

Objects and phenomenologies in the poetry of Zbigniew Herbert and Wallace Stevens

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0. Introduction

The principal aim of my study is to investigate how Wallace Stevens and Zbigniew Herbert perceive objects and objecthood, and how they imagine, if they actually do, a phenomenology of objects. I will do this through the lenses of object-oriented ontology, as it is presented in the work of Graham Harman, a contemporary American philosopher working at the American University of Cairo, and of alien phenomenologies, as defined by Ian Bogost, a contemporary culture and media theorist associated with Georgia Institute of Technology. Object-oriented ontology is a philosophical position that places objects in the center of ontological inquiries by claiming that they are the primary ontological category (i.e. they are prior to any other ontological form, such as relations). It envisages reality as composed of an infinite number of irreducible objects that constitute no hierarchy. A natural consequence of such an ontology is a shift of attention from humans to objects. Alien phenomenology explores an aspect of objecthood that has been previously poorly described, namely the question of how objects experience themselves and the external reality.

The Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, who lived in the years 1924-1998, is considered one of the major figures of Polish post-war literature. He developed a distinct style that combines free verse with classic poetic themes and frequent references to Antiquity. His oeuvre is strongly influenced by philosophy and openly addresses philosophical problems. In several of his poems Herbert directly asks questions about objects and the nature of objecthood. Many of his poems thematize the status of abstract objects, the borders of objects, the possibility of knowing the object in itself etc. I will examine if his poems can give shape to a consistent philosophical position concerning objects. I also aim to explore how object-oriented ontology could serve as a framework for readings of poetry and how this philosophical position could be enriched by those readings.

Wallace Stevens is one of the greatest poets of American modernism. He lived in the years 1879-1955. He is known for original poems that manage to address complex philosophical issues through strong, sensual images, without open recourse to purely reflective voice. Stevens is a very phenomenological poet – his poems often mirror questions and problems addressed in the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology is a school of thought that has its source in Husserl's work from the beginning of the XXth century and was further developed by such philosophers as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and

Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It addressed such questions as the entanglement of subject and object, the embodiedness of perception, the complex structure of experience. All of those subjects are strongly present in Stevens' poetry. In his works there are some poems that could be read as an inquiry into the phenomenological experiences of beings other than humans. I intend to concentrate on those poems in order to examine how they approach and construct the experiences of objects.

There are other poets who might seem a more obvious or instinctive choice concerning the subject of objects and objecthood. Poets such as Francis Ponge or Carlos Williams are well known for numerous poems in which they describe various objects. Those poems constitute a major part of their oeuvre. Especially Ponge's poetry focuses on meticulous descriptions of objects, trying to depict them as precisely and thoroughly as possible. However, by treating objects as objects, these poets are forced to approach them as they appear as objects to human consciousness. In this sense, they retain the dualism of human and non-human, of subject and object, for they describe simply what they see without engaging in the problems of objecthood, access or phenomenology. They did not write poems that attempt to imagine the inwardness of objects either. By contrast, Herbert and Stevens problematize objects and objecthood. Even though they differ in how they approach objects – Herbert reflects openly on the ontological nature of objects, whereas in Stevens's reflections are embedded in the phenomenology of the objects he describes – they both do not merely describe objects their lyrical voices encounter, they question the status of those objects. Therefore, the motivation behind my choice to read those writers together comes from the fact that they are both openly philosophical poets for whom questions concerning objects are important.

In the first part of the thesis I will outline the theoretical background of my project – I will read the works of Harman and Bogost to show how they could be relevant to reading poetry. In the second chapter I will read several of Herbert's poems, focusing on how he problematizes the question of objects and objecthood. Finally, in the third chapter, I will discuss Stevens' poetry from the point of view of alien phenomenology, trying to see how poems can depict non-human beings' experiences or even simulate them. The text of my thesis is followed by an appendix, which contains all the poems I will analyze.

1. Chapter – Theoretical background

In this part I intend to present and discuss the theoretical background of this thesis. Firstly, I will make some preliminary remarks concerning terms such as phenomenology and anthropomorphism, which are central to my thesis. Secondly, I introduce Graham Harman's work, which forms the philosophical foundation of my project. Thirdly, I will present Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology* (2010), in which Bogost translates Harman's philosophical ideas into a more concrete practice of reading cultural artifacts. Finally, I will link those philosophical and theoretical positions to Amerindian perspectivism, which bears certain similarities to them. Amerindian perspectivism is a position taken by ontologies of South America, which reverses the culture-nature distinction – it perceives culture as universal in opposition to particular natures. Human culture is only an actualization of a universal structure that other beings actualize in their own manner. Amerindian perspectivism could be possibly successfully used as an additional helpful tool, because it allows us to transpose human perspective onto objects, thus creating analogies which facilitate speculations about non-human phenomenologies.

I have chosen the work of Graham Harman and Ian Bogost in order to set up my theoretical framework for several reasons. First of all, the notion of alien phenomenology comes from Ian Bogost and the reading of his *Alien phenomenology* was a direct inspiration for this thesis. His work provides a productive framework for identifying, analyzing and describing alien phenomenologies.

Ian Bogost uses the philosophy of Graham Harman as his main reference point, and therefore I will start with a brief introduction of his project. His philosophical considerations about the nature of objects are the methodological basis for my analysis of Herbert's and Stevens' works and will help me address the problem of objects and objecthood in their poetry. This introduction is also necessary for understanding why and how the practice of describing phenomenologies of non-human beings is an interesting and important task – it helps us see cultural artifacts as a medium that allows us to imagine the experiences of other beings.

Moreover, Harman's additional relevance for the objectives of this thesis also lies in the fact that he offers an answer to the question of how and in what sense we can conceive of poetry as a cognitively valid source of knowledge. This concerns not only the positive

content of poems but also their form – in Harman's philosophy cognition is equally possible through sensible and aesthetic experiences.

1.1. Preliminary definitions

It is necessary to note that my understanding of the term “phenomenology” is not directly related to Husserl's phenomenology, despite displaying a historical connection to it. My understanding of phenomenology is derived from Harman and Bogost's writing. They could be both accused of a certain oversimplification of Husserl's approach, but in return they propose to broaden the understanding of phenomenology which leads to interesting philosophical consequences – Harman shows how phenomenology could be interpreted ontologically and be used to build an ontology of objects, whereas Bogost attracts attention to non-human phenomenologies.

By phenomenology, and in particular by phenomenology of an entity – as there is no such thing as phenomenology as such, there are objects and their phenomenologies - I understand the way an object experiences things. The term phenomenology in this sense could be possibly interchangeable with such words or expressions as cognitive system or perception. My preference for the word phenomenology over those alternative terms is motivated by the following reasons.

The first reason is practical: I situate my understanding of phenomenology in relation to Harman's philosophy and to Bogost's practical application of it, and both of them employ the word phenomenology in the sense I just delineated. When Bogost talks about nonhuman beings and their experiences, he poses the following questions: “but what do they experience? What’s their proper phenomenology? In short, what is it like to be a thing?” (Bogost 10). Those three questions guide my project, since I am interested in how poetry can depict or simulate nonhuman experiences.

The word phenomenology also has advantages over its not exact synonyms such as perception or cognitive system. Perception suggests more sensuality, the pure data delivered by the senses. To perceive means to see and to hear rather than to look and to listen, it implies a certain passivity, a sensual registration of the external world. To experience implies a certain degree of transformation of the incoming data: a meaning-making process. This process is understood in a more complex sense than just reception or registration. “Cognitive

system” suggests a system with a physical basis. And although it is important to understand the biological mechanisms that underlie cognition and experience, this scientific understanding is not productive when talking about a simulation of experiences.

Phenomenology also includes a certain subjective aspect. Although we can by no means fully comprehend what it is like to be a bat, the question we are trying to answer here is what its experience is for itself. In this way, this method imitates the phenomenological descriptions of human experiences as they appear to the human being.

The aim of this project is to examine how the poetry of Stevens and Herbert casts or reflects upon non-human entities and to trace the complex position of humans as objects of perception or experience in their poetry. Even if we want to do justice to non-human entities as they are, without seeing them as objects of the human world of meaning, we cannot do that in complete abstraction. We are bound to speak from the human point of view. This concerns not only Stevens or Herbert, but is a general condition of our cognition.

This is what Bogost also claims: “Indeed, I’ll take things farther: anthropocentrism is unavoidable, at least for us humans. The same is true of any unit (for the bats, chiropteracentrism is the problem)” (Bogost 64). The discovery of the correlationistic nature of our cognition was made quite a long time ago, and the conditions of this correlation have been scrutinized ever since. Bogost proposes to turn away from post-Kantian positions, i.e. from positions concentrated on the correlation between humans and the world, not because the critique they are based on is invalid, but because it limits the range of subjects that philosophy can discuss. It forces philosophy to stay in the human realm and prevents it from any metaphysical speculation. What he proposes is to consciously affirm anthropocentrism as our inevitable standing point and to start speculating from that standpoint. He asks for acceptance of our limits instead of constant and repetitive inquiries about what those limits are.

Andrew Cole notes that object-oriented ontologies are haunted by “contradictions within each of these new philosophies — it is and it is not anthropocentrism, anthropocentrism is and is not a bad thing” (Cole 107). To avoid some of these problems, in this thesis I will use the words anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, which I will redefine to emphasize a certain difference that is crucial for my project.

By anthropocentrism I understand the tendency of humans to place themselves in the

center of things, at a privileged position; the fact that humans perceive everything in relation to themselves. Anthropocentrism is hierarchical, as it places the human atop of all creation, and dualistic, as it draws clear lines between the human and the non-human. I disagree with Bogost that anthropocentrism is inevitable. Humans do not always have to put themselves in the center or relate everything to their own species. What is however unavoidable – and this is what Bogost in my view is actually aiming at – is the impossibility of stepping outside of human cognition to achieve any form of objective knowledge. Humans not only see the world through their own concepts, but simply also through their own perceptual system, which includes a particular construction of all senses, the domination of sight etc. All those particularities create a certain point of view that humans cannot transcend.

By anthropomorphism I understand the tendency of human beings to understand everything in human categories. The popular view of anthropomorphism defines it as addition of human traits to everything a human being perceives. I understand this term in a broader way. In the sense that stems from the works discussed in this thesis, anthropomorphism means the impossibility of thinking in a way that would not be human. It is assumed that other ways of thinking and experiencing are definitely possible but are inaccessible to humans. That humans understand the reality from a human point of view, through human perception, is an obvious truism that can become interesting only in the light of the philosophical theories I discuss in the thesis. Bogost asks us to fully acknowledge anthropomorphism in order to think how non-human phenomenologies could be translated into human phenomenology. Since we cannot avoid perceiving the world in a human way, we should consciously anthropomorphize it even more by translating the incomprehensible elements of non-human phenomenologies into elements that we could understand. In order to achieve this more radical and conscious anthropomorphism, we have to acknowledge the inevitability of the pre-theoretical anthropomorphism that is inscribed into being human.

In this sense, much as anthropocentrism could be avoided, anthropomorphism is an unavoidable consequence of human beings' being human and nothing more. One therefore ought to embrace it, investigate the outer world and speculate about other beings' experience with the constant consciousness of it.

1.2. Graham Harman, speculative realism and object-oriented ontology

Graham Harman is a key figure of speculative realism – a contemporary current of thought that groups loosely related philosophers. What the philosophers labeled under this term have in common is their interest in various forms of realism that would not fall into the naiveté of scientific realism. The task of building a realism that would not fall into old metaphysical traps is pursued with a constant reference to Kant and his writings that set the direction to continental philosophy. The philosophical Copernican revolution consisted in Kant showing how the cognition of the external world is structured by categories imposed by our own minds, entangling the subject and object of cognition. It resulted in putting a strong limitation on metaphysical inquiries as well as in placing the subject and subject-object relation in the center of philosophical attention. The question of how we can overcome Kant as a central figure to all 19th and 20th century thinking is at the center of the discussions.

The term speculative realism was coined after a conference held in Goldsmith College in 2007, in which Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier all took part. Not all of the aforementioned philosophers sympathize with the idea of being labeled in such a way. For instance, Meillassoux explicitly distanced himself from it in a lecture held in Berlin (Meillassoux 2012). Though some philosophers identified with speculative realism deny their adherence to any such group, the resonance of this label led to a propagation of their ideas. Tom Sparrow notices that we can talk about family resemblances between philosophies that are labeled through speculative realism, as there is neither one methodology nor a well-defined set of beliefs that would unite those philosophers (Sparrow 20).

Harman adapts one of Meillassoux's key terms, the notion of correlationism. This notion designates a wide branch of philosophical approaches that center on the relation between thought and its correlated object as a primary one, or to put it differently, approaches that problematize the human access to the world as a central question of philosophy.

Ray Brassier proposes the following definition of correlationism:

correlationism affirms the indissoluble primacy of the relation between thought and its correlate over the metaphysical hypostatization or representationalist reification of either term of the relation. Correlationism is subtle: it never denies that our thoughts or utterances aim at or intend mind-independent or language-independent realities; it

merely stipulates that this apparently independent dimension remains internally related to thought and language. (Brassier 51)

The definition points towards the subtlety of correlationism. Different philosophers of the group adopt divergent approaches to oppose correlationism or to deal with its various consequences. For the purpose of this thesis, I will concentrate on Harman's way of approaching correlationism.

Graham Harman calls his own philosophical project object-oriented ontology (Harman "Guerrilla Metaphysics" 1). Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) is a project of ontology that takes objects as its primary unit. This is an approach that tries to do away with the anthropocentrism that dominates Western philosophy. Harman tries to shift focus from human beings (which are for him just another type of object) to the world of things. With this attempt he tries to construct a so-called flat ontology – an ontology in which everything is equally an object (i.e. there are no more-objects or less-objects) and no object has a privileged position.

The flatness of ontology entails a complete equality of all objects – a part of a chair is just as much an object as the chair itself. Such philosophy rejects hierarchisation through metonymy. Being part of and being composed of are just other kinds of relations. An object cannot be reduced to its parts, but a part cannot equally be reduced to the object it composes. Instead of trying to theorize human access to objects, Harman proposes to discuss the relations between objects themselves. Human access to objects is nothing more than a relation between humans (understood as objects) and other objects, not different in kind from any other relation that one might find between non-human objects (Harman "Guerrilla Metaphysics" 9). Harman does not propose a return to naïve realism that would ignore the problem of human access to reality. His project is completely metaphysical, in that it embraces the limitations of human access as such and tries to speculate beyond them. In this sense, it could be considered a posthumanist philosophy, as it explicitly tries to overcome the privileged position given to the human being by most philosophers since Kant.

Harman's object-oriented ontology privileges objects over relations between objects. In this sense Harman differs from numerous other realists or materialists, such as Alfred North Whitehead or Bruno Latour, who put a strong emphasis on relations between objects. They envisage relations as prior to objects. As Harman notes in *Guerrilla*

Metaphysics, according to “Whitehead's philosophy of organism, any attempt to refer to an actual entity apart from its complex of relations with other such entities is a cardinal philosophical error (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 82)”. Harman proposes a critique of such approaches, claiming that they do not allow for any real ontological change to occur, and in result their universes are completely static. His aim is to reestablish objects as valid metaphysical units.

Harman's objects exist as in a vacuum – there are separated and cannot influence each other or enter into causal relations; the only possible form of causality for him is the so called vicarious causation, bearing similarities to occasionalism (a medieval doctrine that claims that there is no actual causation between substances, that no object causes a change in another object; all the changes are caused directly by God). Harman arrives at this idea of objects through an analysis of Martin Heidegger's tool-being. Heidegger analyzes the way various objects are present to us – they appear as tools that we can use to achieve our goals. Their being seems reduced to their functionality. Only when a tool breaks and it is not possible to use it (and thus to reduce it to its usability), does it appear as something more – it appears as an object that has its own independent life and is more than just its function. According to Harman, this experience points towards the independent existence of objects. This form of realism is thus far from the one that might arise from natural science, and indeed involves several speculative moves, as I will show further. Harman develops his approach gradually in each new book he writes, which is why his theory is not entirely consistent.

Harman's theory is based on the dualism of inwardness and outwardness – an assumption that every object has an “inside”, some part of it accessible only to itself. This is a very anthropomorphic assumption, for it has a clear source in how human beings perceive the world and their presence in it. One can argue that this is a feature of human psyche, for in our common-sense experience we can clearly notice how various perceptually external things and events influence and modify the supposedly closed inwardness. In Harman's version, this feature becomes ontological: inwardness becomes a feature that could be ascribed to any object as its primal ontological state. Outwardness ceases to be a space through which various objects influence and modify each other, and instead becomes a space of communication between closed beings.

1.2.1. Style, aesthetics and metaphors in Harman's philosophy

The central move of Harman's philosophy is to extrapolate the correlation outside of the mind. To achieve this, Harman transforms the notion of style, which he finds in Merleau-Ponty. Style, in its most basic meaning, could be attributed to works of art and designates a certain quality that allows us to identify a particular author and yet is not reducible to any descriptions or list of features. It is something *specific* to an author, or in broader terms, to a person.

The notion of style could be easily extended to human beings – we could easily think about a person having a set of qualities, character traits or behavior, but the overall impression that this person makes, or in other words, the experience one might have of this person could never be reduced to those qualities. But Harman proposes to think this further and see objects as having particular styles. Each object has its own *style*, understood not as a set of cognizable properties but as a certain behavior.

What Harman is aiming at is the aesthetic that is always contained in perception – when we perceive the redness of blood and hardness of steel, it is not merely a matter of knowing, of recognizing this property, it is also a matter of feeling it; all those qualities have a particular *taste*. The unity of style requires that all the sensible qualities of an object are linked, “the style of a thing animate its a? multitude of distinct and isolable qualities (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 57)”. An interesting question is where this unity of style that gives birth to an object could be placed on the map of phenomenology. In other words, to what extent the style is a purely sensual phenomenon, and to what extent it is produced in intentional synthesis. This is another way of asking if Harman is successful in overcoming correlationism. Harman does not continue his investigations into that problem. However, he claims that a certain form of unity (which in phenomenology would result from synthesis) is necessary for the qualities to appear as they are – the color of a carpet could only be perceived through its thickness and structure, and vice versa.

Harman derives his radical point of view from what he finds in Merleau-Ponty's *The visible and the invisible*. “Being and the world [...] are only its manner or its style, they are the *Sosein* and not the *Sein* (Merleau-Ponty 109)”. Being appears as having a particular style, some kind of character, it is never neutral, but always already has a way of appearing. The style is *in* being, it cannot be detached, singled out or described. This is crucial for the aesthetic approach that Harman proposes because it introduces the aesthetic into the very core

of ontology. And yet, for Harman, this unity is not a question of synthesis understood as an activity of the mind, this unity is already implied in the object, it is the object as such, as appearing. This is a purely speculative, metaphysical move. The notion of style leads to aesthetization of perception – all the sensual qualities, before they enter into the world of meaning, already have a certain *taste*, i.e. they are aesthetically acknowledged as such.

Harman takes this idea even further. For if the objects, due to their style, appear as a whole and this whole cannot result from synthesis, for the objects already appear in the human sensibility as whole, this means that the synthesis is external to the subject. The unity of style and the emergence of object is thus not an operation belonging to the realm of epistemology but rather to ontologized aesthetics. To put it in other words, suggesting that the feeling of an object's wholeness comes from the aesthetic feeling of style has ontological consequences.

The irreducibility of style points towards the irreducibility of objects to their parts – every object is more than its parts and every part is more than a part of an object, for it is an object in itself. Aesthetics is the unifying principle for every object because every object appears as a whole through its style. Even if the unification of bundles of qualities into objects does happen in the perceiving mind, the unity results from something external to the mind – the style of every object.

Harman here touches upon a very particular mystery, which remains interesting even if one does not accept Harman's radical metaphysical stance. His philosophy points towards the question: if aesthetics is something more than just a realm of perception, then what is it? What is this mysterious allure, this style of things that is not reducible to their parts? Harman only seems to begin to give an answer in his book. Even though the move that Harman makes is neither clear nor strongly justified, it is central to his argument against correlationism. He proposes that what we previously considered to be a phenomenological property of our cognitive system is actually ontological in its source.

Harman points towards the importance of metaphoric and poetic thinking which do not serve merely as an embellishment but have genuine cognitive value. Harman follows Ortega y Gasset's essay on metaphors entitled "An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface" in claiming that art allows to recreate an object in such a way that the work of art tries to be like the object, to recreate and expose not its external qualities but its inwardness. The work

of art is a simulation that is bound to fail but nonetheless constitutes a meaningful attempt (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 105).

As Harman notes, “Ortega's claim for metaphor, of course, is only that it presents the inner execution of the things in simulated form (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 107)”. Metaphors are a method of simulation, they do not allow to touch the thing from inside but to picture certain of its qualities in an indirect way. Metaphors do not necessarily concentrate on essential qualities (understood in a traditional way, as qualities necessary to identify an object); on the contrary, it is their use of inessential qualities that allows them to simulate an object. By foregrounding the inessential qualities and enlarging them, metaphor creates a certain feeling about the metaphorised object. This particular feeling is the core of the simulation.

Harman claims that such a simulation is possible because every object, apart from all its sensible qualities that could be noticed, described and cataloged, appears as a unity. Every object is experienced as an individual entity and cannot be reduced to a bundle of qualities. This particular object-feeling exceeds everything that can be said about the object, which, in its singularity is distinct from any other object that I might encounter.

There is the cypress as a unified thing that I encounter, that fills up some part of my life as I adopt a definite lived stance toward it, however faint. Insofar as the cypress enters the sphere of my life, it is not just a sensory image, but also a single executant reality within my life, an actual experience that I undergo, a mysterious unity at which all my attitudes aim. (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 108)

This is a very phenomenological stance – Harman tends to think of intentional objects not merely as sensual images that could be decomposed into some bundles of qualities or points of colour, as proponents of Hume and British empiricism would do (Harman “Prince of Networks” 199). Objects appear as unified entities.

Harman underlines this unified aspect of encountered objects, which always appear as wholes that cannot be reduced to their parts. “The cypress is not only an image sparkling with diverse features, but also a murky underground unity *for me* (Harman 2005:108)”. Objects appear in human experience as wholes that have a particular style, that give us a particular feeling. It is at this style and this feeling that metaphors are directed. In this way, aesthetics

ceases to be merely a way of embellishing things, it becomes a mode of communication that allows us to recognize entire beings as certain wholes, to speculate about their inwardness and eventually to simulate it.

It is worth noticing that the way Harman discusses the cognitive status of metaphor is radically different from how cognitive studies (and especially cognitive linguistics) would approach this issue. This difference stems from Harman's ontology, which sees metaphors as originating in, or provoked by, the thing that is metaphorised itself. Cognitive linguists perceive metaphor as a completely internal cognitive process, which facilitates understanding of the world, but is fully independent of the world.

Meillassoux is right in judging that Graham Harman does not go beyond correlationism but extends it in a very specific way (7). He generalizes carnal phenomenology, understood as an aesthetic insertion into the world of objects through the body, the body being the tool that responds to otherness with sensibility. This is the form of correlationism that he extends onto other beings. The structure of human phenomenology, that is, the structure of a sensible tool, is generalized into the structure of reality, its metaphysical embroidery. To put it in other words, he considers human phenomenology as a particular realization of a more general system of interaction in the ether of sensibility. This ether is what enables communication between objects that reside in void.

What allows the objects to appear as synthesized wholes is their style, this emergent particularity that connects all their qualities and surpasses them. But the most central fact for Harman is that the synthesis of qualities into objects – what was the source of correlation as such – is displaced outside of the subject into the world – it becomes an ontological property. In this sense Harman both accepts and defies Kant – accepting the synthesis but depriving the subject of its constitutive role in it.

1.2.2. Prince of Networks and Harman's relevance for my project

So far my attention has been concentrated on *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, a book central to Harman's philosophical project. Harman develops several ideas covered in *Guerrilla Metaphysics* in a book devoted to Bruno Latour entitled *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. The last chapter is Harman's elaboration of his own project and the steps he took since his previous book.

Harman proposes a complex model of reality, which I will have to slightly simplify for the purposes of this thesis, mainly by omitting some details with little significance for the subject of my thesis. However, I will try to remain faithful to the spirit of Harman's philosophy. Harman differentiates between real objects and sensual/intentional objects. This is the only distinction that makes his flat ontology a bit less flat, as he himself acknowledges. Real objects are inaccessible entities and their existence is independent from any externality, whereas sensual/intentional objects are what appears in the mind (or, as Harman calls, on the interior of a thing, because they are not necessarily exclusive to humans) and are dependent on that mind.

Harman formulates this distinction explicitly only in *Prince of Networks*. However, the way of thinking that led to its conception is already visible in *Guerrilla Metaphysics* in the form of considerations concerning human phenomenology and how objects appear as whole entities due to their style and not as bundles of qualities. Two real objects can never touch each other, they are withdrawn. They get related to each other only by a mediator, this mediator being the sensual/intentional object. Likewise, two sensual/intentional objects cannot touch each other otherwise than through the mediation of a real object. Two real objects related by means of a mediator constitute a new object. This, Harman claims, is how new objects are constituted.

Harman proposes a certain form of panpsychism, which he understands in the light of his philosophical discoveries. He claims that although we obviously cannot ascribe to inanimate objects higher mental activities similar to those performed by human brains, those human cognitive capacities are merely a more developed and elaborated version of a very basic mechanism that underlies all relations between objects. As Harman puts it: "What I have done [...] is to reduce human cognition to its barest ontological feature—the translation or distortion of a withdrawn reality that it addresses" (Harman "Prince of Networks" 212).

Harman's thinking is very relevant for my approach to Stevens' and Herbert's poetry. First of all, he provides a general philosophical framework to think the role of objects anew. He shifts the focus from human beings to objects. His sheer interest is in the world of objects, in their richness and variousness. Non-human entities are at the center of my project as well. The flatness of his ontology implies for me an equal interest in all types of non-human entities, regardless of their similarity to human beings.

Secondly, Harman proposes to embrace correlationism in the following way: he notices that all we have is the restrictions of our cognition and he transposes them onto a higher level, into the metaphysical structure of the world. By claiming that our phenomenology is glue between real objects and that it is nothing more than a more sophisticated form of something that all beings have, he radically restructures metaphysics.

He tries to reinvent phenomenology, by showing that it can go beyond the boundaries of the logocentric and anthropocentric. He claims that we encounter objects as whole entities that are something more than merely a bundle of sensual impressions – due to their style which is something more than the sum of qualities of an object and allows one to recognize this object as this object; the style does not arise from a synthesis that we would perform, it is immanent to the object. Phenomenology is not perception, it is communication between objects that exist in a vacuum.

We receive a vision of objects as independent realities that have their own phenomenology. This phenomenology is not only a way of experiencing things but also a way of communication. Following Harman, we can assume that human phenomenology is just a realization of a more general phenomenology. We can thus try to map our phenomenology onto other beings in an attempt (always in vain, always bound to fail, as we are limited to our anthropomorphic way of thinking) to imagine how they experience reality.

Harman proposes that this attempt could be realized through metaphor (among other things). Metaphors are simulations of, and speculations about, the inner life of objects. Metaphors as such could be found in abundance in poetry. And although there is no qualitative distinction between metaphors in poetry and in other media, the richness of poetic expression, and the fact that poems are more likely to contain nested metaphors (metaphors in metaphors) and that entire poems could comprise complex metaphors, makes poetry interesting to study in light of Harman's philosophy.

Harman himself points to poetry and especially metaphor as one of the modes of cognition that allow humans to imagine other beings' inwardness by simulating it. My work stems precisely from this assumption, namely that metaphor in its realization in poetry is a mode of cognition, apart from having rhetorical value. The idea that metaphors could be a valid source of cognition is not new. It was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson in their *Metaphors We Live by*. Their understanding of metaphors and their functioning strongly differs from Harman's approach. They claim that metaphors are not a poetic embellishment,

but they are present in our everyday lives and allow us to better express more abstract issues, but also shape our modes of knowing, understanding and perceiving the world around us in ways that are not always conscious. A canonical example of such a quotidian metaphor would be GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN – which can be seen in such an expression as “We hit a *peak* last year, but it's been *downhill* ever since” (Lakoff & Johnson 17). Those metaphors are present in our everyday language and have nothing poetic or unusual about them, they are petrified. Harman's theory sees the cognitive value of metaphors in a completely different area – for him metaphors allow us to allude to qualities of objects that we otherwise have no access to. Those metaphors cannot be petrified, for their strength lies in their originality.

One can accuse Harman of generalizing human perception – instead of generalizing something else that would not be so directly connected to human beings – and therefore of repeating the gesture of anthropocentrism. This accusation would not be completely unjustified. One may however counterpose in Harman's defense that he is bound to start from the human since he is one, and that it is easier to start from the human because it is what he knows best. He simply notices that there is nothing special about the human cognitive system. By calling it just another way of communication, Harman states there is no qualitative difference between it and other forms of communication. He tries to deprive humans of what they considered so special about them. Post-Kantian philosophy implicitly considers the transcendental rift to be the anthropological difference, which differentiated human from non-human. Harman's powerful step is to reinscribe this rift into ontology itself, and ascribe it to every single being.

In my analysis of the poetry of Herbert and Stevens I adopt Harman's ontological model and compare its several elements with the philosophical standing points that arise from their poetry. I stage a discussion between this philosophy and poetry to see how they can enrich each other. Harman's philosophy allows me to show aspects of Herbert's poetry that are omitted by most of his scholarship which is centered on ethical and existential questions. It also allows me to ask if Stevens could be read not only as the poet of human phenomenology but also as the poet of phenomenology in general. In return, the poets can help elucidate the complexities of Harman's philosophy, by providing concrete examples for abstract philosophical ideas or question some of Harman's assumptions. For instance, Herbert's poem “Wooden die” problematizes the opposition of the internal and the external – an opposition central for Harman.

1.3. Ian Bogost and Alien Phenomenology

In *Alien Phenomenology* Bogost develops what was only briefly sketched in Harman's work. With his reflection on metaphor, Harman indicates certain ways of speculating about the inaccessible inwardness of objects. With this move he wants to go beyond anthropocentrism while staying anthropomorphic.

Ian Bogost takes up Harman's ideas and develops them into a fully practical approach. He proposes to work with alien phenomenologies; by this term he understands the phenomenologies of non-human beings, the way they experience themselves and the external world. Since we have no access to those phenomenologies, we can only rely on speculation. Bogost follows Harman in claiming that when it comes to our knowledge about objects "there is something that recedes—always hidden, inside, inaccessible" (Bogost 6), we can never fully grasp objects as there is always something that eludes us. Experiences, perceptions are an example of such a hidden thing – something that "eludes observation even if its edges can be traced by examining physical properties" (62). This is the reason why science cannot provide a complete description of such qualities as the feeling of "being-like"; being-like a snake, being-like a stone, being-like a tree, all those experiences, even though they have a particular physical basis which can be observed and described, can nevertheless not be reduced to it. "Even if evidence from out-side a thing (be it bat, hookah, or cantaloupe) offers clues to how it perceives, the experience of that perception remains withdrawn" (63).

However, even though it is not possible to be granted access to the experiences of non-human entities, alien phenomenology claims that is worth trying to describe such experiences by analogy. "Unlike objective phenomenology, alien phenomenology accepts that the subjective character of experiences cannot be fully recuperated objectively, even if it remains wholly real. In a literal sense, the only way to perform alien phenomenology is by analogy: the bat, for example, operates like a submarine" (Bogost 64). The existence of such an irreducible layer leaves us disarmed. Such experiences cannot be reached by our knowledge, understood scientifically, they can be only speculated about. Bogost proposes to accept the inevitability of anthropocentrism: "we are destined to offer anthropomorphic metaphors for the unit operations of object perception, particularly when our intention frequently involves communicating those accounts to other humans" (65). Therefore, the

simulating analogy has to be anthropomorphic, i.e. it has to be adjusted to human cognitive skills, to use media that interact with the human senses etc.

This is, however, a humble version of anthropocentrism – one that does not stem from perceiving man as the center of things but arises from seeing “man” as yet another kind of thing that is bound to be what it is and cannot go beyond him/herself. This is a declaration of the fact that we do not possess *the* knowledge, we merely possess a knowledge, human knowledge, that in a certain sense is not better than bat knowledge, stone knowledge or any other kind of knowledge.

Bogost repeats Harman in claiming the importance of metaphors for human cognition. Seeing their usefulness for the purposes of alien phenomenology, he proposes to take them at their face value by arguing that “relation takes place not just *like* metaphor but *as* metaphor” (Bogost 67). This stems from the assumption that perception is not a passive faculty but rather a specific form of communication, of being in the world among other beings. And yet a metaphor cannot be considered to be the metaphorised object itself, nor does it allow direct access to the object. It is a mode of cognition and communication, yet there always remains something inaccessible; a metaphor is always a metaphor for us, it is always a human metaphor.

Bogost further asks about the possibility of speculative ethics understood as a reflection on how different things can ethically relate to one another. Ethics, abstracted from the human level in the same way Harman abstracts phenomenology, turns out to be a specific code led by a certain kind of logic, different for every being. Bogost discards this idea due to the difficulties it poses: it is possible to speculate about perception, since there exist objective accounts one can base one's speculation on. But to obtain similar factual evidence for ethical relations seems an impossible task. However, entertaining the thought of a nonhuman ethics could be inspiring (Bogost 78).

Having briefly sketched Ian Bogost's theoretical position, I can proceed to explain how he imagines the application of his ideas. Bogost uses plenty of technological examples to demonstrate his ideas. The most evident and clear example is that of sonar devices that are used in submarines allowing them to move around in the underwater world. Such a machine uses sound waves, which constitute a sense completely unknown to the human cognitive system. However, various forms of echolocation – the use of sound waves to navigate in the

environment – are present in numerous other species, such as bats or dolphins. Bogost claims that one can perceive sonars as a device that simulates the experience that such creatures as bats might have when they navigate with the use of echolocation.

The choice of the object that will best serve as a simulation device is entirely external, i.e. it is based on our conventional knowledge of how both objects (the simulated and the simulating) function. In this sense the simulation is an anthropomorphic procedure: we choose objects as simulation devices based not only on similarities in their functioning but also on the cognitive value that this simulation has for us, how it addresses our cognitive needs and deficiencies.

Bogost claims that such devices are “artifacts that do philosophy (85)”. In this sense, he tries to push the boundaries of philosophical reflection, away from its traditional textual reservoir into a broader domain. For him other experiences besides reading could also have a philosophical value.

This approach, attractive as it may seem, can raise questions that Bogost does not seem to either ask or answer. What is the status of the simulating object? Is not some help necessary to understand its experience, since the simulating device is an object that is equally foreign to us as the simulated object? Would we not need a third object, another simulating device, that would simulate the experience of the first simulating device? Is the simulating device experiencing the simulation as simulation, i.e. as an analogy? Do we experience the experience the simulating device has of simulation? Those questions are especially problematic in the light of Bogost’s ambition to use simulation devices as philosophical tools.

Regardless of the objections that I raise to Bogost's theory, his ideas remain useful. The philosophical difficulties that might arise from the fact that we try to understand an object we have no full access to with the help of another object that we have no full access to, become less relevant if we think about the act of simulation as purely instrumental. We do not need to access any inner world of the simulating device, we only use it as an instrument whose particular sensual qualities allow us to create a metaphor through which we can speculate about the experiences of the simulated object. Understood solely as instruments, simulation devices could prove themselves useful. I propose to interpret certain poems as such devices. Obviously not all poems that I will analyze here would qualify as such. There is a considerable difference between poems that function as a metaphorical device – i.e. poems that are themselves a complex metaphor that simulates the perception of a certain being and

poems that speak *about* the perception of a being, metaphorically or not, but do not constitute a simulation themselves. In such poems, for instance, the description of experiences is not central. It is also possible to encounter parts of poems that work as such devices.

The question of simulation could be seen as problematic due to the textual character of poetry. Could a text, i.e. a medium that uses language as its primary way of expression, simulate the experiences of things that do not use any form of language? How can this experience be translated into language?

Does simulation imply analogy? What we are supposed to experience through a simulating device should be in some sense analogous to what the actual simulated being is experiencing. It is worth noticing that in principle Bogost does not make any distinction between the experiences of animate and inanimate beings – they are both equally unknowable for us and they are interesting to simulate. A simulating device is then just a trigger for our own experience, shaped in a way that enables us to *imagine* what it feels like to be this object. It does not recreate the experience directly in us with the use of different means, there is no direct analogy, no isomorphism between the experience of the object and our experience. A simulating device provides us with a particular set of information delivered in a way that stimulates the mind to create in the imagination an idea of what the object might be experiencing. The sonar machine is a good example thereof because it clearly does not provide us with any factual information about bats or dolphins and their echolocation systems and was not created for this purpose. It uses powerful visuals to achieve its aim. Those visuals could be used by our imagination as material to build up a vision of these beings' experiences. However, this visual material as a representation has no direct connection to the actual experience.

Therefore, a simulating device works because it presents some information about an object that stimulates us to imagine what it might experience. It should be even possible to imagine a poem that stimulates a perception of an object without a direct description of this object or reference to it. If we can think of a sonar machine as a simulation of echolocation, although it was not designed as such nor does it refer to the animals at all, then we can also think of a poem that works in a similar manner.

Bogost's relevance for my project is more self-evident than in the case of Harman. He proposes to see some cultural artifacts as useful philosophical tools to investigate the phenomenology of non-human entities. What I take from Bogost is the practical approach

that allows him to see metaphoricity as a way in which human beings can conceive of other beings' phenomenology and his proposal to construct devices that would simulate those phenomenologies.

1.4 Amerindian ontology

To reinforce the methodology proposed by Bogost, I will show its correlation to the model of thinking of the Amerindians as described in the book *Cannibal Metaphysics. For a Post-structural Anthropology* by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a Brazilian anthropologist working in Sao Paulo, whose writings are strongly influenced by philosophy, in particular by Gilles Deleuze. The similarity between Amerindian ontology and Bogost's theory is methodologically inspiring for two reasons: firstly, it destabilizes the opposition of nature and culture, which reinforces and is reinforced by the distinction of human and non-human. Secondly, it allows me to further deepen the model of investigations based on an analogy between human and non-human as proposed by Bogost; this model allows me to understand the unknown experiences of non-human beings through an analogy to well-known elements from human experiences.

Amerindians have a very particular ontology that generalizes certain human traits into more abstract personhood that other nonhuman beings also possess.

In seeing us as nonhumans, animals and spirits regard themselves (their own species) as human: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their houses or villages, and apprehend their behavior and characteristics through a cultural form: they perceive their food as human food- jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the worms in rotten meat as grilled fish-their corporeal attributes (coats, feathers, claws, beaks) as finery or cultural instruments, and they even organize their social systems in the same way as human institutions, with chiefs, shamans, exogamous moieties and rituals. (Viveiros de Castro 57).

Amerindian ontology abstracts human culture into a more general form – personhood, which could be then actualized by various non-human beings. The human actualization of this form

is not primary in any way. The general form of personhood enables analogies between what animals and humans do; to understand the animal through an analogy to well-known human behavior.

I do not postulate to adopt the Amerindian ontology. What I propose is to instrumentalize it for the purposes of my thesis, to use its powerful way of making analogies. Those analogies, although they might seem far-fetched from the point of view of traditional Western anthropology, are not quite unjustified on the ground of Harman's object-oriented ontology and constitute an outstanding tool for alien phenomenology.

Harman would not generalize the human condition onto the entire universe, i.e. he would not impose the form of personhood on every entity; and he openly claims that he wants to avoid a panpsychism that would ascribe human cognitive skills to other beings. On the other hand, it cannot go unnoticed that he considers human cognition to be a more developed form of what all beings are capable of. However, he derives the glue that allows for objects to touch from something that is human, namely human phenomenology. He might have looked for it beyond the human realm (not necessarily successfully) but he finds it in humans. And although his generalization of human phenomenology into a universal gluing form is definitely more abstract than the generalization of human culture as it takes place in Amerindian ontology, there is an analogy between them. Precisely just because we assume that there is no substantial difference between humans and any other object, we can assume that human experience is not special, it is just a particularization of a more general system, and that we can try to reach out for this general system for philosophical purposes.

Bogost's practice of alien phenomenology bears close resemblance to the Amerindians' perspectivism as described by Viveiros de Castro. Alien phenomenology is also an exercise in empathy – in trying to imagine how the other thinks. Amerindians are anthropomorphic in precisely the same way as the practice of alien phenomenology is. Alien phenomenology does not posit the human as a center of being (it is not anthropocentric in this sense) and sees the human being as just another object in the universe. What follows from this is the assumption that everything human beings do is just a particularization of a more general category. This implies a different ontological model, in which the nature/culture duality does not play a central role.

To illustrate the different construction of the duality nature/culture, Viveiros de Castro evokes an almost anecdotal difference between the reactions of Spanish colonizers and the

indigenous people of America inhabiting the region of Great Antilles when those two groups encountered each other for the first time.

The marked dimension for the Spanish was the soul, whereas the Indian emphasized the body. The Europeans never doubted that the Indians had bodies- animals have them too – and the Indians in turn never doubted that the Europeans had souls, since animals and the ghosts of the dead do as well. Thus the Europeans' ethnocentrism consisted in doubting that the body of the other contained a soul formally similar to the one inhabiting their own bodies, while the ethnocentrism of the Indians, on the contrary, entailed doubting that the others' souls or spirits could possess a body materially similar to theirs. (Viveiros de Castro 52)

This results in a completely different construction of the nature/culture distinction. For Europeans nature is a unifying category – there is only one nature and everything belongs to it, as part of it. Culture (or rather cultures) is what modifies nature, working upon bodies pre-defined by nature. For the Amerindians there is only one culture – one that is shared equally by humans and animals. What we know as human culture is only an actualized version of a more general form, that of personhood. “The concept of the person - a center of intentionality constituted by a difference of internal potential - is anterior and logically superior to the concept of the human” (Viveiros de Castro 58). This form is actualized by every being. This actualization has various forms, which are various natures, for there is no common ground to assert one nature. This results in an opposition between Western multiculturalism and Amerindian multinaturalism.

Therefore, one of the main advantages of evoking Amerindian anthropology for the purpose of this thesis is that it destabilizes the nature/culture distinction and allows to partially bridge the gap between humans and non-human beings, and in particular between humans and animals. The Western nature/culture opposition ascribes a special position to humans as the only beings capable of culture, a position that also allows them to partially modify nature. Another advantage of Amerindian perspectivism is the role it ascribes to shamans and their abilities to connect humans with non-human beings.

Amerindian shamanism could be defined as the authorization of certain individuals to cross the corporeal barriers between species, adopt an exospecific subjective perspective, and administer the relations between those species and humans. By seeing nonhuman beings as they see themselves (again as humans), shamans become capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in the trans-specific dialogue and, even more importantly, of returning from their travels to recount them; something the "laity" can only do with difficulty (Viveiros de Castro 60).

There is an analogy between shamans and poets. The poet would be considered as a shaman, the one that is able to see other beings as they see themselves, and in this way, to establish a specific form of communication. Obviously there is no reason to think that Herbert or Stevens would consider themselves to be such shamans, neither would they not claim any privileged access to non-human entities. Nonetheless, Western poetry knows well the association of poetry with shamanic or prophetic powers. Beginning with poetic character of religious texts such as the Bible, passing through the visionary poetics of Romanticism, numerous Western traditions claim that poets have access to things normal people do not, or at least, that poetry is a special form of discourse that allows to address the inaccessible.

The Amerindian perspective, as delineated above, corresponds with the distinction between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism that I have proposed. For the Amerindians ontology is strongly anthropomorphic – with every being seeing itself as if it was human (or as if it was a person, to use the language of Viveiros de Casto) – and yet not anthropocentric – for the human as a species is only a particular instance of a more general personhood. As Viveiros de Casto writes,

Our epistemological game, then, is objectification; what has not been objectified simply remains abstract or unreal. The form of the Other is the thing. Amerindian shamanism is guided by the inverse ideal: to know is to "personify," to take the point of view of what should be known or, rather, the one whom should be known. The key is to know, in Guimaraes Rosa's phrase, "the who of things," without which there would be no way to respond intelligently to the question of "why." The form of the Other is the person. (Viveiros de Castro 60-61)

This is exactly what connects those anthropological and philosophical investigations to my project. There is a strong parallelism between alien phenomenology, as proposed by Ian Bogost, and the Amerindian ontology and perspectivism. Although neither Bogost nor Harman openly propose to assume any universal form of personhood that would be actualized through different beings, and thus would enable us to depict the phenomenology of those beings by analogy to our own phenomenological forms, their writings nonetheless convey the impression that the procedures of analogy and metaphor may be more than merely a technical means to achieve something unachievable.

1.5. Conclusion of the theoretical part

The methodology I presented does not constitute a closed whole. Harman's object-oriented ontology is not a method as such, it does not propose a way of reading. It is rather a particular philosophical position that forms the background of my thesis. The problems it addresses, such as the question of objecthood and of the accessibility of objects, are the problems I will investigate in my readings of Stevens' and Herbert's poetry.

Alien phenomenology, on the other hand, presents a particular method, a set of instructions on how to approach texts and what to look for in them. It specifically suggests reading texts as devices that potentially simulate the phenomenology of various entities. Strengthened by the lesson of perspectivism, it allows us to read poems completely anew.

There is obviously no opposition between object-oriented ontology and alien phenomenology; the former is a fully developed philosophy and the latter a practical application of some of the consequences of that philosophy. They thus constitute a theoretical continuum that forms the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis.

2. Chapter – Zbigniew Herbert

Zbigniew Herbert's poetry is deeply reflective and intellectual, populated by various allusions to philosophy and even having philosophers as its main characters. In this chapter I will concentrate on those poems in which Herbert reflects on the subject of objecthood and the impossibility of access to objects and their phenomenology or any other kind of inwardness. Herbert, I argue, penetrates the ontological differences between humans and inanimate beings, seeing their sometimes radical dissimilarity as both attractive and alienating.

First, I wish to consider Herbert's reception (in particular in Poland) in order to point out how my research proposes to enrich existing scholarship on Herbert. The reception of Herbert in Poland is first and foremost shaped by his political engagement in the opposition during the final years of communism in Poland (i.e. in the period 1981 until 1989). Before that period he was not strongly present in the political life, although his critical position towards communist authorities was well-known. He became politically active especially after the rise of Solidarnosc, the largest Polish independent trade union whose political activity in the 80's was one of the major factors that contributed to the fall of the communist regime. Herbert's poems were widely distributed and published in the underground press of that time. This political engagement and strong ethical components present in Herbert's poetry resulted in a reception concentrated on the moral values that he endorsed, namely steadfastness, courage, humbleness, heroism and pride. One can trace the echoes of antique ethical stoicism. An example of a poem that explicitly expresses those values is "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito". This phase of reception, which prevailed in the 80's and the 90's, remains uninteresting for my project. A canonical example of scholarship focused on the political Herbert would be Włodzimierz Maciag's *O poezji Zbigniewa Herberta*.

The next phase of reception of Herbert's work is centered on the so-called "metaphysical Herbert" (Ruszar 67). The adjective "metaphysical" should not be understood strictly philosophically, as it refers to a set of existential philosophical questions rather than as a synonym for ontology or metaphysics as the term is understood in academic philosophy. Although some scholars have been reflecting on this aspect of Herbert's poetry from the beginning of his career, it was largely neglected in the 80's and the 90's due to domination of political readings of Herbert. It was not until the 2000's that a major rise of interest in the "metaphysical Herbert" could be observed.

Herbert's poetry raises questions about classical philosophical and existential themes such as God, death, human destiny, etc. for instance in poems such as "Dog, Hermes and Star" or "The Cultivation of philosophy". Numerous studies devoted to Herbert in the past few years concentrate on those themes, reading them in comparison with other poets whose philosophical interests were central for their poetry (such as Eliot, Rilke, Hölderlin in Mikolajczak (2013)).

That we can talk about the political or metaphysical phases of reception of Herbert's poetry does not mean that there was no scholarship covering subjects that do not belong to one of those two major areas, or that, for instance, there were no texts discussing Herbert's philosophical thinking that appeared in the time when the political readings were the most popular. Scholars were always aware of the richness of Herbert's poetry. Those phases of reception indicate merely certain trends that were prevailing in particular decades and that could be associated with events in Polish political and cultural life. There can be no doubt that humanity is Herbert's central concern, as his poetry is deeply engaged in human ethics, history or people's metaphysical position in the world. It is thus not surprising that the interpreters of Herbert's numerous poems that are devoted to objects or the question of objectivity adopted the anthropocentric perspective.

I would like to propose a reading of Herbert inspired by object-oriented ontology, i.e. a reading that focuses on objects and the question of objecthood and tries to avoid anthropocentrism. Even though objects were not in the center of Herbert's attention, there are (more than) a few poems that thematize objects and objecthood. My contribution to Herbert's scholarship consists in drawing attention to those poems and proposing an interpretation thereof through the framework of object-oriented ontology, thereby showing that Herbert's intellectual reflections reached beyond what interpreters usually concentrate on, i.e. beyond questions concerning humans and their existential position.

Whenever I refer directly to Herbert's texts, I quote from *The Collected Poems: 1965-1998*. I will read the following poems (with the respective page numbers from *The Collected Poems: 1965-1998*): "The wooden die" (207), "Pebble" (197), "Study of the Object" (193-96), "Clock" (211), "Armchairs" (217), "Hen" (141). All of the poems, apart from "Hen" which was published in the collection *Dog, Hermes and Star* (1957), appeared in the collection entitled *Study of the Object* that was published in 1961. That almost all of the analyzed poems belong to one collection stems from the fact that *Study of the Object* was the

most philosophically elaborated of Hebert's collections. His moral stance, which dominates in later collections such as *Mr. Cogito* (1974) or *Elegy for the Departure* (1990), is less visible in Hebert's earlier works which I discuss here. The political and moral explicitness of his later work results from Hebert's growing political engagement.

“The wooden die”, “Clock”, “Armchairs”, “Hen” are prose poems, a form that Hebert used for several of his texts. His prose poems are always short, very impersonal and descriptive, often either very rigid or surrealistic. This form is characteristic for his earlier period, for such collections as the above mentioned *Dog*, *Hermes and Star* and *Study of the Object*. The other two poems that I analyze, “Pebble” and “Study of the Object”, are written in free verse, a form most common for Hebert's poetry. All the poems that I have chosen for analysis problematize objects and objecthood.

2.1. Pebble

The poem “Pebble” describes an encounter of a human being with a pebble. The voice of “Pebble” seems to belong to a particular person (although the poem does not reveal anything about this person); one can even say that the poem is a description of an encounter between a human being and a pebble rather than a mere description of the latter.

The poem starts with the lyrical subject's assertion that the pebble is a perfect creature, “equal to itself | mindful of its limits || filled exactly | with a pebbly meaning”. The pebble is thus a closed object. One could here possibly trace an echo of Sartrean existentialism with its thesis of the human being as incomplete, never finished, in opposition to inanimate objects which are exactly what they are, no more, no less, and thus could not alter. This is a clearly anthropocentric view, as, according to Sartre, this incompleteness is what allows for human freedom and self-constitution. But even without this existentialist association, the poem is clearly constructed upon the opposition of completeness and incompleteness. The pebble does not need anything from the outside, it does not enter on its own into any external interactions, as it is complete.

The pebble is limited by its own physical properties. It does not alter by itself, it remains the way it was shaped by the external world. The pebble knows its limits as it knows it cannot reach for more than it is. The Polish expression “pilnujacy swoich granic” which is translated as “mindful of its limits” is ambiguous as the word “granic” could signify “limits”

(and this version was chosen by the translator) as well as “borders”. The word “limit” suggests something that cannot be crossed from the inside, that blocks from the inside rather than something that protects from the outside as a border does. The pebble is therefore closed from the inside as well as from the outside, as it cannot go beyond itself and does not let anyone in. When held in a hand, the pebble “is permeated by false warmth”. The warmth is false as it does not come from the pebble itself, it comes from the external world. There is no interaction between the human and the pebble: the warmth is also false because it is a human impression that remains at the boundary between this human and the pebble. It never actually enters the pebble. The warmth comes from the human and goes back to him.

The pebble is not out there for humans. It could be perceived without any problem, and could be included into the symbolic order without resistance. It is as neutral and indifferent as possible – it is there not to matter, it is there to remain ungraspable. As far as objects are accessible to humans, the pebble could be reached out for. And yet it does not matter to anybody nor to the world, it has a life of its own that has little to do with humans. The pebble is abstract in its simplicity and complete lack of significance or worth for humans, and at the same time it is very mundane, graspable.

At this point Herbert arrives closer to Harman, as the poem hints at a world filled with various entities that are independent objects, each one living a life of their own. At the same time, the objects never really touch each other, never really enter into interaction understood as causation. That is how the “false warmth” could be read – the warmth, produced by the human hand never really reaches the pebble itself. There is an impenetrable distance between the human and the pebble, an ontological one. This distance cannot be crossed, the two beings can never grasp each other. The pebble does not produce warmth, and although it may seem to take over the warmth of the human, it remains unaltered.

The false feeling of warmth exposes the withdrawal of objects and the alienation this withdrawal might imply. The sensual impression of warmth remains in the human subject. There is the feeling of warmth and there is the intentional pebble (the pebble as it is in the subject's mind) but the real object is inaccessible. This is the source of the ultimate indifference of the pebble: there is simply no way in which those two beings, the human and the pebble, can directly touch each other. This is also an interesting question for Harman's philosophy that has not been asked and therefore remains unexplored: is the fact that all objects reside in a vacuum and cannot directly touch each other not alienating? And if yes,

then in what sense? Herbert's poem suggests this question but leaves it unanswered.

The speaking voice in the poem is not neutral towards the pebble and his own reflection on this object. Although the lyrical subject hardly expresses any feeling directly apart from his “heavy remorse” - the guilt he feels because he disturbs the peace of the pebble when forcing it to take the “false warmth” - the poem has a certain ambiguous emotional tone. The lyrical subject seems slightly jealous of the ontological status of the pebble, its fullness, its closeness and its incredible indifference towards all the problems of human life. The subject admires the pebble’s perfection. This admiration could be generalized into admiration for objects and objecthood, for the state of being complete and indifferent. We have to remember though that this admiration is very anthropocentric, as it arises from a supposed quality that objects have and that contrasts them to humans.

In his study *Uciekinier z utopii* the Polish poet and critic Stanislaw Baranczak claims that Herbert's poetry has an antinomic character. Baranczak discovers several oppositional pairs that either have specific meanings in Herbert's aesthetic language (for instance, the opposition of white and gray as connoting particular meanings and associations) or are an expression of the poet's beliefs. One such opposition is that between the abstract and the tangible. Abstract means inhuman with an emphasis on all the negative connotations of this word – something that is abstract cannot suffer and is indifferent towards suffering. There are certainly reasons to consider Baranczak’s claim, since one of Herbert's poems, “The cultivation of philosophy” explicitly criticizes the abstractions that philosophy proposes. However, as other poems (such as “Study of the Object” that I analyze later) show, Baranczak’s claim is also contestable.

Baranczak (71-72) interprets the pebble and its indifference along the axis of the abstract and the tangible, as well as the axis of the perfect and the imperfect. He reads the perfection of the pebble as inhuman – lacking fear, suffering and the possibility of death. He claims that Herbert sees perfection as impoverishing: perfection means that there are some aspects of reality that the pebble cannot experience. In this sense, being human implies a life filled with imperfections that enrich it. In Baranczak’s reading, perfection is associated with abstraction, while tangibility with imperfection. He sees the pebble as a perfect example of something abstract, and consequently reads the inhumanity of abstraction into it. Despite the tangibility of the pebble as a particular object, Baranczak claims that the pebble represents the abstract because of its inaccessibility and indifference.

However, the pebble has its own “pebbly sense”, its own life that is simply inaccessible. Thus, although it might seem perfect in human eyes, this impression might be exclusively due to the fact that humans can perceive only certain aspects of its pebbly existence. One can assume that the pebble does not experience certain feelings (such as fear) like humans do, but one cannot know if there are some things that the pebble experiences and that humans have no access to, or they simply cannot experience because they are different beings. Cognition could also be considered as an act of gaining control over something; and certainly finding a way to use an object could be equaled to subjugating it. It is difficult to determine if Herbert would think that depriving objects of their independence calls for justice. But the independence of objects as a moral question is present as a motif in many of Herbert's poems.

In the end, an encounter of the poet with the pebble, and the interaction between those two entities, leads the speaking voice to a more general conclusion that concerns pebbles and humans (“Pebbles cannot be tamed | to the end they will look at us | with a calm and very clear eye”). The poem creates an image of what the pebble might see, and in particular how the pebble might perceive humans. This is achieved not through an imaginative “leap” into the mind of a pebble (as Stevens might have done it), entering its skin and describing from that point of view; rather, it is inferred from the human perception of the pebble and the contrast between the characteristic traits of both entities. The lyrical subject sees the pebbles' perception as calm and clear, as one can deduce from their properties as described in the previous lines. They are closed, unalterable, and essentially indifferent to humans. What is also worth noticing is the fact that Herbert shapes his reflection on the pebble along the lines of human-pebble interaction, which points towards Herbert's anthropocentrism.

The lyrical subject also notices that pebbles “could not be tamed”. This phrase should be read in relation to other Herbertian poems, such as “Hen” or “Armchairs”. In those poems the hen or the chairs are accused of having lost their independence, their dignity and wild nature, of having been tamed by human beings – not by any direct conscious human action, but simply by coexisting with humans and by being used by them. They have been integrated into the symbolic order of human life and in this sense they have lost their independence as entities existing out there, just like that, they have become objects of human use, filled with human sense that turns them into instruments. “Pebble” praises the dignity of the pebble that arises from its indifference to humans. It is a reminder of the fact that not everything can be

tamed, not everything can join the human world, but there is something beyond that world.

The will to recognize the independent existence of objects and to attribute moral value to it could be considered close to Harman's project. Herbert discovers in human experience, which is usually full of human meaning, an object that falls out of it and leads to a broader reflection on objects. In a sense, Herbert finds a space that could serve as a source for feelings and reflections that could lead to a position similar to Harman's, namely that there is a world of independent objects that do not care for us and whose existence cannot be reduced to their usefulness as tools or to their presence in the human world of meaning.

Moreover, the fact that pebbles “will look at us | with a calm and very clear eye “ could be interpreted as a sign of an actual relationality between the pebble and humans. It seems to be a metaphor, since it is not possible to actually perceive the pebble's eye. However, it could also be read more literally, if we assume that the pebble actually really relates to humans, perceiving them with its eye, creating a relation – this relation from the human perspective is simply indiscernible, impossible to grasp empirically. The pebbles, however cold, completely distanced and avoiding any interaction with humans, do look back at them. The indifference of pebbles does not result in any form of ontological closeness, it turns out to be phenomenological in nature. Pebbles seem completely closed and detached but in fact they relate to humans (any to other entities) just as any other object, even though this might not be perceptually graspable. This relation is expressed as the stare, the intentional object (in the sense proposed by Harman) that arises both in the human mind as well as in the pebble itself.

2.2. Study of the Object

Herbert's “Study of the Object” is a fascinating reflection on an abstract object and objecthood in general. It consists of six parts. I will devote more attention to some of these as they are more relevant for the theme of my thesis. This poem is a mediation upon an object that does not exist and is purely imaginative. As the poem develops, the lyrical subject moves deeper and deeper into a completely abstract imaginative world.

The poem comprises six parts. Apart from the first, purely descriptive part, the poem is written in a mode of instruction. The speaking voice instructs either the reader or another unidentified addressee (an implied “you”) or, perhaps, himself on how s/he should proceed

with an object that does not exist. The instructive mode adds a certain moral tone (present in most of Herbert's poems) to a poem that addresses epistemological questions. The poem avoids any clear indication why this particular way of proceeding is better. It is legitimate to suppose that possible gains in imagining an object that does not exist are epistemological in nature – by following the instruction of the speaking voice, one can discover something that is otherwise unavailable.

The title of the poem suggests in itself a little twist of expectations – it promises a reflection on an object but instead it discusses an object that does not exist. Whether an object that does not exist is an object is a very interesting question that the poem refuses to answer openly. The use of an object that does not exist, allows Herbert to reflect on objects through negation and to reach a higher level of abstraction, as the lyrical subject does not refer to anything concrete known from experience, he meditates upon pure ideas or things that are deprived of any particularizing qualities.

In the first part the lyrical subject introduces the idea of an object that does not exist. He praises its beauty that stems from the fact that an object that does not exist is completely abstract – it does not serve anything, it is ahistorical, it does not enter into interactions of any kind with other objects, and, finally, it cannot be destroyed. The descriptions of those properties unravel through enumeration and negation: “it does not serve to carry water | or to preserve the ashes of a hero || it was not cradled by Antigone | nor was a rat drowned in it”. A non-existent object escapes all particularity that would define it in space and time. In this way it also avoids all limitations that real objects have due to their material concreteness. This lack of limitation is expressed through the emphasis on this object’s openness – “it has no hole | and is entirely open”. It is also “seen | from every side | which means | hardly anticipated”, breaking away from the limitation imposed by spatiotemporal location. The last quoted verse (“hardly anticipated”) in the original Polish version “zaledwie przeczute” could also be translated as “merely felt”. It is a paradox that the object seen from all sides at the same time is in fact not seen at all, but merely felt.

In the second part the poetic voice starts his instruction. The addressee is asked to “mark the place | where stood the object | which does not exist | with a black square“, which is an impossible task. In this way he proposes to enter a higher level of negation. To the first negation, that of the object that does not exist, the lyrical subject adds another one, that of a place where the object once stood – the past tense implies that the object does not stand there

anymore, that it is absent. In this context absence is substantial, it does not merely mean that something is not present, it rather means that there is a substantial lack of presence. This results in a double negation in which a thing that does not exist is absent.

The third part describes what happens next, as a result of the demarcation. The space around starts to revolt against this double impossibility, that of an object that does not exist and that of marking the space where it stood.

At the end the space empties itself out. There is nothing and this “empty space” is even more beautiful than the object that does not exist. Herbert equals it with the creation of the world, completely independent imaginary reality. This creation takes place in the mind of the one who imagines the object, following the speaking voice's advice.

In the fifth part, the lyrical subject asks the addressee for the strongest form of purity. For this is the part that requires enough self-control to retain the emptiness of the newly created world. A lot of common, ordinary things would like to populate this new imaginary world, to make it beautiful in the most banal way: clouds, trees and rich colors. The lyrical subject asks the addressee to follow the “counsels | of the inner eye” and to reject all that.

The sixth and final part of the poem serves as the culmination of the meditative process. From the empty space, saved from the attempt of all kinds of things to occupy this new world in part five, the speaking voice asks the implied “you” to take out a chair. It is interesting how in this context, after having achieved a very high level of abstraction, the speaker reaches out for a particular object. It seems that the object that does not exist served as a ladder through which the speaker reached this imaginative world. But even in this world, an object that does not exist cannot appear. It can only cast shadows, out of which the chair has to be taken out.

The chair, “beautiful and useless”, serves as the final object of the poem. It is as simple as it can possibly be. It is an interesting question why Herbert chooses a concrete object at the very end of the poem, especially because negation is his major tool throughout the poem. The lyrical subject asks the reader to imagine an object that does not exist, then to replace it by an empty space, then to renounce to different things that might try to appear in this empty imaginary world. All those moves, imagining the nonexistent, deletion, emptying, reduction and renouncement are based on negation. The last part brings a certain positivity, as the speaking voice asks the reader to introduce a concrete thing that has a positive content, it is a chair, filled with “chairness”.

In the very last stanza, the speaking voice (this time as a “we”) addresses the chair directly in an apostrophe. The chair is asked to reveal the most fundamental things and questions of human existence, such as “the pupil of death” or “the iris of necessity”. Although the lyrical subject does not make it very specific, he wants the reader let the chair “have the face of the last things”. There is a strong change in the course of the poem. It seems that the final chair, the object that does not exist and the whole negative imaginary process are to a certain extent instrumentalized in order to lead to something beyond them. Herbert does not make it clear whether those final questions that the chair is supposed to answer (“we ask reveal o chair | the depths of the inner eye | the iris of necessity | the pupil of death”) arise spontaneously in the process, as a certain by-product, or whether they were the final goal from the beginning. Regardless of the actual intention, the process turns out to reach beyond a meditation of an object as such.

Herbert, in his love for the inexistent object in this poem, seems to locate himself far away from Harman's sensibility. Harman has a huge admiration for the particular - his books are full of descriptions of particular objects in various settings. His philosophy is fueled by the conviction that the world is full of particular, individual objects and that we should do justice to them in the way we do philosophy. He does not praise objects as philosophical abstractions but rather as concrete material entities that are out there and that have to be properly addressed in their full richness.

It is difficult to say how the philosophical positions of the poet and the philosopher precisely differ as they seem to address different things between which there is very little overlapping, even if at first glance they seem to discuss objects. The reading of this poem through the lenses of Harman's philosophy exposes the fact that the poem that claims to study an object, does not actually do it.

For Harman an object that does not exist would certainly be possible to conceive as a mental invention. His philosophy considers everything to be an object; ideas and mental images certainly qualify as objects for him. In principle, he also does not differentiate between types of objects. Thus, mental objects are no lesser objects than material things. However, his interest resides in objecthood as such and in the question of how one can build a philosophy in which objects are the primary units.

What Herbert is actually studying in the “Study of the Object” is not any object in particular (although the first part is devoted to a description of an object that does not exist)

or objecthood in general (despite the high level of abstraction in the poem). What he is reflecting on is a particular state of mind and imagination that results from a meditative contact with an object that does not exist. Herbert arrives at a vision of human imagination, but it is hard to tell whether what he arrives at is pure objecthood, and even if he does, this is certainly not the center of his concerns. He remains more interested in how this abstracted object interacts with humans. He asks the reader to learn a lesson that he suggests such an object can teach. This didacticism is never made explicit. And yet, it could be seen in the construction of the poem, which is dominated by imperatives: the speaking voice literally commands the reader what to do. The frequent use of imperatives is characteristic for Herbert's numerous other poems whose didactic intentions are much more explicit. For instance "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito" is constructed entirely upon imperatives. Even if it is difficult to call this poem's vision a phenomenological one, as the imaginative journey is not per se perceptual (although it is a certain experience), the speaking voice is clearly more interested in how the object and objecthood appear to humans, and in the consequences of this appearance, rather than in objects themselves.

We do not know if Herbert held any correlationist beliefs. And yet we can say that in this poem Herbert strongly remains within the frame delineated by the correlationist philosophical tradition because, in his interest in humans, he relates (willingly or not) the objecthood to human perception and imagination. The title "Study of the Object" does not suggest the study of a real object, not even an intentional object in the way it appears, but a study of a meditative experience. This meditative experience does not arise spontaneously as a reaction to a real or intentional object, but seems consciously arranged, as if Herbert knew from the beginning what the study was aiming at and what his final point would be.

The question that one might want to ask at this point is whether "Study of the Object" teaches anything about objects, even if its ultimate focus is human imagination. When Herbert reaches out for the higher levels of imaginative abstraction, for instance, when he writes about the chair that comes from the shadows of an object that does not exist, it is difficult to say that he is talking about the same objects as Harman does.

Herbert's poem shows love for the abstract. The poem seems to counter the rhetorics of the "Rich Elsewhere". This rhetorics, characteristic for Harman, Bogost and a few other speculative realists, calls for a return to objects because of the richness that the non-human world can offer. In other words, apart from various philosophical arguments to support their

claims, these philosophers state that by remaining within the human scope and by concentrating on the correlation between human mind and the external world, we lose all the variety of the world, simply because we do not pay attention to it. They reject the correlationist argument as boring and leading to uninteresting results because it focuses on the correlation between human mind and the world itself and literally almost cuts out everything else (Brassier, et. al. 423). Humans and their phenomenology have been in the center of attention for too long, leaving aside an abundance of objects outside of the human realm. There is an ongoing discussion in the circle of speculative realism on whether the assumptions behind the rhetorics of the “Rich Elsewhere” could be treated as a valid argument for the abandonment of interest in the human.

This sometimes almost ecstatic interest in the external world and its richness of various objects, as presented by some of the above-mentioned philosophers, represents a spirit completely foreign to “Study of the Object”. In this poem, Herbert shows very little interest in the nature of the object itself, or any objects at all. Moreover, he does not seem to be interested in the human relationship to objects either. Although the poem allows us to infer its position towards the problem of objects and objecthood, it is never explicitly formulated nor is it the poem's main concern. In spite of what the title might suggest, the poem is anthropocentric because its major concern is human imagination.

There is something profoundly ascetic in his stance, the renunciation of the world with all its richness in favor of the purity of abstraction. This abstraction leads to final questions and to confrontation with their ultimateness – in the end one has to confront oneself with the “last things”, with necessity and death. And although Herbert gives no description of what this confrontation could look like, nor of its consequences, it seems clear that to reach it is the purpose of the poem's didacticism. However, this is bought at the price of reduction of everything external, for the success of the poem's lesson relies on an ascetic purification of imagination.

2.3. Object prose poems

Herbert also wrote several prose poems that are brief impressions-reflections on various objects. “Button”, “Wall”, “Clock” or “Hen” are all examples of Herbert's prose poems. They are consistent in form – they are all short prose poems that consistently hide the speaking subject. This stands in contrast with such poems as “Pebble” in which the speaking

voice is manifestly present and has a particular stance and tone. This desubjectivised voice is completely neutral and impersonal, focused on description. It is characteristic for Herbert's prose poems, which constitute a class of their own, and is limited almost exclusively to them. In his other poems, even if the voice does not seem to belong to anybody in particular, it almost always has a well-defined tone and attitude towards what is happening in the poem.

The style of those poems is very specific – neutral, simple, descriptive, written almost without any rhetorical embellishment. What creates a strong estranging effect is that they present unusual or unbelievable stories as if they were absolutely normal or unsurprising. All the poems are written as if they were simple descriptions of the most common and translucent objects. This makes it possible to read the stories as parables or metaphors, but at the same time nothing prevents us from reading them absolutely literally. Much as our literary conventions would encourage us to interpret these poems metaphorically, a literal reading seems more interesting, as it presents us with a unique and bizarre reality.

2.4.1. The wooden die

In this simple prose poem Herbert describes the impossibility of human perception to reach the essence of a wooden die. The construction of the poem is very simple and it resembles that of numerous other prose poems to which I devote more attention later on. Like in most of his prose poems, the tone in this one is very impersonal and neutral.

The lyrical subject states that a wooden die “can be described only from without”. There is no access to “its essence”. Herbert's poem is based on the dualism of the inside and the outside, which could be read both in the traditional Kantian way – the inside corresponding to the inaccessible *thing-in-itself*, the outside being the phenomenal appearance of the object – or in a way proposed by Harman – an object having its own inward life to which we, as humans, do not have any access from the outside.

Even if we make an attempt to learn about its inwardness by cutting it into to pieces, “its inside becomes a wall”. It is interesting how the poem casts the opposition of the inside and outside literally – an opposition that is usually understood metaphorically. This opposition could be read in different ways, depending on the discipline or school of thought. The literal reading of the difference between the inside and the outside consists in the fact that every object is a physical container – what is contained in it is called the inside, what is

not contained in it is called the outside. However, the difference between the inside and the outside is never literal. It stands for more a complex opposition, like, for instance, the opposition between the mind located in a body and the outer world, the opposition between the essence of an object (its inside) and its external qualities, the opposition between the intentional object of cognition (the outside) and the real object (the inside) etc. All those realizations of the basic opposition of the inside and the outside imply something more than could be inferred from the opposition itself. Herbert's interpretation also suggests that there is something more to it, something more than just the fact of something being inside and something being outside; the inside is invested with the sense of a mystery to be discovered. However, the brutal literalism of his reading mocks this idea by showing that if we cut a thing in two in search for its mystical inwardness, we merely discover that the opposition between the inside and the outside is a metaphor, metaphor that always refers to some other order, and that has nothing to do with any physical reality.

And yet, the poem is based on the assumption that there is an inwardness, something inside the die, its inner life that cannot be discovered. What is particularly interesting is the fact that the concealment of inwardness seems to be a feature of the die that is inscribed in its nature as almost an active behavior. In this sense Herbert allows us to see the die as an actor, and its concealment of its inside not as a fact but as an act. As a result, we are able to think of the difference between the inside and the outside as constantly performed by the die. Just as human subjects could be described as constituted through their acts (or even being nothing more than acts), so can the die be described as constituted through the act of self-concealment.

This also leads to the dualism of inwardness and outwardness breaking apart. For the act of self-concealment that the die performs when cut in two does not belong either to the outwardness or to the inwardness. Although there is an external event (namely, the cut) that causes it, the fact that the self-concealment occurs does not result solely from the cut, but has its source in the die itself. The self-concealment is not an effect of the cut, but rather a reaction to it. It stems precisely from the very nature of the die, from its inside, or, although I use this word carefully, from its essence, the essence that we cannot reach. On the other hand, no access to inwardness is granted. As a result, the self-concealment turns out to be an in-between state, caused by an external force, but also arising from the die's internal act, and thereby showing that this pure dualism between inside and outside does not hold.

In this sense Herbert's text displays a certain aporia as it tries to claim the impossibility of accessing the inwardness of a wooden die by pointing towards a complete separation of the internal and the external, with no points of intersection, and at the same time proposes a certain gray area, in which the difference between the internal and the external is being enacted. Although the poem does not explore this further, it could be posed that the act of self-concealment is performed only as a reaction to the cut. To put it in other words, when one cuts a die, one captures a moment in which one is able to experience or perceive the act of self-concealment. But we could also assume that the act of self-concealment is an ongoing process, i.e., that the die conceals itself all the time, but its act can simply not be registered by human perception. It is possible that what we know as a stable object is actually constituted not by a single act of self-concealment but by constant and repetitive acts of self-concealment.

All this leads to the question of the ontological status of the die. The act of self-concealment is something that does not belong to the prototypical picture of an object, for it exposes the fact that objecthood is not a simple state of being, but somehow constituted through an act of self-concealment. The die, a supposedly perfect example of an object with a fully inaccessible inwardness, turns out to defy the blunt opposition of the inside and the outside. And is not self-concealment what Harman is talking about – the ultimate inaccessibility of things that are not graspable – when he writes that “objects withdraw from one another into the darkness, unable to affect each other directly (Harman “Guerrilla Metaphysics” 90)”? The die is a prototypical example of an object whose only perceptible action is its withdrawal from the world.

One might object that an object's withdrawal from the world is its ontological feature, not directly graspable phenomenologically, as is the case in this poem. My answer to that would point to Harman himself and his philosophy that relies on phenomenologically accessible traits of reality as a suggestion concerning its ontological nature. Harman arrives at the idea of withdrawal in a dialogue with Heidegger and his idea of presence-at-hand from which the object withdraws. But Heidegger's analysis is largely phenomenological, it is based on what is phenomenologically accessible. And yet, this does not prevent Harman from deriving ontological claims from Heidegger's analysis. Analogically, I propose to read Herbert's poem in this way, as not exactly demonstrating the withdrawal but rather as pointing towards it.

The final parts of the poem suggest that it is not possible to create the psychology of a wooden die – “it is impossible to lay foundations for the psychology of a stone ball, of an iron bar, of a wooden cube”. The impossibility of this psychology would already be implied by the impossibility of looking inside, through the inwardness of the die. However, if we understand psychology in the way suggested by Harman, a psychology of the die becomes all the more possible. Harman proposes a particular version of panpsychism in which the sensual/intentional objects are the elements that enable two real objects to be connected and to interact. Human perception, which glues together two real objects, the perceiving human and the object he is perceiving at the moment, is analogous to any other interaction that connects two real objects. Harman gives an example of fire and cotton – we perceive at the sensual level that the fire burns the cotton, although both the fire and the cotton as real objects do not touch each other. Harman claims that this type of interaction does not ontologically differ in kind from the type of interaction that we know as perception. It is thus possible to create a psychology of a wooden die by describing its relations with other beings or by seeing it as composed by other objects. It would obviously not be a psychology analogous to the one we have of humans, also because we would never have direct access to how exactly a wooden die relates to other beings or how its inner parts compose the die, just as we do not have access to another human being's perception nor to the way her inner parts compose her. And yet, some external observations that could lead to a peculiar form of speculative psychology are certainly possible.

The major difference between “Pebble” and “The wooden die” lies in their tone. The speaking voice in “The wooden die” remains much more indifferent towards the closedness of the die, whereas in “Pebble” one could detect traces of the affection that human beings might have for pebbles. “The wooden die” resembles numerous other prose poems by Herbert that are marked by a neutral tone. This difference in tone results in the biggest difference between those two poems, despite the similarity of their philosophical reflection. In “The wooden die” the speaking voice remains neutral to what it discovers about the die and the die's self-concealment, treating it as an intellectual and phenomenological property of the world, whereas in “Pebble” the lyrical subject arrives at some sort of moral reflection that sees a powerful dignity in the indifference of the pebble. That the pebble remains closed to human perception is not simply a fact that one can easily bypass, but forces one to reflect.

2.4.2. Armchairs and Hen

In “Armchairs” the poet imagines chairs as wild animals, animate beings, which became tamed through a long coexistence with humans and as a result changed their properties: they turned into inanimate objects. They used to be “noble flower-eating creatures”, contact with humans turned them into “the most wretched species of quadrupeds”.

The poem suggests that chairs have a construction similar to humans or at least to animals – they have legs and a neck. Due to the fact that chairs are one of the most common objects of everyday use, this similarity remains unnoticed, although it is hard to miss. The anthropomorphism is already inscribed in the language, as we call chair legs “legs” because they resemble human or animal legs. This is a good example of a petrified, anthropomorphic everyday metaphor – a catachresis.

But Herbert takes this metaphor only as a starting point. His originality lies in reading this anthropomorphism in a literal way – he animalizes the chairs, constructing their genealogy. This genealogy points towards the uncanniness of these objects - taming thereby appears as a process required for the chairs to yield to human power but also for humans to overcome the uncanniness of those objects, their initial alien status. The particular behavior of chairs is interpreted anthropomorphically, i.e. by analogy to humans. It is worth noticing that Herbert's narrative refuses to metaphorize this anthropomorphism – the chairs are not *like* humans, they behavior is not *like* human behavior, it is as if their behavior really was human, and it was just a matter of noticing that they express human emotions, even though they are slightly different.

The point of view from which the story is cast is also interesting in this respect. The chairs appear as actants that willingly chose to submit themselves to human use. It is thus not humans who fettered those wild beasts, but the creatures decided on their own to act in this way. In the end, they lost their independence completely, becoming wholly reliant on humans. This reverses our common perception of reality in which humans are the ones taking action and the rest of the world undergoes human action. This is a clearly anthropocentric point of view that does not see the relation between the human and the object as requiring interaction. To use one of Harman's favorite examples, cotton burning in fire results from interaction of certain qualities of fire with certain qualities of cotton; even if we perceive fire as devouring the cotton, we would still call it an interaction. There is no need to think of human-objects

relations as being different in any way.

Another very similar prose poem entitled “Hen” describes a similar metamorphosis. The hen, once a wild animal, became miserable and disgusting, “lost the lightness and grace of a bird” due to her interactions with humans. The attitude of the speaking voice in both poems differs significantly. In “Armchairs” the description is rather neutral, possibly with a subtle undertone of nostalgia, whereas in “Hen” the speaking voice is affectively charged: one can easily trace the disgust and contempt that the speaking voice has for the domesticated animal. Again, this poem seems anthropocentric in its concentration on the influence that humans had on hens. The hen might be in the center of attention but the ultimate point of reference for the poem is human. The poem lays out the perception of the hen by the speaking voice – a human voice – and no attempt is made to enter the hen’s consciousness or speculate about the hen’s self-perception.

2.4.3. Clock

“Clock” uses human traits metaphorically to describe an object. It imagines the clock as the face of a miller. This metaphor stems from the fact that the hands of the clock turn around similarly to a mill. What is particularly curious is that the clock is compared to a miller and not to a mill, which would seem more logical.

When one looks inside, there is a “nest of worms”. This is a powerful image, as it conveys the ugliness of worms, the surprise and uncanniness of them being in a clock, and the complexity of a nest as a mechanism, a living entity, making the image of the nest of worms possible to read in a double way – the worms represent both the mechanism of the clock as well as entrails of a human being.

Compared with the difficulty of discovering the inner life of the wooden die, it is quite easy to open up a clock and see its entrails. “The wooden die” problematized the accessibility of the inwardness of the die as a result of its physical closeness, the impossibility of opening it and seeing what is inside. This impossibility arose from the die's physical structure, the fact that it phenomenologically seems to be a block of undifferentiated matter. Regardless of that, Harman's philosophy assumes that such a die is built up from smaller parts, even though it might phenomenologically not appear as such. In contrast, the clock appears as having distinct parts that we can easily perceive and describe. This phenomenological difference

results in Herbert's completely different approach to both objects. The die questions the difference between the inside and the outside and problematizes it. Thus, this difference does not serve any rhetorical purposes in the poem – it constitutes the central subject of the poem that the speaking voice reflects upon. “Clock” engages this difference for rhetorical purposes – it is used to oppose the external semblance of an ordered, mechanical movement and the internal chaos of biological decay represented by worms. The opposition of the inside and the outside is thus also a metaphor of the opposition between semblance and the true nature, between what is visible at first glance and what is hidden.

This different treatment does not suspend the ontological validity of the reflection in “The wooden die”, as both poems have different aims and reflect on different questions. It merely shows that the opposition of the inside and the outside is applied in various poems in different ways, as it serves different purposes. It is also worth noticing that the clock, in comparison to the wooden die or the pebble of the previously analyzed poems, is a thing constructed by humans for a particular purpose. It is not a random object that could be found out there in the universe, it belongs to the human world, it has a particular meaning, a conventional place in everyday life and a particular mode of using. That is important if we take into account the distinction that Herbert seems to make between objects used by humans and objects that could be found outside of the human world.

The construction of the poem is clever, as it manages to describe an object by reference to human beings, and human beings by reference to an object. What seems particularly interesting, is the fact that the poem in its construction gives almost no priority to humans. Apart from the last line, which is purely reflexive (“And that is what's supposed to usher us into eternity”), the text seems to be treating humans just like another object that one can compare to things in a poem to achieve a poetic effect.

The inwardness of the human is equally surprising for Herbert as the inwardness of the clock. He approaches the human as a biological entity, understanding its inside not as its mind, the world of its experience, but as a biological secret that the lyrical subject unwillingly uncovers to its own surprise. The poem is constructed upon the unexpected discovery of the biological nature. There is an ugliness to this perception of the human being as a biological unit subject to decay and death. And the metaphor continues – the clock and the human both point towards eternity as well as the failure to achieve it: both the clock with its imperfect mechanism, as well as the human body, the inner clock, which seems imperfect, too repelling

in its biology to serve as a vehicle that carries the human to eternity. The human body is simply not eternal and its decomposition (which the worms signify) indicates that no eternity is achievable due to the passage of time (the clock). However eternal the human mind might seem in its purity, the body is there always to disclose the dark secret of death and decomposition.

Despite the almost equal treatment of both humans and clocks as objects, the poem clearly remains in the group of poems that do not deal with the objecthood of non-human entities, but rather show them in relation to human beings. This stands in contrast with “The wooden die” or “Pebble” which thematize objects as such, asking questions about their nature and the nature of objecthood.

From the point of view of Amerindian perspectivism that would transpose human culture onto other beings, the break in Herbert's treatment of objects becomes even more evident. In other words, Herbert's poems do not suggest the possibility to map human behavior into objects, or to read an object's inner world through analogy to humans, using human categories. The objects in such poems as “The wooden die” or “Pebble” are clearly constructed in opposition to humans. Especially “Pebble” articulates this opposition almost explicitly. The poem suggests that humans have their world, their own emotions, passions and incompleteness, whereas pebbles, complete creatures, with their perfect indifference towards any externality, are ontologically radically different. It would be therefore impossible to rewrite those poems' ontology through Amerindian perspectivism, or broadly speaking, through anthropomorphism.

Other poems, such as “Hen”, “Clock” or “Armchairs” ostensibly relate non-human beings to humans. Anthropomorphism serves here partially as a rhetorical tool to express the uncanniness of certain objects, to push the readers out of their usual perception of those objects; but anthropomorphism is in part also a way to metaphorically formulate a reflection on humans, and their limitations, their mortality, their strangeness. The reader can decide which reading s/he would choose or find more attractive.

2.5. Herbert – conclusion

Herbert does not have a consistent stance towards objects and objecthood as such. In his poems one can find different tendencies. There are also numerous poems that remain

indifferent towards the question of objecthood in general, even though objects might be at their center. “The wooden die” seems to be the only poem that asks the question of objecthood explicitly, devoting all the attention to reflect on it. Therefore, its philosophical consequences – the way it questions the opposition of the inside and the outside that is central for Harman – are the most fruitful for the purposes of this thesis. However, other poems could also bring interesting insights to the reflection proposed by object-oriented ontology. There are however some common threads that make Herbert an interesting case study despite the contradictory approaches I have traced in his poetry.

It is worth noticing how chairs change meaning and connotations across his poems. The chairs of “Armchairs” are perceived as once animate entities that became inanimate in the course of their coexistence with human beings. The chair of “Study of the Object” is the ultimate simple object that can lead to fundamental truths. There seems to be no consistency in how Herbert approaches this object, showing that for Herbert various contexts can bring about different reflections and feelings about the same objects.

Herbert deprives objects of traits that would distinguish them from other members of the same kind of objects. Although his descriptions of those objects are concrete and sensual, the described features could be easily ascribed to any other object of the same kind. This means that the objects depicted in the poems could be monotonically read as representing the entire kind of objects. In “Armchairs” or “Then hen” this is almost explicitly stated, and in the other poems there is nothing that would discourage such a reading. This tendency to use a member of a kind of objects that could be virtually replaced by any other member of the same kind could be explained by Herbert's inclination towards philosophy because it allows to draw more general conclusions. And more general, philosophical reflections is what Herbert's poems seem to be aiming at.

Herbert is essentially a poet of morality. The questions of how human beings incorporate values, what hierarchy of values should be assumed, and how and at what price those values ought to be defended, are central to his poetic project. However, his poetry is not limited only to those questions, as I have tried to show. Herbert does not think about objects in a singular, homogeneous way, as the major differences between the analyzed poems show. There are, however, some common threads in his approach worth discussing, as well as some meaningful discrepancies.

There is a sharp contrast in attitude between such poems as “Study of the Object”,

“Pebble” and certain object poems such as “Hen” or “Armchairs”. Herbert seems to have an utterly strong admiration for independent objects that do not serve utilitarian human purposes. There is certainly a consistency in the poet's moral stance. It is interesting how he reads certain moral values out of (or maybe into) objects, how he can identify moral dignity in a pebble by seeing its independence, calmness and indifference, and how he can be openly disgusted by a hen that completely lost its independence and serves humans. This independence has no ontological or epistemological connotation, it is exclusively a matter of morality, and it returns in several poems despite their having different structures, subjects and aims. This moral engagement seems to be one of the threads that connects all the poems.

3. Chapter – Wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens was an American poet who lived in the years 1879-1955. His work consisted mostly of poetry; *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1936) and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) are among his best-known collections. He is considered to be one of the major figures of American modernism. Christopher Beach argues that Stevens represented the so-called “lyrical modernism” which combined modernistic innovation with post-Romantic interest in the self (49). The interest in the self could be connected to phenomenological reflection. And indeed, questions connected to phenomenology, perception and their connection to the outer world are present in Wallace Stevens’ poetry as well as in his theoretical reflection presented in the collection of essays entitled *The Necessary Angel*. What it means to perceive and to experience, how perception constructs both its object and its subject are questions that Stevens abundantly poses to himself and his reader. There are also several poems in which he seemingly abandons human consciousness to penetrate other beings’ minds. Those poems will be in the center of my attention.

Stevens has been widely read as a phenomenological poet (Mildenberg 25). The relationship between the mind and the world, which is the most central concern of phenomenology, is also one of the main themes of Stevens’ poetry. I will not devote too much attention to this problem, since it is too large for the scope of this thesis, and has been extensively commented upon, for instance in Leonard and Wharton (1984) or Hines (1976).

“The poetry of Wallace Stevens is surely philosophical; it should be suggested, however, that it is philosophical – without self-consciousness or deliberation – in a phenomenological way” (Natanson 8). The strong parallel between Stevens’ writings and the tradition of phenomenology does not stem from a poetic interpretation of philosophical truths or insights or from a conscious application of philosophical methods to poetic matter – it is a marker of similar sensibilities that addressed problems that arose in that time. Husserlian phenomenology was born out of the search for a solid, scientific method that would ground philosophical inquiries and was based on a meticulous analysis of what was given, or what appeared, to the consciousness. Those scientific ambitions were abandoned by his followers who redirected phenomenology towards different questions, retaining however the focus on experience and structure of consciousness. This project was later developed by various philosophers, who did not necessarily follow Husserl’s scientific ambitions; instead they

broadened phenomenology into other directions. Heidegger pushed phenomenology in the direction of existentialism, whereas Merleau-Ponty developed threads concerning body and embodied cognition.

The phenomenological side of Stevens' work could be productively read in the context of the writings of classic phenomenology, such as those of Husserl, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty. However, it could be equally productive to reach beyond the classic phenomenologists and read Stevens through the lenses of alien phenomenology, as presented by Ian Bogost. I will show how in certain poems Stevens depicts phenomenologies different than the human. He does it in a very subtle way that does not erase the fact that the speculation about alien phenomenology is carried out from a human perspective. Therefore, I will concentrate on those poems in which objects could be interpreted as having a certain type of phenomenology that could be described by the poem or experienced in the act of reading it.

I will read the following poems (the numbers in brackets refer to the pages from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*): “The Snow Man” (9-10) and “The Wind Shifts” (83-4) from *Harmonium* (1923), “A rabbit as king of the ghosts” (209-10) from *Parts of a World* (1942), and “Note on Moonlight” (531-2) from *The Rock* (published for the first time in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* in 1955). The choice of poems is motivated by their presenting various non-human phenomenologies. In contrast to Herbert, whose philosophical inquiries about the nature of objects are limited to his earlier work, Stevens' oeuvre remains interested in this inquiry in its entirety.

3.1. The Snow Man

“The Snow Man”, published in the collection *Harmonium* (1923) is one of Steven's best-known poems and has been interpreted by numerous critics. The poem is divided into two parts by a semicolon (“Of the January sun; and not to think”). The differences between those parts are rather subtle and do not create the effect of a break but rather a smooth passage from one to the other. The first part is positive as it concerns the conditions that have to be fulfilled to create or to have a phenomenology of a snow man. It uses a very impersonal tone, which is strengthened by a neutral description of what could be perceived. The second part begins with a negative statement (“and not to think”) and the negative dominates the entire part, returning in the form of the repetitive “nothing” in the final stanza. The break is also reflected in the

distinction between seeing and hearing. Seeing dominates the first part of the poem (through the use of such verbs as “regard” and “behold”), while hearing is more visible in the second part, through the repetitive use of the noun “sound”.

The first part of the poem concentrates on what the snow man perceives. “The opening line can be read in two ways: one must have winter’s mind, in which case winter is personified, or one must ‘de-humanize’ oneself and let one’s mind take shape according to the nonhuman world: a mind of winter rather than a mind of the human” (Knickerbocker 45). Actually, both options are possible at the same time – the winter indeed gets personified in the figure of the snow man, who is essentially a non-human creature, in spite of being partially human and sharing some human qualities.

The first thing that the snow man perceives is the frost, which could be read both as the thin layer of white spread over the landscape but also as a particular time in which everything is covered with this layer. Before seeing any particular objects, that is, before seeing “the boughs | Of the pine-trees crusted with snow”, the snow man regards the frost itself.

The object and subject of perception mingle here in the first stanza, as it is impossible to say whether the frost is an external quality the snow man perceives, or whether it is its internal quality of mind, the fact of being made of snow and cold that makes him perceive the first in the first place as its initial condition for perception. The layer of frost might be understood as a perceptual filter, one that comes both from the internality of the frozen mind as well as from the externality of the frozen landscape.

The second part of the poem explores the nothingness of winter, which is connected to the negativity of the subject. Especially in the final stanza (“For the listener, who listens in the snow, | And, nothing himself, beholds | Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is”) the poem becomes ambiguous since we cannot say whether the snow man is still the subject that “listens” and “beholds”. In this stanza, the reduction of the perceiving mind to almost complete nothingness, the nothingness of winter, eliminates any other possible subjectivity in the poem different from the snow man. There is no human perception in there, no poet to write his poems or to observe the snow man. The listener and beholder of the second part is almost completely reduced to a part of the landscape, of this whole scene.

It is difficult to determine who is speaking in the poem. Helen Vendler claims that Stevens’ work presents “[...] a sense of the multiplicity of ways in which the self can regard

the self, from the indivisible unity of the subjective ‘I’ to the dyadic intimacy of ‘you’ to the collectivity of ‘we’ to the apparent objectivity of ‘one’ and ‘he’” (Vendler 134). She claims that whenever Stevens uses the third person pronouns such as “he” or “one”, he actually refers to himself. The abundance of impersonal pronouns is a characteristic trait of Stevens' poetry and is used for several reasons according to Vendler. “The chief reason is that in doing so he must make an effort to see himself from the outside, as if he were a character in a story. He adopts the novelist’s or dramatist’s view: what is this character doing, or thinking, or describing now? In separating the described self from the describing voice, Stevens wishes to combine expressive accuracy with the truthfulness of detached observation (134).

Vendler interprets third-person pronouns as a rhetorical tool that Stevens uses to achieve particular effects, but that could be virtually translated into the first-person pronoun “I”, and thus refer to the lyrical subject in the poems. In this way Vendler reduces the originality of this element of Stevens' poetry, completely disregarding its cognitive value. The use of “one” is not merely a rhetorical choice, aimed at a stronger expressive effect, but results in (and from) a particular epistemology. Stevens' subject is displaced in the sense that it is too impersonal and too universalized to be a particular human being that participates in the described situation, a character in the story. It is not a specific person, it is not the poet. At the same time it cannot be identified with someone who speaks from the complete outside of the situation, a truly detached voice, common for typical philosophical poems, because it uses verbs of perception.

Stevens’ subtlety in this poem lies in the fact that the snowman is not cast as a real figure whose inner mental life would be described by the poet. The snowman does not have to be interpreted as physical, in the sense of having a particular body made of particular snow that could be located in space and time. It could be the idea of a snowman. On the other hand, nothing prevents a reading in which the snow man is an actual entity, built up by someone and physically present in the landscape described in the poem. It is possible to speculate further that Stevens depicts not only the phenomenology of a snowman but of any creature made of snow, any winter creature that would have “a mind of winter”, as the opening verse of the poems declares.

Having “a mind of winter” is a condition necessary to be a snow man, or to perceive the reality like it does. Another condition is “to have been cold long time”. Those two conditions, the length of being cold and the possession of a mind of winter are required to

achieve a certain kind of phenomenology, the phenomenology of a snowman. One can even say that those two conditions, unattainable by human beings, are phenomenological conditions of this experience as such, i.e. if it was possible for human beings to have “a mind of winter” and “to have been cold long time”, it would be possible to see and experience in the way a snowman sees and experiences. This is underlined by the title “The Snow Man” that clearly distinguishes itself from the common noun “snowman”.

The title evokes the image of snow man, but forces us to question the social connotations associated with this image. Snowmen symbolize winter in its entertaining aspect, together with Christmas trees or snowboards. The title breaks down the word into its components in order to emphasize the literal sense of the word: a man made of snow. It thereby posits the question: what does it mean to be made of snow? And more specifically, what does it mean to be a man made of snow, i.e. to have a form of consciousness that is similar to that of a man, and yet radically different?

In this sense Stevens presents a very interesting form of alien phenomenology. He does not scrutinize or imagine a phenomenology of a radically different being, of an animal or a tree, but of a being whose form is similar in many respects to humans. That is what allows Stevens to speculate on the phenomenology of a snow man – he recognizes the human aspect in the snow man, noticing that the general physical shape of the snow man resembles that of a man, and he takes the similarities between human and snow man as the starting point. However, he takes this analogy further, assuming that the similarities are not only physical but that there are also mental resemblances. The anthropomorphism here does not serve as a metaphor that would facilitate understanding of the creature at hand, but is an inherent feature of the creature described in the poem.

The above-mentioned conditions have to be fulfilled in order to “perceive”, “behold” and “not to think”. The snow man is thus imagined as a solely perceptive and passive (in the sense of not taking any other action than being a merely receptive) being. This passivity and receptivity is set against thinking understood as interpreting. To be able to “think | Of any misery” implies a particular kind of interpretation that triggers an emotional response. The snow man does not assign any meaning or emotion to what he perceives, contrary to human beings, as the poem seems to be suggesting. It is a being of pure receptivity, of pure seeing.

The “Snow Man” is usually read as an extraordinary example of Stevens' powerful use of negation and reduction, which are both abundantly used and central in the poet's

writings (Wargacki 13). Those are not only rhetorical tropes which would aim at expressing the nothingness of the wintry landscape, but also have a particular ontological and epistemological function, as I will clarify further in my analysis. The role of nothingness in the poem is central to its understanding. Lensing sees this nothingness as unification with the perceived reality: “what would it be like to be one with the earth in an absolute sense, to erase altogether the Cartesian rupture?” (Lensing 122). The one that is “nothing himself” is a figure that epitomizes winter because if there is no experiencer, and yet, there is an experience, it is the winter that experiences itself.

The problem of the distinction of subject and objects is addressed in the poem in a very peculiar way that makes the epistemological become ontological. Perception - beholding and listening - is the only activity of the snow man. That is why his ontological status is difficult to determine, for receptivity and passivity are his only mode of being. In this sense it is also an imaginary figure, for what we call perception in the entities we know, such as humans or animals, has its pragmatical context; even if it seems to be passive, perception is part of a broader structure, it is embodied, coupled with the possibility of taking action and eventually serves this purpose – it is a means that would allow for acting. The case of the snow man is different, for perception is his only possible action.

The subject – the snow man – is reduced to perception of this particular moment and particular landscape sketched in the poem; the ability to perceive becomes the ability to exist. The flickering existence of the perceiving subject, the one that is “nothing himself”, stems from the fact that there is nothing to see. The subject at the same time is and is not because it perceives and yet there is nothing to perceive. The existence of the perceptive subjectivity as such is conditioned by the existence of an object of perception. And yet, since there is no such object, there is nothing. And yet, the nothingness, or the lack of the object of perception is a thing that could be perceived, or at least remarked. The lack of object of perception becomes an object of perception as such.

Can this poem be a simulation of the experience of being a snow man? This is difficult to determine. It certainly provides a description of the mind of a snow man, how it is intertwined with the wintry landscape and how its functioning is based on this connection. There are also some descriptions that could be read as that what the snow man sees and feels (“the frost and the boughs | Of the pine-trees crusted with snow” in the first stanza and “the junipers shagged with ice, | The spruces rough in the distant glitter” in the second) and how it

participates in the landscape.

Whether the poem can function as a simulating device is probably a question of individual reception. Some readers may find the impressions created by the poem sufficient to imagine what it feels like to be a snow man. Especially the meditative and calm character of the poem encourages such impressions, it encourages the reader to meditate upon the image of winter, its suggestive presence in the form of snow and ice, and the nothingness it brings with it. Since for Stevens to be a snow man means primarily to perceive winter and its sensual characteristics up to a point in which one's subjectivity dissolves in the powerful image, partially unifying with its own object of perception, a meditative penetration of a wintry landscape could lead the reader to experiences similar to those of a snow man. In a certain sense, Stevens provides his reader with a set of instructions on what to do, what to experience and how to experience in order to feel like a snow man, to learn what it feels like to be a snow man.

There is also a possibility of a peculiar Harmanian reading of the poem. For Harman the intentional/sensual objects that are created in the human mind while perceiving a real object are a way for that object to be related to the human mind. Perception is a more specified version, characteristic for animate beings, of the mechanism that glues real objects together. At the same time, any relation creates a new object from the two objects that it glues. If we interpret the snow man not as a physical being present in the landscape but rather as an abstracted and generalized "mind of winter", we can read it as the object that is created by gluing a human mind and the winter that this mind perceives. A human mind that meditates upon a wintry landscape to the point in which it undergoes a total immersion creates an object that is the essence of how humans perceive winter.

3.2. A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts

"A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts" was first published in *Parts of a World* from 1942. The poem could be read as a simulation of the phenomenology of a rabbit. It is constructed upon recurring motives: the cat, the rabbit, the light on the fur. Those figures return in a way that resembles a stream of consciousness.

Stevens describes the perfect peacefulness ("To be, in the grass, in the peacefullest time") as being in the light and feeling the "light on your fur". The image of the light on the

fur dominates the poem and has an almost overwhelming presence. For how the rabbit experiences and interprets both itself and the externality is heavily influenced by the light on the fur. It is more than a simple feeling or sensation; it becomes a whole interpretative category, a lens through which the rabbit sees everything in a particular way.

The expression “a rabbit-light” that appears in the fourth stanza and describes the light in the poem is central for the interpretation of the entire text. As it could be seen in the “Note on Moonlight”, light has a particular meaning for Stevens. It is light that makes things appear, allows them to acquire their objectness, and consequently to be identified and invested with meaning. Therefore, the light is one of the most important ingredients in creating the consciousness of the rabbit, as it is what allows it to engage with things. It also points towards the rabbit as the speaking voice because if everything is seen through this “rabbit-light”, then everything is already marked with the rabbit. This means that it is seen through the perspective of the rabbit and that the objects are created through the process of the rabbit’s perception – they would appear in a different way if the perceiving subject were, for instance, a human. The world is for the rabbit. The “rabbit-light” could be treated as a metaphor of the phenomenological appearance of the world to the subject (which in this case is the rabbit) and of how the mind interprets and ascribes meaning to everything that reaches consciousness.

The subject and object of perception are indistinguishable, the light is “a rabbit-light” and the rabbit is “a rabbit-light”. There would be no rabbit, as we encounter it in the poem, if there were no light. But the light is not neutral; it is in itself “a rabbit-light”, this particular light in this particular place at this particular fur. The light, although it determines the rabbit and its experience, is in its turn determined by the rabbit.

There is an interesting play with the pronoun “you” throughout the poem. It refers to different beings in the text – it seems to address the rabbit and at times it seems also to have the value of a generic ‘you’, having no particular addressee. This plenitude of references, so characteristic of Stevens, serves to displace the speaking voice in the poem: it is not clear who is speaking and to whom. In a way similar to the “Snow Man”, it serves to blur the distinction of subject and object.

Moreover, the actual ontological status of the rabbit could be questioned. The poem “imagines what it *feels* like to be a rabbit or shade of a rabbit” (Ragg 15). The rabbit is an elusive figure here because its materiality is not certain, being partially created by the play of

the sun. The feeling of warmth at the fur is what constitutes the rabbit, for it is phenomenologically so strong that the feeling dominates the consciousness of the rabbit. And the feeling of the sun's warmth that the poet feels is what makes him experience the rabbit. The word experience is chosen here on purpose, as we cannot eventually tell in what way the rabbit appears to the poet, whether he sees it, feels it or imagines it. Nonetheless, the rabbit is a certain being, real or imagined, that has a certain phenomenology that the poem tries to render.

At the same time, the light is precisely what mediates the experience of being a rabbit to the poet. The light is a "rabbit-light" or "fur-light" also because it makes the poet feel like a rabbit. The feeling of the sun, its warmth, makes the poet feel as if he had a rabbit's fur, this ever-lasting, always present layer of warmth. This particular sensual impression allows the vision of the rabbit or of being like a rabbit to appear.

In this way the poem sets up a particular set of conditions that could make us feel like a rabbit. There is a certain similarity to the "Snow Man" in which the particular state of mind that allowed to perceive the world like a snow man was only possible to enter if one were already in that state – one had to be cold long enough to see the cold. This poem presents a reverse situation in which the sun and the warmth are the conditions for the vision to appear and for a consciousness of another being to be reached. It is also worth noticing how the two poems oppose each other in tone. "Snow Man" is a poem of void and nothingness with which the snow and winter are associated. The reductionist power that the poem possesses leads to almost complete negation, both of the world as well as of consciousness. By contrast, "A rabbit as king of the ghosts" is almost ecstatic. "The imagination's happiest and most requiting pairings with the world find celebration in the fullness of summer" (Lensing 127). The summer and the warmth caused by the sun allow the consciousness to grow beyond its limits and encompass everything on its way. It seems that only the end of the vision (in the last stanza, marked with a dash and a sudden change of tone) could stop this growth. This is also probably the reason why it has to stop – whereas nothingness could be contemplated and leads to a slow dissolution of the subject in it, the experience of marking everything within the self is too rapid and ecstatic to allow such a gradual process; the ecstasy grows quickly and it ends when it reaches the feeling of wholeness, when everything has been marked with the self, encompassed within the self. One could even argue that the poems actually lead to similar conclusions, as wholeness and nothingness are dialectically the same.

This could be suggested by the final phase of the vision (just before the break signaled by the dash): “you are humped higher and higher, black as stone”. Black is the color that unifies nothingness and wholeness, as it does not allow one to see anything, thereby evoking nothingness, but at the same time it prevents things from becoming distinct, which points towards wholeness. A stone is also a symbol of completeness and wholeness that is associated, as shown in the part devoted to Herbert's poem entitled “Pebble”, with dead perfection, finitude without movement. This immobile completeness goes against the spirit of the entire poem, dominated by lively imagery, movement and color. Stevens leaves us with no clue to resolve this inconsistency.

The poem presents a particular moment, a moment of meditation, in which the reality seems to stop. This structure is characteristic for Stevens and appears in several other poems. Stevens suggests that at such moments something happens to perception that radically alters the experience. The usual, normal flow of consciousness simply registers what is happening around it in order to be able to respond to it with action; in this sense perception is mainly functional, it is there not to please the subject but to make it act according to what is happening in the external world. This way of functioning of consciousness is modified – the perception is so overwhelming that it forces its subject to concentrate only on the now, on what it perceives. That is how the feeling of completeness arises. The consciousness of the rabbit is a consciousness of the now, of a present that fills the entire mind. The feeling of growing of this consciousness, of it encompassing more and more of the experienced world is built up in the course of the poem. This feeling of being fully present means that there is no need to think and ascribe any categories to the external world: “then there is nothing to think of. It comes of it-self; | And east rushes west and west rushes down, | No matter”. Geographical co-ordinates are abstract notions that do not come directly from that experience, and thus they become completely irrelevant.

The title of the poem indicates the rabbit as the central figure. The use of the indefinite article before the noun “rabbit” points towards the arbitrariness of the poem's rabbit – there is nothing special about it *per se*, it is a random representative of its species that acquires meaning only due to particular conditions that the poem describes. The rabbit is called king due to the fact that the poem is organized around it. The rabbit marks everything with itself and with its “rabbit-light”, even though it needs particular conditions (i.e. the light that touches its fur) to achieve this special status. Everything is what it is

because of the rabbit and the “rabbit-light”, which makes things enter into ecstasy. The ghosts allude to the visionary aspect of the entire poem – the fact that all of the experience that the poem describes is actually happening in the mind of the poet.

The cat is a recurring motif throughout the poem. At first it appears in a seemingly casual way, as part of an ordinary picture: “There was the cat slopping its milk all day, | Fat cat, red tongue, green mind, white milk”. The alternating colors are an element that stands out in this picture. When the cat reappears later in the poem, it is accompanied by a different adjective each time referring to this set of colors – there is a “red cat” (seventh stanza) and a “green cat” (eighth stanza). The switch of colors points to the cat as a presence that always slightly alters, and yet remains the same, or at least retains its identity. No matter how intense and ecstatic the feeling of the “light on your fur” is, it cannot erase the cat, it can only alter it to a certain extent.

The cat is an ambiguous figure, for clearly the speaking voice does not want to think about its presence; the special moment in which the speaking voice experiences “the peace-fullest time” is a moment “Without that monument of cat | The cat forgotten in the moon”. The poem gives hardly any clue as to why forgetting the cat is a condition for the subject’s ecstatic happiness. We might speculate that the cat presents a threat to the rabbit – a dangerous predator that could always do harm, even if not necessarily deadly. The possibility of its attack does not allow the rabbit to fully enjoy itself in the sun.

That danger is neutralized in the poem, through the power of the “rabbit-light” that allows the rabbit to be the king of ghosts, to organize meanings and to fill the world with its own consciousness. The cat does not disappear from the poem, what changes is the meaning attributed to it. In the final stanza, even if the vision has ended, the cat presents no longer a danger, it is nothing more than a “bug in the grass”. In this sense the vision is more than merely a sudden ecstatic experience that passes away with no influence on the subject that is experiencing it, there is a change, as fear and danger disappear.

We can think about the rabbit and its structures in terms of Amerindian perspectivism, i.e. we can think about how the rabbit’s mind structures and experiences mirror those of humans. The cat represents a certain kind of fear. It is a constant presence that does not allow the lyrical subject to experience the fullness of life. In the case of the rabbit, this fear, which in humans might take various forms, takes the form of the cat. By contrast, the feeling of light on the fur stands for the feeling of peaceful fulfillment and safety, apart from its function as

an element that allows for this whole scene to be experienced and for an analogy between the warmth of sun felt by a human being and the light on its fur felt by the rabbit to be created.

Out of Stevens' poems that I analyze here, "A rabbit as king of the ghosts" is the one that interacts best with perspectivism. The poem uses the analogy between the feeling of light on skin and fur as its constitutive element. Moreover, there are also other analogies, such as the one between the cat and the greatest fear, that strengthen the reading of the poem as a device that allows to understand the experience of being a rabbit through an analogy between humans and rabbits.

What the poem eventually describes is the act of simulation in which there is no particular device that would be consciously used to experience the feeling of being a rabbit, but there are particular conditions that trigger this feeling. The light seems to be the central condition that allows the speaking voice to experience the simulation. Being in the sun simulates having fur. There are also other, more minor conditions that probably influence the kind of light: it is "the end of day", "August the most peaceful month", there is grass all around, there are trees, the night is coming. This quite casual scenery together with the light trigger the vision.

The way in which "A rabbit as king of the ghosts" could serve as a simulation device differs from "Snow Man". "Snow Man"'s structure does not imply the poet in the scene, it is more general. Whereas "A rabbit as king of the ghosts" clearly insists on a particular situation with a particular rabbit, "Snow Man", although it also uses particular images, is more generic as the conditions of the experience it proposes are more generic and therefore could serve better as a self-standing simulating device.

"Snow Man" is also more general in the sense that it presents a very generalized vision of what it feels like to be a snow man. Since the snow man is essentially a creature of winter that has the "mind of winter", virtually any snow man would have similar experiences. The entire meditative description that the poem presents is necessary for us to imagine the feeling, as it erases everything that is not an element of winter – what remains in the poem is the pure essence of winter. This allows the reader to picture the state of mind of a snow man more adequately, as there is the deep onto-epistemological connection between the snow man and winter.

"A rabbit as king of the ghosts" does not present what it feels like to be a rabbit in general – how it feels to be any member of this species. The hero of this poem is a particular

rabbit that is experiencing its “rabbitness” in particular conditions, of which the “rabbit-light” is the most important one.

3.3. The Wind Shifts

The poem “The Wind Shifts”, published in *Harmonium* (1923) constitutes a case for the fact that the experience of non-human beings could only be speculated upon by being related to human experience. This is exposed by the construction of the poem. Its structure is built upon a series of comparisons of the shifts of the wind to human experience. Each comparison is introduced by the phrase: “This is how the wind shifts” or its alternation “The wind shifts like this”. Each of the comparisons includes the word “human” or “humans”. Stevens also uses adverbs that are commonly used when referring to human actions: “despairingly”, “proudly”, “angrily”, “eagerly”.

The poem, in comparison to the previously analyzed “Snow Man” or “A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts”, does not build a particular scene that would condition the experience nor does it construct the mind of wind as a cohesive phenomenology that is described in particular circumstances. The comparisons do not compose a coherent scene; they are rather aimed at invoking a plethora of different pictures – Stevens leaps from one image to another, without elaborating the details, but rather constructing short impressions or associations. This construction of briefly sketched scenes does not lead to any conclusion. In this way the structure of the poem mimics the airy and intangible nature of the wind.

In what sense can we understand the similes the poem presents, i.e. what aspect of the wind is like humans? Do the comparisons describe the way the wind acts, its externally phenomenologically accessible changes of movement? Or could they possibly reach its phenomenological side, i.e. how the wind experiences itself and the world? How could we even conceive of that? A direct answer is not provided by the poem in any way.

The distinction between the externality of the wind – how we can perceive it from the outside – and the intricacies of its inner life becomes unclear. Phenomenologically speaking, the wind does not have an inside and an outside. It is thus impossible to translate it into a metaphor of Harmanian “inner life” of objects that relies on the distinction between the inside and the outside. Although, it is important to remember, that this is merely a metaphor, from a purely philosophical point of view Harman would still claim that the wind has an “inner life”,

i.e. every object has a side that is completely inaccessible to other objects. Harman, despite the use of the metaphor of the “inner life”, does not rely on it philosophically. However, in the case of alien phenomenology, it is not so clear that it could do without the distinction between the inside and the outside – although we can theoretically claim that every object has some kinds of experiences, it seems difficult to speculate about the experiences of objects different from us in that they cannot be conceived of in terms of the inside-outside distinction. “The Wind Shifts” shows this difficulty in the way it differs from the previously analyzed poems. Especially a comparison with “The Snow Man” could be fruitful. “The Snow Man” could be read as a simulation of the experiences of winter itself (so an object that definitely does not have an inside and an outside), the poem does so, however, through the tangible figure of a snow man. This intermediary step between humans and winter is necessary in order for the simulation to be possible. Obviously, the snow man's similarity to humans does not reduce only to the distinction of the inside and the outside; it is, however, an important trait. Such an intermediary figure does not appear in “The Wind Shifts”, making a simulation virtually impossible.

We can try to imagine the wind having human-like emotions by observing the phenomenologically accessible signs of its presence, however this does not necessarily mean that this is enough to imagine what it feels like to be the wind at this particular moment. These difficulties in imagining the feeling of what it is like to be the wind, might be also resulting from the fact that there is no merging of subject and object, which is so characteristic for Stevens.

3.4. Note on Moonlight

“Note on Moonlight” was first published in 1955 in a group of poems entitled *The Rock*, which Stevens added to his *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*.

In this poem Stevens imagines the moon as an object whose purpose is to shine on things to evoke their “objectiveness”, a term Stevens uses several times in the poem. I will devote more attention to the term and its meaning later in the course of my analysis. Again, like in “The Wind Shifts”, Stevens uses a comparison to a human being in order to describe an inanimate object. However, in contrast to the previous poem, “Notes on Moonlight” constructs a particular scene, which, though not so clear and distinct as the one in “Rabbit as

King of the Ghosts”, allows us to speculate about the phenomenology of the moon, or at least to reflect on its interactions and relations with other objects.

Moon is what enables the objectiveness to be seen because it shines on things, delivering only as little light as is needed to “disclose the essential presence” of a thing, but not more. The moonlight allows the silhouette of a thing to emerge from the darkness, “to disclose the essential presence” . The moon does not allow the object to be fully present, to fulfill its perceptual richness, it only allows it to be remarked, noticed, but not fully seen.

It is worth noticing that in the context of this poem objectiveness is first of all a perceptual category, not an ontological one, or at least not in a direct way. Its ontological status, if we can talk about it, is mediated through perception. Objectiveness could be described as a certain experience (for it is difficult to call it a feeling or a reflection, or any other name) arising from a particular perception – that of seeing things in the light of the moon. Contrary to such poems as “The Snow Man” or “A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts”, which presented particular situations with the rabbit and the snow man being the main experiencing subjects whose consciousness strongly influenced what was depicted in the poem, “The Wind Shifts” seems to have no such subject. The situation described in the “Notes on Moonlight” is not particularized by any concrete entity that would perceive the moonlight; in this sense the poem is more general.

In a certain sense, the presence of objects that the moonlight discloses is more felt than seen, as the moon only allows us to realize that something is there. The moonlight and its light decide the degree to which an object becomes an object, how much of this objectiveness, this presence as an object, it has. It does not matter what the material, physical form of the object is, it appears as “object the more” or “object the less”, depending on the moonlight. For Stevens objects are less objects when they are less visible, and more objects when they are more visible. In this sense his idea of an object is strongly phenomenological. Although the speaking voice does not claim that there is no outer world or that what is not visible does not exist, what he calls an object is essentially a visual phenomenon. To be an object means to be seen as an object.

One has to remark that the moon that is the theme and the central object of focus in the poem is not exactly the physical moon that could be found in cosmic space because strictly speaking the cosmic object does not shine, i.e. there are no chemical reactions in it (or on its surface) that would result in the production of light. However, its powerful influence on

Earth is caused by its reflecting of the light of the sun.

This raises a very difficult question to Harman's philosophy – is the light of the moon something that belongs to the object? Can we even say that the moon as a physical cosmic entity and the moon that we can see on Earth are the same object? What allows us to say so and what would be the criteria that would allow us to distinguish these objects as different (or qualify them as the same)? We can also assume that the light is the object in question. In this case, the moon is retroactively created by the sum of its actual influence on the world.

What is also noteworthy is that the objects are not “more” or “less” due to the properties of human perception, but due to this particular property of the moon, the amount of light it gives. This is what decides the appearance of the objects. The poem suggests that their ontological status is bizarrely something in-between, they are neither physical objects, nor purely objects of human perception, they are simply objects in the moonlight and of the moonlight. It is the moonlight that stares at them, making them precisely what they are. What the lyrical subject really observes in the poem is not how the objects appear to him in the moonlight, but how they appear to the moonlight. Their appearance to the moon's stare makes the objects into what they are. Thus, they appear to humans mediated by the way the moon sees them.

The fact that human seeing is mediated by the moonlight's seeing could be linked to Harman's philosophy and to the particular way the philosopher thinks of perception – perception is just a kind of interaction that glues real objects together. One should be reminded here that Harman claims that real objects can never interact with each other. They need the sensual layer and sensual objects that serve as a glue for real objects; two real objects glued by sensuality become a new real object. For Harman, perception is a kind of sensual interaction that connects two real objects – the perceiver and the object he perceives – and creates a new real object as a result. The parallel between human perception and the moonlight means that the sensual interaction (represented by the light) between the moon and some objects leads to a creation of new real objects. And those new objects, created by the moonlight, are the actual objects that a human mind perceives.

The moon becomes a God-like figure akin to Berkley's God. George Berkley was a British philosopher who lived in the first part of the XVIII century and was known for a radical form of empiricism. Berkley, who argued that things exist only when there is someone

who perceives them, faced a major difficulty in accounting for the surprising stability of the world and the fact that things seem to be out there even if nobody is looking. He claimed that all things are constantly being perceived by God who in this way grants their constant existence. The moon of this poem could be seen as a similar figure, allowing the thing that it shines at to exist. There are major philosophical differences between Berkley and Harman, however, an analogy could be drawn between the roles they attribute to perception and experiencing – they both see them as central for ontology, although in a different way. For Berkley perception is what allows things to persist, whereas for Harman perception has a creative role – it allows for new things to emerge by gluing already existing objects. This interpretation of the ontological role of the moonlight modifies the way I interpret the notion of “objectiveness”. To be an object does not mean to be seen as an object but rather to be shined at in a way that allows the object to be seen as an object. In the poem, the appearance of objects is more an ontological than an epistemological event.

The difference between the term objectiveness as employed by Stevens in the phrase “mere objectiveness of things” in the penultimate stanza of the poem and the term objecthood as used by Harman seems clear. Objectiveness is related to the appearance of an object as a certain event that is bordering of ontology and epistemology. It is thus a term indicating a process of appearing through the mediation of the moonlight, whereas objecthood is related directly to the essence of objects, what they are as such.

“The one moonlight, the various universe, intended | So much just to be seen [...]”. The poem is ambiguous concerning what exactly is meant to be seen. Is it the moonlight, the universe, both? Or could the “one moonlight” and “the various universe” be one and the same thing, since the syntax of the poem allows us to read those two expressions in apposition? This idea that they might be one the same thing is strengthened by the parallel (“The one moonlight, in the simple-colored night, | Like a plain poet revolving in his mind | The sameness of his various universe, | Shines on the mere objectiveness of things.”) between the poet and “his various universe” which he has in mind, and the moonlight and “the various universe”. This suggests that just as the poet sees a particular universe in his mind, so the moon sees its own reality through its light.

The speaking voice in the poem is difficult to identify. It seems to belong to someone, probably a human being, that is looking from the outside of the described scene on the moon and the effect it has on objects. However, this person is never directly located in the poem, his

physical presence is unspecified. The speaking voice never openly asserts that it is speaking from within the moonlight's mind nor that he has access to what is happening there directly. Contrary to "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts" where the speaking voice assumes the point of view of the rabbit and is almost inside the rabbit's mind, "Note on Moonlight" does not posit the world from the moonlight's point of view. It does not seem to posit the world from any well-defined point of view. The speaking voice seems to be undefinable – not being placed in any recognizable standing point, it is neither (or it neither belongs to) the moon, nor the light, nor the poet, nor any particular observer placed inside the scene.

Light and the question of visibility and invisibility are some of the poem's central motifs. This would suggest that, if there is something that can be seen and cannot be seen because of the amount of light, there should be an observer that could (or could not) see things due to the light. But despite the use of particular images of objects, there is no identifiable subject in the poem that would see them. Stevens uses the impersonal pronoun "one" to refer to the observer – a word that underlines the lack of any particular person that would "see" or "feel". The speaking voice probably does not belong to this "one" because it refers to it with equal distance as it refers to the moonlight. It observes the whole situation of perception from outside of it.

The "purpose to be seen" does not come before seeing, it results from it. The purpose, the meaning arises almost as a visual impression. Seeing is so suggestive and so perceptually powerful that it automatically gives rise to meaning. This meaning appears as primarily epistemological. However, the purpose is treated somehow at a distance. It is introduced by the phrase "as if" ("It is as if being was to be observed, | As if, among the possible purposes | Of what one sees, the purpose that comes first, | The surface, is the purpose to be seen") that indicates that there might be no purpose in it at all, or that there might be other purposes which are more important. Seeing comes first and as such is superficial. Stevens gives no clue whether this superficiality harbors any deeper purpose. This is also strengthened by the final words of the poem that express an explicit doubt about the certainty of this purpose. It seems that the feeling of meaningfulness is only a matter of an instant that it is going to disappear. Stevens discloses the nature of purposefulness and meaningfulness as subjective feelings that depend on external impressions.

In comparison to "Snow Man" and "A rabbit as king of the ghosts", it is difficult to say that this poem could serve as a stimulatory device. The analogy between seeing and

shining is of a different kind, it does not allow us to imagine what it feels like to be a moon. The poem presents a certain model of interaction, that, although it has its roots in sensual experiences, transcends it. There is a form of translation from one medium to another, i.e. between the shining of the moon and human vision. Just as the human eyes make objects appear by seeing them, the moon makes them appear by shining on them. The analogy is not so simple though, as human eyes require light (that could be generated by the sun, by lamp but also by the moon) to see things, whereas the activity of shining does not require such an additional component. And this is what allows Stevens to make the imperfect analogy – an analogy between perceiving and allowing to perceive, between producing light and seeing light.

However, the moon and its shining on objects could be easily read in light of Harman's theory of relations and his views on how real objects relate to each other. Just as humans relate to different real objects that are withdrawn from their access through the mediation of their perception that creates sensual objects, so does the moon relate to other real objects by means of its shining. However, the analogy between seeing and shining is not exactly necessary to establish the connection between the moon and the objects on which it shines. It is a helpful tool that allows us to notice that shining might be a way in which the moon connects with other real beings and that in this case shining is a counterpart to perception, as they both create sensual objects that mediate between the real things. Both perceiving and shining allow sensual objects to appear.

The parallel between perceiving and shining leads to yet another meaning of objectiveness. To be an object in the sense proposed by Stevens is to appear as a sensual object that relates two real objects, the moon and the object on which it shines, which cannot otherwise touch each other. This places Stevens and his poetry far from the Hartmanian love for real objects that exist outside of human access – Stevens is interested mostly in sensual/intentional objects and how they appear. Stevens, however, would probably not make the differentiation between real and sensual objects.

3.5. Stevens – conclusion

Stevens' poems that I analyzed could function efficiently as simulation devices – they provide their readers with powerful imagery that is placed in non-human consciousnesses. They allow

us to imagine what it feels like to be a rabbit or a snow man, or if they do not, they at least offer a powerful poetic projection of alien phenomenologies.

What allows those poems to function as good examples of simulation devices or projections of alien phenomenology, in the way these categories were conceived by Bogost, is the fact that they are openly anthropomorphic. They do not naively jump into the consciousness of non-human entities but always relate the speculation about those consciousnesses to human phenomenology and human experience. This relatedness is expressed through analogies and metaphors, following the assumption that in order to imagine what we cannot have access to we have to use what we have access to. Thus, for instance, reading “The Snow Man” does not allow readers to experience the winter as it is in itself: this is something we will never have access to. It allows us, however, to experience the snow man, a man made of snow, who is not human anymore and yet retains some human traits that enable us to relate to it through analogy. “The mind of winter” is thus necessarily anthropomorphic. But in this anthropomorphism lies the strength of Stevens' poetry as a simulation device.

Bogost's alien phenomenology turned out to be more helpful in the analysis of Stevens' poems than Harman's object-oriented ontology. This claim stems from the fact that in his poems Stevens does not reflect extensively on the nature of objects, since phenomenological themes are at the center of his attention. Only the recourse to objectiveness in “Note on Moonlight”, although this objectiveness appears at first to be phenomenological in nature, could be successfully connected to object-oriented ontology. This one exception is interesting to study in the framework of Harmanian philosophy, as it delivers, as I already showed, a very good example of a relation between objects that is very similar to the relation constituted between humans and objects through perception.

4. Summary and conclusion

Stevens' poems penetrate the experience of non-human beings through human phenomenology, through human experiences. By means of analogy, he manages to poetically cast the phenomenology of a snow man and of a rabbit. This functions in two different ways: firstly, his strong and vivid descriptions could make the reader imagine what it feels like to be this or that particular thing. Secondly, he also describes the conditions of the experience, i.e. what external physical conditions could lead to the experience of feeling like a snow man or a rabbit.

This is certainly possible due to the strongly sensual character of Stevens' poetry. His writing is suggestive enough to create such impressions. Nevertheless, the entanglement of subject and object is also very central for the simulation that his poems yield. It reminds us that in order to simulate a phenomenology in a way that would take us close to what the object is actually experiencing, it is necessary to reconstruct not only their mechanisms of perception (as far as humans might know them) but also the surroundings in which this perception operates. This is why Stevens' poems are so successful as simulation devices: they construct not only the phenomenology of a being but inscribe this phenomenology into a context within which it operates.

Stevens does not ask the question of objecthood as explicitly as Herbert does. The barrier between the external and the internal does not exist for Stevens the way it does for Herbert. This difference also results from their respective aesthetic choices and sensibilities. Stevens is essentially a poet of perception and what is experienced is always central for him. Even if his poems engage in reflections, these are always part of a certain stream of perceptions, they arise naturally from them. Herbert's poetry is of a much more reflective nature, in the sense of formulating his reflection explicitly through direct philosophical statements, whereas Stevens' philosophical positions are very rarely explicitly expressed, they are rather inferable from what is described in the poem and how it is described. Especially Herbert's "Study of the Object" helps to succinctly highlight Herbert's contrast with Stevens' position. Stevens' objects, however simple, are never ascetic, for Stevens' aesthetic position does not allow for it. For Stevens even nothingness could be perceived and this perception is deeply sensual. Herbert's inexisting object is a powerful way for the lyrical subject to create a world of his own, a world that is deliberately cut off from our realities. However, the

condition that allows this process to be successful is the ultimate reduction of the sensual richness of the world.

In the case of Herbert, his poetic positions could be partially related to the historical circumstances in which he wrote. His moral stance was forged in a direct confrontation with the communist regime of the post-war Poland, especially in the Stalinist period (1948-1955) in which he had to choose between yielding to the aesthetics of social realism that was enforced by Polish authorities and remaining unpublished. Eventually, Herbert did not yield, his first collection of poems was published after the Thaw – the period after Stalin's death (1953) in which the censorship was relaxed and works representing aesthetics other than social realism were allowed to be published. Obviously, despite the Thaw, Herbert still could not publish poems that would openly criticize the communist authorities. This resulted in poems which promoted, often using historical or mythological figures, moral values that stood in opposition to the regime and its practices. And even though the recourse to the rich European tradition and the universal scope of his moral stance do not allow to reduce his poetry to its political and historical dimension, the circumstances in which it was written must have shaped profoundly some of its aspects. First of all, the choice of subjects – numerous Herbert's poems focused on the questions of liberty and its limitations as well as different moral stances that one could take in reaction to the system – opposition and compliance. This could be seen as resulting from the conditions of living in communist Poland and the choices one could make – to collaborate with the regime and its repressive security service, to oppose it or to emigrate internally, trying to ignore its existence. Some of Herbert's poems are a reaction to this reality. However, the moral character of his poetry could not be seen purely as a reaction to the political circumstances, especially if one considers that his moral stance could be dated before the rise of communism and his conviction that the role of a poet is to set moral standards. The fact that all the poems had to be approved by a censor before publishing forced poets to use different camouflaging strategies to critically refer to the political or social situation. Herbert would use historical and mythological figures to express his stance towards the reality he lived in. However, Herbert's admiration for Greek and Roman Antiquity as a fascinating period and a source of European culture was too strong to be reduced only to a mean of avoiding censorship.

Herbert is focused on moral problems and he aims at making his poems semantically transparent in order to express his moral stance, as he claimed in a short text about the role of

poetry and poets (Herbert "Poeta wobec wspolczesnosci" 44). This led him to a form of poetry that is deliberately anti-aesthetic, in the sense of avoiding rhetorical embellishment in favor of clarity.

Whereas Herbert's poetry operates within a more clearly delineated historical and ideological background, that could explain certain features of his poetry, the contexts in which Stevens operated are more difficult to capture. His poetry was often perceived as having no moral or political purpose (Richardsson 19). In terms of writing style he is definitely influenced by modernism, in terms of philosophical stance, he is influenced by american pragmatism with its anti-essentialism, antisystematicity, and disregard for logic (Eeckhout 113). The latter could be also associated with questions concerning subjectivity and the subject-object relation, which, as it could be seen in the analyses I have done, are essential for understanding his poetry.

Thus, the major philosophical difference between the two poets, that can explain the differences in their poetic stances, is related to the particular disciplines of philosophy that the poets favor – Herbert's main concern is ethics, whereas Stevens focuses on epistemological questions. And while in the case of Herbert it is possible to point towards particular historical and political circumstances that form his poetry, in the case of Stevens it is rather difficult.

Herbert's poems are not simulations or simulating devices in the sense proposed by Bogost. This becomes especially clear if we compare them to Stevens' poems, with their focus on sensual description. This stems from the construction of the poems, their style and the use of language. Whenever Herbert describes an object, he usually focuses on the trait necessary to make a philosophical point. Herbert, even if he values sensuality and concreteness, as Baranczak claims, does not dive into phenomenologically suggestive scene construction, nor does he seem to have a phenomenological sensibility or interest in the problems of experience and perception. That is why his poetry can hardly help the reader imagine what it feels like to be an object. On the other hand, it definitely encourages readers to reflect upon the question what an object actually is. His is more concerned with the ontology of objects than with their phenomenology.

5. Appendix

This appendix contains the texts of the poems that I analyze in the thesis.

Wallace Stevens

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time

To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,

In the sound of a few leaves,
Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

(Stevens “The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens” 9-10)

A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts

Related Poem Content Details

By Wallace Stevens

The difficulty to think at the end of day,
When the shapeless shadow covers the sun
And nothing is left except light on your fur—

There was the cat slopping its milk all day,
Fat cat, red tongue, green mind, white milk
And August the most peaceful month.

To be, in the grass, in the peacefulest time,
Without that monument of cat,
The cat forgotten in the moon;

And to feel that the light is a rabbit-light,

In which everything is meant for you
And nothing need be explained;

Then there is nothing to think of. It comes of itself;
And east rushes west and west rushes down,
No matter. The grass is full

And full of yourself. The trees around are for you,
The whole of the wideness of night is for you,
A self that touches all edges,

You become a self that fills the four corners of night.
The red cat hides away in the fur-light
And there you are humped high, humped up,

You are humped higher and higher, black as stone—
You sit with your head like a carving in space
And the little green cat is a bug in the grass.

(Stevens "The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens"209-10)

The Wind Shifts

This is how the wind shifts:
Like the thoughts of an old human,
Who still thinks eagerly
And despairingly.
The wind shifts like this:
Like a human without illusions,
Who still feels irrational things within her.
The wind shifts like this:
Like humans approaching proudly,
Like humans approaching angrily.
83This is how the wind shifts:
Like a human, heavy and heavy,
Who does not care.

(Stevens "The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens"83-4)

Note On Moonlight

The one moonlight, in the simple-colored night,
Like a plain poet revolving in his mind
The sameness of his various universe,
Shines on the mere objectiveness of things.

It is as if being was to be observed,
As if, among the possible purposes
Of what one sees, the purpose that comes first,
The surface, is the purpose to be seen,

The property of the moon, what it evokes.
It is to disclose the essential presence, say,
Of a mountain, expanded and elevated almost
Into a sense, an object the less; or else

To disclose in the figure waiting on the road
An object the more, an undetermined form
Between the slouchings of a gunman and a lover,
A gesture in the dark, a fear one feels

In the great vistas of night air, that takes this form,
In the arbors that are as if of Saturn-star.
So, then, this warm, wide, weatherless quietude
Is active with a power, an inherent life,

In spite of the mere objectiveness of things,
Like a cloud-cap in the corner of a looking-glass,
A change of color in the plain poet's mind,
Night and silence disturbed by an interior sound,

The one moonlight, the various universe, intended
So much just to be seen—a purpose, empty
Perhaps, absurd perhaps, but at least a purpose,
Certain and ever more fresh. Ah! Certain, for
sure . . .

(Stevens “The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens” 531-2)

Zbigniew Herbert

Pebble

The pebble
is a perfect creature

equal to itself
mindful of its limits

filled exactly
with a pebbly meaning
with a scent which does not remind one of anything
does not frighten anything away does not arouse desire

its ardor and coldness
are just and full of dignity

I feel a heavy remorse

when I hold it in my hand
and its noble body
is permeated by false warmth

—Pebbles cannot be tamed
to the end they will look at us
with a calm and very clear eye

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 197)

Study of the Object

1

The most beautiful is the object
which does not exist

it does not serve to carry water
or to preserve the ashes of a hero

it was not cradled by Antigone
nor was a rat drowned in it

it has no hole
and is entirely open

seen
from every side
which means
hardly anticipated

the hairs
of all its lines
join
in one stream of light

neither
blindness
nor
death
can take away the object
which does not exist

2

mark the place
where stood the object
which does not exist
with a black square
it will be
a simple dirge
for the beautiful absence

manly regret
imprisoned
in a quadrangle

3

now
all space
swells like an ocean

a hurricane beats
on the black sail

the wing of a blizzard circles
over the black square

and the island sinks
beneath the salty increase

4

now you have
empty space
more beautiful than the object
more beautiful than the place it leaves
it is the pre-world

a white paradise
of all possibilities
you may enter there

cry out
vertical-horizontal
perpendicular lightning

77

strikes the naked horizon

we can stop at that
anyway you have already created a world

5

obey the counsels
of the inner eye

do not yield
to murmurs mutterings smackings

it is the uncreated world
crowding before the gates of your canvas

angels are offering
the rosy wadding of clouds

trees are inserting everywhere
slovenly green hair

kings are praising purple
and commanding their trumpeters
to gild

even the whale asks for a portrait

obey the counsels of the inner eye
admit no one

6

extract
from the shadow of the object
which does not exist
from polar space
from the stern reveries of the inner eye
a chair

beautiful and useless
like a cathedral in the wilderness

place on the chair
a crumpled tablecloth
add to the idea of order
the idea of adventure

let it be a confession of faith
before the vertical struggling with the horizontal

let it be
quieter than angels
prouder than kings
more substantial than a whale
let it have the face of the last things

we ask reveal o chair
the depths of the inner eye
the iris of necessity
the pupil of death

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 193-6)

Wooden Die

A wooden die can be described only from without. We are therefore condemned to eternal ignorance of its essence. Even if it is quickly cut in two, immediately its inside becomes a wall and there occurs the lightning-swift transformation of a mystery into a skin. For this reason it is impossible to lay foundations for the psychology of a stone ball, of an iron bar, of a wooden cube.

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 207)

Armchairs

Who ever thought a warm neck would become an armrest, or legs eager for flight and joy could stiffen into four simple stilts? Armchairs were once noble flower-eating creatures.

However, they allowed themselves too easily to be domesticated and today they are the most wretched species of quadrupeds. They have lost all their stubbornness and courage. They are only meek. They haven't trampled anyone or galloped off with anyone. They are, for certain, conscious of a wasted life.

The despair of armchairs is revealed in their creaking.

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 217)

Clock

At first glance it's the placid face of a miller, full and shiny as an apple. Only one dark hair creeps across it. And if you look inside: a nest of worms, the bowels of an anthill. And this is what's supposed to usher us into eternity.

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 211)

Hen

The hen is the best example of what living constantly with humans leads to. She has completely lost the lightness and grace of a bird. Her tail sticks up over her protruding rump like a too large hat in bad taste. Her rare moments of ecstasy, when she stands on one leg and glues up her round eyes with filmy eyelids, are stunningly disgusting. And in addition, that parody of song, throat-slashed supplications over a thing unutterably comic: a round, white, maculated egg.

The hen brings to mind certain poets.

(Herbert "The Collected Poems: 1965-1998" 141)

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