

Objects as Temporary Autonomous Zones

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The world is teeming. Anything can happen.

John Cage, "Silence"

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Autonomy means that although something is part of something else, or related to it in some way, it has its own "law" or "tendency" (Greek, *nomos*). In their book on life sciences, Medawar and Medawar state, "Organs and tissues...are composed of cells which...have a high measure of autonomy."¹ Autonomy also has ethical and political valences. De Grazia writes, "In Kant's enormously influential moral philosophy, *autonomy*, or freedom from the causal determinism of nature, became prominent in justifying the human use of animals."² One of the oldest uses of autonomy in English is a description of the French civil war from the late sixteenth century: "Others of the...rebellion entred in counsell, whether they ought to admit the King vpon reasonable conditions, specially hauing their autonomy."³

Life, and in particular human life, and in particular human politics, is well served by the usages of autonomy. What about the rest of reality, however? Should it be thought of, if it's even considered real and mind-independent, as pure stuff for the manipulation or decorative tastes of truly autonomous beings? We tend to think of things such as paperweights and iPhones as mere tools of human design and human use. To use them is to cause them to exist as fully and properly as they can. But according to Martin Heidegger, when a tool such as a paperweight is used, it disappears, or withdraws (*Entzug*). We are preoccupied with copying the page that the paperweight is holding down. We are concerned with an essay deadline, and the paperweight simply disappears into this general project. If the paperweight slips, or if the iPhone freezes, we might notice it. All of a sudden it becomes *vorhanden* (present-at-hand) rather than *zuhanden* (ready-to-hand).⁴

Yet Heidegger is unable to draw a meaningful distinction between what happens to a paperweight when it slips from the book I'm copying from and what happens to the paperweight when it presses on the still resilient pages of the thick paperback itself. Further still and related to this point, even when I am using the paperweight as part of some general task, I am not using the entirety of the paperweight as such. My project itself selects a thin slice of paperweight-being for the purposes of holding down a book. Even when it is *Zuhanden* the paperweight is withdrawn. Graham Harman is the architect of this way of thinking.⁵ Harman discovered a gigantic coral reef of withdrawn entities beneath the Heideggerian submarine of *Da-sein*, which itself is operating at an ontological depth way below the choppy surface of philosophy, beset by the winds of epistemology, and infested with the sharks of materialism, idealism, empiricism and most of the other isms that have defined what is and what isn't for the last several hundred years.

¹ P. B. Medawar and J. S. Medawar, *The Life Science: Current Ideas in Biology* (London: Wildwood House, 1977), 8.

² David DeGrazia, *Animal Rights: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

³ Antony Colynet, *A True History of the Civil Warres in France* (London, 1591), 480.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996) 62–71.

⁵ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2002).

At a moment when the term ontology was left alone like a piece of well chewed old chewing gum that no one wants to have anything to do with, object-oriented ontology (OOO) has put it back on the table. The coral reef isn't going anywhere and once you have discovered it, you can't un-discover it. And it seems to be teeming with strange facts. The first fact is that the entities in the reef—we call them “objects” somewhat provocatively—constitute all there is: from doughnuts to dogfish to the Dog Star to Dobermans to Snoop Dogg. People, plastic clothes pegs, piranhas and particles are all objects. And they are all pretty much the same, at this depth. There is not much of a distinction between life and non-life (as there isn't in contemporary life science). And there is not much of a distinction between intelligence and non-intelligence (as there is in contemporary artificial intelligence theory). A lot of these distinctions are made by humans, for humans (anthropocentrism). And the concept *autonomy* has come into play in policing such distinctions. In this essay I shall try to liberate autonomy for the sake of nonhumans. I shall do so by parsing carefully the title, which is taken from Hakim Bey's work *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*.⁶ First we shall explore the term *autonomous*. Then we shall explore what the full meaning of zone is. Finally, we shall investigate what *temporary* means. Each of these terms is of great value.

An object withdraws from access. This means that its very own parts can't access it. Since an object's parts can't fully express the object, the object is not reducible to its parts. OOO is anti-reductionist. But OOO is also anti-holist. An object can't be reduced to its “whole” either, “reduced upwards” as it were. The whole is not greater than the sum of its parts. So we have a strange irreductionist situation in which an object is reducible neither to its parts nor to its whole. A coral reef is made of coral, fish, seaweed, plankton and so on. But one of these things on its own doesn't embody part of a reef. Yet the reef just is an assemblage of these particular parts. You can't find a coral reef in a parking lot. In this way, the vibrant realness of a reef is kept safe both from its parts and from its whole. Moreover, the reef is safe from being mistaken for a parking lot. Objects can't be reduced to tiny Lego bricks such as atoms that can be reused in other things. Nor can be reduced upwards into instantiations of a global process. A coral reef is an expression of the biosphere or of evolution, yes; but so is this sentence, and we ought to be able to distinguish between coral reefs and sentences in English.

The preceding facts go under the heading of *undermining*. Any attempt to undermine an object—in thought, or with a gun, or with heat, or with the ravages of time or global warming—will not get at the withdrawn essence of the object. By essence is meant something very different from *essentialism*. This is because essentialism depends upon some aspect of an object that OOO holds to be a mere appearance of that object, an appearance-for some object. This reduction to appearance holds even if that object for which the appearance occurs is the object itself! Even a coral reef can't grasp its essential coral reefness. In essentialism, a superficial appearance is taken for the essence of a thing, or of things in general.

In thinking essentialism we may be able to discern another way of avoiding OOO. This is what Harman has christened *overmining*.⁷ The overminer decides that some things are more real than others: say for example human perception. Then the overminer decides that other things are only granted realness status by somehow coming into the purview of the more real entity. When I measure a photon, when I see a coral reef, it becomes what it is. But when I measure a photon, I never measure the actual photon. Indeed, since at the quantum scale to measure means “to hit with a photon or an electron beam” (or whatever), measurement, perception (*aisthesis*), and doing become the same. What I “see” are deflections, tracks in a diffusion cloud chamber or interference patterns. Far from underwriting a world of pure illusion where the mind is king, quantum theory is one of the very first truly rigorous realisms, thinking its objects as irreducibly resistant to full comprehension, by anything.⁸

So far we have made objects safe from being swallowed up by larger objects and broken down into smaller objects—*undermining*. And so far we have made objects safe from being mere projections or reflections of some supervenient entity—*overmining*. That's quite a degree of autonomy. Everything in the coral reef, from the fish to a single coral lifeform to a tiny plankton, is autonomous. But so is the coral reef itself. So are the heads of the coral, a community of tiny polyps. So is each individual head. Each object is like one of Leibniz's monads, in that each one contains a potentially *infinite* regress of other objects; and around each object, there is a potentially *infinite* progress of objects, as numerous multiverse theories are now also arguing. But the infinity,

⁶ Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991) <http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html>.

⁷ Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Ripley: Zero Books, 2011), 7–18.

⁸ This is not the place to get into an argument about quantum theory, but I have argued that quanta also do not endorse a world that I can't speak about because it is only real when measured. This world is that of the reigning Standard Model proposed by Niels Bohr and challenged by De Broglie and Bohm (and now the cosmologist Valentini, among others). See Timothy Morton, “Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology,” *Qui Parle* 19.2 (Spring–Summer, 2011), 163–190.

the uncountability, is more radical than Leibniz, since there is nothing stopping a group of objects from being an object, just as a coral reef is something like a society of corals. Each object is “a little world made cunningly” (John Donne).⁹

We are indeed approaching something like the political valance of autonomy. The existence of an object is irreducibly a matter of coexistence. Objects contain other objects, and are contained “in” other objects. Let us, however, explore further the ramifications of the autonomy of objects. We will see that this mereological approach (based on the study of parts) only gets at part of the astonishing autonomy of things. Yet there are some more things to be said about mereology before we move on. Consider the fact that since objects can’t be undermined or overmined, it means that there is strictly *no bottom object*. There is no object to which all other objects can be reduced, so that we can say everything we want to say about them, hypothetically at least, based on the behavior of the bottom object. The idea that we could is roughly E.O Wilson’s theory of *consilience*.¹⁰ Likewise, there is no object from which all things can be produced, no *top object*. Objects are not emanations from some primordial One or from a prime mover. There might be a god, or gods. Suppose there were. In an OOO universe even a god would not know the essential ins and outs of a piece of coral. Unlike even some forms of atheism, the existence of god (or nonexistence) doesn’t matter very much for OOO. If you really want to be an atheist, you might consider giving OOO a spin.

If there is no top object and no bottom object, neither is there a *middle object*. That is, there is no such thing as a space, or time, “in” which objects float. There is no environment distinct from objects. There is no Nature (I capitalize the word to reinforce a sense of its deceptive artificiality). There is no world, if by world we mean a kind of “rope” that connects things together.¹¹ All such connections must be emergent properties of objects themselves. And this of course is well in line with post-Einsteinian physics, in which spacetime just is the product of objects, and which may even be an emergent property of a certain scale of object larger than 10^{-17} cm).¹² Objects don’t sit in a box of space or time. It’s the other way around: space and time emanate from objects.

How does this happen? OOO tries to produce an explanation from objects themselves. Indeed, the ideal situation would be to rely on just one single object. Otherwise we are stuck with a reality in which objects require other entities to function, which would result in some kind of undermining or overmining. We shall see that we have all the fuel we need “inside” one object to have time and space, and even causality. We shall discover that rather than being some kind of machinery or operating system that underlies objects, causality itself is a phenomenon that floats ontologically “in front of” them. In so doing, we will move from the notion of autonomy and begin approaching a full exploration of the notion of *zone*, which was promised at the outset of this essay.

Since an object is withdrawn, even “from itself,” it is a self-contradictory being. It is itself and not-itself, or in a slightly more expanded version, there is a *rift between essence and appearance* within an object (as well as “between” them). This rift can’t be the same as the clichéd split between *substance* and *accidents*, which is the default ontology. On this view, things are like somewhat boring cupcakes with somewhat less boring sugar sprinkles on them of different colors and shapes. But on the OOO view, what is called *substance* is just another limited slice of an object, a way of apprehending something that is ontologically fathoms deeper. What is called *substance* and what is called *accidence* are just on the side of what this essay calls appearance.

The rift (Greek, *chorismos*) between essence and appearance means that an object presents us with something like what in logic is known as the Liar: some version of the sentence “This sentence is false.” The sentence is true, which means that it is a lie, which means that it is false. Or the sentence is false, which means that it is telling the truth, which means that it is true. Now logic since Aristotle has tried desperately to quarantine such beasts in small backwaters and side streets so that they don’t act too provocatively.¹³ But if OOO holds, then at least one very significant thing in the universe is both itself and not-itself: the object. An object is $p \wedge \neg p$. To cope with this fact, we shall need some kind of paraconsistent or even fully *dialetheic* logic, one that is not allergic to dialetheias (double-truthed things).

⁹ John Donne, Holy Sonnets 15, in *The Major Works: Including Songs and Sonnets and Sermons*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* (Washington: Regnery, 1968), 243.

¹² Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory* (London: Penguin, 2006); Petr Horava, “Quantum Gravity at a Lifshitz Point,” arXiv:0901.3775v2 [hep-th].

¹³ Graham Priest, *In Contradiction* (Oxford University Press, 2006), passim: the most notable recent quarantine officers have been Tarski, Russell, and Frege.

Yet if we accept that objects are dialetheic, $p \wedge \neg p$, we can derive all kinds of things easily from objects. Consider the fact of motion. If objects only occupy one location “in” space at any “one” time, then Zeno’s paradoxes will apply to trying to think how an object moves. Yet motion seems like a basic, simple fact of our world. Either everything is just an illusion and nothing really moves at all (Parmenides). Or objects are here and not-here “at the same time.”¹⁴ This latter possibility provides the basic setup for all the motion we could wish for. Objects are not “in” time and space. Rather, they “time” (a verb) and “space.” They produce time and space. It would be better to think these verbs as intransitive rather than transitive, in the manner of *dance* or *revolt*. They emanate from objects, yet they are not the object. “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (Yeats).¹⁵ The point being, that for there to be a question, there must be a distinction—or there must not be ($p \wedge \neg p$).¹⁶ It becomes impossible to tell: “What constitutes pretense is that, in the end, you don’t know whether it’s pretense or not.”¹⁷

In this notion of the emergence of time and space from an object we can begin to understand the term *zone*. Zone can mean *belt*, something that winds around something else. We talk of temperate zones and war zones. A zone is a place where a certain action is taking place: the zone winds around, it radiates heat, bullets fly, armies are defeated. To speak of an *autonomous zone* is to speak of a place that a certain political act has carved out of some other entity. Cynically, Tibet is called TAR, the Tibetan Autonomous *Region*, for this very reason. In this phrase, Region tries to emulate zone: it sounds as if the place has its own rules, but of course, it is very much under the control of China.

What action is taking place? “[N]ot something that just is what it is, here and now, without mystery, but something like a quest...a tone on its way calling forth echoes and responses...water seeking its liquidity in the sunlight rippling across the cypresses in the back of the garden.”¹⁸ If as suggested earlier there is no functional difference between substance and accident; if there is no difference between perceiving and doing; if there is no real difference between sentience and non-sentience—then causality itself is a strange, ultimately nonlocal aesthetic phenomenon. A phenomenon, moreover, that emanates from objects themselves, wavering in front of them like the astonishingly beautiful real illusion conjured in this quotation of Alphonso Lingis. Lingis’s sentence does what it says, casting a compelling, mysterious spell, the spell of causality, like a demonic force field. A real illusion: if we knew it was an illusion, if it were just an illusion, it would cease to waver. It would not be an illusion at all. We would be in the real of noncontradiction. Since it is like an illusion, we can never be sure: “What constitutes pretense...” A *zone* is what Lingis calls a *level*. A zone is not entirely a matter of “free will”: this concept has already beaten down most objects into abject submission. Objects are far more threateningly autonomous, and sensually autonomous, than the Kantian version of autonomy cited in the first paragraph of this essay. A zone is not studiously decided upon by an earnest committee before it goes into action. One of its predominant features is that *it is already happening*. We find ourselves in it, all of a sudden, in the late afternoon as the shadows lengthen around a city square, giving rise to an uncanny sensation of having been here before.

Objects emit zones. Wherever I find myself a zone is already happening, an autonomous zone. It is the nonautonomous zones that are impositions on what is already the case. Or rather, these zones are autonomous zones that exclude and police. They are brittle. Every object is autonomous, but some objects try to maintain themselves through rigidity and brittleness, like (and such as) a police state. Paradoxically, the more rigidly one tries to exclude contradiction, the more virulent become the dialetheias that are possible. I can get around “This sentence is false” by imagining that there are metalanguages that explain what counts as a sentence. Then I can decide that this isn’t a real sentence. This is basically Alfred Tarski’s strategy, since he invented the notion of metalanguage specifically to cope with dialetheias.¹⁹ For example we might claim that sentences such as “This sentence is false” are neither true nor false. But then you can imagine a strengthened version of the Liar such as: “This sentence is not true”; or “This sentence is neither true nor false.” And we can go on adding to the strengthened Liar if the counter-attack tries to build immunity by specifying some fourth thing that a sentence can be besides true, false, and neither true nor false: “This

¹⁴ Priest, *In Contradiction*, 172–181.

¹⁵ William Butler Yeats, “Among School Children,” *Collected Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996).

¹⁶ Paul de Man, “Semiotics and Rhetoric,” *Diacritics* 3.3 (Autumn, 1973), 27–33 (30).

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre III: Les psychoses* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1981), 48. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 206.

¹⁸ Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 29.

¹⁹ Priest, *In Contradiction*, 9–27.

sentence is false, or neither true nor false, or the fourth thing.” And so on.²⁰

It seems as if language becomes more brittle the more it tries to police the Liars of this world. Why? I believe that this increasing brittleness is a symptom of a deep fact about reality. What is this deep fact? Simply that there are objects, that these objects are withdrawn, and that they are walking contradictions. This means indeed that (as Lacan put it) “there is no metalanguage,” since a metalanguage would function as a “middle object” that gave coherency and evenness to the others.²¹ Since there is no metalanguage, there is no rising above the disturbing illusory play of causality. This may even have political implications: no global critique is therefore possible, and attempts to smooth out or totalize are doomed to fail.

To think the zone is to think the notion of *temporary*, which we shall now begin to discuss in greater detail. The zone is not in time: rather it “times.” But because a zone is an emanation of an object, it is based on a wavering fragility, since objects are $p \wedge \neg p$. When an object is born, that means that it has broken free of some other object. An object can be born because it and other objects are fragile. If not, no movement would be possible. Objects contain the seeds of their own destruction, a dialethic sentence that says something like “This sentence cannot prove.”

Kurt Gödel argues that every true system of propositions contains at least one sentence that the system cannot be proved. In order to be true, the system must have a minimum incoherence. To be real, it has to be fragile. Imagine a record player. Now imagine a record called *I Cannot Be Played on This Record Player*. When you play it on this record player, it produces sympathetic vibrations that cause the record player to shudder apart. No matter how many defense mechanisms you build in, there will always be the possibility of at least one record that destroys the record player.²² That is what being physical is. An object is inherently fragile because it is both itself and not-itself. When the rift between appearance and essence collapses, that is called destruction, ending, death.

When an object breaks, several new objects are born. An opera singer sings a loud note in tune with the resonant frequency of a wine glass. (See the movie included here.) The singing is a zone, an autonomous level of intensity, opening a rift between appearance and essence. The glass ripples—for a moment it is nakedly a glass and a not-glass—almost as if it were having an orgasm, a little death. It is caught in the rift of the singing. Then its structure can’t handle the coherence of the sound waves, and it breaks. It is incoherence and inconsistency that is the mark of existence, not consistency and noncontradiction. When things break or die, they become coherent. Essence disappears into appearance. I become the memories of friends. A glass becomes a dancing wave. Instantly, there are glass fragments, new temporary autonomous zones. The fragments have broken free from the glass. They are no longer its parts, but emanate their own time and space, becoming perhaps accidental weapons as they bury themselves in my flesh.

Thus Hakim Bey’s instructions on creating temporary autonomous zones oscillate disturbingly between performance art and politics, circus clowning and revolution. To play with the aesthetic is to play with causality, to rip from the sensual ether emanating from things new regions, new zones. Anarchist politics is the creation of fresh objects in a reality without a top or a bottom object, or for that matter a middle object:

Everything in nature is perfectly real including consciousness, there’s absolutely nothing to worry about. Not only have the chains of the Law been broken, they never existed; demons never guarded the stars, the Empire never got started, Eros never grew a beard.

...

There is no becoming, no revolution, no struggle, no path; already you’re the monarch of your own skin—your inviolable freedom waits to be completed only by the love of other monarchs: a politics of dream, urgent as the blueness of sky.²³

Bey imagines that this is because chaos is a primordial “undifferentiated oneness-of-being.” A Parmenides

²⁰ See Graham Priest and Francesco Berto, “Dialetheism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta.

²¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 311.

²² The analogy can be found at length in Douglas Hofstadter, “Contra-crostipunctus,” *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 75–81.

²³ Bey, “Chaos: The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchism,” *Temporary Autonomous Zone*.

or a Spinoza or a Laruelle would read this a certain way. Individual objects, or decisions to talk about this rather than that, are just maggot-like things crawling around on the surface of the giant cheese of oneness.²⁴ Yet he also describes chaos as “Primordial uncarved block, sole worshipful monster, inert & spontaneous, more ultraviolet than any mythology.” This image is of an inconsistent object, not of an undifferentiated field. An object, indeed, that can be distinguished from other things. If not, then the first part of *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* text, subtitled “The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchism,” is a kind of onto-theology. Onto-theology proclaims that some things are more real than others. Bey, however, is writing poetically, and thus ambiguously. We are at liberty to read “undifferentiated oneness-of-being” as something like the irreducibility of a thing to its parts and so forth (undermining and overmining). This certainly seems closer to the language in the following paragraph: “There is no becoming ... already you’re the monarch of your own skin.”²⁵

On this view, there is no difference between art and politics: “When ugliness, poor design & stupid waste are forced upon you, turn Luddite, throw your shoe in the works, retaliate.” Since Romanticism this has been the war cry of the vanguard artist.²⁶ To say to is to fall prey to the tired axioms of the avant-garde, and we think we know how the game goes. But OOO is not simply a way to advocate “new and improved” versions of this shock-the-bourgeoisie boredom. Bey is certainly full enough of *that*. Rather, since causality as such is aesthetic, and since nonhumans are not that different from humans, the new approach would be to form aesthetic-causal alliances with nonhumans. These alliances would have to resist becoming brittle, whether that brittleness is right wing (authoritarianism) or left wing (the endless maze of critique). No “ism,” especially not the ultimate forms, nihilism and cynicism, is in any sense effective at this point. All forms of brittleness are based on the mistaken assumption that there is a metalanguage and that therefore “Anything you can do, I can do meta.”

I will not be listing any approaches here, as Bey does. Such lists and manifestos belong to the vanguardism that no longer works. Why? Not because of some marvelous revolution in human consciousness, but because nonhumans have so successfully impinged upon human social, psychic and aesthetic space. It is the time after the end of the world. That happened in 1945, when a thin layer of radioactive materials was deposited in Earth’s crust. Geology now calls it this era the *Anthropocene*. Ironically, this period, named after humans, is the moment at which even the most thick headed of us make decisive contact with nonhumans, from mercury in our blood to manta rays to magnesium.

Richard Dawkins, Pat Robertson and Lady Gaga all have to deal with global warming and mass extinction, somehow. We now live in an *Age of Asymmetry* marked by a skewed, spiraling relationship between vast knowledge and vast nonhuman things—both become vaster and vaster because of one another and for the same reasons.²⁷ This means that coming up with the perfect attitude or the perfect aesthetic prescription just won’t work any more. Even the most hardened anthropocentrist now has to pay through the nose for basic food supplies, and has to use more sunscreen. Whether he knows it or acknowledges it, he is already acting with regard towards nonhumans.

There is nothing special to think, no special critique that will get rid of the stains of coexistence. The problem won’t fit into the well-established modern boxes, which is why the “mystical,” “spiritual” quality of Bey’s prose is welcome. Of course, when I put it this way, you may immediately close up and decide that I am talking about perfect attitudes after all, or something outside of politics, or other ways that the radical left marshals to police its thinking of the nonhuman. Because that is what is really at stake in all this: the nonhuman in its coexistence with the human—bosons, gods, clouds, spirits, lifeforms, experiences, the sunlight rippling across the cypresses. Bey begins to get at this in a Latour litany in the second part of *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, “The Assassins”:

Pomegranate, mulberry, persimmon, the erotic melancholy of cypresses, membrane-pink shirazi roses, braziers of meccan aloes & benzoin, stiff shafts of ottoman tulips, carpets spread like make-believe gardens on actual lawns—a pavilion set with a mosaic of calligrammes—a willow, a stream with

²⁴ This is closest to the language of François Laruelle in *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2011) 179.

²⁵ Bey, “Chaos: The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchism,” *Temporary Autonomous Zone*.

²⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²⁷ For further discussion see Timothy Morton, “From Modernity to the Anthropocene: Ecology and Art in the Age of Asymmetry,” *The International Social Science Journal* 209 (forthcoming).

watercress—a fountain crystallized underneath with geometry—the metaphysical scandal of bathing odalisques, of wet brown cupbearers hide-&-seeking in the foliage—“water, greenery, beautiful faces.”²⁸

This will be conveniently dismissed as orientalism. If we’re never allowed to escape the crumbling prison of modernity for fear of imperialism there is truly no hope. In a similar way, the fear of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism is very often staged from a place *that just is anthropocentrism*.²⁹ Critique turns into *ressentiment*.

An object radiates a zone that is aesthetic and therefore causal. Because objects “time” they are temporary. Not because they exist “in” time that eventually gets the better of them. Their very existence implies the possibility of their non-existence. Since objects are not consistent, they can cease to exist. But nothing, no one, will ever be able to insert a blade between appearance and existence, even though there is a rift there. Now that’s what I call autonomy.

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²⁸ Bey, “The Assassins,” *Temporary Autonomous Zone*.

²⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 75–76.