Object-Oriented Ontology and Its Critics

Simon Weir*

Art and Ontography

https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0116
received April 25, 2020; accepted July 28, 2020

Abstract: Graham Harman describes the allure of art as the tension and fusion of a real object to sensual qualities so that it makes it seem that the inwardness of reality is opened to us. Yet real objects are withdrawn; how are we aware of their fusion? Since Harman's ontology mandates that contact between real objects occurs only through sensual objects, this essay explores the idea that art's allure must be a tension between sensual objects that draw the experiencer to believe, or alieve, they are in contact with the withdrawn real. By looking at the examples in representational painting and sleight of hand magic, we see that ontographic art objects use at least four, carefully separated sensual objects to produce their aesthetic effect. The conclusion summarises allure as a sensual object process, speculates on art's dialetheic confusion of sensual and real objects giving an enduring allure to idealism, and notes potential motifs of an infra-realist resistance.

Keywords: Object-Oriented Ontology, Harman, Dalí, Raphael, infra-realism, sensual object, magic, allure

1 Introduction

Graham Harman's ontological theory of art is grounded in Josè Ortega y Gasset's 1914 "Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface," wherein Ortega explains, "a work of art affords the peculiar pleasure we call esthetic by making it seem that the inwardness of things, their executant reality, is opened to us."[1] There is a strong flavour of infra-realism in Ortega's phrasing of an inwardness seeming to open, making it a good match for Harman's ontography of the infra-realist Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). Harman's fourfold ontography is divided into real objects and sensual objects, plus real qualities and sensual qualities. As an infra-realist ontology, real objects in OOO are withdrawn from all access. This is a core prohibition: real objects cannot touch. Real objects only have access to their own sensual objects and they interact only via their sensual objects.[2] So how do real objects interact with each other? Harman's theory of causation is a customised version of occasionalism: the theory wherein all contact between entities requires an intermediary.[3] The earliest known versions of occasionalism posited by al-Ash'ari and Malebranche held Allah or God as the active intermediary connecting all things; more recent variations by Hume and Kant deploy the human perceiver as the connector.[4] Harman's occasionalism unifies symmetrical causation

1 Ortega, "An Essay in Esthetics by Way Of A Preface," 139.
2 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 128.
3 Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," 171–206; Harman, "Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: a New Theory of Causation," 1–17; Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense," 96–109; Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 69–81; Weir, "Living and Nonliving Occasionalism," 147–60.
4 Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, 82.

* **Corresponding author: Simon Weir,** School of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, e-mail: simon.weir@sydney.edu.au

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(two objects impacting each other) and asymmetrical causation (one object perceiving another) by replacing such unimaginably complex figures as an omniscient entity and the perceiving self, with the humble sensual object.[5]

As Harman describes it, sensual objects have direct access to both their own sensual qualities and to the real qualities of their real object, "real and sensual qualities [...] are always bound together in the same sensual object."[6] When a moment of contact occurs, "sensual objects do not touch other sensual objects, but only exist as *contiguous* in a singular experience that serves as their bridge."[7] Adding detail to this situation, we assume some of three things to be happening when interactions between real objects occur. Either two real objects' contiguous sensual objects transfer or translate their real qualities to each other, or two real objects' sensual objects merge into a single sensual object that now has access to both real objects, or sensual objects and sensual qualities merge, or partially merge, and are regrouped and objectified separately by the many different real objects involved.

Whether a moment of causal contact is considered as two real objects with a single sensual object between them, or multitudes of real objects with even greater multitudes of sensual objects, is a question for the perceiver. As Timothy Morton argued in *Realist Magic*, we ought to think of real and sensual objects as dialetheic: objects are both real and sensual; objects are real *for* other objects.[8] We can generate this process ourselves; when you look at a key card, then imagine that key card, that imaged card is its own real object. This realisation of the sensual, and sensualisation of the real, is the blurry centre of Harman's fourfold: perception can objectify sensual qualities into sensual objects and realise sensual objects into real objects. Taking Harman's fourfold one step towards an OOO psychology, the inevitable avalanche of post-sensual real objects must undergo an active ordering and validation process, seeking a real beyond perception, monitoring for independence. This mechanism, in the psychology of surrealism, is a primal urge of subconscious origin, like hunger, like the erotic, like Gestalt perceptual mechanics, or unending paranoiac association.

With this introduction so far, we have reviewed the basics of ontology focusing on infra-realism, plus Harman's fourfold and its occasionalist mechanism of interaction. Onto this foundation, we have added an urge, or other active component of perception, seeking validation of the real. This requires the filtering of sensual objects (especially the real objects made from sensual objects) sorting real qualities from sensual qualities. Recall now that for Harman, art's allure arises from the fusion of real objects and sensual qualities.[9] As an example of this kind of art object, Harman gave the example of a gloomy watermelon. The sensual qualities of gloominess are fused not onto the real withdrawn watermelon, but onto the "ghostly withdrawn" real object of a gloomy watermelon.[10] The allure of the art object persuades us to fuse sensual qualities into a newly synthesised withdrawn real object.[11]

Allure is the word Harman often repeats when describing art, but some caution regarding its meaning is necessary.[12] Harman wrote a long exegesis on allure in his 2005 book, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, prior to his definitive explanations of the fourfold in 2011. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, allure was a threefold operation. "First, it pushes the sensual object to a distance, as if transforming it into something like a real object."[13] Second is the process that Harman calls "the separation of an object from its qualities."[14] Third is the

5 Weir, "Living and Nonliving Occasionalism," and extending this into time and space occasionalism: Harman, "A New Occasionalism?"

6 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 106, 131–3.

7 Ibid., 75.

8 Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, 31, 162, 192.

9 Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense," 104.

10 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 106.

11 Using the experiencer, as a real object, to fuel and host the real object, since it only exists within the experiencer who created it, it is preferred to refer to it as a reified sensual object.

12 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 141–4; Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," 194–206; Kimbell, "The Object Strikes Back: An Interview with Graham Harman," 112.

13 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 180.

14 Ibid., 153.

reframing of an experiencer's perception to notice these qualities independent of the objects on which they appeared.[15] However, in 2010, Harman wrote that insofar as alluring objects

> *allude* to an ungraspable veiled object, I would group them under the related noun *allure*. This term was described in some detail in my book *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, but there I placed it in what I now consider to have been the wrong place on the gridwork of the world. Allure produces a fusion of the previously separate real object and the always accessible sensual qualities.[16]

Thereafter, allure was more tightly focused on "allusion to a ghostly [...] object lying beneath the overly familiar sensual [object] of everyday acquaintance."[17] Only in allusion,

> do we escape the deadlock of merely rolling about in the perfumes of sensual things, and encounter qualities belonging to a distant signalling thing rather than a carnally present one. The only way to bring real objects into the sensual sphere is to reconfigure sensual objects in such a way that they no longer merely fuse into a new one, as parts into a whole, but rather become animated by allusion to a deeper power lying beyond: a real object.[18]

Given this change of orientation, and Harman's revised ontography of the fourfold, we might recognise that the separation of sensual qualities from a sensual object is now called confrontation.[19] Allure is now reserved for the fusion of real object and sensual qualities. A revised sequence of the mechanism of allure, focusing on the sensual objects, will be sketched out in the conclusion.

This detailing of Harman's fourfold ontography and theory of art in this manner goes some distance to explaining something that appears at first impossible. Since Harman's ontology only allows real objects access to sensual objects, and art's allure is the tension on a real object, how can we feel a tension on an object that is withdrawn? The hypothesis of this essay is that since experiencers, as real objects, only have access to sensual objects, art's allure must arise from sensual objects that give rise to the delusion that the real has been opened to us. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, Harman calls art's allure, "simulated direct contact with these objects themselves," and then twists this around, "what it really does is make the visible seem withdrawn."[20] Aside from this concession that an opening onto the withdrawn is purely sensual, Harman has not yet expanded on this targeted and deliberate confusion. For the orchestration of such misperception, surrealist painter Salvador Dalí preferred the term, delusion: "systematic delusion [is][...] the basis for the artistic phenomenon in general."[21]

The essay offers three examples of ontographic art objects that engage directly with the delusion of artistic presentation and the impossibility of presenting the withdrawn. Each of the examples will be devoted to explaining how art objects interact with separate perceptual systems in the experiencer to produce an impossible real object. These examples aren't meant as exhaustive exemplars but as points of focus on the illustrate processes. Having then examined how art objects function, the conclusion considers the appearance of idealism in this context and some implications for infra-realist ontography. Before proceeding on to the examples of impossibility, we shall quickly review the term, ontography, in the context of OOO.

2 Ontographic objects

An arctic bear's footprint filling with snow, buoyancy, a briefly imagined Pablo Picasso impersonator, a moment of shared excitement at the prospect of a fictional encounter, and a pink plastic penguin in a

15 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 153.
16 Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense," 104.
17 Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," 200.
18 Ibid., 204. See also, Harman, *Art and Objects*, 46–7.
19 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 126.
20 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 161–2.
21 Dalí, "Total Camouflage for Total War," 340.

brown paper bag. These are all real objects. Ontography in OOO began with Harman and Ian Bogost playing with the ontographic nature of Latour Litanies, i.e. strings of "items loosely joined not by logic or power or use but by the gentle knot of the comma."[22] Harman explained them as working to register a flat, non-anthropocentric ontology, "their primary value is to establish the autonomous force and personality of individual actors, rather than allowing them to be reduced to or swallowed up by some supposedly deeper principle."[23] Harman explained:

> I want the feel of randomness about my lists [...] I always try to include at least some humans, some nonhumans, some natural things, some artificial things, some live humans, some dead humans, some fictional objects, and maybe some impossible or self contradictory ones.[24]

These were all aimed at the representation of a flat ontology, which Harman regards as more or less necessary condition of being an ontological realist. Harman explained, "to be realist, a philosophy needs to treat the relations between rocks and wind or cotton and fire on the same footing as the relation between humans and what they encounter."[25] Most Harman broadened ontography onto all of the fourfold: "the main principle of ontography is that all of the movement and stasis in the world can be derived from a single root: the interplay between objects and their qualities."[26] In *The Quadruple Object*, Harman includes all ten possible combinations of real and sensual objects and qualities.[27] Within the narrower context of the present essay on the ontographic art object, our focus is on the alluring object that communicates ontological ideas through its sensual qualities and thereby appears to open the withdrawn real towards us. This uses a slightly broader definition of ontography than Harman's own infra-realist ontography, accommodating the possibility of ontographies for any and all ontologies and for artists or philosophers to produce innumerable idiosyncratic ontographies for innumerable ontologies.

Previous research has identified images of veils embodying the eternally withdrawn real, Henri Kahnweiler's interpretation of Cubism as the withdrawn Kantian noumena, Salvador Dalí's interpretation of Giorgio de Chirico's objects as Kantian categories, and Dalí's grilled lamb chop ontograph.[28] This essay expands the examples of ontographic art objects towards explicit presentations of impossibility. Three examples of artistic impossibility, namely, the rationality and non-relationality of colour in representative painting, surrealist double objects, and sleight of hand magic, will each show a split and union of sensual objects necessary for their realisation. In conclusion, we summarise the motifs recognised across the examples and note the recurrent phantom of idealism that recurs in ontographic formulas of infra-realism.

3 Non-relational colouring of objects

Although museums of classical and academic art are ostensibly full of mimesis, less is mimetic than it might at first appear. Indeed, the subjects most commonly depicted in classical and academic paintings were autonomous, non-relational, and withdrawn from human access, yet nonetheless having a real influence on human lives. These were the classical gods. Love, lust, wrath, consciousness, and things we might now be more accustomed to calling abstract concepts were all embodied in classical art as objects,

22 Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 38.
23 Harman, "Latour Litanies and Gibbon."
24 Picard, "Interviewee: Graham Harman, Interviewer, Caroline Picard," 28.
25 Sparrow, "On the Horrors of Realism: An Interview with Graham Harman," 219.
26 Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology*, 163.
27 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 124–39.
28 Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, 12; Dalí, "Psychologie non-euclidienne d'une photographie," 56–7; Weir and Dibbs, "The Ontographic Turn: From Cubism to the Surrealist Object," 389; Rothman, "Object-Oriented Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the Poetic Autonomy of Things," 176–96.

specifically as the humanoid figures: Venus, Cupid, Mars, and Psyche. The Catholic equivalents are the divine saints, each acting as beneficing patron to some area of life. In the works of High Renaissance masters, this divinity, this non-relationality, was often represented by all sorts of symbolic objects; but in Raphael's work, it is also designated by their colouring.

The colours of Renaissance master, Raphael, are often and correctly described as luminous. It is common to mistake luminosity of colour with brightness or saturation but luminosity describes the quality of softly glowing of gently emitting light. Raphael's colours do not emit light so that there is a glowing aura of colour around them that we are now familiar with through the extensive use of this effect in comic books and movies but through the extraordinary consistency of their hue. Renaissance painters are often described as observing natural appearances, and there is no doubt that their observations and depictions of subtle shifts in light and dark, especially exemplified in drawing, were wondrous, but their observation of colour remained fairly simple.

To understand Raphael's colouring, consider the following effect. Take a white object and place it beside a strongly coloured object, like deep blue fabric, you can observe immediately that the white object immediately adjacent to the fabric takes on a subtly blue hue. Blue light reflects off the blue object into the white object and on your eye. Similarly, the blue object becomes subtly more white. This effect is exaggerated in the objects in Figure 2, Salvador Dalí's 1930 painting, *Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion*. The blue ball at the lower right stones blue onto the floor and has a yellow edge from the colour of the sky, and all the objects share their colours.

Knowing this colour effect, we can understand that glowing and luminous objects do not reflect the colours from their surroundings but only shine their colours outwards. In Raphael's paintings, all the central objects are luminous. For example, in the *St Catherine* (Figure 1), the light and dark of the forms is exquisitely modelled so that the image when converted to only shades of grey, it appears very realistic, but the colouring is very unnatural. The strong hues of the fabrics are not reflected onto the adjacent fabrics nor onto the Saint's body. This occurs because Raphael's objects are, generally, painted with only one hue: a blue fabric beside a red fabric beside a white fabric, none sharing their hue with their neighbours. In his painting technique, Raphael is quarantining his pigments, only red, white, and black in the red areas; blue, white, and black in the blue areas; and so on, which keeps the hues strong and

Figure 1: Raphael, 1507, *St Catherine*, National Gallery of London. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=157683.

Figure 2: Salvador Dalí, 1930, *Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion*, Pola Museum of Art, Pola Art Foundation, Kanagawa. Christie's Images Limited. London, © Photo SCALA, Florence. © Salvador Dali, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dali/VEGAP. Copyright Agency, 2020.

saturated.[29] The exception is the background landscapes, wherein all the objects of the landscape – buildings, grass, dirt, rocks, trees, hills, and mountains – are coloured with the same few pigments, unifying their colour as if they all share their light with each other. Together this produces the effect that the painting's luminous central subjects are not effected by their neighbours nor their environment and thereby have a heightened individuality that Raphael's saint is not effected by her environment. This is further emphasised by the fact that she is impeccably clean. No dirt sullies her perfect hues, no tears mar her fabrics. In every way, she is untouched by her surroundings.

These painted objects display an unnatural autonomy and haecceity. The effect of the colouring is that relatively realistic objects appear more intensely separated from their worlds than objects appear in real life. By displaying their own colour, the colour they have when not adjacent to other objects, these objects communicate to the beholder something of their essence – how they are without context. This combined effect of unnatural haecceity and the heightening of perceivable essence made this period of painting extremely well suited to depicting non-relational objects: gods, deities, mythological and allegorical figures, and non-relational objects in relational environments. In Raphael's ontography, the relational and non-relational coexist. When encountering the painting, the experiencer sees something impossible, i.e. a figure that is simultaneously normal and extraordinary to the level of impossibility: a non-relational object.

The effect in Raphael's paintings is rather subtle, and many people would not recognise and describe the colouring as impossible but instead perhaps artfully beautiful colouring. In the terminology of OOO,

29 See Shearman, *The Princeton Raphael Symposium*; Clifford, *Raphael: Pursuit of Perfection*, 57; Roy et al., "Raphael's Early Work in the National Gallery: Paintings Before Rome," 4–35.

the hue and brightness can be experienced as two separate sensual quality objects. With the tension between hue and brightness in Raphael's image, the luminosity is fused to an impossible real object.

4 Double objects

> We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.[30] – Pablo Picasso.

When first theorising about surrealist objects and "hand-done colour photography of the [...] deceptive,"[31] Dalí sought precedents in classical literature and adopted the animals and postures from Plato's *The Sophist* for his 1930 multiple painting, *Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion*, (Figure 2).[32] *The Sophist* is Plato's most systematic deconstruction of the arts of representation. Socrates speaks directly about deceits that painters and sculptors commit to make their works more beautiful. For example, with extraordinary large works where the perspective of view is considerably different from regular perception, the painter and sculptor necessarily "abandon the truth and give their figures not the actual proportions but those which seem to be beautiful."[33] Since skilled likeness-makers generate false impressions which seem true from a certain point of view, Socrates compared them to magicians.

Through the course of his dialogue, Socrates laid out an expanding taxonomy: image-maker, appearance-maker, likeness-maker, and eventually found his own descriptions disorienting: "it is extremely difficult to understand how a man is to say or think that falsehood really exists and in saying this not be involved in contradiction."[34] It would be fascinating to know what Socrates would have made from OOO's taxonomy of sensual and real, keeping track of all the separate objects that artists manipulate. Socrates effectively differentiated the physical object from the multiple perceived objects emanating from it, and that image-makers could be understood as crafting multiple, separate perceived objects. This, ultimately, was what Dalí adapted from the text: the aim to paint objects that give rise to multiple perceived objects. With *Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion*, Dalí began a series of double and multiple images aiming for paintings that aimed to be "a representation of an object that is also, without the slightest pictorial or anatomical modification, the representation of another entirely different object."[35] The kind of object that Dalí described in his theoretical writings is far broader than the examples he painted; a group of objects that fit snugly into the description are magicians' tools.

Writing about these objects, Dalí, again reiterating Socrates, drew a comparison between the image making work of artists and magicians: "in our world, there is still role to be played by magic."[36] Image makers know that appearances are influenced by their contexts, as Dalí explained,

> visual reactions can be controlled [...] they can be beamed, or even jammed, by purely psychological effects [...] an image can be rendered invisible – without transformation – simply by surrounding it with other images which make the spectator assume he is looking at something else.[37]

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30 Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, 10.

31 Dalí, *The Conquest of the Irrational*, 13.

32 Fanés, *Salvador Dalí: The Construction of the Image*, 159; Plato, *Sophist*, 262b. http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg007.perseus-eng1:262b.

33 Plato, *The Sophist*, 236a.

34 Ibid., 236e–7a.

35 Dalí, *La femme visible*, 15.

36 Dalí, "Total Camouflage for Total War," 343. Recalling his early Surrealist work, Dalí wrote, "my 'tricks' [...] were various, and even contradictory." Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 224. Quote from the original edition, cut from recent abridged editions.

37 Dalí, "Total Camouflage for Total War," 342.

With the example of luminous colouring, it was argued that the effect is alluring because the quality of brightness and darkness of objects is sensed separately from objects' hue. When these senses are unified into the perceived object they produce an object with impossible qualities. Socrates' sculptors and magicians and Dalí's painted double objects reiterate the example of artists crafting real objects comprising deliberately separate sensual objects. The example of magic is especially apt since it is the theatricalisation of the withdrawal of the real. Also the tension between sensual qualities and real objects is largely the same in art as in magic, and in magic we can more easily grasp two different perceptions of the same object. A real object (the trick) is used to deliver to the spectator a carefully designed sensual object that strategically misrepresents the real object. For the spectator, there is a stunning rift between the sensual objects perceived and the real objects associated with them. For the magician, the real object has two associated contiguous sensual objects, one for the experiencer and one for the magician, both reliable and stable, but isolated from each other.

5 Magic

Lying respectfully is a terribly delicate art.[38]
Ray Teller

Magic is an occult phenomenon, yet I do not mean occult in the Heideggerian "present-at-hand" sense. I do not intend to argue from the perspective of a supernaturalist but from the perspective of an amateur sleight of hand illusionist resourced by *YouTube* and magic stores. Magic, I will argue, operates because of the tension between competing sensual objects vying for verification and, in so doing, theatricalises the tension between the sensual and the withdrawn real.

One of the first things you learn when attempting simple coin magic, like beginning with two coins in your hand and making one of them vanish in a fraction of a second, is that you don't need to perform them very well to fool people. What you learn is that people don't pay much attention to what they're looking at; and people are inherently very trusting. After the magician establishes trust, or the illusion of trust, spectators accept just about everything the magician tells them.[39] Or perhaps, they trust and distrust the magician simultaneously. Imagine the following scenario and put yourself, for a moment, into a magician's polished shoes. First, establish trust by stating something obviously true: that you have two coins in your hand, then you open your hand and show them. The trick has already begun, but from the spectator's point of view, the trick comes next. Close and reopen your hand and now only there is only one coin. The second coin vanished, and the spectator asks the predicted question: "where did the other coin go?" Yet you, in your magician's uniform, know there were no coins to begin with, but what you have in your hand is a peculiar object called a flipper. A flipper is a shiny metallic disc that looks like a coin, with the familiar low-relief sculptures to which we are accustomed seeing on coins. Magic shops sell flippers in most of the world's currencies. Although it looks like a coin, a flipper is really two interlocking metal discs with a tiny hinge connecting them and a rubber band that pulls the two halves together. With the hinge swung open, one side of the flipper looks like two slightly overlapping coins, the other side reveals the hinge and the rubber band. When the flipper is closed, like a book, it looks almost exactly like a single coin, just with a very fine incision running around one side's perimeter and across one face. With the tension of the rubber band, when you close your hand, the flipper snaps closed automatically. Even if, when you open your hand, you reveal the coin face with the incisions, the marvelling viewer almost never notices them – regular coins are often a little scratched – and they never imagine that there were no coins at all.

38 Stromberg, "Teller Speaks on the Enduring Appeal of Magic."
39 Macknik et al., "Science and Society: Attention and Awareness in Stage Magic: Turning Tricks into Research," 876.

For trained magicians, magic is a conscious and systematised performance that controls attention largely by directing vision. Magic operates by having the viewer wondrously fascinated by things that are not relevant to the physical mechanics of the trick. There were no coins, yet they ask: "Where did the coin go?" The viewer must misunderstand what happened and be thrilled by their misunderstanding. The magician succeeds only when the audience is deceived, but magic is not as simple as deception. So note two separate possible perspectives: the disappointing experience of learning that a magic trick is merely a toy and a lie and the spectator's experience of seeing two coins and a moment later, one of them is gone. Eyes search hands and sleeves. It really seemed to vanish.

The simple explanation based on the fourfold is that one sensual object is perceived and the real qualities habitually associated with the sensual object's qualities induce the belief that a different object was present. But this misunderstanding or misapprehension is only a piece of magic, i.e. the psychology of false belief is intrinsic to magic and art. When Ray Teller, one of the most articulate and skilled magicians working today, explained his craft to the *Smithsonian*, he drew attention to the tension between the real and the perceived:

> you experience magic as real and unreal at the same time [...] To enjoy magic, you must like dissonance. In typical theatre, an actor holds up a stick, and you make believe it's a sword. In magic, that sword has to seem absolutely 100 percent real, even when it's 100 percent fake. It has to draw blood. Theatre is willing suspension of disbelief. Magic is unwilling suspension of disbelief.[40]

In his essay "The experience of magic" in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Jason Leddington argues that Teller is not quite correct that magic is the unwilling suspension of disbelief. Instead, he argues, it requires active disbelief, a direct cognitive attempt to disprove what is presented.

> The magician does not want you to believe that magic is real; rather, you should believe that it is impossible, yet – as far as you can tell – it is happening anyway. This is the cognitive bind the magician wants you in [...] magic apparently presents impossibilities – as impossibilities [...] to be able to make a coin vanish [...] itself has an ironic structure: it appears to be what it simultaneously admits cannot be.[41]

For Leddington, nor is an audience member's experience a simple case of cognitive dissonance between believing and disbelieving but instead an activation of two separate cognitive systems, namely, belief and alief. Tamar Gendler coined the term alief in a *Journal of Philosophy* essay and began her explanation with an anecdote about the Grand Canyon Skywalk in Arizona. Cantilevering 70 feet out from the canyon's edge, the skywalk's glass floor holds visitors 4,000 feet above the grey-orange rock. Gendler notes the terror experienced by visitors as part of the thrill and describes their dual experiences as follows:

> How should we describe the cognitive state of those who manage to stride to the Skywalk's center? Surely they believe that the walkway will hold: no one would willingly step onto a mile-high platform if they had even a scintilla of doubt concerning its stability. But alongside that belief there is something else going on. Although they venture some souls wholeheartedly believe that the walkway is completely safe, they also alieve something very different. The alief has roughly the following content: "Really high up, long long way down. Not a safe place to be! Get off!"[42]

Alief not only activates terror in safe places but can initiate more complex and trained actions. Gendler next tells a story of attending a conference, having accidentally left her wallet at home and borrowing some cash from a friend. Immediately upon being handed the cash, she dug into her bag for her wallet.

> Although I believed that my wallet was several hundred miles away as I rooted through my bag, I simultaneously alieved some thing very different. The alief had roughly the following content: "Bunch of money. Needs to go into a safe place. Activate wallet-retrieval motor routine now."[43]

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40 Stromberg, "Teller Speaks on the Enduring Appeal of Magic."

41 Leddington, "The Experience of Magic." 256. Leddington also draws a parallel with Kant's mathematical sublime, which can be understood from an OOO perspective by referring to Harman, *Art and Objects*, 41–2.

The striking difference in these modes of apprehension in Gendler's anecdotes is that one is cognitively endorsed and the other is not.[44] As Gendler asserts, "alief is associative, automatic, and arational [...] states that we share with nonhuman animals."[45] And more charmingly, "adult humans have aliefs, but so do puppies and frogs."[46] Gendler's anecdotal examples bear a striking resemblance to the famous painting competition recorded by Pliny the Elder. Two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, were attempting to outdo each other in realism.

> Zeuxis [...] represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen.[47]

The idea that anyone would be tricked by a painting of curtains today seems ridiculous. For approaching a century, we have been deluged by photography and become casually familiar with animations so lifelike as to be almost visually indistinguishable from reality; but more than 2000 years ago, when this painting competition took place, images of even approximate realism were exceptionally rare. The disorienting magic of pictorial realism still effects children, and an awestruck "wow" is often heard when a child first witnesses precise and accurate sketching. Bob Ross' 20-min landscape paintings still enthral millions. It is only those educated in art and connoisseurship that routinely rebuff the magic of pictorial realism. True enough, when faced with a relatively common technique, a certain amount of education kills the effect of magic. Once you have understood a flipper, watching a sleight of hand artist turn two overlapping coins into one becomes affectively exhausted and decidedly non-magical. When the experiencer confronts and disintegrates the sensual object of the trick, and regroups the sensual qualities into different sensual objects corresponding to different real objects, then the magic can die.[48] The analytical disintegration and reintegration of these tricks, these conquests of the irrational, take time, and there is always a new generation encountering them as new. Hence, magic remains always excitingly occult for some and boringly trite for others, both living and dead.

6 Four sensual objects

In the examples of image makers discussed, each crafts at least four different sensual objects. The hypothesis is that the crafter's object is designed to effect at least two separate perceptual systems in the experiencer, such as different senses, different aspects of the senses, emotion, belief and alief, etc. This means that for the crafter there are at least four sensual objects: first is their own sensual object of the real object, then there are two separate sensual objects delivered to the different senses or cognitive processes of the experiencer, and finally the fourth sensual object synthesised by the experiencer.

As we enter the concluding discussion, recall Morton's dialetheism that objects can be both real and sensual. Since perception can objectify sensual qualities, realise sensual objects, and sensualise real objects, we need to maintain a continuous point of view on the objects to stabilise the labels. For this conclusion, the position of the image maker will be given this central role, since it is to guide those that this essay is written.

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42 Gendler, "Alief and Belief," 635.
43 Ibid., 637.
44 Gendler, "Alief in Action (and Reaction)," 574; Leddington, "The Experience of Magic," 257.
45 Gendler, "Alief and Belief," 641.
46 Gendler, "Alief in Action (and Reaction)," 558.
47 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*.
48 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 132.

Harman reminds us that moments of allure, the fusion of "always accessible sensual qualities"[49] onto a reified sensual object, are ontologically "special experiences," but they are very common in human life.[50] Everyday objects are imbued with symbolic significance, whether it be functional, sentimental, historical, belief, alief, or any other cathection, and their sensual qualities are fused into their reified sensual object by the experiencer. Because of this art making tendency of all experiencers, Morton seems largely correct suggesting that since objects are dialetheic (real and sensual for each other) then causation is the aesthetic phenomenon.[51] This radical universalisation of the aesthetic phenomenon reminds us of Andy Warhol's evasive remark "if everybody's not a beauty, then nobody is."[52] Yet this quantisation of the aesthetic down to every real object's interaction does little to help us gauge any aesthetic quality, and it does not square immediately with Ortega's view of the aesthetic of art as an opening of the withdrawn, and for these we need to consider multiple objects.

In OOO, whenever we might want to say that two objects are causally interacting, including merely when someone perceives something, it is also true that many real objects are interacting, emanating many sensual objects.[53] Art objects are assemblies of sensual objects; and many of the sensual objects are independently aimed to activate the experiencer's senses in a manner that provokes an animalistic, instinctive response and also a reasoned, intellectual response. The qualities of the sensual objects appropriate for art are "an almost limitless range of fascinating terrain," and the examples offered in this essay are examples of explicit impossibility that theatrically reproduce Ortega's impossible opening onto the withdrawn.[54] The experiencer blends multiple sensual objects into the fourth sensual object, a single sensual object synthesising the second and third (and perhaps more) sensual objects, resulting in the capacity for qualitative expansions, tensions, and contradictions yielding impossibilities. The image maker takes aim on that fourth synthesised, sensual object, though for them it is doubly withdrawn and buried within a withdrawn experiencer. That fourth sensual object is important to the image maker because some sensual quality in the contiguity of sensual objects must fuse with the real object of the experiencer to become a reified sensual object within the experiencer.[55] Stated in sequence like this, allure resembles the capacity of a sensual object to become memorable.

The need for magician's multiple sensual objects to fuse into a reified sensual object like a fictional real object is especially clear because the experiencer needs a convincingly impossible event, not a meaningless and confusing mess of events. If the experiencer sees multiple sightings of things that might be coins, there is no magic. There is magic only if there are clearly two coins and then a moment later, only one coin. This two-to-one coin transformation is the reified sensual object generated by the experiencers from the sensual objects presented to them by the magician. The qualities within the crafted sensual objects need to be designed so that the experiencer will place the pieces in the correct order to produce the two-to-one coin transformation in their reified sensual object.

Using the ideas gleaned from the examples, we might conceptualise art a little more like magic. Art thereby might be defined not by its material qualities but by the psychological affects a mixture of qualities produces.[56] After an experiencer has worked to understand the techniques of art and magic, some may cease to be mysterious and alluring, but their power to charm others remains unchanged. For each experiencer, art moves through periods of thrill then boredom. Rather than asserting that a material piece or event is or is not art, critics might note the magical effects that do or do not personally effect them and display a little generosity for their less wise earlier selves, by retaining an appreciation for an art's magic that no longer captivates their experienced connoisseurship.

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49 Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense," 104.

50 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 142.

51 Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, 19, 31, 162, 192.

52 Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 70.

53 Weir, "Living and Nonliving Occasionalism," 158; Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 161.

54 Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, 148.

55 Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense," 104.

Art lures us into false belief or false alief and continually persuades us that their contiguities of the sensual are something real; so what would happen if we were finally persuaded? Since the real only appears in the perceiving self and in the sensual, it seems reasonable to presume that reality only exists in the self and the sensual. If art was completely, permanently, and ubiquitously convincing that it opened to the withdrawn, then the so-called withdrawn reality would thereby be merely an arrangement of sensual objects, and reality must be merely a quality of the sensual.

When art does not explicitly concede that the revealed withdrawn is an illusion, life and art merge into the permanent theatre of idealism.[57] If left undirected and unalloyed, art might allure only towards idealism, so an infra-realist ontographic art object might explicitly counteract this momentum. Infra-realist ontographic art would resist idealism's persuasive phantom and present the opening onto the real as impossible, or as an illusion, as incomplete, broken, tragic, pathological, and masochistic. The finality of withdrawal is shown as veils and masks or untouchable, non-relational divinities. Comically, they might fail after persevering with valiant futility. Or they might, by this or other means, remonstrate on art's opening's natural theatricality and on the truthful deceptiveness of all revelations of the real.

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56 Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 120.

57 Ortega was disdainful of the tendency to theatricalise and fictionalise an artist's identity: Ortega, "Reviving the Paintings," 106.

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