

## Speculative Realism and Other Heresies

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### 1. Speculative Realism

Speculative realism is the title of a workshop held on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 at the Goldsmiths University in London. Four participants were on the program of that unforgettable event: Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux. All the debate was recorded and transcribed in a special issue of *Collapse*, the journal that has been supporting Speculative Realism since the beginning and that is still following its developments. This is a quote from the introduction by the editor Robin Mackay:

Rather than announcing the advent of a new theoretical ‘doctrine’ or ‘school’, the event conjoined four ambitious philosophical projects – all of which boldly problematise the subjectivistic and anthropocentric foundations of much of “continental philosophy” while differing significantly in their respective strategies for superseding them. It is precisely this uniqueness of each participant that allowed a fruitful discussion to emerge. Alongside the articulation of various challenges to certain idealistic premises, a determination of the obstacles that any contemporary realism must surmount was equally in effect. Accordingly, some of the key issues under scrutiny included the status of science and epistemology in contemporary philosophy, the ontologi-

cal constitution of thought, and the nature of subject-independent objects.<sup>1</sup>

First of all we have to notice that Speculative Realism is not a doctrine, nor a school, nor a movement, but an “umbrella term”<sup>2</sup> gathering together heterogeneous thinkers who share nothing but a common enemy: correlationism. This name was given by Meillassoux to indicate every philosophy that since Kant has considered that knowledge must be entangled within the relation between human subject and object: the first organizes the given impressions in order to represent the latter. For Correlationism we cannot know things as they are in themselves, in their autonomous being, but we have to limit knowledge to things as they are for us: we cannot access reality beyond our experience of it. In other words, thanks to a priori structures, it is possible to organize sense data in coherent representations, but it is not possible to know if the objects determining our impression are actually like they are given to us. After Kant, philosophy stopped questioning about the metaphysical reason for the adequacy of knowledge and started to be interested in finding the best conventional rules for representing phenomena. Thus the only feature shared by Brassier, Grant,

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<sup>1</sup> Brassier, Grant, Harman, Meillassoux, “Speculative Realism”, in *Collapse III: Unknown Deleuze*, Robin Mackay editor, Urbanomic, London 2007, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Harman used this expression in the introduction of *Speculative Turn* (Briant, Harman, Srnicek editors, Re.Press, Victoria 2011).

Harman and Meillassoux's speculation is the effort to overcome correlationism in order to access the subject independent reality of things in themselves, beyond representation, beyond the way they are given within the relation with human subjects. This does not mean to go back to a pre-critical metaphysical thinking, rather the project aims to develop a new metaphysics embracing the rational anti-dogmatic achievements of criticism. In this paper I will outline the different strategies proposed by the Goldsmiths' workshop's participants, then I will offer an overview of the more recent developments of Speculative realism by introducing more recent tendencies like *Object Oriented Ontology* and *Accelerationism*.

## 2. Quentin Meillassoux: After Finitude

Quentin Meillassoux's *Après la finitude*, translated in English by Ray Brassier as *After finitude*<sup>3</sup> provoked the wave of anti-correlationist awareness that brought about the meeting of the Goldsmiths. The book presents a brilliant rationalistic demonstration of the absolute contingency of reality which is attained by overcoming correlationism from the inside. Contingency is assumed to be an absolute feature of any possible fact that can be affirmed independently of experience. Moreover, it al-

lows to dismiss the metaphysical belief in the necessity of this world's order and in God as the reason for the world being like this rather than otherwise. To reach this absolute and subject independent truth about any virtually possible fact, Meillassoux starts questioning correlationism and its anti-dogmatic achievements. Since correlationist philosophers have to admit that the correlation could be destroyed and that there is no way of demonstrating the necessity of a specific a priori organization, Meillassoux claims that the correlation must be assumed as contingent. This implies that it is not possible to prove the necessity of the causal connection that we apply to link the impressions in order to predict future effects. Thus, from a correlationist point of view, it is not possible to prove the necessity of natural laws, like Hume already knew. The question, then, becomes: why has nobody claimed that the laws are contingent, although nobody succeeded in demonstrating their necessity? It is because we experience the stability of the laws of physics, because we see that the same causes are regularly followed by the same effects. Accordingly, we have the tendency to believe that laws cannot change and that there is reason making them to be thus rather than otherwise. If laws were contingent, in fact, we would expect to see them change frequently, thus the evidence of their stability is assumed to prove their necessity and to support the idea of a transcendent reason for the order of the world. But, Meillassoux claims, there is a mistake in this reasoning which consists in thinking that contingent laws must change frequently. Refer-

<sup>3</sup> Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude. Essay on the necessity of contingency*, Continuum, London 2008.

ring to the set theory, in fact, he explains that the mistake derives from an erroneous application of the probability calculus to a non-totalizable set, like the set of all the imaginable mathematical functions describing possible laws of physics. Actually, we are allowed to apply probability only to totalizable sets, like the set of the six sides of a dice. If a dice fell always on the same of its six sides, we are driven to think that there is a trick, a reason for the same number to be drawn at every throw. But it is not possible to calculate the probability of something included in a non-totalizable set, like the set of the rationally acceptable physical laws: we should not be surprised if a hypothetical dice with a non-totalizable number of faces falls always on the same side. In this way, the observed stability of laws does not exclude their contingency: the fact that they do not change frequently does not imply their necessity. Thus Meillassoux can declare that, although we do not observe them changing, natural laws are contingent: the fact that we cannot prove their necessity is not due to the limitation of our understanding regarding the metaphysical reason for their stability, but to their absolute contingency, to the actual absence of a reason for them to be in a certain way or otherwise. Contingency being the only rational necessity that we must acknowledge to laws, we have to state that they can change at any time but also that they do not have to change. This means that we do not need a God to be the origin of the order of the world because the world we make experience of is just one of the virtually infinite possible that can be actualized in

an absolutely contingent way: everything can happen at any time, even nothing. Since the laws of this and all the other possible worlds can be exactly mathematically formalized, reality is absolutely contingent but totally rational. This implies that we can mathematically describe all the virtually possible facts even if nobody is there to perceive them.

### 3. Iain Hamilton Grant: Philosophy of Nature after Shelling

Iain Hamilton Grant's subject independent reality has almost nothing in common with Meillassoux's, as every speculative realist elaborated his anti-correlationist strategy from a very different starting point. Meillassoux's references are Descartes, Hume, Kant and Badiou, by contrast Grant's work is based on Shelling, Plato and Deleuze and it aims to create a new realist philosophy of nature inspired by Idealism. In *Philosophy of nature after Shelling*<sup>4</sup>, Schelling is presented as the philosopher who first understood nature as having its own history that extends far deeper into the past than was ever before acknowledged, while even now producing forms in excess of what human understanding might make of them. Dispensing with the sharp separation between organic and inorganic, Schelling unveiled in nature a material vitalism that rescues matter from the category

<sup>4</sup> I.H.Grant, *Philosophy of Nature after Shelling*, London: Continuum 2008.

of the inert and mechanical to which Kant and Fichte had relegated it. For Grant, Ideas pertain to nature and must be considered as actualities rather than mental subjective principles: they are the natural tendencies driving the flux of becoming whose thought and subject are nothing but products. Since there is only one process always becoming according to immanent nature's ideas, thinking must be acknowledged as a natural production taking part into the production. That is the reason why Deleuze is considered by Grant one of the few contemporary philosophers who developed Schelling's philosophy of nature. To explain natural production, Grant introduces a special sort of causality, that cannot be equated to a teleological one, nor to an efficient cause. The "becoming of being", in fact, is the becoming that being undergoes precisely because becoming is dependent on an end that it cannot attain, this end is the Idea, whose function is similar to that of the attractors of dynamical systems. Grant's philosophy of nature is neither "pulled" by ends nor "pushed" by beginnings, so that the becoming of being must be considered as the *being of becoming*. Grant's surprising move is that he not only pits Schelling against both Kant and Aristotle, but he does so in the name of Plato. His evidence is a commentary on Plato's *Ti-maeus* written by a very young Schelling. Central to the text is the idea that the world had not only primal matter at its base, but *matter in movement*, which indicates the existence of a *world soul*. Indeed, the entire earth can be understood as arising out of and through the force of its own inner magnetism. What Schelling offers, and what Grant devel-

ops, is not simply a speculative physics but a specifically *Platonic* physics that endeavors to understand that which is darkest and most obscure: matter itself as the last instance of the real. For Grant reality is nature as condition for production of everything, thought included, for this reason nature always exceeds our knowledge. The thinking subject is just a product of the nature and he is part of the process of becoming of everything, thus concepts are considered to be determined by nature's ideas rather than by subjective a-priori structures.

#### 4. Ray Brassier : Nihil Unbound

**T**his inversion of the position of the transcendental, that becomes the real's determinant for the concept, is shared by Ray Brassier's transcendental realism that aims to explain how concepts differentiate from the real and how it is possible to know the real despite its being the non-conceptualizable condition of conceptualization. In other words, the question is: how is it possible to think what cannot be an object of thought, the last instance of the real as non-objectifiable condition of objectification? How is it possible to think the immanent determinant of the correlation allowing the determination of objects in thought? As Brassier explains in *Nihil Unbound*,<sup>5</sup> the question can be answered only by a radicalization of nihil-

<sup>5</sup> R. Brassier, *Unbound. Enlightenment and Extinction*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2007.

ism, which to him is the highest point attained by the rationalistic project of Enlightenment.

Nihilism is not just a skeptical attitude toward values, but the idea that truth does not correspond to the meaning that humans pretend to find in the world. Nihilism leads to assume the indifference of the reality to any subjective need and pushes reason to follow its own interests. In another words, a continuation must be given to nihilism in order to accomplish the program of disenchantment which is the authentic rational aim accompanying the understanding of the absolute independency of the real from any relation to human subjects. That implies to reshape the image of man built by philosophy within the frame of a meaningful world. Thus, following Wilfrid Sellars, Brassier claims that philosophy should stop to contribute only to the construction of the manifest image of man to take into account the scientific image, where human cognition can be analyzed like an object independent of the pursuit of meaning.

Only this analysis would allow to understand how cognition actually works and how it is determined by the absolute indifference of the real. But what is the real as subject independent? To answer this question Brassier follows François Laruelle's *Non-philosophy* which defines the real as what is situated outside the circle of philosophical decision, that establishes the relation between subjective conditioning and conditioned objects. Thus, the real is the non-determined allowing every determination, the non-conceptualizable allowing any conceptualization. Since it is situated beyond the circle of determination, the real cannot be determined like a being by the

subject and it must be conceived as *being-nothing*. *Being-nothing*, as the last instance of the real, is the zero degree of being which does not correspond to a negative non-being opposed to a positive being, but it is the immanent condition of being from which any determined being differentiate, without the former differentiates from the latter in retour. It is what Laruelle calls "non-dialectical unilateral determination in the last instance". Then, thinking cannot objectify the real, so it cannot actually "know" it, but it can recognize that objects in thought are effectuated in the same way as objects differentiate from the real as being-nothing. In other words, thought effectuates the objectification of objects without differentiating from these objects, it is like the zero degree of objectification of objects in thought.

Therefore, it is not possible to represent the real by objectifying it, but it is possible to think according to the real: that means to imitate it in effectuating determinations without differentiating from said determinations; it means to be the immanent non-determined condition of determination. Thus, thinking can grasp the real only thinking according to it, recognizing itself essentially as being-nothing, as the zero degree of being. Thus, thinking according to the real consists in recognizing that the will to know is actually a will to nothing, the will of equating the real as being-nothing: what Freud called *Death drive*. That's why in *Nihil unbound*, Brassier claims that "Thinking has interests that do not coincide with those of the living, indeed they can

and have been pitted against the latter”<sup>6</sup> and that “Philosophers would do well to desist from issuing any further injunctions about the need to re-establish the meaningfulness of existence, the purposefulness of life, or mend the shattered concord between man and nature. Philosophy should be more than a sop to the pathetic twinge of human self-esteem”<sup>7</sup>. Because he states that traditional projections looking for a meaningful interpretation of the world should be dismissed as well as what Sellars defined “Folk Psychology”, Brassier is an allied of eliminativism, a reductionist position claiming that the manifest image of man can be explained analyzing the functioning of the brain and that many complex effects can be accounted for considering simpler and lower levels of material organization. In other words, cognition must be explained as determined by the real in a non-dialectical way as differentiating unilaterally from being-nothing.

### 5. Graham Harman : Guerrilla Metaphysics

Characterizing Brassier’s speculative strategy, eliminativism and reductionism are refused by Graham Harman, whose *Object Oriented Philosophy* (OOP) affirms that no entity can be explained by reducing it to its simplest parts because any object has a specific character

that can be understood only by considering it as a special whole, as a specific being. In Harman’s ontology, which is populated only by objects and where everything is an object, any object has the same rights as any other and the same degree of reality: an atom, a cat, a stone, a mailbox, a tree, Santa Claus, a cloud, 10 Euros and Mona Lisa. In Harman’s ontology all the objects, inorganic, organic, big, small, visible, invisible, simple, composed, concrete, abstract, living or dead, are on an equal footing. Not only does Harman refuse the scientific idea that objects can be reduced to the simpler objects composing them, like it happens in physics, but he also refuses to consider objects as they appear to human subjects, or as they are given within their relation to human subjects, like it happens in phenomenology. Realism, here, means to understand the specific way of being of any object independently from its composition and from any relation that can be established with human subjects and any other non-human object. From this point of view, Harman considers that the first object oriented philosopher was Heidegger, as it would be clear from his interpretation of the famous tool analysis of *Being and Time*. Despite the fact that the German philosopher was mostly interested in the *Dasein*’s existential condition, he stated that objects are different from the relations they can enter in: objects are in themselves what withdraw from all relations. This splits between the object and its relations, or between the object as it appears in any interaction (with humans and non humans) and the object as it is in its secret inaccessible inti-

<sup>6</sup> Brassier, *op. cit.*, p. XI.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

macy, is the first fundamental trait of the actual way of being of objects<sup>8</sup>. But for Harman there is another fundamental rift separating the object as a unity, as an intentional object in Husserl's sense, from the multiplicity of its traits and qualities. Because any object results divided between its public and private life and between its unity and multiplicity, Harman speaks of a quadruple philosophy, that has the merit of avoiding the dualistic partition of classical metaphysics. Traditionally, in fact, there is a separation between a world of transcendent models enjoying a full reality, and a world of appearances enjoying a lower degree of being. On the contrary, for Harman any object is as real as any other and the difference it is not between an authentic world and a simulacral one, but between any object and itself, between its public and its private life, between its multiplicity and its unity. This ontological frame given, what has to be explained is the way in which objects can interact despite the fact that they always withdraw from any relation. In other words the question is: how can objects touch without touching? *Guerrilla Metaphysics*<sup>9</sup> deals with this problem and with another not less difficult question: how can an object unify the multiplicity of its traits? The answer provided by Harman

to both the questions is "vicarious causation". This is a special cause that allows the communication between entities which are not directly communicating: it is a mediated causality that, like God in Occasionalism, makes two objects change together as one determined the change of the other without any actual interaction between them. "Vicarious causation" is the answer to both the questions because the way in which an object enters into relation with another is not basically different from the way in which an object relates to the multiplicity of its parts in order to unify them. If there is nothing but objects, then we must consider that the multiplicity of traits and qualities of an object are nothing but objects that are vicariously bounded together to make a new object, whose inaccessible core withdraws. Thus, vicarious causation explains how the four poles of an object can cross, it explains how an object enters into a relation with other objects, including the objects which are its parts. As a consequence, any object must be conceived as a multiplicity of objects vicariously bounded together to merge in a new object showing its own style or special character as a unity. Vicarious causation can be understood as the mediation allowing objects to fusion in a new object, but how does it happen? It happens within the phenomena that Harman calls "allure", when an object perceives another object not just as a variable surface of multiple traits and qualities, but as a unity possessing special notes: objects merge together by means of notes, interacting as sensuous intentional objects. It is just overcoming the disturbing noise of

<sup>8</sup> Harman deals with the issue concerning Heidegger's approach to objects in his doctoral dissertation published in 2002 as *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court)

<sup>9</sup> G. Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: phenomenology and the carpentry of things*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.

the multiplicity of traits, which are immediately perceived when an object encounters another object, that the two can access their unified being and merge together. This the way in which two object can vicariously interact without touching: their cores withdraw but their notes allow them to touch without touching. Anyway, since vicarious causation allows an object to bound other objects as its parts, we must conclude that objects always communicate on the interior of another object, even when we do not consider the product. For example, when I perceive an object, I encounter immediately the noise of the multiplicity of its surface qualities, but when allure happens, then I perceive the object as a special unity, as an intentional or sensuous object and I recognize it as a unity whose intimacy withdraws. Then, if I start thinking of what happened I realize that the object and me have entered into a relation producing another object: perception. Thus we can say that any object interacts with any other object inside a third object. In fact, as there is nothing but objects, relations must be considered objects too: the relation of two sensuous objects produces a third object, thus objects always interact inside other objects. Harman's reality is made of objects which are always inside other objects, and, even if the interior of an object always withdraws from any relation, we are always inside objects. As a consequence, in Harman's reality there is no transcendence but a certain metaphysics is required to explain the vicarious causation allowing objects to touch without touching. It is also clear that from Harman's stand-

point human access to objects does not enjoy any privilege since vicarious causation intervenes mediating between every object.

## 6. Other realisms: Object Oriented Ontology

It is evident that the four described ways of accessing the great outdoor are very different and they support heterogeneous conceptions of what the real is. Because of this variety of strategies and solutions, it is clear that Speculative realism cannot be identified as a coherent movement or as a school, despite all the involved personalities share the same enemy: correlationism. Since the workshop at the Goldsmiths, this already heterogeneous "speculative turn"<sup>10</sup> has been rapidly spreading all over the world and today it can pride itself of a surprising variety of contributions and developments, as well as of the involvement of an increasing number of thinkers. The debate has been increasing by the means of new medium, at least for philosophical discussions, like blogs, internet websites and non academic journals. A lot of people all over the world started posting their comments and suggestions, sometimes offering clever and original remarks, sometimes producing a sort of vulgarization

<sup>10</sup> *Speculative Turn* is the title of book edited by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman that in 2011 try to make a map of the different positions raised after the workshop "Speculative Realism", sharing the anti-correlationist inspiration and developing original standpoints.

of the original ideas. That's why Brassier refuses to recognize the existence of an international and spread *Speculative Realism Movement*.

The 'speculative realist movement' exists only in the imaginations of a group of bloggers promoting an agenda for which I have no sympathy whatsoever: actor-network theory spiced with pan-psychist metaphysics and morsels of process philosophy. I don't believe the internet is an appropriate medium for serious philosophical debate; nor do I believe it is acceptable to try to concoct a philosophical movement online by using blogs to exploit the misguided enthusiasm of impressionable graduate students. I agree with Deleuze's remark that ultimately the most basic task of philosophy is to impede stupidity, so I see little philosophical merit in a 'movement' whose most signal achievement thus far is to have generated an online orgy of stupidity.<sup>11</sup>

It is certainly true that today is difficult to say what *Speculative realism* is since the already heterogeneous anti-correlationism of the beginning has been differentiating and it has taken new forms developing in a variety of directions. What is sure is that we are experiencing a major event in the history of philosophy because of the non-academic internet based diffusion and because of the revolutionary anti-correlationist will: the concrete consequences can only be evaluated in the future.

Amongst the more recent developments demanding a place under the umbrella of

<sup>11</sup> Ray Brassier interviewed by Marcin Rychter in *Kronos*, March 4, 2011. <http://www.kronos.org.pl/index.php?23151,896> (visited on March 11, 2014)

Speculative Realism, *Object Oriented Ontology* (OOO) is one of the most solid and followed philosophical tendencies sharing the principles of Harman's *Object Oriented Philosophy*. OOO is a compact movement based on some precise theoretical assumptions: ontology is made of nothing but all possible objects; all objects are on an equal footing; objects exist independently of human perception; objects are not exhausted by their different relations. Since the publication of *Tool being*<sup>12</sup>, a number of theorists working in a variety of disciplines have adapted Harman's ideas, including philosophy professor Levi Bryant, literature and ecology scholar Timothy Morton, video game designer Ian Bogost and French writer Tristan Garcia. To give an example of an object oriented approach different from Harman's, we will outline the principles of Briant's *Onticology*<sup>13</sup>. The first principle is that "there is no difference that does not make a difference"<sup>14</sup>, it means that any object is a difference in being. The second is called *Principle of the Inhuman* and asserts that the concept of difference producing difference is not restricted to human, since difference is independent of knowledge and conscious-

<sup>12</sup> G. Harman, *Tool-being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of objects*, Open Court, Chicago 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Levy Briant's main book for understanding *Onticology* is *The democracy of objects*, available to download from the *Open Humanities Press* web site ([openhumanitiespress.org/democracy-of-objects.html](http://openhumanitiespress.org/democracy-of-objects.html)). He also writes a blog called *Larval subjects* (<http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com>) where he discuss the mains concepts of his philosophy and other topics related to OOO and Speculative Realisme.

<sup>14</sup> *The Speculative Turn*, cit., p. 263.

ness. The third states that “if a difference is made, then the being is”<sup>15</sup>, which means that to be means to be a difference, thus, there are objects (differences) or there is nothing. For Briant all beings are real in the same sense — including fictions, signs, animals, and plants— as they are all differences. Moreover, all objects are themselves composed of differences. Referring to its own ontology, Bryant has also proposed the concept of “wilderness ontology”, in order to indicate that agency is shared by all objects and not only by humans, that there is no ontological hierarchy nor any bifurcation between nature and culture.

### 7. Reza Negarestani and Accelerationism

The interest in agency, the refusal to make distinctions between concrete and abstract objects, and the militant anti-reductionism make of OOO one of the targets of Brassier’s criticism. To him, in fact, the goal is to pursue the Enlightenment’s disenchantment of the world, following contemporary scientific achievements especially in the field of cognition. Thus, for him the object oriented approach is just an indiscriminate extension of *folk psychology* (in Sellars’s sense) on entities that do not deserve to be considered real since they derived from false subjective beliefs and narrations. The reductionist credo as-

sumed by Brassier, in fact, implies the elimination of all the non objective beliefs based on the human need of providing a sense for his existence in the world, productions that are not determined according to the real in the interest of rationality, but according to meaningful narrations. This rationalistic pursuit of the properness of reason beyond humanistic perspectives, has been recently embraced by the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani. Hosted on the Urbanomic website, his blog *Deracinating effect*<sup>16</sup> gathers together the last talks and public interventions on the autonomy of reason and the process of its own becoming. Following rational achievements of Enlightenment, it would be time to turn reason against humanism in order to acknowledge the process of thinking itself merely to recreate the notion of “human”. This rationalistic turn in Negarestani’s thought comes with his forthcoming theoretical fiction novel *The Mortiloquist*<sup>17</sup>, where “the history of philosophy is, barbarically and problematically, revealed to be a differential form of arborescent emptiness which is in the process of blackening its vitalistic twists”<sup>18</sup>. This novel follows his first philosophical science-fiction novel, *Cyclonopedia*<sup>19</sup>, which is partially inspired by

<sup>16</sup> <http://blog.urbanomic.com/cyclon/> (08/03/2014)

<sup>17</sup> R. Negarestani, *The Mortiloquist*, Urbanomic, London 2014.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.urbanomic.com/pub\\_mortiloquist.php](http://www.urbanomic.com/pub_mortiloquist.php) (08/03/2014)

<sup>19</sup> R. Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with anonymous materials*, Re.press, Victoria 2008.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

Nick Land's *Geocosmic Theory of Trauma*<sup>20</sup> and aims to explain capitalism through the reality of the traumas bringing about the dynamic of terrestrial economy. The latter would have been modeled according to the relation between the Earth and the Sun, the excessive energy of which demands the planet to manage the surplus that will eventually consume it and its living inhabitants to death. As a part of this solar economy, capitalism appears as a *thanatropic* machine that unlocks the earth's resources, especially fossil fuels, to make them available for dissolution. Therefore capitalism can be seen as a process of acceleration of the consumption of the Earth by the Sun. Negarestani's proposal consists in suggesting that this model must be revised since the Sun is not the absolute (i.e. the origin and the end of life), but the relation between the Earth and the Sun is part of a larger universal frame. In other words, we have to open the perspective that has been transcendently conditioned by the relation between the Earth and the Sun in order to be able to think the reality of universal economy and to access the great outside. Terrestrial economy should be open to the cosmic economy of trauma to liberate thought from the slavery of solar economy's transcendental frame and to understand its actual reality and interests. That would allow to overcome geocentric and anthropocentric points of view and to take in account

<sup>20</sup> N. Land, *Fanged Noumena. Collecting writings 1987 – 2007*. Brassier and Mackay editors, Urbanomic, London 2011.

the reality of trauma as the subject independent determinant of subjectivity.

Negarestani and Brassier, whose interests toward a realist explanation of the autonomy of rationality converge, are also involved in what Benjamin Noys called *Accelerationism*<sup>21</sup> to criticize Nick Land's deleuzoguattarian approach of capitalism. *Accelerationism* is today one of most discussed and productive branches which pride themselves of some sort of participation in the anti-correlationist philosophical turn. A manifesto of Accelerationism has recently been published by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams<sup>22</sup> and a big symposium has been held in Berlin last December. The movement has the realistic aim to analyze capitalism as an autonomous entity, as a subject independent system whose ends are not necessarily humans' ends. This point of departure can be found in Land's writings which claim that matter is the last instance of the real and that it must be conceived as production of production: so capitalism is part of this original flux. The problem is that the functional dynamics of capitalism consist in *reterritorializing* what it has *deterritorialized*, so that it slows down the intensification process that should be liberated. In order intensify the process, that means to think according to the absolutely deterritorialized

<sup>21</sup> B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edimburg University press, Edimburg 2010.

<sup>22</sup> N. Srnicek and A. Williams, "Accelerate Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics", in *Dark Trajectories: politics of the outside*, J. Johnson editor, [name], Hong Kong 2013.

matter which constitutes the last instance of the real, Land claims that it is necessary accelerate Capitalism beyond its limits. The fact is that speeding capitalism in this way implies to attain death: matter as the absolutely deterritorialized zero degree of being. That's why Land conceives capitalism like a force whose purpose lies beyond the interest of humanity and, to him, to approach capitalism in a realist way consists of understanding its autonomous drive independently of humans' interests: the continuation or intensification of the process demands the elimination of humanity as a substrate for the process. Because in Land's theory, matter is the last instance of real as the limit of being or "zero degree", because matter is what determines everything as production of production, even thought, and because to think according to the real as matter's pure intensity implies death, it is now clear why Brassier is interested in Accelerationism and why he usually contributes to the discussion. Moreover, it is clear that Negarestani's theoretical approach aims to take further Land's solar-economical conclusion to open capitalism to the great outside of the universe.

Talking about Accelerationism, it is not possible to forget Snirneck and Williams' *Accelerate Manifesto*. Starting from Land's positions, these young philosophers are creating an original criticism of capitalism by accelerating the process that has been blocked by neo-liberalism. Rather than denying the possibility of a future for humanity, it would be necessary to liberate capitalism's creative forces and to allow a new future to come. Their starting point is that to-

day nobody is able to offer a solution to the crisis which is annihilating our society since the situation demands a realist analysis of the system as it is in itself: that would allow to acknowledge the underlying forces driving its becoming and the reason for the present stagnation. For Snirneck and Williams, in fact, Land's analysis is not totally correct because the speed of capitalism alone seems not to be enough to provoke the transition to another organization if the process keeps the same rules. Their *accelerationist* suggestion asserts that an experimentation of new rules of developments is needed in order to make the becoming become. Capitalism, as Marx already noticed, cannot be considered the agent of its own acceleration, but it must be overcome by producing a radical change of the constraints of the present conception of value. This can be attained only by pushing forward technological advancement in order to solve social conflicts by eliminating the necessity of labor: the paradox to be solved consists in the fact that everybody wants to work less but, even if we have the technology to accomplish this dream, we are all working more. What prevents us from solving the problem is the fact that capitalism constrained technology directing it towards narrow ends rather than employing it to liberate humanity from labor, which would be the cause of social differences and abuses. The goal of accelerationism, in its will to free all the power of technological and scientific advances, consists in unleashing latent productive forces in order to launch them towards post-capitalism, towards a new possible future bringing about a new, more

equal end free society. As we read on the Manifesto:

We want to accelerate the process of technological evolution. But what we are arguing for is not techno-utopianism. Never believe that technology will be sufficient to save us. Necessary, yes, but never sufficient without socio-political action. Whereas the techno-utopians argue for acceleration on the basis that it will automatically overcome social conflict, our position is that technology should be accelerated precisely because it is needed in order to win social conflict<sup>23</sup>.

That project would need experimenting towards the future, considering the possible reality which is outside the narrow perspective of present capitalism. It would need a social reorganization able to pursue Enlightenment's will for social self-mastery to be achieved by rational programming. In other words, it is a matter of pushing reason beyond the limits that present capitalism imposes as a transcendental condition in order to reach the Outside, a reality which is not conditioned by the present market's value restrictions.

Accelerationism has been criticized, especially by Benjamin Noys, as it is nothing new but merely a prosecution of neoliberal politics. Anyway, it has been able to catalyze a growing interest and an expanding international debate, it meets a largely spread desire to renovate political thinking beyond the limitations of present criticism. Because it allows to discuss an effective application in

<sup>23</sup> Srnicek and Williams, *Accelerate Manifesto*, cit., p. 146.

politics, this branch of Speculative realism is today the most alive and productive in many different domains like politics, aesthetics, art and economy.

## 8. Nuovo Realismo

Before concluding, we will comment on Maurizio Ferraris' *Nuovo Realismo* which is trying to enter the international debate. It seems to us that this Italian tendency cannot be included in Speculative Realism since it does not share the only common feature to the variety of the described positions: anti-correlationism. In fact Ferraris does not intend to access a reality which is beyond the phenomenal appearance which is given within the subject-object relation, but he affirms that the objects that we perceive exist and that they are immediately the real. His enemy is not correlationism – stating that the subject can only know the phenomenal world of experience by organizing senses data coming from an unknown thing in itself that could possibly be totally different from the way it is given to us – but a theory that would claim that objects exist only in the mind rather than outside the subject. The problem is that nobody ever affirmed such a theory. Neither Descartes, nor Kant, and not even Richard Rorty have ever claimed that there is nothing outside the mind, but just that we apply some ideas or a-priori structures in order to build a coherent representation of the perceived world. As everybody knows, in fact, Descartes' *cogito* is an experience of

thought that aims to eliminate any doubt about the existence of the *res extensa*. Moreover the French metaphysician's goal consisted in elaborating a method that allows the knowledge of things in an objective way, by the means of mathematics: God being the guarantor of the adequacy between mathematical ideas and the world. Descartes never states, as Ferraris seems to claim, that external reality is nothing but a mathematical construction which has no actuality outside the mind. There is difference, in fact, between using subjective schemas to organize the impression in a coherent representation and to create a mental world independently of the given impressions. Speculative realism's antagonist is the first way of thinking: the goal consists in understanding if it is possible to know things in themselves independently of the way they are given to our a-priori schemas. Nuovo Realismo's antagonist would be the second theory, that he thinks to find in Descartes or Kant and his realist statement consists in claiming that objects exist outside the mind and the real is what we perceive rather than our mental representation of it. If for speculative realists Kant must be overcome because he limited knowledge to the constitutive relation between a given phenomena and a subject by claiming that we cannot access things in themselves, for Ferraris Kant must be criticized because it would consist in stating that phenomena are not the real but subjective representations of it. So, according to Ferraris the problem of the possible difference between appearances and things in themselves (which is the reason why speculative realists

want to access what is beyond impressions) would not subsist. In other words, Speculative realism aims to access the great outdoor as the real which does not correspond to the phenomenal world which is given to the senses and organized by a conscience, on the contrary Ferraris seems to state that objects, as we perceive them, are immediately the real rather than a subjective perception of it. To Speculative realism, Nuovo realismo would look like a naive realist position unable to go beyond the relation between subject and object, for Ferraris everything is given within the relation between a subject and its environment and we do not need more "speculation". Thus, we would say that Nuovo realism can be considered as a reaction to certain extreme postmodern positions, but it is not sharing the speculative aim of accessing the real as the dimension which is hidden beyond our relation to the sensible world.

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