

# All Objects Are Deviant

## FEMINISM AND ECOLOGICAL INTIMACY

### *Plato's Cave and the Proximity of Things*

This chapter is going to argue that because of withdrawal, objects are intrinsically deviant. They are never straight. They always swerve. I shall first argue for a view of objects that counterintuitively posits them as irreducibly “close,” despite their reputation for being distant, “objectified,” background beings. This proximity cannot be thought as immediacy; rather, it is the ultimate subversion of the metaphysics of presence. The metaphysics of presence depends on a certain visuality and on a certain distance. Object-oriented ontology (OOO) subverts the metaphysics of presence by arguing that all beings *withdraw*, that is, they are incapable of being (fully) accessed by another entity: my idea of this glass is not the glass, the parts of the glass are not the glass, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

“Withdraw” cannot be thought ontically: it cannot be thought as distancing in space or time. Withdrawal rather underscores the unspeakable suchness of a thing. *Withdrawal* is a paradoxical term, since it might be better to imagine what it consists in as an *intimacy* or *proximity* that makes a thing impossible to access because it is *too close*. Impossible to “see” not because they are too far away but because they are too intimate, objects crowd upon one another like characters in an Expressionist carnival. They cannot be fully subjected or subjugated by us (or indeed by anything). Nonmetaphysical proximity is better thought when we replace the language of vision with a language of kinesthesia. A reading of Plato’s allegory of the cave will establish this.<sup>2</sup>

What this chapter outlines, then, is a strange new form of essentialism, which perhaps we could call *weird essentialism*. In this weird new essentialism, we have dropped the metaphysics of presence—namely, the idea that in order to exist you have to be constantly present. This idea of constant presence affects metaphysics whether it has to do with basic substance ontology or with more recent and perhaps sophisticated forms of process philosophy in the lineage of Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gilles Deleuze.

Why is that? Because with substances or with fluids, what we are thinking of when we think of an existing thing is something that is present in such a way that it can be subdivided—it is constantly there, so there can be parts of a thing, whose removal will at some point drastically alter that thing's existence. Say, for example, I am an ecologist studying a meadow. If I think that the meadow is constantly present, I can remove pieces of it—a blade of grass here, a blade of grass there. At some point I imagine that the meadow will not exist anymore. The trouble is, when exactly is that?

I remove a single blade of grass—the meadow is still there. I remove another one—still the same meadow. I can go on removing blades of grass and verifying that the meadow is still there, perfectly logically, until all I am looking at is a bald patch of dirt. I conclude from this, mistakenly, that there must not have been a meadow there in the first place—again, I am cleaving to “being a meadow there” in terms of something that must be constantly present. Likewise, I can start the process in reverse. I plant a blade of grass on the dirt patch. This is evidently not a meadow. I plant another one—the same logic applies. I plant ten thousand blades of grass, and still I do not have a meadow.

This is known as the Sorites paradox, the paradox of the heap: how many grains of sand are there in a heap of sand? How many cloud puffs are there in a cloud? The Sorites paradox applies to vague predicates, which is to say that it applies on my view to real objects in the real world, such as meadows, and indeed to other entities that ecologists and biologists study. I can do what I did to a meadow to the biosphere as a whole, I can do the same with an individual life-form such as a meadowlark, and so on. If I regard them as existing insofar as they are constantly present, I can apply the Sorites paradox to them and make them evaporate. Either the beings that biology and ecology

study are not very real, or my logic is faulty. I may have to accept at some point that to exist is to be fuzzy—that is, if I am not an antirealist or a nominalist for whom nothing exists but as it is designated or named as existing.

I use the term *fuzzy* in a way that is far from fuzzy, but indeed rather sharp. A thing is a set of other things that do not sum to it. These other things include its various parts and the way it appears. There is an intrinsic and irreducible gap within a thing between what it is and how it appears, a gap I call the Rift.<sup>3</sup> This gap cannot be located anywhere in what I am calling ontically given space-time. That is, I can travel all around the surfaces and depths of a thing, study its history, think about how it is used, interview it—if it can speak—and I will never be able to locate the Rift.

I cannot point to the Rift because a thing does not sum to its uses, or history, or relations, or pieces. A thing is an irreducible unicity. This means that I have to accept that things can be themselves and not-quite-themselves at the very same time, because the appearance of a thing just is not the thing. This means that to be a thing means to be in a state of logical contradiction, which means that our OOO view is diametrically opposed to Alain Badiou, for whom to exist is to be consistent.

This line of thought brings us to Plato's allegory of the cave in the seventh book of *The Republic*. Reality is something to be seen, suggests the allegory. After considerable mental toil you infer the existence of real things of which the shadows on the wall are just distorted projections. But what are the conditions of possibility for this toil? Why would one even start in the first place, chained to the spot and totally taken in as one is? Isn't there something like a faint echo, in the very fact that you are able to turn around and stumble toward the fire, and then make your way up the tunnel into the light, a faint echo of an intuitive grasp of reality, already installed in your mind?

Plato may think here of the doctrine of transmigration of souls and of the soul's task of remembering its previous existence, and better yet, remembering what it is. Yet there is a more satisfying, less tacked-on way of thinking about this already installed knowing. It has to do with the fact that *I am physically there*, sitting in the cave, chained up. Martin Heidegger reads Plato's figurative language about the cave as an artifact of some nonmetaphysical way of thinking reality: there

are all kinds of motions and movement in the cave, all kinds of things are happening already—it is not simply a hypnotic spectacle. To move toward the light of the truth, I have to *turn*—and Heidegger makes a lot of this physical motion, which for him suggests the *kehre* or turning (or bending, or swerving, just to make it more physical) within his own philosophy, the way that thinking can turn from the metaphysics of presence.<sup>4</sup>

I feel the warmth of the fire on my limbs. I sense the coexistence with a host of people all watching the display. What I see on the wall are shadows, fluid, motile, flickering—I see what indigenous humans saw painted on cave walls, dancing figures. Figures that are distorted shadows—distortion itself, as a dis-torsion, a twisting away or apart, as movement. They are shadows of things, but they are also shadows in themselves. It is as if, buried within the imagery of Plato's cave, there resides a deeply ancient figure of Paleolithic humans watching shamanic displays.

At no point in the display, at this level of thinking about the allegory, am I ever separated from reality. It is not correct to say that reality is outside the cave, waiting for me up there, waiting for me to see correctly. Reality is literally all over me—in the sweat from the fire's heat, in the dancing shadows. Reality is already here. Plato seems to want us to struggle away from this reality to see the truth that must reside somewhere outside it. But what is more interesting is that there is a kind of "beyond" *within* things, not *outside* them—I feel my way along, totally shrink-wrapped in reality, unable to get a firm purchase outside it from which to see perfectly. This groping, grasping, handling, and turning is more like what OOO means when it thinks about how entities are.

It is not some fantasized immediacy of touch, as opposed to seeing, that intrigues me about Plato's kinesthetic imagery. It is rather the total opposite. What intrigues me is that when I handle a thing, when I walk along a corridor, when I turn my head, when I walk upward toward the light, I do not exhaust the corridor or my neck bones or the upwardly sloping passage. When I handle a thing, I can never see it all at once. What was the underside of the object is now the front side—I can never see the underside of this rock as its underside, but only by rotating it so that a new face presents itself to me. A cross section of the rock now gives me the rock sliced in two—in a

sense, I now have two problems, or more, where before I had just one. My grasping or apprehension of the thing never gives me the thing itself.

This is an insight that Immanuel Kant has about raindrops. I feel them on my head—but I don't feel *them*. I feel anthropomorphic, or better, human head-shaped renderings of them. The intimacy of a thing, the intimacy afforded to me by its haptic nudging, reminds me not of its constant presence but of its withdrawnness. The essence of the raindrop is not just any old thing. A raindrop is not a stick of butter. It is raindroppy, not buttery. It has just these qualities of wetness, a certain heaviness as gravity pulls it toward my skull, a slight or extreme coldness, the explosive thing it does to some of the hairs on the top of my head. Yet none of these things is the raindrop as such. Consider how Kant talks about it:

In phenomena, we commonly, indeed, distinguish that which essentially belongs to the intuition of them, and is valid for the sensuous faculty of every human being, from that which belongs to the same intuition accidentally, as valid not for the sensuous faculty in general, but for a particular state or organization of this or that sense. Accordingly, we are accustomed to say that the former is a cognition which represents the object itself, whilst the latter presents only a particular appearance or phenomenon thereof. This distinction, however, is only empirical. If we stop here (as is usual), and do not regard the empirical intuition as itself a mere phenomenon (as we ought to do), in which nothing that can appertain to a thing in itself is to be found, our transcendental distinction is lost, and we believe that we cognize objects as things in themselves, although in the whole range of the sensuous world, investigate the nature of its objects as profoundly as we may, we have to do with nothing but phenomena. Thus, we call the rainbow a mere appearance of phenomenon in a sunny shower, and the rain, the reality or thing in itself; and this is right enough, if we understand the latter conception in a merely physical sense, that is, as that which in universal experience, and under whatever conditions of sensuous perception, is known in intuition to be so and so determined, and not otherwise. But if we consider this empirical datum generally,

and inquire, without reference to its accordance with all our senses, whether there can be discovered in it aught which represents an object as a thing in itself (the raindrops of course are not such, for they are, as phenomena, empirical objects), the question of the relation of the representation to the object is transcendental; and not only are the raindrops mere phenomena, but even their circular form, nay, the space itself through which they fall, is nothing in itself, but both are mere modifications or fundamental dispositions of our sensuous intuition, whilst the transcendental object remains for us utterly unknown.<sup>5</sup>

This means that there is a gap between subjects and everything else, which for the anthropocentric Kant means that there is a gap between humans and everything else. But to return to the cave, there is also a gap between the fire in the cave and the walls of the cave. There is a gap between the walls of the cave and the shadows projected onto the walls. There are gaps within the shadows themselves, which I detect as their flickering motility. There are all kinds of gaps, at least as many as there are things—and exponentially more, when we consider that things interact in all sorts of ways with all sorts of other things. Trillions of gaps. The OOO reality is like a beautiful piece of Japanese raku wear, cracked to smithereens yet somehow coherent.

I cannot peel myself away from the so-called illusion level of reality, the level of appearance. It means that reality has the quality of art, and as we know for Plato, art is a little bit evil, because it tells lies in the form of the truth, lies that are thus contradictory on the inside. It is not the laser guns and hyperdrives that would disturb a Plato about *Star Wars*, it is the expressions of fatherhood. Art also exerts a demonic influence insofar as it renders my free will somewhat inoperative. It flows all over me, it pushes me or hits me, communicating some kind of force from a dimension beyond me. The trouble with the shadows is that I simply cannot tell whether they are illusions or not: “What constitutes pretense is that, in the end, you don’t know whether it’s pretense or not.”<sup>6</sup>

To put it in Heideggerian terms, what happens in the cave is a play of nothingness. Of nihilation. The shadows both are and are not translations of other entities, projections of puppets and fire. To be immersed in them is to experience a never-ending play of illusion.

This is not absolutely nothing at all, but rather a-ness, a quality of nothing, “nothing-ing,” if you like. A philosopher, goes the allegory, is someone who tries to tear himself or herself away from the illusion. But this act of wresting oneself away results in a fourfold series of blindings, as one is dazzled by higher and higher levels of truth. Even this truth is seen as a kind of nothing at first, since the onlooker cannot assimilate to her experiences in the cave.

But outside the cave, the philosopher knows the illusions to be illusions. Within the cave, the illusions are not known as such. How on earth, unless the inkling that there are illusions is already present, is the protophilosopher to move upward? Or even imagine doing so? Plato strives to separate the language of seeing, of insight into truth, of clarity, from the haptic confusion of the cave’s interior. Yet this is impossible without reducing the nothingness within the cave to absolutely nothing—to pure illusion, which one knows is illusion. Once illusion has been reduced this way, it is not really an illusion, because we can tell whether it is an illusion or not—we are sure that it indeed is an illusion. The cave’s display has been totally negated. The clear seeing of the philosopher is separated from the warm, haptic seeing of the cave dwellers.

Within the cave, the essence of things is weirdly hidden inside them—the shadows distort the puppets, but not completely. There are puppets and there are shadows. Outside the cave, however, there is a clear bright line between truth and falsity. What Heidegger calls *alētheia*, undisclosedness, is already there inside the cave. It must be, as Heidegger argues—it is an always already, a condition of possibility for the metaphysical journey. What the metaphysician does is to posit some things as more real than other things and to draw a thin, bright distinction between them. Realness here means constant presence—the sun of truth keeps shining no matter what, more real than the shadows on the cave wall.

The object-oriented reality is withdrawn precisely because it is so proximate—it is in your face; it *is* your face. The most incontestable fact about me, the fact that I just am me, whatever that is (let us call me a *human*) is phenomenologically the most distant thing about me! This is the same as saying that my glasses, through which I see everything else, are hiding on my nose. Hiding in plain sight in the allegory of the cave are all kinds of objects, and all kinds of human

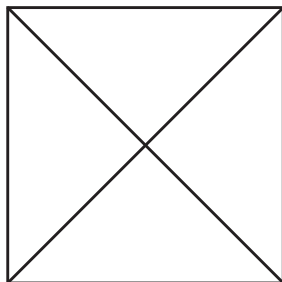
relation to objects. And objects in the mirror, as my American car tells me, are closer than they appear. This means that what is most intimate about me is in fact *nonhuman*, if by *human* we mean not “just exactly what I am” but “this graspable, given entity that I can point to in a mirror.” Indeed, as Kant showed, this nonhuman being is within thinking itself as a condition of possibility for pointing at myself in the mirror!

What suggests itself here is a return to the kind of essentialism advocated by 1970s feminism, but with a weird twist: *weird essentialism*. In this weird essentialism there are real things, but they are not subject to the metaphysics of presence. It is this weird essentialism that provides a fourth position on the logic square of common arguments about existence these days.

This is just what we need for navigating the strange and disturbing ocean of ecological awareness. Why? Because ecological awareness is coexistence with beings that are sometimes terrifyingly real at least in spatiotemporal, scale terms, yet downright impossible to locate as constantly present. Beings such as *evolution*, *biosphere*, and *climate*. Let alone beings such as *human* and *species*. Beings such as global warming, a gigantic entity executing itself in a high-dimensional phase space that happens to have an amortization rate of one hundred thousand years.

1. Essentialism + metaphysics  
of presence

2. Nonessentialism + metaphysics of  
presence (relationism, process)



4. Essentialism – metaphysics  
of presence (OOO)

3. Nonessentialism – metaphysics  
of presence (deconstruction)

Figure 2.1. Ontology: a logic square.



## *The Deviance of Things*

Now that we have established the need to return to something like a *weird essentialism*, promoted for instance in the work of Luce Irigaray, let us proceed with more detailed thoughts about how things might be if we understood them this way. In brief, *objects would be deviant*.

All objects are deviant insofar as they exist in difference from themselves. This is because they are riven from within between what they are and how they appear. To say this is to continue the thought of Irigaray, for whom at least one entity, known as woman, falls outside the logical Law of Noncontradiction, insofar as female physicality cannot be thought either as one or as two but as a weird touching between one and two, a loop-like self-touching denigrated as narcissism.<sup>7</sup> Irigaray observes that women's speech is alogical: "she steps ever so slightly aside from herself" with "contradictory words."<sup>8</sup> Irigaray asserts that women's bodies are "neither one nor two."<sup>9</sup> What object-oriented ontology does is simply apply this thought to any object whatsoever.

The question is, in so doing is one exiting logic altogether? Are objects (people, fish, stars, gurgling fountains) just illogical? Or does logic require rethinking from within? I shall argue that the latter is the better option, and not only for the strategic reason that an entire region of thought should not be handed over without struggle to reactionary forces. The main reason for working on logic is that logic works much better if it is able to think deviance, to think deviantly.

First, consider Jacques Lacan's formula for subjectivity,  $\$ \diamond a$ .<sup>10</sup> This means that the "split subject" is constituted in relation to a fantasy thing, the object-cause of desire.  $\$ \diamond a$  is also his formula for perversion. Why? Because, and this is a general truth of correlationist thought, the subject and its fantasy thingy are mutually constituting—there is no subject *before* its correlation with the object. Thus the subject is looped through the other, which is best expressed in forms of so-called perversion where my desire is looped through your pleasure—this so-called perversion expresses a general truth about desire and being a subject at all.

Barred S, the subject:  $\$$ . This means the transcendental subject as opposed to phenomenal me, which follows from Kant's grounding of David Hume. This is not a subject that exists when you subtract all

of the phenomenal me—my clothes, what I am wearing, my fondness for those little cubes of lemon-flavored gum. There is nothing that is not me in those phenomena, yet they are not me. It is the same with a raindrop. There is a raindrop, it is not a gumdrop, alas—or a little lemon-flavored gum cube—but when I reach for it with my fingers or with my tongue or my thinking, what I find are raindrop phenomena.<sup>11</sup> I do not find lemon gum phenomena. There is a real raindrop, but it is, to use the object-oriented language, withdrawn. This does not mean that something is lurking behind the phenomena. It means *ontologically* withdrawn—there is an irreducible gap between what a thing is and how it appears.

This is how Kant grounded Hume. For Hume there are data, such as the iron-y or leathery taste of some red wine (as he puts it in “Essay on the Standard of Taste”). But what I do not have is the ability to see the actual cause of this taste, definitely, once and for all, unnecessary to repeat. In a way Hume could have written the lyrics to Pink Floyd’s song “Breathe”: “All you touch and all you see / Is all your life will ever be.”<sup>12</sup> Then you drink the cask of wine and find that there is a key on a leather strap at the bottom.<sup>13</sup> But now the wine has gone—you cannot have direct contact with the key in the wine. Yet the wine has been, in OOO terms, *translated* by the key and its leather strap. Now here comes a further twist. When you get hold of the key, argues Kant, you do not have the key either—you have key data; it is shiny and makes a certain crunching sound in a lock, and so on—inseparable from the actual key, but not the key. Any bald metaphysical assertion that there is a key (or a cause, or an effect) would be scraping the bottom of the barrel (groan).

At this point we need to explain *a*, which stands for *autre*, the little other, the thingy, on the other side of the manifold. This *a* is the fantasy thing that you structurally cannot directly get ahold of. It is like the soap in the bath: if you grip it too hard, it slips out of your fingers. It is what in advertising is called the *reason to buy*: it is not the product itself but the dream that happens when I think about consuming the product. What I am buying is this elusive dream, and of course it slips away as the product slips down my throat, so I will need to get another product, thanks very much. I am coconstituted by my idea of me, which is in a loop with actual me: it is me insofar as it is me-phenomena, as it were—but it is not me. Anyone who has

meditated will easily discern here the funny thing that happens when you do so—you notice your thinking and you notice it is not you, but that you are not anywhere else, either.

For the rest of this chapter, I shall call the manifold  $\$ \diamond a$  by the name “Roadrunner,” after the misadventures of Wile E. Coyote, a desperately desirous being in pursuit of his obscure object of desire, even at the cost of his happily malleable life. It is both funny and true. If Wile E. Coyote ever actually caught up with Roadrunner, he would eat Roadrunner, and Roadrunner would become him. So he can never truly catch up with Roadrunner.

And we must explain  $\diamond$ , the funny little lozenge in between the subject and the little thingy. This symbol simply means *has a loop form*. By *loop* I mean *mutually determining*: the two things on either side of the symbol are coconstituting such that neither one has ontological priority. Consider trying to find out whether the light is on in your fridge. You have to open the fridge to find out. But now you have changed your fridge, so you cannot ever find out whether the light is really on before you open the door. But the idea that the light might be on is a kind of fantasy thingy that gets you to want to open the door in the first place. So you and the fantasy light are in a loop.

This manifold, Roadrunner, sits on top of what I here call *object*. Roadrunner, the dialectic of desire, happens because there is an irreducible Rift between Roadrunner and the *object*. Consider it again in terms of fridges. I wonder about the light in the fridge because there is a fridge. I cannot specify what that is in advance, because all I touch and all I see are all my life will ever be, so I just have to go ahead and open the fridge.

This might give me the masculine fantasy that I am Harold and the Purple Crayon and I can do anything to anything—reality is a kind of wonderful Play-Doh, and I get to mold this plasticity as I like. Kant is already associated with the Marquis de Sade by Lacan for this very reason. Yet this is to assume that the object is just a lump of whatever, and we have already ruled that out. The sadism in Kant does not come from correlationism. It actually comes from a viral piece of code that I believe derives from patriarchal agricultural “civilization”: the idea that a thing is an extensive lump decorated with accidents, like something that comes out of an Easy-Bake Oven, the Hasbro toy. Let us call this kind of substance (alas, it is still default)

the Easy Think Substance. Actual objects are not Easy Think Substances. They are not lumps of blah decorated with accidents. Their phenomena are inseparable from them.

This means that there is a flip side to the supposed Harold and the Purple Crayon approach to things, just as we know that masochism subtends sadism. There are already things; they issue directives in whose tractor beams I find myself, always already. There is a givenness about reality that is not quite the same as saying that there is a god or there is substance or any other metaphysical assertion. To assert such things, which Quentin Meillassoux calls the Ancestral Statement, is not so different as the well-rehearsed deconstructive argument that for every sentence there must be some kind of writing, an arche-writing.<sup>14</sup> I am not going to find it when I look directly for it—but that is not so much a proof that it does not exist, as oblique evidence that it *does* exist.

Let us name the manifold  $\$ \diamond a / object$  Looney Tunes.

Looney Tunes is truly loony and loopy. This is because *object* is sparkingly uniquely itself, its phenomena inseparable from it, yet not it. Because this is true, I can have fantasy thingies that do not coincide with it. Because I can have fantasy thingies, I can have Roadrunner. Imagine all the fun when the object, the fantasy thing, and the supposed subject all have the same name, like Tim or whatever. You could write a lot of Romantic poems that way!

Next, consider this: Roadrunner is the formal structure of the appearance of any object whatsoever, not just a (human) subject. I have already shown that, by the way: there has to be some kind of object (in the object-oriented) sense for Roadrunner to happen. And all the terms in Looney Tunes can coincide, as I just mentioned with my autobiographical example. So there is no need for an external perceiver who “makes it real” by observing or otherwise correlating with it. There is already a difference between a thing and itself. But since this de-anthropocentrism is still quite counterintuitive, let us run through it a little.

I cannot have fridge light fantasies without fridges and lights. Yet when I look for the fridge and its light, I have the same dilemma with which I started. I cannot jump out of Roadrunner. When I try, I find myself in Roadrunner. But that does not mean that there is nothing at all. Yet, and for the same reasons, it is not me who makes

the fridge and its light—I am not Harold and the Purple Crayon, tempted as I am to resolve the Kantian tension in that familiar and patriarchal way, running to technologically intoxicated idealism or what one might call Happy Nihilism: How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb. . . . So although I cannot access the fridge in itself, there is a fridge, in itself. The fridge appearance is not the fridge reality. Yet the fridge is not this purple crayon, and so on. It just is a fridge.

The way a photon accesses the fridge will be just the same as the way I access the fridge. It is actually well established at that very small scale that *to see* is also *to change*, so that a photon cannot directly see what it ends up touching. Quantum-scale phenomena give very elegant examples of how when you isolate a thing as much as possible by cooling it right down and putting it in a vacuum, it starts to shimmer, without the aid of anything else, such that its appearance and its weird essence do not directly coincide.<sup>15</sup> But meditation also does this: when you isolate yourself and relatively immobilize yourself, you discover that you are sort of rushing with thought, while sitting quite still watching yourself, at the same time.

There is no reason why \$ needs to be a human. It could be a camera, a photon, or a line of code. Quantum-scale phenomena show decisively how things quite happily get caught in Roadrunner all the time—they do it without humans, in vacuums close to absolute zero, conditions that would be violated if I were able to peer in. They happen in physically isolated systems. Yet they happen, I claim, because things are just like that in general. A cask of wine talks about a key and a leather strap. But what it says is not the key and the leather strap. This means you can have debates about whether your wine is iron-y or leathery. The trees talk about the wind. But the sound of the wind in the trees is not the wind. And so on.

Now let us proceed. Roadrunner is the structure of how anything appears. Moreover, Looney Tunes is the formal structure of any object whatsoever: human, crowd of humans, grass blade, grassy meadow, spoon, spoon collection. Everything is riven from its appearance yet inseparable from its appearance. This means that Roadrunner deviates from Looney Tunes, and it also means that Roadrunner is deviation (from itself), since its loop form is recursive. It is not symmetrical, because \$ and *a* are coconstituting. We have Roadrunner deviations because of the more encompassing Looney Tunes deviation, which is

between an object and its appearance. The soap in the bath is slippery because the entire bath, and the bathroom, and me looking for the soap are also a slippery bar of soap.

Thus an object deviates from itself, let alone other things. This deviation violates the “Law” of Noncontradiction. But this violation is a good thing because it is the price you pay to part decisively from Easy Think Substances. If I cannot peel how an object appears away from what it is, I cannot make a neat metaphysical dotted line that tells me where the key data stop, the key appearances (sparkly metal, crunching sounds, etc.). I am stuck with appearance wherever I look. But these appearances are not the object. Again this is quite evident at scales that are small enough and isolated enough for the blurry, shimmering qualities of things to become more obvious. Sparkling and shimmering are metaphorical qualities of the nothingness—which is the soapy slip of this weird, undetectable yet real and irreducible gap. Sparking is a visual fluctuation of reflected light that appears to travel across a thing, like the surface of a lake or a Christmas ornament. Things are sparkly with nothingness, dappled by shadows.

An object is deviation—*objects in general turn*, not just the human (Heidegger’s *kehre*). Not simply from our (human) idea of it, but from other entities’ models, conceptions, plans, frameworks. And not simply from other objects, but from itself. We are not talking about movement of an Easy Think Substance in some Easy Think space or time. Movement is part of being a thing, period, such that a thing deviates from itself, just to exist. Preventing a thing from deviating is called destroying it.

Thus Irigaray’s theory of woman as self-touching loop is in fact a theory of everything. A loop is a looping, or a circle is a circling, just as nothingness is nothing-ing or as Heidegger puts it, nihilation. Circles are not all that holistic. They are lines that constantly deviate from themselves. In the same way pi, which rules the world of circling, cannot be found anywhere in the infinite set of rational numbers. But you can think it easily, and you can somewhat see it, by looking at the diagonal proof of Cantor. Imagine this fantasy thingy: a grid on which are arranged all the rational numbers, in sequence from the first to the whateverst. Appearing down the diagonal of this incredible list is a weird, monstrous, deviant number that literally slants away from the others. An irrational number such as pi is not in the infinite set of

rational numbers, by definition! No wonder there is a rumor that Pythagoras, worshipper of the sacred integer, drowned Hippasus, who discovered irrational numbers.

We need to explore the term *veer*, from which we obtain the term *perversion*. Fascinatingly, we get the term *environment* from the same root.<sup>16</sup> The environment is a *veering* insofar as it circles in the deviant sense just outlined, all around us and within us. It is not your granddaddy's Nature, as contemporary data concerning the Anthropocene and its global warming have made all too clear. What is called Nature is just an Easy Think Substance version of the actual, deviant veering around, the evolution, the symbiosis, the feedback loops, never returning to the same place.

The marvelous thing about *veer* is that it is disturbingly poised between activity and passivity—and here I beg your indulgence, as we are all inclined toward the Law of the Excluded Middle, which is a consequence of the Law of Noncontradiction. When a ship veers, is it turning by itself or following the current—or is that whole way of questioning not relevant? There is a deep poetic truth in Lucretius's account of how things got started—with a veer, an inclination (*clinamen*). Perhaps *veer* is a better term for that than the popular *swerve*, because that verb implies something from which I am swerving. But veering may not imply a simple state from which I deviate. It disturbingly or wonderfully suggests that I will not find a simple, undeviant state.

I veer toward the refrigerator. Am I choosing of my own free will to open it and find the cool sparkling water? Or do the fridge and my sparkling water fantasy of what is inside the fridge emit kinds of tractor beams, such that like a good surfer I catch their waves and find myself drawn toward them? There is a basic uncertainty there, an uncertainty we should not try to crush or ignore. Don't we know from consumerism that there is a good way to handle a glass of wine, a bottle of sparkling water, a small rubber toy?

Free will is overrated. What is now required is a mutual veering (attunement). This mutual veering takes the form of Roadrunner—it is irreducibly perverse. There is some Easy Think Substance code in Kant, which ended up in Lacan, who deviates a little bit from deviation when he thinks Roadrunner. It is as if the object itself is only a blank screen or a mirror. This tendency is corrected by Alphonso

Lingis in his theory of directives and levels, the masochism that underlies sadism, and in the transition from Lingis to Graham Harman, with his theory of objects that are too unique to be exhausted by their appearances or relations.<sup>17</sup> Yet Lingis also suffers from the residual Easy Think code insofar as he wants to show that there is a proper way to consume a thing, a proper way to follow its directives. There is a good, natural way to handle a glass of wine, and a bad artificial way. Don't these two positions of Kant and Lingis, like two halves of a torn whole, say something about the profound ambiguity of modernity, with its consumerism? Isn't there perhaps a glimpse, within my relationship to the sparkling water, of a relating to nonhuman beings and among human beings that is not instrumental or sadistic? Or anthropocentric?

And isn't it thus necessary to think how things, and how thinking, can be ambiguous and contradictory, without being wrong? And isn't this what Irigaray says about the fluid being she calls woman?

Thinking is a form of deviance. Insofar as thinking is deviance, it is environmental.

## Notes

1. The locus classicus is Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 133.

2. Plato, *The Republic*, 7.51a–517a, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>, accessed November 14, 2014.

3. Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Open Humanities Press, 2013), 28, 38, 40–41, 56–62.

4. Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*, translated by Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002).

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (Boston: Bedford, 1965), 84–85, A45–A47/B63–64.

6. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre III: Les psychoses* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1981), 48.

7. See also Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Sigs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 882.

8. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 6th ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 29.

9. *Ibid.*, 26.



10. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 209.

11. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 84–85, A45–A47/B63–64.

12. Pink Floyd, “Breathe,” *The Dark Side of the Moon*, EMI, 1973.

13. David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1760hume-taste.asp>, accessed November 14, 2014.

14. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, translated by Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2009), 10–11.

15. Amir H. Safavi-Naeini, Jasper Chan, Jeff T. Hill, T. P. Mayer Alegre, Alex Krause, and Oskar Painter, “Observation of Quantum Motion of a Nanomechanical Resonator,” *Physical Review Letters*, art. 033602, January 17, 2012.

16. I follow here a wonderful book by Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 2–5.

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