2019

Hyletic Phenomenology and Hyperobjects

Seth Daves
University of South Florida

Object-Oriented Ontology and Its Critics

Seth Daves*

Hyletic Phenomenology and Hyperobjects

https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2019-0036
Received May 31, 2019; accepted October 10, 2019

Abstract: In this paper, I attempt to argue alongside Clayton Crockett that Timothy Morton's hyperobjects can be extended to encompass every object, not merely those that are large in comparison to human beings. However, unlike Crockett who uses the works of Derrida and Lacan to achieve this goal, I turn to Husserl's underdeveloped theory of hyletic phenomenology and hyle. Despite Husserl's articulation of hyletic phenomenology ending as quickly as it is announced, I argue that three lessons can be learned from what Husserl does have to say about hyle. Specifically, hyle is non-intentional, it is co-constitutive of intentionality, and hyle contains the possibility of broadening our traditional understanding of objects. Taken together, I suggest that Husserl's understanding of hyle caries considerable overlap with both Crockett and Morton's understanding of hyperobjects.

Keywords: Hyletic phenomenology, Object-Oriented Ontology, Husserl, Hyperobjects, Timothy Morton, Clayton Crockett

In chapter five of Clayton Crockett's *Derrida after the End of Writing: Political Theology and New Materialism*, Crockett argues for a Lacanian and Derridean reading of Timothy Morton's conception of hyperobjects that broadens the concept to extend to every object. In line with Crockett, I suggest a similar argument can be made through the work of Edmund Husserl's underdeveloped notion of hyletic phenomenology. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to articulate possible points of contact between Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects, and by extension Object-Oriented Ontology, and Husserl's understanding of hyle. To show this, I will begin by explicating Timothy Morton's understanding of hyperobjects as articulated in his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. After which, I will then turn to Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects and the field of philosophy they emerge from, Speculative Realism. As Speculative Realism is, at times, presented as being antithetical to phenomenology, I then turn to Patrick Whitehead's development of Husserl's hyletic phenomenology, showing that hyletic phenomenology does not fall prey to the correlationism criticism raised by Speculative Realism. From there I move on to uncover three lessons that can be taken from Husserl's discussion of hyle. These lessons, I argue, constitute the possible points of overlap between Husserl's hyle and both Crockett and Morton's understanding of hyperobjects that in turn points towards the possible development of a Husserlian grounding of hyperobjects.

As Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects directly stems from the work of Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*, it will be beneficial to begin with Morton himself. Hyperobjects are defined as "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans."[1] Examples of hyperobjects range from black holes, the sum-total of all nuclear material on Earth, and oil fields[2] to evolution,[3] an ancient bamboo forest,[4] and global warming.[5] For Morton, hyperobjects, like evolution and global warming, are 'objects' even if

1 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 1.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 27.
4 Ibid., 87.
5 Ibid., 27.

***Corresponding author: Seth Daves,** University of South Florida, Tampa, United States of America;
E-mail: sethdaves@mail.usf.edu

we may typically want to consider them as events or mere data reducible to mathematical abstraction.[6] Although it may not be too difficult to stretch our understanding of objects to include the Earth (considered simply as a very big ball) and black holes (infinitely small and dense points of matter), the idea that global warming (what we might consider to be nothing more than a process of change observable only through complex line-graphs plotted over vast tracks of time) itself constitutes an object might be seen by some as a category mistake – confusing systems or events with objects. And yet, it is exactly this step that Morton suggests hyperobjects have themselves already pushed us to take.[7]

An immediate difficulty arises, however, as Morton includes plastic bags and Styrofoam as examples of hyperobjects.[8] Again, for Morton, hyperobjects, in their most basic form, are objects that are exceptionally large (spatially *and* temporally) in relation to humans. Yet, plastic bags and Styrofoam (neither of which are physically large in comparison to humans) are both said to constitute hyperobjects. Morton's reasoning appears to be that because for both the time in which it will take them to biodegrade is itself significantly longer than any single human's life span they can rightfully be claimed to be hyperobjects.[9] Thus, we may say that hyperobjects are objects that are extremely large in relation to humans *either* physically *or* temporally, despite Morton's continued use of the conjunction. Yet, to begin to articulate how global warming can constitute a hyperobject we need to more specifically articulate the defining characteristics of hyperobjects. For Morton, "hyperobjects seem to have five interrelated qualities" that uniquely constitute hyperobjects: viscosity, nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing, and interobjectivity.[10]

As we classically have considered objects as finite entities that bump into each other like billiard balls and then continue to go on independent of one another, Morton suggests that there is a stickiness to hyperobjects – a viscosity that breaks from our classical billiard ball understanding by suggesting that hyperobjects "'stick' to beings that are involved with them."[11] Hyperobjects are not simply 'out there' as something I can point at and avoid like a car screaming towards me as I walk down the road. Rather, we are already "stuck to them," enmeshed *in* them and their reaching effects.[12] Global warming is not something out there, like the car, coming towards me as something I can avoid, but something I am deeply embedded in, something that defines and affects my daily life. It, like the car, affects how I understand myself, how I take myself up in the world, just as much as my choices to recycle or not likewise affect it. We find ourselves already enmeshed in an environment affected by oil spills, the burning of fossil fuels, and deforestation - all of which shape my existence in the deepest ways possible. As Morton writes, we "find ourselves already in them," defined by them as we define them.[13] "The name of this trap is *viscosity*."[14]

Unlike the car, hyperobjects are not something located in an easily identifiable region of space. Rather they are *nonlocal*. As Morton explains, "When I look at the sun gleaming on the solar panels on my roof, I am watching global warming unfold. Carbon compounds and other molecules in the upper atmosphere magnify the burning intensity of the sun in the Great Central Valley of California. Yet I do not see global warming as such."[15] There is no single definable object I can point to and say 'there, there is global warming.' Rather, we only ever capture glimpses or pieces of hyperobjects at a given time.[16] As global warming is something that takes place all over the world and is recorded only through data collected over a vast period of time, I do not see the entirety of it when I look out my window on a warm day in winter. And yet, I find myself always already capturing glimpses of global warming through its effects on my daily activities. It is both there and not there. Insofar as this paradoxical way of speaking about the location of

6 Ibid., 73.
7 Ibid., 24.
8 Ibid., 1 and 60.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 23.
11 Ibid., 1.
12 Ibid., 28.
13 Ibid., 32.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 38.
16 Ibid., 70.

hyperobjects captures their locality, Morton is right to claim that hyperobjects are constituted by a general nonlocality.

We must be careful, however, to qualify nonlocality as *general* nonlocality and not no-locality or infinite-locality. It is not the case that hyperobjects do not inhabit any amount of space or that they constitute all regions of space. Hyperobjects, after all, are finite entities[17] even if they are not reducible to their local manifestation.[18] The Earth takes up a finite amount of space. Global warming is not affecting the rain on planets within the Andromeda galaxy – even if it affects the rain in Spain. As Morton qualifies his claim, he suggests that it is perhaps only the quantum realm that exhibits true nonlocality.[19] However, nonlocality for hyperobjects captures our inability to locate the entirety of the hyperobject, either spatially or temporally, at a given time and place. Global warming certainly extends both spatially and temporally in a way that far exceeds the physical and temporal aspects of a human being. Yet recall, that Styrofoam and plastic bags, although small in size, nevertheless constitute hyperobjects insofar as their existence far out-lasts that of any given human individual. Thus, Hyperobjects remain exceptionally large in relation to humans, "massively distributed in space [or] time," but we only ever observe slivers or manifestations of hyperobjects at a given time and it is in this sense that they can be said to be constitutive of general nonlocality.[20]

As we have already mentioned, hyperobjects are not merely large in relation to humans merely in terms of size alone. They are equally massive temporally. As Morton writes, "The Florida Everglades have lasted for about five thousand years. Some call them Nature because that is what they are used to. But beyond this, they are a hyperobject, massively distributed in time and space in ways that baffle humans and make interacting with them fascinating, disturbing, problematic, and wondrous."[21] This extreme temporal duration is in part what Morton refers to as temporal undulation. The other part of temporal undulation that Morton articulates stems from his engagement in Einsteinian relativity and quantum physics. Here, given the sheer size of hyperobjects, we recognize that hyperobjects themselves call into question our average way of thinking about time and space. Given the size of planets, they themselves, as hyperobjects, affect both time and space – so much so that they give rise to tangible relativistic effects[22] which in turn call into question our ability to think about time and space as "empty containers that entities sit in."[23] Given the findings of relativity and quantum physics, we may suggest that hyperobjects orient us towards thinking about time and space as emerging from objects.[24] In the end, we may summarize Morton's discussion of temporal undulation as the characteristic of hyperobjects that captures both their massive temporal longevity and their ability to undermine classical conceptions of time and space by justifying the findings of both relativity theory and quantum physics.

And yet, it is not immediately clear how Morton can maintain both notions of temporal undulation, if we consider objects like plastic bags and Styrofoam as hyperobjects. The notion that either plastic bags or Styrofoam constitutes a hyperobject is already difficult to square when we think of hyperobjects as being extremely large in size, but this difficulty is redoubled when we consider this idea that the size of hyperobjects manifests *tangible* or *measurable* relativistic effects as is the case with planets. This is further called into question as we ask if global warming, Morton's prime example of a hyperobject, manifests tangible relativistic effects. Although Morton certainly gives examples of relativity taking place with every object (large and small)[25] it is not clear how we can capture this within every example of hyperobjects he gives. The plastic bag certainly 'out lives me' many times over, but it does not give rise to tangible relativity in a manner equivalent to a planet. Yet, Morton refers to these objects as hyperobjects.

17 Ibid., 60.
18 Ibid., 1.
19 Ibid., 44.
20 Ibid., 48.
21 Ibid., 58.
22 Ibid., 62.
23 Ibid., 65.
24 Ibid., 63.
25 Ibid., 65.

One way to square both claims might be, like nonlocality, to suggest that not every hyperobject manifests tangible relativity wherein tangible relativity consists of noticeable relativistic effects on a scale equivalent to that of a planet. Rather, only those hyperobjects that are exceptionally large do this and as such only those objects that show us that every object, to some degree, affects time and space. So, although not every hyperobject presents tangible evidence of relativity, we can say that those that do manifest such evidence teach us that every object does so. In this way, we can maintain that every hyperobject, although some better than others, both manifests relativistic effects and is massively distributed through time.

For Morton, both nonlocality and temporal undulation can be captured under the fourth characteristic of hyperobjects: phasing. As another characteristic of hyperobjects, phasing captures how hyperobjects appear to phase in and out of the human world.[26] This indicates that hyperobjects "occupy a high-dimensional *phase space* that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional scale basis"[27] which in turn entails that hyperobjects occupy a higher dimensional space than ourselves.[28] This then is why we can speak of hyperobjects, like global warming, as being nonlocal and temporally undulating. At any given point in which we 'experience' global warming, we are only glimpsing one localized manifestation, and yet, this effect is indicative of something much larger – global warming itself. This further justifies why we classically have been accustomed to talk of global warming as an event but can now speak of it as an object in its own right. As something that we experience non-directly and over vast tracts of time, we are inclined to think of global warming as an event but if we consider global warming as an object residing at a higher dimension, then we can think of it as an object that manifests itself to us in an event like manner. For this reason, Morton goes as far as to say that a process simply is an object experienced by humans who are ill-equipped to experience them on their own dimensional level.[29] As such, hyperobjects are constitutive of phasing insofar as they occupy a higher dimension and therefore are, at times, experienced as processes or events wherein we never experience them in their whole as they really are but only ever through glimpses and slivers.[30]

Interobjectivity, the final quality of a hyperobject, captures the "mesh" or the interconnected webbing of objects or systems as each object causally plays a role in the system it both constitutes and partakes in.[31] Like intersubjectivity, interobjectivity constitutes a shared space of meaning. However, unlike intersubjectivity, which pertains to human subjects alone, interobjectivity additionally constitutes "systems of related objects,"[32] including human subjects, and captures "the strange interconnectedness of things."[33] For Morton, "Hyperobjects provide great examples of interobjectivity— namely, the way in which nothing is ever experienced directly, but only as mediated through other entities in some shared sensual space."[34] Take global warming, for example. At any given moment in which the hyperobject global warming is being experienced, it is not the object in its entirety that is being experienced but always only the system of effects that make up the atmosphere, both literally and figuratively, of my environment. We see a multitude of effects through the interactions of pollution, smog, altered animal migration, longer rainy season, etc., all of which affecting each other, making each in part what they are, while also constituting the hyperobject itself. Each object is deeply influential on every other object, leaving traces or histories[35] of its effects on the other, all the while constituting the system that it partakes in – global warming. It is this web of interconnectedness that constitutes interobjectivity.

There is, perhaps, an additional quality of hyperobjects that Morton does not make explicit as an essential quality, but nevertheless mentions as possibly being constitutive of hyperobjects. That is, hyperobjects are

26 Ibid., 70.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 70-73.
30 Ibid., 74.
31 Ibid., 81-83.
32 Ibid., 84.
33 Ibid., 83.
34 Ibid., 86.
35 Ibid., 88.

essentially agential. As one of the more crucial aspects of hyperobjects that Crockett will pick up on, Morton at times refers to hyperobjects as being agential, as being able to affect subjects and make ethical demands upon them.[36] Indeed, Morton explicitly states early on in his introduction that "hyperobjects are agents"[37] and latter expands upon this by claiming that they can make ethical demands by issuing ethically charged directives upon us.[38] As Morton lauds Jane Bennett's description of object agency, it may be beneficial to cite Bennett herself:

> While the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus or clinamen, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces.[39]

She goes on to further clarify object agency as she cites Deleuze:

> Deleuze explicates this point: the power of a body to affect other bodies includes a "corresponding and inseparable" capacity to be affected; "there are two equally actual powers, that of acting, and that of suffering action, which vary inversely one to the other, but whose sum is both constant and constantly effective."[40]

With this understanding of object agency in mind, it should be clear that for Morton it is interobjectivity itself that both constitutes the agency of hyperobjects themselves while at the same time enables human agency itself to take place. If every action is always in relation to something that makes that action possible, itself, in turn, constituting an agent, then the interrelatedness that constitutes hyperobjects is the field through which agency manifest, both by subjects and objects as each plays an equal role in causality and agency.[41]

This idea becomes so powerful for Morton that he identifies interobjectivity itself as that which gives rise to subjectivity, cognition, and the self.[42] As Morton explains:

> On the view I expound here, by contrast, what is called subject and what is called mind just are interobjective effects, emergent properties of relationships between enmeshed objects. Some neurons are wired together in a brain, and the brain sits in the skull of a lifeform that is sitting at this computer, typing these words. Mind is not "in" the brain but rather, to use the Heideggerian term, "thrown" into the interobjective space consisting of a banker's lamp, skull, computer, and keyboard, as well as fingers, neurons, and Mahler's seventh symphony playing on iTunes, Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, a pair of eyes, a medium sized wooden Danish dining chair covered with black velvet, the muscular system, and so on.[43]

The human subject thus loses its privileged position in the world as it finds itself no longer the radically autonomous agent that it once thought it was. Rather, subjectivity and agency are now found only in the give and take of agents, both human and nonhuman, acting upon one another. Clearly playing off Husserl's famous claim that consciousness is always a consciousness-of, Morton emphasizes the now levelled playing field between human and nonhuman agents by declaring that consciousness is now better understood as a "consciousness-for," an effect of the interconnectedness of objects, including humans, wherein consciousness is claimed by and made possible by the objects that help give rise to it.[44] It is in this way that Morton situates hyperobjects outside those philosophical trends that maintain a form of correlationism as foundational truths as it is no longer consciousness shaping and articulating a meaningful world, but the interconnectedness of objects that shape subjectivity, personhood, and consciousness itself.

---

36 Ibid., 141.
37 Ibid., 29.
38 Ibid., 141. Here, Morton uses Lingis' description of a burgeoning forest fire set off by a tossed cigarette as an example of a hyperobject (the forest) issuing forth an ethical demand to respond by stomping out the fire.
39 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.
40 Ibid.
41 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 83.
42 Ibid., 84.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.

In summation, hyperobjects are extremely large objects, either physically or temporally. We are constantly entangled within them (viscosity) and affected by them (interobjectivity), even though they appear to be both nowhere in particular (nonlocality) and yet sporadically announcing themselves (phasing) over vast tracts of time (temporal undulation). However, as I have attempted to gesture towards but will now make explicit – it is not clear how essential each quality is for Morton's understanding of hyperobjects. There are some exemplary examples that Morton gives of hyperobjects that appear to capture all five qualities. And yet, there are some hyperobjects, like plastic bags and Styrofoam, that appear to only exhibit some of these qualities. It is not clear how to reconcile these difficulties without either dropping one or some of the essential qualities of hyperobjects or without overemphasizing Morton's claims that these qualities "seem"[45] to be essential properties that hyperobjects "have in common."[46] These difficulties are, perhaps, why Crockett, as we will see, gives a rather attenuated account of hyperobjects.

Crockett introduces Timothy Morton's hyperobjects as a category of objects that are distinguished by their exceptional size, both physically and temporally. Relative to humans, hyperobjects are massive and can be said to include things we might typically call processes or systems.[47] Examples of hyperobjects include things like "the Solar system, a black hole, an oil field, [and] global warming."[48] Hyperobjects are said to emerge as we begin to think on a cosmic scale, precipitated by technological advancements and our recognition of the geological effects we have had on the world. Consequently, hyperobjects call into question, not only our understanding of objects but ourselves as well. They question our being at the center of the universe, holding a privileged and distanced relation to the environment by putting our existence into perspective through their sheer size and the clear interrelatedness of objects on a massive scale.[49]

For Crockett, hyperobjects are not only defined by their prodigious size but also by their agential and ethical nature. Quoting Jeffery Cohen, Crockett tells us that hyperobjects are like the stone which "'supports, defeats, fosters, yields, impels, risks, resists.' This agential nature of lithic and other objects involves relations, and therefore broadly speaking ethical relations."[50] As Crockett rightfully points out, even though Morton primarily uses very large objects as examples of hyperobjects, perhaps to a fault,[51] they do, like the stone, contain a similar agential and ethical dimension. As Crockett continues explaining, "hyperobjects introduce an asymmetry in relation to us, that we end up being confronted by hyperobjects as opposed to confronting them as objects that we can impose our will on and dispose of however we like."[52] Although Crockett does not go into the exact details of the agential and ethical nature of hyperobjects, the central point here is that hyperobjects are agential insofar as they confront us and thereby subsequently carry an ethical dimension.

Crockett's account of hyperobjects, insofar as what has been said is all that can be said for Crockett, is short and reductive. There is no direct reference to the five essential qualities Morton articulates in *Hyperobjects* except through cursory discussions of the interconnectedness of things (interobjectivity) and how this view, in turn, calls into question our classical understanding of the world, objects, and subjects. For Crockett, it is the agential and ethical dimension of hyperobjects that constitute their essential qualities, not their size (neither physical nor temporal). In Crockett's defense, this is not so much a failure on his part but a result of the overall project of his book – bringing Derrida into contact with contemporary movements, broadly speaking, within twenty-first century continental philosophy. As such, Object-Oriented Ontology and Morton's hyperobjects are a peripheral topic for his book as a whole. Even more so, we might think that Crockett is also engaging with Morton through a Derridean lens in part as a response to Morton's criticism

45 Ibid., 23
46 Ibid., 1.
47 Crockett, *Derrida*, 83.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 83-87.
50 Ibid., 85.
51 Crockett, *Derrida*, 84, 87, and 90. Although I have attempted to point out that Morton does example some small objects as hyperobjects (plastic bags and Styrofoam), Crockett is correct to point out that the majority of Morton's examples are overwhelmingly, and almost by definition, extremely large in size in comparison to humans.
52 Ibid., 85.

of poststructuralism: that poststructuralism failed, where hyperobjects and Object-Oriented Ontology succeed, to bring about an ecological realism.[53]

Perhaps we can approach Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects from the view of the criticisms I touched on above. As I mentioned earlier, one way to overcome the issues inherent in Morton's understanding of hyperobjects is to de-emphasize certain essential qualities and emphasize others. For Crockett, this entails placing the ethical dimension hyperobjects announce front and center. Yet, in doing so, we must ask to what degree would such an account throw the baby out with the bathwater? Crockett does not appear to be too concerned with this question but rather only at looking at how we can learn from Morton's conception of hyperobjects in order to develop a Derridean and Lacanian inspired ecological ethics that captures the ethical dimension hyperobjects announce. However, despite Crockett's limited account of Morton's hyperobjects, he does not want to completely break from Morton by denying an understanding of hyperobjects as including massive objects, events, and processes. Rather, Crockett wishes to extend hyperobjects to include all objects, regardless of their size.

Having explicated his unique understanding of hyperobjects, Crockett goes on to articulate a Derridean and Lacanian account of hyperobjects that extends the notion of hyperobjects to include every object. One way in which Crockett brings Derrida, Lacan, and Morton into conversation is found in Morton's understanding of the asymmetrical ethical relation hyperobjects place us under. However, this ethical dimension is captured primarily through Crockett's analysis of Lacan and only afterward claimed to align itself with Derrida's famous claim in *The Gift of Death* that *tout autre est tout autre* – that "*Every other (one) is every (bit) other*," that every other is radically or wholly other than all others and therefore resists the application of general categories.[54] As we will see, this general reading of *tout autre est tout autre* will be read anew through Lacan's notion of the *objet petit a*.

Crockett begins his account by suggesting that we can read Lacan as an Object-Oriented Ontologist, one that can help extend the notion of hyperobjects to all objects with the use of Lacan's notion of the little other object (*objet petit a*) – a "strange little object" that has the ability to affect a subject.[55] In one of Crockett's more explicit claims about the *objet petit a*, he states that "The little other is the crystallization of the symbolic big Other[, an abstraction,] that forms a knot around which our imagination gets fixed."[56] Crockett's example of a little other object is found in Freud's understanding of the "mother's breasts, which is the entire existence for the infant baby until she learns to separate her breasts from her own body."[57] As such, the *objet petit a*, for Crockett, appears to be a node or focal point around which one's life can be oriented around.

Lacan's complex notion of the little other object, for Crockett's purposes, parallels Morton's hyperobjects insofar as,

> ...for Lacan, an object is never a simple object, and it confronts us with our own symbolic meaning-making as well as implicates us in the Real beyond or within the symbolic. There is a trait that connects us to the object, and this trait goes from the object to us and distorts our perception and understanding in powerful ways.[58]

Here, according to Crockett, Lacan can be seen as being well in step with both the asymmetrical ethical dimension and the non-correlationist position captured within Morton's notion of hyperobjects but with one important exception, every "object is potentially an object *a*", a little other object.[59] Indeed, as we saw above, the *objet petit a* is not reducible to any specific or general category of objects. Instead, it can be found in any object so long as that object forms a locus of meaning that affects us. As it is the object itself, then, that affects the individual, Crockett believes that this reversal in directionality (from subjects confronting objects to objects now confronting subjects) allows him to read Lacan as an Object-Oriented Ontologist

53 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 2 and 22.
54 Derrida, *Gift*, 69. See also, Crockett, *Derrida*, 22.
55 Crockett, *Derrida*, 89.
56 Ibid., 88.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 89.

and his notion of the *objet petit a* as being deeply in tune with Morton's hyperobjects. That is, As Crockett understands the distinctive characteristics of hyperobjects to be their ability to both confront subjects and, by virtue of doing so, make an ethical demand upon them, he suggests that the *objet petit a*, which likewise constitutes an object that confronts subjects and affects how they take themselves up in the world, shares in the same essential characteristics as hyperobjects. Indeed, Lacan's *objet petit a* and Morton's hyperobjects are believed to be so in line with each other that Crockett goes as far as to say that hyperobjects are little other objects.[60] Thus, Lacan, Crockett argues, supplies a way of thinking about Object-Oriented Ontology through the little other object (what Crockett coins as *a*-O-O, or object *a*-oriented-ontology) that allows one to think about every object as a hyperobject insofar as every object is potentially an *objet petit a*.

Crockett then bridges Lacan with Derrida through Derrida's notion of *tout autre est tout autre* suggesting that by opening the door to the possibility of every object being a little other object, we can extend Derrida's claim to suggest that "every object *a* is every other object, including a hyperobject in Moron's sense."[61] Insofar as hyperobjects are little other objects by virtue of capturing a non-correlationist realism, an asymmetrical ethical relation between all objects (Morton's interobjectivity), and little other objects are potentially every object, we can point towards a Derridean and Lacanian inspired Object-Oriented Ontology (or *a*-O-O) that treats every object as a hyperobject. Sadly, Crockett's point is not to fully articulate what an *a*-oriented ontology would be but to merely point towards possible points of contact between Derrida, Lacan, and Object-Oriented Ontology. Whether or not the account could be sufficiently established without being problematically inconsistent (for either Derrida, Lacan, or Morton) appears to be a question Crockett leaves for another project.

And yet, despite the Crockett's potentially over-reductive understanding of Morton's hyperobjects, the importance of his argument should not go missed. Crockett correctly identifies a shortcoming in Morton's ecological account – namely that Morton's obsession with exceptionally large objects prevents him from recognizing that the ethical dimension inherent in hyperobjects can be found in every object. It is this infatuation that, for Crockett, prevents Morton from seeing the natural conclusion that hyperobjects announce. Indeed, for Crockett, this next step not only follows from the recognition that hyperobjects can make ethical claims on humans but, even more so, it is necessary to properly capture the ethical dimension needed in an ecological realism said to respond to the Anthropocene and resituate humanity here, on Earth. For this reason, Crockett's attempt to extend the ethical dimension inherent in hyperobjects to every object by broadening the notion of hyperobjects to include all objects ought to be viewed as a welcome endeavor.

In what follows, I would like to approach a similar line of thinking through the lens of Edmund Husserl, one in which Husserl might prove to be another possible source for extending hyperobjects to include every object. However, before we can look at a possible Husserlian approach to hyperobjects, we need to investigate the possibility of blending Husserlian phenomenology with the philosophical approach hyperobjects emerge from - Speculative Realism.

Speculative Realism constitutes a movement within philosophy that attempts to establish a realism that is not restricted by correlationism. Proponents of Speculative Realism have often criticized post-Kantian philosophy as failing to establish a proper form of realism due to their emphasis on the necessary relation between subjects and objects. That is, Speculative Realism wants to begin to think about objects in ways that do not problematically flirt with idealism but instead instantiate a true, genuine realism.[62] As both Dan Zahavi and Tom Sparrow point out, how Speculative Realists establish a non-correlationist realism varies wildly, yet they are all united by a common enemy – correlationism.[63]

Correlationist philosophies maintain that subjectivity and objectivity are fundamentally interrelated. On this view, neither subjectivity nor objectivity can be analyzed separately.[64] According to Crockett, modern

60 Ibid., 90.
61 Ibid., 89.
62 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 9.
63 Zahavi, "The end of what?", 293; Sparrow, *The End*, 115; see also Harman, *Quentin*, 127.
64 Zahavi, "The end of what?", 293.

correlationism "claims that objects rotate around human categories of intuition and understanding"[65] and are fundamentally "tied to the conditions of representation given by a human subject."[66] For both Crockett and Morton, one way to overcome correlationism is by establishing the ability of an object to make a claim upon a subject.[67] As hyperobjects constitute an agential object that makes claims upon subjects, a claim that issues from the object to the subject, they establish a reversal in the orientation of claim-making. That is, instead of only subjects making claims on objects, hyperobjects make claims on subjects. For Crockett and Morton, the ability for hyperobjects to make claims on subjects alone undercuts the problem of correlationism that Speculative Realism is concerned with.[68]

For some Speculative Realists, this stark opposition to correlationism has necessarily entailed that phenomenology constitutes a fundamentally antithetical position to their own. However, as Zahavi correctly points out, Speculative Realists approach the problem of correlationism in a variety of ways. For Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, and Tom Sparrow, phenomenology maintains such an antithetical position. As Meillassoux writes,

> By "correlation" we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined...During the twentieth century, the two principal 'media' of the correlation were consciousness and language, the former bearing phenomenology, the latter the various currents of analytic philosophy.[69]

Meillassoux continues as he articulates a strong model of correlationism, saying that

> The strong model in this characterization seems to us to be represented as much by Wittgenstein as by Heidegger, which is to say, by the two emblematic representatives of the two principal currents of twentieth-century philosophy: analytic philosophy and phenomenology.[70]

We can find a similar impetus in Brassier as he writes,

> Indeed, the founding axiom of phenomenology (Husserl's 'principle of principles') could be simply stated as: appearances can only be understood in their own terms. But what are 'their own terms'? Precisely the terms concomitant with the first-person phenomenological point of view.[71]

And again, this is echoed by Tom Sparrow as he writes,

> Otherwise put, phenomenology must at least adhere to Husserl's "principle of principles" (Ideas § 24), which dictates that direct intuition is the origin of knowledge and to be respected as its own authority, and necessarily entails the view (hereafter referred to as "correlationism") that subject and object, consciousness and phenomena, thought and being are inseparable binary pairs. The rejection of correlationism, as we will see, is a foundational brick in the edifice of speculative realism. If phenomenology must commit itself to correlationism, and it seems it must, then speculative realism's commitment to the reality of things can be read as anti-phenomenological.[72]

However, it does not appear to be the case that every Speculative Realist is fundamentally opposed to phenomenology. Morton himself, although claiming Heidegger as an exceptionally strong proponent of correlationism, almost to the point of constituting the strongest form of idealism after Berkeley, nevertheless takes a favorable view of Alphonso Lingis' phenomenological description of moral imperatives deriving

65 Crockett, *Derrida*, 75.
66 Ibid., 83.
67 Ibid., 85-86; see also Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 88-89.
68 Ibid., 89.
69 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5-6.
70 Ibid., 41.
71 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 27.
72 Sparrow, *The End*, 15-16. See also 92.

from nonhuman objects.[73] Indeed, Morton goes as far as to use Lingis' phenomenological description as a way of capturing the asymmetrical imperative Hyperobjects assert on humans.[74] Likewise, Graham Harman (whose Object-Oriented Ontology Morton subscribes to)[75] claims that his work in *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* locates part of its foundation from his earlier book *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* and the other foundation in the carnal phenomenologists: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Alphonso Lingis.[76] *Tool-Being* itself, as Harman makes explicit in the first lines of his introduction, is in turn deeply indebted to Heidegger's analysis of equipment.[77] As such we can see his work as deeply receptive to but ultimately moving beyond the phenomenological tradition.

Despite these differences, the question remains: To what degree, if any, can phenomenology contribute to Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology, if, as some maintain, its fundamental starting point is correlationist? Is phenomenology something that must necessarily be rejected or perhaps used only as a useful tool for moving beyond itself into the true realism Speculative Realism promises? Is it necessarily the case that phenomenology is correlationist? For Zahavi, the idea "that phenomenology is indeed a form of correlationism is easy to illustrate."[78] However, as the work of Patrick Whitehead shows, this may not necessarily be the case and may depend on our understanding of correlationism, what constitutes a successful response to the problem of correlationism, and whose understanding of Speculative Realism we abide by.

In Patrick Whitehead's article, "Phenomenology Without Correlationism: Husserl's Hyletic Material", Whitehead draws from section 85 of Husserl's *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* to suggest a possible avenue for phenomenology that overcomes the correlationist critique. Whitehead's cue comes from Husserl's undeveloped distinction between hyletic phenomenology, concerning matter or hyle, and noetic phenomenology which concerns the noetic phases of intentionality.[79]

Husserl's distinction between the two forms of phenomenology stems from two understandings of the term 'sensory.' For Husserl, the term 'sensory' contains a "double meaning exemplified in the contrast between 'sense-bestowing' and sensory."[80] As Husserl explains, the latter refers to "that which is mediated through the 'senses'."[81] This meaning of sensory indicates an experience that is prior to any meaning bestowed upon it by a subject - something that is sensed but has yet to become the object of consciousness. Sense-bestowing, on the other hand, entails an understanding of sensory that is dependent upon consciousness. As what is sensed becomes the object of consciousness, it is consciousness itself that bestows meaning upon that which is sensed, giving it form and meaning.[82] Husserl calls our being conscious of something *as* something a "*noetic phase*" which itself becomes the object of investigation for noetic phenomenology.[83] On the other hand, that which is merely sensed, that which is prior to being formed by consciousness, Husserl refers to as "*hyletic* or *material data*" which in turn is the object of investigation for hyletic phenomenology.[84]

To help further solidify this distinction, let us turn to an example offered by William McKenna in *Husserl's "Introductions to Phenomenology:" Interpretation and Critique*. As McKenna explains, while deep in conversation in a dining hall, food was beginning to be shuffled around out of sight in preparation to be passed out. During this time McKenna began to experience a smell that he did not pay attention to, connect to anything specific, nor recognize as coming from anywhere specific within the room. Only after a friend

73 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 140-141.
74 Ibid., 141.
75 Ibid., 13-14.
76 Harman, *Guerrilla*, 2-3.
77 Harman, *Tool-Being*, 1.
78 Zahavi, "The end of what?", 293.
79 Husserl, *Ideas*, 178.
80 Ibid., 176.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Husserl, *Ideas*, 176.

announced that the spaghetti was on its way did the smell "'transform into' the smell of spaghetti" coming from the kitchen.[85] As McKenna reflects upon his experience he explains that prior to the announcement of the coming spaghetti, the smell was at best described as a "smell-experience" and "was in no way the smell-experience *of* anything" nor one that was "located in the room."[86] The smell-experience was certainly something that he was undergoing. However, insofar as intentionality, for Husserl, is always *of* something and this was an experience that was not *of* anything, it constituted an experience that Husserl would call non-intentional.[87] Only after the declaration of the soon to be served spaghetti was the smell transformed, it had a sense bestowed upon it, and it became intentional - the smell *of* spaghetti.

For Husserl, this double meaning of the word 'sensory' suggests a corresponding twofold distinction in phenomenology.

> *The stream of phenomenological being has a twofold bed: a material and a noetic*. Phenomenological reflexions and analyses which specially concern the material may be called *hyletically phenomenological*, as, on the other side, those that relate to noetic phases may be referred to as *noetically phenomenological*.[88]

For Patrick Whitehead, this indicates that Husserl had recognized a second path for phenomenology, one in which the primary focus of phenomenological investigation would be hyle. That is, Husserl points towards a field of phenomenology that would investigate that "*which contains in itself nothing intentional*, [from which] concrete intentional experience takes form and shape."[89] However, as Husserl continues, we see that hyletic phenomenology was not pursued because Husserl believed noetic phenomenology to be "incomparably more important."[90] Insofar as noetic phenomenology was favored by Husserl, a phenomenological path that is concerned with experience *as* it is experienced by consciousness, it becomes clear why phenomenology has been targeted as correlationist. As noetic phenomenology deals with the ways in which the world shows up meaningfully for the conscious observer, all investigations that come from this approach will necessarily fall into a form of correlationism as the world and meaning are understood solely as they are *for* consciousness. However, as we see from the distinction made between hyletic and noetic phenomenology, it need not necessarily be the case that phenomenology remains noetically oriented.

Although Husserl's discussion of hyle is painfully brief, there are three lessons we can learn from hyle – lessons that I maintain situate Husserl as a more ideal source for capturing Crockett's desired understanding of hyperobjects insofar as they allow us to both capture Crockett's desired conclusion while remaining truly faithful to Morton. First, hyle is antecedent to the sense-bestowal of consciousness. Insofar as hyle contains "*nothing intentional*," hyle is what Patrick Whitehead refers to as "ontologically neutral" - it lacks the definitive ontological status of being either an object or a subject.[91] Indeed, as the subject-object status of an entity is bestowed by consciousness and hyle is non-intentional, hyle is prior to the subject-object differentiation and therefore constitutes "a possible subject or object."[92]

As antecedent to the subject-object differentiation bestowed by consciousness, hyle does not conform to traditional ontological discourse. For example, while the agential status of an entity is either affirmed or denied according to the sense bestowed upon it by consciousness, ontologically neutral hyle remains open to both possibilities as its ontological status has yet to be established. As such, hyle contains the possibility of being both agential and non-agential. For Patrick Whitehead, this means that hyle makes possible "subject-object reversibility."[93] In other words, hyle makes possible an agential experience while afterward being consciously grasped as a non-agential object.

---

85 McKenna, *Husserl's*, 53.
86 Ibid., 53-54.
87 Ibid., 54.
88 Husserl, *Ideas*, 178.
89 Ibid., 175.
90 Ibid., 178.
91 Whitehead, "Phenomenology", 6.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., 8.

Second, hyle plays a role in forming intentionality. This comes out in two places. First, when Husserl says,

> Such concrete data of experience [(hyle)] are to be found as *components* in concrete experiences of a more comprehensive kind which as wholes are intentional, and indeed so that over those sensile phases lies as it were an "animating", *meaning-bestowing* stratum [...] a stratum through whose agency, out of the *sensile-element* [(hyle)], *which contains in itself nothing intentional*, the concrete intentional experience takes form and shape.[94]

Here, Husserl claims that hyle is one component in intentional experience. As hyle is antecedent to intentionality but constitutes a part of the intentional whole (the object of intentionality after being shaped by the sense-bestowal of consciousness), hyle contributes to the formation of intentionality - it forms a stratum out of which intentionality takes shape. This is further corroborated by Husserl's later discussion of hyle when he says that hyle and "the animating construals—thus *both together* [. . .]—belong to the 'really inherent' composition of the mental process."[95]

Husserl's emphasis on hyle and the sense-bestowal stratum as components of intentional wholes calls into question the correlationist critique that subjects alone confront and organize the world. Although it remains to be the case that the sense-bestowal stratum gives shape to hyle, hyle, as antecedent to and independent from the sense-bestowal stratum, equally partakes in the constitution of intentionality. It is only through their mutual relationship that intentional wholes come about. As co-constitutive of intentional wholes, "to grant ontological primacy to [either] subject or object ignores the pre-objective and pre-subjective (terms that only receive their designation retrospectively) [components] that were the necessary conditions for" intentionality.[96] Hyle, therefore, calls into question the directional primacy of subject-object confrontation. As the correlationist critique maintains that phenomenology can only maintain a position in which consciousness confronts and organizes the world - denying the possibility of objects confronting subjects - hyle not only contains the possibility of confronting subjects but it does so in a way that participates in the formation of intentionality.

Finally, hyle contains the possibility of expanding our understanding of what constitutes an object. Indeed, as Husserl writes, hyle "might also be entitled *formless materials*."[97] Although Husserl does not go into this paradoxical possibility, one possible reading is that Husserl is predicting non-intentional experiences that, post sense-bestowal, break from our basic understanding of subjects and objects. When read alongside hyperobjects, one might read Husserl as being open to the idea of considering events or systems (like Morton's trans-dimensional hyperobjects) as objects. It is possible that, for Husserl, an event, process, or system (such as an ecosystem or global warming) may constitute formless material insofar as I never experience them (like some hyperobjects) whole and all at once. That is, as our scientific advancements make possible the recognition of hyperobjects like global warming, our experiences of them prior to the sense-bestowal afforded them by these technological advancements may constitute an experience of formless materials. Looking back to our example from McKenna, in the same way he experienced a non-intentional sensation that only after the announcement of the food became an experience *of* spaghetti, hyperobjects, prior to their being announced by technological advancements, constituted non-intentional experiences. Only after the technological announcement of global warming was a sense bestowed upon our prior experiences that we now recognize as events within the broader event of global warming. Such possibilities may push the boundaries of how we conceptualize the world, forcing us to reconsider our ontological categories in ways that begin to align hyle with hyperobjects.

As we have seen, hyle is ontologically neutral. As such, it is prior to subject-object differentiation. Moreover, hyle is non-intentional, which, as we have seen, suggests that it can confront us prior to our bestowing sense upon it. In such confrontations, hyle contains the possibility of being agential, acting as

94 Husserl, *Ideas*, 175, emphasis added.
95 Husserl, *Essential*, 97.
96 Whitehead, "Phenomenology", 5.
97 Husserl, *Ideas*, 175.

a subject, even though post sense-bestowal it is co-constitutive of an object. We have also seen that, as a necessary component of intentional wholes, hyle is co-constitutive of intentionality itself. Last, but not least, hyle contains the possibility of being formless materials, a paradoxical description that may predict the expansion of our understanding of objects to include processes and events like Morton's hyperobjects.

With this in mind, I suggest that hyle carries an uncanny overlap with Morton's understanding of hyperobjects while allowing for Crockett's desired extension of hyperobjects to include every object. As hyle constitutes a non-intentional and necessary component of intentionality itself, we can, like Crockett and Morton, recognize hyle as confronting subjects. That is, as hyle can both constitute experiences prior to intentionality and, as a component of intentionality, affect the constitution of intentionality itself (making them co-constitutive of subjectivity), hyle offers a way of thinking about entities as confronting and affecting subjects.[98] Insofar as this itself constitutes the agential character of objects for both Crockett and Morton (and, in turn, their ethical dimension), hyle carries both the necessary agential and ethical dimensions that constitute both Morton and Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects.

Moreover, as hyle makes up one component of intentionality, hyle extends to every intentional object as a necessary condition for the possibility of intentionality itself (in part, an inversion of the correlationist position). As such, hyle offers an ontology that constitutes a substratum prior to subject-object differentiation, thereby encompassing every possible intentional object. Furthermore, given the paradoxical nature of hyle as possible formless materials, Husserl's understanding of hyle contains the possibility of incorporating those massive objects, processes, and events that characterize hyperobjects. Taken in conjunction with hyle's agential and ethical dimension, hyletic phenomenology offers a way of thinking about every object, including events and processes, as a hyperobject.

And yet, as Crockett's account of hyperobjects failed to capture Morton's five essential qualities of hyperobjects, we can show that hyle does not carry the same risk. As hyle is co-constitutive of every object, including subjectivity itself, while remaining prior to intentionality, hyle can be said to be viscous, nonlocal, temporally undulated, phased, and interobjective. As every intentional object is co-constituted by hyle, we can rightfully claim that hyle is everywhere, making up an essential component to every possible intentional object. And yet, given that hyle is prior to intentionality (which bestows spatial meaning), it is also nowhere as it exists in a space prior to spatial meaning-making. I am deeply immersed in them as they co-constitute my subjectivity and the world around me, and yet I cannot ever point to hyle. In this sense, hyle is both viscous and nonlocal.

Remembering our spaghetti example, it remains possible that hyle does announce itself, but always in ways that become clear immediately after the formation of intentionality. Here we glimpse hyle, but never directly nor in its entirety. As such we may say that hyle is temporally undulated and phased – popping in and out of intentional existence for undeterminable lengths of time (if time is only quantifiable when it is the object of intentionality). Finally, as hyle both constitutes a fundamental building block of all intentional objects while remaining prior to intentionality itself, something that makes hyle a possible-agent, hyle carries with it an interobjective dimension as it affects me and the world around me by co-constituting the very space in which both take place.

Given Husserl's ability to better capture Morton's essential qualities of hyperobjects, hyle can be seen as a better way to capture Morton's hyperobjects while at the same time moving towards an idea of every object is a hyperobject. Indeed, in some ways, our Husserlian approach to hyperobjects may allow us to overcome certain difficulties found in Morton's own understanding of hyperobjects. As I have mentioned above, Morton's use of Styrofoam and plastic bags as hyperobjects (along with some of his other examples) presents certain difficulties with his overall conception of hyperobjects. Yet, through our Husserlian hyperobject lens, if we recall Husserl's understanding of hyle as formless materials while maintaining that hyle is co-constitutive of every intentional object (including subjects), we can consistently maintain *both* smaller objects (like a plastic bag) *and* trans-dimensional objects (like global warming) as containing the essential qualities of hyperobjects. As such, hyletic phenomenology appears to not only smooth out certain issues within Morton's account, but it further allows us to both remain faithful to the five essential

98 To further see this, recall Morton's reference to Bennett's use of Deleuze cited above.

qualities of hyperobjects he articulates while at the same time capturing Crockett's claim to every object as a hyperobject.

Sadly, Husserl's declaration of phenomenology's twofold bed ends as quickly as it is announced. However, given what has been said about hyle, I have attempted to point out overlapping points of contact between Husserl's hyle and both Morton and Crockett's understanding of hyperobjects. As hyletic phenomenology remains underdeveloped, it is my hope that by having shown such points of contact between hyletic phenomenology and Speculative Realism that we can begin to see potential avenues for future cooperation and development between the two fields of philosophy. One such avenue, as I have argued above, resides in the ability of hyle and hyletic phenomenology to capture alternative ways of conceiving hyperobjects - ways that, in line with Crockett, extend hyperobjects to include every object.

References

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. USA: Duke University Press, 2010.

Brassier, Ray. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Crockett, Clayton. *Derrida after the End of Writing: Political Theology and New Materialism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret*. 2nd Ed. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Harman, Graham. *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*. USA: Open Court Publishing Company, 2005.

Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. USA: Open Court Publishing Company, 2002.

Harman, Graham. *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Edited by Donn Welton. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. New York: Routledge Classics, 2012.

McKenna, William. *Husserl's "Introductions to Phenomenology:" Interpretation and Critique*. USA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Sparrow, Tom. *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and New Realism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Whitehead, Patrick. "Phenomenology without correlationism: Husserl's hyletic material." *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*. 15:2 (October 2015), 1-12.

Zahavi, Dan. "The end of what? Phenomenology vs. speculative realism." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. 24:3 (2016), 289-309.