

Taking Up The Challenge Of Space: New Conceptualisations Of Space In The Work Of Peter Sloterdijk And Graham Harman

Marijn Nieuwenhuis

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ABSTRACT: The arguably two most creative theoretical contributions on established understandings of space have recently been provided in Peter Sloterdijk's *"Spheres"* [*Sphären*] trilogy and in the works of Graham Harman. Their work reveals a strong Heideggerian presence which can be traced back to the importance granted to concepts such as *Dasein* (in the case of Sloterdijk) and "tool-analysis" (for Harman). Both authors employ the concept of space to challenge the authority of traditional understandings of metaphysics and subject-oriented ontology.

This paper will analyse the role of space in their work and search for possibilities that could enable a conceptual synthesis. Such a preliminary investigation into the conceptual foundations of space should allow for a speculative reengagement with the long abandoned question of how space ontologically relates to being. The objective of this exercise, therefore, is to resume speculation about key concepts and ideas that have long been abandoned by the social sciences.

INTRODUCTION

This essay will argue that space is not an autonomous container in which things merely exist. Space is instead speculated to be an inseparable quality of objects that relate. This argument is therefore not the same as that conceded earlier by Leibniz in his 1715-1716 correspondences with Clarke. Leibniz, contra the Newtonians, argued that space was neither absolutist nor autonomous from objects. He famously argued instead for a relational space that was "an order of co-existences" (Leibniz 2001: 13)^[2]. This order was consequentially characterised by distance and situations relative to positions. Casey (1997a: 362, original emphasis) describes Leibniz then, as the "primary culprit" for the modern loss of the particularity of place, the denial of infinitive space and for developing "a new discipline of 'site analysis' (*analysis situs*, a rigorous analytic-geometric discipline)". The closing-off of the problem of space led to a so-called "fallacy of the misplaced concreteness [of space]" (Whitehead 1948). The way we experience space is not geometric. Neither is our knowledge of space *a priori* to space itself. My small flat is for me not definable by the geometric measurements of its interior. It is instead my place of dwelling. It is historical, warm, cosy, and familiar; it is home. Focusing on its geometric measurement would deprive the room from what it is, or what Heidegger (1996) called

its "worldhood". Lefebvre (1991), inspired by Heidegger, famously argues for a "true space" rather than a constructed "truth of space". Our modern knowledge of space has however closed-off speculations of what space could be. The limiting of space, by our particular modern knowledge of it, has led to a depoliticisation of space. While the "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994) has received a lot of attention in the social sciences, the "spatial trap" has remained largely unaddressed.

Sloterdijk and Harman take on a speculative understanding of what space is. The discussion that follows rests on the work of these two contemporary thinkers, who have effectively broken free from post-Kantian philosophies of access. Speculation is important for it allows for disclosure and, therefore, for the repoliticisation of space. The act of speculating playfully challenges the concreteness of knowledge and flirts with the possibility of contingency. Speculations on space are of particular relevance today, when the concreteness of space is imposed upon us through violent acts of regional, national and everyday bordering. Speculation about space is therefore not merely an intellectual tool to reintroduce its relevance in the social sciences. It is also of concrete importance to challenge the dominating and imposing modern knowledge of space.

This article argues that both authors see space instead as inherently relational and non-relational (or *anti*-relational). This leads to the conclusion that space itself is not an entity on its own. Space lies instead at the mutual exteriority of objects that stand in a phenomenological relation. I will propose to analyse space from what has recently been described as a "metaphysics of objects" (see e.g. Harman 2002). Such a position entails a negation of the Kantian idea that human agency grants the only viable means for accessing reality. I will employ the work of Sloterdijk and Harman to allow for a discussion which returns to the fundamental question of what space is. This point will be elaborated on and consequentially used to argue for a speculative return to a revised form of realism.

The paper's position starts from the idea that every object exists *in* something and *with* something. This Heideggerian-inspired notion is then used to challenge and replace traditional metaphysics with a "flattened" and "relational" ontology. Speculating about the

potentiality of different forms of Being^[3], other than human *Dasein*, allows us to think of other "worlds" that are independently constructed of human consciousness. This essay does however not entail a return to a raw version of scientific naturalism, for which reality is constituted by bare physicality, but wishes to commence from a phenomenological position that considers reality to be always of an intentional category. This idea of intentionality is in the work of the two authors removed from the idealism of an earlier phenomenology and replaced by a more object oriented mode of access.

Contemporary discussions on space have been shaped and taken over by abstract discussions of, for example, the ill-defined phenomenon of "globalisation". The emphasis on such abstractions symbolises a worrying trend to think of space as detached from objects and devoid of access. Peter Sloterdijk famously expressed the concern that discussions about the globe make little sense, because we never find ourselves outside of it. It is however not only the space of the globe which is always withdrawn from us. All spaces are both withdrawn and simultaneously always present in an allusive form. Space allows us to identify, classify and differentiate objects. Space is however also non-relational, because space does not allow us to ever fully grasp the objects in it. Space is in this article argued to belong to the world of phenomenology. Space allows for the coming into existence of worlds. Space is worlding. The capacity of space "to world" is not limited to human experience. Objects similarly "world". There is a growing need to return to discussions that start from the small and the tangible to shed light on the relationship between Being and space. Speculations about the meaning of space could additionally help challenge historically constructed and socially embedded understandings of space. This essay therefore hopes to modestly contribute to a growing body of literature which proposes to return to the big questions or what Quentin Meillassoux (2011) calls the "great outdoors" from which philosophy and the social sciences originated.

The thinkers I will be discussing in this paper both attempt to reengage with the prehistoric essence of Being and its relationship to space. Their work signifies (to different extents and purposes) a trend to move away from traditional post-Kantian philosophies in search of an alternative and progressive form of metaphysics. There are

admittedly many differences between Sloterdijk and Harman's work which could make a comparative assessment of their understandings of space a challenging exercise. Their tone and style of writing, but also their theoretical origins and philosophical starting positions are largely diverging. One of the things they do share in common, besides the obvious spatial predisposition in their writings, is the great influence that Heidegger's *Being and Time* enjoys in their work. The shared appreciation for what they both define as the greatest work of 20th century philosophy will therefore constitute an important component in this article. The mutual appreciation of both thinkers for the relational ontology of the French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour is similarly of noticeable influence in their work. Both Harman and Sloterdijk not only employ Latourian terms and concepts, but also draw inspiration from his wish to pluralise the concept of "world" and to repopulate it with a larger number of both animate and inanimate actors.

Peter Sloterdijk, the thinker discussed in the first section, has only recently been introduced to the Anglo-Saxon academic world^[4], but has for some time already been a household name in continental philosophy. Sloterdijk's seminal work *Spheres* [*Sphären*], on which this paper mainly draws, is characterised by its post-Heideggerian approach in enabling a more spatial understanding of ontology. His work is and should, according to him, be understood as the spatial companion to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Graham Harman, whose "Object-Oriented Ontology" (OOO) is discussed in section two, comes from a very different theoretical tradition. Harman combines the clarity of writing characteristic of analytical philosophy with the ontological insights of earlier phenomenologists such as Husserl, Zubiri, Whitehead among others. Harman gained prominence as a founding member of the so-called "Speculative Realism" (SR) school. Harman's OOO rests on a revision of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in which he, as with Sloterdijk, attempts to transcend Heidegger, to arrive at a potent and fertile form of realism. The third section of this article will attempt to pull the two thinkers closer together to allow for a critical engagement on the basis of their different conceptualisations of space. Such a dialogue will be translated into a preliminary synthesis, which will allow us to start speculating about the conceptual challenges that space poses to Being. The act of translation is admittedly not an

exclusive constructive exercise. The section will therefore be careful not to lose sight of what might get lost in the making of such a synthesis. The conclusion will then summarise some of the main findings and reiterate the argument that space is inseparable from the Being of objects.

SLOTERDIJK AND SPHEROLOGY

Taking his inspiration from oriental philosophy, French post-structuralism and German critical theory, Sloterdijk is as much a thinker of everything (but never just anything) as an eclectic "intellectual magpie, taking inspiration and ideas from a wide-range of intellectual sources in the German language and beyond, arranging them in new and surprising ways" (Elden 2012: 3). Sloterdijk, however, reserves a specific role for phenomenologically-inclined thinkers who provide him with the possibility to discover and elaborate on the ontological dimensions of space or, in Sloterdijk's own words, on the "onto-topology of Being". As such, space, for Sloterdijk, is something that is simultaneously relational and ontological.

Sloterdijk defines and studies spheres in a manner that is redolent of Edward Casey's profound, but oft neglected, *Fate of Place* (1997) and *Getting Back into Place* (2009). Sloterdijk allows spheres, as Casey does for places, a central role in the definition and possibility of Being itself. To "be-there" (*Da-Sein* or *Dasein*) means for Sloterdijk always to "be-with-something" (*Mit-Sein*) and to "be-in-something" (*In-Sein*). The "in" and the "with" are for Sloterdijk therefore the essential ontological cornerstones for any being to be at all. This insight was also made by the young Heidegger, though he later changed directions and chose to ever more legitimise the specificity of human *Dasein* in existential terms. Sloterdijk (as well as Harman) consequently considers his effort as a return to the young Heidegger for whom space was an essential element for the ontology of Being^[5].

The spatiality of Heidegger's *Dasein* is composed of "de-distancing" (or "de-severance" or *Ent-fernung*) and "orientation" ("directionality" or *Ausrichtung*). Malpas (2006: 91) takes the former "to refer to the way in which specific things take on a certain relation to us from out of the larger structure in which they are situated". Heidegger (1996: 97) writes: "De-distancing means making distance disappear, making the being at a distance of something disappear,

bringing it near. Dasein is essentially de-distancing... De-distancing discovers remoteness." I walk across the street towards the confectionery which allows me to become aware of the long, thin black liquorice on sale. Orientation by contrast "refers to the way in which, in being involved in a certain task, I find myself already situated in certain ways with respect to the things and places around me..." (Malpas 2006: 91). For example, while eating, I have a fork on the left of me, a knife on the right and a plate in the middle. Heidegger (1996: 100, original emphasis) argues that "Da-sein is spatial by way of circumspectly discovering space so that it is related to beings thus spatially encountered by constantly de-distancing. As being-in which de-distances, Da-sein has at the same time the character of *directionality*. Every bringing near has always taken a direction in a region beforehand from which what is de-distanced approaches so that it can be discovered with regards to its place". De-distancing on the basis of orientation allows Dasein, in other words, to make sense of a withdrawn reality in which things exist objectively (but not ontologically) in the world (*sein in*). Objects are "ontic", while Dasein is thought to be ontological. The latter is through its capacity of de-distancing and orientation, therefore, "in-the-world" (ie. "Being-in") and "world forming" (or *weltbildend*).

"What recent philosophers referred to as 'being-in-the-world' first of all, and in most cases, means being-in-spheres... Spheres are air conditioning systems in whose construction and calibration, for those living in real coexistence, it is out of the question not to participate. The symbolic air conditioning of the shared space is the primal production of every society" (Sloterdijk 2011: 46).

A sphere is, in yet other words, as a "world formatted by its inhabitants... or as the spaces where people actually live. I [ie. Sloterdijk] would like to show that human beings have, till today, been misunderstood, because the space where they exist has always been taken for granted without ever being made conscious and explicit" (Sloterdijk in Kristal 2012: 153, original emphasis). Spherology offers then a "theory of the minimal *conditions* for the initially impersonal process of creative self-organization which isolated and distanced the proto-hominids from their environment in what he [i.e. Sloterdijk] calls 'anthropogene islands' or 'anthropospheres'" (van Tuinen 2009: 110).

Heidegger showed that humans are "thrown-into-the-world" into its "there", but for Sloterdijk this does not mean that we are immediately at home in the world. He argues that "it is exactly this concept of being-at-home in the world that must be questioned, as to simply accept this condition as a fact would mean to fall back into the logic of container-physics that needs to be overcome." (Sloterdijk 2012: 37). Sloterdijk shows that we are not only able, but indeed compelled to make our own worlds. Without spheres humans would simply not be able to survive as a species. "Being-in-the-world" is for Sloterdijk thus first and foremost "Being-in-a-sphere". Such spheres are however not singular, but always plural. Sloterdijk provides in his 2,500-page magnum opus (1998, 1999, 2004) a historical onto-anthropological understanding of how humans are to be understood topologically. Topology lies at the heart of spherology given that for Sloterdijk it is "the *topos* of man [which] is a far more determining aspect of human existence than the *essence* of man" (ten Kate 2011: 103). The *topos* is for Sloterdijk "a condition of being in which our *Dasein* - to use Heidegger's redefinition of human existence - is fully integrated, to the extent that the *Da* of our *Dasein* is understood as fundamentally topical" (ten Kate 2011: 105). Sloterdijk therefore challenges the still dominant philosophical tradition which started with Descartes and continues to be of still great importance in discussions on the essence of human *Dasein*. The premise for Sloterdijk's ontological anthropology is not grounded in the *existential* question *what* being is, but revolves instead around a "relational 'onto-topology'" of the places *where* Being is made possible. The *Da* in *Dasein* forms as such the first sphere. It is also here that Sloterdijk breaks with Heidegger's existentialism.

Sloterdijk's emphasis on space leads him to detach Heidegger's notion of a "house of Being" from its original context of language. Sloterdijk proposes instead a literal reading of the house, which starts from the necessity of Being to interact with its surroundings. Sloterdijk agrees, in other words, with Heidegger that Being is thrown (*Geworfenen*) into the world, but only to part again ways with Heidegger to demonstrate that this original act is followed by the development and employment of what Sloterdijk describes as "anthropotechnologies". Such technologies, of which language is only one, help construct the "shell", "housing" or "sphere" (*Ge-Häuser*) that translates into a Foucauldian-like biopolitics of self-

domestication. This early sphere protects beings from the outside world and helps to transform mere ontic being into Being. Anthropotechnology is therefore considered to enable the Heideggerian "clearing" (*Lichtung*) from which Being-in-the-world becomes possible.

Sloterdijk conceptualises spheres in different sizes and forms which he defines as "thought-figures" that possess a relational capacity to being. He chronologically analyses and discusses them according to their size and temporal evolution. The first volume of *Spheres* (2011 [1998]) deals with the "microspherology" [*Mikrosphärologie*] of "bubbles" [*Blasen*]. The second volume (1999)^[6] deals with the "macrospherology" [*Makrosphärologie*] of "globes" [*Globen*] and the third volume (2004) with the "plural spherology" [*plurale Sphärologie*] of "foam" [*Schäume*]. The volumes could be read in a linear, chronological fashion in which humans first existed in the bubbles of the microsphere and later came to construct more complex macro-spheres. The last volume is a socially critical analysis of the recent emergence of so-called "foam". The first volume of *Spheres* is for this essay however the most relevant among the three, since it sets out the ontological presuppositions and foundations that will form the building blocks for the other two books.

Bubbles are in the first volume described to be the micro-spherology of human beings. Human beings are, as Sloterdijk shows, always located in a bubble which protects them from the outside and allows them to be and remain alive. Bubbles are, in other words, the climatologically tuned spaces or spheres ("greenhouses" or *Treibhäuser*) which allow beings immunity from the environment (*um-welt*). They are also, as briefly noted earlier, "world-forming" (*weltbildend*) in that humans adjust their spherological environment ("Greenhouse effect" or *Treibhauseffekt*). Sloterdijk discusses and describes bubbles and spheres in both material and in immaterial form (e.g. the uterus, the home, the polis, etc.). In the second volume of his trilogy he, in fact, attaches the concept of a sphere to the globe itself. However, he never departs from Heidegger's fundamental idea that *Dasein* is situated *in* a somewhere and *with* others. He rather constantly deepens the importance of being-in. To be means for Sloterdijk and, as discussed in the next section, also for Harman, always to be-*with* something and Being-with something always takes place *in* something. This

forms the conceptual springboard for his genealogical assessment of the beginnings of spheres.

Sloterdijk's perhaps most widely discussed example of such a sphere is the relationship between the foetus and the placenta that make up the bubble of the uterus ("the original sphere" or *die Ursphäre*). The intimate relationship between the foetus and the womb is, according to Sloterdijk, the most intimate (and therefore closest to perfect) example of a bubble. The structural process which allows the two "poles" to merge into one sphere is what Sloterdijk, in Latourian language, defines as "coupling"^[7]. "We hold the opinion that through a theory of couplings, of genius and of complemented existence, we can save all there is to save from Heidegger's interest in rootedness." (Sloterdijk 2012: 41).

The reasons that Sloterdijk commences his spherology and pays special attention to the 'perfect symbiosis' that takes place between the placenta (the "original companion") and the foetus are plural. I will present here the two that I find most appropriate for the purpose of coming closer to Sloterdijk's relational understanding of space. The first of which demonstrates and confirms the earlier suggestion that Sloterdijk is not so much looking for an answer to the question of *what* makes us human, but is rather more interested in the question *where* humans are. "Where" comes for Sloterdijk before "what". He therefore does not start his analysis from a position in which humans are *a priori* presented as the subjects worthy of investigation, but rather flattens the ground for a topological understanding of *where* humans can come (and have historically come) into Being. Being is in Sloterdijk's "onto-anthropology" removed from its revered position as an autonomous "subject" and effectively replaced by bipolar and multipolar relations that enable and constitute a sphere.

Sloterdijk empirically demonstrates that within the womb ("*The inner-sphere of the absolute Mother*" or *innenraum der absoluten Mutter*), it is impossible to draw an epistemological distinction between the object and the subject. This is because the foetus does neither recognise the placenta nor the "'nobjects' ([i.e.] neither subjects nor objects) such as placental blood, intrauterine acoustics, and other medial givens... [The] child develops [therefore] an identity not by recognizing itself at a distance in the mirror but

through presubjective resonances" (van Tuinen 2007: 281). This "negative gynaecology" (*negative Gynäkologie*), Sloterdijk argues, embodies the perfect immersion of "Being-a-pair" [*Paar-Sein*] in a bubble, which ultimately bursts when the natal process commences.

"In terms of its dramatic content, what one generally calls 'cutting the [umbilical] cord' is the introduction of the child into the sphere of ego-forming clarity. To cut means to state individuality with the knife. The one who performs the cut is the first separation-giver in the subject's history; through the gift of separation, he provides the child with the stimulus for existence in the external media." (Sloterdijk 2011: 388).

The moment the child is "thrown-into-the-World" and has bid farewell to the placenta ("primal companion" or the *Urbegleiter*) is also the moment in which it will have to form new relationships and in turn create and dwell in new bubbles. The uterus is the (primordial) sphere responsible for creating the conditions in which the relation between the two objects literally comes to life *before* the foundation of subjectivity and the subject itself. Sloterdijk's introduction of a "pre-subjectivity" therefore provocatively challenges the idea that philosophy should start from the premise of a subject-object dichotomy and flattens the metaphysical ground on which, as discussed in the next section, we also find the object oriented ontology of Graham Harman. Sloterdijk, in another vein, argues against the idea of the European "metaphysical age" that object and subject are divided. He (Sloterdijk 2004: 42) laments that they "put the soul, the self and the human on one side, and the thing, the mechanism and the inhuman on the other... At the same time it denies to things and materials an abundance of characteristics that upon closer look they in fact do possess. If these traditional errors are corrected respectively, a radically new view of cultural and natural objects comes about".

For Sloterdijk, as with Harman, objects do not exist anonymously from each other, but must instead always be understood in relation to other objects. They do not have an existence prior to, or independent from, these relations, but are also not reducible to a set of finite relations or qualities. The possibilities of Being are, if we would draw Sloterdijk's ontology to its logical conclusion, infinite. The number of possible spheres is, in fact, as infinitive as the number of

objects. Co-subjectivity and co-existence [*Mit-Sein*] are the norm in Sloterdijk's post-human philosophy. Sloterdijk ridicules Cartesian notion of subjectivity and cogito when he writes that:

"Man is a thinking meteorite. Only in contact with what exists does his surrounding catch fire. Through my incandescence appears what exists and makes sense as a surrounding. I burn, and therefore, it can't be that there is nothing. If I burn, it is because I am here to co-exist with the rest of what is here" (Sloterdijk in Kristal 2012: 160).

The "tragic" and "traumatic" element in the bursting of the "ur-bubble"^[8] forms the second component in Sloterdijk's relational onto-topology. Sloterdijk contextualises this primordial separation, which forces the subject to confront the "Big Outdoors", in both structural and historical terms. Sloterdijk's structural analysis relies on and echoes Arendt's (1998) notion of "human natality" in which the natal function of action works as the foundation of constant renewal. Sloterdijk however, blends this concept with his own philosophical anthropology to win our attention for the importance of the historical *whereabouts* of the human. The longing for the perfect union in the bubble of the broken womb will, as we are told, throughout the subject's lifetime compel her to travel, create and dwell in many different spheres. Human beings are for Sloterdijk, in a Heideggerian sense, therefore quite literally "life-enabling" and "animating" architects and engineers. Being means for Sloterdijk therefore first and foremost the engineering and designing of architectural spheres that make possible and give meaning to existence^[9].

The interaction between objects in a place is, in other words, structurally and continually repeated throughout the beginning of time. It is however equally important to remember that Sloterdijk also here again refuses to draw a strict line between the subject and objects or between humans and things. Every object we "confront" or "encounter" is for Sloterdijk a relational act of immersion. He (Sloterdijk 2011: 92, 93) describes the insertion of a candy into one's mouth as the realisation that even "[t]he most basic luxury food is suitable to convince me that an incorporated object, far from coming unambiguously under my control, can take possession of me and dictate its topic to me". He (Sloterdijk 2011: 94) follows this line of reasoning and consequentially poses the

provocative question what it is that “remains of the [enlightenment] dream of human autonomy once the subject has experienced itself as a penetrable hollow body?”. The answer to this question leads back to the core of Sloterdijk’s spherology which is grounded in the idea that to be always means to be with-something and in-something. The reified individual or the fetish of individualism (latin: *in-dividuus* or “indivisibility”) is for Sloterdijk (as is the indivisibility of atoms for quantum mechanics) therefore a myth. The individual is for Sloterdijk and less explicitly (and politically) also for Harman relationally composed of smaller parts (as other objects). Sloterdijk’s discussions of spheres are, to briefly sum up, as much about the undertaking “of the experiment to demonstrate to what extent the “being-a-pair” [*Paar-Sein*] precedes all encounters” (Funcke and Sloterdijk 2005), as they are about exposing the myth of an autonomous individual subject. “There are no individuals, only dividuals [*Dividuen*] – humans only exist as particles, or poles of spheres. There exist exclusively pairs [*Paare*] and their extensions [*Erweiterungen*]...” (Sloterdijk 2001: 144, translated, see also Sloterdijk 2011: 83 ff.). These realisations are also of importance for Sloterdijk’s genealogical record of human relationships in spheres to which we will now shortly shift our attention, before moving on to Harman’s OOO.

Sloterdijk describes how the placenta in pre-modern times was respected across different cultures and religiously represented as the inseparable doppelganger of the foetus. The arrival of modernity (which Sloterdijk mockingly describes as the regime of “placental nihilism”) has, however, come to alienate the foetus from the placenta, which was consequentially excommunicated and banished from any form of philosophical consideration^[10]. “But where, as in the most recent part of the Modern Age, the With-space is annulled and withdrawn from the start through the elimination of the placenta, the individual increasingly falls prey to the manic collectives and total mothers - and, in their absence, to depression.” (Sloterdijk 2001: 285). The loss of such “intimacy” between objects (for Sloterdijk a defining element of modernity) was replaced by the myth of an autonomous individuality. The analysis of the post-natal diversification of spheres does for Sloterdijk, however, neither start nor finish with the sphere-dependent and sphere-creating “di-vidual”, but is also constitutive of the genealogical foundations of the “macro-spheres” which he (1999) discusses

in the second volume of his trilogy. The third volume (2004) deals with the breakup of spheres and the emergence of so-called “co-isolated foams”. I do not believe however, that an analysis of the last two volumes would contribute to a better understanding of the theoretical premise of Sloterdijk’s spatial ontology nor does this paper seek to undertake such an endeavour^[11]. Neither of these volumes radically departs from the conceptual ontology presented in the first volume which shows that Being for Sloterdijk always means to *be-with* something and to *be-in* something.

The philosophical foundations of Sloterdijk’s *Spheres* are, to shortly summarise, first and foremost grounded in a historical study of the need of Being to create interior spaces. Humans need to be *in* and *with* something, but human bodies themselves are similarly *thein* something for another thing. Human animals “flourish only in the greenhouse of their autogenous sphere” (Sloterdijk 2011: 46). The capacity and necessity to create spheres in order to be is, of course, not reserved to humans alone, but could equally be applied to the realm of other animate and even inanimate entities. Every individual as much as every other entity is an aggregate. Space for Sloterdijk grants, in other words, the condition necessary for the existence of Being. “It provides room, both literally and metaphorically, for whole species of spaces to grow and bloom, spaces of empire, spaces of capital, spaces of signal and communication, spaces of eros, spaces of dreams” (Thrift 2012: 143). Space is, as Thrift (2012: 140) notes, thus “understood ‘gynaecologically’ as a set of envelopes or surrounds or shelters, self-animated spaces that give their inhabitants the resources to produce worlds”. It is this faculty of space, to produce intentional realities for animate and inanimate objects alike, that forms the phenomenological bridge between Sloterdijk’s theory of spheres and the object ontology oriented (OOO) philosophy of Graham Harman.

OBJECT ORIENTED ONTOLOGY

Graham Harman is one of the four thinkers^[12] who helped pave the early foundations of the so-called “Speculative Realism” (SR) school. The interdependence between the theories and research interest of its core members and the influence which especially Quentin Meillassoux has had on Harman’s OOO, compels me to shortly introduce the main philosophical principles of SR.

Quentin Meillassoux is a former student of Alain Badiou whose writings inspired Meillassoux's (2011) now famous *After Finitude*. The work could be said to have served as a general introduction to the underlying principles of the school and will be discussed shortly in greater detail.

Speculative Realism

The theme which unites the SR thinkers is their common discontent over the longstanding Kantian dominance in both the analytical and continental philosophical tradition. The realism that SR proposes is, however, not so much a return to a form of pre-critical realism, but rather a third road between realism and idealism. It openly attempts to speculate "about the nature of reality independently of thought and of humanity more generally" (Bryant et al., 2011: 3).

SR attacks the foundations of what is commonly known as the Kantian "Copernican Revolution", which, unlike the name suggests, is argued to refer to the exact opposite of the decentring of human existence. Kant is said to have been among the first to make our access to the world dependent upon our knowledge of it. This form of so-called "correlationism" is, Meillassoux (2011: 118) argues, the exact opposite of the task pursued by the empirical sciences which aim "to actually uncover knowledge of a world that is indifferent to any relation to the world". The task which SR sets upon itself is therefore nothing short of a challenging of the Kantian dualistic thinking.

SR is, crudely summarised, centred on a revision of Kant's inaccessible "thing-in-itself" (*das Ding an sich*). Meillassoux shows that the thing-in-itself is temporally outside human access. He uses the example of a fossil (the "arche-fossil") to show that we cannot come to terms with things that temporally existed prior (ancestrally) to our knowledge of it. This supports his thesis that things not only exist temporally autonomous from human consciousness, but also independent from Kantian facticity. Harman's argument moves beyond Meillassoux's temporal critique. He argues that correlationism not only fails to explain the existence of things before and after human temporality, but that it is also incapable of talking about realities that are spatially outside of facticity. "The correlationist seems no better able to account for the falling vase than for the ancestral formation of the earth" (Harman, 2011c: 42). Harman notes that "spatial exteriority is the

really crucial point... [and its omission in *After Finitude*] might be a candidate for the 'blind spot [of Meillassoux's work]...' (2011a: 89). Harman notes that things are perfectly able to exist in a reality that is unknown to us.

Thinking about something is, according to SR, always *for me* and relies thus on what Meillassoux describes as the "correlationist cogito". The reality of the thing-in-itself is, in other words, constrained by the number of finite possibilities imposed by our human capacity to think. This means, bluntly put, that even though "*for me* we cannot think a tree existing outside thought, ... such a tree might exist nonetheless *in spite of my not being able to think it*" (Harman, 2011c: 27, original emphasis). Harman elaborates on this point and shows that reality is in fact "hidden" or "concealed"; however, this does not mean that things do not exist but rather that our access to them is limited. Harman goes on to show that we do not need human Dasein to realise that reality is always concealed, and that it is not solely humans that are able to "be-in-the-world".

"The world is not just Heidegger's "world," but always a world populated with distinct forests, atoms, and omens. For this reason, it is misleading to claim that only the world as a whole has primary reality, that its constituents are only *potentially* there. On the contrary, the parts of the world are *really* there, defending their private integrity even while besieged by the worldhood of the world." (Harman, 2002: 292, original emphasis).

A vase might be falling in an unoccupied country house without anybody seeing it being destroyed into smaller shards of glass. Harman drives this point somewhat later home when he argues that "*even in the case of direct physical presence an entity outstrips the thought-world correlate in a manner that is never merely lacunary [in perceptual terms].*" (Harman, 2011c: 43, original emphasis). Harman connects the idea of independent objects to the still largely unexplored depths of Heidegger's philosophy of "absence" to that of the intentional world of "presence" described in Husserlian phenomenology.

Tool-Being

Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects is the product of Graham Harman's PhD dissertation (1999) which bears a similar title. The

book contains a similar critique of contemporary philosophy as that of Meillassoux's (2011) *After Finitude*, but starts from a different philosophical premise and arrives at largely different conclusions. Harman's main philosophical influences in his search for an "object-oriented metaphysics" are the phenomenological protégés of Franz Brentano. He relies mainly on the works of Husserl, Twardowski, Whitehead and others, but also on Bruno Latour and, of course, the towering figure of Martin Heidegger. The last thinker provides him with the duality of the "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*) and "ready-at-hand" (*zuhanden*) which he, on more than one occasion, identifies as the idea which made Heidegger "the single pivotal philosopher of the twentieth century" (Harman, 2002: 3, Harman, 1999: i). This widely cited philosophical concept has, despite embodying the central thread of Heidegger's entire intellectual corpus, "been almost universally misunderstood" (Harman, 2002: 4). The reason for this will be discussed shortly. The other great influence on Harman's work is Edmund Husserl whose notions of "accidents" and "intentional objects" he employs alongside Heidegger's tool-analysis^[13]. The fusion of these two sets of concepts and thinkers helps him to combine Heidegger's philosophy of "absence" with a philosophy of "presence" (Harman, 2011b: 35). The result is the materialisation of a unique "quadruple structure" (Figure 1). He places this structure, technically inspired by Heidegger's *Geviert* (fourfold)^[14], at the centre of each and every (animate and inanimate) object.

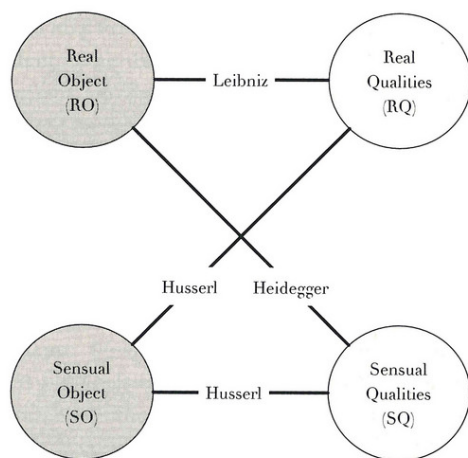


Figure 1: The theoretical sources of inspiration for Harman's fourfold structure^[15].

Harman's quadruple structure begins with Heidegger's (e.g. 1996) tool-analysis, which is grounded in the idea of a reality composed of objects that are hidden from view. Harman describes the subterranean realm of objects as "tool-being". An object is for him a unified entity which exists autonomously "from its wider context and also from its own pieces" (Harman, 2011b: 116). A "real object" (defined by its "tool-being") is always concealed from other real objects and therefore absolutely non-relational. Harman complements Heidegger's concept of the concealed nature of objects with the Husserlian notion of the "intentional" or, as Harman describes it, the "sensual". Sensual objects are the intentional interpretations of concealed objects by intending objects. They enjoy a rich relational capacity which helps to constitute the reality of real, intending objects.

Harman's resultant OOO must therefore be understood as a fourfold structure consisting of two dualisms at the centre of every object. The first dualism is of a Heideggerian origin and is grounded in the idea of concealed objects with equally withdrawn real qualities. The second dualism is inspired by the philosophy of Husserl and consists of sensual objects and equally sensual qualities that are abundantly visible in their sensuous "present-at-handness". Reality can, according to Harman, be experienced as a result of the tension between real objects and their sensual translations. This tension is what for Harman constitutes space. He identifies however, three other, additional structural tensions: "time", "essence" and "eidos" (Figure 2). We will for the purpose of this paper however primarily dwell on Harman's spatial tension which shares the same strong Heideggerian overtones that we identified earlier in Sloterdijk's theory of spheres. First however we feel that we must explain why OOO rests on the foundational principle that real objects are inaccessible. This will allow us to further elaborate how this inaccessibility of the real ("the real always hides") renders into the need to translate objects into a sensual form.

Most analyses on Heidegger's tool-analysis, as Harman (2002) demonstrates, proceed from a pragmatic philosophy in which "present-at-hand" and "ready-at-hand" are thought of as parts of a "practical philosophy" which concentrates on the tools themselves. Humanity is through its ability to emotionally and theoretically experience reality in such accounts raised above the experiential capacity of both animals and inanimate objects.

Humanity is, in other words, singled out as the unique agency which is able to penetrate the ready-at-hand of tools and to reach into the subterranean realm of their present-at-hand.

This ability to expose the *zuhandenheit* of an object and to return it to a projected "world-in-itself" is commonly said to be one of defining characteristics of the uniqueness of human *Dasein*. This is, according to Harman, however not how we should read Heidegger or as Harman notes himself: "the tool-analysis *does not* serve to criticize the notion of independent objects, as if to champion instead a subjective human realm of gadgets.... The concept of *Dasein* is not introduced in order to rough up the notion of a world-in-itself" (Harman, 2002: 19, original emphasis). *Dasein* does, in other words, not lend humans a special capacity to access the world as it really is. This reading of Heidegger's *Dasein* expresses a similar kind of criticism as the one voiced by Sloterdijk. The latter similarly intends to break with the "hysteric-heroic subject that always believes itself to be the first to die and that remains miserably ignorant concerning its embeddedness within relations of intimacy and solidarity" (Sloterdijk 2012: 40). Sloterdijk wishes to depart from the existentialism from which both the old and the young Heidegger suffered. Both thinkers express an eagerness to move beyond the reified character of *Dasein* and a desire to travel to a post-subject/ object philosophy. For Sloterdijk this means not asking the "who" question, but the "where" question. Harman (2002: 128) wishes to leave *Dasein* altogether and notes that "the theme of *Dasein* is subordinate to the analysis of tool-being rather than the reverse... [I]t means that the being of an entity makes only sense in terms of the general strife between its concealed execution and its luminous surface."

Here we seem to have arrived at the thrust of how Harman intends to break with Heidegger's existential *Dasein* to pursue the phenomenology of Husserl. The true nature of objects is always receded from experience which means that any form of interaction with tool-being can only occur through an intentional mediation (or "vicarious causation") in which only certain so-called "sensual qualities" of the object are encountered.

Harman's notion of the sensual are closely related to Husserl's phenomenological "intentional objects", but are removed from Husserl's concealed idealism. They could in fact be said to

perform the role of Heidegger's "as-structure" in which the Being of an object can only in a mediated form be experienced as a "sensual object". The "vicarious causation" between a real object and a sensual one is, according to Harman, what constitutes space. Space is for Harman, as it is similarly for Sloterdijk, thus phenomenally understood as the relation which occurs at the exteriority of interacting objects. Space is the sensual as-structure that results from the relationship between objects. This mode of interaction is in Harman's account not reserved to human *Dasein* alone which, through its existential "de-distancing" and "directionality", is supposedly able to make sense of the world. Space is for Harman instead the (present-at-hand) "broken hammer". Heidegger is for Harman (2002: 55) therefore the "[philosopher] of tools and space". Let us, however, not get ahead of ourselves and so briefly return to the debate on the inaccessibility of the autonomous real object. The idea of a flattened ontology without existential anthropocentrism (an "ontological difference without metaphysics" as Sloterdijk (in van Tuinen 2011: 49) writes) challenges the historically long-privileged position of the human cogito vis-à-vis that of other animals and even inanimate objects.

Human agency, Harman (1999, 2002) writes, is through its earlier refuted ability to make *withdrawn* things *visible* not able to move an inch closer to the thing in-itself, but rather provides its own translation of the thing. An apple remains, even if we would subtract it from its accidental (sensuous) qualities, *for us* only an apple and not a weighty companion as it might be *for the apple tree*. What we see is, in other words, a Husserlian "intentional object" from which we create our own, intended human world. Harman calls these specific versions of real objects "sensual objects" because they exist "only in relation to the perceiver... [while] the real is whatever withdraws from that relation." (Harman, 2011a: 110).

This makes humans in fact not very different than, let's say, dogs that similarly "experience" the object (that we perceive as) "car" through a specific intentionality from which a sensual version of the object emerges. It is unlikely that the sensual object for the dog will be the sensual car-object that it is for us. What remains *for us* (and all other animate and inanimate entities) is, in other words, a "caricature" of the (subterranean) object which will always make visible only some of its

"qualities". There is for Harman no reason why humans should be considered to enjoy a privileged point of access to the real objects that constitute reality^[16]. There is for him therefore neither a possible justification for a division between object and subject. Harman does, in other words, not deny that reality exists (as some correlationists might argue), but instead proposes the idea that we can access it only through an intermediation that creates our intended version of it.

"If all relations are really on the same footing, and all relations are equally inept at exhausting the depths of their terms, then an intermediate form of contact between things must be possible. This can only take a *sensual* form, since it can only encounter translated or distorted versions of other objects" (Harman, 2011a: 120, original emphasis).

The ensuing "democratisation" of access to reality^[17] means that objects will, if made present-at-hand, instead always be experienced through their specific, sensuous qualities. All objects are for other animate and inanimate objects therefore Latourian "translations". This leads to the result that different "worlds", alongside the human one, now start to become possible, but also that the reality is something that we can openly "speculate" about but not deny. This means that Harman in fact proposes an extreme form of realism from which multiple, overlapping worlds exist alongside each other.

Objects must then, as we have already hinted at, have two kinds of qualities: real qualities which are autonomous and invisible and other qualities that Harman describes as "sensual" (e.g. colourful, soft, hard etc.) which do not recede from appearance but allow objects to be experienced. The former are for Harman entirely "non-relational" and remain withdrawn in the object itself (for which Harman uses the classical concept of "essence")^[18]. The latter, in contrast, are responsible for generating a specific tension with the (always) concealed real object from which these qualities radiate. Tensions (Figure 2) are in fact what make objects sensually visible for other "objects" to experience. They therefore form an important pillar for understanding Harman's object-oriented philosophy as they constitute the "relations" from which reality gets translated for all entities.

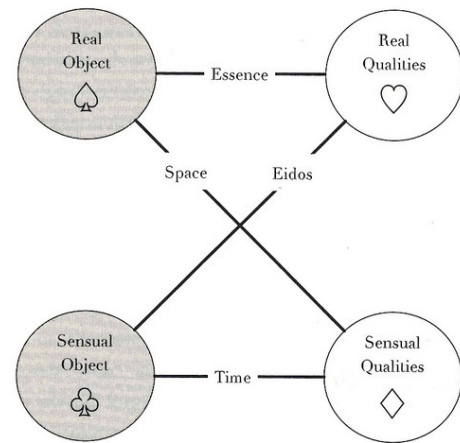


Figure 2: The Four Tensions in Harman's quadruple structure (Essence, Space, Time and Eidos)^[19]

The fact that sensual qualities can make objects visible comes forth from their ability to relate to other objects. Harman (2005: 164) describes sensual qualities therefore as the "glue of the universe... Instead of God intervening in every interaction in the world, qualities as a whole now take on this formerly divine mission, and serve as the sole conduit between one entity and another". It is only through sensual qualities which reside in tension within the interior or real object that objects are able to connect and relate to their outside.

The sensual translation of real objects is, as we have seen before, the result of an intention which is responsible for bringing into life the sensual object (or "sensual vicar") that mediates between two real objects. The confrontation between a real object through a sensual mediation is what we earlier described as "vicarious causation". The causation is "vicarious" because real objects are inexhaustible and thus need to be experienced phenomenally (or sensually). The metaphor of "translation" is neither entirely accidental. A lot of the original message gets normally lost in its execution, but the act of translating also holds a certain transformative power. It creates a world of meaning. This means that the real object is, as a result of its encounter with an intending (or translating) object, first separated from its original surroundings and "parts" and later reintegrated to constitute a sensual object. This new sensual object is, as I will demonstrate more empirically, also a real object because it fulfils the requirement of autonomy and unity to define it as such.

Causation between object works however not

only constructively upwards, but also constructively downwards. The separating of sensual “notes” from real objects exposes in fact an indefinite (or maybe even infinitive) regress. The “peeling of the onion” helps to expose the many relations that make up reality, but never quite manages to confront the concealed “essence” of all these layers. The peeling of reality has thus also a transformative function in which objects are sensually experienced, but remain forever hidden. This process of ontological “fissure” of sensual objects is the principle act of what Harman describes as “allure”^[20]. Allure “splits objects from their notes while preserving or even inaugurating the connection between them” (Harman 2005: 254). Alluring is not confined to human objects, but is also what (constantly) occurs between other animate and inanimate objects. Without allure “causation would be impossible, and the world would be made up of frozen and isolated monads. But even this could not happen, since without allure the levels of the world would never communicate, and without communication no object could ever be built up out of parts, meaning that nothing would have any specific qualities in the first place” (Harman 2005: 245). Allure is therefore an entirely relational process. It allows impregnable objects to communicate with each other in their sensual form.

Imagine walking across a residential street and becoming aware of a multi-storey house. One is consciously or unconsciously forced to accept this house as an incomplete, concealed translation of the real entity. This “perceiving” of objects, such as the house, is however conceptually different from the act of “allure”. The former translates objects into qualities or “notes”. Perceiving the house means therefore taking the door of the house as an integral quality of the house or experiencing the house as the integral quality of the street. Allure refers instead to a downwards conversion of notes into sensual objects from which the olive-green door or the Gaudi-like house becomes *ipso facto* the object of analysis, admiration or nostalgia. “Allure is that furnace or steel mill of the world where notes are converted into objects.” (Harman 2005: 179). Allure does not, however, merely mean “separation”, but also enables a new relation (e.g. between me and the door). The act of alluring reveals reality therefore in its sensual form. “[A]llure is a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing's unity and its plurality of notes somehow partially disintegrates.” (Harman

2005: 143). Allure harbours therefore strong spatial connotations. Space is thus not a container nor an autonomous entity, but rather the active tension that lies between the interior of relating objects.

The gradual deconstruction of the house, as the act of allure, allows for a process of de-distancing between the intending real me and the sensual house which at this point now starts to withdraw from the intended reality. I am now engaging myself with the new intentional objects that are no longer sensual notes but objects (e.g. the olive-green door, the dirty grey curtain etc.) for and in themselves. The tension between the real object and its associated sensual qualities is constitutive of space. Space is therefore, according to Harman, the exteriority of objects that relate sensually. It provides a concrete form to non-relational real objects and is relationally constitutive of the emergence of new sensual objects. It is therefore, on the one hand, entirely “relational” and, on the other hand, entirely “anti-relational”. I might stand on the other end of the road and see my friend's house. Space becomes in this instance relational. Upon crossing the road and facing the house, I am unable to come to terms with the real, withdrawn house. Space is in that instance non-relational. “This interplay of relation and non-relation is precisely what we mean when we speak of space...” (Harman 2011a: 100).

Through the act of allure we separate the intended house from its relationship of its neighbouring buildings, the street, passing cars and other sensual objects that we think, as we walk by, are not “part” of the sensual house. Harman describes this process in which connections between sensual objects are partly dammed to prevent the total fusing of reality as “buffered causation”.

A “buffer zone” is formed from which I am prevented to access the real object, but can start intending its sensual spatial form. Such buffers are constituted by what Harman calls “black noise” which helps to effectively distribute and channel the sensual qualities, notes and underlying relations into a specific sensual object. The structuring capacity of black noise allows objects to become sensually visible for me. The resultant house is however, not merely a schism of human consciousness, as many traditional phenomenologists have argued, but instead a real object which will continue to be real even after

and before (or completely without) human presence.

Reality is, in other words, made accessible through the black noise on the interior of objects in which accidental notes are buffered. Black noise does however not construct reality (because space does), but rather allows it to be experienced in its sensual form. It is the tension between sensual qualities within the sensual object. If space is the constructive and performative relationship between objects, time is that which only resides in the interior of sensual objects. It grants objects to take a concrete sensual form in one instance. Think for example about a frozen pizza. The frozen pizza is the sensual object which hosts time. Time allows for the tension between the sensual object (the pizza) and its accidental features (the pizza's frozenness). The way we experience time is not progressively or linear, but through the accidental qualities of the sensual object. "[T]here is a separate time on the interior of every object that exists, in which the internal notes of those objects are showered with a varying succession of different floodlights, strobes, confetti, and glitter, while nonetheless remaining the same. Time is the strife between an object and its accidents or contiguous relations." (Harman 2005: 250).

Time can, however, never affect the real object. It is for that reason also non-relational. It is composed of the fluctuating sensual qualities that make up the appearance of the sensual object. Time is according to Harman therefore "[t]he black noise: not the condition of possibility of this noise, nor the ecstatic structure through which humans encounter it, but simply this noise itself" (Harman 2005: 250). Time belongs therefore to the subjective experience of the sensual, while space is what is constitutive of changes in reality. This leads Harman to conclude that "[t]he mere flow of time changes nothing, and what we are measuring when we measure progression are changes in the actual regime of objects, also known as changes in space" (Harman 2005: 252). Space is therefore the Heideggerian experience of the concealed real object.

Harman's (2002: 253) conclusion that "space is made up of quanta, because space is the absolute mutual exteriority of objects" resembles Sloterdijk's dyadic structure of spheres. The technical functioning of Harman's "allure" and Sloterdijk's dynamic process of "coupling" share a number of interesting commonalities. The former

and the latter are in basic agreement that a space or sphere is inseparable from the exteriority of an object that is constituted through the vicarious interaction between the "poles" of objects. Being means for Sloterdijk, as we have seen, first of all Being-a-pair. Coupling (the relational act of "Being-a-pair") is therefore always primary to the individual. Allure is the causal effect of two interacting objects from which a third object emerges. Reality is therefore entirely "relational" and "non-relational". Both authors also distance themselves from subject oriented metaphysics and embrace an ontological theory of space that is composed of objects. "[A]ll relations must be viewed as objects, since if a relation is real then it has a reality inexhaustible by any interpretation of it or any collision with it, no matter how fleeting these events may be." (Harman 2005: 165). All these real entities form connections with other object through a vicarious mode of causation in which "worlds" are constituted. All reality therefore occurs in the interior of objects. All objects are within other objects which means that objects are first and foremost vicarious relations and that relations are in turn objects. "After all, the space in which objects meet must already be a unified space if things are able to meet within it." (Harman 2005: 193). It is now perhaps time to elaborate more firmly on such conceptual commonalities, without neglecting some of the ontological differences between Harman's OOO and Sloterdijk's Spherology.

SEARCHING FOR A COMMON SPHERE

Bridging the two thinkers and their respective conceptual understandings of space will help us in reopening the discussion of the relationship between objects and space. Speculating about the ontological space we encounter in everyday life helps to challenge the concrete abstraction of space that has come to dominate all aspects of social life. It helps to overcome the shortcomings of the Leibnizian relational model of space, in which space is reduced to an order of positional relations. By speculatively decentring space from mental facticity we can disclose (and potentially repoliticise) the problem of space. Both Harman and Sloterdijk have, through different roadmaps, attempted to read Heidegger's *Being and Time* in a spatial context. For Sloterdijk (in Schinkel and Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2011b: 12) this translates into the observation that Dasein shares strong spatial connotations and "that in Heidegger's work lie the seeds of a 'revolutionary treatment' of Being and space." Harman (2011a: 100) moves

altogether away from human Dasein and replaces it with a more comprehensive analysis of "tool-being" which for him "is actually about space, not about time as he [ie. Heidegger] wrongly contends". The idea that Heidegger is a spatial thinker, shared by both authors, comes at least partially forth from Heidegger's emphasis that Dasein means both "Being-in" and "Being-with". For Harman (2005: 253) this translates into the observation that space is "made up of quanta, because space is the absolute mutual exteriority of objects". The exteriority of objects helps objects to translate each other into sensual images of these respective objects. "The simultaneous withdrawal of real objects from one another and their partial contact through simulacra is space itself." (Harman 2010: 162). Space is thus also "always the space of a specific interior... [S]pace forms the inside of objects." (Harman 2005: 250, 251). Space for Sloterdijk instead refers to the sphere in which Being-in is always realised alongside a Being-with. Sloterdijk and Harman share, in other words, the Heideggerian premise that space is as much relational (ie. Being-with), as it closes relations off (ie. Being-in). It reveals and conceals. The vicarious relation between withdrawn objects enables for the sensual "world-forming" capacity that Heidegger initially uniquely reserved to human Dasein. Space for Sloterdijk creates subjectivity. The sphere allows for and is constitutive of life. Space for Harman creates instead the sensual translation of the always withdrawn object. The arrival of object subjectivity means for Harman however, simultaneously also the neglect of other possible subjectivities and relations.

This concept of worlding is for neither author however singular, as Heidegger alludes to, but rather infinitely plural. "The 'world' is [is in the case of Sloterdijk] not an object for thinking subjects but rather a continual snowfall of events which are held in place by what spaces it is possible to construct and breathe in, what interiors it is possible to make possible". The relations possible in Sloterdijk are "positive". I mean by positive that they create worlds (in the plural). Those worlds are, however, limited to the still subject-centred intentionality of humans. Sloterdijk is, after all, primarily interested in those spatial relations that inform human life and make it possible. Harman very similarly opens a box of infinitive potentialities - a word which he dislikes for its opposition to "actuality" - from which an entire new "post-metaphysical" understanding of

the world(s) arises. Access to the world is for Harman, more than for Sloterdijk, no longer restricted to human Dasein alone. Access to the world is "democratised" and consequentially opened to other objects. I will return to this difference shortly.

Space is for neither author geometrically fixed. Space has become instead a relational and an ontological force. For Sloterdijk, space is the primordial capacity of objects to be comprised and connect to other objects. For Sloterdijk, every sphere seems, in fact, an object that is organised along dyadic, triadic and/ or multi-polar structures. Space is, in other words, the result of the inherent capacity of objects to form relations with other objects that can only occur in and concurrently give rise to a new object (ie. sphere). The Being-with and Being-in creates an ontological trinity in which neither space nor object comes first, but all are instantaneously and existentially interdependent (ie. marriage/ husband/ wife, taste/ candy/ mouth, nest/ tree/ bird etc.). It makes for Sloterdijk in this Latourian framework little sense to differentiate between objects and subject, materials and souls etc. This is similarly, but perhaps less metaphorically, described in Harman's OOO in which space can only be created through the interaction ("allure") between objects and their sensual qualities. The hammer can *for me* only exist in its sensuous hammer-like quality from which I create my (own) *objectified* world. The falling hammer will, in turn, however, encounter me in the form of a soft physical obstacle (my thumb). The hammer thus exists and relates in its own specific sensual world. The result of this relational process of allure, between the object-me and the object-hammer, is the creation of a space which lies in the exterior of both objects. For Sloterdijk this form of "coupling" between objects creates a sphere in which the hammer is both *with me* and *in* (and therefore constitutive of) a sphere. Both Harman and Sloterdijk seem therefore in basic agreement that spheres (or space) are located at the exterior of dyadic (or multi-polar) objects. These objects form in turn the interior sphere (or space) of other multiple polar objects^[21]. The workings of space are for spherology and object-oriented ontology therefore similar.

Their ontological premises are however different. The latter preoccupies itself with the intentionality of all objects with the purpose of unravelling the mysteries of "tool-being", while the former largely explores spheres as the specific intentionality of a

human agency. Exploring this divergence is important if we wish discussions to depart from the prevalent ontic knowledge of the world and move towards the direction of a speculative form of realism that could provide a more ontological reading of space. In the remainder of this essay I will attempt to understand what causes this difference. This is not to lead to a full reconciliation between the two thinkers. The objective is not a complete synthesis. Too much of Harman and Sloterdijk's labours would get lost in the forceful forging of such a project. I will instead argue for a more modest conceptual synthesis between the thinkers' respective readings of the ontological functionality of space.

The ontological rift between Harman's withdrawn "tool-being" and Sloterdijk's "Being-in/ Being-with" is an admittedly difficult one to bridge. This comes forth from the autonomous nature of objects in Harman's work and Sloterdijk's wish to rescue the latent existentialism in Heidegger's Dasein. The split stems from an ontological divide as to what Being refers to. Being for Harman is forever withdrawn and entirely without relations. For Sloterdijk Being means to be-in and with others. Being is for Sloterdijk therefore inherently relational. Human Being (Dasein) remains moreover, and relatedly, for Sloterdijk unique in that it is able, as mentioned earlier, to demarcate and master the environment for the production of incubators (*greenhouses*). Sloterdijk time and again refers to the capacity of humans to create worlds. It therefore would seem that Sloterdijk refers to *zuhanden* instead of *vorhanden* when he refers to the importance of spheres for human Dasein's uniqueness. However, Sloterdijk (2000: 26) explicitly refutes the claim that he uses something "merely ontic" for determining what he considers to be ontology. He perhaps does this most vocally in his untranslated *Die Domestikation des Seins: Die Verdeutlichung der Lichtung* ("The Domestication of Being: For a clarification of clearing"). Here (2000) he elucidates in so-called "paleo-anthropological" terms how he set humans apart from other animals. The text paves the foundation for his Spheres trilogy, in that it shows how human production of spheres plays a fundamental role for the establishment of what we identified earlier as "ontological difference" (*ontologische Differenz*). It is through these, earlier discussed, worldly spheres that humanity cuts itself off from the environment (*umwelt*) and thus differentiates itself from other animals which remain restricted to the demarcated limits of the "en-vironment" (*um-welt*). Human Dasein is

ontological for the reason that it creates its own, enclosed worlds independent of the restrictions from the en-vironment.

It would seem unwise and unproductive to painstakingly critique Sloterdijk's historical onto-anthropological project via Harman. Harman could argue that other objects are similar to humans "world-forming" (*weltbildend*), and subsequently suggest that the dichotomy between nature and society is a false one. It would be equally imprudent to counter Harman's withdrawn tool-being from a spherological position. Sloterdijk would want to pursue the argument of the human animal's unique capacity to insulate itself from the environment and to create worlds of its own. A complete synthesis between the two thinkers would therefore be difficult to realise. Too much of their individual labours would get lost in such a translation. What would be more useful, at least for our purposes, is to instead concentrate on their understanding of the ontological necessity of the production of space to create worlds. It is in the acknowledged importance of spacing (or "worlding") in which the two thinkers find a common ground.

The middle ground is situated in their respective emphasis on the intentionality of space. The account of Sloterdijk seems to identify objects in their intentional form in which they are presented *for* something. The sensual quality that makes something-in-general become a "hammer" (*for us*) cannot exist without a relation that confronts or makes the withdrawn object present itself as the specific sensual object that is the "hammer". Sloterdijk's divisibility of objects seems, in other words, to refer to sensual objects rather than to the real, withdrawn objects themselves. He does not raise questions (and is perhaps neither interested) about the hammer's Being or what lies outside the intentionality of Dasein. This is confirmed by the fact that Spherology is first and foremost an onto-anthropological theory that starts from Heidegger's early ontology in which the existential powers of human Dasein are central. Sloterdijk is, in other words, not interested in answering the "who question" of the later Heidegger. He is instead more interested about the "where" of Being and what Heidegger (1996) called Dasein's spatiality of the world [*Einräumung*]. Sloterdijk's Being-in-the-world (or in-the-sphere) is therefore presented in equally "intentional" terms as the sensual worlds described by Harman. But while the former is

dedicated to analysing the intentionality of humans, the latter provides a broader and more technical framework for understanding the sensual relations between *all* objects.

The emphasis on “worlding” allows us, in turn, to reintegrate Harman’s OOO, given that the sensual world is for both authors that which allows for the mediation between objects. The materials used to build a house are intentionally used by the engineer according to their specific (sensual) qualities that permit her to build a place of dwelling (or sphere). This worlding process leads for Sloterdijk to subjectivity and for Harman to the concealment of the real object. Sloterdijk is, again, not interested in what might get lost in translation in the process of “clearing” (*Lichtung*). He is instead interested in how objects are used to create anthropological spheres. Harman does not deny the potency of the sensual relations between objects, which he writes are responsible for the creation of an infinite number of new worlds, but shows awareness that these simulacra tell us little about the real objects underneath these worlds, whereas Sloterdijk refrains from engaging with other forms of Being.

Objects are for Harman as for Sloterdijk thus composed of (but not limited to) relations between their parts or qualities. It is however equally true “that *any relation must count as a substance*. When two objects enter into a genuine relation, even if they do not permanently fuse together, they generate a reality that has all of the features that we require of an object. Through their mere relation, they create something that has not existed before, and which is truly *one*” (Harman 2005: 85, original emphasis). This relation between two objects is, as mentioned before, not established directly, but has to occur *vicariously*. The vicarious relation between the notes of relating objects serves as the glue that constitutes the universe.

Let us shortly return to the earlier embryological example to illustrate this more empirically. The fertilisation of the ovum by the spermatozoa results in the creation of the zygote. The relation between the first and second object is entirely of a sensual kind. The real objects remain instead entirely withdrawn from the relation. It is however through the vicarious relation between them that a third, autonomous object arises. This third object “has an identity and a depth that belongs to neither of its parts [equally objects], and which is also irreducible to all of its current effects on

other entities, or to the knowledge we may have of it.” Sloterdijk’s study of how the dyadic relationship between the foetus and the placenta shape the uterus is another demonstration in which we see the emergence of third object (the uterus). This third object is formed in the space (or sphere) from the mutual exteriority of the first and second object. The foetus and the placenta remain, in their turn, autonomous real objects despite now being “parts” of and standing in a vicarious relation to the uterus. Space allows for, or maybe *is*, the relation. Space is not the object; it is the mutual exteriority of objects.

Harman’s observation that objects are, but not exhaustively, composed of relations means that objects relate to other objects through the sensual world. Sloterdijk (2010) has *Human Dasein* in mind when he argues that “[a]ll being-in-the-world possesses the traits of coexistence. The question of being so hotly debated by philosophers can be asked here in terms of the coexistence of people and things in connective spaces”. This could however equally be said for other objects (inanimate and inanimate) that constantly and vicariously relate to other objects. The real object itself does not relate. The hammer presents itself rather to me in its sensual form (as the hammer). The thing, which I sensually call ‘hammer’, remains instead withdrawn and unknowable. The sensual world is flooded with relations. These relations are characteristically intrinsic to the sensual. Sensual objects are constantly both in and with other objects in space. They relate constantly. Sloterdijk leaves the subterranean realm of objects unaddressed. His rich spherology is primarily, if not exclusively, interested in the sensual process of human (or Dasein’s) worlding. It is through the sensual realm from which his onto- anthropology is made possible. The question, which I will leave unaddressed for someone else to pick on, is whether we can equally (yet differently) speak of an paleo- anthropology of dogs, elephants or maybe even rocks. These categories were according to earlier Heideggerians described as ontic beings that either were “worldless” (*weltlos*) or “poor in the world” (*weltarm*). It seems increasingly difficult to think that we can continue to undervalue these objects along purely ontic-ontological lines.

The Heideggerian message that the world itself is too big to access in its entirety forms the phenomenological foundation for the writings of both authors. They start their respective analyses

from the common need of objects to “translate” or subjectively appropriate the world. From this process numerous worlds alongside the real, withdrawn world come into existence. Sloterdijk limits himself mainly to the worlds (or spheres) in which human Dasein dwells and is made possible. Harman subtracts the idealism embedded in Heidegger’s “Being-in” further still and replaces it with a “democratised” “Being-in” that grants the emergence of worlds sensually experienced by both humans and non-human entities.

CONCLUSION

This article was written with the objective of challenging the silence in the social sciences on the fundamental question of the nature of space. The silence of the misplaced concreteness of space has led the acceptance of space as static “positions in a nexus of relations.” (Leibniz in Casey 1997b: 183). The exercise of speculating about what could constitute space rather than descriptively talking about spaces as sites and things that happen in space was undertaken through a comparative assessment of the work of two influential contemporary thinkers. Their analysis starts from a Heideggerian position which refuses to accept traditional metaphysics and consequentially transcends Heidegger’s own thinking. The produce of their labours demands a radical revision of traditional metaphysics and allows for a return to a very concrete, albeit somewhat “strange”, form of realism. An endorsement of a “flattened ontology” does, however, not necessarily mean that we now have to consider stones on the same phenomenological footing as humans. I would rather propose a Latourian-Sloterdijkian post-metaphysical approach on the basis of “ontological difference”. This difference is for both authors embedded in the relational capacity of space. It is not the relation itself. The sensual notes of objects are responsible for the relation between withdrawn objects. Space is the result of that relation. The relational capacity of space, which in the writings of both thinkers comes to the fore as the stuff that shapes worlds, makes them what I would like to call “natal thinkers”.

The first section discussed the work of Sloterdijk and paid special attention to his spherology. The theory of spheres has in this article been described as an ontological analysis of the necessary spatial (or spherological) conditions for Being to be possible. *Spheres* is first and foremost a work about the human necessity to construct an

interior space (or sphere). Spheres are for Sloterdijk the product of two exterior spaces that form one interiorised space. Sloterdijk describes an onto-topology which departs from traditional metaphysics and does, therefore, not ask the question *what* Being means is but *where* Being is. Space is for Sloterdijk, in other words, not something that is merely created by humans, but that which always lies at the exterior. Being-in-a-sphere is therefore perhaps also not only an exclusively human-specific quality, because his post-humanism is dedicated to blur the rigid demarcations between the subject and the object, the soul and body and the animate and inanimate. There is some room for manoeuvre in Sloterdijk’s unique palaeoanthropology. The possibility of thinking about a non-human world and the use of a “pre-epistemic” framework bring Sloterdijk into the maelstrom of Harman’s thoughts. Harman proposes a more radical, flattened ontology in which humans are objects just like the books, coffee mugs and pens on my table. Humans are in Harman’s account, as in Sloterdijk’s, irreducible objects through which new vicarious relationships (and thus new objects) can emerge. Objects exist, in other words, in tension with their sensual qualities that help constitute the space of new objects. Space is for Harman therefore similarly to be found at the exteriority of connecting objects.

This article has described a form of realism which provides space the purpose of giving form and life to an otherwise withdrawn reality. Space facilitates for Sloterdijk Human Dasein. Dasein is, as Harman shows, however, not able to come to terms with reality as such. Dasein instead helps to spatially interpret and construct an intentional reality in a manner similar to the tool-being of other objects. The meaning of Being translates subsequently into its always sensual *being-with* and *being-in* another object. The resultant sphere is not only essential for human Being but also for all other forms of Being.

NOTES

[1] The author wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. The author is also grateful to Alex Sutton (University of Warwick) for his comments on a draft of this paper.

[2] “I hold space to be something merely relative, as time is: I hold it to be an order of co-existences, as time is an order of successions” (Leibniz 2001: 13)

[3] I will capitalise Being when explicitly discussing ontology and use a lower case when referring to ontic existence.

[4] Sloterdijk's works have in two different periods been translated into English. The first of which were published in the 1980s and consisted of Sloterdijk's *Critique of cynical reason* Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis (MN): University of Minnesota Press, 1987). and *Thinker on stage: Nietzsche's materialism* Peter Sloterdijk, *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism* (Minneapolis (MN): University of Minnesota Press, 1989).. The so-called "second coming of Sloterdijk" Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta, "Being-with as Making Worlds : The 'Second Coming' of Peter Sloterdijk," *Environment and planning D : society and space* 27, no. 1 (2009). in the late 2000s and early 2010s resulted in the translation of seven other books which embedded a much stronger spatial resonance. The recent attention to Sloterdijk resulted in his invitation to talk at the Tate Modern in London on *Spaces of Transformation: Spatialised Immunity* (in early 2012) and in dedicated issues in 'Environment and Planning D: Society and Space' Stuart Elden, Eduardo Mendieta, and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Special Issue: The Worlds of Peter Sloterdijk - Volume 27, Issue 1* (Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2009). and 'Cultural Politics Sjoerd Van Tuinen, ed. *Cultural Politics, Special Issue on the German Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk - Volume 3, Issue 3* (Cultural Politics, 2007).. Two further edited volumes S. Elden, ed. *Sloterdijk Now* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Willem Schinkel and Liesbeth Noordegraaf-Eelens, eds., *In Medias Res - Peter Sloterdijk's Spherological Poetics of Being* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011). were published with Sloterdijk at the centre of attention.

[5] Earlier efforts to "spatialise" Heidegger's work have also been made by, for example, Malpas Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2006). Sloterdijk's effort, however, is arguably the most detailed and sustained analysis of the relationship between Being and space in Heidegger's writings.

[6] The German publication of Volume II was published in 1999 but remains as of yet untranslated in English. The third volume was published in German in 2004 but has similarly at the time of writing not yet been published in English.

[7] The first Spheres book is therefore, as Sloterdijk notes, "a general theory of the structures that allow coupling" P. Sloterdijk and Jean-Christophe Royoux, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres," in *Cosmograms*, ed. Melik Ohanian and Jean-Christophe Royoux (New York (NY) and Berlin: Lukas and Sternberg, 2005).: 224.

[8] Sloterdijk metaphorically compares this medical intervention with the biblical expulsion from the Garden of Eden as the "primal spherological catastrophe" [*sphärologische Urkatastrophe*]. Sloterdijk keeps on returning to the creation of dyadic and/ or multi-polar spheres in different artistic forms and historical contexts throughout his work on spheres.

[9] This is also the reason why Bruno Latour Bruno Latour, "A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk) " in *Keynote lecture for the Networks of Design meeting of the Design History Society Falmouth, 3 September 2008* (Cornwall 2008).: 9; also Bruno Latour, "A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a Philosophy of Design with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk," in *Medias Res: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherological Poetics of Being*, ed. Willem Schinkel and Liesbeth Noordegraaf-Eelens (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011). awarded Sloterdijk with the title "THE philosopher of design... No contemporary philosopher [Latour argues] is more interested in materiality, in engineering, in biotechnology, in design proper, in contemporary arts, and in science more generally." For Sloterdijk it is, in other words, the manufactured materiality of the world to which we should focus our attention if we wish to understand *dasein*.

[10] Sloterdijk P. Sloterdijk, *Spheres - Volume I: Bubbles Microspherology* (Los Angeles (CA): Semiotext[e], 2011). eloquently demonstrates how in different cultural contexts the placenta used to be honoured as the twin of the foetus. The onset of modernity is for Sloterdijk however one of clinical 'nihilism' in which the placenta is thrown away as residual waste whilst the foetus is singularised. The initial co-subjectivity was in other words replaced by the myth of an autonomous individuality.

[11] For a detailed and critical analysis of the genealogical evolution of global spheres see especially Morin's Marie-Eve Morin, "Cohabiting in the Globalised World: Peter Sloterdijk's Global

Foams and Bruno Latour's Cosmopolitics," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(2009); M-E. Morin, "The Coming-to-the-World of the Human Animal," in *Sloterdijk Now*, ed. S. Elden (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

[12] The other members are Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier and Iain Hamilton Grant. The term 'Speculative Realism' has recently become less prominent as the philosophies of the original members have started to diverge.

[13] Husserl employs the idea of "accidents" to describe the overabundant richness of an object's appearance. These accidents do not exhaust however the object's reality. An apple does, for example, not stop being an apple if it would not have the accidents of being red, sweet and perfectly round. There exists for Husserl, as for Harman, therefore a tension between the object's accidents (its qualities or adumbrations) and the unified object (or the particularity of the apple). This does not mean however that there is a Heideggerian concealment of the apple at work in Husserl's notion of accident but rather that the apple's accidents (or adumbrations) help us "intending" the object as the apple for us.

[14] Heidegger's *Geviert* is a notoriously ambiguous concepts. Harman explains it as consisting of two dualisms. In the first dualism we find that objects both are something in general and something specific. The second dualism shows that the same object is both concealed and visible. Harman radicalises this concept and argues that the object is something in general and something specific but that its specificity changes upon the relations that it forms with other objects. This difference between Heidegger and Harman also means that Harman reject the idea that access to objects is solely restricted to a human agency.

[15] Reproduced with courtesy from Graham Harman.

[16] Harman does write that humans possess a more sophisticated range of abilities than other objects to relate to other objects. He however argues that all such relations between objects should be conceptualised on "equal footing" if we wish to come to an honest and truthful form of metaphysics. Harman invokes Whitehead's notion of 'prehension' (here referring to the act of relating) to substantiate the claim that "[a]ll relations are on exactly the same footing. This

does not entail a projection of human properties onto the human world, but rather the reverse: what it says is that the crude prehensions made by minerals and dirt are no less relations than are the sophisticated mental activity of humans. Instead of placing souls into sand and stones, we find something sandy or stony in the human soul" Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester

Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2011): 46.

[17] This is also the theme of Levi R. Bryant's *The Democracy of Objects* Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor (MI): Open Humanities Press, 2011) and his proposal for a 'flat ontology' which contains some interesting similarities (and an equal amount of important differences) with Harman's own work on OOO.

[18] The real qualities of real objects are those withdrawn features that make sense of what otherwise would be a giant nothing or an indistinguishable and non-differentiable totality. They exist in tension with the object which ultimately results into what Harman calls the essence of the object. "These [real] qualities are not the same as the real object itself, and hence it lives in a kind of permanent strife with them, which is precisely what we mean by essence" (Harman, 2010: 15). The stone-like or roof-like real qualities which unify the essence of the 'houseness' and 'treeness' are not what constitutes the house but are, reversely, the qualities that are embedded in the essence of house. The real qualities of real objects allow, in other words, for the Leibnizian monadic essence to be 'something specific'.

[19] Reproduced with courtesy from the author.

[20] "This term pinpoints the bewitching emotional effect that often accompanies this event for humans, and also suggests the related term 'allusion,' since allure merely alludes to the object without making its inner life directly present" Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," in *Collapse Vol. II: Speculative Realism*, ed. Robin Mackay (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007): 215.

[21] There seems to be sometimes explicit and at other times implicit evidence that the works of both authors start from the *ad infinitum* of the irreducibility of objects. This hypothesis in turn is validated by modern theoretical physics which

similarly argues for the infinitive divisibility of space. Both authors also seem to agree that although regress is possible infinitively, it is less certain that the same works in the opposite direction.

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Taking Up The Challenge Of Space: New Conceptualisations Of Space In The Work Of Peter Sloterdijk And Graham Harman