking about the inhuman that are strange to us today. The point of looking to them is not to highlight their literary character, but to allow these forms of thinking to emerge. There is nothing problematic about such a project in itself, but when considered in the light of its claims to be an ecology of the inhuman certain issues arise.

First, despite the references to ecophilosophy, including Morton’s OOO version, there is little to no engagement with ecological principles. Granted, this is not a weakness specific to Cohen’s book, but the fact that it is endemic to philosophically focused environmental theory is not a defense of its being present in an approach that claims to be paradigm shifting. One will find this lack of engagement in *Hyperobjects* and the vast majority of essays that make up

---

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 173

<sup>18</sup> Cohen, *Stone*, 152.

*Prismatic Ecology* as well.<sup>19</sup> To be specific, there is no sense that philosophical investigations of environmental objects requires or has any need for work done in scientific ecology. Instead the vagueness of an ecological thought is appealed to with mixed results. With regard to *Stone* we might begin to ask a number of questions that touch on the deepest claims Cohen makes. *Stone*, after all, is not alien to scientific ecology. The various manifestations of stone are important for ecosystem understanding and management. Yet the way stone is engaged with in the scientific literature is left to the side—arguably it is “discounted”, to use Morton’s phrase—and this means that Cohen’s claims are based largely on the claims of the literature he investigates. This is undeniably a decision, but one that is not interrogated by Cohen in the book. If Cohen had presented this book as simply a question of literary theory, and not an “ecology of the inhuman,” then this would be an unfair criticism. However, since this claims to engage that literature in an ecological way, it was important that ecological concepts guide his inquiry into these surveys of literature and biographical moments.

Why might this be important enough to mention as a criticism? After all, one of the claims of OOO is that an object, like stone, cannot be undermined or overmined. Wouldn’t thinking stone through scientific ecology simply reduce stone to what science is able to tell us about it? Cohen often says that we must rethink matter and one might think that thinking about stone through scientific ecology would be to think stone through a concept of matter that makes uninterrogated philosophical assumptions. Avoiding such a reduction is good philosophy. However, scientific ecology offers more than simply unacknowledged philosophical metaphysics and Cohen’s text itself contains many such unacknowledged philosophical decisions as well. For example, relation is of course important in ecosystem thinking, but the importance of life is not. Indeed, scientific ecology already assumes a kind of autonomy and activity of stone in its many manifestations without the need to anthropomorphize that autonomy as “liveliness”. Rock is not alive or dead, but one might say it is never-living. Such a concept is more alien to philosophy and literary studies, which are often caught

---

<sup>19</sup> For a more general overview and critique of this weakness in the environmental humanities, especially in environmental philosophy and ecotheology, see Smith, *Ecologies of Thought*, Part 1.

between a dialectic of life and death in their environmental thinking. Owing in part to a surfeit of sentimentality, one is always encouraged in this dialectic to “choose life” (as the Biblical text of Deuteronomy 30:19 has it), or perhaps more accurately “choose liveliness,” in such a way that treats death and, moreover, the never-living as lesser despite their ecological importance. Such a battle of aesthetics ignores a deeper abstraction, a more thoroughgoing strangeness that could be had through thinking the total deracination present in the never-living.

Cohen’s book has an undeniably stupefying scope and he deftly—often in well-wrought prose—surveys this impressive range of literature. Its strength, however, lies in the way it works as an index of an anthropomorphic alliance with the inhuman. Aside from a kind of commitment to thinking beyond anthropocentrism this index does not become an ecology in any meaningful sense. By the principles of OOO such an index has reality, it has a certain kind of value and even political import, but an index is not an ecology and the decision for an index over an ecology is one that should be acknowledged and accounted for. Else it appears that OOO does not engage with scientific ecology in a truly democratic or flat way. Or, in other terms, OOO lacks nothing that could be derived from scientific ecology and acts instead as the dominant discourse when it dialogues with ecological thought generally. This is certainly true of Harman’s own engagement with environmental questions in “Gold” where at the end of the essay he returns to the two principles of OOO and says quite tellingly, “Gold has helped us to reinforce these two points.”<sup>20</sup> In similar fashion, *Stone* gives us a vision of the inhuman that reinforces a certain kind of humanity while disavowing the importance of that familial vision (heteronormative, reproductive, and futurist) for the projection of what the inhuman is.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that Cohen’s use of OOO would be limited since he is confident to use it alongside of other contradictory theoretical apparatuses without concern for addressing these contradictions. If Cohen is ecumenical in his engagement, Morton’s *Hyperobjects* is the work of a proselytizer. Ostensibly this is a book expanding upon a concept, hyperobjects, introduced in his 2010 book, *The Ecological Thought*. At that time he was not a proponent of OOO, but it is not surprising that he would turn to a philosophical practice focused explicitly upon

---

<sup>20</sup> Harman, “Gold”, 119.

objects to try and think through the concept of a hyperobject. Yet he goes further than that sense of OOO as a tool and claims that both hyperobjects themselves and OOO as a philosophical practice are equivalent as symptoms of the “shaking of being, a *being-quake*”.<sup>21</sup> This already raises questions since hyperobjects are defined on the first page as “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans.”<sup>22</sup> Objects that may be classified under this banner include the cosmic (blackholes) and the horrifically mundane (Styrofoam cups) as well as everything in between, human-made and not. This concept is potentially interesting even simply as a heuristic regarding ecological time; it potentially bears upon certain ecological concepts in new ways, and it would be fruitful to bear out those ways. However, it is distracting to equate a young and provincial philosophical movement like OOO with such massive objects. As we stated in the introduction, such distractions occur too often with regard to OOO and must be bracketed to assess and analyze the actual arguments put forward.

*Hyperobjects* does not lay out an explicitly different ecotheory than that found already in Morton’s earlier work. As in *Ecology without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* Morton’s preferred dialogue partners are found in a very general engagement with physics and a deeper engagement with aesthetic objects and theory. While *Ecology without Nature* was concerned more with literary production, *Hyperobjects* spends much more time discussing visual art than it does discussing scientific ecological theories. While the discussions of quantum physics are interesting (though my own knowledge of quantum theory is restricted to a general understanding as well and I recognize certain dangers here) it does strike me that we are given a cherry-picked version of art and science that offer examples of the philosophy being put forward and not challenging or directing that philosophy.

With regard to OOO itself, the only difference between the philosophical orientation of this book in distinction to his others is that this one is said to be concerned with ontology rather than ethics.<sup>23</sup> This claim is one example of a litany of contradictions that riddle the book. For the ontological investigations of the

---

<sup>21</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 22.

book (into the nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing, and interobjectivity of hyperobjects) gives way constantly to muddled ethical thinking. These ethical principles are summarized by Morton as hypocrisy, weakness, and lameness. This does not add anything fundamentally new to Morton's discussion of hyperobjects in *The Ecological Thought* where he claimed that to deal with hyperobjects like plutonium we would need to devise new and impure rituals.<sup>24</sup> The framework of OOO does not appear to modify or deepen his analysis aside from a few remarks attempting to bring his earlier statements in line with the principles of OOO outlined above, as when he states that his earlier concept of the "mesh" is an object.<sup>25</sup> Does such a claim make any intellectual difference? If the greatest import of OOO is supposed to be the autonomy of objects at all scales, with attendant resistance to undermining or overmining, and the concept of withdrawal that secures the autonomy and reality of an object, then massive objects like mesh (which is a kind of set of processes) and hyperobjects seem to already contain resistance to anthropocentrism while also performing a kind of overmining (or a kind of "reducing" of an object up in scale).

This practice of overmining can be seen in the ways aesthetic objects come to the fore for Morton. The overwhelming experience of the uncanny carried by a hyperobject opens up to what Morton calls a "masochistic dimension" of the experience of art.<sup>26</sup> Turning to the example of the music of My Bloody Valentine, this masochistic dimension is held up as "more truly ecological" than music thought to be "natural" or peaceful ambient music. This is all an ontology in the service of an ethics of sadomasochism grounded ultimately in aesthetics. All of which may be interesting in itself, even if Morton may be better assisted in investigating his sadomasochism by an engagement with other theorists, including queer, Black, and Black queer theorists who would challenge his easy valorization of transgression, weakness, and even hypocrisy as the ethical stance needed to address global warming (I address this at greater length below).

*Hyberobjects* uses the terminology of Harman's OOO, but does not modify them in dialogue with ecological concepts. Rather we see a few concepts appealed

---

<sup>24</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 130-32.

<sup>25</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 30.

to in order to support Morton's own aesthetic fan-fictions, but in no sense is OOO modified on the basis of scientific ecology, environmentalism, or even Morton's favored forms of quantum physics. Rather, ecologists and environmentalists are given a lecture. A lecture about how their philosophical paradigms are unethical (because they fail to account for the inability of accounting for the future),<sup>27</sup> which continues on to say that their aesthetic choices are in poor taste, and ends by telling them that they need to give into the masochistic demands of an Earth cast aesthetically as nothing but "a wadded tissue of vomited milk."<sup>28</sup>

## Pornotroping Objects

Such a self-proclaimed "dark aesthetic" is unfortunately endemic to speculative realism's forms.<sup>29</sup> This colorism has not been interrogated for the way it repeats certain tropes and, indeed, political ontologies of anti-Blackness. Ecotheory, we are told, is all too often "conducted in the shade of 'bright green'" which as a hue symbolically calls forth problematic themes and modalities that require one to be "affirmative, extraverted, and masculine" as well as "sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty, and healthy".<sup>30</sup> Such ecotheory may sound good as the natural framework for a popular documentary on climate change, but it is not a framework supported by a wider experience of the environment that includes biomes which exhibit a diversity of colors. To some the conceit of the *Prismatic Ecology* volume may sound arbitrary or even silly, but if the invitation to riff off of the associations produced by thinking through different colors produces a form of ecological thinking beyond the limitations of the problematic tropes

---

<sup>27</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 31.

<sup>29</sup> For a version of this see Ben Woodard's essay "Ultraviolet" in *Prismatic Ecology*. This "dark aesthetic" is entangled with early speculative realist engagements with the aesthetics of Black Metal. See the collection edited by Masciandaro, *Hideous Gnosis*. I don't want to deny the interesting work on aesthetics that this work undoubtedly contains, but the allergy to analyzing issues to do with race is present in this volume as well. The troubling connections of Black Metal with white nationalism and other racist ideologies is well documented in the popular press, yet does not emerge as a major problem to be theorized.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, "Introduction," xxi.

associated with “bright green” then it would be worth it. So, the question then follows, does the volume live up to this promise? And yet to answer such a question within the bound of environmental theory we have to also ask if such a promise is itself ecological?

These “bright green” tropes identified by Cohen (and explicitly drawn from Timothy Morton) are indeed problematic. Marxist and other radical left-wing theorists have identified these themes and frameworks as being shared with the ideology of fascism, particular in the form found in Nazi Germany, and these tropes haunt contemporary environmentalism in troubling ways. But a prismatic ecology also surfaces themes that are very clearly “human-oriented”, as most of the colors in the prism are specifically human ways of seeing. This attempt in speculative realism to link realism with an anti-anthropocentrism often fails. This is true even of the work of Quentin Meillassoux, who is not a proponent of OOO but who is rightly or wrongly taken as the inspiration behind the attempt to move beyond “correlationism” to realism. A clear-eyed reading of *After Finitude* will note that the supposedly realist ways of reaching the primary qualities of the ancestral realm are couched in numbers that are tied specifically to the rotation of the (human populated) earth around the sun. This is an issue because, for Meillassoux and those who align with his brand of realism, any real knowledge of primary qualities must be grounded on knowledge that is not dependent upon human subjectivity. All of the numbers that Meillassoux claims provide access to the reality of primary qualities are dependent upon the relative reality of the earth’s rotation as translated into “years”.<sup>31</sup> So, despite rightly diagnosing a problem, *Prismatic Ecology* does not move past that problem.

Perhaps a supporter of OOO would claim that this slippage is actually the result of rejecting the nature-culture binary. The supposed troubling of the nature-culture binary is a central element of OOO, but it is not particularly new in environmental theory. Cohen and others are persistent in their slippage between emphasizing the autonomy of objects from the human subject and the demand to attend to particular questions of social justice produced by thinking that autonomy.

---

<sup>31</sup> I owe this point to an observation that Peter Hallward made at a Middlesex University philosophy seminar. I also thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this essay for pointing out the human-centered nature of the prism.

But this is not truly a deconstruction of the nature-culture binary, rather it is the refusal to think deeply the relationship between justice and object that runs throughout these three books. Such important problems are often elided in OOO-inflected environmental theory. Remaining with Cohen's introductory remarks to *Prismatic Ecology*, he ends with a common sentimentality endemic to Morton's work as well: "the binding of the elements is love."<sup>32</sup> Such a claim is made without any support, left to simply dazzle the reader, to impress upon her the importance of all these elemental colors and warn her off asking what exactly such a statement means. Is this not ideology rather than analysis? Are we allowed to ask about the relationship of bondage to love? Can we really pass by the auto-deconstruction manifested by such a statement appearing on a page numbered with the roman numeral "xxx" that causes us to ask if OOO doesn't confuse love with a kind of pornotroping through the rainbow?

Pornotroping is a concept enacted by the literary theorist Hortense Spillers whose work on race has been pathbreaking, specifically with regard to questions regarding Blackness and the reduction to a mere thing of those who embody Blackness. While OOO philosophers have spent their time arguing that the latest in "Continental philosophy" can powerfully shift the paradigm of ecotheory more generally, they have ignored the challenges and powerful philosophical concepts produced by scholars in Black Studies. By taking into account Spillers' concept of pornotroping, for example, OOO theorists might pause before assuming their aestheticization of the environment can take place without accounting for its own practice.

There is something remarkable about the fittingness of her description of pornotroping with the play of pleasure and violence found in OOO-inflected environmental theory, especially seen in Morton's gleeful discussions of pain and sickness or the very pain required for a split between human experience and the in-itself character of objects generally. Spillers summarizes pornotroping in her pathbreaking essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" writing:

First of all, their New-World [i.e. the New-World for Africans forced into slavery], diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive

---

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, "Introduction," xxx.

body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender difference in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being* for the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; 4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.<sup>33</sup>

First, let's assume that proponents of OOO are serious that the human is an object amongst other objects. If environmental theory—that of OOO included—wants to dethrone the human, then it must attend to the actual construction of the human outside of the politically denuded space of philosophies like OOO. Spillers directs our attention to that construction by first showing how the capture of Black objects (to use the language of OOO) enacts a perverse anti-humanism that ultimately undergirds and gives coherence to (white) humanism. There are those "black life forms" (Rinaldo Walcott's term) that are taken by an implicit Western ontology as not being human or, at best, not-quite-human; pure real objects whose social death is lived as withdrawn from sensuous qualities like personhood.

To get a deeper sense of the way in which pornotroping surfaces OOO's inability to analyze its own colonial and anti-Black episteme, let's overlay Spillers's pornotroping fourfold onto the more naive OOO fourfold of Harman. Harman's fourfold plots objects along the polarities of sensual and real objects and sensual and real qualities already touched on earlier. First, in the capture of the Black body "it"—and I only use this term in strict faithfulness to Spiller's analytic description of the grammar of white supremacy's anti-Black violence, it should not be confused as a normative value or capitulation to that grammar—becomes a sensual object. Yet, at the same time this body becomes pure thingliness, pure object. That is Blackness becomes a pure object withdrawn from sensuous qualities like gender. While I am here performing a crossed reading of two fourfold

---

<sup>33</sup> Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", 67. My understanding of Spiller's concept has been formed in part by Alexander G. Weheliye's reading. See Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, Chapter 6.

structures, it is supported in an unconscious turning to Blackness as quality as described in Harman's *The Quadruple Object* where he writes, "I never encounter black as an isolated quality, but only as the black of ink or poison, a black infused with the style of these objects."<sup>34</sup> In the captured body of the Black slave Blackness is encountered not as isolated quality, but neither does it "infuse" with "the style" of the person as object. Instead here the real object is experienced in the otherness of withdrawal from physical and biological expression. Here the capture of the object is located as becoming-flesh for white pleasure, even if it is simply the sadomasochistic pleasure of theorizing.

Alexander G. Weheliye explains the etymology of pornotroping as bringing together the original Greek sense of *porno* as a term that referred to female slaves who were sold for the express purpose of prostitution and *trope* as "turning" or even "deviation" and later via Latin as "figures of speech". In summation, pornotroping "figures the remainder of law and violence linguistically, staging the simultaneous sexualization and brutalization of the (female) slave, yet—and this marks its complexity—it remains unclear whether the turn or deviation is toward violence or sexuality."<sup>35</sup> Regardless of which poll one turns to with regard to the pornotrope Black object, this ungendered, withdrawn, and purely objectified body is powerless. This opens up a line of critique of the easy appropriation of queer positivity—as opposed to queer negativity as found in anti-social queer theory—for all and everything present in OOO environmental theory.<sup>36</sup> For here we find a mode of ideological disavowal between real and sensuous objects not available in our anti-Black theoretical grammar for the captured Black object. In fact, it is not available to the extent that the grammar of OOO does not really allow for the Black to even be an object, since it can't be plotted in the way the white body can. In an isomorphism with Spillers distinction between body and flesh, we might say that by being pure object the Black object is the real unable to be spoken of within

---

<sup>34</sup> Harman, *Quadruple Object*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Weheliye, p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> See Morton, "Queer Ecology". For an insightful critique of Morton's breezy use of "queer" see Rosenberg.

the grammar of OOO.<sup>37</sup> In distinction, the white object is able to navigate various forms of relation within the OOO fourfold, always knowing that his or her sensuous qualities (included amongst them social constructions like gender and sexuality) do not ultimately touch on the real object withdrawn from those qualities. In a pure ideological formulation, the straight white male sensuous object enjoys the knowledge that deep down they're more than their oppressive relations in the social world. The powerful get to be hypocrites in speaking about powerlessness. They are able to pretend that, at the level of reality, they too are powerless, they too are bound. This time not by ropes that cut and produce the anagrammatical scream in response to violence, but instead bound by love.

This ideological enjoyment is foreclosed to the subject denied personhood, treated as an object not only within philosophy but within the social ontology of white supremacy that produces that philosophy. Thus the captured Black body no longer retains sexual difference according to Spillers while at the same time sensuously being experienced by the captor without recourse to queer positivity. Like OOO's objects these bodies are reduced to flesh (that is without organization or social construction) and so come to manifest being itself. Irreducibility then is not simply a theoretical good, as presented in OOO. Instead, when the object is Black flesh, such irreducibility is a product of the violence done through capture and denial of a subject position.<sup>38</sup> What we find here is a perverse reversal of Harman's statement quoted above regarding the "quality of blackness" in *The Quadruple Object*. For the pure being of Blackness is only able to be represented

---

<sup>37</sup> For an investigation of how this schema shapes subjects after the end of slavery see Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies* in addition to Weheliye.

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that the essay by Levi Bryant entitled "Black" acknowledges the existence of race, as do some of the other essays in *Prismatic Ecology*, but *merely* makes mention. Problems that manifest when one turns and thinks under the problematic of race are not addressed and one is left with the sense that race is only mentioned to address any questions about why race isn't mentioned. A defensive reaction against what is perceived to be political correctness gone mad, rather than a real problem that requires time and energy to think through. But, to call on a phrase of Bryant's, on the basis of the lack of serious analysis race isn't taken to constitute a difference that makes a difference. Thus when he discusses "Black bodies" they are simply a metaphorical name for all bodies that are autonomous from their relations. See Byrant, "Black," 304-05.

through its aestheticization. As Weheliye notes in his exposition of Spillers, the Blackness produced by the capture and enslavements of Africans is beyond representation except as sexuality or anagrammatical noise.<sup>39</sup> These representations from which the real object of Blackness withdraws is what OOO would locate as a sensual quality. “Powerlessness” should be read through the reality of pornotroping and doing so surfaces that the withdrawal from relations lauded within OOO in a simplistically positive way hides an underlying violence. This should be subjected to a certain pessimism.

Other critics of OOO have noted its fittingness with ideologies that emerge and support neoliberal capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Such criticisms have been dismissed on social media and blogs by proponents of OOO as a thinly veiled moralism that attempts to conflate ontology with politics and vice versa. Yet, in more developed publications, the accusation that OOO contains a certain liberal bourgeois orientation appears to be borne out. For example, in the first developed engagement with hard political problems, Harman devotes most of his time to an investigation of The Dutch East India Company that is often gleeful and struck by awe as if it were possible to be so ignorant of colonialism today (a word that does not even merit a token mention in the book).<sup>41</sup> Theorists like Spillers are part of a tradition that argues for a deeper antagonism underlying and sustaining other antagonisms like those of gender, class, and sexuality. That is the antagonism of anti-Black racism. And so I end by putting forth the charge that part of the underlying weakness of OOO is the way it leaves this founding antagonism unthought. Such a charge is not a simple moralism. If I am correct in the charge then it means that OOO’s value for the environmental humanities is limited by the way in which it allows us to continue our analytical work in ways that are unable

---

<sup>39</sup> Weheliye, pp. 91-96. Via Hartman’s deep analysis, he points to the scream of Aunt Hester in *The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*.

<sup>40</sup> See Galloway, “The Poverty of Philosophy,” 347-366. For criticisms from the post-Kantian and Marxist traditions, and the reading of these traditions within OOO, see Cole, “The Call of Things,” 106-118 and the very acerbic Brown, “The Nadir of OOO,” 62-71. Brown’s review is particularly frank in dealing with the inconsistencies in Morton’s work. An aspect of Morton’s style that is also, unfortunately, on full display in *Hyperobjects*.

<sup>41</sup> Harman, *Immaterialism*, 35-125.

to face how ecological thinking is predicated upon a certain anti-Black violence as the binding together of a colonial episteme. It collapses all human beings under the narrative of the anthropocene, without noting that it is indeed “some humans” who bear the real responsibility for climate change.<sup>42</sup> In short, it means that any attempt to construct a grammar of ecological suffering will be forged upon an unacknowledged anagrammatical suffering. If the environmental humanities are to live up to their radical promises then this is where I believe we must turn, not simply to the aesthetics of the “dark” (as in Morton’s most recent *Dark Ecology*) without questioning how such colorist aesthetics functions within a racial episteme that determines even our most radical ecological thinking.

Anthony Paul Smith is Assistant Professor of Philosophical Theology in La Salle University’s Department of Religion and Theology in Philadelphia. He is the author of *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2013), *François Laruelle’s Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), and *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Polity, 2016). In addition to a number of translations he is the series co-editor with Rick Elmore of the Ecotones: Ecology and Theory series. His current research projects include a critical inquiry into forms of theodicy within European philosophy.

## **Bibliography**

Allewaert, Monique. *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Anker, Peder. *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

---

<sup>42</sup> This is the phrase of Malm and Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind?”. I extend my gratitude to Thomas Lynch for pointing out this argument to me in a recent conference paper, though it can be found in a number of postcolonial sources including Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”.

Bauman, Whitney. *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics: From Creatio Ex Nihilo to Terra Nullus*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Brown, Nathan. "The Nadir of *OOO*: From Graham Harman's *Tool-Being* to Timothy Morton's *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*." *Parrhesia* 17 (2013): 62-71.  
[https://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia17/parrhesia17\\_brown.pdf](https://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia17/parrhesia17_brown.pdf)

Bryant, Levi R. "Black." In *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*. Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 290-310. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses" in *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197-222.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Introduction: Ecology's Rainbow." In *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*. Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, xv-xxxv. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Cole, Andrew. "The Call of Things: A Critique of Object-Oriented Ontologies" in *Minnesota Review* 80 (2013): 106-118.

Cronin, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Galloway, Alexander. "The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism" in *Critical Inquiry* 39.2 (Winter 2013): 347-366.

Golley, Frank Benjamin. *A History of the Ecosystem Concept in Ecology: More Than the Sum of the Parts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

Harman, Graham. *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2016.

Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Hants: Zero Books, 2011.

Harman, Graham. "I am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must Be Destroyed" in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (October 2010): pp. 772-790.

Hartman, Saidiya V. "The Position of the Unthought", interview with Frank B. Wilderson III in *Qui Parle* 13.2 (Spring/Summer 2003): pp. 183-201.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Lynch, Thomas. "Climate Change and Apocalypticism: A Hope Indistinguishable from Nihilism." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, GA, November 2015.  
<https://itself.wordpress.com/2015/11/27/climate-change-and-apocalypticism-a-hope-indistinguishable-from-nihilism>

Malm, Andreas and Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," in *The Anthropocene Review* 1 (2014): 63–64.

Nicola Masciandaro (ed). *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*.  
<http://www.radicalmatters.com/metasound/pdf/Hideous.Gnosis.Black.Metal.Theory.Symposium.I.pdf>

Mbembe, Achille. *Critique de la raison nègre*. Paris: La Découverte, 2013.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Morton, Timothy. "Queer Ecology" in *PMLA* 125.2 (March 2010): 273-282.

Radkau, Joachim. *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Rosenberg, Jordana. "The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present" in *Theory & Event* 17.2. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/546470>.

Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism" in *Intensions* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 1-47. [www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jaredsextonarticle.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jaredsextonarticle.pdf).

Sexton, Jared. "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" in *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 29 (2016). <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/sexton.html>>.

Sharpe, Christina. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Smith, Anthony Paul. *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought*. New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2013.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer, 1987): 64-81.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

Wilderson, Frank B. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Woodard, Ben. "Ultraviolet." In *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*. Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 252-269. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.