

STATION

GAMES III

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31st January — 21st February 2015

Objects are weird to us. We approach objects from a tellurian perspective with alien assumptions — like tentatively walking into a cold ocean. If we are unable to anthropocentrically grasp what is before us with our internalised automatic recognition system, this weirdness may even give rise to emotions of fear or hate: a sad but common human response towards the unknown. Objects live in a ‘darkened’ space — hidden by the very fact that we cannot engage with or comprehend them without the use of human cognition, they are cloaked in a human-construct of weirdness due to their initial unknown character — resulting in an instinctive fear of the object and its place in the world. That is, until our human-to-object engagement becomes a positive dictatorial relation, freeing us from the unknown.

And if objects are strange in isolation, what then of their locality: their placement or orientation, their relational ontological engagement? Surely there has to be meaning to an object’s locale, a Kantian reason with a corresponding human engagement. The object-components of games fit this formula well, their individual positions only part of a greater strategic effort. But what if games were not simply ‘games’, and the objects came to represent more — in a theoretical sense? In Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* a game of chess with Death comes to represent the extension of life for knight Antonius Block, and by way of his “meaningful deed”, the actor Jof and his family. Likewise, within the 1945 short story *The Dreams of Albert Moreland*, Fritz Leiber narrates a series of conversations between a Mr. Moreland and his friend regarding the former’s steadily progressing dreams of a chess-like game played at the end of the universe atop an invisible infinity of darkness. A game that consists of large unknown objects that move by an unseen force, and that on his awakening leave Mr. Moreland with the feeling that this game has more to it than the simple placement of objects — that it somehow holds sway over the proceedings of World War II. While even more abstractly, in the lead up to the film credits of *Men In Black*, the viewer watches on as the camera zooms out into the cosmos, through our solar system, the Milky Way and beyond, only to be wholly encompassed and objectified as a spherical glassy bead that alien-beings are using in a game of marbles.

Such speculative tales present a new interpretation of the objects used in games, perhaps even those in more general employment, and to the effects that their positioning within games’ parameters may produce. Though whether consciously or unconsciously, these objects may still be the epitome of a reduction to the Heideggerian term of ‘present-at-hand’, existing only by virtue of human relation, and therefore we “inevitably fail to grasp them as they are.”¹ Which leaves us to accept the reality that both the objects and their placement in the world is a darkened existence, one that we will never truly grasp as we cannot perceive said objects without the interference of our own ontology, that their existence is intertwined with human cognition. As Harman postulates, these subterranean objects recede “from all relations, always having an existence that perception or sheer causation can never adequately measure ... a universe packed full of elusive substances

¹ Harman, Graham, ‘Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things’, Chicago: Open Court, 2005, p. 74

stuffed into mutually exclusive vacuums'. For Harman, there is a fundamental gap between objects as they exist in and for themselves, and the external relations into which these objects enter."²

So objects exist for themselves, within their external relations (a human connection), and then tentatively — or maybe in our instance, within another relation by which they are pawns (pun intended) in a larger relationship: a game. A space where an object's prescribed placement is relative to an overarching scheme; one that utilises objects by way of their position to defeat an opponent, make theoretical war-room decisions, or simply be representative of a configuration: say one straight line of objects sitting opposite one wonky line of similar objects. In recognising these human relations, accepting that we are unable to comprehend objects truly as 'objects', we hide from a truth that is beyond our comprehension and start to put aside the fear and weirdness that they possess. This allows us to start a new game, that of forging new placements or 'installations' without rules (or with) that are not representative of any active decision (or that are) and design new relations with and between these objects that we really don't understand.

— Jack Willet

² Shaviro, Steven: 'The Actual Colcano: Whitehead, Harman and the Problem of Relations' in *The Speculative Turn*, Melbourne: re.press, 2011, p. 282