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**Equally Existing Objects: Tracing the Emergence of Non-Hierarchical Being  
Through Film and Occupy Wall Street**

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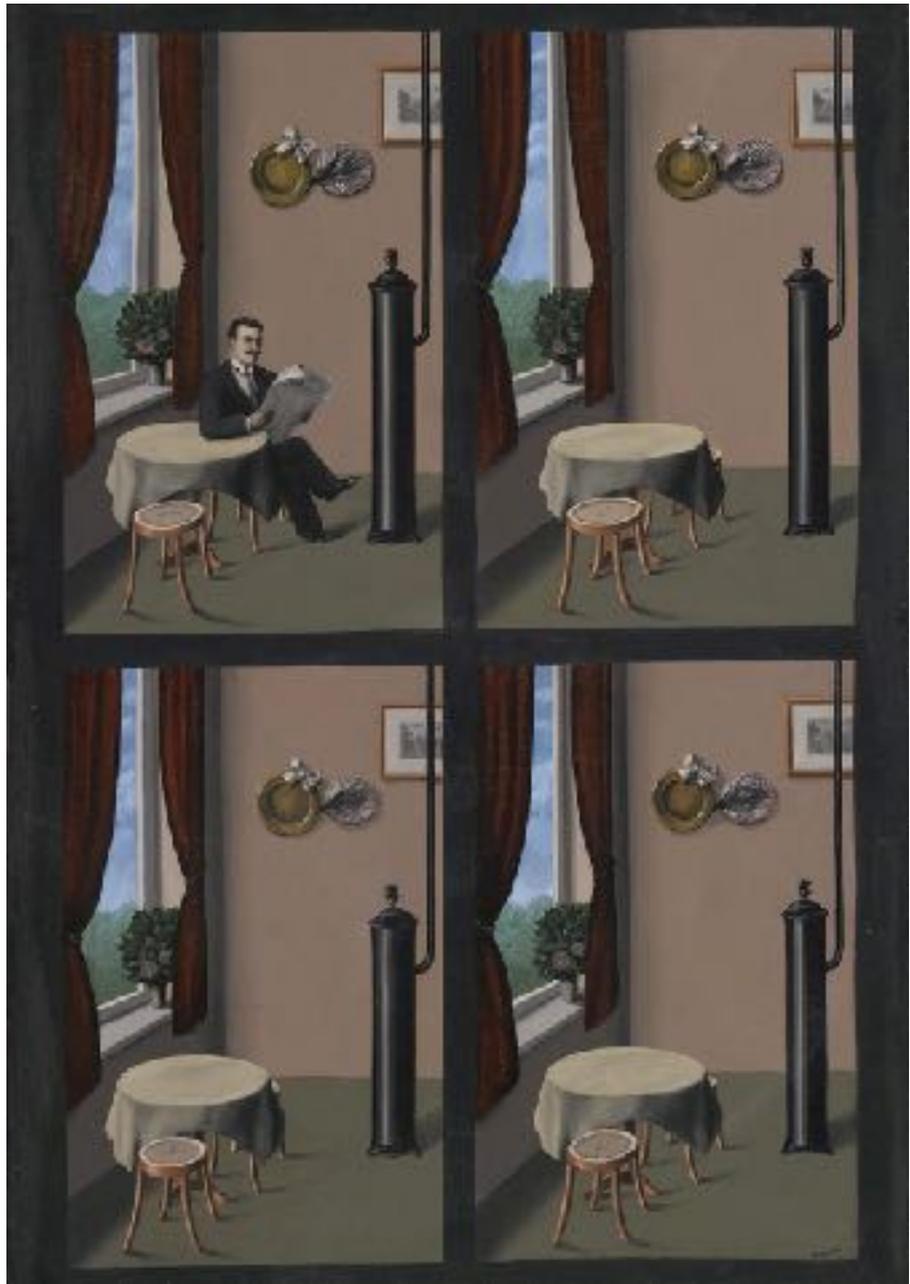
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Rene Magritte, Man With a Newspaper, Tate Britain, [tate.org](http://tate.org).

(Magritte 1928)

# Introduction and Current State of Research

## 1. Foreword

My father was dying, and subsequently died as this project was taking shape. His organs began to shut down as they succumbed to the cancer that was spreading throughout his body. As such, he became an object of matter inside of which interactions and new sets of relations were taking place amongst various bodily objects, medications and technologies, outside of any cognitive configuration. When he slipped from being a rational human being, to a being of non-reasoning matter, all the value, dignity and privilege associated with being a human subject passed away too. The importance in his being shifted into the realm of the withdrawn potential of the remaining matter. He is now the sets of expressive relations caused by the memories of him, in and on other objects: the people that remember him, his family and friends. He is also the remaining material left behind, the affect his physical and mental labour had on the objects they encountered, his offspring and the sets of relations his material possessions can now enter into. But most importantly, he has become part of the larger object of the world/universe. He is decomposing flesh and bone, combined with the clothes and artefacts he was buried with, inside of an also decomposing wooden box. The object that is buried now has the potential to feed living entities and turn into chemicals of decomposition which will affect the surrounding objects that come into contact with this. He exists as matter without rationality, outside of subject/object relations and has fully entered the realm of objects and object interaction in which there can be no hierarchy of being relating to existing as a thing. Whilst some objects outlast other objects, or greatly outsize them, all objects must be seen as existing equally and outside of a human/world correlation or duality. Some objects, a mountain for example, will outlast many other objects, a crumb of bread for instance, but both entities act and interact with other objects in the same way, outside of their relations to humans, and it is here that all objects must be seen as being non-hierarchical entities that access being and relations in the same way. If we attribute more being to mountains because they can enter into more sets of relations, or affect more things that come into contact with them by outlasting them, then we run the risk of maintaining the hierarchies of being that will be discussed throughout this project, but

especially in the Conclusion Chapter, in relation to the hierarchical operations of a system like neoliberal capitalism which treats certain entities as having a more useful purpose, or being, than others. This is the realm of this project: objects, object interactions, networks and assemblages. A non-hierarchical ontology of being that does not rely upon human rational constructs or discourses for all objects, out there in the world, to exist and interact as equally valid entities. For the short duration of time that my father existed in, he could directly and rationally affect relations between other objects, but now that his reasoning abilities have ceased, he can still manage, as an object, to affect and deform relations between the objects that come into contact with him and *vice versa* for an indefinite and prolonged period of time.

From the outset it should be noted that objects are discussed in this project in the terms set out by Graham Harman and the philosophical branch of inquiry known as object-oriented ontology (OOO)<sup>1</sup>. Both Harman and OOO discuss objects as “any entity that cannot be paraphrased in terms of either its components or its effects” (Harman 2016, p.3). In other words, objects can not be merely reduced to their component or atomic parts, nor can they be only seen as their functions, specifically their functions and uses in relation to a human subject using them for their own specific ends which overlooks the vast withdrawn well of the remaining object’s potential. This withdrawn potential is not some sort of absent trace of the object (in post-structural terms), but is the very being of the object that exists in new sets of relations that it can enter into. Hierarchical systems limit this potential by only allowing a limited access to the thing (the worker in capitalism for example, or the planet as raw material). If objects had no withdrawn potential then new objects could not emerge out of newly formed sets of relations. What is withdrawn may never emerge, but it has the potential to do so outside of any relation to a measuring human subject. When objects interact, we, as humans can only speculate about how they do so, or what happens to them in the process. The term “prehend” or “prehension” comes from the philosophical writing on how objects interact and it will be utilised in this project to discuss this process. Prehension is the mode of

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<sup>1</sup> This branch of philosophy is a recent (2007) post-Kantian mode of thought that emerged from a conference in Goldsmiths College. It deals primarily with object existence and speculates on the way all objects act, interact, react and exist apart from our ability to rationalise them and linguistically and discursively produce them in epistemological terms. It is a mode of philosophy that allows for the existence of things-in-themselves and not merely the phenomena of these things as they appear for us.

interaction that occurs between non-rational, or non-cognitive, objects: prehension and aesthetic understanding are thus to be seen as equivalent terms. Timothy Morton uses aesthetic interaction “outside of its ideological role as matchmaker between subject and object” (Morton 2013, p.19). This liberates aesthetic understanding from merely acting as a subjective ideological measure of hegemony; of what is to be considered as acceptably aesthetic, or that which subscribes to an imposed measure of beauty for example. This objective aesthetics is directly related to Terry Eagleton’s use of the aesthetic understanding in the following pages, one that is non-subjective, non-cognitive and yet which allows for a form of understanding to emerge. Object interaction, or prehension, is akin to the mode of understanding humans experience at an aesthetic level that is outside of rationality, but which still permits *a form of understanding* to take place. All causality, all object interactions and all the withdrawn potential that emerges are to be understood in line with Morton’s formulation: “*The aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension*” (Morton 2013, p.20).<sup>2</sup> To give an example that will be reiterated under the sub-heading ‘Being in Post-Modernity’ in a fuller context: the planes that struck the World Trade Center on 9/11 interpreted the towers in a certain way. A meaning was created from this interaction that produced impact, explosion and fire all of which made the tower and its components interpret these objects leading ultimately to collapse: this collapse can be read as the emergence of withdrawn potential, or the emergence of a new object. This may seem as a simple case of cause and effect if we only look at it in terms of human understanding. However, it is objects interpreting other objects and acting and reacting in ways similar to, but outside of, human interpretation: on a causal, or aesthetic level. All of the elements involved act, interact, deform, change and allow newness to emerge in the processes of prehension. This will be expanded upon in relation to aesthetic experience and affect in the forthcoming discussions. The aesthetic becomes the realm of interaction between all objects since a rock encountering another rock for example can not comprehend this interaction in rational terms but in terms of object prehension - it is prehension that will become a mode of understanding that can arguably

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<sup>2</sup> Furthering his explanation on the importance of aesthetic understanding, Morton states: “Precisely because reality is real - that is, encrypted against access by any objects, including a probing human mind - the aesthetic is incredibly important” Morton, T. (2013). *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press. p.31. We can never access objects in their entirety since they withdraw from us, and from one another, so we can only speculate how they act, or what they are, on an aesthetic level, through art in this instance. It is in this way also that objects interact. They cannot comprehend one another so they perform a sort of art when they interact and they understand at this aesthetic level.

be rooted in the aesthetic. Aesthetic understanding is that mode of understanding that does not rely on reason or rationality in order for a type of understanding to take place. Understanding is too anthropocentric a term for this process, so it makes sense to read it in terms of object prehension. This element will pick up on much of what Timothy Morton has to say about causality being aesthetic in his book *Realist Magic*.

In a way, it is easier to imagine interactions and causality as occurring on an aesthetic level when trying to comprehend how non-human actors interact and affect one another. The aesthetic takes human comprehension out of the equation of experience and understanding and allows for a mode of feeling to arise that can not be rooted in the human rationale: aesthetic understanding affects objects in ways that are outside of typical understanding yet it still permits a cause and effect movement (prehension/causality) to take place in a specific set of relations between the objects interacting. Aesthetic understanding can be understood as being moved in an affective, as opposed to rational, sense (when relating to humans): it affects us but we can never really say how or why. There is no rational explanation to describe the affect caused and thus it can be applied to the interactions between other non-rational entities. We must look at this type of understanding in relation to objects as they interact or prehend one another since these interactions also take place outside of our understanding of them: whilst we may be able, empirically, to know what is happening, we can never know how the objects were affected. There is an interaction or cause that draws out an affect that is outside of rationality: a movement that brings forth an epiphany or modulation in the objects affected: a movement that creates space for newness to emerge<sup>3</sup>. Terry Eagleton describes the aesthetic as follows: “The aesthetic is in no way cognitive, but it has about it something of the form and structure of the rational; it thus unites us with all the authority of a law, but at a more affective, intuitive level. What brings us together as subjects is not knowledge but an ineffable reciprocity of feeling” (Eagleton, p.75). This feeling is prehension and object interaction and can be seen to operate through every object in the same way it does in the human subject: since objects experience in this way,

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<sup>3</sup> Newness here can simply mean the prehension that occurs between two or more objects, and which, in its occurring, deforms the objects involved and as a result causes a new object to emerge.

a way attributed also to human subjects, we must be willing to attribute the same dignity to objects that we do to human subjectivity<sup>4</sup>.

This mode of object interaction allows a flattened ontology of being to take the place of the anthropocentric mode of being that places human thought at the apex of ontological validity and experience, and as such maintains hierarchies of being. In this formulation, all objects hold something back, or remain withdrawn, as a well of potential: this potential is the possible sets of relations that objects can enter into in the event of prehending another object; it is their actual being that can come to act in certain circumstances. It is within the terms of the potentiality of withdrawn objects that object-oriented ontology, and its sister branch of philosophy speculative realism, come to have their strongest claims - we can and must speculate that objects outside of our access to them can have a being of their own that we, as human subjects, will never encounter. According to Steven Shaviro, discussing speculative realism, “the world is independent in some way of our conceptualizations [sic] of it. The very fact that the ‘thing in itself’ is unknowable, as Kant declared, is supposed to make it suitable as an object of speculation” (Shaviro 2015). We therefore need to operate in a realm of uncertainty; allowing objects to exist for themselves and for other objects and not solely reliant upon a thinking human subject for their being to unfold in epistemological terms. We can only speculate on how objects interact and “feel” when they encounter one another. This relates back to the idea that object interactions are aesthetic: this means that objects interact in ways that are akin to the experience of a human aesthetic affect where understanding takes place at some level, but it is not rational and can not be reasoned through; however, it causes an affective experience to occur between two objects, moving and changing both objects in some way. Morton, discussing the interaction of all objects, puts it as follows: “An effect is always an aesthetic effect. That is, effect is a kind of perceptual event for some entity, no matter whether that entity has skin or nerves or brain” (Morton 2013, p.119). The idea that objects interact must allow for a sort of understanding to take place between the objects, but it must also allow for the view that

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<sup>4</sup> When this type of event occurs for a human we can attempt to rationalise it and understand it, but this will always fall short. Here lies the difference between subjects and objects: we can try to understand our, and others, feelings through empathy, but we can never get close to feeling like a tree for example, and this is the reason a speculative (realist) approach, or an aesthetic approach, is to be maintained. We can speculate that trees are affected in some way but we must accept that we can not empathise with the way a tree feels.

this understanding takes place on a level that is entirely *different* to how humans understand things in the traditional sense, and it is for this reason that the aesthetic prehension of objects is being discussed at this early stage since it forms the foundation of non-rational interactions. Human understanding cannot explain the affect caused by an aesthetic experience fully, or in terms that are entirely familiar, and this can be used as a means to frame the way other, non-sentient, objects interact and experience affect/affective responses.

## **2. Introduction and Methodology**

This project aims to look at how resistance to the hierarchies that form the foundation of the system of neoliberal capitalism force us to look at and think about objects in a different way. This mode of looking at or experiencing things will be rooted in film analysis and the way this mode of resistance and this mode of object interaction arose over time. Film allows us to experience the epistemic trends, or the dominant discourses of a time in the same way that looking at literature allows us to examine the time from which the writing arose. This is a cultural materialist approach which looks at cultural products as simply that; products of a time and a culture which, however tacitly, expose the collective cultural consciousness. By looking at hierarchies of power, and how they affect those involved, we begin to look at the ways objects interact. At a base level, we as human subjects interact with myriad objects at all times, be they computers, trees, networks of communication, books or animals; but on a more sinister level, humans also interact with other humans as objects in relation to themselves as subjects, and it is here that the hierarchies of capitalism must come under scrutiny since this mode of thought permeates all of our interactions with objects. Traditionally, the human subject has placed itself as the measure of being before which all other objects manifest themselves as a use value. In other words, we as humans have traditionally seen ourselves as the centre of being. By focussing on the hierarchies innate in the system of neoliberal capitalism, attention must turn to the way being is measured and portioned out to certain subjects, with less access to being offered to other subjects that do not meet the criteria of what warrants them to be seen as full subjects (or simply as objects in relation to measuring subjects) - women in a patriarchal system, or people of colour in predominantly white political regimes. Neoliberal capitalism is the state of global capitalism that we currently

inhabit. It is summed up by Noam Chomsky in the following: “Liberalize [sic] trade and finance, let markets set price [...], and inflation [...], privatize [sic] [and the] government should ‘get out of the way’” (Chomsky 1999, p.20). The hierarchical nature of this type of economic regime is elaborated by Chomsky: he states that the ‘principal architects’ of neoliberal capital are “the masters of the private economy, mainly huge corporations that control much of the international economy and have the means to dominate policy formation as well as the structuring of thought and opinion” (Chomsky 1999, p.20). It thus becomes clear that within the structures of neoliberal capitalism, hierarchical modes of being are its foundational necessity, allowing those few with the access to the most capital dictate the modes of being for the majority of the people that have no choice but to live within the system of inequality and unequal wealth distribution; this point will be taken up further in the Conclusion Chapter in relation to Occupy Wall Street and We Are the 99 Percent. To illustrate the above point, Chomsky uses Russia as an example, pointing to UNICEF inquires in 1993 which estimated half a million extra deaths a year “from the neoliberal ‘reforms,’ which [Russia] generally supports” and how an estimated “25 percent of the population has fallen below subsistence levels, while the new rulers have gained enormous wealth” (Chomsky 1999, p.24). In an object-oriented mode of thought, all entities, including humans, are to be considered as being objects. What this does is collapse hierarchies of being: humans can no longer be seen as residing at the top of the ontological pile just because they have the ability to think rationally. Trees and computers exist as much as humans do, and they also exist with as much validity whether they are in relation to a thinking human subject or not. By thinking about objects in this fashion, we begin to think about how objects interact and act outside of a human/world correlation that only allows for objects to exist in relation to a human subject. This type of thought begins to tear the human out of the centre of being and places us amongst the other objects of the world, forcing us to face up to objects like global warming or redressing our views on animals and the ensuing hierarchies of being that these hierarchies permit: including wealth distribution, access to the political arena and freedom to access education and health care equally. This mode of being flattens out access to being and allows for all objects to equally exist - in other words, in a flat ontology there can be no hierarchies of being.

What this mode of being allows for is a world made up of equally existing and equally acting entities that act, interact and react without the specific need for a human understanding to allow this to be rationalised and understood in anthropocentric terms alone. By changing the way we think about ourselves and the objects we encounter, we begin to realise that objects, ones that are much larger than us, or that are impossible to comprehend in their totality, affect us every day and will continue to affect other entities when the human subject is no longer a thinking entity at all. Global warming is one example of this - the entity of global warming is something we can not see or experience in all its existence yet it acts and reacts regardless of whether we experience any of its affects or not at a localised level. However, this is also the case with any object since any and all objects retain a vast well of withdrawn potential that only surface in new sets of relations, and which may never surface at all, and this will happen regardless of whether these objects come into contact with rational subjects. We must look at an entity like global warming the way we look at all other entities. In this case it has been put in motion by human activity, but it now has a life of its own, causing effects and affects that are beyond any control and beyond any correlation amongst humans and non-human objects alike. An entity of this scale, one that is too vast in both space and time to be fully comprehend, moves and acts as an independent object, interacting with other objects and changing them and being changed in the process. Global warming is directly affected and exacerbated by the capitalist system which sees the planet, people, raw materials and so on as subordinate objects in relation to it as the master subject. As such, the system of capitalism uses these entities as tools that are present-to-hand, or which operate as a surface profile only in relation to how the system employs them, disallowing any other element of their being to emerge. Objects in hierarchical configurations do not exist as things-in-themselves, but merely as use values to the subjects that employ them. It is this type of being that will be looked at in relation to the texts covered in this project focussing on how a mode of being emerged that moved from a subject/object correlation on to a flat ontology of being within which all objects are seen as equally existing. The Occupy movement are the living example of the espousal of this mode of being. They resist the hierarchies of neoliberal capitalism, they see the planet as an equally existing object that must be given the same dignity as a traditional human subject, they oppose the neoliberal politics that are the root of hierarchies of being that atomise society as opposed to crating a community and they flatten themselves in relation to being by existing

equally in the physical lived world and the ethereal digital world. The Occupy Movement came to fruition in New York in 2011 but has its roots in late 1990s protest groups that “rejected the concept of hierarchical power, of looking to the state as the ultimate decision-maker [and] instead looking to one another” (Taylor 2011, p.9). As such, the Occupy Movement are opposed to the innate hierarchies of power that neoliberal capitalism depends upon for it to appear as hegemonic. Coupled with their opposition to hierarchies, is their horizontal, non-hierarchical mode of existing. Chomsky sees one of the most important and exciting elements of Occupy as being their “construction of [...] associations, bonds, linkages and networks [...] whether it’s a collaborative kitchen or something else” (Chomsky 2012, p.45). Whilst Occupy never had a set list of demands like an industrial protest, they did have an aim which was: “the creation of cooperative communities - something very much lacking in an atomized [sic], disintegrated society - that include general assemblies that carry out extensive discussion, kitchens, libraries, support systems, and so on” (Chomsky 2012, p.57). Their aim is a social context in which large corporations can not dictate power at the level of policy making since this results in policies in which the “designers tend to do quite well, though the subjects [of said policies] often take a beating” (Chomsky 1999, p.26).

From the outset, it needs to be pointed out that this project has its roots firmly based in the fields of cultural studies and the humanities, with film studies as a mode of cultural inquiry. Within these disciplines ambiguity, doubt, inequality and discursive practices can be addressed, looking at how they maintain hierarchies of power through the imposition and maintenance of ideology and hegemonic norms via representation and mediated practices. They do so through textual analysis and qualitative evaluations and judgements: as such, their focus is entirely anthropocentric and focuses on the power structures upheld through the discursive and linguistic imposition of ideological power structures. It is for this reason that this project borrows philosophical concepts in order to help think through certain difficult ideas, like being, object existence, object interactions, the relations between non-sentient beings, ontologies and so on. The epistemological approach of the humanities and cultural studies can only be taken so far and will always and inevitably fall short of an ontological discussion: a discussion of the very nature of being itself, and not just a discussion of how being is manipulated or perpetuated in certain social relations. Whilst the epistemological approach is incredibly important to

this project, it must be taken further by borrowing a framework from a branch of philosophy, namely speculative realism or object-oriented philosophy, which has the tools to address ontological issues. By taking from a long line of ontological thought, namely from Kant onwards, or in a post-Kantian fashion, and applying it to the areas of humanities and cultural studies, the difficulty in addressing how certain objects act and interact, exist and create newness, can be helped by an external field. Object-oriented philosophy and speculative realism are extremely well equipped to aid other fields in gaining a footing in the area of ontology and a number of the writers coming from this field of philosophy directly address cultural artefacts like film, literature and art, returning to the traditional realms of the humanities and cultural studies<sup>5</sup>. Since both the humanities and cultural studies aim at addressing unequal hierarchies of power, a turn to object-oriented philosophy as a theoretical aid is almost a natural step to take since it deals in speculative being and the flattening of ontology: or it allows for a world to exist that is not solely reliant upon a correlation between things and the way we think about them. It thus becomes a powerful ally in relation to the difficulties in addressing ontological ideas from a starting point outside of philosophy itself. In a sense, the theoretical aims of this project are mirrored in what the project is addressing: namely the flattening of hierarchies between fields that are traditionally deemed to be separate or positioned in terms of a value of one type of knowledge over another in a hierarchical manner.

It is not the aim of this project to delve into the vast taxonomy of objects and objecthood, relating this only to the relation and use values attributed to them by a hierarchically positioned human subject. Nor is this project concerned with crystallising a definition of what it is to be an object or what being an object comprises of. What is at stake in this project is the way objects are viewed and understood by humans and how this construction/representation changes over time and how this is collectively consumed. The aim here is to look at objects as existing without the need of a human rationality to

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<sup>5</sup> “Speculative Realism insists upon the independence of the world, and of things in the world, from our own conceptualizations [sic] of them. It rejects the Kantian thesis that the order of the world depends upon the way that our minds (or our languages, or our cultures) work to structure it” Shaviro, S. (2015). "Speculative Realism - a primer." Retrieved 01/06/15, 2015, from <http://terremoto.mx/article/speculative-realism-a-primer/>. In other words, an epistemological approach, pushed far enough, can only see the world as a linguistic construct that relies upon our discursive practices for things to exist; an ontological approach looks at the things themselves, apart from our access to them in linguistic or conceptual arenas.

produce them in a limiting productionist or correlationist fashion. This, of course, is the most important point here: how objects, and being, are seen changes over time and with different epistemic trends. We are currently in a time when it is impossible to ignore the autonomous and also symbiotic nature of all objects, relating to ecology, global warming and bio-technology or post-humanism. This allows for the type of philosophical discussion of objects that sees them as existing on an equal plane to all other things, including especially the human. There is no space in this discussion for a god-like figure that resides at the top of ontological being before which all other objects are measured. For this reason, this project will not be looking at the atomic or sub-atomic being of objects, as this permanently and only reduces them down to their parts in what Harman terms “undermining” (Bryant 2011, p.25). Whilst there is no allowance in this project for objects to be constructed by and for humans alone, there must be a close analysis of how humans interact with and see, or represent, objects in relation to themselves. It is for this reason that this project is focussing on film as a lens for a philosophical discussion of objects. Films represent a cultural collective consciousness which is produced and consumed and which alters over time. By focussing attention on films that work as philosophy in relation to the current discussion, the power of the Occupy movement as an object-oriented protest can be discussed and consumed in a fashion that is already rooted in a dominant form of cultural and political expression and which displays a non-hierarchical mode of being.

This overall project will be broken into three main chapters: throughout these chapters a line will be traced following the emergence of a mode of being that is to be understood as residing in prehension and object being as opposed to a correlation between humans and how the world appears for humans. In other words, the human being and human rationality can no longer be seen as the centre of being when all objects act and interact outside of any relation to the human mind, or human understanding. This will focus on how all being is to be seen as equal and not just how being is measured or understood in terms of its relation to a thinking human subject. In order to do this I will be looking at how this flattening of being emerged over a certain period of time and how it is

represented in film since film can be seen as a measure of a collective consciousness<sup>6</sup>. This will lead on to the implementation of this type of being with the Occupy movement which values all objects equally, or which wants being to be understood as accessible to all things equally and not just to the rational human mind. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the first chapter will begin by locating the project in the dying days of postmodernity. The main focus of this chapter will be to look at *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg 1999) and to locate this text in a period when the lines between the virtual and actual were beginning to blur to such a degree that it became *almost* impossible to distinguish the two. The virtual, however, at this point is still fully reliant upon human interactions and commands and as such remains as a subordinate entity to human subjectivity. This chapter focuses on showing the early days of the digitisation of life which will be the main focus of the next chapter. The second chapter will take off from the foundation laid down in the work on *eXistenZ*, locating the human subject as a diverse entity made up of human, non-human, organic and inorganic actors, especially digital technologies. This focus on *Die Hard 4.0* (Wiseman 2007) will pick up on the reliance on digital technologies as the measure of being and how life can be threatened by 'hactivism'. The technologies deployed in the narrative can be seen as somewhat sentient and can act/interact/react of their own accord allowing them to be more ontologically valid than the pre-millennium virtual reality of *eXistenZ*. However, it is in *Die Hard 4.0* that the digital takes the place of the human as the centre of being, or as the measuring tool of being. Here, the digital can be seen to replace the human as the correlative measure of ontology, allowing technology to reside at the apex of being, before which all other being is measured. It takes an analogic techonphobe, or neophobe in the shape of John McLane (Bruce Willis) to reinstate humans as the measure of being. The final chapter looks at the modes of being depicted in *Avatar* (Cameron 2009) along with *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan 2008-2013), which arrive at the end point of the allotted time scope. These two texts espouse the flattened ontology discussed by object-oriented ontology which will be shown to be the main focus of the Occupy movement in the

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that film, as a measure of collective consciousness, hails individuals: "The term collective consciousness refers to the condition of the subject within the whole of society, and how any given individual comes to view herself as a part of any given group" Piepmeyer, A. (2007). "Collective Cnsciousness." Retrieved 01/02/2017, 2017, from <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/collective-consciousness/>. The way we interact with technology for example, or the way technology is seen, is, in relation to this project, structured for us through cultural texts that hail us in certain ways and as such make us see technology in the ways prescribed by the texts.

conclusion chapter. The conclusion will enunciate the overall argument and show why this mode of being, one that tries to establish a level ontological field in which the human subject is no longer the measure of being, is the only way to resist imposed hierarchies which allow being to be portioned out in very specific ways, always with a measuring subject deemed to be more ontologically valid than the objects it measures.

What will now follow is a breakdown of each chapter followed by a look at the current state of research in a number of fields such as object-oriented philosophy, film studies and aesthetics. The first chapter begins by locating the project in the last days of postmodernity when arguably the world was emerging from a total immersion in images to become a more visceral and interactive mix of the real and the technologically virtual. The main focus of Chapter One is David Cronenberg's 1999 film *eXistenZ*. This text and its concurrent modes of thought, especially relating to virtual and digital reality, will be located in a period when the lines between the virtual and actual were beginning to blur to such a degree that it became impossible to distinguish one world from another. This type of collapse between virtual worlds must however be seen in the light of a master world which creates them and is the root of all other virtual worlds and as such remains in a hierarchical position of being that places the human world at the apex of ontology as it still creates and maintains the other possible worlds that exist within its confines. This will lead on to a discussion of how human subjectivity can be seen as an open and assembled entity like any other entity. I will relate this back to the contemporary modes of being at the dawning of the new millennium and the advances in digital technologies and internet access (in the film the characters have an exaggerated access point in the form of a semi-organic bio-port implanted into the base of their spines from which they can log on to the virtual game realms). However, despite this, human subjectivity remains fully intact by the end of the film as it quashes the virtual worlds, seeing them as an "effective deforming of reality" (Cronenberg 1999). The virtual at this point is still fully reliant upon human interactions and as such remains as a subordinate entity to human subjectivity. This first chapter focuses on showing how the seeds were thus sown for the digitisation of life which is the focus of the second chapter. All of this, the digitisation of life and an acceptance of the virtual as an equally existing object, is set out in order to show how the Occupy movement eventually became a realisation of the modes of being that disallow hierarchical access to being and which espouse a flat

ontology which is traced from its infancy in *eXistenZ*, through its evolution and eventual repression in *Die Hard 4.0* and on to *Avatar* which is a filmic crystallisation of a non-hierarchical flat ontology.

The second chapter takes off from the foundation laid down by *eXistenZ* and locates the human subject as a diverse entity made up of human and non-human actors, especially digital, communication and computer technologies with a discussion of assemblage theories. This chapter will focus on *Die Hard 4.0* (Wiseman 2007) and will pick up on the reliance on digital technologies for the operations of everyday life and how these technologies manage to affect the other objects they interact with, looking at the reliance on the digital and how everyday life can be threatened by ‘hactivism’, the shutting down of traffic light systems, the failure of municipal services to act correctly, the stealing of information caches and other acts of terror. These technologies can be seen as somewhat sentient and can act or interact of their own accord becoming more ontologically valid and more operative than the nascent virtual reality shown in *eXistenZ*. However, it is in this text that the digital is represented as taking the place of the human subject in the classic correlation of objects existing in relation to said master subject. Here, the digital can be seen to replace the human as the correlative measure of being. The text however relies on an atavistic brute (Bruce Willis) to restore the hierarchies of being with man transcending technology, returning an anthropocentric mode of being and a presumed equilibrium in this post-9/11 world. Whilst technology was on the way to becoming an autonomous object in its own right at this moment in time, human being was as yet unwilling to accept that it may be knocked off its perch as the measure of being by objects that it itself had created. If this had have come to fruition, that technology was instated as the measure of being, then another hierarchy of being would simply have been instated as the measure of ontological value. It took the assembled, rhizomatic and non-hierarchical event of *Avatar* to emerge and show how a flat-ontology of being can be possible in which no single object is deemed more worthy in relation to being than any other and it is here that *Avatar* exposes the epistemic trend that led to the occupation of spaces and resistance to capitalism espoused by the Occupy movement.

The main focus of the third chapter is a discussion of the modes of being depicted in *Avatar* (Cameron 2009) and how these modes of being evolved from the previous texts

under discussion. This mode of being is non-hierarchical with human, alien, technology and nature all interacting on equal levels of being as opposed to the aforementioned modes of being that instate a master subject in relation to all other objects. The reason this film has been chosen is that the 3D technology used highlights the interaction between man and technology and reflects the rhizomatic mode of being depicted in the text itself<sup>7</sup>. What this does is remove human subjectivity as the main actor in being, allowing other entities to affect and interact in aesthetic ways. In a sense, all entities in the realm of the film operate on an equal ontological footing and this arguably also takes place for the viewer and the related technology created specifically for this text, allowing the text, the technology, the event of watching, the narrative and sound to all act and interact on an equal footing which privileges no single entity in the assembled object. *Avatar* arrives towards the end point of the allotted time scope (roughly 15 years from the turn of the last century to the present time). The mode of being shown and enacted in *Avatar* correlates to the mode of occupation and meaning that will be shown to be rooted in the affective presence that the Occupy movement (an innately anti-capitalist movement) espouse and how they were forced to continue to do so in an equally affective/effective digital way after their physical occupations of space were eradicated. The power of the Occupy movement is that they can use objects such as spatial formations in order to deform their imposed use or meaning, and the objects that they encounter and that encounter them, in order to create new objects and a new object-meaning. Occupy aims at opening a dialogue that promotes a non-hierarchical mode of being that is in direct resistance to the hierarchies imposed by the system of capitalism that only permits being to those objects (and people here are to be considered as objects) that offer the system the most use value - in other words, those who possess the capital and the power to dictate who is afforded equal access to being: those that are not deemed equal are seen merely as tools - objects whose use is only what they can perform in relation to the system, ignoring all of the other potentialities they possess. The overall

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<sup>7</sup> A rhizome is a non-hierarchical root system which "ceaselessly establishes connections" within which "any point [...] can be connected to anything other, and must be": it is an assemblage in which territorializations and deterritorializations take place allowing "multiple entryways" and newness to become actualised and de-actualised Deleuze, G. a. F. G. (2011). *A Thousand Plateaus*. London, Continuum. As such, all things interconnect and equally exist, but some things may disappear or become-different and as such do not exist equally, or may be weaker and less able to survive: or they may come together and territorialise a new being altogether which comprises of two entities which combine to become a new being that does not privilege any of the unifying elements (a becoming-). All things in this system of being access being in the same way and along the same lines and as such deny binary structures and systems which privilege certain entities over other ones.

argument shows why this mode of being, one that tries to establish a level ontological field in which the human subject is no longer the measure of being, is more important now than ever, relating it to a mode of resistance towards the system of capitalism which enforces an unfair and hierarchical mode of being on everything that resides within its field of influence. It also relates the importance of object interactions and non-human actors to issues like global unrest and climate change which have been exacerbated by the very system of capitalism that continues to create structural hierarchies and further damage the ecological system of the planet, forces certain areas into dire famine and poverty, ignores the carbon emissions that are forcing the climate to change and retains hierarchies in relation to race, gender, class, sexuality and ability.

Non-human actors are becoming more and more important in relation to the unfolding of being and the emergence of new modes of interaction. The centrality of human rationality in relation to how things exist, interact, relate,prehend and affect other objects has to be reexamined and in its place a more diverse, flattened ontology must be seen as a valid mode of existence. This does not mean that humans, or human rationality, are to be seen as obsolete, or unnecessary, but they are to be seen as being another object in and of the world which is populated by myriad other animate and inanimate objects. This project aims to investigate concepts of being, object interaction and an ontology that no longer relies on a master object for its existence which has traditionally been the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic mode of being rooted in the rationality and discourses of the human subject. A flat-ontology of being accepts all objects outside of their imposed tool-being: as Harman points out, the problem with objects and object interactions “is that we cannot say that the botanist or the ontologist sees the tree *even more* ‘as’ what it is than the drunkard does. The reason is simple: by definition, the tree in its tool-being can never come to presence at all” (Harman 2009, p.61). In this sense, what Harman discusses as the as-structure is how all objects *appear as-something* for one another, and this occurs for humans as they encounter objects, and for all other objects as they too encounter other objects. Objects are seen as tools, but when this surface use value is broken, or disrupted, or indeed, encountered in a new way by another entity, it elucidates the as-structure of the object: “the thing ‘as’ thing is not the same as the thing itself, which can *never* be openly encountered” (Harman 2002, p.69). Objects all interact in a multitude of ways that are not reliant on any master object for their meaning to be

expressed. A tree is encountered as a material for fire-wood or a material for construction for a human structure; it is encountered as a vast network as-food or as-dwelling for birds and insects; it is encountered as-oxygen for other living creatures and so on, but it is never encountered as-entirety (entire tree).

This presence-based mode of being is not reliant upon human conceptions of being or on the correlation between human perception and world: in other words, the objects of the world are not only in a valid state of existence in their relations to the viewing/encountering subject and if we take a master subject out of the equation, things can be thought of (speculated upon) as they are meant to be, or as things-in-themselves and not as tools. The non-correlationist mode of being which will be focussed on here creates a flat ontology in which all objects equally exist and affect one another in ways that are incomprehensible to, or outside of, human constructs such as language, comprehension, thought and discursive practices. This type of being has been demonstrated by the silent protests of the Occupy movement which espouses a non-hierarchical mode of being that includes all people, spaces, objects and so on that are assembled in any example of their occupations<sup>8</sup>. Occupy are a silent protest in that they do not have an immediate set list of specific demands that can be met easily like a workers strike or an anti-water-charge protest. They are demanding a non-hierarchical mode of living, taking the lives of those deemed worthy of less access to being, such as the less financially stable, those that can not afford health care, the well being of the planet, a reform of banking and wealth distribution amongst other things into account (Picket 2011). However, before an actual vague list of demands were set down, what made the Occupy movement a silent protest was their occupation of space to highlight the inequalities they are protesting against and their refusal to engage in a dialogue with the corrupt system they oppose. Philosopher, and Occupy supporter, Slavoj Žižek sums this up as follows: “All we say now can be

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<sup>8</sup> The Occupy movement, according to Noam Chomsky is “the first major public response to thirty years of class war”: it is a “people powered movement that began in New York City on September 17, 2011, and rapidly spread to thousands of locations worldwide”. According to Chomsky, who is a vocal supporter of the movement, their major success has been simply to “put the inequalities of everyday life on the national agenda, influencing reporting, public perception and language itself.” Chomsky, N. (2012). *Occupy*. London, Penguin Books. The Occupy movement began in the USA but rapidly became a global phenomenon. According to an active Occupier, the movement’s most basic aim is “Economic justice [...] Doesn’t their presence on Wall Street say that?” (2011). *Occupy: Scenes From Occupied America*. London, Verso. Economic justice relates to access to the political arena and access to basic rights and amenities for both people and the planet.

taken from us – everything except our silence. This silence, this rejection of dialogue [...] is our ‘terror’, ominous and threatening as it should be” (2011).<sup>9</sup>

People know at every level that inequality, ecological destruction and global warming are a part of the operations of the system of capitalism, yet they continue to happen. Occupy are occupying spaces and in the process of doing so, their symbolic message is that this mode of hierarchical, unfair, corrupt and anthropocentric way of living that has been hitherto accepted as the only way of life can no longer continue to be the accepted mode of being. This mode of being is imposed on the majority of people, and the planet itself, neither of which are allowed to have a contribution to the stakes and shapes of being. Therefore, Occupy do have demands, but not ones that can be set down and discussed at a table like an industrial dispute: their demands highlight and expose the inequalities of capitalism and the damage that ensues from this system on an ontological level. It is in this sense that they refuse to engage in discussions with those representing the operations of capital, and it is for this reason that they are a silent protest. By occupying spaces, and, in the process showing how a new space must be opened for dialogue on these issues and how a new mode of being must arise in which all things are equally important, Occupy became a protest of presence and object interactions: entities such as humans, nature, weather, health, space and relations all matter equally and must combine and assemble to be a form of life that allows being to exist in its fullest. In order to make this mode of being more understandable for the purposes of this project, certain films and television texts which highlight a turn to object interaction will be utilised. Not only do these texts display examples of this mode of being in their content, but in some cases they are also examples of this very mode of existence in their form. James Cameron’s *Avatar* for example relies on the filmic text, the story, the audience, the interactive technology and the event unfolding in a cinematic context as equally important elements of the assembled object which unfolds on a level plane of interaction. Relating this back to the Occupy movement, this mode of being opens up spaces for resistance against a system based in a primarily symbolic realm: global capitalism.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a reminder to those occupiers that everything understandable by the system of capital, including vocal opposition, can be subsumed and drained of its power by the system of capitalism which will in turn make opposition a marketable product. As such, any form of valid opposition must be wholly un-understandable in relation to what it opposes.

The importance of this research is its understanding of the value of all objects, animate or not, and accepting that forces such as nature, climate change or natural disaster need to be addressed as affects of a network that includes entities such as humans, ecology, animals and technology and no longer just focus attention on how those things can affect human life or how human life can alter them or benefit from the extraction of being from the planet. It is along these lines that a new horizon can emerge: one of a “Real ethics (of everything)”. Borrowing the “Real” from Lacan “the Real is what any ‘reality’ must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression” and which can “only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality” (Fisher, p.18). This relates to the surface profile of all objects, or their use-value in a capitalist system where all we are allowed access to is a prescribed ‘reality’. When this is ruptured, or broken (broken-tool), we can glimpse the Real, or real reality. This does not mean that there is some sort of universal measuring subject, but a universe of measuring objects thatprehend, act, react and interact with a dignity that is traditionally withheld for humans. If we are to attribute an equal status to all objects, we must be willing to extend an equal ethical status to them also and this relates to the dignity of objects that will be touched upon throughout this project. A massive object like global warming needs to be looked at in relation to ethical decisions that take human action, planetary action, political decisions and object interactions into account on a level ethical field. This is also true of the case with regard to global capitalism, which must at all times be looked at in relation to its affect on the well being of the planet, as well as its affect on human beings. Capitalism has the ability to consume all things and to make them appear in very specific ways (making war look inevitable, making global warming something to fix in itself as opposed to fixing the causes, namely global capitalism). This is the reality we encounter: by addressing the repressed Real however, we can begin to look at things/entities/objects for what they are, as things-in-themselves, that require a new form of ethical address; a Real ethics (of everything).

The Occupy movement are an integral element of this project as they are the crystallisation of a mode of being that refuses to accept hierarchies of being that go toward limiting access to being. They directly oppose the influence of large corporations in relation to politics and political funding: they oppose hierarchies of being that are upheld within the system of capitalism at institutional levels relating to race, gender, sex,

sexuality, class, ability and so on: they oppose the destruction of the planet by industry and the concurrent issues relating to this such as global warming: they oppose police brutality and finally: they oppose a hierarchy of being that disallows entities an access to being on the same level as other privileged entities - in this case, we can see this in their espousal of a digital mode of being that is to be seen as being as valid as any other, traditionally privileged mode of being. Reading the Occupy movement against the chosen cultural texts allows us to look at the current and recent inception of this refusal to allow certain beings to construct a reality that only reflects their needs, that is, the needs of the few, which overlooks the needs of the majority of other people and objects. The tracing of this resistance to the system of capitalism, which is here to be seen as the main producer of unfair and unequal access to being, unfolds over a short period of time that takes in the turning of the millennium and also the recent global financial crisis and the resulting global recession. It is therefore unsurprising that the Occupy movement aim at redressing economic inequalities and the role of large corporations in politics. Relating all of this to cinema allows for a comparison to an incredibly popular form of mass media which operates as a gauge of collective consciousness. This will be the perfect counterpoint form which to look at the Occupy movement's aims and from which we can look at the differing perspectives on being as the new millennium was dawning and also the changing perspectives as the global economy collapsed. On top of this, there has been the rising issue of global warming and the prevalence of natural disasters: Occupy are very aware of planetary issues and as such are concerned with humans and objects alike as equally existing entities.

Before addressing the Current State of Research, I must address one issue that occurs within the body of the text: this relates to my references to human subjects. Within traditional modes of thought, human subjects have become the referent for being, or the measure of being, before which all other things relate to (this is the 'correlation' that I will address later). However, within this project humans come to be seen as objects like any other object that exists. Despite this, there are, especially within the hierarchies of neoliberal capitalism, humans (those with access to the most wealth for example, and thus access to the political arena at the level of policy or actual power) who see other humans as objects in relation to themselves as subjects - black women in a predominantly white male political climate, or refugees in the countries they have fled to. Also in a

conventional hierarchic anthropocentric context, objectification of humans is associated with denied access to agency (such as when a human body is perceived as attacked by a virus or at the receiving end of physical violence, rape, domestic abuse and so forth). Whilst this project aims at redressing the overall hierarchy that places humans as subjects and other entities as objects in relation to them, it is Occupy who, attempting the same action, aim their efforts at redressing the hierarchies within capitalism that place some people in the position of lesser subjects (or objects) in relation to other humans as full, dignified subjects who can abuse, misuse and create others in whatever way they feel. This discussion will be touched upon throughout this entire project but will find its main focus in the Conclusion Chapter in the discussion on Occupy, We Are the 99 Percent and Rolling Jubilee.

## **2.1: Being in Postmodernity**

It makes sense to locate this project as emerging from the excesses of postmodernity. By questioning and challenging the idea that physicality can be experienced in itself or by rejecting the metaphysical status of an “original”, this may have led to excesses of simulation or representation. The emergence of the Occupy movement, as well as the films, observed in this study (spanning from 1999 to 2013) negotiate the backlash of those excesses of signifiers, with which ever more precarious attempts of “meaning” were created. The decision for the overall time scale of this project is based on the emergence of the Occupy movement and a number of other cultural artefacts which were turning towards a meaning based in a non-hierarchical, object-oriented mode of existing. The overall time scale for this project will run from 1999 (*eXistenZ*) up to 2013 (*Breaking Bad*) as this short period of time saw an incredible change in the way technology operates and also in the way finance and austerity affect both humans and the

planet<sup>10</sup>. The emergence of this type of meaning rooted in object interaction is a backlash to the primacy of a meaning rooted in signifiers, or in representation alone which can be seen as heavily subjective, anthropocentric and objectifying of entities outside of the reasoning subject, especially in relation to the functioning of the system of capitalism which uses representation in order to make all things ideologically consumable. As Laura Marks succinctly points out: “the highly symbolic world in which we find ourselves nowadays is in part a function of the capitalist tendency to render meanings as easily consumable and translatable signs” (Marks 2000, p.139). Human understanding has been crafted by capitalist modes of production that aim at making meaning easily consumed and easily consumable: the modes of being that we are familiar with are fashioned in such ways that it is now almost impossible to exist in any other way. Ideological impositions are inherent in almost every image, from television station logos (the old RTÉ logo was the cross of St Brigid) to the Angelus which appears on said national broadcasting station throughout the day, representing only the Catholic religion/modes of being in its imagery. Other overt examples are advertising, and especially those types of adverts dubbed “lifestyle” branding. This type of representation is “an attempt to make a corporate brand part of the identity of a person or group”: representation stands in the place of actual interaction<sup>11</sup>. Lifestyle brands are an attempt to “sell an identity, or an image, rather than a product” (Laskowski 2010). Arguably this reliance upon image and representation is done in order to draw attention away from things-in-themselves as they are too complex and remain permanently withdrawn from all understanding and all access. Presenting images of a certain lifestyle, or object, for example, offers the

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<sup>10</sup> On top of this there is an argument that postmodernity ended with the act of 9/11. According to Slavoj Žižek, the act of violence perpetuated on September 11th gave rise to another, ontological act of violence. The Western World was attacked by an image so often seen and so readily consumed: that of the disaster movie, or Hollywood action movie. We entered the “desert of the real” when the images that we were so familiar with and which were seen to uphold reality, surpassed themselves by becoming real acts and as such, a life based in images and simulacra was shattered. As Žižek writes: “what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e. the symbolic co-ordinates which determine what we experience as reality)” Žižek, S. (2002). *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London, Verso. p.16. Ontological questions were raised by this attack; an attack on how the Western world viewed its own reality. The images so often seen on screens, entered the fabric of reality, and as such collapsed the reliance on images and simulations which allowed life to be lived on the surface alone, or through the image alone. This shows how the image, or simulation, was as equivalent as the reality that it represented and that neither side of this equation could be privileged over the other.

<sup>11</sup> Representations exist as much as any other object, so it is unfair to decry the damage they may have done to human interactions - the issue is that these representations are supplanting all other types of interaction between objects and are tainting and tailoring the way certain objects are perceived and how they interact, offering no alternative and no space for resistance since they have become a ubiquitous mode of accessing and suppressing objects outside of the human subjects that consumes them.

consumer a readymade point of entry into a mode of being that is vastly different from their actually lived being: in other words, they present us with seemingly fully realised representations with no remaining potential. The reality of being, most likely, has none of the glittering qualities of the presented image and always remains withdrawn. In order for our understanding to be effective we are only ever afforded access to images of things, or representations, since these could be rapidly and effectively absorbed as meaning in an ideological system like capitalism which limits our access to the fullness of things and to ourselves. Representation, in this mode of being, is all that we have access to and it is this that became the realm of living from modernity, through postmodernity and on to the present stage of post-postmodernity/post-ideology.

Moving on to discuss the more directly philosophical elements of this argument and the perceived turn to object being, a look at Graham Harman, a leading object-oriented ontologist, will help us understand how objects, despite offering only images of themselves, retain a non-hierarchical being that must be accepted by human modes of being. In a strange turn of events, object-oriented ontology offers what at first appears to be a similar conclusion to the dire state of postmodernity: all we have access to is images and never the thing itself since the thing-itself remains permanently withdrawn from all access and only certain surfaces/images are presented as the thing for other objects to experience (and this of course includes the human, which in an object oriented perspective is to be considered as being another object amongst a vastly populated universe of objects with no hierarchy of being attributed to any object over any other despite the traditional privilege associated with human rationality). It is these things, or objects, which can impact things and are themselves impacted on and by the various encounters they make within the networks they exist in, that are termed “tool-beings” by Harman (Harman 2009, p.25). As Harman points out: “Tool-beings (namely, *all* beings) recede into the work of an unnoticed background; their sensible facade is not what is primary” but it is primarily all that we have access to (Harman 2002, p.44). All we can

know is the facade of things and never the thing itself as it is outside of our access to it<sup>12</sup>. This will be discussed at a later stage in relation to cinema and an object-oriented perspective with the focus shifting towards the Occupy movement and how they became a “broken tool” as a means of resistance against the unfair and hierarchical system of global capitalism. This is the focus of this project: to show how cultural artefacts reflect the epistemic trends (in this case a resistant episteme) that lead towards a more inclusive, more caring mode of being. This proposed mode of being allows for all objects to be looked at with equality and thus treated with equality, whether this be the city space used in an Occupy demonstration, or the planet itself in the face of global warming. We are now at a stage where human activity overshadows all other activity including ecological and global activity and this must be looked at in ethical ways for humans to understand the damage caused by a hierarchical system that allows them to be positioned as the

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<sup>12</sup> This line of thought is one that has a long philosophical tradition and in this instance can be rooted in Kant and the beginning of the bourgeois subject as the measure of being (see footnote 17). Harman builds upon Kant’s writing on metaphysics, subjectivity and the aesthetic, leading on to Heidegger and other more recent thinkers in the object-oriented vein (Shaviro, Bryant, Morton and so on). Kant sees objects as phenomena reliant upon the subject and as such as limited representations of what the things really are in themselves (noumena). This mode of being posits objects only in relation to the subject experiencing them: they may exist out there, but humans can only experience them as sets of relations that occur through our perception of them. As noted earlier, in an object-oriented mode of being we experience the objects of phenomena and they too experience one another. Kant’s constructions of things keeps objects/entities permanently withdrawn and only existing as sets of internal relations within the subject: all objects, and thus all being, are solely reliant upon the central object of anthropocentric rationality, the bourgeois subject, for them to be experienced. As Kant writes: “our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be [...] and that if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all the constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us” Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p.78. Harman takes the (bourgeois) subject out of the equation as the measure of being, and in fact, any human subjectivity for that matter and places all objects as equally existing entities that do not rely upon a subjective internal projection for their ontological validity to be experienced. Terry Eagleton sums up the Kantian subject/object binary as follows: “The wider the subjects extends its imperial sway over reality, the more it relativizes [sic] that terrain to its owners and desires, dissolving the world’s substance into the stuff of its own senses” Eagleton, T. (1990). *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge, Basil Blackwell. p.70. What this means is that all ontological being is reliant upon human rationality in order for it to be considered as being, or to be experienced: as Eagleton continues, relating to Kant and the subjective nature of being: “The sense that the object makes consists entirely in the sense that it makes for us” (*ibid*). Harman performs a shift away from this correlationist formulation by placing all objects in the (dignified) position of the human subject and as such allows all entities to exist for all other entities in an equal, relational, prehensive fashion: in a way making every object a traditional subject in its own right and pushing towards an object oriented ethics within which the interactions of all objects are viewed as equally and as ethically as the interactions of the human subject.

measure of being above all other objects<sup>13</sup>. When any equipment or object “breaks” it becomes a broken tool (in Harman’s terms) and as such “its prior unthematic function comes to view; it is liberated to some degree from its invisible potency in the world and comes to light ‘as’ what it is” (Harman 2009, p.56). What this means is that any entity is used for what it appears to be and for the ways it can benefit those (other objects) that construct it in such a fashion, typically human use-value: the break comes when this surface value is ruptured and the operations once carried out by the tool are no longer its only being; as such more of its true being comes to the fore from the withdrawn hidden depths of the thing-itself.

It is worth moving away from tools and broken-tools for a moment to discuss what Jean-Francois Lyotard states in relation to postmodernity, or the postmodern condition, in order to locate this project and give it a place in relation to the philosophical, theoretical and cultural lines of thought from which it emerges. According to Lyotard the question of the here-and-now disappears in representation (cinema or representation in this sense can be seen as tool-being), whereas with presentation “something is *there now*” (Lyotard, p. 61): this can be seen as the broken-tool since the thing-in-itself is present and not mediated or withdrawn - an assembled event like *Avatar* for example. Whilst this can be seen as a valid observation it ignores the fact that what is being represented and how it is occurring, through projection, writing, painting, language, digital rendition or so forth are all equally ontologically valid objects that exist as, and in, the “there now” as things that can affect and be affected as much as any other existing object. It is these non-human actors and actions that are to become the crux of this argument and also the basis of a flat ontology of being in which all objects equally exist, but perhaps do not, as Ian Bogost

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<sup>13</sup> In scientific terms, we have entered into an epoch now known as the “Anthropocene”: a period in which “Humans are altering the planet, including long-term global geologic processes, at an increasing rate” and when human “activity is leaving a pervasive and persistent signature on Earth”. In this current period “humanity is driving rapid and widespread changes to the Earth system that will variously persist and potentially intensify into the future” altering mineral compositions and leading to sea-level rises and a higher and more rapid extinction rate. Waters, Colin N, J. Z., Colin Summerhayes, Anthony D. Barnosky, Clément Poirier, Agnieszka Gajuszka, Alejandro Cearreta, Matt Edgeworth, Erle C. Ellis, Michael Ellis, Catherine Jeandel, Reinhold Leinfelder, J. R. McNeill, Daniel deB. Richter, Will Steffen, James Syvitski, Davor Vidas, Michael Wagreich, Mark Williams, An Zhisheng, Jacques Grinevald, Eric Odada, Naomi Oreskes, Alexander P. Wolfe (2016). "The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene." *Science* 351.

points out, exist equally (Bryant, p.279)<sup>14</sup>. With this mode of ontological being, all objects are equally as valid in the sense that they exist and are not reliant upon a master object, traditionally humans, or a god figure, for their being to be validated: however, there is still space for the obvious lived hierarchies, or local hierarchies, that come with objects and object relations which can typically be based on size and power for example, or race, gender and access to capital in relation to a capitalist mode of being. Getting back to Lyotard's postmodern condition: it is true to say that with representation there is an inherent lack, a gap between the signifier and the signified but this is an issue that is generally only located in the realm of human understanding and communication. This point is also arguably situated in the realm of epistemology: how do we know what we know? It is through language and signification that we, as human actors, shape the world in accordance with our own specific understanding of the world. Object-oriented ontology displaces this (Kantian) mode of understanding as the centre of being since it is solely located within the realm of human understanding. Ontology moves the question of how we know onto the question of being and how beings exist. In a sense, this can never be solely focussed on humans alone as they are just one other object amongst a universe of already existing other objects that can also lay claim to a validity of being: this validity of being is every objects' affective nature that will exist and operate outside of any human construction or conception. Quentin Meillassoux sums up the Kantian mode of thought that object-oriented ontology refutes as being a correlationist mode of thought: by correlation he means "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being" and a disqualification of the claim that it is "possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (Meillassoux 2008, p.5). The correlationist argument places human rationality as the measure of being, and as such, as the privileged ontological entity that exists and according to which all other objects are granted a phenomenal existence or a measure of being.

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<sup>14</sup> That is to say, all things are granted an equal ontological status in that the existence of one object is absolutely as real and valid as any other and that they are not merely given a being in relation to an anthropocentric mode of meaning. However, it does still allow for localised hierarchies of beings to exist, and this point will come to have more of a bearing in relation to the Occupy movement and their aims and motives within the system of capitalism which they are attempting to resist.

It is this issue with knowing and understanding that can be expanded upon in relation to Brian McHale's reading of modernist and postmodernist fiction which elucidates the split between modernity and postmodernity rather succinctly. When discussing modernist (or postmodernist) fiction and certain tropes therein, it must be kept in mind that these tropes are not merely literary styles or turns, but are reflective of the modes of thought and understanding/epistemes of the time, culture, collective consciousness and history from which they emerged and of which they reflect and represent. They are to be seen as dominant discourses of thought that arise from a culture and the material artefacts of a period. Ignoring for the moment the preceding caveat that the following theories relate primarily to fiction, McHale's writing can help us understand the difference between an approach to (a/the) world and an ontological one and this shows the value the humanities can have in relation to this project: allowing us to look at how we know things, leads us on to a discussion of how things exist. McHale equates modernist fiction, and thus the moment of Modernity, with an epistemological goal. Within this dominant epistemological paradigm he finds the following tropes or questions: "How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?" and "What are the limits of the knowable?" (McHale, p.9). This dominant of modernist fiction can be seen in the style of writing, the ambiguity, the ruptured chronology and the access to various minds that we encounter in this type of fiction. The predominant concern in this type of fiction is *how* man can know the world. This dominant changes in relation to postmodern fiction which arguably becomes concerned with ontological questions such as "What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" (McHale, p.10). Epistemology is limited to trying to find out how we know what we know - an anthropocentric issue - but a valid one nonetheless that leads us into a deeper discussion that requires help from philosophical fields in order to address the question of being itself and not only how we can know about being. Ontology looks at the being of objects (or worlds) and asks how they exist and how many types of worlds might exist. It is this question that can push into the object-oriented mode of thought by seeing the world as consisting of all objects that exist and not just the human perception of objects that constructs things for itself through absent signifiers and internally realised phenomena projected outwards which become the centre of being against which all things are measured. It must be noted that we can experience the entirety of a presented world in modernist terms: one that is closed off and internally relating. This mode of

viewing and presenting began to alter with the advent of new technologies and arguably with the paradigmatic shift in epistemic values caused by the postmodern turn where presented worlds began to spill into other worlds and rupture into our world. McHale discusses this in relation to postmodern literature and how in postmodern literature we are presented with ontological objects that have an existence, but which, like real world objects, we can not experience fully due to their withdrawn excess. He terms this mode of being an “ontological oscillation”, or a “flickering effect” (McHale 1987, p.32). With postmodern fiction, worlds and objects began to spill into one another as characters could migrate into various literary worlds, and our own world, leading to a flattening of ontologies, but more importantly, the understanding that literary worlds are equally existing objects that are experienced in the same limited way as real world objects through their surface profiles alone. The flickering or oscillation is merely Harman’s surface profile of objects in literary terms - we only access a limited potential of any object, be it a book, a character, a literary house or a material house.

Without delving into a semiotic or linguistic account of signs, signifiers and signifieds, this topic will be addressed in line with examples also discussed in this project i.e. in cinematic terms. Through the lens of cinema this notion of epistemology and ontology can be explained: we can look at the surface of a screen and upon it will appear a digital or filmic rendition of a mouse for example. Epistemologically, we can know how the mouse is there and we can know what a mouse is (in relation to us). The representation of the mouse is not a mouse of course. A mouse may have appeared as an indexical object in front of a camera at some point in time, or it could be a digitally rendered mouse that has never existed as a living, organic entity in front of any camera. In either case, the representation is just that - it re-presents the image of the mouse and is not, and never can be, the mouse itself. For the purposes of this argument, it represents a part of mouse-ness: that is, it shows us what a mouse looks like, or a small example of what the mouse is doing or has done. This is the extent of representation in this sense; it can only show us a very limited side of the object it represents and in so doing, the rest of the actual object (mouse, or mouse representation) remains withdrawn from access no matter how many representations of it are in existence at any given time. So in this case, there is a gap between what is represented and what it represents. Images are standing in

in the place of the now absent mouse<sup>15</sup>. Lyotard's point above is a fair point, but in relation to an object-oriented line of thought, what this mode of reasoning ignores is the fact that what is represented, and how it is represented, also make up very real and ontologically valid objects that are "there now". For example, the digital image is a new entity/object and the technology we view when we view an image as such is also there now, operating and affecting other objects and creating relations and situations in which other objects are changed, moved, affected or even created. In relation to *Avatar*, the technology almost becomes the event itself and effaces what is represented in the film text/narrative: what actually occurs however, apart from the use of a new and immersive technology, is that all things involved in *Avatar*, the text, the narrative, the technology, the audience and the sound are all to be seen as equally valid objects that assemble to create the overall event of *Avatar*. With the motion capture and 3D technology utilised in this film in particular, we are immersed equally in the operations of technological objects and the operations of narrative structure. The world of technological objects emerges from its withdrawn potential and shows how non-human actors and entities can affect us in certain ways. The preceding discussion of modernity, postmodernity and object-ontology has been necessary in order for us to navigate the following discussion of being in relation to objects as a collective and wholly inclusive term that enumerates all things. Film texts, global warming, protests, goblins, golf balls and genomes all equally exist outside of any anthropocentric or anthropomorphic field of thought and in what follows an evolution of this idea will be mapped out in equally existing examples.

### **3. Current State of Research**

#### **a. Harman, Shaviro and Object Oriented Ontology**

In what follows, there will be a review of the existing literature and research, primarily from the fields relating to object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, aesthetics and film studies. The breakdown of each piece of existing research will highlight the importance of the piece to the current endeavour, relating them to the film texts covered

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<sup>15</sup> The argument here changes in relation to a fully digitally rendered mouse: in digital cases there may have been no actual mouse in the first place and the digital one we see is an absolutely new object - a simulacra - to borrow Baudrillard's term. This digital mouse is not a representation as such and it highlights the affective and ontologically valid nature of non-human entities. This line of thought will be returned to at a later stage especially in relation to *Avatar* in which the indexical and the non-indexical are fully ontologically equal beings.

in the body of this project, the Occupy movement, or both. Steven Shaviro and Graham Harman are two of the key thinkers in relation to this project and as will be shown, the two work in a closely related subject field, ontological philosophy, but both approach it from very different angles. Despite the two disagreeing on various topics, they do tend to become more alike one another in certain areas. In what follows, I will discuss the two philosophers' works, comparing them against one another and showing how and why their research is invaluable to this project.

Stephen Shaviro's book, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Shaviro 2010), alongside Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's *Production of Presence* and Harman's *Tool-Being*, forms the cornerstone of this project's basis in cinema, ontology and digital/object being. Shaviro and Harman both come from a speculative realist, or object-oriented position and this means that any cinematic theory discussed by Shaviro (or Harman) will also come from this theoretical/philosophical position. In *Post Cinematic Affect* Shaviro discusses four texts that he deems to be "post-cinematic": each of these texts relates to the world of transient and global capitalism, either diegetically or formally (or both). They all raise questions about the ontological validity of film texts in the digital age and resolve these questions by proclaiming a 'flat-ontology' which refuses to hierarchically position one mode of aesthetic production or interaction over any other. In this way, all post-cinema, or cinema that refuses or resists elements like continuity in narrative or classical Hollywood production methods, becomes an equivalent plain of form equalling content and also of object equalling subject (or text and consumer). In this way, *Post Cinematic Affect* provides an ontological blueprint for the overall argument presented in my own project, especially when combined with the epiphanic moments of presence discussed by Gumbrecht and the discussion of the tool-analysis by Harman (both of which will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming discussion). It becomes possible to discuss filmic texts, whether digital or classical, or whether relating to form or content, on an equal ontological plain, refusing any hierarchy of perspective, position, production or use. All of the film texts involved in this piece of research, *eXistenZ*, *Die Hard 4.0*, *Avatar* and *Breaking Bad* are either ontologically flattened or their diegetic realms question and address issues surrounding the flattening of ontology. It should be noted here that in a flattened ontology, all objects access reality, or being, in the same way and as such exist on the same plane of being. This means that all objects, or everything that acts and

interacts with other things, be they as diverse as balls, cats, dreams, words or movies, must all be seen to exist as things-in-themselves, outside of a mind/world, or subject/object correlation. It is for this reason that objects are the central point of focus in this project, and especially objects as autonomous entities that can create, alter, deform and destroy other objects as they interact in and on their own terms. Without Shaviro's research in *Post Cinematic Affect*, this area of my own research would be set back and would require a vast amount of research above and beyond what is already a massive pool. Shaviro relates the flattening of ontology (the over- or excessive-mediation of text and life) to the excessiveness of the capitalist system taking up on some of Fredric Jameson's ideas. The most notable one in this case is the idea of "cognitive mapping", or "affective mapping": this is a process of coming to know the world, and in this case, the "unrepresentable" global system, in a "non-representational and non-phenomenological way". Shaviro believes that maps do not just replicate the territory they represent, but they "actively [*inflect*] and [*work*] over that territory". In relation to film and music, Shaviro, furthering Jameson's thought, believes that in the (post)capitalist era, these affective texts map, perform and construct the "social relations, flows and feelings" that they are about (Shaviro 2010, pp.5-6) This element of Shaviro's writing in his book relates directly to the present discussion of Occupy, and also the filmic texts. Whilst the current intention is to take this idea further and invert the outcome (spaces and objects dictate the way we experience them), Shaviro offers a stable, pertinent and extremely well thought out starting point for this area of the current project<sup>16</sup>.

In his article 'Emotion Capture: Affect in Digital Film' (Shaviro 2007), Shaviro comes much closer to Harman's perspectives and for this project this is beneficial in that there is a positioning and a utilisation of Harman's writings in the area of object-oriented ontology. The main benefit is that whilst Harman is rooted firmly in objects *per se*, Shaviro discusses film in particular as an object, and particularly digital film and media. This article gives a comprehensive run down of the analogic cinematic image from the perspective of Andre Bazin and how this type of image creates a present, or an image of

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<sup>16</sup> As opposed to merely mapping out and becoming a part of the fabric of affective living, the Occupy movement want to use this type of affective and object-oriented being as a mode of resistance to the impositions of hierarchies innate in the system of capitalism, with a particular focus on space, the well being of the planet and the fair and inclusive use of capital in relation to economic policies and the unfair and exclusive privatisation of basic necessities.

presence: images take on a life of their own over and above the spectator and the creator and show a time that has passed by, but which is now moving in the present. Their value, like still images for Roland Barthes, lies in the fact that they are indexical: they represent actual objects and events that stood in front of the camera and which have now passed away, but can still be seen in the present of the images. Shaviro makes the point that digital media can no longer be considered as classically indexical: but despite losing its indexicality, or the power to re-present what once was present, digital images become a new object which can lay claim to their own ontological being. Shaviro discusses how real life has been saturated by images and especially digital images, to the point that real life is indistinguishable from these images (a point that will be taken up in Chapter One with a discussion of Baudrillard's theorisation of simulacra). The indexical nature of digital images goes full circle in this argument: since all life is digitally mediated, producing simulacra, these simulacra become themselves the reality we experience and thus, simulated images or simulacra become indexical in themselves. These points are relevant for this overall project in that they afford digital images an ontological validity along the same lines as the ontological validity afforded to other non-digital things. Shaviro utilises the philosophical writings of Deleuze, in relation to cinema, especially the time-image which is an image system rooted in affect, newness and rhizomatic movement, as opposed to cause and effect and linear movement, and the philosophical writing of Derrida in relation to 'hauntology': the remaining trace of a thing that is absent. In this case, this relates to the indexicality of the digital and how simulacra become things-in-themselves. These points will have a strong bearing on the writing about *eXistenZ*, *Die Hard 4.0* and *Avatar*; all of which either represent the loss of the 'real' (actual and physical) in their narratives, or represent this loss, and the creation of a new digital indexicality, or digital being, in the event of their presentation: that is, when they are being viewed and experienced as an event which levels out the being of the narrative, the text, the technology, the audience and the haptic imagery. By accepting digital images as ontologically valid objects, Shaviro allows for an object-oriented approach that must be afforded to all objects and thus he comes in line with Harman's mode of thought.

Shaviro continues to set out a strong object-oriented position in *The Universe of Things*, making a request that we "recognize [sic] that the fate of humanity is deeply

intertwined with the fates of all sorts of other entities" (Shaviro 2014, p.1) and *vice versa*. He calls for a focus on how objects perceive one another, taking up on Alfred North Whitehead and Harman, and how this prehension allows for a flat ontology of being: prehension is "any process [...] in which an entity grasps, registers the presence of, responds to, or is affected by another entity" (Shaviro 2014, p.29). Whilst it may seem that entities can have no perception, and to attribute a perception to them is merely a case of anthropomorphising them, arguably they do interact in ways similar to how interaction would take place in entities that can perceive things, or simply as an aesthetic relation. Timothy Morton terms this causality between things an aesthetic effect (Morton 2013, p. 119) in which entities, or objects, interact in what he terms interobjectivity: "Interobjectivity positively guarantees that something new can happen, because each sample, each spider web vibration, each footprint of objects in other objects, is itself a whole new object with a whole new set of relations to the entities around it" (Morton 2013, p.122). Interobjectivity is an aesthetic event/effect because, like an aesthetic event occurring for a human, it occurs outside of rationality, in a different area of understanding that can not be rationalised in human terms, and as such, can be attributed to the interactions that take place between any and all objects that form a relation, or set of relations. This idea of prehension is vastly important to this project in relation to the affective nature of the technology, the text and the audience in the event of *Avatar* and in the way the Occupy movement utilised the occupation of space, the spaces involved, the demonstration of presence, the workings of cities and so on in their occupations. On top of this object interaction, Shaviro discusses aesthetics, which will also feature strongly as a mode of object understanding in relation to this project. Aesthetics for Shaviro "involves feeling an object *for its own sake*, beyond those aspects of it that can be understood or used" (Shaviro 2014, p.53): an aesthetic encounter for Shaviro is termed allure and allows an access to the thing outside of any correlationist binary, or human rationality which places itself as the apex of ontology. The main point to be taken from all of this is the acceptance of all objects as equally valid on an ontological level, and equally as "aware" as humans (on some level) when it comes to interaction. This has important implications for all of the issues addressed in this project and will have implications relating to issues such as global warming and natural disasters, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

Furthering his discussion of object interaction, Shaviro, in 'The Actual Volcano: Whitehead, Harman, and the Problem of Relations' (Bryant 2011) discusses another primary philosopher relating to this piece of research, Graham Harman, and within this discussion he relates him to yet another philosopher of ontology, Alfred North Whitehead. One point that this article makes clear is that all speculative realists or object-oriented philosophies are of a post-Kantian bent: Kant saw all objects as being dependent on the human mind for them to be accessible<sup>17</sup>. This denies the possibility of things in themselves and places human thought at the centre of existence: this type of philosophy, according to Shaviro "subordinates ontology to epistemology" (Bryant 2011, p.280). Shaviro spends the rest of the article setting up the similarities and differences between Harman's and Whitehead's philosophical positions allowing the agreement that both see no hierarchy of being. Shaviro posits Whitehead as a philosopher of relations, or 'prehensions': objects are actual in so far as they relate and interact with other objects - this is their primary state of being. This type of relational being is a very limiting type of being that only views entities as the sets of relations they enter into. As such, this ignores the thing-in-itself and its vast withdrawn nature. Reducing things to their relations causes them to be seen, or utilised, only as tools that can perform a use-value in relation to another object, which will most likely be seen as a dominant subject. Harman is posited as keeping something back: objects are more than their relations: they retain a well of withdrawn potential. Shaviro sets up two philosophers that agree on actual object existence, but disagree on how these objects exist. Shaviro cites Harman on accusing Whitehead of an infinite regress of relations; Shaviro counters this, claiming Harman falls into the same trap, only now with an infinite regress of parts and wholes. In the end, Shaviro falls on the side of Whitehead, claiming that Harman's objects remain in a state

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<sup>17</sup> Shaviro points this out in a very succinct and straightforward article about what speculative realism and object-oriented ontology are. The centrality of human understanding and the focus on epistemology have for so long disallowed the things of the world any existence independent of a relation to human mind which is summed up as follows: "Kant insists that 'things in themselves' are unknowable; all we can really be sure of is phenomena – how things appear to us" Shaviro, S. (2015). "Speculative Realism - a primer." Retrieved 01/06/15, 2015, from <http://terremoto.mx/article/speculative-realism-a-primer/>. Both object-oriented ontology and speculative realism want to break free of this reliance on human mind which posits reality in relation to how the mind perceives it and in no other way: this is the correlation that is referred to throughout this project. Elaborating on the Kantian position from which object-oriented ontology and speculative realism move, Harman writes: "Kant insists that human cognition is finite and cannot reach the things as they really are. These 'nuomena' can be thought but not known": in other words, there is a correlation between the world, and how we perceive it. Harman continues his explanation on the Kantian position: "Humans have direct access to 'phenomena,' and thus philosophy becomes a meditation not on the world, but on the finite conditions through which humans can understand it" Harman, G. (2016). *Immaterialism*. Cambridge, Polity. p.27. The Kantian position is a correlation of human and world, with the world understood through human thought.

of stasis and allow for nothing new to emerge. The article opts for relations over substances and in this way sidesteps the question of what singular entities, or objects, actually are in-themselves: but also in a sense, aligns more so with the position of DeLanda in relation to assemblages and the nature of relations that are formed in this type of object construction. If objects are a sum of their relations then they do not exist outside of these relations.

Harman offers a reply to this charge by Shaviro in 'Response to Shaviro' (Bryant 2011). Importantly, this response makes Harman's position very clear in relation to both Whitehead and Shaviro. The main point of clarification is ontologically categorical in that it discusses relations versus objects as the ontological basis of being. Harman falls firmly into the field of object-oriented ontology: he relates a story about Heidegger and Whitehead to show how objects can exist outside of relations, or in isolation. Both Heidegger and Whitehead were writing in the late 1920s, and both were writing on an almost identical subject, yet they never met or had any correspondence. This affirms how "contemporary realities do not affect one another" (Bryant 2011, p.292). These two men, two individual objects, created other objects (their philosophical writings) without any form of relation to the other. Harman, however, does make the two relate, and in so doing, does form a new object; his own philosophical position. He utilises the withdrawal of objects from Heidegger's writing which allows actual objects to exist in-themselves, and he uses the Whiteheadian model of relations that allows relations to create new objects from the interactions they enter into. It is for this reason that Harman's writing is here utilised over that of Whitehead or the direct writing of Heidegger: whilst both are important and both will be integrated, they will not be primary sources since Harman's position is a more fitting one and allows me to come to know both Heidegger and Whitehead through a lens of combination and relation. Throughout this article Harman makes his own critique of Shaviro, exposing Shaviro's main downfall: that is that relations must be associated with change. This is important as it allows Harman to explain why his philosophy is more suited to change than the position of Whitehead, that the Shaviro of this retort follows, allows. If objects are a sum of their relations, then that is their entire being: "[e]very object would be exhausted by its current dealings with all other things; actuality would contain no surplus [...]" (Bryant 2011, p.295). If, according to Harman, objects are withdrawn, or hold something back, whilst entering into relations,

then something new can still emerge and the charge of stasis is reversed. Harman's position is more in line with this project in that it allows for change to arise; change here can be seen as an eruption of newness or the deforming of objects: a set of relations coupled with the material assemblages akin to the political silence and occupation of Occupy for example, which becomes difficult to deal with by the static capitalist system that perpetuates its own logic.

In terms of the philosophical research relating to object-oriented ontology and speculative realism, Graham Harman is certainly one of the most integral writers and philosophers to be regarded in this project. Not only was he one of the founders of the speculative realism turn which opposes "correlationism" "that bases all philosophy on the mutual interplay of human and world" (Harman 2013, p.10), he also coined the term and led the way with "object-oriented ontology" and later object-oriented philosophy which sees individual entities as the "ultimate stuff of the cosmos" and which never exhausts entities through their various relations since objects "withdraw from relation" (Harman 2013, p.12). In the current article 'Realism Without Materialism' (Harman 2011) Harman refutes materialism saying that it does two things to entities: it reduces them down to their material underpinnings (undermining) or it reduces them upwards to their appearance for human beings (overmining). Both undermining and overmining are contrary to the descriptions of what Harman does as a philosopher. Harman espouses an ontology of objects which means objects can never be seen in all their appearances and which exist beyond these appearances, especially if these appearances are coming from an historically anthropocentric viewpoint. If all objects relate to one and other on an equal footing, equal to that of the human relation to the world, then this mode of thought paves the way for a levelling of object relations and flattens any subject/object hierarchy. In this way, this article, and the wider writings of Harman, has immense value to this project which sees Occupy's attempt to protest a grossly unfair system of capital, one which sees humans merely as lesser objects that are to be utilised as tools, or objects from which a use value can be extracted, and nothing else. The same sort of argument holds true for the cinematic element of the piece. If meaning is to be found in the objects themselves and not in the relations between these objects and other objects, including human beings, then there is a new meaning formed between the text and the viewer that sets the two on a level plateau of object-hood,

elevating neither side of this relation to a higher status than the other. The notion of withdrawal is also important here: objects withdraw from other objects in that their full existence is never experienced in any of their encounters or in any number of possible encounters. This means that the true being of any entity exists somewhere else other than in the uses or encounters other objects experience of them and this will always remain outside the scope of, and access of, the human rational mind. Importantly, this will relate closely to the Occupy movement and the emerging mode of cinema that can be considered as affective or as existing in its own right and which operates on a non-hierarchical plateau of being.

In his short book *Circus Philosophicus* (Harman 2010) Harman reinvigorates the philosophical trend of the Platonic myth. By using story and myth, Harman makes difficult philosophical ideas more accessible and readable, and thus, easier to understand and apply, especially in fields outside of philosophy itself. This project attempts to do something similar, only with Hollywood film in this instance. The main areas of philosophy Harman discusses through these myths are object-oriented philosophy and the nature of objects themselves<sup>18</sup>. For the object-oriented discussion, Harman takes from his writing in *Tool-Being* and his other speculative realist writings - he shows how all objects exist as objects in themselves, even if they never create any relations with other things. This is their withdrawn reality that can never be experienced since the relations the object enters into can never exhaust all the other possible relations the object may enter into. In this sense, all objects exist on a level ontological plain of withdrawn being: this will be the main point of convergence between these philosophical concepts and how the Occupy movement operate and their attempts to flatten out the hierarchies of being that exist within the capitalist system. The withdrawn potential of objects means that their actual being is more than just their relations to other beings as certain philosophers of networks tend to argue. The other element that receives major focus is the Four-fold nature of objects which Harman borrows from Heidegger's writings and extends in his own writing. All objects have the potential to encounter one another at some level: when

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<sup>18</sup> Harman uses stories to discuss his philosophical ideas relating them to a massive ferris wheel, half buried, before which all objects pass; a ghost ship in an Asian sea; a musical instrument and so on. In a sense, Harman posits the objects of discussion, and the discussion itself as a flattened out mode of discussion that allows philosophy and literature to be seen as equally existing objects, where neither form can be positioned as hierarchically more important, or accessing more being, or reality, than the other.

objects do relate or encounter, they encounter images of the objects since the real object resides elsewhere in a withdrawn state: objects consist of time, space, eidos and essence, but they are also something at all (a thing in themselves). Alongside this is the notion of the broken-tool which sees objects as taken for granted when they function. As such, they are taken as the process of being a tool that is used in a specific way and in very specific sets of relations with a subject-object binary, and the thing-in-itself is overlooked. Thus we only encounter an image of the withdrawn object, never the object itself, only its phenomenal presence. When a tool is broken, or loses its use value, it is seen as it truly is (a thing-in-itself or a broken-tool). Since these theories consider any entity as an object, they form the base theory of this project.

Film works as the primary example of phenomenal presence, but can also be seen, through the various texts that are under discussion, as becoming broken-tools, in that they highlight the interaction of objects, and not just the interaction of humans and objects (the as-structure). The Occupy movement also operates on this level as a critique of the system of capitalism that uses certain humans solely as tools. By exposing themselves as broken tools, objects highlight their being as more than just tools from which to extract a use value. By highlighting yourself as a broken tool, you can expose yourself as a thing-in-itself, and this means becoming more than the sets of imposed relations into which you enter. Arguably, only sentient beings can do this through choice, as with the Occupy movement, however, other objects, when they enter or exit certain sets of relations, or lose a use value in relation to some other object, also become broken tools, and as such, become things-in-themselves by exposing some withdrawn potential. All this goes towards creating an object-oriented, flat ontology of being that sees all objects as existing equally. *Towards Speculative Realism* (Harman 2009) continues to outline Harman's object-oriented ontology with a particular focus on networks of interaction and Bruno Latour's network theories in particular. Throughout *Towards Speculative Realism*, Harman delves into to assemblages and networks and how objects enter into wider sets of relations and manage to retain something of a singular being, whilst also becoming a component part of the relations and objects they encounter: namely, the assemblages they add and relate to. It is well documented in his book how objects are more than just their material existence, since their potential to enter into and affect new networks can never be fully tapped: their full being remains permanently

withdrawn from all access and as such this allows for newness to emerge through various and limitless potentialities. Harman's theories, which build on and depart from the philosophical traditions furthered by Kant and Heidegger are integral to this project in relation to both the filmic artefacts and the actual occupation of space by the Occupy movement. Relating Harman's philosophical writing to the network and assemblage theories set down by Latour and DeLanda allows all objects to exist with a sort of subjective presence and affective nature that was traditionally only assumed to exist for the rational human subject. It is here that we can see the flattening of ontology and the importance of object interactions in assemblages and as things-in-themselves.

In his article 'On the undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy' in *The Speculative Turn* (Bryant 2011) Harman offers a succinct history of object-oriented philosophy which works well as a companion to the aforementioned 'primer' by Shaviri. It begins with Harman's description of objects: they are "unified entities with specific qualities that are autonomous from us and from each other" (Bryant 2011, p.22). This mirrors his description of objects in *The Quadruple Object* and is a direct reference to the above four-fold: here he states that objects will be defined "only by their autonomous reality. They must be autonomous in two separate directions: emerging as something over and above their pieces, while also partly withholding themselves from relations with other entities" (Harman 2011, p.19). The reason these two descriptions are important here is that they show how Harman uses the terms "object" and "entity" as equivalents, and this will follow through in my own project. These descriptions are an important departure from Kant as they show how the term object can be applied to any entity, set of entities, ideas or relations: they also show how object-oriented ontology speculates on the existence of objects without their having to rely on human thought or perception for their being to unfold. Importantly, it must be noted that, in relation to a post-Kantian mode of thought, when objects are being discussed, they are to be considered to be the objects of phenomena and how they act and interact, and not just how they appear for humans, or how humans access them. Harman provides a comprehensive list of historically anti-object philosophical schools of thought all of which, he sees, as remaining in the correlationist mode of thought that equates world with human. Following on from this, there is a breakdown of what most continental philosophers tend to do, philosophically, in relation to objects: they "undermine" them -

reduce them downwards to their pre-individual atomic components, or they “overmine” them - granting no autonomy to an object apart from how it is thought of by humans or how they relate only to humans. The next important factor is a run down of a close peer of Harman’s, Iain Hamilton Grant. Harman traces similarities, but ultimately discrepancies in their views; again, this works towards narrowing my research scope since Harman has already effectively shown how Grant and himself differ, allowing me to weigh up the two philosophers’ positions in relation to my own work and to evaluate the place they may have within it. In criticising Grant and a number of other philosophers similar to him, Harman also goes on to show why certain philosophical trends can also be set aside (i.e. the processes of undermining and overmining): however, in doing this, Harman is openly self-reflexive and admits that what he is doing is only important or feasible if one is coming from his object-oriented position and is interested in returning the dignity and democracy of objects.

‘Asymmetrical Causation: Influence without Recompense’ (Harman 2010), and *The Quadruple Object* (Harman 2011), discuss the relations between objects with other objects and between objects and humans: the latter relation has been termed ‘correlationism’ by another key philosopher in relation to object-oriented modes of thought, Quentin Meillassoux. This article sets up and expands the reasons why Harman is against the notion of correlationism: correlationism assumes that all being is purely relational and that in turn, all being is predicated on the relation of world to human (the Kantian position). Instead of an anthropocentric relational being, Harman discusses the dignity that should be involved in the interaction of all objects with one and other as being on the same level as the dignity attributed to the relation between human and world<sup>19</sup>. He also highlights how objects retain autonomy beyond any relational qualities they may have, thus granting a withdrawn being to all objects that remains beyond the perception of humans and also beyond their relations to other objects. This argument has

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<sup>19</sup> Arguably, this appears as a very anthropocentric way to discuss objects: after all, dignity is a feeling, or a sense of worth that occurs in humans. But it is this sense of worth that must be attributed to objects. Whilst objects may not feel an innate sense of worth since they lack the ability to make value judgements, they have a sense of worth in that the actions and reactions they enter into can alter and distort other objects and other sets of relations and as such are catalysts for newness to emerge. On top of this, there is a lack of dignity attributed to objects from the anthropocentric rational position, since this, traditionally, places objects at a lower scale of being to humans. This is something Harman and the Occupy movement are trying to refute, especially in terms of planetary issues, natural disasters and global warming and as such, it allows for the emergence of a possible object-oriented ethics to take root.

is foundations in Kant's and Heidegger's philosophical thought and is continually built upon by Harman in other texts that relate to the present project. In this sense, the argument can be followed and understood from its inception, right up to its most recent form considering Harman is still extremely active. The current article also emphasises the notion of the fourfold (which is developed in Harman's book *The Quadruple Object*). Objects are real in that they appear in front of us and can be used; they are present-to-hand. They also withdraw from us in that they can never be fully realised in all their tool-being - this is the first two-fold axis. Beyond this, objects are something specific, but importantly, they are something at all: this is Harman's addition - a second two-fold axis - to Heidegger's notion of being. This idea lays the foundation for an object-oriented ontology: objects and relations both become tool-beings, or objects, since they exist as a specific thing and exist as something at all. This model is important in relation to the discussion of Occupy and also film since it considers relations between objects as objects themselves, and also the objects involved in these relations, collapsing subject/object hierarchies and instating the power of objects, despite them being eternally withdrawn in their fullness, on a level footing. This will have a major bearing in relation to the discussion of the protest against the system of capitalism and will also shed light on the relations formed between text and viewer in relation to cinematic objects. When it comes to understanding cinematic relations, psychoanalysis has proved invaluable, however, this remains at the level of subject/object interaction, and arguably at the level of epistemological exploration. An object-oriented approach becomes an ontological discussion of the being of this relationship. Whilst psychoanalytic approaches will remain valuable for our understanding of textual meaning and relational values, an ontological approach looks at the actual existence of the beings, or tools, involved, and attempts to focus on their object-relational existence beyond any perception rooted in human understanding. However, there will be some psychoanalytic theory involved in the discussion of the (human) subject and the collapse of boundaries between the subject and the object: see the discussion under the subheading "*eXistenZ* and the Object".

Harman's *Tool-Being* is the locus of his writing on Heidegger, in which he takes a detailed look at tools, tool-being and broken-tools. He especially looks at how objects remain withdrawn from both human interaction and object interaction and how all that is accessible is a caricature of the thing itself: this will relate to a discussion on

postmodernity and Jean Baudrillard's theorisation of simulacra in Chapter One. Heidegger sees entities as present-to-hand tools whose reality is in excess of their use, but all we can access is their sensual facade: what they do and how they function for *us* is their being. In *Tool-Being* Harman places ontological validity onto broken-tools: it is when a tool loses its use value and function for us that we can see it for a thing-in-itself: "The broken tool counts as the first way in which the entity is freed from its contexture, released from the dimension of reference. Here, the tool is encountered *as* a tool rather than only quietly functioning as one" (Harman 2002, p.49). All entities gain their externalised meaning from the relations and encounters they enter into: their withdrawn potential remains within them and may never come into being, but it exists nonetheless. Harman's point of departure here is that all entities can relate to and encounter other objects outside of a need for this to happen in the minds of human beings. This is the point of a flat- or object-oriented- ontology: all things exist with the validity of the traditional human subject and all things relate to all other things equally: this can mean not at all, but the potential to do so remains as a withdrawn part of the entity itself and this withdrawn potential shows how newness can emerge from object interactions. *Tool-Being* becomes one of the most important texts in relation to this project as it outlines the status of objects in an object-oriented mode of being. Objects are ontological, ontic, something specific and something at all and they relate to and encounter each other outside of any human/world correlation. This goes towards explaining how elements of their withdrawn excess come into being in various object relations and explains the link to Occupy and their focus on the occupation of space as a mode of resistance and their emphasis on planetary issue alongside economic ones. It also ties in to how all of the objects involved in *Avatar* are as important as each other, be it the text, the narrative, the event, the technology, the 3D glasses, the spectator and the actors.

## **b. Assemblages and the Abject**

Moving away from directly object-oriented philosophers for the moment allows for a broader discussion on how this type of philosophy interacts and compliments other areas. Manuel DeLanda discusses the importance of assemblages and the operations and contributing factors of assembled entities. This ties in well with the object-oriented approach in this project and has a special relevance in relation to Chapter Two and the

discussion of *Die Hard 4.0* and the reliance upon digital modes of living which becomes the measure of being in the place of human subjectivity. In *A New Philosophy of Society* (DeLanda 2013) DeLanda lays out and explains the theory behind assemblages, or flat ontologies. Assemblages are material and expressive entities interacting and reacting: they are networks that territorialise and deterritorialise on various levels of experience and being. This concept is taken from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and expanded upon with the aids of sociological, geographical and economic research and also everyday, lived experiences<sup>20</sup>. Whilst hierarchical modes of existence pertain in this philosophy, they only do so on the level of the local: the local here relates to localised institutions for example and their internal operations, whether this be on a national or international level of operation for example. This hierarchy of power relents in relation to the overall emergence and operation of the systems behind the localised operations of existence. Road networks, train systems, communications technology, trade patterns and the emergence of markets growing from local rural markets, to national markets and on to a global market, electricity grids, bus drivers etc all affect the material and expressive nature of all relations in assemblages (the actual and the virtual - the building and its uses/functions for example). An assemblage is a network of these entities and expressions that emerges from the sets of historical and material conditions including technological advances, geographical locations, gas pipe systems or railways, and also the set of possible outcomes that can emerge as these entities operate on one another. Assemblages territorialise, or emerge in specific ways relating to the politico-historical and geographic potentialities of their existence, and they can deterritorialise for exactly the same reasons when certain things are altered, or when a new set of relations emerge. For example, the railway networks arose through the specific relations caused by rapid industrialisation and the need to transport goods, colonisation, the desire to travel and slave labour in America with the aim of expanding West. In this way, the train network territorialised out of a set of relations relating to industry, greed, transport, labour and

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<sup>20</sup> DeLanda looks at assemblages as diverse as nations, cities, transport systems, biological entities, humans, information systems and other such objects in a cultural materialist fashion. In order to look at assemblages as such he takes their historical development and their social impact into account, especially in relation to transport systems and the building of cities and nations. In relation to humans, he gives the example of a child learning to ride a bicycle: he states that when a child learns to ride a bicycle or learns to swim “a new world suddenly opens up for experience, filled with new impressions and ideas. The new skill is deterritorializing [sic] to the extent that it allows the child to break with past routine by venturing away from home in a new vehicle, or inhabiting previously forbidden spaces like the ocean” DeLanda, M. (2013). *A New Philosophy of Society*. London, Bloomsbury. p.50. This allows the child’s social world to expand and takes its conditions of existence into account.

essentially, capitalism. They became deterritorialised when the sets of relations changed with air travel and improvements to road networks which coincided with the speeding up of the nature of capitalism and the perceived need for quicker transport and information sharing. These assemblages of politico-historical contexts can also be seen to work when a nation emerges from the formation of boundaries and becomes territorialised: immigration and advanced travel and communication technologies alongside the global nature of capital allows for a deterritorialisation to take place and affect the assemblage in new ways. The concepts of assemblage and flat-ontology relates directly to an object-oriented ontology and to the concept of meaning based in object interactions. In relation to this research, Occupy are a deterritorialising force in relation to capitalism and notions of the self, or the subject as tool, within this system. In relation to cinema, all of the texts can be seen as addressing or becoming assemblages, some on the level of content, others on the level of form and some on both. For this reason, the notion of assemblages becomes primary in that it allows for a non-hierarchical mode of thought and being to take root and it also allows for newness to emerge and to create change in the nature of meaning and being.

Despite not discussing the above assemblage theories, or networks of operations directly, Julia Kristeva's writing on the abject and abjection from *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982) allows access to a psychoanalytic theory that disrupts the human subject, changing it from a closed off entity to an open and porous one that operates in a way similar to the territorialisation and deterritorialisation of the above assemblages. This allows entities to affect, enter into, escape from,prehend and, relating to Deleuze and Guattari, via DeLanda, territorialise and deterritorialise the subject, exposing it as an assemblage of entities the enter and leave its makeup. Traditionally, the subject has been a closed off being which is in opposition to the objects of the world out there: however, with the notion of the abject, this changes, allowing for theories such as post-humanism to become relevant and essential in relation to the identity of any entity (in this case the human) by allowing for the entry of the outside world into the subject and *vice versa*. The reason this theory is so relevant is that it disrupts the traditionally closed off human subject. In a flat ontology of being, objects act and interact with each other in ways that disallow for any closed off entities to remain as such and so, the abject allows us to frame the fear of a flat-ontology in psychoanalytic terms which helps us to realise this fear of

losing subjectivity and which in turn leads to humans being seen as objects. The abject has its most relevant discussion in relation to the research on *eXistenZ* as this text comes closest to the writings of Kristeva and the notion of a border that encroaches upon everything: worlds being to spill into and out of each other, as do the living organisms of human and semi-organic object, calling into question the boundaries of objects. Whilst this will also be the case in relation to *Avatar*, the fear and apparent loss relating to the abject is lost and the openness and porousness of the subject-as-object is celebrated. The theory of abjection works in symbiosis with object-oriented ontology, bringing philosophical thought and psychoanalytic arenas together in order to understand how objects interact and how they relate to one another in ways similar to how human relations occur. Addressing ontology in psychoanalytic terms allows for the humanities, which has a long history of utilising psychoanalytic discourses, to address unfamiliar concepts through familiar frameworks which complement the philosophical approach being used here.

Levi Bryant continues the discussion of a flat-ontology of being in which all entities interact, relate and prehend one another in a mode of being that allows for a sort of openness between all objects. He makes a valid and clear distinction between modes of being in *The Democracy of Objects*: “Objects require no subject to manifest themselves in the world” and “Manifestation is an *ontological* predicate, not an *epistemological* predicate” (Bryant 2011, p.88). This removes all human rationality and subjective positioning from being and opens up the universe as a flat ontology in which all entities manifest themselves to one another in a way that requires no master object to give validity to their state of being. Bryant addresses the fears people may have in relation to this type of philosophy, stating that a “post-humanist, realist ontology is not an *antihuman* ontology, but is rather [...] an ontology where humans are no longer monarchs of being but are instead *among* beings, *entangled* in beings, and *implicated* in other beings” (Bryant 2011, p.40). This ties in with DeLanda’s writing on assemblage theory and allows for a deeper connection with the philosophy being utilised in this project. Bryant also utilises ideas of prehension and withdrawal, combining Harman, Shaviro and Heidegger and also aesthetic interaction and ideas of relations which allows new objects to emerge from interactions, but which do not rely solely upon those interacting objects for their being. Each of the texts in this project engage with elements

of this philosophy and there is a culmination of this mode of being in *Avatar* and the Occupy movement. The entire project will be seen as an assemblage of various texts that come together to form a new object that traces the outline of a flat ontology of being.

The aesthetic realm, and aesthetic interaction, is further discussed in *Realist Magic*, by Timothy Morton, where the shift of aesthetics away from the realm of human experience and on to the realm of object interaction and causality are under particular focus. The way objects interact occurs on a level akin to that of how humans experience the aesthetic: as a kind of non-rational causality that causes new sets of relations to occur: “An effect is always an aesthetic effect. That is, effect is a kind of perceptual event for some entity, no matter whether that entity has skin or nerves or brain” (Morton, p.119). Morton also discusses, again in a vein similar to DeLanda and Bryant, the interactions and relations that take place between objects and how these interactions allow for new objects and entities to emerge: Morton terms this “interobjectivity”, but it can also be an assemblage, a flat-ontology, object prehension, tool-being, aesthetic experience, epiphany, allure and so forth. The important element is that it always occurs outside of any necessity of human interaction, and it is here, like with Harman, that the shift from Kantian phenomenal experience is focused. “Every event in reality is a kind of inscription in which one object leaves its footprint in another one. Interobjective reality is the sum total of all these footprints, crisscrossing everywhere” (Morton, p.71): this highlights how all objects rely upon one another for their being to emerge, and not on any one single master-object, traditionally seen as the human subject, or a god figure. What must be highlighted in this discussion relating to relations and prehensions is that relations and prehensions are not the only things involved in the make-up of objects: there still remains the thing-in-itself in its withdrawn excess; relations and prehension are merely another element relating to objects and they help to explain how new relations, or new objects, come to be. As Morton notes: “The qualities of the object are not the object. Objects then are both themselves and not-themselves” (Morton, p.27). Objects are the uses we attribute to them, and also the uses other objects attribute to them and *vice versa*: this means that in a hierarchical mode of being, objects are merely reduced to the sets of relations they enter into, allowing only their use value for something else to become primary, but there still remains the thing itself and its hidden well of potential that is beyond the remit of relations and interactions which allows only a glimpse of the object

through its sensual qualities. The well of withdrawn potential is important since without it no future causality could be possible since objects would be closed off and complete, thus disallowing anything new to emerge unless a god like figure could be pointed to as the root of change, newness and action. This aesthetic dimension relates to the work of Gumbrecht, Kant, Harman and Shaviro and as such will be of great importance to this project. Object interaction occurs in a similar way to (human) aesthetic interaction and this will underpin all of the aspects of object-oriented ontology in relation to film, the Occupy movement and the wider issues of global warming and natural disaster as all of these objects act and interact in a way that causes an affect in the objects involved, but which is always outside of a similar interaction that may take place between a human and an object.

An article that needs to be discussed at this point, since it shows how object-oriented ontology, assemblage theory, object interactions/prehensions and aesthetic interaction, work at the level of organisation, politics, services and natural disaster, is Pierides and Woodman's 'Object-Oriented Sociology and Organizing in the Face of Emergency: Bruno Latour, Graham Harman and the Material Turn' (Pierides and Woodman 2012). Their article discusses a major natural catastrophe that occurred in Australia: 'Black Saturday', as it came to be known, was a massive bush fire in Victoria and was also one of Australia's most heavily mediated natural disasters. The main element of their article relates to the organisation of responses to emergencies of this type, and the discussion takes a turn in the direction of emergencies as emergencies that cannot be accounted for in human terms. In other words, how can emergencies be related to when they are completely and utterly beyond any human interaction or interpretation. This is a major element of object-oriented ontology that sees objects as having their own sets of relations to each other and to events that occur as a result of these relations outside of any human-world perception/correlation. There is an important discussion of Harman's object-oriented philosophy and how objects interact on their own terms: this discussion of Harman's work is particularly interesting as it is related, not to abstract notions, or imagined scenarios, but to a very real occurrence in which emergency services were unable to act successfully because they failed to take into account the relations between objects and events that occur beyond any human interaction or involvement. The withdrawn nature of objects is important to this situation: emergency services could only

imagine certain outcomes, or certain potentialities, because they could only focus on objects as created or sustained by human perception, and what this perception of objects allows for. What they failed to recognise was the withdrawn, or hidden, potential of objects that may never surface, but which are potentialities of the object nonetheless. In this instance, these elements of the objects involved (weather, fire, combustion, drought) interacted in ways not accounted for by humans and thus human reactions fell short of being effective. When objects are withdrawn, they can generate surprises when they emerge in a relation to other objects and this is the cause of human inability to deal with these objects if and when they emerge. The important point to glean from this article is that objects interact and relate in ways that are beyond all human interaction and perception of those occurrences. Relations become important in that objects relate in ways that cannot be planned for by humans - in a similar way, cinematic relation can affect us in unforeseen ways and create moments of epiphany or when relations are unjust or levelled in favour of certain objects, change must occur as in the case with the Occupy movement. When these new sets of relations emerge, the objects themselves are altered as things-in-themselves: it is at this level of being that the Occupy movement were setting their aims. They were focusing on a new formulation of being that accepts that objects are more than their sets of relations and which deserve fairer access to being than the hierarchies that exist and maintain certain types of being allow. For these reasons, Pierides and Woodman's article, despite focussing on an Australian bush-fire, becomes integral, not only as it is a lived example of object-relations, but because it shows that object-relations cause a reality to occur that is beyond the correlation of human and world since it emerges out of the withdrawn excess that resides in things as things-in-themselves.

### **c. Gumbrecht: Presence and Epiphany**

Moving on to another important philosopher allows for a deeper understanding of how affective responses can emerge from objects interacting. *Production of Presence* (Gumbrecht 2004), by Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, focuses predominantly on how meaning can be produced and observed in moments of epiphany, or aesthetic interaction. This is another way to focus on how sets of relations allow newness to emerge, but again, it can only do so if we see objects as having a withdrawn well of potential from which to draw

from and create newness. In other words, we must look at objects as their sets of relations, but also as things-in-themselves. It is this well of potential that Occupy will be drawing from when it comes to how they are resisting the mode of being that sees human-as-capital, or human-as-tool. This is the mode of being for most people under the unfair and hierarchical system of capitalism which can be seen to permit access to being to certain groups of people over others. Gumbrecht takes a very biographical and humorous tone in his book making an extremely heavy philosophical and historical topic easily accessible and extremely interesting. The production of meaning that is non-semantic, or non-linguistic, or not reliant upon humans for its meaning to be a meaning, is traced through a long line of philosophical and theological concepts, up to the present, where the author terms these moments, moments of epiphany. He discusses such moments when meaning is based in the actual occurring or unfolding of an event in relation to the sensation of being able to feel the notes of a musical piece on the skin, or the intensity and power of a passage in a game of sport that unfolds in such a way that it can not be described, but can only truly be experienced by living in the moment of its occurring<sup>21</sup>. Gumbrecht takes a humorous view of the Humanities and sees the field as being too theoretical and too heavily based in the production of absent meaning, or theory, that is solely based in linguistic, or discursive terms. My own issue with the author in relation to the present topic is that he takes too much of a Heideggerian approach. This arguably ignores any type of object-oriented philosophy which grants objects a perception of other entities, albeit on a less perceptual level than human perception and it also disallows a look at how an object-oriented approach could affect human subjectivity, leading to anxiety and a decentering of anthropocentric perspectives. Object perception is the prehension of objects discussed above. Gumbrecht, in a Heideggerian fashion, sees being and understanding as solely located in the realm of *human* being. In this sense, animals, objects, events, tools and so on can only exist in a relation to human perception, or sense making, and can not perceive or prehend objects as entities in themselves: a rock smashing into another rock in deep space will perceive/prehend this event at some level. Whilst Gumbrecht's notion of epiphany is extremely useful for the current project in relation to the notion of a meaning that is primarily based

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<sup>21</sup> This relates back to the non-subjective aesthetic understanding described by both Morton and Eagleton and which is to be taken as the mode of aesthetic experience under discussion throughout this project. This mode of experience is in no way cognitive or ideological in the way subjective aesthetic constructs of beauty are.

in prehensive moments, it is limited only to the production of meaning relating to humans in a Kantian sense. If we look at it through the aesthetic modes of causality discussed by Morton or Harman for example, we can attribute an epiphanic moment to any and all objects equally since this project is more concerned with the meaning and being of all objects on an equal footing. Gumbrecht's ideas are useful in understanding *Dasein* and some of the other writings of Martin Heidegger and the book will prove invaluable in the discussion of human understanding, but will fall short in the discussion of an object-oriented philosophy. Despite never really touching on the area of either speculative realism or object-oriented ontology, and as such ignoring the validity of object interactions, Gumbrecht remains an integral writer and theorist in relation to the current undertaking.

Gumbrecht discusses in 'Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Worlds: Reclaiming an Unredeemed Utopian Motif' (Gumbrecht 2006), the moments in everyday life, especially those related to works of art, when we feel an almost religious experience, or an epiphany when life and art appear to fuse together. This is a more traditional aesthetic experience and is not as overtly anti-subjectivity as Terry Eagleton's non-rational aesthetic experience, but it can still be attributed to any and all objects equally if we take the understanding that occurs as being non-rational<sup>22</sup>. Whilst Gumbrecht is aware of the anti-modern connotations of this type of experience, or theorisation, he proceeds nonetheless, and utilises these moments of experience to relate them to moments of presence<sup>23</sup>. Gumbrecht sees these everyday aesthetic experiences as moments of 'crisis' or interruptions in the flow of everyday life. However, despite him being aware of it, Gumbrecht is close to discussing the broken-tool of Heidegger which becomes so central to Harman's object-oriented ontology, Morton's aesthetic causality and Shaviro's allure and thus the central philosophical thread of this work. It is only in moments of this timbre that we become aware of objects 'as-something', or that their being 'as-something' is highlighted outside of a traditional rational position. Whilst Gumbrecht

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<sup>22</sup> The aesthetic experience described by Terry Eagleton is "in no way cognitive, but it has about it something of the form and structure of the rational" Eagleton, T. (1990). *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge, Basil Blackwell. p.75. Eagleton goes on to say that aesthetic understanding in relation to art offers "an alternative to thought" Ibid. p.347. Since aesthetic understanding is neither cognitive, nor is it a thought, it can, and must be seen to be attributed to the way all things "feel" when they interact orprehend.

<sup>23</sup> A moment of presence can be considered as a moment of being a broken-tool, when a thing is a thing-in-itself, and not a tool that exists only in its sets of relations to other things.

sees these moments as switches in situational frames, or discursive alterations, these moments of aesthetic experience, or epiphany can be used to discuss the more object-orientated leanings of certain philosophers who feel that objects and perceptive animals exist and experience things in similar ways. Whilst a tree may not have an aesthetic experience akin to a traditional human one, it can certainly be the root of one (excuse the pun), and it can also be seen in a different light as the result of one: but it also experiences other objects in a way that is aesthetic in that it is 'moved' by the experience in a way that is outside of all rationality, but which nonetheless, means something and causes affect. It is this seeing in a different light that emerges as important from this article. If trees can be experienced in a different way in everyday life, so too can all other objects: it is then a simple ontological step to see all objects as encountering other objects in different lights - the tree may experience the bird on its branch in a certain way in a hail-storm and in another way in sunshine, or in relation to it building a nest or pecking a hole in its bark. Whilst this may not be a jarring epiphany for the tree, the concept does emerge from Gumbrecht's writings and is useful in the sense that it is directly related to art and can then also very easily be related to one of the major elements of this project, cinema. The relation to cinema is especially pertinent since Gumbrecht relates these moments of epiphany to modernity and post-modernity as a return to a more material mode of understanding, one that oscillates between meaning and presence, but relies on presence for the epiphany to affect us. It is here that Gumbrecht's writing will relate to the unfolding of the cinematic event of *Avatar* which requires the audience, the text, the narrative, the technology and the actors to all emerge in the same moment as an aesthetic event, or epiphany.

Gumbrecht's 'Epiphany of Form: On the Beauty of Team Sports' (Gumbrecht 1999) predates *Production of Presence* by 5 years, however, it lays out his writing on epiphany and event in an extremely clear and detailed way. These notions are taken up in more historical and philosophical detail in *Production of Presence* but what makes this article so important in relation to the current area of research is that it is entirely related to sporting events. Whilst there will be a focus on certain cultural phenomena, namely film and protest in this piece, sport relates to these events in that they all offer up a new, or object-based mode of understanding that can only be experienced as the event emerges, or as the entities involved interact. Gumbrecht focuses on the notion of form: an entity or

object (any existing thing) must take on a form (be it a car, an idea, a golf ball or a sun) in order for it to exist. Form becomes important in the sense that it makes things perceivable (prehensible) to one another. What makes sport so important in this respect is the purity of form that emerges through certain passages of play. Gumbrecht sees these passages of play as form alone; a thing that emerges and undoes itself in the same instant and as such, must be experienced or lived in order for it to share or be shared as an event of presence based understanding. Whilst Gumbrecht does take up on this concept in *Production of Presence*, 'Epiphany of Form: On the Beauty of Team Sports' takes a clear and everyday example of an epiphanic event (sport) and relates it to dense philosophical and ontological ideas on the notion of being and understanding. This relation to sport allows a concrete example of an emerging understanding that is not necessarily anthropocentric to emerge (despite Gumbrecht never reaching this point) that can be transplanted onto other emerging events, allowing a broader and varied understanding of the notion of being to take root. This notion will be related to the event of cinema, particularly the much debated digital cinema exemplified by *Avatar* and which is also discussed as a fear at the loss of subjectivity in the content of *eXistenZ*. On top of this, the presence-based silent protest of Occupy can be seen to take on its true meaning through this lens of emerging event and epiphanic presence that must be experienced as it is happening for its true meaning to unfold.

Whilst Gumbrecht allows for object interaction and aesthetic affect, he does so by allowing the human to remain as central to this equation. Moving the focus back onto objects, Timothy Barker, in 'Objects and Interaction' (Barker 2011) utilises and builds upon the object-oriented philosophy of Shaviro and Harman, who take up from Whitehead and Heidegger, with a particular emphasis on how objects interact. Objects in this case are to be taken as any entity that exists and it should be noted that in this type of philosophy, entities that exist, or that are to be considered as existing are as diffuse as trees, fictional characters, dust, distant planets, global warming, ideas or networks of interactions. Barker's article is of interest as at the outset the importance of setting all objects or entities on the same ontological level is emphasised, thus espousing an object-oriented approach that does not privilege human perception or understanding as primary to existence. Importantly, and with especial relevance to this topic, the article focuses on the interaction of human and digital objects and how these interactions themselves

become objects in the sense that Bruno Latour attributes to an actor network in which all objects that exist interact and affect one another on a level playing field where no entity (typically the human being) is taken as a privileged being. However, Latour focuses too intently on the network and thus reduces all being to relations and not to being as things-in-themselves - DeLanda will come in here as the measure of interaction and material as combining to make an object. The article itself discusses a number of digital art installations and how the interaction between space, technology and human unfolds or withdraws to use Harman's terminology: this withdrawal, as we have seen, relates to how an object is never fully experienced in an encounter in all of its being. This element has a bearing on the discussion of film in this project, especially relating to *Avatar* since all of the elements relating to *Avatar* must act and interact on the same level of being without the need for a master subject as the measure of being. Another extremely interesting and relevant idea to come from this article is the notion of a being that 'inexists': objects interact within the larger paradigm of a network of other objects and in this sense they are seen to withdraw or to inexist in the sense that they exist as an element of a wider object: this existence is both as a thing-in-itself and a thing as part of a larger thing (again relating to the assemblage theory and flat-ontology theorised by DeLanda). This idea is paramount in relation to the Occupy movement element of the current project: in a capitalist system, the worker loses their being as a subject and inexists in the system of capital, subsumed as an element of a wider mechanism, reduced to the surface profile of a tool that has only a single use value to the system which utilises it as such. The Occupy activists were trying to protest this subsumption as the over-all object of capitalism privileges profit, privatisation and production above the actual tool-worker and thus the system exists as an unfair and destructive network of power relations.

#### **d. Film, Digital Objects, Aesthetics**

Focusing more now on cinema will allow for a direct relation between cinematic events and experience and the philosophical direction of this research. An interesting entry point into this discussion, and a relevant and important way into this, is via 'What Is Heideggerian Cinema? Film, Philosophy, and Cultural Mobility' (Woessner 2011) by Martin Woessner which discusses the films of Terrence Malik in relation to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. However, before the article launches into this

discussion, it makes clear the relevance cinema has in relation to philosophy in general, pointing out that cinema can be philosophy in praxis as opposed to just being an exposition of certain philosophical concepts in theory. In this sense, as his article makes clear, concepts and disciplines transgress borders and genres and this in itself highlights a relation that creates a new form of understanding, or a new perception of being, and which also in a sense, makes the collapse between the humanities/cultural studies and philosophy more understandable. This relates to, and helps to explain why and how I have felt able to utilise philosophical thought in relation to the humanities and cultural studies. The article sets up an interesting discussion about Malik, who was an accomplished Heideggerian graduate, and how this transfers into his films. The main issue for my research is that of the Heideggerian positing of man as the producer of meaning, accessed only as *Dasein*. This conception of Heidegger has been refuted recently by the speculative realists and object oriented ontologists who see meaning, and being, as existing between all objects - not just between man and world. However, what is interesting is that Malik and the article both discuss film in relation to Heideggerian concepts. Malik relates film to philosophy in that both disciplines draw attention to the limits of the world - in film, the world is framed, in philosophy, the world has a horizon. This is the most relevant point in relation to my own research. If film is the world framed, then it is a fully made up world in which humans are not at the centre and thus do not need to perceive or create the world. This leads to a lack of anxiety - to a placid and fulfilled experience of consuming a pre-made ontology - the world is out there and we can view it without the need to create it. This anxiety returns however with the notion of 'cyberphobia' (a fear of the digital or virtual) in and of films from more recent times. If a movie is an already constructed world, we can relent anxiety: if the film spills out on to us (and *vice versa* - like in the text of *eXistenZ* or the event of *Avatar*) then the anxiety returns. However, the anxiety is not that of having to create the world, but that of being placed on an equal footing with the objects of the world. Film no longer presents the world for us to view; it is part of the world - another space for us to be a part of and *vice versa*. The main issue with the article is that it is an anthropocentric, and thus temporal, view of being. Being itself must be taken as primary, since all temporal being is still the same if taken out of a temporal context and viewed as a snapshot. By relenting the human as the centre of being upon which all things depend, an anxiety emerges, but so too does a non-hierarchical and flat ontology that relates to the current discussion of film

and of Occupy (see the discussion on anxiety in Chapter Three, under the sub-heading “The Anxious Audience”).

Furthering the discussion on film and the relation between the philosophy utilised in this piece of research and the event of cinema is an interesting article by Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Between Erlebnis and Erfahrung: Cinema Experience with Benjamin’ (Elsaesser 2009), which discusses the ‘turn’ towards affect and experience in the cinematic event, moving away from traditional modes of textual understanding, rooted primarily in psychoanalysis. Affect and emotion focus more on the actual experience of the spectator and the text as they interact with each other and create emotional and physical responses. Elsaesser utilises concepts discussed by Walter Benjamin which expand on the moments of experience and the texture of experience. This moves away from the gendered, patriarchal, subject/object paradigms of psychoanalysis towards a more inclusive mode of experience that sees all elements of an affective textual event as being on a similar level of emergence. There is a discussion of the loss of experience in modernity in the article that relates directly to other articles and texts that are being considered in this thesis: particularly, the loss of all subjectivity in the hierarchical system of capital where workers are subsumed as anonymous elements in an overarching object of capital production. Whilst I focus on an object-oriented philosophy which does espouse a collapse between subject/object or between objects, I do so in such a way that allows for an equality of objects as elements in wider objects and not one that takes advantage of objects perceived as lesser beings. The loss of experience discussed here operates on the level of hierarchical experience of being, where certain objects are seen to be of less value to the overall object than others - this is reflected directly in the aims of the Occupy movement and their ‘turn’ to a mode of understanding that is based primarily in presence, or in the moments and textures of events and objects. The idea of the limit of (bodily) experience comes to the fore in this article, relating ‘bodily’ texts (horror, pornography and in my own examples, 3D) to the limit of event experiences, where the body and the text interact in such a way that it creates a limit, or in Deleuzian terms, a ‘becoming’ where text, event and spectator become a new object: a becoming-*assemblage-of-affective-aesthetic-interactions*. However, *becomings-* are not to be seen as a new sort of being, since what a *becoming-* tends to overlook is that the objects

interacting are already things-in-themselves that are not just granted a new object-being because they have entered into a new set of relations.

Discussing cinema in this way allows for a discussion on convergence culture and how entities and technologies converge with one another to create affective assemblages. In lieu of this David Bolter (Bolter 2005) offers up a relevant discussion, and history, of how cinema has been and will be 'threatened' by new digital forms such as digital film and computer games. His article touches on an important element of this threat that came to a head in the late 1990s: this threat, or fear, became known as 'cyberphobia'. Cyberphobia represents a fear of the digital-, or of the virtual-, realities that were rapidly becoming a new form of mediation. The late 90s produced a number of classic Hollywood films that represented this threat: some of these films utilised this very threat in the form of special effects that were created, not in the lived, 'real' world, but in and on digital computer technologies. The main thrust of this piece discusses these new forms of mediation, especially computer games and how they attempt to 'remediate' film: remediation is both the paying of homage and the presence of threat to another form of media from which there is a departure: this relates to territorialisation and deterritorialisation in assemblage theory which has been discussed and also to the notion of the abject which is discussed in relation to the only text from the period under discussion by Bolter, *eXistenZ*. Digital media utilises elements of classical Hollywood, including the linear narrative structure, however, it still appears as a threat to the indexical nature of film, or else it appropriates this indexicality and hybridises it with digital imagery. However threatening this new media may appear, according to Bolter, Hollywood still triumphs in the sense that its linearity and indexicality remain as primary signifiers or primary vehicles for linear narrative structures. Bolter has a valid point in this regard, however, since the article was published in 2005, it has dated quite rapidly. Bolter sees film as ontologically privileged over other media forms in that it is supposedly closer to a version of reality than that of other media forms, although perhaps not over television, but television offers up a similar ontology to film. For my purposes, digital and film mediations (including television) must now be seen as occupying a flattened out ontological space, and this space must include every object that is represented and also presented (outside the mediated texts). Despite this difference in views, perhaps stemming from a distance in time, this article is still relevant in that it

does address the anxiety of flattening out ontology, despite not addressing it in these terms, that occurs in the re-presenting of the world through various media forms. Pushing this further would have perhaps led Bolter to the position now being researched in this piece. It is for this reason that his article is a primary example of the anxiety that occurs in relation to the discussion of ontology, and in particular, object-oriented ontology.

For a more in-depth look at exactly what convergence culture is and how it is seen to operate *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (Jenkins 2006) is a prime resource. This book focuses on the convergence of media, and how this process allows a more interactive version of 'old media' to take root. Convergence does not mean that all types of media will be rooted in a single 'black-box'; it is more of a combination of various platforms being used for more than one form of communication, or media consumption, and the more interactive use of the media. Convergence media allows for both a top-down and a bottom-up production and creation of media content: large corporations still own the majority of media distribution networks, however, grassroots media production is also extremely accessible to individuals or groups now with platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. What convergence media highlights is the open-ended nature of narrative, news, communication, self-creation and selection processes that now replace the old notion of media consumers. This relates to a number of issues in articles I have utilised and discussed and which are about to be addressed, ranging from posthumanism, to site specific political being, to architectural space and affect. It is most clearly related to the notion of posthumanism and the anxiety surrounding digital media and the inability to define the subject, be it a digital text or a human. The human subject now occurs across a number of different media in the same way a film can occur across a computer, a video game, a fan-zine or a spin off. In a sense, this allows for the creation of a flat-ontology of being in which there is no central or hierarchical point of being by which all others are measured, or from which all others issue. The Occupy movement utilised the convergence of media to great effect, existing across a number of sites, platforms and spaces simultaneously; disallowing the closure and removal of their physical protests to put an end to the movement. The notion of convergence also relates to the films being researched as each text relates to, in form or content, or both, the convergence of various types of media and how these affect the form, content and audience that consume and help to create them as they emerge as events.

Whilst most of the above texts focus on visual and physical interactions, it is useful to take a brief look at how sound can cause affects and affective responses as another object of interaction in order to cover all aspects of film. In order to do so, McQuire's 'Impact Aesthetics: Back to the Future in Digital Cinema' (McQuire 2000), is a perfect place to begin as it both highlights the cyberphobia innate in the form and content of certain movies relating to the rise and use of digital technology, and there is a cogent discussion of sound, and of how sound was digitised many years before the image. The argument revolves around the question of why audiences, whose actual affective consumption of cinema changed drastically with the digitisation of sound, did not question this change, but waited for the digital image before decrying the end of film as an indexical entity. McQuire terms the change in how digital sound and also digital imagery works on the audience 'impact aesthetics'. This is firmly rooted in the affect these aesthetic effects have on the audience and in this case, it relates to the work of Gumbrecht and Shaviro. In relation to the digital imagery element of his article, the claim is that the spectacle produced on screen (or aurally) overshadows the content on screen. In this sense, the image is a purely affective 'time-image' to borrow Deleuze's term. They are spectacles that are not rooted in narrative and are there purely as images that affect the viewer in certain ways - perhaps disorienting the viewer, creating anxiety, showing pure duration as opposed to cause and effect or so on. While early cinema worked in this fashion, it could only do so as the viewer had not learned how to consume the images produced by a new medium. The notion of digital spectacle, created through CGI (computer generated imagery) and more recently motion capture technology, comes to the fore of arguments relating to the ontological validity of these very images and their ability to create affective responses. Whilst affective responses are certainly not a new element of theatre or cinema, the affective responses created in the event of *Avatar* are. Affective response theory has its roots in Aristotle. In his short book *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses tragedy as follows: "A tragedy [...] is the imitation of an action [...] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" (Barnes 1984, p.2320). Catharsis can mean to purge, to purify or to clarify and what is true in each case is that, despite "catharsis" in relation to its use in *Poetics* being a vastly debated term, it causes an affective response in the viewer, audience or consumer. As such, it highlights how one object, drama, can affect another object, the

spectator, in a way that is both outside of human rationality and outside of traditional correlations of subject/object positions. In other words, the affect produced somehow changes the viewer: it deforms the viewer-as-object in some way. We can experience pity or fear in a representational form, perhaps allowing us to cope with it when it occurs in our lives, or again, perhaps it allows us to purge these emotions from ourselves, thus not having to deal with them in our own lives. Either way, we, as the spectator of these imitations or representations, are moved to feel something. Aristotle points out that imitation is “natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world and learns at first by imitation” (Barnes 1984, p.2318). Whilst Aristotle’s theories of tragedy and drama allow for affective responses in the viewer, these responses relate learning and coping, purification and purgation, to an imitation or representation of emotion. What has happened with *Avatar* is that the viewer can enter the world of the text itself, in all its haptic and immersive materiality, and can experience affective responses directly related to this immersion, and not merely a response relating to how the viewer should or could act in this situation, or if they were to encounter it in their lived lives. It is the aim of this project to argue that these haptic and immersive affective emotions and responses are as real, or can lay claim to as much being, as the indexical imagery of classical Hollywood imagery, or theatrical drama, or any other object for that matter. The anxiety about these images, or the loss of the indexical, is rooted in the primacy of the visual, or of the visuality of narrative, as shown in the failure by audiences to react in a similar way to the digitisation of sound. McQuire’s article is interesting in a number of ways and despite coming from the early 2000s is a solid base from which to move. Dealing with the affective nature of the visual and the aural relates to the lived experience, or the affective relations between text (as form and content) and audience and how this creates a new form of non-hierarchical being.

#### **e. Spatial Zones and Posthumanism**

Moving on to a discussion about space and spatial configurations will allow me to discuss Occupy in relation to a flat-ontology which relates directly to a reconfiguration of the notion of being, and this too will allow for a discussion of the spaces opened up by certain technologies and certain films. This allows space, technology, narrative, spectator

and event to exist equally and to affect and be affected in an assemblage of co-existence. 'The Politics of Autonomous Space' (Woodward 2012) offers up an interesting and relevant discussion on the concept of a 'flat ontology' (DeLanda) and relates it to the formation of space, or of a site, in which the flat-ontological space itself becomes a political zone, or a political objectivity that is not reliant on the typical political constructions of hierarchical spatialities. This means that the typical signifiers of political being, or the usual signifiers of subjectivity, class, race, gender or sexuality are not the creators of a political space, or vice versa, but that the materiality of the site itself can create a new mode of being that is all inclusive and non-hierarchical (the expressions coming from this space may be a different story and may create hierarchies of power relations, but not hierarchies in the nature of being). At a base level, what this aims at is a theory of being and political being that does not place the human subject at the centre of reality. In this way, other, more objective factors can have a bearing on life and on being and on how space, or sites, and humans interact and co-create the factors that emerge. This type of being allows for unplanned and chaotic relations to emerge, especially from the excess of subjectivity, or the parts of being that are ignored by the discursive (political) production of subjects and objects and the affectivity of these modulations or materialisations. This type of theory takes the molecular, biological and material into account in the production of meaning or being and allows all of these to affect each other in ways that are not primarily rooted in human perception/correlation or in the perception of subjects narrowly created by the confines of traditional politics. Political sites are therefore open to 'reorganizations' and 'disorganizations' (territorialisations and deterritorialisations) since they are non-hierarchical and every element in a site or situation can affect any other, not just from the top down. This does not mean that the human subject disappears, it just means that it must interact fully and fluidly with all of the factors affecting a site or a situation and allow for newness to emerge and for unplanned and unknown processes to unfold that are beyond their control and perhaps even their perception - this is the withdrawn potential of all objects. This has obvious links to the Occupy movement and can be read as a direct correlation to the movement which incorporates all walks of life and also various spaces: what happens when this occurs is a materiality of flattened-ontological being that is outside, beyond, or the remainder of discursively produced political subjectivities.

More discussion and research into spaces and spatial configuration comes from another article, 'Wearable Space' (Hansen 2002) which focuses on affective spaces and how these affective spaces can be digitally mapped and created. By mapping, or by modelling architectural space on affective space, how certain spatial dimensions, interactions and usages of spaces can create new modes of experience emerges between buildings and people. Digital architecture can create new spaces that would have remained un-experienced, or un-thought, in the era of hand drawn architectural planning. This shows how the digital can be considered as being as ontologically valid as any other object and how a digital mode of being can affect and distort the lives of non-digital entities. In his article, Hansen argues that architecture has replaced cinema as the quintessential art of framing for our time. Whilst this is an extremely interesting and valid argument, the task at hand is to argue that entities like 3D cinema and motion capture imaging, especially in films like *Avatar*, could be seen as creating a cinematic architecture that can be lived in, for however brief a moment, and that can cause physical affects to be produced in the same way that digital architecture can produce affective space. Throughout his article there is an argument made for the presence of architectural structure: this is not the actual situated building, but the meaning of the building as a sign and a signifier of itself, contained in itself and not reliant upon an external human mind for its meaning to be significant. A wall is innately a structural wall, but is it also, at the same time a sign of a wall. Unlike linguistic signs which are always already absent and only referential, the wall is present in its sign and in its signification. In this way, meaning is rooted in the presence of the thing and not in its absence in thought or language, and also, through this architectural analogy, the presence based mode of meaning espoused by Occupy and by certain filmic texts can be understood and seen to occur in another cultural text. This very comparison allows for a flat ontology of being or meaning to be looked at and traced in any number of cultural events and artefacts. Whilst film texts may be seen to merely re-present things, these representations themselves, the unfolding of the text, or the event of *Avatar*, must be seen as existing as equally as a piece of architecture. This has most relevance in relation to the digitally haptic space opened up by *Avatar* through the application of 3D glasses and motion capture technology.

There is, in all of the aspects under discussion in this project, a great scope for further discussion on posthumanism, as this is an undercurrent in all of the other elements so far addressed: the likes of flat-ontology, object-oriented ontology, assemblage theory, the abject, nature, affective cinema, technological development and affective spatialities. 'Makeover: Writing the Body into the Posthuman Technoscape: Part One: Embracing the Posthuman' (Lenoir 2002) is the introduction to a volume relating to the concept of posthumanism. As such, it offers a general overview of the concept and also offers succinct explanations of the key ideas, philosophies and writers in the area. Whilst the present overall project may not be firmly rooted in concepts of the posthuman, the notion of posthumanism does offer up excellent ground for the discussions raised by object-oriented philosophies and adds to the discussion of applying technology to the body in the form of 3D glasses whilst experiencing the event of *Avatar*. The main area of interest for me arising out of this article is the question of what it is to be a (post)human being: where does human and technology start or end and can the two be separated in a highly technologised world? The reason this is interesting is that it allows objects, or technology, to move from a secondary state as object or material, to an equal ontological state of being with humans. Or, posthumanism can be seen to de-centre the anthropocentric perspectives of humans and allow objects/technology a more central position, not only in the construction of subjectivities, but in the creation of being itself and in areas of causality, assemblage and abjection. Whilst posthuman theories allow for 'cognitive' or intelligent machines and computers, it says nothing of their ability to perceive (on whatever level) other objects. This article also addresses the common distinction between theorists who see the body as a discursive and historical construct, and those who see the body as a material object that as a singular and sensory being cannot be understood in the usual linguistic or discursive configurations. The reason the posthuman is important to my own area of research is that it can relate to areas such as the 3D extension of film in *Avatar* and also the digital presence of the Occupy movement which now primarily exists as a digital entity as opposed to their original spatial presence in occupied space. The article raises the question of embodiment as integral to intelligence - the actual chemical and biological interactions of the brain and cognition - and this is related to the possibility of computers as being autonomously intelligent whilst being artificially embodied. This relates to the notion of being in the story

conveyed in *Avatar* and what it means to be embodied, whilst the event of the film also highlights this by making the text and the spectator become one and the same event.

'Deconstructing Affect: Posthumanism and Mark Hansen's Media Theory' (Cecchetto 2011) is another article of great importance in that it raises the question of posthumanism which is related to and importantly linked with my overall topic - the relation here is more toward the side of *Avatar* and the question of technology and its affective nature in an assemblage of cinematic event, but it does relate to objects and object-oriented questions of being. If the human is no longer just a human and is partially (technological) object, then surely this opens up space for objects to be afforded the same 'dignity' as humans and allows objects a being that is on an equal footing (and an equal ethical footing). In one of the opening lines of the article, Cecchetto discusses the limitations of the human body when the technology we rely upon (the internet in this case) is not available to us for use. This lack in technology which the body has to to rely upon "forces [Cecchetto] back into the confines of a body that [he can] no longer identify as being the sum total of [himself]" (Cecchetto 2011, p.4). The discussion follows instantly about how we can seamlessly navigate between the realms of being human and the realm of technology<sup>24</sup>: here we can see how human and objects (that benefit humans) are afforded the same ontological standing, and how the unity of human/technology creates a new object (or tool) that must be taken into account. The other main thrust of the current article is a discussion of Mark Hansen's writings about technology and theory. Hansen points to two modes of understanding: theorists who understand objects on a purely discursive level and technologists who come from an object-oriented frame of reference but who also ignore the cultural and mediated discourses around these objects. Hansen highlights how theorists who focus on the linguistic or discursive side of understanding (technology in this case) ignore the affective, or material, role of objects as they impact upon other objects at the level of material being. The point of this article is that Cecchetto claims that despite arguing this, and despite having a strong and valid point, Hansen cannot escape the mediating force of discourse in relation to understanding, even understanding the affects of objects upon other objects. Hansen remains firm on this point however, claiming, in relation to the 'skulls' installation that renders 2-dimensional

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<sup>24</sup> This can be seen to relate directly to the recent film *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) in which a man falls in love with a piece of apparently cognitive technology that appears as an autonomously emotional female.

images into 3-dimensional entities, that "we can appreciate the radicality of a particular technology's inaccessibility - without reducing it to language" as the installation is so far outside theoretical discursive practices that it must be lived, or experienced in its being, to be understood (Cecchetto 2011, p.15). Hansen comes close to Gumbrecht's epiphany in this instance. Here Hansen argues for a reality created through "motor activity" and not just language and in this sense, this can pave the way for a more object centred mode of experience and existence that is at the core of the current research.

N. Katherine Hayles' 'Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments' (Hayles 2002) relates posthumanism to certain virtual reality art installations in the early years of the new millennium. The notion of embodiment, how we are *in* our bodies, is discussed in relation to new technologies, in computing, information, communication, medicine and prosthesis, and how these interact inside and outside with the body. In other words, the body can no longer be perceived or constructed as an organic and closed off unit. The body is now a combination of environment, technology, internal and external that acts as much on its external factors as the external factors act upon it<sup>25</sup>. The body, or embodiment, is a relational process that includes all the other objects that exist in the sets of relations and encounters with it as a thing-in-itself. Another interesting element is the fact that this article, regarding the relations of objects, discusses the material side of the mind. The mind is the network of synaptic nerves that create and utilise new connections in the material of the brain in order for the brain to function. This not only highlights the being of matter in relation to mind, but also how matter itself creates a reality that is not created in the mind of human perception, but is the actual creation of the mind itself, or in the matter of the mind. The extended mind is anything from language, to writing, to mapping and computing. All of these extend the scope of the mind allowing the mind to exist in matter that is external to the human, but which aides the human in relation to perception or memory: note also the digitalisation of archives and the material within which they now reside. The reason this is so relevant is that it allows for a being to emerge that is not solely rooted in human thought, or in the correlation of human and world. As such, this is another way to talk about a flat-ontology in that all of the elements must be seen to equally exist in a non-hierarchical relationship.

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<sup>25</sup> This relates to the discussion of the abject in Chapter One and which appears as a strong theme running through the entire piece of research

Virtual reality opens up new spaces in which perception can be actualised and also in which the environment creates the type of perception that is experienced. In other words, the virtual (but not actual - like the mind which can imagine things but only in and on a matter that allows this to emerge) become as ontologically valid as the external 'real' world. All objects become an extension of reality, not just an extension of the mind, and these objects include virtual realities, thoughts, digital spaces, computer algorithms and other such objects. A flat ontology of being that exists in perception, digitalisation, matter, mind, materialisation and relations.

'The Implicit Body as Performance: Analyzing Interactive Art' (Stern 2011) takes up on the work of both N. Katherine Hayles and Mark Hansen and actually discusses the same interactive art installation covered in their respective articles. However, this article is far more contemporary and also comes from a more presence-based or object-oriented position. The article discusses artworks that are interactive and also relate to virtual reality. The point of the piece is to show how meaning is rooted in interaction, relation, presence and embodiment as opposed to being solely situated in linguistic, semantic, discursive or abstract meaning that emanates from human rationality and relations alone. Stern wants to show how meaning can be based in the thing-itself as opposed to the perception of the thing - in one artwork, participants use markers and pens to mark their experience or to show their trace - this is not done in order for these to be read, but in order for the participants to relate to and co-create the art that is in process. In this way, Stern argues for an art that is an equal event of consumer and producer, the emerging and processual nature of the piece as its being (note the similarities to convergence culture and the ability for media consumers to be simultaneously media producers). This allows meaning and being to reside in the relations formed (again, much like the convergence-media argument that is produced and created from the top and the bottom and which has its meaning in its network of relations and events); it also allows for art and interaction to become a philosophy in itself as opposed to an example of philosophy, much like how Woessner above describes the cinema of Terrence Malick. The only issue with this article is that it relies too heavily on the nature of relation: Stern claims that relation is the essence of being - but this disallows any entity to exist outside of relations as a thing-in-itself and thus disallows things to emerge as they are and only allows them to emerge in relation to other things. This allows ontological hierarchies to emerge and runs the risk of

becoming anthropocentric. Overall, the article is extremely useful to this piece of research and its focus on relation, event, embodiment and convergence allows me to relate it to and expand the discussion of film texts and Occupy, both of which rely on interaction and presence to allow their meaning to emerge.

The notion of embodiment and enactment comes under discussion in terms of a flattened ontology of being in 'Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete' (Wegenstein 2002) which focuses on going beyond Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body Without Organs' to a configuration of the body and all other objects that interact/interpenetrate with it as an Organ Instead of a Body. By doing this, any bodily hierarchy, especially that afforded to the face, and to skin, is collapsed. This means that the body becomes a flattened out 'sur-face', or screen, upon which any amount of external and internal interfaces can be inscribed/transcribed. Wegenstein discusses certain artists that play with this notion and how they make wearable versions of their actual bodies so that others can literally wear them. There is also a discussion of how architects are collapsing the notions of interiority/exteriority and making spaces that are affective and wearable, as discussed in the above article by Hansen. Movies from the late 1990s and early 2000s are also discussed, including one that appears as a main text in the current project, namely *eXistenZ*. The point of interest with this text is that it allows an interface between technology and the body that in turn allows access to a virtual world. Importantly, the article looks at how psychoanalytic theorists such as Freud, but especially Lacan, theorise the body and the subject as already open/closed, interior/exterior dualities that operate as flattened out surfaces upon which external forces and internal agencies interact to create the subject (Lacan's mirror-stage). This become extremely interesting for my area of research in a number of ways: it opens up the subject to a flat ontology of being and subject formation, it discusses the notion of posthumanism as the mode of subject/object relations that is non-hierarchical and processual or productive, it allows for the digital and the physical to coexist in texts, bodies, architecture and so on and it relates to all of the film texts I plan to discuss (*eXistenZ*, *Die Hard 4.0*, *Avatar* and *Breaking Bad*), all of which relate to the notion of collapsing the boundary/skin between the human and the non-human/object.

In 'Being in the Present: Derrida and Irigaray on the Metaphysics of Presence', Söderbäck (Söderbäck 2013) formulates an argument about temporal presence (being in time) as gendered. Whilst the issue of gendering may not have an obvious impact on the present piece, the discussion of presence through the lens of Derrida and Irigaray does. The article sets up the metaphysical issue of identity as being present over time: the claim is that this is impossible in the conception of metaphysical time, since the present is always absent (withdrawn in to the past or projecting into the future). What Irigaray attempts to show is that through the ages, woman have always been discursively and philosophically maintained as the absent gender in a binary of presence (masculinity) and absence (femininity). It is in this sense that Irigaray posits an entry into presence, or existence in the metaphysical present, as a purely female mode of being. If, primarily, being female means being absent, then being absent means existing in the absence inscribed by male subjectivity. As stated above, whilst this gendered argument may not have an immediate impact upon the present project, the formula of being in absence can be applied to any subaltern subjectivity that is seen as other from the dominant masculine white 'norm': in this case, the protesters of Occupy can be seen as existing in absence, or in the absent present of time, and as such, their silence and absence becomes a mode of resistance and a threat to the hegemonic operation of presence (past and future oriented) maintained by heteronormative capitalism. This formula can also be applied to any subject/object binary that privileges one side of the equation: cinematic viewing sets up a classic subject/object dichotomy. This, however, can be collapsed with the above formulation of time and can allow both the viewer and the text to exist on a level footing, espousing a turn to an object-oriented philosophy and a move away from anthropocentric understandings of being and time. At first glance, this article may have appeared as only mildly interesting and relative to the present undertaking, but on closer inspection, it sets up a formula that is important and accessible and can be applied to any number of instances in order to abstract a non-hierarchical set of relations and a more object based mode of existence. It is this type of resistance to imposed modes of being that is the core of Occupy and which can be seen to run through all of their operations.

Finally, for the best possible discussion on the Occupy movement one must look directly to the source and it is for that reason that *Occupy: Scenes from Occupied America* (2011) is an integral source information and one which relates to a large part of

the current project. At a basic level, the book is a compilation of first hand experiences of actually setting up, organising and partaking in the occupation of public spaces in America and in other international areas as part of the Occupy movement. The book documents the issues relating to the actual running and functioning of the Occupy movement from its inception in Zuccotti Park, New York. It also documents the issues the protesters encountered from political, media and police enforcement agencies. For the purposes of this piece of research, this book is an actual record of how a meaning rooted in objects and things-in-themselves came about and what it meant and how it made meaning. It documents the reactions to this new type of “silent” protest and how agencies were unable to react to the silent presence of the movement other than through violent and restrictive measures. Whilst this book is solely related to the Occupy movement, the processes of making meaning reside in objects can be, and will be, related to the other cultural phenomena being researched, namely film (and especially digital film). There is also a vast amount of critique aimed at the operation and at the seamlessness of the system of capitalism, or at capitalist realism, and this is extremely important in relation to the discussion of object oriented ontology: in a flattened out ontological mode of being, all entities are equal (an impossible feat, and an almost impossible mode of thought, within the capitalist system which has its foundation in inequality, greed and hierarchical wealth distribution). This element of Occupy will relate to the discussion of *Breaking Bad* as an accessible form of capitalist critique that also allows an object oriented ontology to be part of its form. The only issue with this book is that a number of the first hand accounts, accounts written by actual ‘occupiers’, appear as heavily class-ified, privileged and ‘safe’ accounts of the occupation. The notion of protest as a privileged pastime has to be touched upon, as ignoring this would be a major oversight and would negate the possibility of a flat ontology, or a non-hierarchical mode of living. Despite this, the book does also offer views from philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who attended meetings in Zuccotti park, gave public lectures and also warned the movement "not to fall in love with itself".

Whilst the above is not a complete list of texts, or sources, utilised within the body of this text and the thought processes involved, it does set a guide as to what will be discussed and how this will be addressed through frameworks and discursive practices. The texts discussed above are all relevant, have been weighed for their merits and their

shortcomings, and have been integral in building a foundation for this project. The texts are discussed in the horizon of philosophy and cultural studies which are being used as two equally relevant frameworks that work from and compliment one another in relation to issues surrounding post-humanism, aesthetics, being, power struggles, film and cultural artefacts. The two disciplines compliment one another since neither one can fully address the impact or the issues involved in relation to questions about ontology and the reception of these issues by the things they affect (namely rational human subjects which are to be seen as objects amongst other objects).

# Chapter 1: eXistenZ and Nascent Virtuality

The aim of this first chapter is to locate the opening part of the argument in relation to the project timescale, from 1999 to 2013. *eXistenZ* is to be seen as the starting point for the emerging affective mode of being that is rooted in objects and an entry into the modes of thought that sees objects as open and affective entities that can lay claim to a type of being akin to that of the human subject, but which has none of the associated privileged rationality. This is the foundation of an argument that is going to look at a non-hierarchical mode of being in which all things equally exist and which can be seen to emerge in the way the Occupy movement operate: what they do, how they do it, what they are aiming at as a result of occupations, how they see all objects, including the planet, people, the climate and digital modes of being, as existing in a non-hierarchical field of being. This chapter and the discussion that ensues can be seen as the first third of an emerging trend in affective, object-oriented being and will begin to show how the argument will lead on through *Die Hard 4.0* in the early 2000s, on to *Breaking Bad* and *Avatar* in more recent years<sup>26</sup>. The timeline of the overall project stretches from the turn of the last century, 1999 to be precise, with the release of *eXistenZ*, up to 2013 with *Breaking Bad*. This time frame allows us to look at a fearful celebration of technology at the turn of the Millennium, through to a reliance on technology, which was so heavily seen as beneficial to human life that it in a way surpassed the value of human life and became the sublime realm of being in *Die Hard 4.0*. As such, the technology that was praised and lauded became the focus of terror attacks in the post 9/11 world. The discussion of how a balance in equilibrium between human life and object (technological) life was struck will arise in relation to *Avatar* and ultimately the Occupy movement.

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<sup>26</sup> It is important to note at this stage that any reference to a mode of being that focuses on object-ontology is one that has, at the very core of its aim, a mode of being that is non-hierarchical and as such disallows any one object (typically the human) to be the measure of existence of other objects. In other words, all objects are to be seen as valid actors which do not only exist because they exist in a correlation to human being(s).

## 1.1 Introducing Simulation and the Relation to Postmodernity

Getting back to the present text, *eXistenZ*, allows for a detailed look at how the human subject began a journey away from the centre of being, to becoming another object amongst other objects that are to be seen as existing on the same ontological level. There is no scope in this argument for a master object to be seen as the measure of being as this disallows any sort of non-hierarchical mode of being to take root. *eXistenZ* becomes the perfect model for an entry into this argument as it exposes the human subject as a porous and fluid entity, not in terms of human subjectivity in psychoanalytic discourses (despite this having a major relevance), but an object amongst other objects that has no choice but to relent its privilege as the measure of being by allowing other objects to enter into its body and to define and redefine what it means to be a human<sup>27</sup>. In this case, what it means to be a human is also, and only, what it means to be an object: a singular entity made up of combinations of other entities that create, destroy, shape and reshape constantly and which can enter into sets of relations with other objects. There is no hierarchy of being amongst objects in this sense and therefore there is no hierarchy of being that places one entity, or one object, at the apex of ontological validity. This argument is an uncomfortable pill for the human subject to swallow as it attempts to undo the traditional privilege associated with human rationality that sees all being in relation to itself. Using Julia Kristeva's writing on the abject highlights the openness of the human subject, and thus all objects, levelling out being from a subject/object dichotomy, to a rhizomatic mode of living that allows for all entities to act and react upon one another regardless of whether it occurs within the confines of a human rationality. In the discussion that follows I will take a detailed look at *eXistenZ* and how it appears to begin to break down the privileged position of the human being, but which in the end falls short since a reliance on human subjectivity, human reason and human singularity, as opposed to a non-hierarchical mode of object interactions, remains intact. Film has always allowed human beings to test the waters of certain fears, traumas, potentialities, technologies, outcomes and so on, and as such, *eXistenZ* begins a journey that culminates almost 15 years later and which evolves into a more object-oriented vision as it unfolds.

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<sup>27</sup> This is where the relation to posthumanism can be seen to emerge in relation to this project: the human is no longer an organic whole, but must now be seen as a combination of objects, both organic and inorganic, and also the sets of relations that emerge from this relationship, like the production of identity on social media platforms, which will be discussed in Chapter Two in "The Matter of the Digital".

Returning for a moment to Lyotard's statement and a number of other postmodern positions from above, such as those discussed by Terry Eagleton, David Harvey and Jean Baudrillard (under the heading Being in Postmodernity), will allow for an in-depth understanding of the starting point of this line that is being traced from 1999 on through to 2013. This will allow for a deeper understanding as to why this line is being traced, taking into account a number of strands of postmodernity that can be seen as attributing to a waning of physicality, or to an emphasis on the metaphysical over the physical in relation to the predominance of the image or representation. Looking for a moment at how a number of other theorists see this aspect of being should elucidate the point. Terry Eagleton succinctly enumerates the postmodern as follows: he sees it as a "depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience" (Eagleton, p.vii). Whilst this piece will also attempt to blur the boundaries between art and everyday experience, or blur the classic divide between (the human) subject and object, it will attempt to do so in order to (re)instate an object oriented ontology as opposed to an ontological depthlessness based in and on human understanding and representation, which is purely constructed by and for humans, and which allows for the continuation of an unequal hierarchy of being. The postmodern, according to David Harvey, has annihilated space through time: this occurs through, and because of, organisational shifts in production, developments in technologies of production, advances in electronic financing and communications, all of which lead to temporal compression resulting in a collapse in spatial actuality (Harvey, p.205). Harvey's discussion of postmodernity and his construction of a period that collapses space and time allows for a reprieve in the lambasting of postmodernity since, one no longer needs, in this zone of "aspatiality", to exist in the spatial dimensions of the world: it is possible to reside (almost fully) in an omnipresence of virtuality or the digital<sup>28</sup>. It is

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<sup>28</sup> However, the Occupy movement, which will be expanded on in detail in the Conclusion Chapter, manages to exist in actual space, but, if and when their physical presence is and was removed, they can actually still survive in the aspatial zones opened up by postmodernity, namely, the internet. This ability exposes the unity of the present and the absent that is so important to the mode of existence emerging in the post-metaphysical moment. It is a strange mode of being that arises out of postmodernity: it is one that allows for a fluidity between the physical and the digital for example, where a person, or movement, can be equally physical object and digital rendition. This does not detract from the importance of the body, nor does it detract from the importance of existing outside of the body. Arguably, it highlights the flattening of ontological values and places physical objects on a par with non-physical ones, or digital ones, in this case.

in this way that non-human actors like the internet, digital images, algorithms and so on all come to create assemblages that involve human actors but which are by no means reliant upon them to create meaning for them: this will be discussed in the forthcoming discussion on *eXistenZ*. An existence based purely in meaning (a traditionally absent realm of signification), that is, in the metaphysical space of non-physical being, can, in this mode of thought, be considered as an equally valid ontological reality. Elements of materiality have been collapsed or disintegrated through technological advances and digitalisation. However, the digital image will be discussed in much more detail at a later stage since it can be seen to be actually presenting a thing itself as opposed to representing an indexical image that actually existed before a camera in a spatial presence located now in the past.

It is crucial to this project to discuss simulacra and simulation since these will come to have a strong bearing on all of the texts under discussion, especially *Avatar*. In the postmodern era, according to Baudrillard, simulation replaces the real: but not only this, simulation becomes the real<sup>29</sup>. The question of worlds arises in relation to this issue. Which world is real and how do I access it? Simulation and simulacra become the world, but they also become limitless and depthless and replace another type of world making it impossible to know which world we are experiencing at any given time. Since the Industrial Revolution and the ability for the mass production of products, “the extinction of the original reference” means that all production is the production of simulacra; not counterfeits of an original, but the “indistinct simulation of products without originals” (Baudrillard 1998, p.55). To put this another way, simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 2008, p.1). Simulation of this type no longer needs to be rational, or no longer needs to correspond to a physical instance of reality with an origin since it “no longer measures itself against either an ideal or a negative instance” (Baudrillard 2008, p.2). Through this collapse of historicity and physical originality, Baudrillard feels that “it is *now impossible to isolate the process of the real*, or to prove the real” (Baudrillard 2008, p.21): an issue that haunts

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<sup>29</sup> This is one step back from Žižek’s end of postmodernity. Baudrillard sees simulation as becoming the real, as, arguably, does Žižek: however, when the image entered our reality, the image of destruction and disaster coming from Hollywood film, we were forced to relent the image as it entered into and shattered our reality. Simulation is a surface or an image within which we can live, but it covers or stands in for a reality. Only in Žižek’s formulation can the two become actual equivalents.

the narrative of *eXistenZ*. The classic example given by Baudrillard is that of Disneyland which he claims “is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation” (Baudrillard 2008, p.13).

This is a condition of postmodernity that has arisen, like Harvey’s conception of postmodernism, due to the progress of technology and capitalism and it is this which has arguably heralded in the waning of (traditional material) physicality, and which can, in some ways, contribute to the object-oriented ontology under discussion here. For a thing to be real, in relation to the post-metaphysical moment, it must have an origin which exists as a relation to the thing in the world of objects and which coincides with its absent or metaphysical construction in the world of ideas. This may mean that a thing only exists as a set of relations, or that it can only emerge from one entity affecting another in some way, but this remains, nonetheless real because of this. Again, this type of entity does not need to be a physical manifestation of organic or synthetic matter: it can be a digital rendition, a thought, a word, a light particle. It is the aforementioned radical loss of material stability which forces the loss of world upon the post-industrial/postmodern subject (perhaps postmodern entity is more apt, given that in this formulation no stable subjectivity can be formed in a situation where originality and historical origin are effaced and replaced by models). Television, and more recently the internet, has shown how it is possible, due to the technological collapse of space through time, to live in an almost fully virtual way. This will have a bearing on the discussion of *eXistenZ* and *Die Hard 4.0* leading on to a return to physicality in the text and the event of *Avatar* but in an ontologically opposing fashion where the virtual and the real become one object: that is an assemblage of technology, cinematic viewers and the cinematic event. The entire (physical) world is now fully accessible in a virtual format creating an assemblage of real (actual existing physical entities) and virtual (actual existing non-physical entities) that operates simultaneously and symbiotically: money no longer needs a physical manifestation; interactions can take place via video (Skype) or text; music and video have been digitised eradicating the need for physical instances of their (re)production (celluloid, CDs and DVDs ); virtual space is now a site of virtual travel, archives are being digitised and the instantaneous ‘viral’ nature of the internet fully eradicates modernist conceptions of space and time. However, what all of these technological

advances overlook (in the extreme last instance) is the fact that this collapse of space through time utterly eclipses and relegates the world of the physically real to a secondary position, although secondary may not be an adequate term since all objects, physical and non-physical can be seen to exist equally on the same ontological plane of being. The physically real in this instance it should be noted - the realm of life I am trying to describe as being decentred by all objects - is that mode of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic being that sees only real objects as existing in relation to the human subject that attributes meaning and being to the things it encounters, only in relation to itself and its uses (use value): this is the subjective and singular realm of postmodernity. What must be highlighted is the mode of being that sees all objects (and here human subjects are just another object in relation to all other objects) as equally existing and equally ontologically valid in the absence of a subject/object dichotomy, privileging neither the subject nor the object, the simulacra nor the original.

To pave the way into the discussion of how *eXistenZ* positions being, ultimately in relation to humans as the dominant measure of being, we must take a look at what being is or means. This will allow us to understand being in relation to the times of depiction in the various texts in various ways and which will ultimately allow us to position the object-oriented being of *Avatar* and *Occupy* in an historical and philosophical context. In order to look at how being is viewed or understood we must consider cinema as a barometer for the collective consciousness of a time<sup>30</sup>. What is considered as real must now be re-configured and reconstructed and arguably this is being done so in a number of ways<sup>31</sup>. *Being-in-the-world*, which is to be taken as the independent, non-correlationist, existence of any object as any object, or existing as something at all (and not just reliant on human constructions of being), Gumbrecht notes, borrowing from Heidegger, is “an existence that is always already in a substantial and therefore in a spatial contact with the things of the world” (Gumbrecht 2004, p.66). However, this spatial contact, or space in general, according to Timothy Morton comes from the things

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<sup>30</sup> The abundance of zombie and cyborg films in recent times belies the fear of losing full autonomy as an organic entity/subject but also an acceptance that this is now the current state of humanity which is directly addressing issues surrounding posthumanism and object-oriented positions and the concurrent loss of subjectivity that this entails.

<sup>31</sup> What is to be considered as real in relation to this project is every object, and every set of relations between objects, be they physical or non-physical, that exist both for humans and outside of the scope of human cognition or understanding. This includes a vast well of potentialities that remains withdrawn from relations and can emerge as new relations in certain circumstances.

of the world themselves and is not prior to them: “Objects don’t sit in a spatiotemporal box. It’s the other way around: space and time emanate from objects” (Morton, p.48). Space and time arise out of the relations/prehensions of object interactions and assemblages since all there is is a vast amount of objects interacting and creating the movements and zones that we are familiar with: we do not create the space in which to position objects (spatially or ontologically), objects create their own space, both spatially and ontologically in their own terms. In other words, all there is is objects and these are always already outside of human constructions of objects.

Moving away from the metaphysical meaning that has dominated recent thought towards a more presence based and physically-centred ontology has almost been forced upon conceptions of the world due to acts such as global warming and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11. Global warming will be discussed at a later stage in relation to Occupy and *Avatar*, however, events such as 9/11 and other violent acts that focus on physical destruction, according to the philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, demonstrate that the “masses were so deeply immersed in their apolitical consumerist state that it was not possible to awaken them through standard political education” so arguably a more radical mode of intervention was needed (Žižek 2002, p. 9). Basically, people had become so enmeshed and attuned to the metaphysical imposition of ideological norms and meanings (images and simulations) that the only meaning available to them was the slippery and unstable meaning produced by these ideological impositions that affect every object only in terms of human use/value<sup>32</sup>. Žižek continues: people “know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know” (Žižek 2008, p.30). In this way, the metaphysical meaning of ideology covers up the physical reality that huge amounts of unseen people suffer in order for (in this case, Western bourgeois) life to be maintained as common sense and normal (this will again be discussed at a later stage in relation to a discussion on non-human actors such as climate, natural disaster, policy and so on and how these physical

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<sup>32</sup> The cultural network of meaning which underpins the intuitive status quo of perceived reality in contemporary Western capitalist society, which is based in and on images, signifiers or simulations has been exposed as empty by acts such as 9/11. It is arguably in this way that violent destruction and an emphasis on physicality become a mode of liberation, or resistance, and not a means of condoning violent terrorist acts. It is not so much that a life based in or on images is the issue here, so much as a life based in and on the ideological imperatives behind said images. The violence inherent in terrifying acts is a way of highlighting the inherent ideological violence being perpetrated through images, text, advertising, religion, education, heteronormativity, whiteness and so on.

acts can alter and violently disrupt what people take as normal life). Again, we see a representation (ideology) mask and stand in for the real (physical) “truth” and also the idea that life is lived through images that are, not so much empty, but laden with hidden agendas and directives aimed at shaping the lives of those that absorb and consume them and it is this that is then acted out as a lived reality. Images can be seen, and are considered here, as a really real reality: it is how they affect and relate to ideological positions that is the issue, or put differently, how theyprehend and are prehendedy by other objects that proves their ontological validity as non-human actors<sup>33</sup>. Adorno and Horkheimer, in relation to ideology in general, and cinema in specific, sum up this postmodern being as follows: they see “[r]eal life [...] becoming indistinguishable from the movies” (Adorno, p.43). This relates more to the imposition of ideological hegemony and capitalist realism mediated and instated through the mass medium of cinema, and other media, and the resulting inability for sustained critique which this breeds. Real life and the movies become equivalent systems of (re)presentation in that one reality (mediated representation) is indistinguishable from another (presentation understood only through representation). Whilst I will be attempting to argue a similar point, movies and reality form a non-hierarchical lived ontological equivalence, I will be doing so, not on the level of metaphysical ideological meaning taken as common sense, but on the level of the rhizomatic immanent physicality between audience and artefact which unites to create a lived object-oriented ontological equality.

I will now return to the notion of being-in-the-world, violence and space: being-in-the-world demands a relation between objects and their spatial interactions, but as has been discussed above, these spacial interactions emanate directly from objects themselves; the space needed for objects to exist in does not come before the objects but is outlined by them and as such can be seen as innately violent. Each object must, in a

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<sup>33</sup> John Carpenter’s 1988 movie *They Live* is a good example of how ideology operates through images and advertising. A man finds a box of sunglasses: when one wears a pair of these sunglasses they operate like a pair of x-ray specs that allow the bearer to see beneath the surface of an image/advert exposing its true, ideological, content: “obey”. Interestingly, the Obey clothing line established by street-artist Shepard Fairey, stems from this very ability to see beneath the thin veneer of ideological propaganda. According to the Obey website, Fairey’s clothing is a phenomenological experiment which “goads viewers, using the imperative ‘obey’, to take heed of the propagandists out to bend the world to their agendas” (<<http://www.obeyclothing.com/about/>>). Claiming that the “medium is the message”, Obey clothing, like *They Live*, asks the viewer to look past the content of the image to the messages implied in the image and how these implications can form the world in very specific ways. It is these violent ideological imperatives that are attacked by physically violent acts, which can be seen as terrorist acts, and which expose and highlight a mode of meaning that is primarily rooted in the presence of physicality.

sense, fight for its own space of existence. This does not mean that objects must seek to destroy other objects in the process, but they mustprehend and assemble with other objects, becoming part of them, or *vice versa*, in order for space to be created and for new objects to come to the fore from the withdrawn depths of already existing objects. Violence as we know it, in its physical manifestation of harm or damage, or terrorism for example, operates in this fashion: arguably a new world came into being after 9/11 from the withdrawn excess of the world that was violently and horrifically rendered apart by the acts of terror: the Western world was traumatised as other parts of the world celebrated this traumatisation. A number of objects assembled in such a way that forced human understanding and comprehension to shift and to create a new space for a very different object to emerge. Being, taken as all objects that exist both inside and outside of human interaction, also demands a metaphysical level of interpretation taken as meaning: but one cannot be privileged over the other. Interpretation is to be read as prehension in relation to all objects. Whilst objects are incapable of interpreting one another on a level akin to that of human interpretation, they do interpret one another on the level of prehending and affecting entities. When the planes struck the physical towers of the World Trade Centre on 9/11, the objects involved interpreted each other in a certain way and a meaning was created from this interaction. Impact, explosion and fire all made the tower and its components interpret these objects and in time made the towers collapse. This may seem as a simple case of cause and effect, and it is, if we only look at it in terms of our own human understanding. What it is, however, is objects interpreting other objects and acting and reacting to this in ways similar to, but outside of, human interpretation. Timothy Barker, who focuses on interactivity and aesthetics, especially in relation to digital media, draws on Alfred North Whitehead and states: "objects never sense one another in their entirety as an immediately present 'thing'. Objects ratherprehend one another via a nexus, or relational conduit, that allows one entity to sense another" (Barker 2011). Objects sense other objects and actions, and space emerges from this sense perception, or prehension. When the privileging of human interpretation, or meaning, over object interpretation occurs, as with the privileging of the image or the simulation over the physical and original, all worldliness is arguably effaced, as seen in postmodern conceptions of the world. When meaning occurs on the level of pure physicality, the end result can be a terrifying apotheosis of fascistic purity which will be touched on in later chapters in relation to the dubious atavistic content of *Avatar* and the

body image consciousness and brutal atavism in *Die Hard 4.0* leading on to the liberation of physicality and objects in *Breaking Bad*.

This Cartesian split between subject/object, or physical existence and metaphysical meaning "had led Western culture to an extreme state of alienation from the world" (Gumbrecht 2004, p.66). So, if words create the world of things, then the world of things is lost to the world of words and all physical materiality and corporeality is forgotten and degraded: there needs to be an equality of existence and not an anthropocentric measure of being. This focus on the ability of words to create all meaning alone is the traditional, anthropocentric argument against the loss of world through the dominance of the absent signifier that dominated postmodern conceptions of being and as such it ignores the reality and affective nature of those objects and how they act, interact andprehend: all objects must be seen to equally exist. Technology has led to this privileging of virtual reality and simulation, but it has also, in a specific way, through the thingness of the digital image, led to a sort of "virtually-real" ontology which will be discussed in relation to *Avatar* and the other film texts and also the digital life of the Occupy movement which is now the main body of the actual movement itself. It is the notion of physical violence (in extreme cases) and a violent disruption to ideology (in *Funny Games US* [2007] for example<sup>34</sup>), or the violent (taken as shocking) disruption to the boundary between text and audience in texts like *Avatar* that has prompted and forced this return to the physicality of presence in recent conceptions of ontology. This disruption and blurring of borders and boundaries has also been seen in the collapse of the binary between living an organic life and living a type of post-human life which incorporates an assemblage of organic matter, technology, communication, images, medicine and other prosthetic entities. Presence here must be seen as the affective nature of all objects and how they force their existence into being through relations and withdrawal and it is this being which is outside the limited scope of human conception,

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<sup>34</sup> The main characters of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games US* are two ruthlessly violent teens who carry out acts of violence in the text for no apparent reason. Beyond this, they have the ability to pause, rewind, rewrite and reenact scenes from the text in order for them to suit their objectives. In the process of doing so, they have the ability to directly address the viewing audience. What this does is disrupt the classical narrative structures that set up subject (viewer) and object (text) allowing the text an amount of autonomy as an object in itself. By violently disrupting the ideology of classical narrative, with its focus on equilibrium, and a disruption to the ideological creation of beings in a subject/object dichotomy, *Funny Games US* begins to create an object life for itself outside of a necessary rational viewing subject and as such it becomes an example of how a non-human object can exist and affect as an entity in itself.

and always will be. There is space here to discuss the idea of the abject as theorised by Julia Kristeva, as this allows for objects to interact, relate, affect and encroach upon one another in a way that forces human subjects to realise that they are not a closed off singular entity, but an open and porous object that is made up of many things, organic and inorganic, and which thus decentres human subjectivity as the measure of being. This discussion of the abject will focus on *eXistenZ* and as such allows us to begin the discussion of the first text to be scrutinised in the evolution of a non-hierarchical being.

## 1.2 *eXistenZ* and the Abject

In order to understand why this idea of the abject is so important and to show how it can be a useful theory and an effective way of dealing with and comprehending this type of object interaction and the loss of subjectivity that this entails, I will look at David Cronenberg's 1999 film *eXistenZ*. This is the earliest film text being covered by this project in relation to the emergence of an object-oriented, non-hierarchical mode of being that can be seen to emerge over roughly a twenty year period from the turn of the last century to the present time, and which culminates in the Occupy movement and their apparent flight into the digital. Julia Kristeva's approach is a psychoanalytic one and as such is the perfect tool to look at and begin to dismantle the privileged position of the human subject. The abject is something terrifying: something that threatens the unity of things and thus is seen to encroach upon entities. As such, it "draws [us] toward the place where meaning collapses", it is "opposed to *I*" and "cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, pp. 1-2). The abject is a border: it is a place where objects spill into one another and the possibility of a closed off singular subject/subjectivity falls prey to the open-ended and assembled nature of things. It can be argued then that the abject is terrifying only to those objects that attribute a value to the closed off nature of objects as such, which in this case is to be read as human subjectivity. The closed off objects, seen as subjects, that create a hierarchy of being by disallowing other entities to enter into their being, places the notion of a singular subject at the apex of ontology. This ideal of a singular object that is closed off and which forms a subject has come under scrutiny and is being questioned by areas such as medicine and technology and the accompanying theories surrounding post-

humanism<sup>35</sup>. As was noted above, “The object has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to *I*” (Kristeva 1982, p.1). In Kantian terms, or in relation to the classical human subject before which objects are given their measure of being, the object can thus be seen as being opposed to the unified subject. The object is out there because we are not it, and it is not us - but if we look at the object in terms of speculative realism or object oriented ontology, then the object is what unifies all beings and allows all things to exist equally, with no single measuring subject at the centre of being. After all, the object draws us toward “the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 1982, p.2). Meaning is, in this sense, a psychological projection of measure out on to the things we encounter - it is the value we attribute to the self and to the things outside the self. When this subjective meaning is threatened by abjection, we must be willing to accept that we too are merely objects. Open entities that act and interact, affect and are affected in equal measures by the things we encounter. Kristeva sees the object as that which we have let fall out of the subject, or that which is cast aside in order for the subject to be unified, but it is precisely these things which are cast aside that must be seen as equally existing as things in their own right. According to Kristeva “the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything” (Kristeva 1982, p.3). Returning to the opening discussion about the death of my father, corpses are merely objects that have lost the anthropocentric, subjective value that we attribute to living subjects and as such become objects. They are terrifying because they remind us that even the living are also merely objects. It is for this reason that the object becomes a useful tool. It allows us to

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<sup>35</sup> The area of post-humanism is an interesting field especially with the prevalence of personal or wearable technology and advances in medicine all of which draw attention to the fact that human life is no longer a primarily organic thing. Standout examples are prosthetics, be they limbs or eye-glasses, transplants involving man made organs, stem cell technologies, DNA manipulation and so on. But a more mundane example relating to the area of post-humanism can be seen in the invasive nature of certain hand held technologies and the social media related to these. The idea of a human now stretches into the devices we carry constantly and through which we upload our daily lives, including our vital health statistics like heart rate, steps taken, calories burned and sleep pattern - not to mention our GPS position - for all to see. In a strange turn of events, Apple, the very producers of one of the most popular hand held devices, the iPhone, have decided to combat this mode of interaction through an even more invasive, or more attached mode of technology with the Apple Watch. According to the team behind the design and production of the Watch: “the Apple team landed upon the Watch’s *raison d’être*. It came down to this: Your phone is ruining your life”. Pierce, D. (2015). "iPhone Killer: The Secret History of the Apple Watch." Retrieved 08/04/2015, 2015, from <http://www.wired.com/2015/04/the-apple-watch>. The sense in which the iPhone ruins your life is that the screen and the interactions taking place upon it have surpassed any type of face to face interaction with actually present people. The Watch is less interactive than phones, but despite this, the technology itself is now invading the body. It is wearable and it is constantly on you and monitoring you, as opposed to you being constantly on it, as with the iPhone. Technology and the body are coming closer to one another and it is this type of wearable device that will allow a symbiosis of human, technology and internet and a collapse between what is to be considered primarily as a closed off subject and an interactive object comprising of human and technology, be it hardware or software. This line of thought will be picked up at a later stage in relation to the 3D technology utilised in *Avatar* and the use of the 3D glasses as a mode of object interaction and a collapse between subject and object positions.

look at the ways objects threaten human subjectivity, but if we relent this value attributed to subjects and realise the inherent value in all objects, or the inherent *lack* of value in all objects (value being a subjective human measure), then the terror associated with a threat to subjectivity subsides and a more affective and connected mode of living becomes more possible. This becomes apparent in the way we view and interact with the hyperhaptic visuality of a text like *Avatar*. When viewing a 2D text there is a set relationship between the text and the viewer. The text is consumed as a whole: its world is presented to us as a two dimensional, limited geography wherein we can only ever experience what that camera allows us to see. In a text like *Avatar*, the visual geography is extended beyond the screen and almost envelops the viewer adorned with 3D glasses. The geographical space of the text is no longer a flat entity we look on to, but it is a 3D territory we are brought into and which is brought into us in a sort of visual abject movement. The subject/object or audience/text binary is collapsed and we must as traditional subjects allow this to wash over us. It is for this reason that the feeling of 'Avatar Blues' is a real phenomenon. Participants in the cinematic event of 'Avatar' allowed their anthropocentric mode of being be replaced with a mode of being that is comprised of technology (3D glasses, motion capture, cinematic experience, sound, hyperhaptic visuality, CGI and so on) and organic material existing equally as the event emerges: being taken out of this mode of being caused some people to feel depression at the loss of a mode of existing equally with the objects around them with which they interacted and which interacted with them (this is further discussed on p.146).

The reason *eXistenZ* comes to the fore in this instance is that it broaches the idea of the abject and the openness of human objects, commonly known as human subjects, thus setting the foundation of this project's focus on the evolution of non-hierarchical being. It also sets up the trajectory of the importance of the digital object coupled with a form of technology that is added to an object (the human) which exposes the open borders of all objects and which in turn relates to the importance and affective nature of all non-human actors and the symbiosis of organic and inorganic matter, along with the union of digital and analog materials. In *eXistenZ* humans are fitted with a sort of semi-organic "bio-port" at the base their spines through which they can port into, or in more internet savvy terms, log on to, a virtual world of games that appear as real life. They can control their living avatar using a controller know as a "meta-flesh game pod" that looks like a lump of

living flesh complete with umbilical chord (Cronenberg 1999). The internet, or online gaming, which is what logging on to the games in *eXistenZ* can be seen as, was a very different entity in 1999 to what it is today. Online gaming was becoming extremely accessible, with a number of popular *Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game* (MMORPGs) coming into existence (Spohn) and gaining vast amounts of followers (ComputerHope). The following year, 2000, Electronic Arts released the Sims; a role playing game in which you can create and design your own avatar and their surroundings. This game is still in production in a number of variations and has become "one of the best-selling PC games in history, selling over 16 million copies worldwide. The game's success [earned] it five records in the Guinness World Records" (ComputerHope). What all of this is pointing to is that with these advances in computing technology, graphics and processing and the advances in the realm of the internet with ease of access and MMORPGs, the world was beginning to realise the potential of these digital objects and view them as a sort of new frontier of experience and existence. This coincided with the turn of the century and arguably allowed people to think that the future was here and now, existing in a digital format open to all and allowing a new mode of existence to flourish<sup>36</sup>.

It is this type of frontier existence that is shown in *eXistenZ*. Throughout the entire movie, one virtual world becomes another, with layers of reality overlapping, being confused and encroaching upon one another. The game 'eXistenZ' "plugs so effectively into an individual's desires and fears that the frontiers between fantasy and reality disappear, leaving the player wandering compassless [sic] in landscapes and situations that may or may not be of their own imagining" (Rodley 1999). Humans can port a fully functional virtual version of themselves, a replica avatar, into the games and live them as if they were reality, or as if they were entering a new world. What this shows is that the virtual is granted as much of an ontological footing as the real from which the gamers entered the game. The avatar is not a Sim like character created out of the tastes or aims

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<sup>36</sup> The frontier of digital living was of course threatened by the potential of what became known as the Millennium Bug which threatened computer programs and thus the operations of corporations, businesses and science wiseGEEK. (2015). "What is the Millennium Bug?" Retrieved 15/04/2015, 2015, from <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-millennium-bug.htm>. The potential of computer crashes and shut downs caused hysteria due to the reliance upon the technologies that would be potentially effected. This threat of a digital collapse will be picked up again in the discussion of *Die Hard 4.0* in which the digital can arguably be seen as the measure of all life and which terrorists tend to attack in order to disrupt the operations of being.

of the driver, but it is a full and exact replica of the person entering the game. There are ontological levels here that must be discussed. The real world where the gamers enter from is to be taken as the world you and I are familiar with. Upon porting into the game, the gamer enters a world that appears equally as real as our world: it looks the same and feels the same and in a sense it operates under the same physical laws as the world from which the player ported from, in that time and space act in the same ways to a degree. From the virtual game world there are further worlds that can be entered into and all of these also seem as valid and complete as the others, bar that fact that the other, non-avatar, or game characters, can only proceed in their actions if the non-virtual human avatar can provide the correct lines of dialogue for them, spurring them into their pre-programmed actions. What these different ontological levels/layers do is disrupt the ability to know - not the ability to know on an epistemological level, as that remains fully intact - but it disrupts the ability to know on an ontological level. The actual avatars themselves have difficulty in separating real life from virtual life and knowing which world they inhabit becomes an issue. Stepping outside of this from an anthropocentric perspective, what is happening here is that one object, a human, is becoming the same (ontologically) as another object (the semi-organic/digital rendition of the human in the virtual world of the game which is also titled 'eXistenZ').

It is hard to say if *eXistenZ* is actually set in 1999 or in some near, slightly brown cyborgic future. Arguably it is addressing the state of technology at the time of its release and the intrusion of technology into the the organic human being: "*eXistenZ's* critical position with respect to virtual reality and manipulation of the material [...] is in keeping not only with Haraway's suspicion of transcendence but also with her celebration of the permeable boundary between humans and machines, namely, our cyborg status" (discussed above as the abject) (Hotchkiss 2003, p.26). In the first world we as viewers are presented with, the world of on-line games is lauded and celebrated by all those who partake: everyone has a port as a permanent feature of their body from which to plug into the realm of the virtual: within the virtual realm, game upon game is created and furthered in order to keep up with the demand for this type of object interaction. In fact, the first world we encounter is actually inhabited by a marketing panel of gamers who enter into the world of *eXistenZ* (the eponymous game) in order to test out the new game for playability. As the movie proceeds we begin to see how real the worlds are and

how difficult it is to decipher one from another. By the end of the text we learn that the world we were initially presented with is in fact a virtual level in another world. The characters we see carrying out certain actions, which we are forced to take as real world actions, turn out to be virtual renditions of other actual characters who are in fact gaming from another world which is actually the "real" world that we are familiar with. It is not only us as viewers that become confused with these layers of ontological confusion, Ted Pikul, played by Jude Law, questions and is confused by which world he is in at any given time. Interestingly, in the first world we encounter, Ted has no bio-port and must be fitted with one. He shows genuine terror at the prospect of being fitted with one of these semi-organic orifices as it means he will no longer be a unified and closed off human subject and as a result his position of privilege over other objects is threatened (Cronenberg 1999). Ted, in this case, is confronted with the abject and the terror that this entails: he is literally fitted with an orifice, a border, an opening in what was once considered a unified subject (object) and which now "draws [him] toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, pp.1-2). Meaning is here the sense attributed to things from an anthropocentric position: it is what constructs things in terms of human being and which only carries value and meaning in relation to human subjects. With the opening of the human subject, the port in this case, Ted becomes an open and undefinable entity, no longer human, no longer fully organic, but an assemblage of a number of different objects and technologies - a mixture of objects - meaning has collapsed: but it is just the meaning of the human subject that has done so.

The abject forces the human subject to relent its position as hierarchically more real, or the apex, or measure of ontology, and has forced a new meaning to emerge in its place. Kristeva theorises the abject as a thing that is cast out, banished or "thrust aside in order [for the subject] to live" and which from its "place of banishment [challenges] its master"; it is a "‘something’ that I do not recognize [sic] as a thing" (Kristeva, pp.2-3). What this points to is a sort of object that is pushed out of the configuration of another object and which, in the process, defines the remaining subject in a negative way: the subject is the remainder, the not-abject. But since the abject is a border, that which is cast aside can return and reenter the subject - it is not recognised as a thing since it falls outside of human language and understanding - or put differently, the abject is that which is already outside of language and understanding and thus is terrifying and threatening

since it can not be understood in human terms and can only be addressed in object terms. It is these terms, object terms, that are the basis of the non-hierarchical mode of being that is being highlighted in this project and which will culminate in the Occupy movement. It is also for this reason that a theory like Kristeva's which is rooted in psychoanalysis is utilised in order to show the fear that human subjects experience in the face of losing their subjectivity and becoming another object in relation to any number of other interacting objects. The abject is the thing that can be expelled and re-enter the subject via the border and orifices that render the subject apart: objects can fall out of and also fall into the human object and can now be seen as that which adds to the assembled nature of the human and which is taken out of that assemblage in order for the human to continue living. But the abject remains an object and its relations remain real albeit in a negative and terrifying sense for human beings. What the abject points to is the fact that human subjectivity is merely a type of object meaning that is granted primacy and importance over other objects and their meaning since the human subject has the capacity to think, communicate rationally, talk and represent. But the border remains and it is here where meaning is forced to collapse. The human subject when confronted with, or by, the abject, must realise that they too are just another object and that their sacred subjectivity is merely a fluke of object interactions. The human object is forced to enter into relations with objects it fears and cannot understand and these object relations prove that the human can not control them, or construct them, merely through relations of consciousness or thought, since they will always occur without this anthropocentric relation rooted in thought. This is the type of abject-oriented ontology that is highlighted and celebrated in the worlds of *eXistenZ* and which will now be discussed in further detail.

Whilst this type of virtuality and loss of subjectivity appear to be celebrated in *eXistenZ*, there is an element of resistance to it by the end of the text. It is this resistance and the possible reasons for it that will be discussed in what follows. The world we encounter at the beginning of *eXistenZ* appears to be a world very similar to the one we consider to be the real world of everyday experience. The only difference is that the people that inhabit this world are (mostly) all physically fitted with bio-ports from which to log on to games with. Whilst this may at first seem like a far cry futuristic addition to the human body, and which in 1999 may well have appeared as far more far fetched than

it does in today's post-human world, the prospect of becoming virtual, or post-human, or semi-organic/semi-cyborgic, was a distinct line of epistemic thought and appeared as a real possibility in that age of early internet gaming. The fear induced by the possibility of the Millennium Bug highlights this reliance on and celebration of computer technology. *eXistenZ* adds fuel to the fire of terrifying celebration: the people who inhabit the world depicted in the text spend their time porting into the virtual reality provided by games like *eXistenZ* and the fact that the opening narrative is set in a marketing workshop proves the game's import. In the world of *eXistenZ* gaming has taken over as the most common leisure pursuit and is a massive commodity that can only grow with add on packs and world expansions. The fact that Pikul does not have a game port is seen by Allegra Geller, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh as "a cage of [his] own making" (Cronenberg 1999): in other words, not having access to the virtual realm is a sort of disability that only stunts growth and experience, or which only disallows access to the vast amount of new frontier virtual worlds that now exist<sup>37</sup>. The reliance on the virtual as a replacement for lived experience is highlighted when Pikul is told by Geller, upon entering a virtual ski resort where people could turn up to ski, that "nobody actually physically skis anymore, you know that" (Cronenberg 1999). What appears to be the case is that the real, lived world of everyday experience is no longer enough for people so they no longer carry out actions in real life and only do so in the realm of the virtual. Perhaps there is a sort of permission granted in the realm of the virtual that allows mundane acts, or everyday acts, like skiing for example, to become more acceptable: why not ski in real life? It is not an issue of access, as the movie points out ("nobody actually physically skis anymore"), but a preference to act in virtual space as opposed to actual, lived space. Arguably, this is due to an obsession with, or preference for, the flight into the virtual<sup>38</sup>. The celebration of the virtual comes to a rather abrupt end, and in fact, is threatened from the very outset of the film when a spectator viewing the marketing tests attempts to kill Allegra Geller. The man wants to kill her as she is the one that created the game *eXistenZ* and who is seen as the best programmer and games developer

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<sup>37</sup> Not having a bio-port in the world of *eXistenZ* could be seen as not having a smart phone in today's world. Whilst there is the myth of progress that makes us believe we all need a smart phone with instant access to communication and the internet and so on, we have become so accustomed to this type of access that not having one now would seem like a sort of disability.

<sup>38</sup> The flight into the virtual as represented in *eXistenZ* differs greatly from the aforementioned flight into the digital that occurred with the Occupy movement. This will be discussed at a later stage, but it must be noted that the virtual in this case was seen as a sort of new world, or a replacement world, as opposed to the symbiosis of worlds to be discussed in relation to becoming digitised.

in the world. The prospect of killing Geller would be along the lines of someone attempting to kill Steve Jobs: an attempt to cut off the head of a perceived serpent in order to send a message that technology, or virtual reality, is detracting from the world and ruining lived, organic life (as has been noted internally by Apple themselves which has resulted in their Watch being put into production in order to combat this perceived loss of relation to the lived world). The point here is that the attempted killing of Geller highlights that, despite the apparent celebration of the virtual, real, lived life is still valued as the apex of ontological validity and no other type of life, or living, can be afforded the same status as that.

The film itself becomes a symptom of the times and highlights the fact that this type of technology is not yet ready to be considered as a fully real object or as a valid part of the ontological assemblage that would allow all things to exist on an equal plane. It does however highlight the issues of ontological validity and the questions of worldliness and how we can know what world it is we are inhabiting. Toward the end of the film, and after traversing a number of different virtual worlds, and never being able to root a solid ontological foot hold, we come to the base, or first world of the text. In a strange and disconcerting twist, all of the characters we have encountered so far in the virtual worlds are now a different marketing panel and are different people: the ones we encountered initially were merely another virtual rendition. What were perceived as main characters in the film were all actually avatars of other people who were in this base world testing out a new game “*tranCendenZ*” (and are actually the characters in a film and not avatars of said characters). Our first point of access to *eXistenZ* was already a virtual rendition. The two characters known as Ted Pikul and Allegra Geller are now two vastly different people: “Allegra” does not exist in this base world: she is just a game projection avatar. Both characters, played by Jude Law and Jennifer Jason Leigh are now the potential murderers of the actual game producer. These two, like the attempted killer of Allegra Geller, possess a bizarre organic gun that fires human teeth as bullets: arguably this appears as further proof that the celebration of the virtual has soured and in its place a solely organic mode of existence seems to be reinstated as hierarchically dominant or preferable. Despite the attempt to kill the game creators and reinstate the value of the flesh, it is impossible. The popularity of porting into games in the world of *eXistenZ* is too much for it to be able to be shut down. It is not that the games themselves, or the

world depicted in the film, can be eradicated, or should even be focussed on as the main point being displayed here: what needs to be highlighted and taken from all of this is that virtuality and an abject-oriented ontology were being celebrated. As Alain Badiou states: *eXistenZ* is essentially “a chase film: a couple (the mandatory subject for this genre of film) traverses the oddities and perils of the world of semblance, of its mise-en-abyme, and of the semi-monsters inhabiting it” (Badiou 2008, p.21). The two are in fact chasing after reality (full subjectivity in this case), or chasing away the virtual (abject intrusions into the subject) and at this point in time, the technology may not have been able to cope with the demands of flattening out an ontology and allowing the virtual to become a new and other world, or another zone of object interaction and experience as valid as any other entity and the lack of technological ability in this case was just another symptom of the lack of progress in this area. What the technology allowed was a type of interaction to take place that was beginning to displace the primacy of human subjectivity and in its place locate an ontology of objects of all types. There was a confusion, or an over zealousness due to novelty, that meant the virtual was always going to appear as crude, glitchy and separate from the world of everyday experiences.

The virtual worlds shown in the text and their operations remain stunted and nascent. They rely upon the remaining split or duality of human and technology for their existence to be realised; the real world has access to the virtual world: it is a one way street of experience that operates on a subject/object split - a correlation of human and virtual world. Confusing levels of ontology is still somewhat of an issue for epistemology and does not go far enough in realising the differences of worlds, or the values of objects that interact and create the possibility of a flat ontology where all objects are as valid as all others and there is no higher object controlling or measuring ontological worth. In *eXistenZ* there are still higher beings that control or create the worlds and thus are considered to be at a higher level of being than others: Allegra Geller for example, or the validity of worlds, or the virginal quality of a fully organic human that must be tainted in order for him to be able to enter the realm of virtuality. These things still point to a level of being that is to be taken as more real, or more valid, than others: regardless of whether the worlds depicted in the text are real or not, they are all controlled by a god figure and as such this disallows a flat ontology, or a non-hierarchical mode of being, to take root. This type of configuration of being requires "an approach in terms of interacting parts

and emergent wholes [which] leads to a *flat ontology*, one made exclusively of unique, singular individuals, differing in spatio-temporal scale but not in ontological status" (DeLanda 2002, p.47). As has been noted however, this flat ontology of being must come with the caveat that Bogost points to and which allows for all things to equally exist, but not exist equally in terms of their actions, affects and abilities. My computer exists as much as the earth's atmosphere, but one has far more scope to affect change than the other (size/power/potential for impact). But it should also be stated that both of these entities exist at all, and do so outside of human composition and cognition and it is on that level that the two objects, and all others for that matter, equally exist. The reason this is being discussed here is that in a world like the one depicted in *eXistenZ*, things, or objects (and this includes worlds) do not equally exist. The only way in which the other virtual worlds of the text exist is through a type of limited and transitory ontological confusion based on crude man-made technology. Characters and viewers alike can not tell which world is which. It is the problem of knowing how to tell the difference between the real and the virtual and how this attempt at knowledge is stymied and diluted: it is not a question of what a world is or how an ontological field can be experienced or understood, but a question as to which representation of the world is the more real. This is again a disavowal of an ontology in which all things equally exist. The fear in the text is that all things and worlds do equally exist, but it is an illusion. The virtual does not equally exist in this case as it is limited and controlled, and can thus be removed and altered at the whims of the controlling subject. It exists but is too nascent and too troublesome to be given an equal ontological status.

The fact remains that the virtual world is a product of subject/object relations and as such it can never break out of this binary, but only temporarily confuse the borders. The ability to confuse the borders between the real and the virtual makes the virtual an almost terrifying abject entity, but it can not push through these borders and fully threaten the being of the real world. The virtual remains an object in relation to a higher subject/creator and as such can never become autonomous. This will be left to a more advanced mode of digital living to be discussed in the next chapter in relation to *Die Hard 4.0*. The virtual worlds of *eXistenZ* are slippery and amorphous in their internal virtual state, but at a remove, and seen from the perceived real world, they are firmly located in relation to the human subject and as such they can be ultimately controlled and altered to suit the

needs and desires of the human subjects that control them. So, whilst the confusion of worlds remains, it only does so as the experience of gaming is so strong, or dreamlike: the last line of dialogue in the text, spoken by the character that Ted Pikul played in the original virtual world, who is now played by an Asian man, highlights this confusion; “hey tell me the truth. Are we still in the game?” (Cronenberg 1999). The confusion of worlds, or in fact, the validity of worlds, is only an issue in relation to human being in this case. The virtual here only exists in its relation to human subjectivity and as such remains in a position of subjugation. The power of the virtual can only be experienced from within the virtual, or from a position of binary connection to its representations. At first it appears that the virtual worlds can affect and be affected by the perceived real world, but in fact, all that has the power to affect are the human actors that feel somewhat threatened by the confusion instated by the realism of the gaming. In the final world of the text, the really real world, the characters played by Law and Leigh want to kill the game creator for making the most “effective deforming of reality” (Cronenberg 1999). Reality for these two is the non-virtual, real world of everyday experience that is to be seen as the most ontologically valid area of being and as such is to be taken as sacred and whole: reality is the lived, organic being that can not allow the virtual lot threaten its position at the apex of ontology. It is this threat to the real that forces the two to attack the creator of the virtual and also this that leads to the fear of abjection and an open body/subjectivity. The division between the real world and the virtual worlds remains fully intact despite the confusion, which of course only comes from the side of human understanding rooted in a postmodern slippage of ontological representations. The virtual worlds can only ever exist in relation to their human creators and no actual worldly ontological confusion or spillage can take place between the two.

This traces the first third of the apparent emergence of a non-hierarchical flat-ontology of being in which all objects are to be seen as existing on an equal plane of being. Whilst *eXistenZ* retains a correlation of world to human, it does allow for the potential ontological questions that would follow in its wake: issues surrounding the being of objects as they interact amongst themselves and as they interact with us. On top of this it also allows for the beginning of a new horizon which this project is concerned with: namely the idea of a “Real ethics (of everything)”. This ethics allows objects to exist equally, on all levels, to human subjects, extending an ethical consistency to objects

such as global warming, capitalism and post-humanism. It emanates from all things and not just the human ethical position, since all objects must be seen as interacting in the same way. *eXistenZ* set up a virtual world only to knock it down in favour of an anthropocentric mode of being thus showing that human subjects did not, at this point in time, extend the same value or dignity to virtual worlds as they do to the world they inhabit in their daily lives. Following from this, the emergence of a non-hierarchical mode of being will be looked at in *Die Hard 4.0* with a particular focus on the rise of digital being as the measure of all being, and on to *Avatar* which arguably manages to exist as a flat-ontology of objects interacting on an equal plane in both the text and the event of its screening. The reason this project is tracing this line of emergent being is that it occurred over a period of time in which digital and communications technologies began to be advanced at an incredible speed. Information became capital that was stored in databases and this became so valuable that it was targeted by terrorists as it was seen to become the seat of knowledge, power and being. On top of this, an organisation like Occupy could reside in the digital realm and manifest in the real world any where and at any time as a mode of resistance to the unfair hierarchies instated and upheld by a system like global capitalism. However, this was not always the case, as has been shown above. For a technology to reach the status of a god-like figure, it needed to be somewhat autonomous, perfectly operative and constantly evolving. This could not be the case with the virtual technology represented in *eXistenZ* as it remained glitchy, subservient to human commands and as such was treated as an incomplete object in relation to the fuller human subject.

The world represented in *eXistenZ* remains rooted in postmodernity: it is fragmented, layered with other worlds, rife with ontological uncertainty and collapsable. These traits are all part of the representations in *eXistenZ* and this is a representation of the collective cultural consciousness of the time. Each of the texts in this project will be discussed in these terms of cultural representation and the consumption of a collective consciousness that describes the state of being at the time of the texts' production. This will be done in order for the project to focus attention on how objects are seen, how they exist and how they are represented, as opposed to discussing what it is to be an object, or what an object consists of at a level of being outside of any human scope, or on the level of interaction and assemblage. *eXistenZ* attempted to show how the realm of the organic

human and the realm of man-made technology have collapsed into one another and an ontological uncertainty followed. However, this falls short in that the two realms remain distinct on the level of ontology as the realm of technology in this case can always and only operate under the guidance of the controlling human subject. As Lea Hotchkiss points out: *eXistenZ* is “an implicit commentary on the cyberpunk aesthetic in film with its naive celebrations of the transcendence of the body, on the one hand, and restabilization [sic] of the real, on the other” (Hotchkiss 2003, p.16). This idea of collapse between the real and the virtual and the potential of autonomous technology comes to the fore in the more sophisticated depiction in *Die Hard 4.0* which shows a world heavily reliant upon the operation of technology outside of human control. Technology in *Die Hard 4.0* becomes a virtual world tangled up with the real world in a power struggle. Technology begins to gain ground in this struggle and as such was targeted by terrorists as this was now a means to control being through the possession of data-bases and banking information. It took the muscular and poorly armed John McClane (Bruce Willis) to fight back against this encroachment of tech-ontology and reinstate the human as the measure of being. This will be discussed in Chapter Two in detail, relating the rise of social media, communications technology, digital systems of operation and the digitisation of objects to an ontological revolt performed by humans who disallowed their position as the measure of being to be questioned by something other than themselves.

## Chapter 2: Die Hard 4.0 and the Digital Correlation

The aim of this chapter is to continue to trace the emergence of an object-oriented mode of being. Moving away from the now dated and imperfect technologies of the purely virtual which were controlled and operated like the MMORPG computer games of the late 1990s, we must look to the more sophisticated and assembled digital technologies that operate as a part of everyday life, bubbling away beneath every surface. This is necessary in order to show how virtual realities became woven into the fabric of lived life and which began to be relied upon in order for lived life to be lived as such. Digital objects interact and prehend in ways that occur outside of a necessary relation to human beings. They have a meaning of their own and can create new relations through their actions. Of course objects have a meaning in relation to human understanding, with collective consciousness and representation, epistemic trends and impacts, but when these objects are removed from this privileged paradigm they retain their own/actual meaning for themselves and for other non-human objects (prehension). Objects in curated human collections, for example, that are removed from their use value as tools, to become broken tools, are a strange (in relation to human rationality) example of how objects create their own meaning outside of our meaning for them; that is, outside of a human/world correlation, or outside of a prescribed use value. In order to clarify this an example would be necessary: however, if we think of any object, we think of it purely in terms of its relation to us. As such, if we were to take any object out of its relations to us, or strip it of the values we attribute to it, it becomes a strange object. This strangeness only attains to the skewed rationality of human understanding which only understands use in relation to its own value system: objects are not strange to one another - they are merely aesthetic potentialities that can act and interact with and upon other objects in a very mundane and normal way. Object prehension is an un-romanticised form of understanding where objects collide with, interact with, feel, change or create new experiences with other objects in a non-hierarchical way that does not rely on any one central or meta object for this meaning and experience to occur. With this in mind, we must turn our attention to how digital potentialities and sets of relations began to create new objects and to encroach upon human life as an acting object and assemblage that had the potential to become the measure of all being or to displace the human as the centre of

ontological value. In other words, a digital correlation began to replace the anthropocentric one traditionally upheld by philosophical thought.

I will now move on to take a look at assemblages: the reason for this is that in a non-hierarchical mode of being all objects can relate to one another in certain ways and it is through these relations between objects that larger or more complex objects create assemblages. A basic example is computer technologies in which one computer database, for example, is a valid object, but on its own it has a limited scope of interaction. When this computer is introduced to other computers, or various objects which relate to and work in a symbiotic way, new objects are formed such as the internet, transit systems, logistics or communications networks. Each element of the assembled entity can operate as a thing in itself and exists as such, but it can also be a part of the wider system of operations whilst retaining its own being, or identity, or use value. For this reason, I will look at social networks as assemblages consisting mainly of information technologies, humans and hardware that allow for this information to be disseminated. The reason this will be discussed is that it allows us to take a look at an assembled network that we are all familiar with and then to apply what we know to the broader assemblage of the technologies that maintain life on a day to day basis. This will then be discussed within the context of *Die Hard 4.0*, which, as the mid point of the evolution of a non-hierarchical mode of being, remained somewhat short of the mark of a flat ontology: in other words, there is still a hierarchy of being in operation in the text, only this time it is in relation to technology and technological assemblages which replace the human as the measure of being. In an assemblage, the entities do not make up organic or unified wholes that only define themselves as singular, closed off objects. The point of articulating an assemblage theory is to show that all entities are made up of their relations to other entities, or are an accumulation of parts that are themselves assemblages or sets of relations, be it just an assemblage of the singular thing itself (a tree for example) and

its relations to other things (birds, humans, oxygen), or the smaller components (atomic for example) that come together to form a single object or thing<sup>39</sup>.

What a theory of assemblages illuminates is the open nature of objects and how they can give and take elements of themselves and other objects in order to relate to other objects and in the process make new assemblages or objects possible<sup>40</sup>. This is importantly also the case with humans as has been discussed in relation to the idea of the abject. Humans are to be seen as being another object amongst myriad other objects which exist both as objects and the sets of relations, interactions and prehensions between the other objects they encounter. This is what is to be focussed on as being the realm of all being and not just how humans relate to the objects outside of themselves: this is the limiting scope of the Kantian tradition which places the human as the centre, or apex, of being. Objects do not just exist out there in relation to the human rational subject: they exist outside of this duality entirely, as things that relate to and interact with the other objects that they encounter, and this of course includes the human as another object. If the above is the case with objects and how they form assemblages, as DeLanda argues, then all entities are an agglomeration of separate singular entities that come together and relate in a certain way to create a certain entity: a single grain of sand is not a pile - but it is still a singular assemblage at an atomic level. The particles involved do not lose their own identity, or being (function) by becoming a part of a larger assemblage (a pile of sand), in fact, they gain more potential: "unlike wholes in which parts are linked by relations of interiority (that is, relations which constitute the very identity of the parts) assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by

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<sup>39</sup> When I am discussing the notion of object, or thing, or entity, it should be noted that in each case the terms are interchangeable. Anything that exists and as such which is made up of assembled singular parts, like a city made up of streets, buildings, transport networks and people, or a grain of sand which is made up of atomic particles and which itself goes toward making up a sand filled beach are all to be considered as objects, things or entities. Singular entities are themselves assemblages that always relate outwards: relating to other entities by entering into wider networks of assemblages allows for a process to occur in which new entities can emerge or be created. If entities only related to themselves, there would be no scope for any newness to emerge and stasis would prevail.

<sup>40</sup> This relates directly to the discussion of the abject in the previous chapter: human subjects can no longer be seen as closed off, singular, organic entities and as such, subjectivity and what it is to be human have come under question. Assemblages let us look at the human as a collective entity comprising of organic matter, technology, medicine, rationality, sets of relations to other human subjects, communications and so forth. Assemblage theories allow us to realise the material and relational aspects of an open and fluid subjectivity (when it comes to all objects), and the theory of the abject allows us to realise this on a more subjective, psychoanalytic level. Combing the two opens the human subject up in every aspect, allowing for the entry and exit of entities into and out of the sets of relations and materials that make up the previously closed off, dignified and hierarchically dominant human subject position.

relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage" (DeLanda 2013, p.18). If objects are solely made up of relations of interiority then there is no scope for other entities or relations to emerge from the (internally relating) assemblage: the entities only relate inwards and are made of a closed system in which external relations are not so much prohibited, but in which they can not cause other entities to change or interact in new ways thus limiting their potential to act, interact or emerge. This limited internal construction of objects disallows relations of exteriority to be affected/effective and as such there can be no new objects coming to be, and if a new object is to somehow emerge its origin must then be attributed to some sort of master- or meta- object, or god figure, that can create newness out of absolutely nothing. It is the interaction of all objects and how they affect one another that allows for the emergence of new sets of relations, and thus, new objects to come into being out of the withdrawn excesses of all other objects<sup>41</sup>. No sets of external relations can change the potential or summon parts of their withdrawn being into action in a system based on internal relations as this would lead to a bizarre reliance upon a sort of object creationism in which a master object (god figure/privileged human rationality) summons being into operation at its own will and in relation to its own ideas and ideals as is the case with an anthropomorphic and anthropocentric mode of being.

In an assembled network, which, it should be noted, can be seen as any and every object that we encounter, and which itself encounters us and other objects, there are two levels of object (inter)action, which according to DeLanda can be summed up as follows: "[a] systematic entity may be treated as an assemblage by distinguishing those components playing a material role from those playing an expressive role, and those processes that give it stability from those that destabilize [sic] it" (DeLanda 2013, p.49). These two levels comprise of a material element and an expressive element. The material is obvious in that it is the material actual entities involved in any assemblage: roads, buildings, parks, traffic lights, rubbish bins - these are the material elements of a town

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<sup>41</sup> It is this mode of non-hierarchical object interaction that is to be seen as the focus of Occupy and how they are attempting to open a new space for discussion that takes into account the inequalities that form the very base of the system of capitalism: these are not just the inequalities amongst people and their unequal access to capital, education, healthcare, rights, freedoms etc., but also the inequalities involved in animal exploitation (mass breeding chickens for human consumption alone as an example), or land exploitation and its affects on the natural world as well as the affects on humans (fracking as an example). Occupy are constantly relating externally and beyond their human capacities in a direct challenge to those capitalists who are only concerned with their own being/wealth/wellbeing and as such only relate internally.

and transport system that operates as a material element in a larger assemblage of city or nation for example. The expressive elements are the laws and symbolic systems of exchange that aid the material expressions in their operative being (expressive elements can also consist of aesthetic interaction and this will become an important element at a later stage in relation to the next chapter's discussion of *Avatar*, *Breaking Bad* and the Occupy movement). The operative being of these material elements does not rely upon the expressive elements as the expressive elements are purely related to the operations and cognitions of human understanding, however, as will be shown, expressive elements come to have very real material effects and are to be seen as having the same ontological status as their material counterparts and can of course exist outside of human interactions. Objects interact in a number of ways that are outside the realm of all human meaning and interaction. This can include objects that are manmade and which have expressive duties that only mean something in relation to human rationality. A traffic light could still turn from green to red without symbolising the law to stop your vehicle: in other words, the material would still act andprehend in certain ways outside of and not relying on the relational value attributed to the expressive elements by cognitive assemblages<sup>42</sup>. The point being made here is that the expressive components of objects and assemblages can run a risk of reducing all objects merely to their sets of relations, or to their temporal contexts in relation to human constructs. The message can become more important than the expression or than the material implications of the message or expression. DeLanda gives the example of animals and how their expressive elements, spraying of scents for example, can have material effects - rivalries over territory or potential mates can lead to very serious material expressions (DeLanda 2013, p.22). However, moving away from the animal kingdom and on to the digital realm, expressive elements of digital networks take on a very different role and this will lead on to the discussion of digital expressions in relation to *Die Hard 4.0*.

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<sup>42</sup> Imagine a scenario in which a spider has made of web on a set of traffic lights. On a cognitive level, the spider has no relation to what a green, amber or red light means. However, the web of the spider may be spun across the face of the red light, meaning, any time the red light comes on, the heat from the bulb forces the spider to scurry from the centre of its web to a shady corner of the light casing. This can have very real material effects in this sense. In the interim warm period of illumination a moth may be attracted to the light and in the process get caught in the web in the absence of the spider: the moth may have the time to shake itself free before the spider returns. Whilst this is an unlikely situation, it shows how material processes can affect objects outside of all human constructions of expressive meanings attributed to object interactions.

The discussion will now move on to social networks as expressive assemblages with very real material affects. This discussion will allow me to move seamlessly on to the use of technology in *Die Hard 4.0* and will also allow for *Avatar* to be kept in mind throughout these discussions since *Avatar* remains as the prime example of how expressive and material elements operate on an equal level. Taking digital communication, especially social networks as they operate on an individual level via personal interaction as an example, shows how the expressive elements of an assemblage can appear to run the risk of eradicating any material expressions or effects. The reason the expressive relations of social media are being discussed is that these are the point of access for many people to this mode of being that includes the ethereal realm of the digital, and this will lead into the discussion of the realms of digital life in *Die Hard 4.0* allowing for a comprehensive discussion and understanding of how these networks operate on material and expressive levels before moving on to discuss them in relation to *Avatar* and Occupy in the next chapter. This individual level of expressive relations must be discussed before moving on to show how they can have very real material effects especially on a wider socio-economic scale and how these can have a potential to act via a mode of digital being (algorithms and programs) that no longer rely upon human action for their processes to have an affect. If we look at a network like Facebook we can see how the expressive elements work: Facebook is predominantly expressive in that it is a text and image based digital feed that exists in, or on, the internet. The way Facebook operates is that people can express themselves through images or text and others can "like" these posts or share them on their own personal expressive timeline. Posts can also consist of news articles, links to videos, links to songs and other such things: all of which can be shared by the people who encounter them. It is the sharing of links that becomes important here and not the actual end point insinuated in the link. Because Facebook operates on a "liking" system, it can be argued that it is the likes that matter more than the content being shared<sup>43</sup>. It should be noted that Facebook only operates on a liking system at the level of actual interaction: beyond this, Facebook operates on the level of advertising generated by selective algorithms that can tailor content to suit each

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<sup>43</sup> According to a recent study carried out on social media activity "people are generally inclined to share information and cooperate whether or not explicit benefits are involved. In the context of social information sharing, the decision to share certain types of information may be incumbent on the benefits that will be derived from the sharing process" Osatuyi, B. (2013). "Information sharing on social media sites." *Computers in Human Behavior* 29: 2622-2631.

individual and this can result in real material affects such as the purchasing of goods, the shipping that will ensue, the logistics of delivery and the actions and interactions of human and non-human actors that all of this entails. For the purposes of the current argument however, it is the level of the individual acting on Facebook that is important. At this level, there is an element of identity formation that must be considered. Since Facebook represents an element of the individual, a digital expression that makes up a part of the overall assemblage that is the person, the expressive nature of the network is to be taken quite seriously. However, since all that matters in this situation is the expression and the relations created by the act of expressing, the force of any materialisation seems to be washed away in favour of the surface value of "liking", "sharing" and appearing: identity here is the images put forward that are to be consumed by those that encounter them (perhaps this is a lingering trait from the era of postmodernity). One study on social media has stated that "Extraverts appear to use social media in order to enhance their social connections", people "high in neuroticism may be drawn to use social networking sites like Facebook because they hope to receive feedback and reassurance from others", that others may "use social media to maintain relationships and seek social feedback" and that "[f]ear of missing out (FOMO) is a fear that other people are having fun without you" (Blackwell 2017). Whilst the above is related to extraverts and neurotic behaviour, it could be argued that since representation and appearance plays such a major role in modern mediated society, that social media itself can be a root cause of becoming neurotic or appearing as an extravert since so much emphasis is placed on the social media we use and the representation of the self on digital platforms, which is a constant performance. Representation comes to the fore in postmodern capitalist society: it is the image and how the image is seen and shared that outweighs any actual affective response. In a way, there is more of a focus on cultural capital than on materialisation and lived/living response. The accumulation of a type of cultural capital is here more important than what the actual shared message is: for the individual sharing these posts it may be more important to appear concerned about certain topics deemed to have a cultural value and this appearance of caring becomes capital to exchange and invest in the markets deemed most reliable to return the profits of cultural worth, standing and importance.

A recent (2013) trend in sharing photos with images of a child, for example, holding a placard reading “Can I get 1 million likes? I beat cancer”<sup>44</sup> is a perfect example of how expression overrides materialisation for those sharing these posts on a social network and how the appearance and focus on cultural capital becomes primary since “liking” a post is simply an affective immediate and fleeting subjective response. Sharing an image on a social network can have no material expressions on cancer unless each share can be made to generate actual capital to further cancer research for example. As has been pointed out recently, “the most important uncertainty associated with the use of social media is the credibility of both the information shared and that of the information source” (Osatuyi 2013, p.2621). The credibility of information on social media means that fake stories/ fake news, relating to illnesses for example, can be perpetuated by people because they want to appear caring or because of FOMO (fear of missing out). A recent high profile case was brought to light when an on-line fitness blogger, Belle Gibson, was exposed for claiming she cured her own brain cancer through natural remedies and nutrition. The case was taken to court where the judge declared “Her ‘pitch’ [about healing her cancer through diet and nutrition] overwhelmingly used [on-line] groups likely to evoke sympathy because of their vulnerabilities - young girls, asylum seekers, sick children” (Australia 2017). In a book titled *The Woman Who Fooled The World* written in 2017, by Beau Donnelly and Nick Toscano, on the Belle Gibson case, the two point to how “the young Instagram star, who claimed to have healed her own brain cancer solely through diet, had raised substantial funds for charity with the help of her hundreds of thousands of followers – and then had not donated the money” (Douglas 2017)<sup>45</sup>. Returning to the above case of the child that beat cancer, even if this were the case, there would remain huge numbers that share the image and who do not donate to the designated cause, again, focusing only on the generation of cultural capital (for themselves) that this type of image can help generate for the person sharing it: they

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<sup>44</sup> [http://cnt.winkal.com/5206fe52e4b00f8a66b1537a/NYmd\\_700.jpg](http://cnt.winkal.com/5206fe52e4b00f8a66b1537a/NYmd_700.jpg)

<sup>45</sup> Furthering from sharing posts is the “liking” of posts of this nature. A “like” for beating cancer can have no affect on cancer, even if the child of the fitness blogger did indeed beat cancer in the first place. What is “liked” by users on social media like Facebook, appears in the feed of friends of the user that “liked”, allowing the friends access to what has been “liked”. Again, the emphasises in on appearance here, and especially as appearing caring or concerned. As Marcus Gilroy-Ware writes: “While sharing and retweeting are multi-use gestures that allow content to be passed on for informational value, affective value, or any other reason, the ‘like’ gesture is unambiguously an analogue of the user’s subjective emotional response to the content they see” Gilroy-Ware, M. (2017). *Filling the Void*. London, Repeater Books. p.56. Whilst a subjective affective emotional response may be based on a real feeling of sympathy, the appearance of this on social media is exactly that, an appearance, or an outward act of appearing caring.

appear caring, concerned, socially aware, charitable and so on in the eyes of those consuming these images. Sharing the image (and not donating - if that were the case) shows how the actual sharing of the image becomes the most important expressive element. It can be done to see how many likes it gets for the person sharing it; it can be done to show people that you are a caring individual, even though there can be no material expression of this; it can be done in order to gain a sliver of cultural capital amongst specific recipients of the shared image. In all of these instances what becomes important is the expression: sharing and not caring comes to the fore, or in other words, expression over materialisation. The message no longer matters, or, the message can no longer be made to have material affects. The message is reduced to its sets of relations or to the operations of the network alone. The message and any potential material affect it may have had has been eradicated by the primacy of the operations of expression and sharing. If the network of relations is all that emerges in the digital age then this can lead to a loss of value of entities themselves and anxiety at this loss. In the case of art works for example, art can be emptied of all meaning and value, both cultural and monetary, leading to a degree of democratisation in which everyone is a producer of meaning (and not just a select privileged few with access to the means to produce art and to value it as art). But this too then becomes a commodity in that we are producing only to expand the wealth of larger corporations (Facebook etc) by creating images, texts, music or video that can be shared/displayed/exhibited instantly on any social network alongside advertisements. The democratisation of art simply allows corporations like Facebook to become the platform for sharing whilst they still advertise alongside any and every expression uttered. In a way, the only material effect worth noting then is the capital gains made by the social networks through advertising and the associated material/logistic affects related to items purchased for example: we as users merely experience and understand these networks on the level of expressive consumption. The information received is easily consumed and is purely superficial: as was noted by Marks: "the highly symbolic world in which we find ourselves nowadays is in part a function of the capitalist tendency to render meanings as easily consumable and translatable signs" (Marks 2000, p.139). We consume and contribute to the expressive elements of the

networks but we tend, as individual and everyday users, to fail to experience the material elements of these expressions as equally primary players<sup>46</sup>.

## **2.1: The Matter of the Digital**

Arguably, what can be seen to happen is that the digital becomes a network of primarily expressive or inactive relations at the level of the individual actor liking and sharing posts; as was shown above, it is not what is shared that is important, but the sharing itself. The expressions become the meaning, not the content or the possible effects of the sharing. It is wrong to call all expressive relations inactive: a brief look at Althusser's essay on Ideological State Apparatuses shows us how an expression can have very real and effective material affects. The law, when it operates on the level of expression creates material realities out of expressive relations. The simple police hailing of an individual by expressing "hey, you there!" materialises the individual as a subject to, and of the law of the Police/State/Ideology (Althusser, p.1504). In relation to the above example of the social network and its inactive materiality, the subject is not hailed by a shared post as in the example of the police hailing, but just perpetuates the sharing, and in so doing perpetuates the network of relations, ignoring the content and any material outcomes it could possibly have. In a sense what occurs is an imbalance between affect and effect. The individual consuming and sharing certain posts on a social network, an image of a dead refugee child for example, with the call to share the image in order to stop the suffering, may well be affected by the image, but the empty act of sharing the image, with its dead end call to stop suffering, alleviates the individual from having to do anything beyond this, and thus, no material effect will be produced. Perhaps this is symptom of caring capitalism where the price we pay for certain goods is higher than others because we are told the goods already include elements of recycled material, or fair trade practices, allowing us to overlook the damage done by capitalism, mass production or over farming. We know our consumption is still damaging to someone, or something, but we continue to do it regardless as we have paid for an ease of conscience.

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<sup>46</sup> This predominance of expressive elements is not always the case however: if we look at the example of internet bullying in which teenagers have taken their lives due to the affective nature of on-line expressions of hatred and so on. The expressive elements of networks like Facebook do have material expressions but the majority of the time the expressive nature remains just that. It is merely the day to day actions of sharing and liking quotidian information that are under discussion here as these are the base of activity on social networks of this nature.

Similarly, if we are seen to share a post that is asking for compassion or an end to conflict, this is enough for us: it will not change anything, but it makes us seem active in attempting to effect change. We have been affected, but no effect will come from this. We have expressed our desire to end conflict, or to be more caring, but the expression is as far as it is taken. The potential of a material expression emerging from the expressive relations seems to have thus waned in an age where digital representation, especially the representation of the self in everyday digital life through a number of various social media outlets has come to be the primary mode of existence for individuals sharing in the network: the potential of cause and effect has no power since value is placed solely on the operation of a network and not on the possible outcomes of the expressions coupled with the material causes. It is like placing importance only on the sounds of words spoken and not on what they might mean or cause to come into action. In this sense, the image is more important than what it represents. The real has been replaced by the simulation. However, at a vitally important moment, this impotent network of relations awash with postmodern hangups and surface value, has been given life and meaning by the Occupy movement, but also, as will be discussed, this focus on networks of digital expression and materialisation has become the aim of terrorists, since the emphasis has shifted to accept that these entities are no longer just tools to be used by human actors but which now come to act and affect in their own way on the level above individual interaction where the assemblage of individuals and entities comes to unite. In this sense, terror attacks, hactivism and networked “pop-up” occupations are a route back into materialisation and matter as modes of being that contain their own meaning outside of expressive or linguistic meanings and which work as a mode of resistance towards a violently symbolic regime<sup>47</sup>. The expressive has been re-injected with the material and

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<sup>47</sup> Franz Fanon writes about the violence involved in ridding a colonised area of the colonial oppressors and how this operates as a mode of self-assertion: self-assertion in this case, like that of the Occupy movement, is a way of allowing objects to emerge as they are, and not as they appear to be, or as they are used by a perceived higher being that attributes being and meaning to things in relation only to itself. Violence here is a way of emerging as an object that exists on the same level as other objects, as opposed to the violence of a hierarchical system that oppresses and relegates other objects to the status of lesser beings. Interestingly, Fanon also relates the violence of ridding colonial oppressors to a loss for capitalist gains: "capitalism realizes [sic] that its military strategy has everything to lose by the outbreak of nationalist wars" Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York, Grove Weidenfeld. p.78. The colonial capitalists are worried by the emergence of a self-actualising and self-realising object (the violent rebel/violent "native") because it means the plane of being must readjust and disallow an unfair hierarchy of being to continue in which one side benefits from the use value of the other. This is also the aim of the Occupy movement: to readjust the plane of being so that all entities exist on an equal footing.

meaning emerges once again in the presence of a combination of matter and expression, or in entities and their sets of relations that exist outside of any subject/object binary.

Before addressing the power of the Occupy movement there must be a continuation in the tracing of the emergence of this type of being which is based in presence or in matter and expression and this can be done by addressing the second text in this project, namely *Die Hard 4.0*. The reason this text is important in this movement towards a flattened ontology of being in which all objects interact, express and materialise on an equal plane is that it highlights the post-millennium reliance on digital entities and how these affect the world on a wider level than just the daily interactions of human users. We have moved from the virtual world depicted in *eXistenZ*, a world which always remains separate to the lived world, and as such, which always remains reliant upon the human understanding and uses of said world. The world of *eXistenZ* can only relate back to us if we give it the necessary commands: it is fully subservient to human understanding and human relation: unlike the digital, the virtual worlds of *eXistenZ* from the end of the last century can never coincide with the lived world of interactions and relations. The virtual is situated entirely at a remove and is only capable of action in relation to a user or controlling subject. It can not move or exist in its own right unless it is fully controlled and dictated to by the master object (the human commanding subject): “Once inside the game world of *eXistenZ*, the notion of there being a goal to achieve is addressed almost immediately, placing an explicit block in the storytelling that the protagonists must overcome. The narrative in this reality does not progress unless the player acts correctly” (Mack 2016). The programmed world of *eXistenZ* (the game) is static and only relates to itself *internally* unless it is activated and expanded by the master object. This is a subject/object mode of existence that is based on a hierarchy of access to being where the subject/human is the primary being in the duality of human and game/object. The world of *eXistenZ* remains static in a hierarchical duality: the subjects (human life) control and define the objects (the virtual realms of gaming). This type of subject/object duality begins to collapse in *Die Hard 4.0* as the reliance upon the digital becomes so primary that it too becomes the realm of real, lived, experienced life on both expressive and material levels. The reliance upon the digital has, in this depiction, become so primary that if and when there is an issue, the material and expressive elements of the digital network fail, causing all of (organised human) life to grind to a halt in both its

material and expressive instances. Organic and digital life coincide on a plane of existence that is flat and rhizomatic on the surface, but in actuality, the digital outweighs the organic as the measure of being in this case. While there is a risk of the individual uses of digital networks losing their affective nature to the sets of relations they create, as discussed above in relation to Facebook, allowing the focus to shift only onto the expressive and relational elements of networks, a change can be seen to emerge and is traced in *Die Hard 4.0* and the coinciding historical moment of its release.

Empty expression allows for the impotent emergence of a postmodernity that places relevance on the image alone and not on the processes of being that encompass both material and expressive elements to continue to operate as the realm of being. The fact remains that digital networks on a wider scale, encompassing telecommunications, financial markets, financial exchanges and wealth, municipal services, information exchange and information technologies now rely heavily on the expressive and material expressions of the assembled networks which they create and are also a part of and which rely heavily on the operations of digital entities in such assembled networks for their existence to be meaningful and to relate outwards to allow affective prehensions and events to occur. It is for this reason that a post-9/11 text locks its attention on the realm of the digital as a focus and target for terrorist attacks since the world of lived life, as an assemblage of individual human actors and individual non-human actors coming together, relies so heavily on the living world of digital interactions, actions and actors alongside organic and mechanical interactions, actions and actors. The risks entailed in the reliance upon the digital will be discussed as will the waning of physicality in relation to how the digital appeared to become the master object and humans were subject to the machinations of ethereal networks of affect. This will lead the way into the next chapter and the discussion of *Avatar* and how a more levelled mode of being is highlighted in the world depicted along with the use of technology which allows the spectator and the technology to be as important as the narrative and the images. The assemblage of text, technology and spectator will be seen to be equally as valid as one another allowing this type of being to be explained and discussed and related to the Occupy movement. Occupy and *Avatar* will be used, and should now be kept in mind, as the expression of a flat ontology of being as a mode of resistance to the hierarchical mode of being

engineered by capitalism in which grades of life are played out against each other including humans, races, genders, classes, nature, ecology, animals, objects and images.

It is important to note that while the everyday expression of digital networks occurs at the level of the individual, the individual is a material element within wider assembled networks such as the family, the city, the nation<sup>48</sup>. It is for this reason that it is important to address how the apparent impotent expressive use of the digital networks occurs and manages to have material affects that are unnoticed by the individual actor as they are in the process of expression. Individuals express, like and share on social networks. They contribute to the expansion of a digital mode of being that spills out of devices and into the body, becoming a part of the identity of the person. In this formulation the expressive elements of any such digital network become a very real material expression of being on an individual level, relating to things such as relationships, activities or sexuality, depicted in potential social network posts. Despite the flight into sets of relations, the subject (human) utilises these sets of relations to materialise an identity that has material affects/effects in wider assemblages. A brief and everyday example is when a person is “fraped”: this is when someone other than the person accesses a private social media account (typically Facebook) and posts in the stead of the actual person. This type of expression can cause real material events to emerge out of the relations that occur. A person’s fraped account may be viewed by employers and if the expression is offensive or derogatory the employer may be forced to take action in order for the post to be removed. Posts on social media accounts of this type can form damaging relations relating to the company the individual works for and other potential companies that deal with them, having further material effects that can jeopardise relations of business for example. A person could lose their job as they appear to represent a certain company which can not be seen to support such expressions as this could ultimately affect their image or the sets of relations that have formed with other companies who would also take offence to the fraped expression. In this way, there is a perfect, albeit individual example of hacking and how hacking an expressive medium can come to have extreme

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<sup>48</sup> These are a few examples of the material elements of an assemblage that an individual (human) actor is a part of and related to. There are also a number of expressive elements of an assemblage that they also relate to and act upon and are affected by: ideological expressions like education, religion, politics and so forth are all relations of power and potential that form assemblages made up of individual material elements and also wider material elements like the towns, cities and nations where these individual parts happen to relate to and reside in.

material results. This highlights the expressive as material in that the presumed identity of a person is being made to materialise in a different and unexpected way due to the machinations of another entity affecting it.

Hacking on a larger scale than fraping has far more material affects and can cause large scale disruption as will be seen in relation to *Die Hard 4.0* and it is at this level that the relations formed by digital entities will come to have their most potent material affects. At an individual level, these digital relations may have no immediate consequences or lived responses other than attaining likes or cultural capital, but they do make up smaller parts of the wider sets of relations that emerge from them and they also go towards the long term materialisation of the identity of the person behind them allowing images, or the production of an image of an identity to become an enacted identity: but beyond this, they offer up a miniature version of how wider digital networks operate and as such allow the individual to understand how actions can cause prehensions to occur due to the sets of relations that are created. It is for this reason that this detailed discussion of social networks was necessary for the development of this project. Individuals become particles of digital assemblages that operate in ways that means everyday access to them can never really highlight the operations of the networks in the same way that two individuals talking on a street could never be fully aware of the broader operations of the material elements of the city they reside in. The conversations they have will most likely bear no relevance, at this level, on how the traffic system operates, or on the running of the water or electric grids. Arguably, their conversations are impotent in the wider operative networks in which they exist. This is the individual level of expression that bubbles on under the surfaces of assemblages: they are important to the micro-functioning of assembled entities (singular identity formation or gaining cultural capital) but they will most likely be impotent in relation to the overall operations of the wider assemblage of which they are a part of. The meta-functioning of the city will operate over and above the singular instances of individuals that reside within its network but without these, the city would only operate internally, as a city functioning with no real function.

This type of individual interaction can change in relation to political conversations for example where individual expression can have instant material affects but here we enter

into a situation in which individual expression, in this case, casting a single individual democratic vote for example, can lead to a material expression at a later stage via the process of election. This type of affect can be seen to act in a retroactive fashion which allows for new entities to emerge from assembled networks: DeLanda notes that "as larger assemblages emerge from the interactions of their component parts, the identity of the parts may acquire new layers as the emergent whole reacts back and affects them" (DeLanda, p.33). In the case of a voting individual whose singular expressive daily routine may be considered as being impotent in the wider assemblage, after casting a vote into the larger democratic assemblage and voting for certain individuals who represent a political party, their act of expressing a future will can thus cause a retroactive expression to occur affecting certain elements of the voting individual's being, making their perviously impotent relations enter into a wider and more active pool of relations, causing it to become an affective means of expression. Other more mundane areas can also be affected retroactively like income tax, status, identity (especially in relation to sexuality for example with the referendum of Same Sex marriage in Ireland, or the blanket acceptance of same sex marriage in the United States for example) or measures relating to austerity that act back upon the individual, having real material affects on income, access to education, access to health care or social status. In this way, new entities can emerge from the relations acting in assembled networks at both individual and group levels and also on expressive and material levels which alter the formulation of the entity once relations between various objects come into being<sup>49</sup>. This retroactive mode of emergence allows entities to emerge from the new interactions and prehensions that they enter into and these relations and prehensions act back upon the beings involved, changing the way they are and what their potential is and was. This retroaction

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<sup>49</sup> In a telling example, the 2015 British General Election in which the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, was reelected, individual expressions came together to have a very material affect: austerity continues to affect the lower income sectors of the population, the possibility of strict border controls becomes a daily reality for immigrants and refugees and a British withdrawal (Brexit) from the network of the European Union became a reality. By casting a vote, or an expression, into the future, the potential to affect the network retroactively is put into motion: austerity continues to affect a large number of people whose income can be further taxed for example leaving them in a worse position, or the vote to leave the European Union, when accepted, forced people of non-European, and non-British, descent to be viewed in a different light, and to suffer, almost instantly from racial abuse and attacks. It is in this way that entities can emerge from the relations acted out in assembled networks: if the individuals voting had voted in a different way, or used their expressive potential differently, a new entity would emerge - opting out of voting is a way of only relating inwards and never expressing outwards and as such remaining impotent and in stasis - which arguably has happened in the British example. If more people had the will to express their potential, perhaps a new entity (ruling party) would have emerged and a new mode of being could have followed from this, with real and more inclusive material affects that have far reaching and very real potential in relation to actors of all types, not only human ones.

is merely a way for the withdrawn potential of an entity to come into being and as such highlights the potential as having always already been there, only it was relating internally as opposed to externally. It is the emergence of the external relations that allows new objects to surface.

What is important to take from the discussion of assemblages and networks is that despite individual elements acting together, these individual elements are all ontologically equal, be they material or expressive: entities differ in type only and not in terms of being. Expanding on this, DeLanda sums up the ontological validity of all interacting entities as such: "the ontological status of assemblages, large or small, is always that of unique, singular individuals. In other words, unlike taxonomic essentialism in which genus, species and individual are separate ontological categories, the ontology of assemblages is flat since it contains nothing but differently scaled *individual singularities*" (DeLanda, p.28). So in a sense, it does not really matter if the individual expressive relations are impotent when it comes to creating new entities, they are still and will always be, a part of the wider assemblages of being and as such they must be seen as being ontologically valid as they can cause certain entities to emerge in new ways and expose hidden potentialities if and when they enter into new sets of relations. But relating this back to Ian Bogost's insight that all things equally exist, they do not exist equally: individuals conversing on the street and individual expressions on a digital network exist in the same way that the moon, the atmosphere, blocks of cement and language exist, but they can not affect other entities in the same ways as other larger and more networked entities that relate to and affect in more immediate ways the wider assemblages that they are a part of. Nature can affect things immediately for example, with rising global temperatures or earthquakes, but this still exists in the same way as a person sharing a status update on a social network does. One will enter into more active relations than the other and will cause entities to act and emerge in a more affective way, causing object prehensions to occur outside of any relation to a master object (in this case, this can be related back to human understanding and these prehensions and interactions taking place regardless of if they are understood or framed within the confines of a human consciousness). It was necessary to discuss social networks in this way, and other expressive elements, since on an individual level, most operations of daily life occur in this sphere. As has been shown, whilst most individual expression can be

deemed as immediately impotent, they do go towards the materialisation of identity and when placed in wider contexts (the political arena, or with celebrity expressions), they do become immediately affective in expressive and material terms as happened with individuals acting as parts of the Occupy movement on social networks and also those individuals expressing themselves in terms of resistance to dictatorial governments as part of the Arab Spring. This discussion is necessary in order to move on to *Die Hard 4.0* which positions the measure of being in the area of digital technology which has taken the place of the human subject as the measure of being.

## **2.2: Being Digital: In Control of Being**

For the purposes of this project *Die Hard 4.0* offers up the perfect narrative example of how networks of assembled entities interact with and affect other assembled networks, be they singular individuals or wider networks of, for example, power grids, communications technologies, technologies of the digital, information networks and digital entities. The text highlights the reliance of human actors upon non-human entities and networks of operation, showing the dystopian side to the myth of a utopian reliance upon the advances of the digital and upon the technologies related to this (telecommunication, internet, mobile technology, algorithms). In the post-9/11 world depicted in the text, the realm of being has shifted its seat of power from being situated in the lap of human rationality and understanding to the realm of the technological and digital. The digital becomes the underlying power of being that allows entities to exist and act in accordance to its will. It becomes the god-head of being through which a new correlation is created: life rolls on and being exists thanks to the subordination of this life to the power of the technologies that operate smoothly and in the place of the traditional human subject at the apex of ontology. The world depicted in *eXistenZ* is one in which the technologies of the virtual are celebrated as opposed to the slick and well formed technologies of the digital that appear in *Die Hard 4.0*: they open new worlds of experience and understanding; they momentarily take the human out of the world of cause and effect and allow them to operate new worlds through command systems and semi-organic connections and impulses within which they are the creators of all action(s). *eXistenZ* comes from a period of celebration and uncertainty in relation to its depicted technologies and in the end, the human subject remains as the master of

ontology<sup>50</sup>. The other aspect of the celebration of these types of technologies at the turn of the last century is the fear involved in their operations and their openness: there is a fear of losing the closed off system of human subjectivity and the privileged position that this entails as the measure of being projecting outwards on to other objects, which in turn must rely on the master rationality for a validity of being to be bestowed upon them. These virtual technologies allow for systems, once perceived as closed off (the human subject/the world/rationality), to become open and accessible to other objects entering into them and altering them without an ability to resist this. This is the crux of anxiety in relation to the perceived dignity and hierarchical position of the human reasoning subject. *Die Hard 4.0* is at the opposite end of the ontological scale in relation to the world of *eXistenZ* and as such works as the perfect counterpoint in relation to the current discussion: it celebrates this loss of subjectivity in a post-9/11 world which has accepted the role of non-human actors as primary and which allows for expressive affect to become materialised instantly via the operations of technological beings. The celebration of technology in *Die Hard 4.0* differs greatly from that of *eXistenZ*. The celebration in *eXistenZ*, and other texts from this period, entails a glorification of technology and a revelling in its potentialities. Arguably this is the case due to the fact that the technologies of the virtual and the digital were still somewhat nascent, in relation to more recent technologies, and as such, the projected depictions of them were unsure and utopian. Technology visibly took over as the measure of being, but it could be altered and controlled to a degree, and confusion remained as to whether man or technology would triumph.

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<sup>50</sup> An obsession with epistemology has truly been eradicated in the depicted world(s) of *eXistenZ*: how something is known is merely an issue for computer programming and game commands spoken by the dominant and non-virtual human characters that are typically granted power of control over all other objects that exist in relation to them. The end of the text leaves an open ended question as to whether the final, and presumed real world we are invited into, is in fact a real world or a virtual rendition. This is true to the period of the text with it remaining within the scope of postmodernity: other examples from the period include *Videodrome* (Cronenberg 1983), *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998) and *The Lawnmower Man 2: Beyond Cyberspace* (Mann, 1996). However, since there is a celebration of technology and its uses in relation to humans, the ontological questioning remains fully tied to the master subjectivity of human rationality and as such keeps the human subject firmly ensconced at the apex of ontological being, to which all other objects rely upon for their validity. In other words, *eXistenZ* still relies on a correlationist mode of being that places human subjectivity as the measure of being, despite allowing for this subjectivity to be open and porous. Technology relents any power as an autonomous entity and is subordinated once again to the defining power of human rationality and use value.

The celebration of technology in more recent texts, like *Die Hard 4.0*, celebrates a smooth and insidious form of technology that permeates every aspect of life, but which, at the same time, appears to allow life to continue as normal. Technology appears in this more recent text as diffuse, transient and ethereal. Man appears as fully in control, but the opposite is in fact true: technology has become the measure of being under man's nose. The non-human has now become the realm of all of life, surpassing even the glorious position of dignity enjoyed historically by human subjectivity alone, hence the threat of digital terrorism and hacking as a way of disrupting the operations of life on all levels. The viciousness of the terror attacks on 9/11 instantly gave rise to a protection of physical, living beings with an emphasis on stopping this type of physical violence: measures were immediately enacted to quash this type of physical violence from erupting again, and these still remain in place. The digital flourished as the life-blood of operative being (civic, municipal, financial, communication) as human life set up physical operations in order to deter further terror attacks. The backlash to this was a new and concentrated focus on the realm of the digital by terrorists and how disrupting this realm could have far reaching affects on all of life. In other words, man turned its attention away from technology as a focus and on to the organic matter of life, and in so doing, allowed technology to blossom and act as an autonomous entity that gave meaning and life to the operations of daily life. It is this blinding focus on the primacy of human physical life that will result in the atavistic return to brute force in *Die Hard 4.0* and which also leads to the ability of terrorists to attack the digital, as opposed to directly focussing attention on the protected physical, in order to disrupt the physical in a round about way due to its reliance upon the digital. By placing importance on the protection of physical human life as the sacred realm of being, technology was given a free reign and as such began to surpass the operations of human subjectivity and human lived experience. By placing so much value on the being of organic human entities, the digital was allowed to flourish and as such, became the realm of operative life in the latter part of the first decade of the twenty first century. The digital became the realm of expression that could have instant material affects which could disrupt the operations of all life if it entered into new sets of relations with terrorists for example. This will be returned to after a discussion of the representation and cultural consumption of technology allowing for a fuller examination of how technology operates as the realm of being, and how this is accepted and depicted.

It is interesting to look at *eXistenZ* and *Die Hard 4.0* side by side as two texts, separated by only 8 years, that represent man and technology in two very different ways. This is done in order to pave the way for the discussion of the Occupy movement and how they aim at a mode of being that sees organic life and digital (inorganic) life as existing on an equal plain where there can no longer be a hierarchy of being, be it man over technology (as with *eXistenZ*), or technology over man (as with *Die Hard 4.0*). How man and technology work together, or in fact, work for each other as subject and object, as with the two preceding texts, will be examined in relation to ontological positions in which a correlation of man and world still exists and before which all other things are measured or granted existence, after a discussion of actual representation and how the representation of technology changed over the millennium period. It is not merely a change in representation that is under scrutiny here since representation on this scale (Hollywood film) is to be seen as a collective cultural consciousness which operates as a barometer for how what is being represented is consumed and how it is thought of by those that consume it - a sort of epistemic cinema. Technologies of the virtual appear in *eXistenZ* as a new frontier; a space for man, not so much to conquer, but to colonise in his image and in accordance to his wishes. Man is the master of technology and this is seen in that technology relies upon human rationality to tell it exactly how to operate. In other words, man is the subject and technology is the object. This is seen in the way technology is situated in a very specific space. Despite the access to this virtual technology being a semi-organic game-port, it is controlled and dictated to via a central operator (usually the main games creator, but the humans that enter the game space can also dictate how it operates, but again, this is built into the technology by the main human creator). The games are programmed and designed by a single human source, making power and commands stable and centralised, coming from the human subject which is always and actually in control. The human subject here is the measure of being - it creates outwards - technology is merely a projection of the human subject on to a material which it can control and command. This is a productionist metaphysics that shapes material to suit the means and ends of the anthropocentric subjectivity utilising/using it in accordance with its desires. In the text there is a clear hierarchy: humans are in control of technology through the possession of ports of access, programming, controllers and discussion. There is a visible and stable central point of access to

technology and a clear distinction between points of access to the virtual and the real world despite some confusion as to which world is which. This confusion can only arise from a state in which the two realms are actually ontologically distinct. The virtual world is separate from the real world representation and this is seen in the text on a number of occasions: in the same way the bio-port is seen as semi-organic and semi-technological, so too are the depicted worlds, but one is always more valid in relation to human being. Man was deep in celebration of its technological advances without realising that these advances were paving the way for technology to surpass its creator and instate itself as the measure of being. The virtual realms were beginning to encroach onto the realms of organic life, but technology could never catch up to the representation in the late 1990s. The virtual became the digital and the representations of this changed to suit the way technology was evolving and also how the consumption of a cultural consciousness and awareness of technology was evolving. Virtual worlds are still in the process of construction<sup>51</sup>, but other elements of life have already succumbed to an existence in digital realms alone: hard copies of information are in the process of disappearing with video, music and texts all being (primarily) accessible in digital forms or located in cloud storage.

In *Die Hard 4.0* this semiotics of centralisation is eradicated and the need for material instances of certain objects has been replaced with a flight into the digital. In a post-9/11 world it makes sense to decentralise control systems and certain objects of value (like information, finance and operative systems that control the smooth operations of daily life) so that they can no longer become the focus of localised or immediate attacks. However, what has happened is that the terrorists themselves have also become decentralised and transient making it extremely difficult for them to be located, identified and ultimately shut down since they can appear to operate and exist in and on the same level as all other objects equally. It is not only this that has become fluid and transient however: the functioning and operations of technology has become so diffuse that it is impossible to locate or even imagine how and where they function from. In *eXistenZ*

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<sup>51</sup> The Oculus Rift is an example of how the virtual is still being worked on with the aid of technological advances, relating to gaming and the abilities of digital processors. According to the Oculus Rift website: "The Rift is unlike anything you've ever experienced. Whether you're stepping into your favorite [sic] game, watching an immersive VR movie, jumping to a destination on the other side of the world, or just spending time with friends in VR, you'll feel like you're really there" <<https://www.oculus.com/en-us/rift/>>

technology is depicted as stabilising man as the centre and measure of ontological being by retaining man as the operator, or subject, in relation to which, the object/technology, is granted its operative being. Man as entity is stabilised and created as the god-like, central figure in relation to its creations and operations. The assemblage that is man is created by those objects that enter into its being, but in this case, ones which can only do so in relation to the way man creates itself. Man is also the destabilising entity in relation to itself since it still controls the technology that encroaches into its body and this is the root of anxiety and fear in relation to the technology created and depicted. This is reversed in *Die Hard 4.0* where technology destabilises this relationship entirely by becoming the subject and in the process making man the object in relation to which technology can dictate and affect the operations of human life at all levels. As has been discussed, the technology in *eXistenZ*, despite being controlled and created, has the power to begin a process of destabilisation that continues into the new millennium and which can be seen to be represented very vividly in *Die Hard 4.0*. The discussion will now focus on how technology has managed to loop itself around its perceived master and become the master itself - the tools that were used to build the masters' house are now becoming the master as technology surpasses the need to be controlled and dictated to. This is the second step in tracing the evolution towards a non-hierarchical mode of being which, so far, appears as man over technology, now technology over man, and eventually an equality of existence between the two.

Life, as depicted in *Die Hard 4.0*, operates on a seemingly normal level: we encounter a representation of a world that appears to coincide with the one we encounter outside of the cinematic event. The sets of relations between objects in the text appear to mirror those that occur in the world we consider as real (object prehension). For the purposes of this argument, the world represented in *Die Hard 4.0* is the world that we are all familiar with<sup>52</sup>. In the course of the narrative a group of transient terrorists, whose command centre is a large mobile truck, and whose leader is a former government

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<sup>52</sup> This appears as somewhat of an opposition to the world depicted in *eXistenZ* where there are some visually represented differences allowing us the knowledge that the world depicted in *eXistenZ* is different to our own. The main divergence with what we consider as real and what is represented is of course the addition of the semi-organic bio-ports to all living humans. However, this is again a future projection of what technology could be like, so in a sense, it is not all that different to what we are actually familiar with considering again technology like the Apple Watch that can monitor your heart rate continually and which is on your person at all times. Arguably, *eXistenZ* was just ahead of its time with its future projection - one which we are only catching up to now.

computer programmer, plan to shut down the operations of daily life by focussing their attacks on all of digitised life (an aim that can be seen to be somewhat in line with the group of on-line havtivists known as Anonymous that align themselves with Occupy and which will be discussed in the conclusion chapter). This attack becomes known as a "fire sale" (since everything must go) and it has three stages: shut down all transportation systems nationally, including the rail network (but also the traffic light system), disable all financial systems including Wall Street and their information caches, and turn off all public utilities like electricity, water and gas (Wiseman 2007). The basic aim here is to shut down all of the technology that operates beneath the physical manifestations of the networks of daily life at all levels, and which operate silently under the surface of daily routine, allowing for the seamless flow of daily life. The terrorists are after a databank of all of America's financial records set up after 9/11. These records, despite moving from being material to digital entities, remain centralised and this is shown in the narrative as an underground control centre with large stack computers which become the focal point of the attack. This is again symptomatic of the way life was turning to focus entirely on the protection of the physical after 9/11 despite resting most of being in the lap of technology and digital networks. The information itself may have been coded and digitised, but it was still stored on a single hardware device and as such was centralised, locatable and in a sense, ripe for attack, but also blind to this threat, in the same way the World Trade Centre was<sup>53</sup>. By placing something of such importance in a single position, and on a single device, transient terrorists would have no problem locating and attaining power via a number of channels (disrupting all of life as a way to distract the powers that protect the physical target). Whilst the narrative of this text must rely on a centralised object as a focal point of attack for the terrorists, it should be noted that every other type of technology in the text is represented as diffuse, networked and transient, making the central point of focus more of a narrative necessity than anything else. Shutting down one element of the network, remotely, allows for a number of prehensive affects to emerge: by shutting down the digitised network of traffic lights for example, the terrorists can make the daily operations of a city cease operating smoothly, which in turn will have knock on effects at a national and international level. This highlights the power

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<sup>53</sup> The World Trade Centre was a symbolic centralised object in that it represented the apex of Western capitalism and as such was targeted as the physical manifestation of this. To those in the Western World, this may not have appeared as a symbol as such and thus the Towers were overlooked as the site of capitalism and the focus of external threats.

of the digitised network of synchronic light systems that are run by computers and algorithms as opposed to human interfaces. It is here that the representation of technology in this text and *eXistenZ* diverge. As has been shown, technology in *eXistenZ* answers only to human interaction and as such remains subject to human utility and control: it is forever an object.

In *Die Hard 4.0* technology has been enabled as an autonomous and acting entity outside of human interaction or use. Technology, other than the narratively essential central database of financial records which is a necessary representation in relation to plot and narrative drive alone, assembles in such a way that it stabilises the entity known as the city, or the nation via technological networks of operation that function outside of human interaction<sup>54</sup>. The material entities making up the city are there; they exist and are operative and are the focus of preservation. But these entities are no longer operated or given their operative being by the traditionally hierarchical human subject. Cityscape and nation, encompassing the daily operations of human life along with the operations of national and international flows of capital, both financial and human, rely upon the networks of technology that allow them to be and to flow seamlessly. As such, technology has become the measure of being that shapes human life in accordance with its will - technology allows life to flow and operate and since this happens, human life can focus its attention elsewhere - or in fact, human life can become blind to the operations of technology and as such is allowed to become complacent and ignorant of any threats since everything is run by a higher being than themselves. Other objects such as the operations of bureaucracies, or the flows of capital, or caches of information, all of which can be seen to operate as mechanisms outside of the control of singular individuals, all now operate and rely upon the operations of technology for their being to emerge. This is a complete reversal of how human/subject and technology/object operated in the pre-millennium representation offered up through *eXistenZ*. To make the understanding of how networks of digital interaction operate, it was first necessary to relate this to the individual operations of such networks as they operate in relation to individual entities in social networks. This allows for an immediately understandable

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<sup>54</sup> These technological networks have of course been created and programmed by human action, but they are capable of acting and operating autonomously and outside of human interaction once they are set in motion.

iteration of the operation of a seemingly invisible network which may at first appear as impotent and which in some cases is entirely so (certain actions falling into their sets of relations alone as opposed to any materialisation that may stem from them). Whilst individual cases of socially networked entities are controlled by a single entity (mostly a human, but there are numerous cases of social media accounts, especially Twitter accounts, that are generated by computers), what happens beyond the utterances of statuses and Facebook "likes" is a vast network of algorithms that operate autonomously, tailoring content and objects to suit various consumers.

It is this type of system that operates beneath the objects we see in *Die Hard 4.0*. The city and its movements are akin to the individuals creating statuses on social networks - they are somewhat overlooked or powerless in wider networks - it is how they are moved, situated, created and dictated to by the operations of computer technologies that forces their being into a very specific shape (these networks will later be injected with power by the Occupy movement as they were forced to find refuge in the digital after their physical and spatial occupations were violently removed). There would be unfettered chaos and failed networks (of transport, finance, information) if there was no semi-sentient technology bubbling away beneath the surface of things, shaping and directing the flows of life, be they capital, organic, machine or so forth. A status shared on a platform that is not involved in a network of technology for instance, can have no bearing on anything other than itself and as such would only relate inwards, disallowing any newness or movement to emerge. If this same status is related outwards through technological networks its being is allowed to emerge and it can enter into new sets of relations and new entities can come forth into being. It is the network of technology that defines the being of the status in this case and this is how technology appears to operate in the representation of the world of *Die Hard 4.0*. Humans live and interact in the text on an everyday familiar level: they go about their business as normal. But what is highlighted in *Die Hard 4.0* is that business as normal is only possible if technology is able to operate smoothly and under its own aegis. It is here that the crux of the discussion on social networks becomes apparent. An individual posting on a social network is, most of the time, blindly unaware of the technological networks of operation that allow the social network to relate outwards. In a sense, all utterances on a social network are impotent without the ability of technology to make them relate outwards, and to interact

and apprehend in new ways with new entities. Some utterances remain totally impotent and can be ignored, blocked, missed or deleted and others can have effects on other people and objects (as will be shown in the discussion of the Occupy movement) but all of them are granted their being through the networks of technology and digital interaction that takes place outside of human interactions. The reliance upon the digital as the measure of life is complete.

### **2.3: Brute Will - Bruce Willis**

As a counter move to the transient terrorists and their attacks on diffuse networks of technological operations, *Die Hard 4.0* offers up a brute and atavistic antidote to the loss of the human hierarchy of being. *Die Hard 4.0* counters the loss of human control over all of life by having a muscular police man single handedly take on an invisible and moveable network of terrorists using only brute force and being seen as “a Timex watch in the digital age”: in other words, John McClane (Bruce Willis) is openly seen as a throwback to a pre-digital mode of being that is “going to lose” (Wiseman 2007). As an analogic anachronism, McClane is almost a comedy figure in comparison to the slick networking of both digital technology and the transient terrorists who both utilise and attack this type of technology. From the very inception of the character John McClane in 1988 (*Die Hard* John McTiernan), McClane appears as a solo, self-made, muscular man - a comedic counterpoint to any sophisticated threat: the “array of external and technologically sophisticated ‘enemies’ is exactly what Reaganism [neoliberalism] is meant to defy” and this resistance comes in the form of the muscular, fully formed subject (Jeffords 1993, p.61)<sup>55</sup>. From the very beginning of the *Die Hard* series (1988), the first instalment *Die Hard* offers up a text that “is astonishingly tight [with not an] inch of flab in its construction or a loose end in sight [it is a ] genuinely muscular movie” (Tasker 2004, p.61). As such, McClane is the anti-object: he is a white, American male, with a muscular physique and works in law enforcement, capable of “taking on (and defeating) a group of sinister high-tech terrorists ready to hack into and bring down US

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<sup>55</sup> “Neoliberalism sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency. It maintains that “the market” delivers benefits that could never be achieved by planning. [...] After Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan took power, the rest of the package soon followed: massive tax cuts for the rich, the crushing of trade unions, deregulation, privatisation, outsourcing and competition in public services” Monbiot, G. (2016). Neoliberalism - the Ideology at the Root of All Our Problems. the Guardian. theguardian.com.

computer systems” (Boggs 2008, p.567). He is the apex of a closed-off, singular subject that is self-made, autonomous and in charge of his own destiny: he has a “hard, contoured body [which] does not look like it runs the risk of being merged into other bodies” (Dyer 1997, p.152). As such, he is the backlash to the evolution of a technology that tried to take over and reinstate a new hierarchy of being. Bodies like McClane’s, muscular and tight are “over-developed and over-determined [indicating] the triumphal assertion of a traditional masculinity [or] a symptom of the male body (and masculine identity) in crisis” (Tasker 2004, p.109). Interestingly, McClane can be seen to straddle both sides of this equation: he is the apex of a closed-off, singular white male identity that can be seen as the measure of all being; but also a symptom of the threat to this identity coming from inorganic entities that are attempting to take over as the measuring subject of being and as such a muscular physique is a necessity to combat this. *eXistenZ* is the thesis - man is in charge; *Die Hard 4.0* is the antithesis - technology is in charge, and *Avatar* and *Occupy* aim at being the synthesis - man and technology/objects exist in a non-hierarchical flat ontology of being that privileges no singular entity over any other<sup>56</sup>. At one point in the text, McClane manages to ramp a police car into a terrorist helicopter: Matthew Farrell (Justin Long), McClane’s tech-wizard side kick exclaims “you just killed a helicopter with a car” to which McClane replies “I was out of bullets” (Wiseman 2007). What this points to in the text is an almost incomprehensible return to an old form of action that is not rooted in or under the control of digital technologies and as such is made out to be a farce. McClane’s ability to take on more sophisticated and technologically advanced opponents has always, in the *Die Hard* series, appeared as “[childish] naive and hopeless” (Jeffords 1993, p.61). He is a single point of physical resistance to the transient and invisible networks of technology that work as the life force of all other entities they relate to. McClane manages to operate throughout the entire text outside of the remit of digital technology, relying on human skill and force

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<sup>56</sup> The representation of the muscular male in the 1980s and beyond can be read as a backlash to the “feminism of the 1970s [and also] the ‘new man’, himself a creation of advertising images in the early 1980s, and the feminist gains he supposedly represented” Tasker, Y. (2004). *Spectacular Bodies*. London, Routledge. p.1. Tasker goes on to state, and in direct relation to muscular white male bodies of the action genre, that *Die Hard* can be “read as a fantasy of white male dominance rather than one of, say, empowerment” backed up by the fact that in the first film of the series, McClane is angry at his wife who has “chosen to use her own name since moving to LA” (*ibid*, p.64). McClane is a muscular and fully formed subject since he is a white male (police officer). He is a closed off entity that appears as a fully formed internally relating object that must dictate the actions and affects of the other objects he encounters, be they terrorists, women, inanimate objects like cars and his daughter. He is a product of Reaganism and neoliberal capitalism which is based on free market competition where the strongest (richest) subject will triumph.

alone. In the face of “virtual terrorism”, McClane reinstates and reinjects power in human presence: actual physical violence and power. At one point, and as if directly resisting theories of assemblages and networks, McClane points out, in reaction to America being referred to as a (networked technological) system: “hey, it’s not a system, it’s a country, you’re talking about people” (Wiseman 2007). In this text we get a glimpse of a mode of living very similar to the mode of living that occurs outside of the text. Digital technology has encroached to such an extent that it has become the realm of operation in relation to networks of living objects. Human being has stepped back and in its place digital being has flourished as the measure of all being. Physical human life is still a precious entity but it is only able to be such in relation to the operations of the digital that allows all of life to operate smoothly. McClane, as a throwback to a pre-digital era, wants to reinstate the power of human being over all other types of being. In comparison to *Tarzan* or *Rambo* films which also feature muscular white men that appear as atavistic throwbacks, the hero’s hard body is pitted “against the technology of his antagonists [...] who have recourse to elaborate weaponry and massed militia, which the hero confronts with his bare body alone” (Dyer 1997, p.164). The World Trade Center attacks on 9/11 were an attack on a very physical and present object, but it was also an attack on a symbol and a locus of digital and diffuse capitalist modes of operation. As such McClane operates on a level similar to the terrorists that attacked the World Trade Center: both are using the power of physical, present violence as a mode of attack on a network of relations and assemblages that promotes a hierarchy of being in relation to those who may be able to gain more of a footing within these networks (dominant Western capitalists for example). The text highlights the perceived issues of allowing the digital realm to become the hierarchical mode of being that controls all of life and bubbles beneath the surface of every operation performed in relation to human life. Power over being, or the power to control the networks of being, had slipped from the control of human understanding and had rested its might in the innumerable and diffuse hands of non-human networks.

In a sense, McClane, portrayed as the hero of the text in that he (almost single-handedly) manages to eradicate the threat of (inter)national financial disaster, is in fact performing an atavistic task of reinstating the human subject as the measure of being before which all other modes of life are granted meaning. Even in the first of the *Die*

*Hard* series from 1988 John McClane “survives explosions, falls, and injuries to subvert a plot by foreign robber-terrorists. [As the hero he] is defined by a focus on the body [which turns out to be] superior to those of his enemies, his companions, *and* the audience” (Jeffords 1993, pp.52-53)<sup>57</sup>. Seen in the light of neoliberalism, from which the first, to the fourth *Die Hard* films fall into, hierarchies of bodies, competition and power abound. However, all of life must be viewed as an assemblage of entities that work together to create networks of both human and non-human actors and also presence and absence, material and expression. *Die Hard 4.0*, which openly fears the technological advances which result in the waning of physicality, the loss of anthropocentric control and a turn away from productionist metaphysics, makes presence and the focus of being recede into the atavistic primitivism of John McClane. This violence and devolution into brute force, with its focus primarily on human life as the centre of being, is the opposite of what the Occupy movement are espousing. With this in mind, it is possible to see the text *Die Hard 4.0* as favouring a return to a Kantian mode of being which places the human subject as the measure of all else out there and before which all things are granted value and being. It is with this in mind that we must begin to turn our attention to a more inclusive mode of being that considers all things as existing equally and with no one thing being seen as the measure of all other things. In *eXistenZ* humans violently fight their way back to the top of the ontological pile by murdering those who promote a type of life that can rely on a virtual form of living as an alternative mode of being to the one we are familiar with. In *Die Hard 4.0* humans again use violence and brute force to reinstate human being as the measure of all life, despite allowing technology to flourish and control certain aspects of daily living. In both cases, what we are offered up is a vision of an alternative mode of being that has the possibility of allowing human being to coexist on an equal ontological footing as other entities, but in the end, this potential is violently eradicated and human being is once again to be seen as the be all and end all of being - humans are fighting to the death in order to save their position as the measure of life. It is now left to the Occupy movement and to more recent texts to highlight a non-

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<sup>57</sup> In a sense, McClane and his muscular body prescribe a form of being that is to be seen as hierarchically dominant, capable of deterring any threats and overcoming any obstacle. This characteristic of his closed off, complete and singular mode of being makes him appear as a fully formed subject, akin to athletes whose bodies are sculpted and firm and able to withstand outside threats. This relates to the idea that sport is a “regulatory regime that produces normative modes of masculinity”, making hard and muscular, or fit bodies, the measure of subjective being. Holohan, C. a. T. T., Ed. (2014). *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture: Tiger's Tales*. London, Palgrave Macmillan. p.4.

hierarchical mode of being that can accommodate all objects equally in order to stop human being destroying itself along with other objects, like the planet, as an alternative mode of being that must be considered as viable. McClane manages to regain an ontological anthropocentrism by returning power to non-technological, non-digital human force. He is bordering on Romanticism and its attempt to depict and dominate nature, allowing it to flourish in relation to man as its measure. We cannot but see him as a sort of renegade atavist however: a Bear Grylls looking to promote wildly outmoded modes of existence and experience, or an avid follower of a Paleo diet who sees no problem benefiting from the operations of modern technology, but who will only eat what was available to cavemen<sup>58</sup>. Even if McClane is a technophobe, his life is always tied to technology, through financial operations, the movement of information, the systems of transport he uses and the medical help he will require. Despite this, he still attacks and begrudges the move from human mastery over objects to the mastery of humans by technological objects. He allows no space for a symbiosis to flourish. It is this space of symbiotic living and flat-ontology that will be discussed in the next chapter, allowing for man, technology, objects, the planet and all other things to access being in equal ways with no single object, or set of objects as the measure of being.

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<sup>58</sup> In a twist to older forms of Hollywood cinema, the *Tarzan* cycles, the *Rambo* series, or the Vietnam sagas, *Die Hard 4.0* locates the foreign threat, not away in the colonies, but at home in an urban landscape in the form of the transient terrorists and the intrusion of foreign bodies, technology, into the closed off subjectivity of the white bourgeois subject. McClane's built body is akin to those of Tarzan and Rambo in that it "constructs the white man as physically superior, yet also an everyman, built to do the job of colonial world improvement", or in this case, a reverse colonialism where the foreign threat attacks the homeland Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. London, Routledge. p.161.

## Chapter 3: Assembling Avatars

In this chapter the evolution of an emergent mode of being rooted in a non-hierarchy of equally existing objects will come to realisation. This mode of being has coincided with the arguable end of postmodernity, the aftermath of 9/11 and the rise of digital technologies as a focus of terrorist attacks since the digital has evolved to become an increasingly important space within the realm of being. Having traced the emergence of this type of being in the two previous texts, *eXistenZ* and *Die Hard 4.0*, and looking at how this emergence was, in both cases, stunted by the reversion to a mode of being that retains a hierarchy of existence, placing man as the privileged side of the binary in the correlation of human and world, this final chapter will show how this mode of being came to be realised as valid, important, relative and necessary. What sets the event of “Avatar” apart from other traditional collective affective experiences like sport, or a music concert for example, is that in a sporting, or music event, there still remains a hierarchy between the objects interacting or performing. Those producing the event, be it a play in sport, or the music at a concert, are in full control of what they do, and as such can dictate the way the spectators consume the event. *Avatar* on the other hand unfolds as an absolute equality of experience with the cinematic event, the technology involved in the making of *Avatar*, the technology involved in the viewing which is appended to the spectator, the hyper-haptic visuality, the narrative and the actors all being equally as important to the assemblage as one another. In sport for example subject/object relations remain fully intact: the opposing team, or the ball, for example, are objects to a certain subject position, and the team remain as an object to the subjects that are the spectators. Musicians can dictate to a degree the affective responses from the audience by changing the melody, the tempo, the song and other such elements. As such, the affective being of one object relies on the other to produce and maintain its being in the event. This type of relationship is disallowed by the event of *Avatar* since all of the objects involved must be seen to exist equally in the event of its unfolding and as such each object is equally as important in relation to the existence of the object-event of “Avatar”.

The mode of object-oriented being discussed throughout this piece, which highlights the being of all objects as they interact, react and act in relation to other objects in a flat-ontology, is important in relation to the critique of capitalism offered up by *Breaking*

*Bad*: this critique will be discussed at a later stage after a discussion of *Avatar* and how the assemblage of text, technology, actors, audience and event also act as a critique of a system that is founded on the subjugation of certain objects deemed less deserving of dignity, or in the current terms, deemed less worthy of being things-in-themselves. Capitalism treats subjects/workers/certain human beings as lesser objects, or tools that are continually and merely performing invisible actions in relation to the system of capitalism in which they act and interact. This relates to the Heideggerian tool analysis that sees objects as present-to-hand, or never present as an object or being-in-itself as its use value (to capitalist causality in this case) overshadows its actual being as a thing in-itself. In this system of hierarchies the use value of an object outweighs its actual vast depth as an object that can act in certain ways, but within the capitalist binary of subject/object relations it is only allowed to act according to how it is being utilised for a specific value by another object. In this hierarchical system of capitalism, humans become merely present-to-hand tools that operate on behalf of those who employ them: it should be noted, and this is in line with how Occupy see the operational state of capitalism, that those who are seen as employers, or those who own the means of production (or possess the most wealth and as such can dictate certain modes of being), are afforded more of a validity of being, or are higher up in the ontological chain, than those they employ<sup>59</sup>. As Noam Chomsky, a vocal supporter of the Occupy movement points out: "Concentration of wealth yields concentration of political power. And concentration of political power gives rise to legislation that increases and accelerates the cycle" (Chomsky 2012, p.28). This shows how those few that possess the ontological validity as full subjects, or those with access to the most capital (cultural, human and monetary), can maintain a position of dominance as things-in-themselves, whilst the rest of the objects that relate to these as employed entities are merely present-to-hand tools to be used as their employers wish. The term presence-to-hand is summed up by Graham Harman as such: "every tool-being

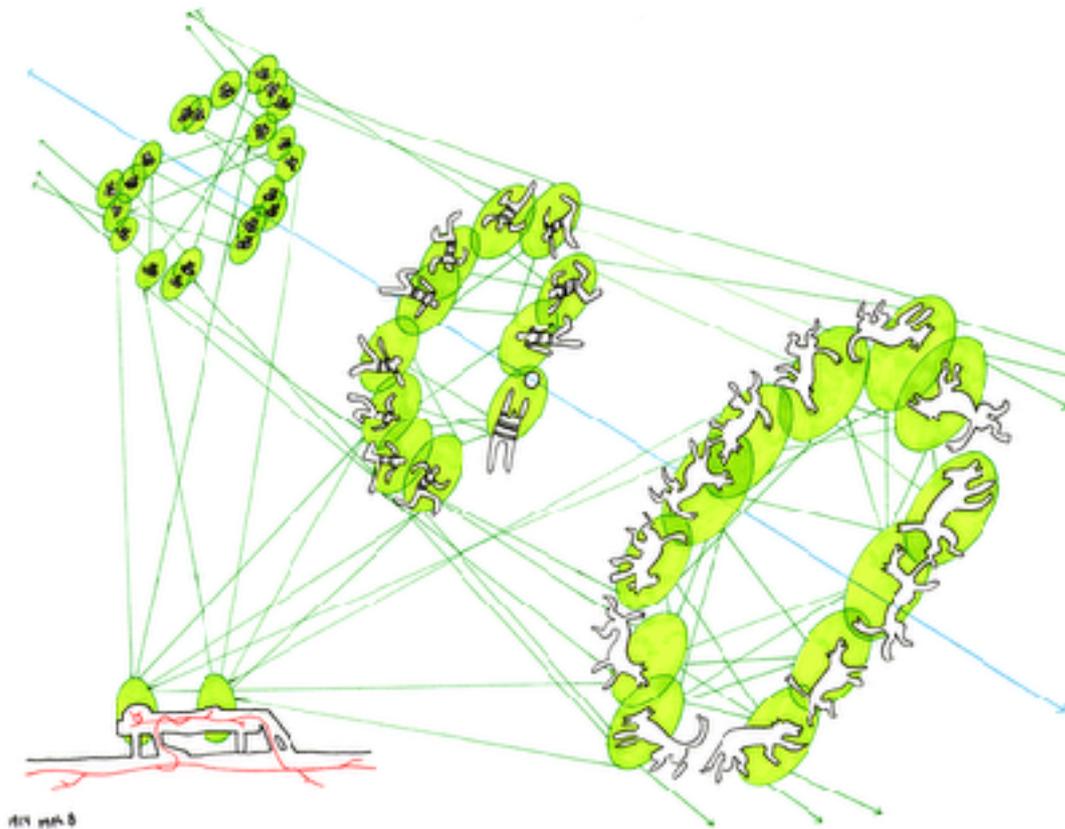
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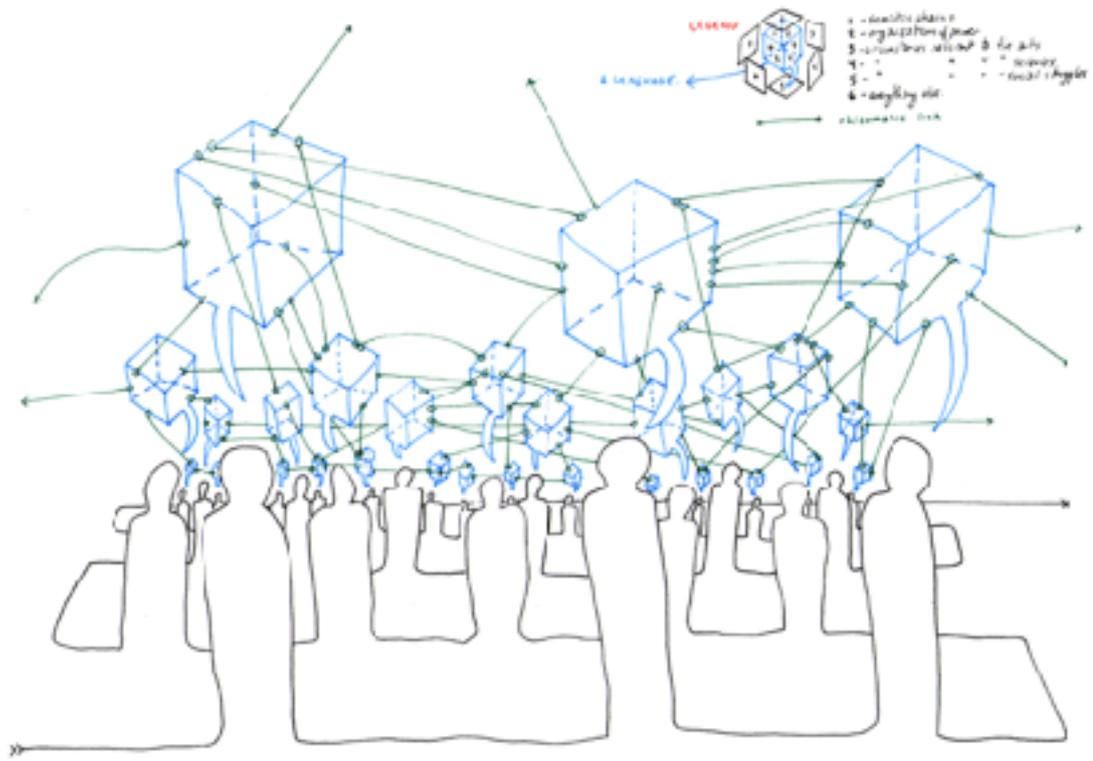
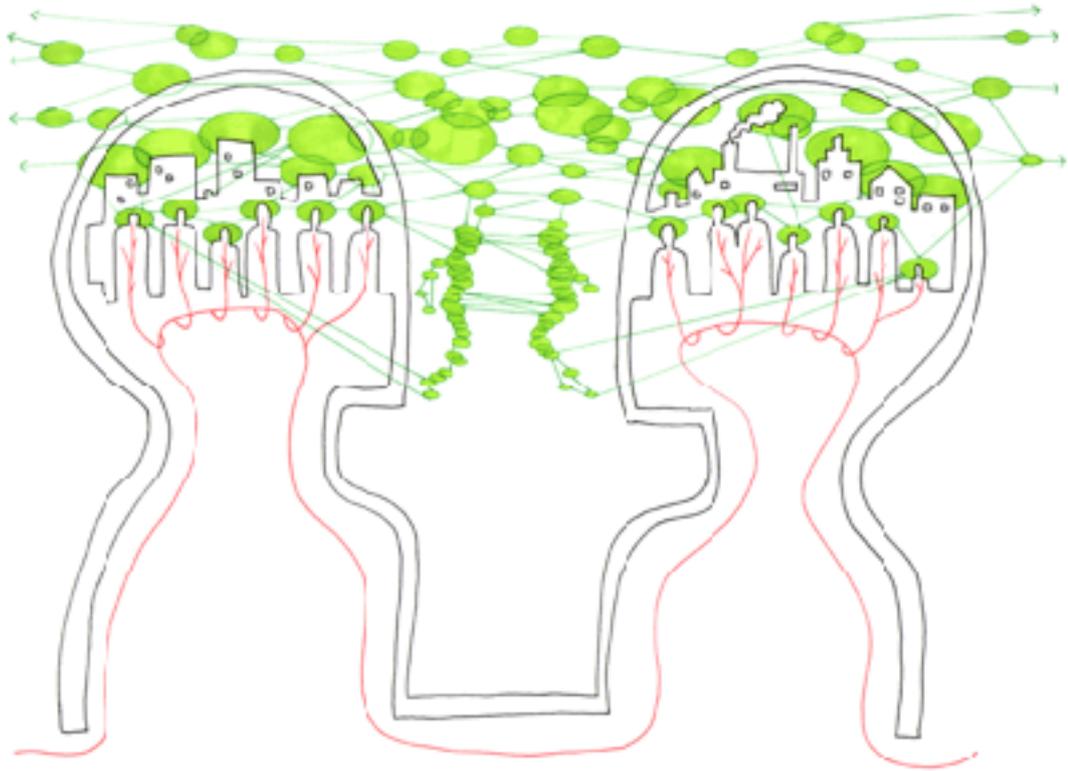
<sup>59</sup> The term "employ" or "employer" here has two meanings: the most obvious one is in direct relation to the system of capitalism in that this group of people are those who are privileged enough to be able to own, operate and profit from the ability to employ other individuals and as such are able to dictate the objects and relations that these employees produce. The second use of the term relates to the employment of objects (and here this relates to other human beings as objects) in relation to, and in accordance with, their productionist ontology that allows those who employ certain objects to do so in very specific ways that suit very specific ends. This retains a hierarchy of being that puts those who employ objects at the top of the ontological/ideological pile, able to dictate and measure the "lesser" objects that they are in control of. It is here that the dangers of a productionist mode of being can be seen since it allows certain groups of individuals to manipulate, dominate and subordinate other less fortunate groups of individuals, objects and beings.

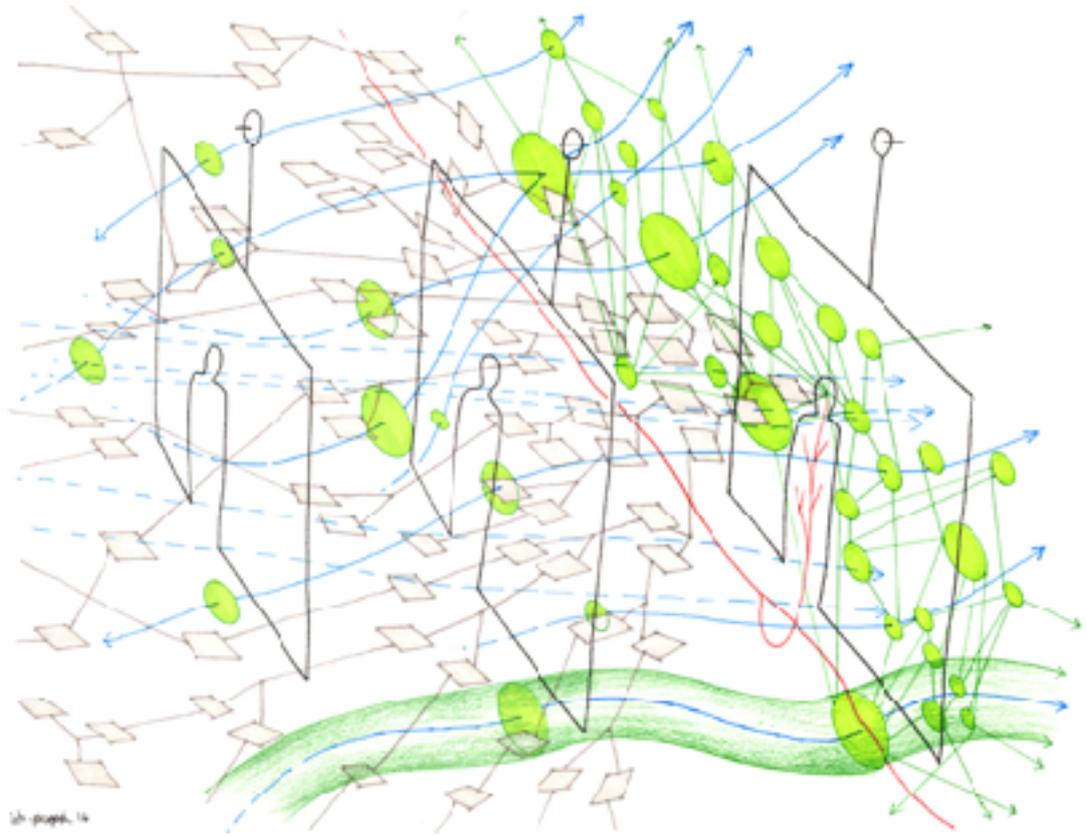
is a font of abundant possibilities [however] such possibilities belong only to the sphere of the tool's *relations* with its sister-entities, not to the tool-being itself" (Harman 2002, p.229). This mode of being is not the being of the thing or the thing itself, it is merely a set of relations into which the thing has entered into in relation to human being and use value and as such it is an invisible entity, reduced merely to the sets of actions it can perform *for* the human using it. It is an image of itself put to use in a symbolic regime that situates all of life in the realm of representation or relation. Objects, as has been shown in the discussion of social networks in the preceding chapter on *Die Hard 4.0*, must be more than merely the sets of relations they enter into, otherwise they are never things, but only the way certain things interact - this disregards the actual object that enters these relations and as such espouses only the image or the surface value of what appears as the object. There is an obvious unequal distribution of wealth, rights, education, access to health care and so on that defines this system of unequal relational usage (capitalism) and this is one of the critiques *Breaking Bad* highlights. Walter White (Bryan Cranston), a chemistry teacher cannot afford to pay for his preferred and desired cancer treatment, since cancer treatment, as an object (of desire) in a capitalist system, can be sold only to those that can afford it. Walter, an object in the system of capital is not afforded the same dignity as other, wealthier objects that can; and since they can, they are seen as more important, or worthier of life (ontological value/being) and dignity than those that cannot. As different objects, Walt and a wealthier individual are on two different levels of being - one is an invisible operation or a set of relations alone (a present-to-hand tool) in a larger system and the other is a full, dignified being: a thing-in-itself. Perhaps this is a way to read the object-oriented perspectives offered up by the various object viewpoints in the show. A chemical vat, a table, the ground are all afforded their own object perspectives showing that, despite being non-human, these objects still interact with other objects and still affect each other on a level that cannot be understood in human terms - these entities are both sets of relations and things-in-themselves. In this sense, *Breaking Bad* is fighting the corner of objects and as such is fighting against the unequal distribution of being that stems from the operations of the system of capital which only sees objects as tools in a relational value-system that returns the value of usage back upon itself and never towards the object being used. By offering up the perspectives of everyday objects, in a way similar to that of human perspectives (especially that of seeing from a subject point of view) *Breaking Bad* becomes an object

that offers up a whole new, and perhaps terrifying, mode of experience. In the visual world of *Breaking Bad*, that is, the world that the viewer has access to, all objects interact and equally exist. Each point of view, or each point of access to the world, or to being, is represented and opened up to the access of all other objects equally. This becomes a terrifying perspective in that it dissolves the hierarchical binary of human subject over non-human object and in its stead creates a level ontological field of being.

### 3.1: Rhizomes of Resistance







(Ngui 2008)

Discussing *Breaking Bad* in relation to this type of object interaction will be picked up in the following section, 'Becoming-broken: Breaking Bad'. The brief discussion of the attempted levelling of ontological value through the access to all objects equally, or through destabilising the traditional subjective viewpoint, is a perfect way in to a discussion on *Avatar* (2009), despite *Avatar* pre-dating *Breaking Bad*. The following discussion of *Avatar* will now attempt to show how object experiences, aesthetics and haptic interactions can emerge as a critique of capitalism, despite stemming from that system itself, or remaining withdrawn within that system and emerging at a point of relations deemed necessary and coinciding with a crisis in global banking and the emergence of global unrest. This discussion, coupled with the brief aforementioned critique inherent in the object-oriented images of *Breaking Bad* will lead on to the Occupy movement and show how an enacted mode of living was attempted along the lines drawn by the cultural texts under discussion in this project and how a levelling of ontology was attempted in order to open a discussion on the inequalities innate in

anthropocentric systems of being and the modes of living that operate as a part of this. In order to get to that point however, a detailed look at the event and interactions of *Avatar* is necessary since this will be the culmination of the turn to a meaning rooted in non-hierarchical being traced throughout this piece.

This project has looked at the process of the emergence/emergency of meaning based in a level field of being since the turn of the last century. Non-hierarchical being, and flat-ontology, here does not relate simply to physical entities that appear to exist, but to all entities that enter into relations andprehend one another in ways outside of the mode of understanding that we, as humans, relate to and typically trace onto other objects in an anthropomorphising fashion. *Avatar*, despite being a triumph of capitalism, as one of the most expensive Hollywood texts and also one of the highest grossing (Numbers 2015), emerges as a new mode of experience that levels out all types of object being in a non-hierarchical fashion and as such becomes a resistant text, coming from the heart of what it resists, in relation to the modes of operation that capitalist being promotes. In a sense classic narratives can be seen as present-to-hand tools: they are subjugated objects that are to be consumed and used in a very specific way by the audience that uses them. It is here that *Avatar* makes a break from this mode of use value and literally becomes a broken-tool, exposing itself as a thing-in-itself that has hidden depths of being and which can act and interact as an object in its own right. Before addressing the ways in which the modes of being represented in *Avatar*, and presented by the event and experience of *Avatar*, open up a new mode of being in which all objects interact on an equal footing, the dubious representations in the text must be addressed as any discussion of this text that overlooks these issues runs the risk of falling short of engaging in any sort of political discussion which focuses attention on the damaging ideological representations within it. Despite these representations however, *Avatar* was received well by some “indigenous groups, political figures, community leaders and scholars. For example, Evo Morales, the Aymara President of Bolivia, praised *Avatar* for its imaginative portrayal of an indigenous group fighting a greedy corporation” (Adamson 2012, p.144): but despite this, there still remains the portrayal of the alien race as primitive, atavistic tree-dwellers.

Slavoj Žižek states in the context of the dubious ideological positions displayed by the text of *Avatar*: "*Avatar's* fidelity to the old formula of creating a couple, its full trust in

fantasy, and its story of a white man marrying the aboriginal princess and becoming king, make it ideologically a rather conservative, old-fashioned film": he then goes on to state that the film "teaches us that the only choice the aborigines have is to be saved by the human beings or to be destroyed by them [and] they can choose either to be the victim of imperialist reality, or to play their allotted role in the white man's fantasy" (Žižek 2010). Echoing this is Steven Norton's comments on the text wherein the "latent content of *Avatar* is the desire for the possession of an archaic feminine-primitive" (Norton 2013, p. 131) and "while the primitives in *Avatar* may be fictional, they are real in the sense that they represent the reiterated and domesticated caricature of the primitive as a function of the Western imagination" (Norton 2013, p.136). These statements succinctly enumerate the issues of the text's white male, imperialist, anthropocentric stance which also echoes the fact that capitalism can only imagine a threat to itself as an atavistic and primitive throwback which can be mocked or disempowered through representation (as is the case with the Na'vi)<sup>60</sup>. The other issue in the text is the actual visual representations of the indigenous people as tribal, dread-locked, tattooed tree dwellers: almost prehistoric throwbacks in comparison to the technologically advanced humans that want to mine their planet (or marry their women). In both Žižek's discussion, and the current discussion of representation, one thing remains clearly intact: hierarchies of being are instated through representation and are upheld as hegemonic realities due to the far reaching and immersive nature of Hollywood film. In relation to the content of the text of *Avatar*, the movie remains firmly situated in a subject/object binary: humans are the subjects, the natives and their planet are the object - in relation to Hollywood, the text is the object to be sold to as many subjects as possible as mentioned above in relation to cinema as a present-to-hand tool. However, in an ontological twist, the ability of the indigenous people to connect with their surroundings and other life forces is mirrored in the event of the movie itself and it is here that the resistant power of the textual event becomes important and falls in line with the mode of being espoused by the Occupy movement: that of the broken-tool. Whilst it may seem like a far stretch to get from *Avatar* to Occupy, it is actually quite a small step if we look at it in terms of modes of

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<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, capitalism has the ability to frame atavism in whatever way best suits its ends: in *Die Hard 4.0* technology was supplanting the human as the measure of being, so an atavistic, white, muscular male was needed to come to the rescue and take control back for the human race. In *Avatar*, the Na'vi are a threat to the operations of capitalism since they operate on a level and rhizomatic field of being, and since this is perceived as such a threat, it is disempowered through representation and discursively produced as an ancient and primitive culture that lives in trees and connects to the planet.

being, resistance to hierarchical power structures and removing the human from being the measure and centre of all other objects and all other being. What will now follow is a necessary discussion on the text and the event of *Avatar* which will highlight the rhizomatic mode of being in the text's narrative and also in the event of viewing and experiencing the text as it unfolds in a specifically cinematic setting<sup>61</sup>. It should be noted that the discussion of *Avatar* as an event unfolding relates to the actual cinematic event located in a cinema with a large screen, surround sound and 3D technology. Since personal consumption and experiences are not quite advanced enough as home viewing lacks the 3D technology, the larger cinematic experience must here be focussed on.

The exoplanet depicted in the text of *Avatar* is named Pandora: the native (humanoid) people that have a long, rich and active history on Pandora are called the Na'vi and are "[g]enerally peaceful, but ferocious in defense [sic] of home, clan and family" (Fox). The text itself depicts the Na'vi as "human-like (and, even by human standards, beautiful). The waist is narrow and elongated. The shoulders are very wide, creating a v-shaped upper back" (Fox): in other words, we are presented with a text that anthropomorphises an alien race in order to make them consumable for human audiences, and not just consumable, but in typically colonial fashion, the alien "subjects" are exoticed and eroticised, disempowering them as autonomous actors and downgrading them to fetish objects. Again, this is a major fault in the depicted representations presented to us by a massive Hollywood text. However, the Na'vi do differ from their human models in that they have a long braid of hair known as a Queue which contains a "neural whip" which is an extension of their nervous system: at the end of these Queues is a

"remarkably intricate branching of neural tendrils that can be connected to similar structures of other life forms, both animal and plant. This connection allows a Na'vi to exchange sensory information with other creatures, and members of the zooplantae phylum, the animal-like plants which are unique to Pandora" (Fox).

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<sup>61</sup> As was stated at an earlier stage, a rhizome is a non-hierarchical root system which "ceaselessly establishes connections" within which "any point [...] can be connected to anything other, and must be": it is an assemblage in which territorializations and deterritorializations [sic] take place allowing "multiple entryways" and newness to become actualised and de-actualised Deleuze, G. a. F. G. (2011). *A Thousand Plateaus*. London, Continuum. pp.8-10. See the above images by Marc Ngui: these are visual representations of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes from *A Thousand Plateaus*.

It is these neural whips that contain the most obvious physiological divergence from anthropocentric physiognomy and modes of living and which allow the Na'vi to naturally exist outside of hierarchical modes of being that attribute different values of being to certain objects that might relate to them and *vice versa*. Arguably, these Queues are a direct comment on the reliance of human beings upon technological extensions of the body (prosthetics, wearable technology, communications technology, the Apple Watch and iPhone) but in the case of the Na'vi, these Queues are always already a part of a non-hierarchical structure of being that does not rely upon a creator, or master-object, like the human in relation to technology (see the discussion on *eXistenZ*). The main human protagonist in *Avatar* is a paraplegic marine called Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) who uses manmade technology to transfer his non-physical being into the able body of a Na'vi warrior. Initially this is done in order for the human mining and military operation taking place on Pandora to infiltrate the Na'vi people with the aim of persuading them to move off their sacred land, a massive tree that houses thousands of Na'vi, as it is on top of a huge deposit of Unobtanium, the mineral compound that is the basis of the human mission to Pandora<sup>62</sup>. Jake manages to do this via manmade modes of technological transference that allows him to port his entire non-physical being into another physical being via a sort of communication pod. The difference between this mode of transference and that depicted in *eXistenZ* is that the entire non-physical being of the human is moved from one object to another as opposed to the dated virtual renditions that appear in 1999 and which operate more as a movement of an entire virtual rendition of the human being to another virtual space, thus retaining a subject/object binary in which the virtual is lower down the ontological scale and is always reliant upon a human master in order to act. Returning to the ability of the Queues and their technological counterparts: the neural whip allows the Na'vi people to exist as a part of a living rhizome. In the text we are given a glimpse of a planet that thrives as a non-hierarchical root system in which all things are connected: the Na'vi can literally plug into their planet in order to feel what it feels; they can connect with the plants and animals on a level field of being which disallows subject/object binaries to exist and they can connect to all the other beings that

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<sup>62</sup> As has been pointed out by David R. Shumway "the mission is being conducted by the military, [however] it is clear that corporate interests are behind the military action" Shumway, D. R. (2014). "Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Utopia, Avatar, and the Loss of Progressive Metanarrative." *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6(1): 45-59. This is in line with the forthcoming discussion on Occupy in the Conclusion chapter: Occupy are protesting the fact that behind almost every act in neoliberal politics, corporate interests loom large.

have existed and which still exist as part of the life/being of Pandora. In a sense, this is mirrored outside of the text, and seen in *Die Hard 4.0*, with the reliance by humans upon technological means (especially with communications technologies) to keep them connected to distant parts of the world, collective knowledge and collective consciousness and which also allows for a collapse of time and space which is mirrored in the fact that all objects can and do relate to one another via networks, assemblages and rhizomatic affective geographies. What we encounter with *Avatar* is a text that depicts a mode of living that is fully connected and located in a rhizomatic system of being in which all things equally exist. There are hierarchies of power that still remain intact but as far as being goes, no object relies on any other object for its being to be considered as existing - in other words - subject/object relations give way to a network of being that allows for all objects to exist, interact and encounter one another in ways outside of any reliance on a master object. However, the most important element of *Avatar* is the event of its cinematic unfolding and it is here that the importance of the assemblage of "Avatar" comes to the fore.

*Avatar* is arguably a spectacle like no other. The following discussion will explain why, relating the event of *Avatar* to a non-hierarchical mode of being depicted in the text (as mentioned above) and also in the viewing of the text in its cinematic unfolding. This will set the foundation for the final discussion on the line being traced in relation to the emergence of a mode of being that is to be understood as residing in objects as things-in-themselves and also object interaction as opposed to a correlation between human rationality and how the world appears for humans within this. This type of being is to be seen as operating in assemblages, rhizomes and networks which flow through the cultural texts under discussion (and all objects in general) and into the Occupy movement, who then mobilise this type of existence as a method of resistance to the inequalities of being that are the basis of the system of capitalism. *Avatar* was the first filmic text to utilise a new type of cinematic technology that was developed and used in production and consumption. James Cameron and his team created what they termed "motion capture" technology to assemble, not an animated film that creates images from scratch, but a film which, with the aid of this groundbreaking technology, aims "to capture the performance of an actor and translate it to a digital character" (Entertainment 2009). The difference between typical computer generated images (CGI) and the images produced by and

through motion capture is enormous. CGI creates images, or simulacra, and these images are then voiced over by a human character that has no real correlation to the image: as such, the simulacra have no direct correspondence to the actor, or in fact, to anything that has been filmed, or that was deemed to have existed in front of any recording device (other than the act of animation itself). As simulacras, these images are the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 2008, p.1): however, despite this CGI (simulacra) images exist as things-in-themselves and should not be taken as being any less real than motion capture images - the only difference is that motion capture images aim at capturing the movements and expressions of something that stood in front of a camera in order to translate this on to another image (this emulates the movement of Jake's non-physical being into the physical being of a Na'vi warrior in the text). Motion capture is indexical in that it takes from an image that existed in front of a camera, or. number of cameras and is transferrable into a digital rendition; CGI is a simulation with no original: following on with Baudrillard's discussion, CGI imagery have "no relation to any reality whatsoever: [they are their] own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 2008, p.6). In other words, CGI images are entirely new objects, created out of purely digital entities which happen to have likenesses to things that already exist and as such are valid new objects.

Within *Avatar*, the background images and the landscapes we encounter are CGI imagery and thus are as valid and important as all the other entities we encounter, from the human actors, to the motion capture Na'vi people. The difference with motion capture is that it levels out being across a number of different objects such as technology, human action, fantasy, emotion, digitisation and simulation: [i]nstead of filming an actor performing the scene or movement in front of a greenscreen and inserting this footage into another environment, virtual cinematography computerizes [sic] performances using a process known as motion capture [...] producing manipulable digital doubles of performers (sometimes called digital stunt doubles or synthespians) (Jones 2013, p.

257)<sup>63</sup>. *Avatar*'s animation supervisor sums up the aim of motion capture as an attempt to capture the "intent of the actor" (Entertainment 2009): the senior visual effects supervisor, Joe Letteri, sees the technology as gathering together what the "actor is doing emotionally" and then "translat[ing] that into the characters" (Entertainment 2009) allowing a computer generated object to act, appear and feel like a human object<sup>64</sup>. To drive the point of motion capture home, director James Cameron sees the technology as opening a space for "true human emotion [to be] captured and performed by a non-human character" (Entertainment 2009): there is also the thought that "the procedure of mo-cap may or may not retain an actor's 'aura'" (Jones 2013, p.258). So what occurs in the production of this film, via technology and human interaction, is a collapse of hierarchies of being that disallows any one object to be situated as a more valid object than any other: *Avatar* as an assemblage of objects and events disallows any one entity in the assembled collection to take a privileged position before which all of the other objects must be measured. Jenna Ng sums up the collapse of hierarchies in relation to the narrative, the technology and the event of watching *Avatar* as follows: the last shot of *Avatar* "in which the mocapped [motion-captured] eyes of Jake Sully's avatar pop open [...] is not just about the transformation from human to Na'vi, but also about a new signification of self – of simultaneous resistance and agency, of being and being invisible, of an effortless moving between worlds, realities and forms" (Ng 2012, p.284). The actor becomes invisible, in the same way Jake does when both transfer their form from one mode of being to another: actor turns into digital rendition, Jake into Na'vi, both through the aid of technology which allows all of the forms mentioned to exist equally. Technology, humans, emotion and simulation all relate to one another and all act and interact upon each other: they create a rhizomatic system, or an assemblage of entities that stabilises a mode of being that can sustain a level of being in which all

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<sup>63</sup> Motion capture differs from CGI imagery in "involves actors performing on an empty set surrounded by cameras while wearing a skintight suit fitted with highly visible markers" that are rendered into a digital rendition of the actor, translating the movements and the body into a digital geography Jones , N. (2013). "Quantification and Substitution: The Abstract Space of Virtual Cinematography." *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8(3): 253-266. p.257. CGI imagery creates an entirely new simulacra of an actor or a body/geography by creating it entirely in and on digital technology, without transferring the actions of an actor via motion capture.

<sup>64</sup> Despite making the Na'vi people humanoid, it must be noted that in all of this, in both the text and the production and consumption of *Avatar*, the human subject is levelled out to exist on an equal footing to the technology used and to the images represented. The viewer is by no means in a position of privilege and by the same measure, is by no means a passive consumer, consuming images for entertainment (although this is an element of the event of *Avatar*, but it is not a defining element): the viewer is merely another element in a wide and sprawling network of objects that assemble to allow the text/technology/viewer to exist equally in the event of the assembled work.

objects relate to one another and equally exist. As Laz Alonso, the actor who translates over to Tsu'tey, a highly decorated Na'vi warrior explains: you get "so deep into the world [of the Na'vi] that you start hearing, seeing, feeling Pandora" (Entertainment 2009). So far we have encountered a text in which the Na'vi can connect to all things equally on their home planet of Pandora (other Na'vi, animals, plants, the planet, the dead souls and minds): on top of this, the technology used in the making of the text allows all elements of production to exist in a way akin to that of the Na'vi in that all the elements of production connect and relate to each other equally, including the transference of emotion from one object to another<sup>65</sup>. Furthering this mode of being, that is both depicted in the text and utilised in the production of the text, is the experience of the audience as the event of *Avatar* unfolds in a specifically cinematic occurrence which is essentially enhanced by the use of 3D technology, and the application of 3D glasses by the viewers to become part of the viewers assembled object make up. According to Miriam Ross "3-D cinema asserts an uncontrollable, infinite depth in its image, producing a hyperhaptic visuality" and that the "hyperhaptic quality of 3-D films introduces depth [...] that includes texture and the desire to touch and be touched by this texture" (Ross 2012, p.384). In this sense *Avatar* moves beyond the frame of the screen in a haptic abject motion, spilling into us and allowing us to spill into the occurrence of the text. In familiar terms, there is a violation of boundaries and of subject-object hierarchies and it is specifically here that *Avatar* casts off the shackles of a classical narrative structure, one which traditionally sets up a subject and object binary in which the subject consumes the object, allowing the text to become a subject in its own right and to become a mode of resistance to the very system that has produced it: by disavowing the statements made by hierarchical systems of power, *Avatar* manages to become a terrifying abject object that levels out being and allows all objects to act, interact and react equally and outside of an anthropocentric correlation between human and world.

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<sup>65</sup> These types or digitally rendered spaces allow for new affective connections to be created: inviting the audience into the world to feel part of it. As Nick Jones points out: "digitally created spaces [are] *nothing but* geographical description [that are] both programmable, abstract and highly (even ostentatiously) navigable" Jones , N. (2013). "Quantification and Substitution: The Abstract Space of Virtual Cinematography." *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8(3): 253-266. p. 261.

### 3.2: Becoming-broken: Breaking Bad

Since the narrative of *Avatar* is so driven by the networks of connections between disparate objects, including the main protagonist, a human who uses technology to transport into the body of a Na'vi warrior and who then becomes a Na'vi who, in turn, can connect to the planet of Pandora and the souls of all of the other Na'vi, and since the event of *Avatar* relies so heavily on a technology that in its own right flattens ontologies of being, removing one subject as the measure of all other objects, attention must be turned to the audience to see if this type of experience of becoming- continues into, or through, them. When the object-Jake-Sully connects to his object-avatar via the motion capture technology in the narrative, he is a becoming-Na'vi; when the Na'vi connect to their animals (or their planet) they are becoming-animal (-planet). According to Deleuze and Guattari, this type of connection, or this symbiosis of objects, allows for the emergence of a new object or a new type of subjectivity to take root: becoming "is not a correspondence between relations [nor] a resemblance [nor] an imitation" (Deleuze 2011, p.262): an entity that is a becoming-x does not change y into x - it actually creates a new object that can be seen as x|y (or y|x) which is a newly assembled entity that appears to exist as a non-hierarchical connection. Both x and y are and were things in themselves prior to the becoming-x|y and this needs to be kept in mind. Becoming a unification of x|y does not mean that the new object effaces the old ones or only allows being to emerge through the sets of relations that has occurred. Becomings are "perfectly real" and in the process of becoming "produces nothing other than itself" (Deleuze 2011, p.262). A becoming-animal is not a human-turned-animal, or an animal-turned-human, but a new ontological materiality of a becoming-animal/human where becoming "concerns alliance" (Deleuze 2011, p.262). Deleuze seems to overlook the essential premise that objects that enter into relations are already withdrawn things-in-themselves, whether they relate to something else or not. It is within the terms of alliance however that the audience enter into the entire event of *Avatar* as a becoming-text/becoming-cinematic/becoming-*Avatar* and as such briefly relent (for the duration of the emerging event) their singular, already existing, human objecthood in favour of an *abjecthood* that permits the

flow of entities in to and out of the objects involved<sup>66</sup>. Anthropocentric meaning collapses and borders encroach. It is in these terms that the images in *Breaking Bad* relate to those of *Avatar* and begin to make more sense as a mode of resistance to the system of capitalism from which they stem. Whilst the audiences of *Breaking Bad* are not as connected, or as becoming- as those of *Avatar* since they lack the 3D technology and motion capture, the images within *Breaking Bad* allow us to experience what it may be like to be a becoming-vat, or a becoming-table/chair/floor and so on<sup>67</sup>. This type of experience is magnified in the event of *Avatar* due to the application of 3D glasses to the audience members' body which allows the audience member to exist as a becoming-technology. This type of becoming which allows the audience to experience technology (and technology to experience the audience) and which in turn allows the audience to experience the hyper-haptic visuality of the world of Pandora causes a phenomenon of depression known as "Avatar Blues" once the audience member is removed from this assemblage of non-hierarchical being. Because of the immersive nature of the 3D and

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<sup>66</sup> According to Thomas Elsaesser "the strongest echo of Cameron's personal themes in *Avatar* is the presence of water, fluids and the liquidity of metamorphosis and transformation. I am not so much thinking of the amniotic fluid in which Jake Sully's avatar is being grown and incubated, or the underwater tank that lets us witness this spectacle of rebirth. Rather, *Avatar* also effects a subtle but crucial change of register in the bodily experience its images try to engage us with. One could call it the metaphoric displacement of sensations we usually associate with water and deep sea diving, into the representational space of the dense forest and outer space, which is where much of the action of *Avatar* takes place" Elsaesser, T. (2011). "James Cameron's *Avatar*: Access For All." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 9(3): 247-264. p. 255. In other words, a fluidity between objects becomes a theme of the film that is represented in the narrative, the images depicted, the audience engagement and audience affect.

<sup>67</sup> It should also be noted that in terms relating to an ongoing serialised narrative, the object of *Breaking Bad* is a much larger and much more diffuse object than that of a once off film text. Audiences become immersed in a different way to the visual and haptic immersion that takes place in *Avatar*, since they return to the ongoing narrative structure on a larger temporal scale than a single film viewing for example. Television texts, like *Breaking Bad* depart from "traditional narrative structure in a number of ways, the most obvious being the way that its many plots never reach a point of closure, and its absence of any original state of equilibrium from which they departed" Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. London, Methuen. p.144. Furthering this, the open and ongoing narrative style of a television series means that "resolution is temporary and fragile" (*ibid*, p.146) disallowing a closed off world to exist in relatable terms. A film is a closed off object that we can relate to and feel comfortable in knowing; a serialised text is almost more akin to a hyperobject: an object so large that we can never encounter it in its entirety so we must come up with new ways to relate to it. Arguably, we become more emotionally attached to these types of narratives since we return to them and must relate to them on a more affective and emotion level, allowing this to create the narrative on a broader scale than the closed off singular narrative of a Hollywood text. Interestingly, Fiske goes on to state that "[t]elevision narratives may embody the repetitious, straightforward structure of the folk tale, but they must be able to build into it contradictions that weaken its closure, and fragmentations that deny its unity" (*ibid*, p.148). *Breaking Bad* weaves so many connections and relations into its narrative that it attempts to make the hyperobject of "Breaking Bad" more understandable and consumable as a whole, allowing us to come closer to rationalising and rendering a hyperobject understandable in terms we are familiar with. Since this type of narrative is serialised, it has become segmented and this segmentation "produces an interruption in the reading, listening, or viewing process" Allen, R. a. A. H., Ed. (2009). *The Television Studies Reader*. London, Routledge. p.242. It is for this reason that the segmented narrative of *Breaking Bad* itself appears as a rhizomatic structure where all things must relate to all others equally: allowing the parts of the whole to relate to one another in order for the hyperobject to be understood and consumed as such.

motion capture technologies, audiences encounter a (hyper)haptic event that allows assemblages and networks of connection to flourish in all aspects of its unfolding. As such, the traditionally closed off human subject is opened up and allowed to become a rhizomatic object amongst other such objects. It is in these terms that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who writes about presence and epiphany, becomes relevant to the current discussion. In relation to things and humans, he writes that "only our death, only the moment in which we become pure matter [can we] truly fulfil our integration into the world of things" (Gumbrecht 2004, p.117).

What is under discussion here is not an actual death, but the death of the human subject as such: the death of the human as the closed off subject before which all other objects are measured and attributed a meaning or dignity. The death of the human subject in relation to a text and event such as *Avatar* means that the human as subject has had their privileged position removed and they have been flattened into an ontology in which all things equally exist. The human, the text, the narrative, the technology and the event all exist in a rhizomatic assemblage in which no single entity is privileged over any other entity. Relating this back to the phenomenon of Avatar Blues, the viewer who has just been fully immersed into the event of *Avatar* and who has experienced the aesthetic death of the subject by becoming a becoming-*Avatar*, is then removed from this event and is returned to the realm of hierarchies of being. This phenomenal epiphany is a moment of experience and interaction in which all things coincide and become meaning in and of themselves; as Gumbrecht puts it: an "epiphany within aesthetic experience is an event because it undoes itself while it emerges [...]. As an epiphany, a beautiful play [in sport] is always an event" (Gumbrecht 2004, p.113). This type of event, be it sporting, musical, filmic or textual allows for a moment to emerge as it occurs between the objects involved in which all the elements attain meaning and being on the same ontological field and a union of elements takes place in which all things are equally existing. Since this undoes itself in the process of its emerging, it only allows a brief experience of this mode of being and this is the reason Avatar Blues becomes such a real phenomenon. According to a 2010 CNN report "James Cameron's completely immersive spectacle 'Avatar' may have been a little too real for some fans who say they have experienced depression and suicidal thoughts after seeing the film because they long to enjoy the beauty of the alien world Pandora" (Piazza 2010). As Thomas Elsaesser states in relation to 'Avatar Blues',

some viewers felt “so distraught that they were in need of serious professional counselling [and] real life turned empty and stale, to the point of sapping the will to live in the here-and-now” (2011). Whilst Elsaesser sees the viewers as not wanting to live in the “here-and-now”, presumably referring to the lived world outside of representation, arguably those who succumbed to *Avatar Blues* did so as they wanted to live in the here-and-now of becoming-digital - they wanted to relent the hierarchies of being and to exist equally with all objects. Some fans of *Avatar* who experienced the event unfold as an assemblage of CGI, motion capture, narrative, acting, emotional transference, aesthetic experience and epiphany managed to experience the affect of an abject-oriented ontology in which all things can spill into one another and dissolve hierarchies of being for a brief moment. Within this moment a mode of being was experienced that was so unique that those who were affected by it did not want to return to the mode of being from which they came and it is here that the power of presence, assemblages, rhizomes, flat-ontology and affect are seen at their most potent. All of the objects involved in the event of the emergence of this mode of being were able to equally exist (like the life depicted on Pandora) and this moment of affective assemblage highlights the inequalities of being innate in a system founded on hierarchies of being and power (capitalism). It is of course arguably another twist of the knife by the system of capitalism that this affective response and aesthetic emergence comes from the highest grossing Hollywood film of all time: however, if we twist this idea and lend it an object oriented bent, arguably all of the objects involved become somewhat autonomous actors which can act and interact,prehend and emerge in ways that are outside any human orientation and as such, stemming from the system of capitalism is merely another element of the objects, and not a defining component or defining regime or discourse of subject/object relations. All of the entities involved began to act in a way that highlighted an alternative mode of being to the one from which they stemmed from, opening up a space for a dialogue to begin on the damage and depression caused by hierarchical structures of being. It is this dialogue that the Occupy movement enter into despite their use of silence and physical occupation as a means of communication and resistance, and it is this that will be the focus of the final concluding chapter of this project.

Before reaching the point of Occupy in this emerging mode of being it is important to look at *Breaking Bad* in more detail, focussing attention on how it operates as a mode of

resistance to the system of capitalism from which it too stems: also important is the way *Breaking Bad* differs in its mode of resistance to that offered up by, and through, *Avatar*. *Breaking Bad* presents a relevant and damning critique of the system of capitalism operating in the United States of America (and by extension, a similar, if not exact model which operates in the rest of the developed Western worlds). A family man, Walter White (Bryan Cranston), becomes terminally ill with cancer but can not afford to pay for the necessary treatments as he is a high-school chemistry teacher whose health insurance will not cover the cost of top private doctors who deal in serious illnesses such as his. Upon the realisation that his cancer is terminal, his family persuade him to go to see "Dr. Delcavoli, a superstar oncologist who didn't participate in Walt's HMO" (Josh 2013). This decision forces Walt to try to get funds together, not primarily for the medication and care he needs, but to make sure that his family can survive above the poverty line after his income ceases. The only way he sees it possible to generate enough income for the family to go on without him is to turn to crime: the manufacturing and distribution of methamphetamine, or "crystal meth", in particular. Walt uses his chemistry knowledge, not for teaching, but for the manufacturing of a virgin form of the drug which happens to be incredibly pure and highly addictive. White comes up with a drug so pure that it has the market in a frenzy, crying out for his new product, and thus he can eventually charge whatever price he sees fit for it. White turns his skills as a chemistry teacher against the system of education and of proper practice to the world of organised crime and illicit money making where he becomes so corrupt that he replaces the drug cartels that are already operating within the same market. He uses the logic of capitalism to benefit from the system of capital in a similar way to how legal drug manufacturers do: he creates a drug so addictive that people can not go without it. The legal equivalent is his cancer treatment: he, as a cancer sufferer can not go without the expensive medication required to help him. It should be noted here that treatment was available to Walt and this would have been covered by his health insurance, but instead his family convinced him that he needed the best possible treatment. This is again a symptom of capitalism in which options are available but people will opt for the most exclusive as they are under the illusion that what is more expensive must automatically be more beneficial, or of a higher quality and thus, far more desirable - as Adorno and Horkheimer point out: "consumers [...] suspect that the less anything costs, the less it is being given them" (Adorno 2010, p.161). It is the hope that Walt could stay alive that ultimately

drives this decision. His desire to remain alive and keep his family safe becomes a commodity. His emotion is the ultimate target of the system of capital that can turn anything it encounters into a commodity for sale and resale in a market based on the hierarchical access to capital.

Walt himself is at an age where he will, relatively soon, be of no benefit to the system of capital were he to be free from disease. So the prospect of keeping him alive has no real benefit to the operations of the system as he will be an expense rather than a mode of producing capital. As such, it is purely Walt's desire to provide for his family that the system of capital is targeting, or in other words, wring as much use out of the tool that is Walt before he is perceived as being utterly useless and broken. The system would be forced to view Walt as a human being and not as a potential well of capital gain or production that only returns value to the system itself. Since medical companies have cornered a certain niche with their products, they can, according to the laws of neoliberal-capitalist competition, charge exorbitant prices for their product, knowing that the sick especially will be willing to pay anything to have their ailments assuaged or their lives prolonged. Walter White merely mimics this nature innate in capitalism, with its focus on unfulfillable desire, only it is done from the other side of what is deemed legal. Walt highlights how human suffering can be capitalised upon and how human emotion can become the root of capitalist gain; he does not want to die and leave his family without money: emotionally, he feels so strongly about this that he is willing to do anything so this worst case scenario does not materialise. Walter White becomes the ultimate object in relation to the subject of capitalism in that he is forced to act only in relation to the laws of capital and not in relation to his own will. As such, his emotion is the driving force of his decision to break the law. His desire for money (for his family) outweighs any possible consequences and as such his emotion becomes capital to be extracted (despite it being on the illegal side - but in a system of capital, arguably, it is not the law that dictates being, but the best offer and the most profitable commodity). In 2015, a young, former hedge fund manager, acquired the rights to a drug that has treated AIDS for 62 years and raised the price from \$13.50 a tablet, to \$750 a tablet over night (Pollack 2015). This is indicative of the state of capitalism in relation to necessary medications: operating on a hierarchical scale, those who can afford to procure the requisite treatment are deemed more deserving of being than those who can not. Having

failed in his ability to raise enough money legally for the exclusive treatment and being faced with a terminal outcome, Walter White decides to go down the illegal route but only by adhering to the laws of capital that govern every exchange and which operate on scales of extraction of value. He creates a niche (recreational) drug that people become reliant upon in a similar way to how actual medical drugs are relied upon by those who need them. Both are subject to demand, and the higher the demand, the higher the price, especially when the demand has an emotional root at its productive source (the desire to be free of illness, to stay alive, to be able to provide for your family). Initially, Walt's desire to prolong his life in order to make enough money for his family is the equivalent of a company wanting to make as much profit as possible and as such, sells this desire to its employees under the pretence that it will benefit their lives if the company is more profitable. The desire for profit and gain keeps the momentum going and this can turn to greed, corruption, illicit action and unfair competition. Throughout *Breaking Bad*, it should be noted, Walt turns from an object under the thumb of capitalism, to a full subject that operates within the laws of capitalism itself. He manages to acquire so much wealth and power that he becomes a thing-in-itself since he has the means to move to the top of the hierarchy of being instated by a system such as capitalism. In fact, he gains so much illegal wealth that he can no longer use it as an entity of exchange or as a measure before which all other objects are granted being: the money Walter gains becomes a pure object, a broken-tool, a thing-in-itself that can only serve as an object outside of all relations and correlations and as such, the very blood of capitalism (capital itself) is depicted as the root of a resistance to the hierarchies enacted by itself.



(Gizmodo 2014)

What *Breaking Bad* shows is that America is only willing to give top medical attention to those that can afford it: if you are unlucky enough to not be able to afford this level of privatised treatment then your options are limited. In other words, if you are deemed more valuable to the system than another individual (or commodity in terms of human capital), your options are wider and you can avail of certain benefits that are not open to those deemed less valuable (private health care or insurance in the case of illness for example). If you are one of the less valued/valuable then you receive a lower level of treatment which presumably has a longer waiting list and also possibly a lower success rate. In other words, access to health care becomes a hierarchical issue based on access to capital. The system of capital constructs each human in such a way that it is an object of capital extraction and as such some objects are valued more than others. This type of system then allows objects to compete for being in that some are granted more access to being than others<sup>68</sup>. Failing to reach the criteria of access (having the requisite capital to afford top-shelf treatment) leaves the sufferer desiring the best treatment possible and in such a state of life or death the sufferers emotions become a target for the system of capital from which they can extract further capital/desire. The prospect of death for Walt entails leaving behind a wife, a son who suffers from cerebral palsy and a new born daughter (and later, arguably the power and capital that accompany the life of crime that he has pursued). It is for these reasons that Walt accepts his family's suggestion to look for the best, most expensive, and admittedly, long-shot treatment available. His emotional attachments are too strong to let go: he could not accept anything less than the best treatment money can buy in order to prolong his life with his family and to have enough time to potentially provide them with the money to survive after his death. Arguably, the reason Walt decides to opt for the high-end treatment is that the emotional attachments to his family are too strong to let go without trying everything to stop his

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<sup>68</sup> Being in this sense, relating it solely to the system of capital in this example, can be seen as freedom from pain, insecurity, illness and other such ailments, and the requisite access to the amenities that alleviate these issues. It is worthwhile for a system that extracts value from human life and emotion to maintain a base level of health amongst the masses, and allow access to a more advanced level of treatment to those deemed more necessary to the smooth operations of that system (the elite few in control of the majority of capital itself). It is ultimately this type of unequal wealth distribution, which can also be read as the distribution of being, that the Occupy movement are openly and innately opposed to since it places hierarchies of being in operation that value the few and disregard the many, not to mention the disregard for the planet, global warming, refugees and others/Others that accompany this mode of being.

cancer. This however, is just a symptom of the unfair system of capital that makes consumers believe that the more they spend on commodities/necessities, the more they will benefit. In this case, it is his emotions and his desire that are the target of capitalism and not his illness or the treatment. His illness happens to be a symptom that he is sick: the real sickness, however, stems from the system of capitalism that is willing to capitalise on the fact that a man loves his family and is unwilling to leave them behind without enough money to remain living comfortably. If there was no emotional attachment, Walt could opt for the base treatment provided by his health insurance, despite the fact that he could die in the process of waiting for this treatment. It is the love of his family that makes him go for the exclusive treatment that is not covered by his health plan and as such, his emotionally rooted decision, the very thing that is targeted by the system of capitalism, is the catalyst that sets him down a road of murder and crime and which will ultimately destroy his life and his family.

Walter becomes the ultimate representation of capitalism and in a twist of fate, becomes the root of a resistance to that system in that he manages to empty capital of all value and expose it as just another object in-itself amongst all the other objects of the world. The cost of the treatment is far too much for Walter to be able to afford on his salary as a public school teacher, but since the emotional attachment is so strong, the system of capital can offer a better version of his treatment that becomes impossible to refuse. This type of medical coverage based on competition and access highlights the hierarchical operations of a system that treats humans, especially those on lower incomes, as present-to-hand tools. As tools they operate invisibly as parts of a wider system. It is only their relations to the system, or what they appear to do, that are seen as important. Their actual being recedes behind their operative qualities: "As such, the work of the tool forever recedes behind its radiant surface profile" (Harman 2002, p.24). The surface profile of the tool, its use value in the system of capital, what it does and how this is valuable to the system, is all that is seen and thus all that counts, not its actual being as an object. The actual being of the object (human in this case) is eradicated and in its place an image of the human, what it can do and how valuable this is to the system of capital, is all that is seen and valued. Humans, seen here as objects amongst other objects, from which a use is extracted, operate invisibly as tools that are seen only as an

operative part of a wider system and never as things in themselves<sup>69</sup>. As Harman puts it in relation to tools (tools here are also referred to as equipment): "Equipment in action operates in an inconspicuous usefulness, doing its work without our noticing it. When the tool fails, its unobtrusive quality is ruined. There occurs a jarring of reference, so that the tool becomes visible *as* what it is [...] the visibility of the tool immediately marks its cessation as equipment" (Harman 2002, p.45). Walt resists the system of capital by breaking through his inconspicuous surface profile. He is a teacher and as such he serves the purpose of teaching: training more tools to enter the system of withdrawal and surface value, relenting their actual being in favour of becoming a means to an end in which they are overlooked and undervalued. He is a father, and as such he must provide for his family and in the process create more tools that will enter the system of exchange and extraction and who will also recede behind their surface qualities. It is this prevalence of withdrawal that effects all objects, but which also succinctly enumerates the operations of the system of capitalism that Walt opposes. All objects within the system of capital are only given their value and being in relation to what the system can extract from them. This means that the system operates by only selecting the uses of entities that happen to suit its ends and by ignoring the rest of those entity's possibilities. The only possible relations that objects are entitled to enter into are those that further the goals of capitalism, and any other relations are deemed superfluous since they generate no profit. Walter, the meek and (physically and emotionally) weak chemistry teacher, has spent his entire life as a withdrawn object with none of the rest of his actually existing, or potentially existing qualities being allowed to come into being. It is this side of capitalism that *Breaking Bad* highlights alongside the obvious critique of capitalism that forces those that live within the system to turn to desperation and violence in order to attempt to fulfil their desires. This resistance to capitalism and its unfair and selective extraction of human capital will be discussed in more detail in relation to Occupy and

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<sup>69</sup> The beauty of humans as objects, in relation to the system of capital, is that they are an endless well of capital extraction: their labour, their emotional attachments, their desire (which is provided by the system of capital itself, which promises fulfilment but which ultimately remains lacking and endless), their leisure, their health, their living arrangements and so on: all of these things that make humans want to gather more capital are all neatly packaged as commodities and sold back to the human. It is all of these things which have become corrupt, or privatised and excessively expensive, that the Occupy movement, and in this case, Walter White and *Breaking Bad*, are rebelling against, and in their own way, trying to open up a space for discussion at the very least, leading to the possibility of change, fairness and a non-hierarchical mode of living with universal access to all things for all people.

their mode of protest which highlights the importance of being present as a thing, and not merely as a tool.

### 3.3: Ways of Seeing/Ways of Being

Alongside its critique of the hierarchical operations and machinations of the system of capitalism that turns humans into tools, or objects from which a value can be extracted, *Breaking Bad* offers up a reactionary vista in the way it (re)presents things: arguably it does this via the aegis of object-oriented ontology, or speculative realism, and it is here that *Breaking Bad* and *Avatar* share a kinship in promoting an ontological equivalence, or a flat-ontology<sup>70</sup>. Whilst this mode of resistance emanates from another object within the system of capital itself, that is the actual television show, which is merely another commodity after all, it does present a form of resistance to hierarchies of being in its visual plane. The visual effects become almost haptic in a 2D mode of cinematic production (this leads on from the above discussion of 3D hyper-haptic visuality in *Avatar*). Throughout the shows we are presented with an object-centric perspective, or the perspective of object "prehensions" as opposed to an anthropocentric line of sight which constructs and presents images from the perspective of a viewing human subject. According to Graham Harman prehension "designates the mutual objectification with which *all* actual entities confront one another, and thereby stakes a philosophical claim outside the limited realm of Dasein" (Harman 2002, p.232). What this means is that objects interact with one another, they encounter one another in ways that are outside the realm of human understanding and human perspectives<sup>71</sup>. Objects touch and feel one another and this touching and feeling is a form of sensual integration, or a form of sensing other objects and how they can affect and interact: an aesthetic modulation. Dasein is the access to being understood and filtered through a mode of ontology coming from, and reliant solely upon human perspectives and understanding: as Harman notes in relation to Heidegger's construction of Dasein "one of the most consistent errors found in

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<sup>70</sup> Throughout the episodes of *Breaking Bad* there is an emphasis on the interconnections and interrelations of all actions and events, and this includes object interactions like plane crashes and apparently innocuous everyday objects. This highlights the assembled nature of all things that come together as an object (the operations of everyday life) that is so large that we can not comprehend it as an object, and can only see it as a compartmentalised and hierarchised collection of unique or separate objects.

<sup>71</sup> As has been stated, humans fall into the category of objects and in the process of doing so, they become just another object that can enter into sets of relations with other objects and within which, they remain withdrawn.

[Heidegger's] writings [is] the tendency to wrongly identify being-in-the-world with Dasein's awareness of the world" which reduces all being to a human awareness of being (Harman 2002, p.92). Heidegger himself elucidates this point: "Dasein, man's Being, is 'defined' as [...] that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse" (Heidegger 2012, p.47). Being in this sense only exists in its relation to its potentiality to enter into human discourse, or into human terms in relation to the being under discussion. If being falls outside of the discourses and terms constructed by human access to it, then in this line of thought, it can not be considered as being. Human awareness of being, or the construction of discourses surrounding being, is not enough for being to exist or for objects to have an existence or a meaning attributed to them since, therefore, they could not exist outside these limited scopes. As Harman continues: "[...] any tool-being is something vastly different from any of the simulacra of it that emerge into Dasein's view" (Harman 2002, p.120): how humans represent objects is not the measure of those objects on an ontological level, it is merely a measure of epistemological worth that relates only to the meaning in relation to human understanding. A meteor, for example, prehends the mass of a planet in deep space upon impact, and *vice versa*: they interact with one another, changing both parties in the event of prehension and create new objects in the process in a way that is fully and always outside of any sort of human discourse for it to take place or to have a being or meaning. We can know about both objects epistemologically, but we can never know both objects involved in their entirety and we can never know what the impact was like for both entities, or how it affected them: we can only posit, or speculate, what it may have been like in aesthetic terms which always fall outside the remit of reason and understanding. In other words, this interaction takes place on a non-hierarchical plane of being where all things exist equally: neither entity produces the other in its own terms and as such, shows how a non-rational experience is possible between objects as they interact. It is for this reason that Timothy Morton discusses all interactions, or all causality, as being aesthetic: as Morton points out "when calcium crystals coat a Paleolithic [sic] cave painting, they are also designing, also painting. Quite simply then, the aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension, which in turn means that it is also the vast nonlocal mesh that floats 'in front of' objects (ontologically, not physically "in front of")" (Morton 2013, p.24). Morton goes on to elucidate how all interactions, however distant in time or space, both of which emanate from objects in Morton's writing (Morton 2013, p.48), are aesthetic interactions:

"Sixty-five million years later, a palaeontologist inspects a fossilized [sic] dinosaur footprint. She coexists with the dinosaur and the ancient mud in a nontemporal configuration space, which I have termed *interobjectivity*. She can influence the footprint, and the footprint can influence her, in this shared sensual space. It's as if this level of reality is a vast mesh of crisscrossing lines, marks, symbols, hieroglyphics, riddles, songs, poems and stories." (Morton 2013, p.82)

Returning to the above example of the meteor and the planet, both objects may have collided in deep space, out of the scope of any human interaction or discourse, and will continue to do so despite any relations or lack of relations to any human subject<sup>72</sup>. As such, they are things-in-themselves and not present-to-hand. The reason this must be elucidated is that it displays a type of non-hierarchical being that involves every existing entity (and has the potential to allow new entities to emerge as things-in-themselves) in a similar fashion to the mode of being the Occupy movement want to promote: one that disavows the hierarchies of being innate in the system of capitalism, which ignores the wellbeing of people, nature, eco-systems and the planet in general. A similar act of object interaction, or interobjectivity, occurs when the space occupied by an Occupy protest becomes as important as the occupation itself and the overarching aims of the movement. The space is as important a being in the field of ontological worth and as such it is as important as any other object involved, interacting and emerging. All objects involved in a meteor/planet collision, or an Occupy/space event, are affected in certain ways that can be equated with the aesthetic, as what happens to both, and how they change and create new objects in the process of interaction and prehension, is always outside of any rational human understanding of how the entities interact fully. We can never know what it was

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<sup>72</sup> It is also worth noting the recent discovery of "seven Earth sized planets [...] found orbiting [the nearby star] Trappist-1". It is also believed that these planets are in the habitable zone that could allow for "water and the life it can sustain" Sample, I. (2017). Exoplanet discovery: seven Earth-sized planets found orbiting nearby star. The Guardian. [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com). This is just one example of how objects have existed outside of any human contact for an unknown amount of time: acting, interacting and reacting in and on their own terms. The recent discovery of their existence in no way makes them more real, it merely allows us to access them in our limited fashion.

like for the entities as they interacted, but we can try to grasp it in aesthetic terms<sup>73</sup>. Recall Morton's description from pages 7-8 above: "An effect is always an aesthetic effect. That is, effect is a kind of perceptual event for some entity, no matter whether that entity has skin or nerves or brain" (Morton 2013, p.119). It is for this reason that Morton equates causality with aesthetics. It is a non-rational event that affects the things that experience it, in non-rational terms. This mode of object interaction is the main mode of being in relation to the event of *Avatar* which has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Getting back to the object-oriented position presented in *Breaking Bad* will help to clarify this point. Arguably all cinema operates on a similar level to Dasein in that if we imagine the camera as the ocular object standing in for the human eyes, this offers us a view of object interactions and relations that we could and would never be able to encounter otherwise. The camera stands in for the human in this case, making sense of what it is seeing and what it records: it selects images that are then edited together to make a (generally) coherent narrative. So in a sense, this still remains on the level of being offered up for the consumption and understanding of (specifically human) Dasein. Since we are viewing a classically constructed piece of film, we are merely viewing, and as such this is occurring at a distance. Since it occurs at a distance, it is difficult for us to gain access to, or experience how the recorded objects interact as things-in-themselves outside of a relation to us (this is why a speculative realist approach must be taken here). The difference with *Breaking Bad* is that the actual screen on which we observe the recorded action(s) (the television screen, the computer screen) takes the place of the objects under discussion, or being represented, and forces a perspective rooted in Dasein to be removed or displaced and in its place an object-oriented perspective emerges. Put differently, we move from viewing these images at a distance, to being given the perspective of the object itself that makes up the image: we are brought into the object, or the image, itself and are made present in the thing that was initially removed from us. For example, in some scenes the screen replaces the bottom of a large steel cooking vat onto

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<sup>73</sup> In Lars Von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia* we encounter a depiction of the end of the world. A hidden planet is orbiting Earth and eventually collides with it. The film depicts the ways the characters attempt to deal with the impending object interaction "with responses raging from suicide to cynical acceptance" Žižek, S. (2014). *Event*. London, Penguin Books. p.16. Žižek describes the incoming planet as a "Thing" (in-itself). It is an object that acts and interacts outside of our ability to comprehend it, or to relate to it in rational terms: "it is our death, we cannot do anything" Ibid. p.16. To understand how object interactions are our "death" we must accept this death as a loss of subjectivity as a measure of being. We are no longer the centre of being, but are made to accept our position as an object amongst other objects and in order to register the experience of object interactions we must rely upon a mode of experience that is outside of all rational configurations, namely, an aesthetic experience.

which a thick sludge is poured, covering the entire screen as if the liquid were being poured on the inside of the actual surface that we are observing the action on, or as if the screen we watch is offering up the actual perspective of the bottom of the vat. In this case, we are made aware of the presence of the object of the televisual screen, which, before it replaced the bottom of a vat, was merely a portal for us to look through onto the images being (re)presented, and as such its being was overlooked in favour of what it was representing. The screen can no longer be ignored in this fashion as it has been marked as an object in its own right and not an invisible border between us and what is being shown to us. It should here be noted that the space that is opened up between the screen and the viewer in *Breaking Bad*, and the glasses, cinema, screen, affect, images and so forth in relation to *Avatar* all operate as affective assemblages.

At this point we can return to the notion of abject-oriented ontology where the screen becomes the border that encroaches upon all things and in this sense it can be a terrifying act that draws attention to the fact that we are not unified subjects, but are objects that are open and uncertain and can become territorialised and deterritorialised in assemblages with other objects and relations, exposing humans as objects in relations to myriad other objects and relations. This has a major bearing in relation to the screen in *Avatar* and how the screen becomes a new space for object interaction to take place in and on, or through, as the case may be with 3D technology. With *Breaking Bad*, for a brief moment we get to see what the bottom of the vat "sees"<sup>74</sup> and in this sense we *experience the experience* of the objects interacting: sludge on vat, or vat receiving sludge, which would always otherwise remain unexperienced to human perception: this again highlights the importance of a becoming-. We are being shown the prehension of objects that otherwise remains withdrawn from our human access. The point of this is not the we are

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<sup>74</sup> Since obviously the vat cannot see, in the place of the human seeing/understanding we associate with cinematic ocularity, the objects "experience" or prehend these events as a mode of understanding that is based in their being as objects and not on a level of human understanding: again, this can be seen to occur on the level of the aesthetic, or as a type of aesthetic interaction. The understanding of objects is again the idea of prehension: the objects interact and affect one another in a way that can alter both objects and create a different object or a new assemblage in the process. This all occurs on the level of the object and not on the level of cognition or human Dasein. Prehension can be seen as object Dasein and as such it takes Dasein away from its traditional anthropocentric meaning and roots it in the realm of all objects. Since we are so accustomed to attribute meaning visually, especially in today's world of incessant imagery, it makes sense to allow us to experience an object interaction on this level and with this sense. The visual prehension allows us to put ourselves in the position of the object in question in a much more affective way than a descriptive narrative for example. The (limited) haptic nature of these visual encounters allows us to imagine the way the objects feel or sense and in doing so, draws attention to the fact that all objects have a sensible ability and a mode of understanding rooted in physical interactions, causality and aesthetics.

humanising objects or anthropomorphising entities to make them more accessible to human perception: it is in fact the very opposite; humans are being objectified and the point is that we are being shown a new perspective from the side of objects as they experience one another as objects, at times even looking back at the viewer. Being allowed this perspective could possibly be seen as an emerging object oriented empathy (or access to the Real ethics of everything) that allows humans to relate to how objects interact, since they too must accept that they are also only objects and as such this attempts to dismantle the privileged position of human hierarchical being over all other objects that come into contact with this and also allows an empathy to emerge for the objects that are under threat due to the operations of the system of capitalism.

Throughout the series of shows that make up *Breaking Bad*, for example, we see a number of low shots that upon our first viewing, or encountering them, appear merely as such, low shots: however, on a number of occasions, these low shots actually turn out to be the surface of another object, for example a table, the bottom of a door or the ground, and what we take as a cinematic norm, actually turns out to be something different; it is the perspective of the table, the door or the floor as it interacts and relates with other entities (and also to the human actors or characters and us, the viewers). Instead of us humanising the table, door or the floor, the table, door and the floor spill into our being and we become just another object of their prehension: they table-ise, door-ise and floor-ise us in an alliance of becoming-table/door/floor. Obviously it is not the actual table, door or floor that is prehending us, but there is a prehension taking place on screen between the table/door/floor and characters. We are granted access to what this prehension would look/feel/be like and from what perspectives it occurs from. We can claim a sort of prehension of the image in relation to the likes of *Avatar*, or other 3D cinema when the digital rendition actually appears to prehend objects on its way to our viewing of it: certain obstacles like other people, seats or the rims of glasses all prehend the digital renditions of other objects as they are coming to prehend the objects that are our eyes. In this case, it is light particles that appear as other objects that are prehending the obstacles. The fact that the light particles prehend the 3D glasses, creating a different object, cannot be overlooked and it shows how objects interact to create other objects. Without the application of the 3D glasses and the prehension between them and the light coming from the projector, a 3D film would just appear as a messy and blurred collection

of images. It is the way these objects interact with one another that makes them make sense, and making sense here means making another object appear out of the assemblage of a number of other objects. It is the relations between these non-human actors/objects that make the object of the 3D images come to have a being, or a meaning, or a set of relations that can have an affect on the other objects that they then go on to interact with - in this case - the viewing objects (humans).

### **3.4: The Anxious Audience**

At this point it must be asked in what way, if any, does this mode of object experience affect the viewing or the viewers? At a basic level, the viewer gets to experience a new mode of experience, one that is rooted outside the normal mode of human perception relating to how we typically perceive or experience things. We get an opportunity to step outside of human being and dip our toes into the sea of object being allowing us a potential to experience things in new ways and as a result go on to think about an object-oriented ethics, or a Real ethics, where all objects are valued and attributed an equal amount of dignity (one that is usually only attributed to certain humans alone)<sup>75</sup>. Most human understanding is typically assumed to occur on a linguistic (and ocular) level: we understand objects only through our human interpretations or representations of them and they exist for us only in as far as we can describe them. They become phenomena for us to interpret. However, from an object-oriented perspective, this mode of understanding is too limited and disallows objects any existence or being outside the anthropocentric subject/object paradigm: this project is concerned with the actual objects of phenomena,

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<sup>75</sup> This is when the typical subject comes to experience the fact that subjectivity can actually be attributed to any and all things equally, only it is a very different type of subjectivity to the human one that we are most familiar with, but it remains a sort of subjectivity (or sense-ability) nonetheless. Perhaps a different term is needed in this case since subjectivity sets up a situation in which one thing is a subject and the other is an eternal object. Objecthood can be a possible term for this but this still seems too vague and ignores the subjectivity of all things. Perhaps abjectivity is a more appropriate term in this case since all things can fall into this category without there being a need to separate something deemed to be part of the subject and another thing, external to that, deemed as an external object that remains eternally separate. With abjectivity, all things can encroach upon all other things and change, assemble,prehend and create further objects in the widest sense of objects. It is necessary here to give a brief recap of what the abject is. A simple example of the abject is excrement; that which is part of us and not part of us at the same time: an object in its own right; it is that which we "thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva, p.3). The abject is that which threatens the perception of a closed off, unified identity with set borders and boundaries: the abject "draws [us] toward the place where meaning collapses", it is "opposed to I" and "cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, pp.1-2). In this case, the abject can not be assimilated as that would require one object to enter into another one and lose its initial identity altogether in the process. What happens is that the entities involved enter into an assemblage, or an alliance of entities that retain their singular identity and at the same time go towards constructing the identity of a wider assembled object or set of relations: the abject territorialises and deterritorialises. We are objects that can stand alone, but we are also objects that can only exist in relations to and with other objects that enter and exit from our entirety.

be they the interactions in the material of the human brain that allow us to think about objects, or the actual objects themselves. What the object-experience under discussion here does is twofold: firstly it allows the human-centred perspective to experience another perspective - that of the object. Secondly, it causes a certain amount of anxiety in the viewer<sup>76</sup>. This anxiety relates to a future twofold: the anxiety of the object as an autonomous entity that exists beyond, or prior to, any human perception - the ocular experience of this existence can cause anxiety in the viewer as their anthropocentric existence is brought under scrutiny. We experience the experience of other objects as they interact as things in themselves, not as we intend them to be: this relates again to the notion of the abject and the anxiety of not being a unified subject that can experience objects outside of itself - the abject threatens identity and stability - it "draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses." (Kristeva, p.2). Meaning in this case is the anthropocentric construction of being relating to subject/object relations in which the subject is the dominant position and objects stem from the experiences the subject may have as they interact with what they believed to be outside of and separate to their concept of subjectivity. Secondly, the anxiety of being faced with *being*. This anxiety can also occur in relation to digital imagery that is non-indexical (it never existed as a thing in front of the camera like a classic image captured of a thing that stood in the field of vision of the camera in the world and this relates back to the motion capture and CGI imagery in *Avatar*), or that has no referent to relate back to, and as such draws attention to itself as a purely digital image. It is this type of digital image that becomes a thing in its own right. There appears to be an ontological issue at stake here which could be seen to stem from this lack of indexicality in relation to digital imagery. Classical film seems to be ranked as hierarchically "more real" or more life like than digital images (due to their indexicality) and as such, it is seen as a more real being, or actual existing object, or at least a trace or representation of an actually existing object. At the same time, the object of indexical film, a film representing indexical imagery, can be seen to be more "real" than a digital rendition. The argument being presented here however is that digital images, like dreams, thoughts or myths are all equally as valid, or as real, as one another

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<sup>76</sup> This experience of the objects perspective is different from that discussed in relation to *Avatar* since the relation between the text and the viewer in *Avatar* allows a new space of experience to open up and not just a new perception as in the above example. *Avatar* opens up a new assemblage of object (screen, story, technology) and human and the space of affect that is created becomes a new affective-object assemblage in its own right.

and no object (the aforementioned are all to be considered as objects) should be privileged over any other. In this sense, the anxiety under discussion here is an ontological anxiety over the nature of being that privileges human perception, or anthropocentric perception, over any other form of knowing or being. The other side of this anxiety could be a fear of this newness (a new form of being and perceiving) emerging that perceives the world, and also helps us perceive the world in a new way. One example is the digital collages of the Paper Rad art collective. What these digital images do is draw attention to their being as objects despite them being made of classically non-existing entities (cartoon imagery, cheap looking computer graphics)<sup>77</sup>. Arguably it is the barrage of different mediums, coupled with the amount of imagery and the somewhat foreboding digital music and lack of classical narrative structures that arouses anxiety and affects the viewer. But if we look at the piece as an object that exists in many different sets of relations and how it can cause a certain level of affective response, we must accept it as a really real object, made up of digital imagery and sound, and that has to be taken as being as real an object as any indexically charged imagery. Arguably, the being that arises from this type of image is exactly that type of aesthetic experience under discussion here. This seems like a poor example of an aesthetic experience as it occurs between, typically, a human and the images, but the point to be taken from this is that the images are capable of creating this type of anxiety, affect and aesthetic interaction and as such are able to act as things-in-themselves outside of the need of a human interlocutor. The depression felt by some audience members after viewing the event of *Avatar* ("Avatar Blues") can be related to this event of anxiety and has been discussed in detail earlier on in this chapter. These collages have a digital being that is not reliant upon classically existing indexical objects or the human experience of these objects for their meaning to take place.

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJoP4MkTnwQ>: Paperrad (2010). My Webpage, youtube.



(Paperrad 2010)

In such a heavily mediated world, and with the above information in mind, we can look at images as rapidly losing their status as images and as becoming part of the very fabric of our reality - they are not to be viewed as representations/(re)presentations - but as things-in-themselves: or, on the flip side, the simulacra theorised by Baudrillard are now what make up reality as opposed to simulating a non-existent reality<sup>78</sup>. The notion of simulacra or images, or the withdrawn nature of objects relates exactly to the as-structure of objects theorised by Heidegger and later by Harman. The as-structure is the way objects *are* for other objects: x experiences y as y for x. Timothy Morton uses sound as an example to highlight what the as-structure is and how it allows for all objects to be as valid and real as the classical human subject. A human hearing a frog croak happens in an anthropomorphic fashion: the frog croaking is understood and experienced in human terms. An MP3 recording the same sound "MP3-morphizes the croak just as mercilessly as I anthropomorphize it [sic]" (Morton, p.120). The sound occurs for the ears in a specific way and it occurs for the MP3 in a specific way. Objects equally exist in specific ways for other objects and this can be seen as a reason for anxiety in that it decentres humans as the sole measure of being and perception and allows all objects an equally valid access to reality despite, or perhaps, due to, their withdrawn nature and arguably their championing of images of themselves as opposed to the actual presentation of themselves. Things-in-themselves are precisely those things that can never be accessed as full or complete things and so we can only ever access images, or surfaces, of things. Any discussion about digital mediation always seems to revert back to a vague notion of anxiety. The apparent loss of the indexical appears to be the main cause of this anxiety: digital images seem to lose, not their authenticity, but their claim to re-present a proof of existence that was once present (as in an object that actually stood in front of a camera). However, from an ontological standpoint, digital imagery has just as much of a claim to being as any other object (in this case, an object is anything that exists, be it an army, the

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<sup>78</sup> Another way of looking at this issue is to utilise Harman's notion of withdrawn objects which he builds upon from the writing of Martin Heidegger and Alfred North Whitehead. According to this mode of thought, objects are withdrawn in that their entire being can never be fully experienced and as such, they retain, or hide, elements of their being, (Shaviro terms this "allure" in his writing) or elements of their being are withdrawn when we encounter them. As such, by not encountering their full being, we only encounter images of the entity, despite encountering an actual entity. In this way, an image system is to be taken as real, or ontologically valid considering the image is the only access we have to the actual entity. It is in this way that Baudrillard's simulacra come to the fore of being in that they are purely surfaces that we encounter and can only encounter as being really real. All objects only ever present images of their true, full selves and as such we, or any other object that encounters them as such, can never experience their full being.

sun, an idea or a word)<sup>79</sup>. The issue is not the ontological value of the thing, but of the ontological value of what the thing (re)presents. Dragons, orcs, cartoons all exist with a being as valid as our ideas and words, but perhaps because visibility offers such a primary (anthropocentric) access to beings, when the mode of visualisation is called into question, or altered (technologically advanced in comparison to older technologies), the validity of what is seen is questioned. All of these objects have a being in that they are virtual but not actual, but virtuality is, and has always been a part of real life (any symbolic regime is founded on the virtual) - but being virtual, or virtual being, is still being: the virtual here is different to the virtual worlds discussed above in relation to *eXistenz*.

The worlds presented in *eXistenZ* existed as much as dreams or orcs or sunbeams but they also only existed in their subordinate relation to human use value and would never be able to exist on an equal footing due to this. They could never break out of their position as an object relating to a “superior” subject whereas other virtual or digital images can now affect things in their own right due to the predominance of their existence (note the discussion of digital affect in *Die Hard 4.0*). So the anxiety resides in the loss of, or questioning of the actual, or the indexical, as a mode of experience. We can experience things in their actual withdrawn presence if they are presented in front of us, or were at one point in front of a recording device: with digital mediation, this is no longer a necessity to (re)production. Perhaps it is the anxiety related to this new emergence of being that creates such an uncertainty about what exists, or what is deemed to exist in relation to the hierarchy of being that sets the human subject up as the measure of all other beings. We can create new images, new worlds, new ways of seeing that were (almost) impossible before the emergence of digital media. This new perception of being, a perception of objects, or parts of objects, that were previously withdrawn from what was thought to be the object is what causes this anxiety. This again relates to the withdrawn notion of objects. If objects retain, or withdraw, elements of their being when we encounter them, or when they encounter other objects, newness can emerge since parts and possible relations of the object are held in reserve and emerge in situations of

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<sup>79</sup> This will lead on to the discussion about Occupy and their digital presence which became their only presence once their actual occupational presence was erased by repressive state apparatuses. It is still a really real and actually existing presence, or set of relations, that allows them to go on existing despite not having any other physical manifestations like the occupied encampments they started out with.

prehension. Perhaps it is this emergence of newness, the emergence of new perceptions (human and object perceptions) that causes anxiety. Epistemology becomes somewhat obsolete in this sense since we can never know what an object holds in reserve and this means we can never know how it will act/interact in certain situations, thus taking the human out of the equation of knowing and experiencing (recall the discussion of the Australian bush fires by Pierides and Woodman in the sub-heading ‘Assemblages and the Object’). Anxiety arises in this loss of knowing on an ontological level. This inaccessible knowledge, relating to the existence of objects outside of and eternally withdrawn from all human access, is the pinnacle of anxiety: the only thing we can know from this event of anxiety is that we are not the measure of being or existence and that all objects exist and interact in ways similar to how humans do, but it is this mode of being, a mode of being traditionally kept for human interactions, that must now be attributed to all things equally. Anxiety arises from the displacement of hierarchical modes of being and humans must now take their place amongst the objects of the world(s). It is for this reason that entities like global warming cause so much anxiety: not only because we are destroying the planet, but because we can do very little to stop the processes that are in place that cause the warming itself and the effects that stem from this like adverse weather conditions, mud slides, earth quakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters. We can never know the object of global warming in its entirety, just through localised symptoms or surfaces.

Traditionally images or films were closed off worlds, made of indexical (and other) images and as such, we were presented with complete world, or complete object views: we could encounter the entirety of the presented world without anxiety<sup>80</sup>. Now, with digital media, and especially with virtual and 3D media, the once solid objects we perceived as whole and complete have been opened up again and their worlds spill into ours, and *vice versa*, showing that they are just as real as our actual world and just as withdrawn. This also relates to the way we can now see these worlds, or how our point of access to these worlds has expanded, as in *Breaking Bad*, which allows us to enter the very viewpoint of other objects and not just experience them from a perceived position of privilege. Their being can never be fully exhausted in encounters with other objects (objects here includes the viewing population). Again, what sets this type of virtual living

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<sup>80</sup> See the discussion of Brian McHale’s “ontological oscillation” or “flickering effect” on pp.31-32.

apart from that discussed in *eXistenZ* is that these virtual objects are actually existing within, or as part of the fabric of the really real and are not just allegorical, anthropocentric depictions of virtuality. This type of virtuality has an affective power, or a prehensive power, that means it can make its own meaning and interact and alter the meaning of other objects it encounters in and on its own terms. It is not bound to a subject/object binate hierarchy in which the subject can only attribute meaning to the object: the object is its own meaning despite it being virtual or digital. It is this mode of being, this flattened-out ontology of equally existing entities that will be the focus of the Occupy movement in the conclusion chapter that follows. It was necessary to have a prolonged discussion of what objects are and how they interact with one another before moving on to an enactment of this mode of being with the Occupy movement. Occupy are a special entity since they promote this non-hierarchy of being in their occupation of space and their espousal of equality in all things. However, what makes them more interesting is that, when their occupations of space were finally shut down by repressive state apparatuses, they continued to exist as a primarily digital entity, showing that they practice what they preach, by placing as much importance on digital being as physical being. The reason film was used to show this emergence, is that film, like the digital existence of Occupy, must be seen as being an affective entity in-itself. On top of this, film belies the current and collective consciousness of the time of its creation and as such allows us to use film as an archival snapshot of how being was perceived at that moment: a sort of filmic or digital archive. What follows now is the conclusion chapter in which the emergence of a non-hierarchical mode of being comes to fruition and is lived out by a movement comprising of people, language, space, capitalism, journalism, planetary issues, weather and so on. The Occupy movement are a crystallisation of object-oriented, flat-ontology in what they do, what they say and how they exist.

## Chapter 4 - Conclusion: Occupying Objects

In tracing a line through three film texts spanning from 1999-2009 (and slightly beyond with both *Occupy* [2011] and *Breaking Bad* [2013]), an attempt has been made to show how a mode of being began to emerge, evolve and take root, moving from a narrative device depicting a collective fear of this mode of being, to an enacted and actualised non-hierarchy of being that encompasses all things equally and which allows for a flattened ontology of beings to take the place of any system with its foundations in inequality. This allows us to reinterpret and reimagine what we consider to be an object, since objects like events that are assemblages can be too large, or seemingly diffuse, for us to comprehend: this could be a terrorist network, a virtual space like the internet or a protest movement involving people, spaces, objectives and the planet<sup>81</sup>. Overall this has meant that the Kantian mode of being in which we can not access the things of the world, but only access them through perception, has been departed from, allowing for the being of all things to exist in their own right, as things-in-themselves, outside of any human/world correlation. Therefore, the human subject, which traditionally enjoyed the position as the measure of all objects, is being replaced by a flat ontology that allows for the existence of objects outside of a reliance upon the master subject of human thought. Objects exist as more than their sets of relations, especially that seemingly sacred relation to human rationality and understanding (outside of any correlation to human thought). Graham Harman, in *Bells and Whistles*, referring to Quentin Meillassoux, discusses the being of objects as outlasting any correlation created for them that only allows them to exist in their relation to a human subject: "the thing-in-itself counts as 'in-itself' only because it is capable of outlasting the human lifespan. For as long as humans exist and think, there is no difference between the in-itself and what we are in principle able to know of it" (Harman 2013, pp.22-23). Within this correlation, things only exist as things-in-themselves when they are experienced by a measuring human subject - therefore, in this formulation, things only exist as present-to-hand tools. As present-to-hand tools, or objects measured only by their relation to human being, objects appear only as surface images of themselves and retain a vast stock of withdrawn potential that can never come

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<sup>81</sup> This type of flattening of ontology allows for a more inclusive ethics that is willing to extend a dignity to all objects equally: this has a major relevance in relation to post-humanism where technology has become an equal element of the human assemblage which can no longer be seen as being a uniquely organic entity.

into view (being), or of which, only certain elements may come into view if their relation to the measuring subject changes or deforms. This final chapter will look at how this mode of flat-ontological being, one that is non-hierarchical, rhizomatic and networked, has moved from being an entirely aesthetic device within the narrative drives of the first two texts covered by this project, *eXistenZ* and *Die Hard 4.0*, to a living and modulating being that accounts for the equal existence of all things outside of the need for a purely human reasoning subject to allow for these things/objects to appear as objects in the first place. The reliance upon a correlation means that the potential of objects, outside of relations, remains eternally relegated to the realm of subjective dependence between humans and the world as it appears for them<sup>82</sup>. The move beyond the purely subjective realm, where this type of being was primarily a narrative device or a dystopian depiction of a future in which humans have succumbed to the rule of machines/technology emerged in the event of *Avatar* (2009) where the combination of narrative, text, event, technology, audience, affect and aesthetic interaction all combined to ensure an experience of a type of being that needed all of the above elements to *interact and combine on a level field* in order for the full experience of a non-hierarchical, flat ontology of being to take place. Shortly after the release of *Avatar*, the Occupy movement set up a camp in Zuccotti Park near Wall Street, New York, in 2011: whilst a film like *Avatar* can in no way be seen as a direct inspiration for the Occupy movement, considering it is a triumph of capitalism, the very thing the Occupy movement oppose, it certainly, as an event combining all of its tributary facets, belies an epistemic trend that was beginning to emerge. As such, *Avatar* absolutely sets the foundations for a movement like Occupy who espouse a fair, inclusive and non-hierarchical being in which all things must be seen as equally existing.

The aim of this final chapter is to look closely at the Occupy movement and to apply the preceding discussion to how the movement set about opening a space for discussing a new mode of being; showing how the line that was traced through the aforementioned cultural texts leads up to, and culminates in, the movement's aims and modes of operation, and their eventual flight into a solely digital realm of acting. It is within this

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<sup>82</sup> According to Meillassoux, to move beyond the correlation we must “think of a world without thought - a world without the givenness of world. [We must] break with the ontological requisite of the moderns according to which *to be is to be a correlate*” Meillassoux, Q. (2008). *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. London, Continuum. p.28.

chapter that the tool-analysis discussed by Graham Harman (in relation to Martin Heidegger) will come to be seen as the most important element in the emergence of objects as things-in-themselves, outside of a human/world correlation, and it is this that the Occupy movement, however unaware of Harman or Heidegger, were attempting to implement as a new mode of being, or a mode of resistance to the imposition of hierarchies of being innate in the operations of the system of capitalism. Whilst the actual implementation of a new mode of being may not be immediately or practically possible as such since capitalist realism is insinuated in almost every act, the Occupy movement were opening up a space for the discussion of an alternative system of being: one that proposed a non-hierarchical ontology as an alternative to the grossly unfair and intensely hierarchical system that operates under the guise of global capitalism<sup>83</sup>. What must be kept in mind from here on is that in the formulation discussed by both Heidegger and Harman, tools are present-to-hand: this means that they are only the sets of relations and the uses that are attributed to them through their reaction to and interaction with the human subject. As a mode of resistance to the systemic hierarchies of capitalism that sees human beings, and the planet (and all objects for that matter) as tools, Occupy, and *Avatar*, set about becoming broken-tools or things-in-themselves, outside of a correlation, that retain a vast taxonomy of potentialities outside of any sets of relations they may enter into, and thus retaining the ability to enter into innumerable encounters with other objects outside of, and away from, any interaction with human subjects, and thus refusing to engage in hierarchies of power or being. This means that as objects, that are assemblages of many various and rhizomatic objects, Occupy and *Avatar* epitomise and valorise a non-hierarchical mode of being that allows things to be things-in-themselves, and not merely present-to-hand tools that are only deemed valuable in relation to a human subject that ascribes worth and use-value only in accordance to how they can use them, or benefit from them within the operations of the hierarchical system.

The writings of the former president of Czechoslovakia and playwright, dissident, philosopher and activist Václav Havel, in discussing the power of the potential of human

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<sup>83</sup> Capitalist realism is a term coined by Mark Fisher, in the eponymous book *Capitalist Realism*. According to Fisher, capitalism has become so insidious, so prevalent and so fundamental that it is the base reality that is left when all other discursive practices, modes of being and ideologies have come and gone. As Fisher states: "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics" Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism*. Winchester, Zero Books.

creative products that work as a mode of resistance to totalitarian regimes that try to limit this potential, is mirrored by the Occupy movement. Havel, writing in 1975, under the gaze of a totalitarian communist regime formulates the hidden and withdrawn potential of creative processes as such: "Life rebels against all uniformity and levelling; its aim is not sameness, but variety, the restlessness of transcendence, the adventure of novelty and rebellion against the status quo. An essential condition for its enhancement is the secret constantly made manifest" (Havel 1992, p.71). As Harman points out: the "tool-analysis is not just about tools functioning smoothly and vanishing into efficient praxis; it is also about the possibility of broken tools, and these are possible only because tools are more than our current use of them" (Harman 2013, p.21): tools and objects retain a secret - a withdrawn potential - that resides outside of any contact with human understanding, both in how they act with other objects outside of human understanding, and how they have the potential to enter into new sets of relations, allowing newness to emerge. To be a broken tool is to be liberated from a value that is prescribed or predetermined from the outside by a subject, onto an object that is deemed to be of lesser ontological worth and this is seen to occur in the modes of being that prescribe certain values to certain things, like capitalism, or totalitarian communism.

Being a broken tool is therefore the most liberating and actualising movement possible in relation to a resistance to an imposed mode of being that limits all potential and measures being only in relation to itself. Capitalism operates as a system that measures all objects in relation to how they can be of value, or benefit, to itself as a system. Within this formulation of capitalism as the measure of ontological value, certain humans (those beings from whom the most value can be withdrawn in the form of labour/capital or desire like the early stages of Walter White in *Breaking Bad*), objects, sets of relations and the planet, all operate as present-to-hand tools that receive their access to being by operating in relation to the system in which they find themselves in a position of subordination. Hierarchies, maintained by capitalism, and the objects or (full) humans, deemed worthy of such being, which sustain these hierarchies, have the ability to measure other objects and grant them a limited access to being so long as they can provide something in return, like capital, services, labour, pleasure and desire. The main issue stemming from a system with its roots firmly located in hierarchies of use value and the value of capital as such, is that there is a very small minority of people who own

the vast majority of capital, private enterprises and access to the ability to amass more of these entities. If we look at this in terms of the Occupy movement's own aims it becomes clearer: the Occupy movement "is fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations" (OccupyWallStreet 2012). This highlights how a minority of individuals can dictate the access to being (in their own terms) that is apportioned out to the majority of people, relating access to being and other (privatised) amenities to the access to capital, both monetarily and culturally. In terms of what has already been discussed earlier on, this means that a select few people, or institutions, have the ability to create the objects they encounter in their own terms and in relation to how they will use them - capitalist hierarchies in this sense operate in a Kantian fashion - or in a very selective anthropocentric fashion which places those with the access to the most capital, especially if those persons are white males from the Western World for example, as the measure of all other beings, which are only granted an access to being via their sets of relations to the master, and measuring, subject. When being is reduced to its sets of relations alone, the objects which relate are overlooked in favour of their actions in relation to other objects and as such they become merely present-to-hand tools whose true being vanishes beneath their shimmering surface. This unequal access to being, and the hierarchies that ensue, is importantly also true with access to the political arena, in the sense of running for office (especially in America for example) which is an extremely costly enterprise. By being able to access this, through the possession of vast amounts of capital, or perhaps also being a white male with the hierarchical privilege this entails, political policies are thus shaped by those who reside in the political arena due to their hierarchical access to it as such (the recent election of Donald Trump as the American president is an example par excellence). In opposition to this Occupy claim that they "must stop the excessive influence of big business in politics, which is today a major threat to true democracy" (OccupyWallStreet 2012). This relates obviously to a capitalist system where those with the access to, and ownership of, the means of producing the sets of relations that maintain hierarchical modes of power, and therefore, access to being, can impose this mode of being on to objects that are deemed to be of less ontological value, and here that means other people - and this in itself is hierarchical - with people of colour granted less access to certain modes of being, and again, women; or women of

colour being granted the least access to the political arena, and thus no access to being in and on their own terms. This relates directly to another branch of the Occupy movement known as We Are The 99 Percent whose own description of their aims is as follows:

“We are the 99 percent. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent. We are denied quality medical care. We are suffering from environmental pollution. We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we're working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1 percent is getting everything. We are the 99 percent. Brought to you by the people who occupy Wall Street. Why will YOU occupy?” (WeAreThe99Percent 2013)

Furthering this, Occupy aim at a form of being in which the "economy must be put to the service of people's welfare, and to support and serve the environment, not private profit. [They] want a system where labour is appreciated by its social utility, not its financial or commercial profit" (OccupyWallStreet 2012). Occupy therefore aim at exposing ideological and corporate manipulation and corruption and the maintenance of specific forms of being which perpetuate the privatisation of public necessities, and to replace this with an open and non-hierarchical access to the determination of public life, global equality, the well being of the planet and fair access to all things for all people/things. This is thus the flattened ontology of being that the Occupy movement, as a global entity, aim at: again, whilst this may not be able to be immediately put into practice, it opens up a dialogue that sees hierarchies of being as innately detrimental to the objects they affect. This also shows how the Occupy movement have a loosely united agenda with non-specific demands, other than exposing the aforementioned inequalities. Václav Havel sees a similar situation in relation to the totalitarian regimes that arose out of the morass of post-World War 2 Europe and how they affect the ability of the people that live under them to create a mode of being on their own terms. Totalitarian regimes, and in this case, the hierarchical operations of capitalism which can be seen to operate in ways very similar to the types of tyrannical dictatorships and post-totalitarian regimes of recent Europe, work in ways that reduce the individual to sets of relations, or present-to-hand tools that only operate in relation to the system and from which the system extracts only what it can use and turn into a value for itself. Writing in 'The Power of the Powerless', Havel states that "if that organisation is to serve people, and not the other

way around, then people will have to be liberated and space created so that they may organise themselves in meaningful ways.” (Havel 1992, p.181). This is almost a direct mirror of the aims of the Occupy movement in relation to the the operations of the system of capitalism and the setting up of a platform of discussion and possible alternatives to the destructive and corrupt hierarchies of the current neoliberal global system. The system must serve the people and the planet, and allow these things to *be* on their own terms and not just in relation to the operative system: this is a complete about face to the way the capitalist system currently operates, with the majority of people, objects, places and materials serving the system to further its being. Before moving on, it is necessary to look at some of the critiques of the Occupy movement in order to get a broad view of all aspects relating to the movement. As a vocal Occupy supporter, Slavoj Žižek takes on the task of keeping the movement in check, asking them to avoid “the danger that they will fall in love with themselves, with the nice time they are having in the ‘occupied’ places”: he goes on to state that “[c]arnivals come cheap – the true test of their worth is what remains the day after, how our normal daily life will be changed” (Žižek 2012). This critique is aimed not only at the spectacle of Occupy as a globally mediated phenomenon, but as an excuse to come out on the streets and have a good time; ignoring the fact of the protest in favour of appearing radical for a brief period and letting the momentum come to an end as soon as the occupations were shut down. Furthering his point, and in relation to all protests that attempt to resist entities larger than themselves, Žižek states: “It is at this crucial point that we encounter the fatal weakness of the protests: they express an authentic rage which is not able to transform itself into a minimal positive program of socio-political change. They express a spirit of revolt without revolution” (Žižek 2012). Since revolution is extremely difficult against a system as pervasive as neoliberal capitalism which can very easily subsume any threat to itself and turn it into a commodity, patience and time are necessary. The Occupy movement could never simply instate a new mode of living or a new socialist economic system with its base in equality and horizontal wealth distribution, however “the protests did create a vacuum – a vacuum in the field of hegemonic ideology, and time is needed to fill this vacuum in a proper way, as it is a pregnant vacuum, an opening for the truly new” (Žižek 2011). Here the movement is being warned that instant change is impossible, since no set demands are being given, and no instant alternative is being offered up. However, the space that the movement has opened for dialogue is their most

important legacy, since this will be what remains after the occupations of physical space have been removed. In a very pertinent line, Žižek states: “we feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom” (Žižek 2012). We lack, in a regime as insidious as capitalism, a way to articulate how insidious it really is, because it operates through all things and can assume any guise. He realises that the silent protests of Occupy appear as fleeting, or as unorganised and carnivalesque: what happens after this appearance is removed is the important part, and is where the real work must occur: entities like We Are The 99 Percent and Rolling Jubilee (discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs) that exist after the spectacle and mediation of Occupy has been removed, are the most important elements.

It is necessary here to talk a little more directly about the philosophical underpinnings of this project: this is necessary in order to show how object oriented ontology, or speculative realism, can be of value to the humanities in relation to studying, resisting and eventually collapsing hierarchies of power, or used as a practical means to open up a space for a discussion regarding the inequalities within the system of capitalism. In this sense, philosophy is being taken from the realm of theory and moved into the realm of potential praxis, allowing for the ideas themselves to permeate other modes of being in the way they themselves talk about: this levelling out of theory and praxis means that neither side of this binary comes to the fore and that both are equally as valid as one another and thus both are granted the same amount of being in separate, or overlapping, realms or discourses. This also allows for the potential of a new horizon of object-oriented ethics, or a Real ethics (of everything), to emerge and be discussed in relation to any and all entities equally. Taking from both philosophy and the humanities allows for a deeper understanding of how an ethics could be formed that can think through the difficulties of attributing a consistent ethics, or dignity, to all things, and not just humans (or animals), but a mode of being that accepts that all things exist equally and act in ways that we may not be able to see in their entirety, but which must be accepted as affecting us and other objects (entities such as global warming, the internet or global capitalism). Discussing this will also help to explain how the Occupy movement were attempting to eradicate the inequalities of capitalism that abound in the fields of politics, business and the consumption of raw materials/labour. This will also make clearer the relations between the cultural texts and the protests (occupation of spaces) undertaken by the

Occupy movement as a direct resistance to the hierarchical impositions innate in the system of capitalism. Within the capitalist mode of being, objects are seen only in relation to their use value or exchange value; either way, objects are only seen as a means, or a set of relations, that will benefit those who control or own them. This means that objects in the capitalist regime are always and only shaped with a specific and set end in mind, and this end is directed by a select few people/institutions that are deemed to control access to capital, or the production of access to being via political means, discussed above as the “1 percent”. Objects here are raw materials, the planet, wind, water, commodities, health care, humans, animals, spaces and other such objects.

All of these aforementioned objects remain dominated by and subjected to a mode of being imposed upon them by a master subject that can therefore be seen to be granted more access to being than the objects it controls since it can be seen to control the objects in relation to its own being<sup>84</sup>. If we look at this in terms of the discussion focussing on capitalism, we can call this mode of being a "capitalist correlation" within which objects only access being through their relation to a master subject, employer, political regime or discourse, located within the systemic hierarchies of capitalism. Harman, condemning any sort of correlation since it is limiting and, in wider terms, anthropocentric and anthropomorphic, claims that "There is nothing for philosophy to say about one asteroid striking another, but only about the relation between this event and our human access to it" (Harman 2010). What he is saying here is that philosophy is traditionally and innately anthropocentric and can only speculate at best about object interactions, and if it does say anything about the interactions of objects, it is traditionally only about the ways in which the interacting objects relate to human understanding, since that is our only relation to

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<sup>84</sup> Killing sharks in order to make the seas safe places for human leisure is a prime example of how human subjects tend to see the planet as their very own playground, within which, animals and nature are there for their entertainment, disposal, use and consumption. In an article from 2014, a journalist from the Guardian, Karl Mathiesen states: “The Western Australian government is preparing to cull large sharks from the Indian Ocean in the name of protecting swimmers and surfers”. The article tends to ignore that it is sharks that actually live, exist, thrive and need the ocean as a habitat - overlooking this fact in favour of viewing the ocean as a recreational product in which humans should absolutely feel free of the fear of shark attacks. Mathiesen goes on to state: “Many opponents of the cull, especially on social media, have told Western Australians to 'just swim somewhere else'. This is unsympathetic and unhelpful”. This ignores any sympathy for the natural habitats of the sharks, seeing their use value as being absolutely measured against the more valuable being of humans. He continues by saying that any opposition to culling sharks “ignores the deep, heartfelt connection many people have with the sea and the pain they must experience from not feeling safe enough to enjoy it.” Mathiesen, K. (2014). Will Killing Sharks Save Lives? The Guardian. theguardian.com. Surely sharks, who have thrived in the oceans for aeons, should also feel safe in their environment.

them. This is the very reason Harman and the other object oriented ontologists wish to break out of this binate philosophical tradition that only allows objects to exist in (cor)relation to a human subject. Harman furthers his point as follows: "correlationism contains two separate aspects, both of which I condemn. First, it holds that human and world must be the two primal ingredients in any meaningful situation. Second, it claims more subtly that 'to be' means 'to be in relation,' and nothing more" (Harman 2010). Harman's rejections of a correlation form a direct relation to the current discussion: firstly he refuses to accept that to be means to be in and on the terms set by humans, and secondly, he refuses a mode of being that reduces things only to their sets of relations, which, as has been shown, retains hierarchies of being in which the withdrawn potential of any object is overlooked, or disallowed, since their surface use value is all that counts in a mode of being that operates on the basis of relations alone. Objects in this formulation of a capitalist correlation therefore only expose their surface values as such: their potentialities remain withdrawn since they do not fit in with the uses dictated for them by the dominant subject/discourse/political regime/capitalist system. By allowing only certain aspects of objects an access to being, the true and withdrawn being of the objects never surfaces and as such, stasis and inertia arise since the vast treasure of being that is disallowed access to being can never unfold in or on its own terms.

Whilst this can seem very heavily philosophical and theoretical, it can have very basic and obvious relations to lived life. If, in a patriarchal capitalist system for example, women are denied access to certain areas of being, whether it be the opportunities needed to become the CEO of a company, or are denied access to education due to the inability to afford childcare after giving birth, or a refusal over the autonomy of their own bodies in relation to abortion for example, then their being is limited (in relation to men's access to the same opportunities) and the withdrawn potential that resides within them is overlooked and denied any ability to emerge in and on its own terms by the systems that places more emphasis on the being of men. To make this point clearer, it makes sense to refer to Harman once again. In relation to humans having the ability to think, an ability that presumably is unique in the way it can occur for humans, Harman states: "The true situation is that in our mind there are certain qualities of an apple or rose, while outside our mind, real objects called apples or roses exist. In other words, the hidden real sphere belongs to objects, while the ideal sphere belongs solely to bundles of qualities" (Harman

2011, p.56)<sup>85</sup>. This is just a simple formulation that points out how the ideal sphere, or the bundling together of certain qualities that are deemed to make up objects, exists in the mind of thinking subjects; however, what these bundles refer to exist autonomously as things-in-themselves outside the human mind with their own objective lives and abilities to act, interact, react andprehend: this is the realist element of the current philosophical discourses being discussed here. It is therefore a simple step to take in saying that the human mind bundles things together and creates a hierarchy of being due to their ability to do this bundling in the mind alone. This naming of the qualities of objects allows the human subject to feel as if it is they who are attributing these qualities to the object and not the object, or the interactions between objects, that contain these qualities themselves. In this correlationist light, what causes new entities to emerge only occurs through the human capability to create discursive practices that pigeon-hole objects, or discursively produce objects in new ways as times and uses change. On the emergence of new objects from an object oriented perspective, Timothy Morton states: "The birth of an object is the deforming of the objects around it." (Morton 2013, p.124). This deforming of objects can not occur only in the human/world correlation, as it occurs in the prehensions of objects as they interact outside of any relation to a thinking human subject. This idea of deforming is important in that it means that all of the objects interacting in any object occurrence will be deformed or changed and new objects and sets of relations can and will emerge (this is how the withdrawal of objects allows for newness to emerge, and is not some sort of absence or trace, but merely another element of the object as it occurs outside of a correlation). This is the emergence of the withdrawn potential of things that has been discussed throughout this project. Objects contain within themselves the potential to act and interact with other objects and what happens in this process is the creation of new objects: this occurs entirely outside of the need for a cognitive human subject or spectator. Importantly, and in the following discussion, this is where the power of the Occupy movement lies - the power to deform objects around it. In the film texts we have looked at so far, only one had the potential to do this. The world depicted in *eXistenZ* remained static and under the control of a dominating human

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<sup>85</sup> The fact that if apples and roses exist outside of our mind, they are not called "apples" or "roses", can not be overlooked, since language is not a quality of the objects as things-in-themselves, but merely an imposition of being stemming from the human mind on to the world: a discursive product. It makes sense to call the objects by their anthropocentric names, but this must also come with a caveat explaining that there is no innate name in the things-themselves as they exist outside of a human/world correlation.

subject, therefore disallowing the deformation of entities outside of its own human ability to do so. *Die Hard 4.0* allowed for a potential glimpse of life where a deforming has occurred and the potential of digital entities emerged, only to be swept back into the control of an anthropocentric and atavistic correlation. Only in *Avatar* can we see the potential of the deforming power of objects as they interact and allow newness to emerge from the hidden and withdrawn depths of the objects involved. It is *Avatar* that allows us to look at the Occupy movement in this light and to see it as the truly new and revolutionary object that it is.

#### **4.1: A Space for Protest**

An immensely important element of the Occupy movement is the inclusion of space into their protests: of course all protests are somehow spatially located, but Occupy arguably involve space as an element of the protest itself and attempt to regain the spaces they occupy for the spaces themselves. Choosing to occupy an area adjacent to Wall Street in New York was not a mistake, or a fluke. In order to show resistance to the system of capitalism, Occupy were intelligent enough to realise that much of the power of capitalism, in its ideological and hegemonic modes of operation, occurs and unfolds through representational, image based and symbolic regimes (especially with Hollywood cinema as a mode of hegemonic consciousness). Occupy have no leaders, no hierarchies and are a horizontal organisation which “embodies a vision of democracy that is fundamentally antagonistic to the management of society as a corporate-controlled space that funds a political system to serve the wealthy [and] ignore the poor” (Chomsky 2012, p.16). Occupy realise the importance of space within this vision and utilise it as a thing-in-itself, allowing it to become as important in an occupation as the actual protesters and their aims. By setting up the primary camp in Wall Street, Occupy are reclaiming a capitalised space, a space so loaded with symbolic and political power that it would be an instant affront to the system of capitalism to attempt to regain it for the majority of the people, and to regain it as a space free of this imposed symbolic burden. In other words, they want to allow the space to become a thing-in-itself again, free from hierarchically imposed use values and meanings. Henri Lefebvre coins the term ‘abstract space’:

“to describe the manner in which he understands space to be imagined, produced and lived in contemporary capitalist states. So prevalent as to be invisible, the idea of abstract space is used [...] to show how space (particularly urban space) is far from a neutral background or a blank container, but rather something that inevitably and powerfully embodies political, ideological and social principles, even if these are rendered invisible” (Jones 2013, p.254).

Occupy realise that space is highly mythologised and politicised and as such see it as a mode of violence against the people that use it and against the place itself: space in a neoliberal capitalist regime is “an intention and not a form in and of itself; it is the goal, orientation, or lens of capital production, a spatial ideology at the heart of the prevailing economic system” (Jones 2013, p.254). By de-symbolising the area of Zuccotti Park (or removing this abstraction of space which imposes a violent ideology on space), adjacent to Wall Street, the Occupy movement were attempting to allow the area to be a thing-in-itself and not a present-to-hand tool of the capitalist regime. As noted above, the Occupy movement started out with no set list of demands other than generally collapsing hierarchies and redressing inequalities: as such, they were seen as a silent protest. In the light of silence, they appeared terrifying and utterly different to anything the system of capitalism had previously confronted and consumed. By using space in a way not intended by the abstraction carried out by capitalism, Occupy became a mode of releasing space from an ideological imposition that disallows any spontaneity or freedom: “[i]n an excessively ordered, technocratic urban space the opportunity for spontaneous action is curtailed because it is not productive” (Jones 2013, p.259). By appearing silent and unproductive, the Occupy movement struck at the heart of capitalism since capitalism must render everything understandable enough to repackage it as a commodity. Silence and non-productivity are not commodities that will benefit capitalist exchange so the implementation of these through protest and the re-inscription of space were true modes of resistance. By proliferating such a vast online presence within a mass medium, the digital spaces of the internet, alongside their physical, spatial presence in occupied encampments, Occupy forced other mass media to accept and engage with the discourse of opposition. Mass media like television news reports which generally maintain a specific status quo, and which are privately owned in the majority of cases if we look at the American media model, were forced to show police brutality

against Occupy supporters, both in the occupied spaces and during the organised marches, and as such were made to openly defy the status quo they usually maintain, again in this case this is capitalist realism. Within a capitalist system, Occupy were thus creating a type of diffuse, technological public sphere that aimed, democratically, to spread information with the hope of achieving a non-hierarchical civic structure and a more democratic distribution of wealth, power and access to being for all things: this is, in every way, *different* to the operations of the system of capitalism which they oppose. Not only are they attempting to de-symbolise occupied spaces in certain cities, they are also attempting to do the same with the digital spaces created by the internet. Chomsky sums up this triumph against the capitalist system as follows: “by early 2012 the movement had already transitioned from occupying tent camps to occupying the national conscience” (Chomsky 2012, p.9). This would not have been achievable without forcing large media corporations to collapse in on themselves by having to show state brutality against a group of people actively seeking to eradicate the system that is upheld and perpetuated by the very types of media under scrutiny here. The focus on how Occupy maintained their presence in a primarily digital way after their physical occupations were violently and ideologically shut down will be addressed in the forthcoming paragraphs. Occupy were de-symbolising and de-mythologising spaces, both physical and mediated, previously produced, maintained and perpetuated under the aegis of capitalist realism. As such, we can look at the Occupy movement as a movement rooted in radical politics: attempting to change something at its very roots.

According to Occupy supporter Slavoj Žižek: “the ultimate goal of radical politics is gradually to displace the limit of social exclusion, empowering the excluded agents (sexual and ethnic minorities) by creating marginal spaces in which they can articulate and question their identity” (Žižek 2002, p.101). Despite Žižek seeing this process as an endless flow of reidentification that can not destabilise a “democratic” (capitalist) political regime, it is a process that aims at opening up being to a non-hierarchical field within which all things can have equal access to the processes that affect being such as mediation, representation, access to the political arena, control over their bodies and their bodies materialisation. Reclaiming spaces, and forcing traditionally capitalist media to loosen their hegemonic hold, and re-injecting them with a non-hierarchical mode of being allows these spaces to become things-in-themselves, reclaimed from their collapse

into mere surfaces and images imposed and maintained by the system of capitalism. Whilst Žižek's point of endless reidentification is extremely valid since it takes into account that acting, or actions, is privileged over objects and what they actually are, it has to be understood that since capitalism can actually subsume almost any threat into its own being, in order for objects to resist this subsumption they must remain in flux, or remain as becomings-. This however, does not ignore what the objects involved are, nor does it privilege their actions over their being. The opening up of marginal spaces within which these becomings-, or these objects, can *be-in-themselves* is the single most important mode of resistance against the imposition of certain modes of being that turn all objects into a use value, or into a set of relations.

What Occupy aim at doing, in the philosophical terms utilised throughout this project, is taking a tool, whose being is withdrawn beneath its radiant surface profile (it's imposed meaning and use value), and breaking this (capitalist) correlation, in order to allow the object to become a broken-tool, or a thing-in-itself. This takes the imposed and limited meaning of an object and exposes it as such: it exposes the hierarchies of being that maintain subject/object relations and as such shows the capitalist system as an unfair system that disallows objects to exist as they are, and not just as what they do. In the terms set down by the Occupy movement themselves, they want to reclaim being, wealth, access to all things equally, from the 1 percent that holds the majority of these things and to distribute it equally, fairly and non-hierarchically amongst the 99 percent. In these terms the 1 percent are those who access full being and the 99 percent are those who operate as surface profiles, carrying out tasks under the system of capitalism. By becoming broken-tools the 99 percent allow their true being to emerge and not just an imposed one that is solely reliant upon their inclusion in the operations of capitalism. The claim by Occupy is that the 1 percent are those who control and own the flows of capital, and which can therefore control the access to politics which in turn acts as a controlling factor in the way being is portioned out: those who can not access the political arena can never really access being in and on their own terms. Beyond this is the fact that corporations and privatised necessities such as electricity, water, transport, housing, waste management, natural resources, mining, oil production and other such entities fail to take into account, in the majority of cases, the affect and impact their operations have on the planet, ignoring for a moment that other privatised amenities such as education

and health care also fail to take into account that the people that need them are unable to afford them and as such are again only allowed a limited access to being in a neoliberal capitalist regime.

#### **4.2: Repressing Objects - Repressive State Apparatuses**

In terms of enduring as a physical object occupying certain physical spaces, the Occupy movement did not last long. Repressive state apparatuses began to shut down their occupations violently and were in no way as (ironically) supportive as their less physically violent brothers, ideological state apparatuses, which were forced to represent this violence and resistance in the media. There are first hand reports from Occupiers of the tactics employed by police forces in order to draw negative attention to the occupied spaces, which again showed how certain being/s is/are seen as less worthy of access to full being, or are deemed solely as objects to be manipulated and employed in very specific ways and in very specific sets of hierarchical relations. According to some Occupiers the police began to round up homeless people, drug addicts, people with intellectual disabilities and recently released convicts and to drop them off in and around the occupied zones. One occupier reported that he had seen “police cars dropping off schizophrenics at [Zuccotti] park” and a story circulated in the camp that the “cops were encouraging the chronically-intoxicated and the longtime homeless to head over to Zuccotti”; on top of this “busses from Rikers [prison] were dropping off the recently-bailed two blocks from the park” (Taylor 2011, p.183). The apparent reasoning behind this was to send the occupied encampments into disarray, to instil fear in the settled neighbours that lived in the area, to cause havoc that would have to be reported by mainstream media outlets like news coverage and Twitter, to make sure these representations would depict the Occupiers as being made up of the elements of society that are traditionally deemed as residing on the borders of the accepted configuration of normalcy and to discursively produce the Occupiers as being on the same level of being as those cast out by, or disallowed to reside in, mainstream society. While there were some issues relating to minor crimes within the occupied spaces, the Occupiers welcomed all of the above as their aims focus in on redressing institutional hierarchies that disallow access to being in-itself, or being on your own terms, as opposed to an imposed and unfair mode of being that relegates certain objects to tools, or to an excess

that can be cast aside, like excrement in the case of the abject. In other words, what the police tactics did was to reinforce the inclusive nature of the Occupy movement and prove that they maintain a non-hierarchical model both in their inclusion of space, or objects, and people of all types, races, sexuality, genders and abilities into their assemblage. One Occupier sums up the police actions and the state of capitalism as follows: “the history of capitalism is also the history of systematic social and economic exclusion. And that today we are all at risk of becoming part of the *relative surplus population*” (Taylor 2011, p.168). Capitalism produces tools; people are tools in this instance. If, in the eyes of capitalism you can not produce a value or a use, you are deemed as surplus (like the chronically intoxicated, the long-term homeless, schizophrenics and recently released criminal offenders). The police began to round up the traditionally surplus population in order to disrupt the apparent unity of Occupy camps. However, Occupy already exist as broken-tools and as such are innately surplus to capitalism and police, or institutional power. They are broken-tools in that they appear to have shaken off their imposed use and are able to exist as things-in-themselves. The radiant surface value which capitalism upholds and utilises has fallen away and all that is left is objects that want to exist on their own terms and not on the terms imposed from above by a limiting and corrupt system. This highlights the main objective of the entire Occupy movement which can, at its simplest, be summed up as attempting to produce a space to allow a non-hierarchy of being to take root and to perform the “difficult task of building a new politics of inclusion” (Taylor 2011, p.169).

Whilst all of this may seem like a far cry from the cinematic unfolding of the event of "Avatar", there are equivalences in the mode of being that is attempting to take root and this is the main point of the preceding line traced from 1999 to 2009/11 (and slightly beyond with *Breaking Bad*) in which this mode of being began to evolve, was nascent and crude, was disallowed to take root by a muscular ex-policeman, and which finally came to fruition in the highest grossing Hollywood film to date. The event of "Avatar" operates in the same way the Occupy encampments do: every element involved exists on a non-hierarchical plane. The event and object of "Avatar", as has been shown, exists as an assembled entity that includes the equal being of the cinema, the screen, the sound, the technology, the narrative, the audience and the actors which makes us reevaluate what we consider to be an object. Occupy enact this mode of being by accepting the space they

occupied as being as important as every single occupier and the broad and fluid demands that aim at allowing a non-hierarchical mode of democracy to take place. One example of their assembled nature is the "human mic" in which, when one person speaks at a gathering or general assembly, the entire audience repeats it down the line so everyone in the crowd can be part of the conversation, and the conversation itself becomes a living, moving object. This mode of conversation is described by a participant as follows: "hearing yourself in an echo chamber means that you make sure your words mean something, because they are being said back to you as you say them" (Taylor 2011, p.38). This mode of conversation removes subject-object relations since everyone involved, including the person actually doing the initial talking, is being addressed in exactly the same manner and is, in fact, addressing themselves as much as they are addressing those in close proximity, those in the media and those that are Tweeting the conversations as they take place, which in turn addresses a vast digital audience. So, like the event that takes place whilst viewing *Avatar*, in which the interactions of parts assemble into the event of "Avatar" which occurs on a flattened ontological plane, the object of "Occupy" occurs in and on the same terms. After the physical occupations of space were violently removed by repressive state apparatuses the Occupy movement did not disappear: instead the Occupy movement moved their site of occupation to a new space, that of the digital.

Leading up to the initial occupations of space, diffuse organisation of resistance to hierarchies of access to certain things, which in this case can be read as access to being on your own terms, started to occur solely on social media websites like Facebook and Twitter. Sites like these allow for an instantaneous and global sharing of information, be it information on how and where to occupy, or information on social inequalities in general. Reuters reported the ability of a leaderless, horizontal mood of affect, or an affective atmosphere, to organise as such: "The Occupy movement, decentralized and leaderless, has mobilized [sic] thousands of people around the world almost exclusively via the Internet. To a large degree through Twitter, and also with platforms like Facebook and Meetup, crowds have connected and gathered" (Berkowitz 2011). The success of this type of information spreading, at a localised level in New York for example, is attributed to "hyper-local tweeters, people who cover the pulse of communities at a level of detail not even local papers can match" (Berkowitz 2011). This allows people on the ground, in and from local communities around the globe to self-represent, or to give an incredibly

detailed and live representation of their locality, spreading local information and events to those seeking out this information or to those who follow the media producers account. Since social media platforms are generally borderless entities, this information can travel globally in an instant and can be searched, identified and contributed to with the hashtag system: a search engine that allows you to search words or trends that have been given significance and hyperlinked with a “#”; for example #OccupyWallStreet, or #OccupyBoston and so forth. So from the very inception of the Occupy phenomenon, their presence has always been maintained and perpetuated in the digital realm, spilling into physical manifestations such as marches, protests, occupations, meet-ups and assemblies with the aid of instant access to information residing in the digital realm. Despite Twitter acting as a foundation for the movement, and also the catalyst for the Arab Spring revolutions, it can be so decentralised and diffuse that information can pass by quickly or can be misleading and produced by those trying to taint the movement’s aims and motivations. As such, Occupy needed anchor sites from which to provide necessary information that in turn could be spread on Twitter or other social media sites with some authority or authenticity. This led to the creation of a number of sites and blogs such as We Are The 99 Percent and InterOccupy. InterOccupy operates as a sort of hub that feeds from and feeds to the grassroots information assembled on the social media sites. While Twitter allowed for the spread of instant information and localised updates from anywhere on the planet, InterOccupy operated as a “robust communication network [...] when camps had trouble contacting one another in order to share important information about the suppression of the movement” and on top of this, their main aim is to “foster communication between individuals, Working Groups and local General Assemblies, across the movement. [This is done] in the spirit of the Occupy Movement and general assemblies which use direct democratic and horizontal decision-making processes in service to the interests of the 99%” (interoccupy). The point of this digital platform is to allow all of the occupations to act in unison and to allow information to spread horizontally, or rhizomatically, amongst the national and global camps relating to issues surrounding the removal of occupied encampments or the inequalities of capitalism in general. Alongside this, InterOccupy “not only provided a space for communication to the displaced communities of occupiers, but also aided in the large-scale coordination for distributed direct actions including the West Coast Port shutdown and more” (interoccupy). So whilst InterOccupy can display information about direct

action, like the shutting down of a port or the occupation of a specific area, the unfolding details of these direct actions occur live on Twitter. This happens so the event can not be shut down in advance and so that people can change the direction of a plan if needed in real time. The anchor site of InterOccupy acts as a site of general information about why to occupy and will provide general information on where and how to occupy, but the live updates from Twitter will fill in the gaps - specific sites and times, general moods from the locations, threats from police and other such ideological organs. Twitter mobilises the movement, whilst InterOccupy informs and supports the movement in a more broad sense and which still does so today in relation to any activity the Occupy movement wish to carry out, or any information on global or national injustices that are deemed to be of issue, for example, the Panama Papers or continual police brutality towards minorities in the United States. Whilst the movement itself no longer occupies physical spaces, it still very much occupies a digital space, both on Twitter and on other anchor sites, focussing on spreading information, raising funds (Rolling Jubilee discussed below), addressing inequalities, informing people on political matters and maintaining a resistance that can mobilise at any moment and at any time if needed. In their own words, InterOccupy (IO) state:

“Mobile communication technologies, such as laptops, wifi, and smart phones, help virtual communities manifest in the streets. As a result, people fighting for social justice have the power to talk to one another as actions unfold locally, nationally, and worldwide in real time. In this global context, IO is just one small node in the massive network of activists seeking to change the world without taking power. IO continues to provide communication services to those who want a dynamic and interactive space for networking, skill sharing, and coordinating actions that hold accountable the oppressive strategies of governments and businesses that do not serve the people” (interoccupy)

As such, InterOccupy are an assemblage of many things such as activists, spatial occupations, Twitter, conversation, digital networks, hardware, software, resistance, phones and wifi. They are a part of a wider object of affect known as Occupy which exists as as assemblage of people, spaces, technology, anti-capitalist belief, non-hierarchical action and theory, digital technology and spaces. It is in this way that

Occupy and *Avatar* share a mode of being that is based on a flat-ontology which aims at levelling out inequalities of being and inequalities of access to being. Arguably, there was an atmosphere of resistance to capitalism and hierarchies of being that spurred *Avatar* and Occupy to unfold as they did and which in this project has been traced since 1999 when events like the Millennium Bug forced humans to accept that they were no longer the sole measure of being. Ben Anderson elaborates on atmospheres as follows: “The singular affective qualities that are atmospheres – homely, serene, erotic and so on – exceed that from which they emanate. They are quasi-autonomous. Atmospheres are a kind of indeterminate affective ‘excess’ through which intensive space–times can be created” (Anderson 2009, p.80). If we look at the line being traced in this project, a line that traces the root of a non-hierarchical mode of being, we can look at this as tracing the trajectory of an atmosphere, or an object. The atmosphere, or object, is non-hierarchical, flat-ontological being with its roots in anti-capitalism. A mode of being that takes into account every object that acts and interacts on an equal footing, be it organic or inorganic, manmade, digital, cartoon, dream or ghost. What Occupy’s digital presence managed to do through InterOccupy and social networks like Twitter and Facebook was make the expressive elements of these sites materialise into, and be a conduit for, atmospheres of affect. In other words, the digital combined with the human in order to create an object that was almost too large to comprehend and which existed on a non-hierarchical plain of being, allowing the expressive elements be as important as the material ones, both of which are capable of creating affective effects. Without these digital objects, the larger object that can be seen as the Occupy movement, or an atmosphere of anti-capitalism, could not have emerged or evolved in the way it did. As such, the digital is as important in this case as the actual people occupying spaces or creating content to be expressed on these sites. The digital, the human, space, anti-capitalist sentiment, the 99 percent, the hardware, the software, the literature and the news reports all assembled to become an object: one that allows each of its elements to equally exist, privileging no single part over any other. Harman points out the importance of objects in relation to how relations are formed: “To say that objects mediate relations is to make the crucial point that unlike herds of animals, human society is massively stabilized [sic] by such nonhuman objects as brick walls, barbed wire, wedding rings, ranks, titles, coins, clothing, tattoos, medallions, and diplomas” (Harman 2016, p.6). What this points to is the importance of inorganic or non-sentient objects in relation to

the existence of humans and human culture. This is true of the digital objects under discussion here too. Whilst objects such as walls frame certain relations, objects like the digital networks of communication used by Occupy allow for relations and atmospheres to travel and grow in a way that would not have been possible in their absence. It is not a case that the digital technology used is only a conduit for mediation, it is itself a network and an assemblage of objects that works with other objects, deforming them and themselves as they enter into new sets of relations, which result in the formation of new, massive objects like Occupy. Anderson comes somewhat in line with Harman's views here in relation to atmospheres: "atmospheres are sealed off through protective measures such as gated communities or certain types of building design [...]. Practices as diverse as interior design, interrogation, landscape gardening, architecture, and set design all aim to know how atmospheres are circumvented and circulate" (Anderson 2009, p.80). When an atmosphere can no longer be contained, or when it spreads into the objects it encounters, which in themselves are assembled networks, it becomes a global object like Occupy which can literally pop up at any location and at any time due to the fact that it can be spread through the digital pathways that allow affective atmospheres to exist as digital entities and physical entities simultaneously and without a hierarchical distinction between the two. *Avatar* points us in this direction via aesthetic and cultural products: it allows us to experience a flat ontology in an event rooted in familiarity and comfort and which allows an affective atmosphere to be created. We can, as humans, relent our subjectivity to allow it to be a part of a larger object that involves us, but which does not rely on us to unfold. When we supplant this aesthetic experience onto a political mode of being we can already be familiar with it as we have experienced it in a safe or comfortable way via a cinematic event in which all things must equally exist. If this atmosphere of equally existing objects is then used as a mode of resistance to the system of capitalism, we already have a referent from which to base any action. Since cinema can be viewed as a barometer for cultural affect, cultural atmospheres or collective consciousness, the mode of being depicted was already existing in other realms and was merely being reflected back by the event in the cinematic realm.

This project, through its espousal of a flat ontology of being and its focus on how the digital must be seen as existing equally as a thing-in-itself will have a bearing on the discussions surrounding the digital humanities and the digitalisation of archives. We are

at a stage where certain archives must be accessible to all people and in order for this to come to fruition they must be created as digital renditions that can be uploaded and accessible to all. The other advantage of this is that objects, especially old or ancient documents, as things-in-themselves, are affected by the elements they encounter and as such run the risk of destruction and deformation through constant contact, disintegration and entropy. Digitalisation allows a simulated version of objects to become a thing-in-itself that can outlast the original and which can enter into new sets of relations and object interactions that will not fade or falter over time. This is also true of entities such as digital architecture that allow us to experience digital spaces in ways that would be otherwise inaccessible without the access to them provided by digital renditions. Spaces like those experienced in the cinematic event of *Avatar* are a primary example of this: spaces we can connect to and feel we are a part of. Whilst this is still nascent, in relation to virtual reality spaces with technology like the Oculus Rift and other gaming platform technologies, these spaces are new spaces that exist as things-in-themselves. Occupy extend this mode of flat-ontology to all of the objects they encounter. By coupling themselves with another on-line digital entity, the group of hactivists known as Anonymous, Occupy firmly rooted itself as existing both in the physical realm and the digital realm, with the ability to exist solely in either-or when necessary and to act, interact and react in a physical way or a digital way. As was reported in the Guardian Newspaper in relation to the alliance of Occupy and Anonymous in digital realms:

What will become of Occupy Wall Street is uncertain: protesters now face eviction from Zucotti Park; yet the movement has sparked similar activism in Chicago, Boston, Denver and other cities throughout the United States. Much has been written about the "Twitter revolution" dimension of the Arab Spring; now it looks as though, in this emerging alliance between street protest and online activism, the Arab Spring is turning to American Fall. (Kazmi 2011)

What this means is that Occupy can literally occupy physical (spatio-temporal) space, or, when this is aggressively repressed, they can move their presence into the digital realm and exist in the guise of the aforementioned InterOccupy, the collaborative efforts with internet hactivists like Anonymous that shut down websites as a mode of protest and leak private documents, or they can exist as their other on-line effort, Rolling Jubilee. Rolling

Jubilee takes up from Occupy's attempts to help people in debt in real life situations: in their physical manifestation "Occupy's relentless and increasingly creative actions in hundreds of cities, [included] occupying foreclosed homes and disrupting auctions where people's homes are sold off to the highest bidder" (Chomsky 2012, p.12). Occupy were attempting to stave off the intrusion of banks and corporations in relation to housing rights, but when the physical manifestation of resistance was eradicated, Occupy had to turn to the digital realm of being in order to continue existing as it did. It is here that they are most obviously seen as espousing the flattened ontology of being that has been traced through the film texts in this project. Occupy have moved from a form of lived, organic life, to a mode of being that relies on an assemblage of equality comprising of digital technologies, humans, debt, protest, hardware, software and so forth, all being seen as equally important actors and objects. In their own words, Occupy's Rolling Jubilee "is a Strike Debt project that buys debt for pennies on the dollar, but instead of collecting it, abolishes it. Together we can liberate debtors at random through a campaign of mutual support, good will, and collective refusal" (Jubilee). By setting up a voluntary contribution website that collects money to buy debt for a fraction of its value, Occupy manage to move their affective efforts into the realm of the digital in a way that has very real effects. Whilst debt in the last instance is a physical burden, it exists primarily as a virtual entity and a set of contracts. If debt, and capital, can exist as real entities in such a virtual manner, then so too can the organisation of Occupy, alongside their aims and objectives. By flattening out ontological value by openly resisting the hierarchies of capitalism and large corporations, and by moving from the physical realm into the digital realm and still being able to act, interact and react, Occupy can be seen as the culmination of the being that is traced throughout this project in the texts analysed. Occupy, like *Avatar* demand that all component parts that make up the larger objects (the protest, the cinematic event) equally exist and matter as much as any other entity deemed to exist. This type of being aims to remove a master subject from the measure of being and allow all objects to interact and exist on an equal footing, thus flattening hierarchical access to being that is entailed in ontologies of correlation and especially in a system such as global capitalism which operates primarily through correlative measures of being.

On a bodily level, it has made sense for me to relate this mode of object-interaction to the disease that killed my father in order for my mode of understanding to alter. The cancer inside my father existed prior to the diagnosis of it as cancer. Cancer is not some sort of malevolent actor: its diagnosis is the emergence of an already existing object that happens to be detrimental to human life and which may not be detected under certain circumstances. The medical diagnosis of cancer did not make cancer “cancer”, it merely made it relatable to human understanding (which, in large part, it still evades). Cancer exists outside of a human/world correlation and merely naming, or diagnosing, it does not mean that it only exists in that set of relations or discourses. It exists before and after these things, as a thing-in-itself. When it is diagnosed, it merely enters into a set of imposed relations that have no bearing on it as a thing, until of course another object, chemotherapy for example, comes into the relation and yet another object is formed: that of cancer-being-treated. However, as in the case of my father, chemotherapy failed to understand cancer, or failed to make it succumb to its correlation of medicine/cure. It is along these lines that Occupy became an object. Resistance to the imposition of hierarchies that capitalism upholds can not be made to reside in a set of imposed relations: elements can be controlled, as in the case of subcultures being subsumed into the fashion industry, but this fails to take them into account as objects-in-themselves and literally usurps elements of their imagery or signifiers. Occupy and anti-capitalist modes of being existed before they assembled to become the named object “Occupy” in the same way cancer existed before it was discursively produced as such: they existed as separate instances of resistance to hierarchical access to being, to capital, to a lack of universal health care, to planetary issues, to animal rights and so on. Occupy, like cancer, were always a potentiality. The object of Occupy existed as a vast assemblage of ideas and eventually technology and the occupation of physical spaces. The naming of it as Occupy did not create it as a thing, it merely brought it into a correlation of discourses and objects. But it existed prior to this as a diffuse version of its solidified self. It is through bodily actions and interactions that this project has taken shape and the modes of thought and understanding that occur between objects outside of a human/world correlation have been understood and engaged with through this lens. Cancer operates outside of understanding and as such it operates as an object. Occupy became an object, one of global proportions, and as such it operated as a whole, outside of traditional understanding in the same way. The emergence of this type of being has been traced in

this project through the medium of film, since film operates as a measure of collective consciousness, and as such, collective understanding. The understanding of objects and object interactions changed over time to allow for a flat ontology of being to be understood and lived. Understanding objects in this way allows object empathy: it allows for the interaction of objects outside of human understanding, but it also allows more of an empathetic interaction between objects as they interact, especially between humans and the planet for example, or between political actions and the objects they affect. A flat ontology of being opens a space for all objects to equally exist and as such it is an innately anti-hierarchical mode of being. By framing resistance to capitalist regimes in these terms, access to being, or being in terms stemming from objects themselves as opposed to imposed hierarchies of access to being, all objects, all things that exist, can exist as things-in-themselves and not merely as tools to be employed in situations of a use extraction for the benefit of the employing entity.

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