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Speculative Realism

Resources on an emerging discipline

Speculative Realism is a contemporary philosophical movement taking its name from a 2007 conference held at Goldsmiths College in London, England. Speculative Realism is difficult to define: like the hodge-podge of divergent theories falling under the label Postmodernism, it is less an internally consistent set of ideas than a diverse group of theories unified against a common adversary. Speculative Realists and their allies are combating what they call "correlationism," or the belief that all existence is reducible to the human experience of existence. Thus they claim, against theorists as varied as Immanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida, and Karl Marx, that there is a world outside of the mind, language, and economic forces. The exact nature of this world, however, is the source of much dispute.

Speculative Realism is an apt subject for Internet research since much of the discussion surrounding it has taken place online. Additionally, traditional print reference resources, such as the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* or the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* are silent on this recent trend. Worst of all, two of the best Internet reference resources, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* also lack entries for Speculative Realism, most of its related theories, and its leading figures.

Due to the lack of authoritative resources, many of the most useful research sites related to Speculative Realism are of an informal nature, such as blogs, discussion lists, and individually maintained content lists, but they are all consistently maintained and of high quality. Further, since the last "Internet Resources" column on Philosophy was in April 2000 and the state of philosophy Web sites has, predictably, shifted quite a bit since then (for instance, Peter Suber's Guide to Philosophy on the Internet has not been updated since February 2003 and features a multitude of broken links), I will list a few general resources, as well.

Reference resources

• **A Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names.** This is an index of famous philosophers throughout history, as well as a list of technical terms and their meanings. This resource culls information from several authoritative sources, such as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind,* displaying a concise summary of the item in question. As such, it is a great resource for those unfamiliar with philosophical lexicons. The dictionary's primary limitations are the lack of a full-text search feature and its currency, as the Web site has not been updated since 2006. *Access:* http://www.philosophypages.com/dy/.

• **Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.** This Web site provides freely available reviews of most recent philosophy books and is available as a free e-mail subscription, as well. The reviews are notable both for their detailed summaries and high overall quality.

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Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews can be used both as a reference resource and a collection development tool for subject specialists. While there are reviews of Speculative Realist works—such as Quentin Meillassoux's seminal *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*—all other philosophies are also covered. *Access:* http://ndpr.nd.edu/.

• **Speculative Realism Pathfinder.** Disclaimer: the author of this column is also the creator of the Speculative Realism Pathfinder Web site. However, I think that the Pathfinder warrants inclusion here because it contains a few useful lists unavailable elsewhere, such as a compilation of the names of related theories and an introductory reading list of eight important books. The Web site also provides links to bloggers who frequently speak to Speculative Realism issues, and a few Twitter accounts are thrown in for good measure. *Access:* http://courseweb.lis.illinois.edu/~phettep1/SRPathfinder.html.

• **Speculative Realism–Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia.** While this Wikipedia page is only of Grade C and a little difficult for laypeople to understand due to its usage of complex philosophical terminology, it does provide a solid background of the Speculative Realism movement and the issues surrounding it. The Wikipedia page's best features are its details on the movement's founders, citations from a few major monographs in the field, and the list of pertinent journal articles under the "Publications" heading. The author of the Complete Lies blog (see the Blogs section below) frequently updates this entry. *Access:* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_realism.

Aggregators and indexes

• **Episteme Links.** Episteme Links collects a very broad array of Internet resources on both philosophical topics and specific philosophers. The Web site lists audio and video, blogs, course materials, e-texts, Philosophy departments, and much more. Further, the organization of resources is pretty good, with most categories indexed in multiple ways. The audio and video resources, for instance, can be browsed by philosopher, topic, and source as well as searched in two different ways, via title keyword or author/speaker. *Access:* http://www.epistemelinks.com/.

• **InPhO Taxonomy.** The Indiana Philosophy Ontology Project aggregates search results for predetermined terms across the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Google Scholar, and Noesis, thus compiling and categorizing scholarly resources according to a hierarchical structure. InPhO is particularly great at illustrating interrelationships among ideas and philosophers, but since it includes searches only for a few preset concepts, it can be difficult to navigate and locate known items. Entries related to Speculative Realism might be found under "Metaphysics > Causation" or "History of Philosophy > Contemporary Philosophy." *Access:* http://inpho.cogs.indiana.edu:16080/taxonomy/.
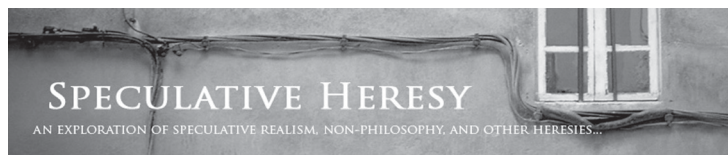

• **PhilPapers: Online Research in Philosophy.** PhilPapers is a robust database with many full-text items as well as citations to works that are not currently open access. Searches for the primary figures of the Speculative Realist movements will retrieve numerous articles by and about them. Further, PhilPapers' hierarchical subject structure makes it possible to look for papers on a specific topic or subdiscipline, such as "Metaphysics > Varieties of Causation." However, the interface

does have a serious navigation problem in that one cannot search in specific fields (i.e., author, title, journal, etc.) but only the full text of each work. *Access:* http://philpapers.org/.

• **PhilWeb.** From the "Topics" or "Regions" tabs on this Web site, one can explore philosophy in new and interesting ways, choosing to investigate the theories originating in certain geographical locations or observing how different schools of thought approach various social issues, such as economics and education. PhilWeb also features a Google Search bar at the bottom of the page, which can be used to see where various topics or theorists are indexed and what resources, both online and off, might provide further information about them. *Access:* http://www.phillwebb.net/default.htm

• **Speculative Heresy.** The blog Speculative Heresy emerged as an early focal point for all things Speculative Realism, and its resources page is no exception. In addition to announcing related conferences, calls for papers, and participating in philosophical discussions, Speculative Heresy provides PDFs of articles, book reviews, dissertations, interviews, and other multimedia related to Speculative Realism. It is also worth mentioning the "Faculty" tab on the Web site, which provides links to the academic profiles of 15 professors and researchers who are in some way associated with the movement. *Access:* http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/resources/.

• **Speculative Realism Blog Aggregator.** This Web site collects entries from 22 blogs that focus on issues pertinent to Speculative Realism. It is maintained by Georgia Tech Professor Ian Bogost, himself related to the Object-Oriented Ontology vein of Speculative Realism. The aggregator is great for in-depth reviews of the most current material, but the sheer volume of posts per day can make it

daunting. There is also no means of searching the full text of the aggregate posts. *Access:* http://www.bogost.com/speculativerealism/.

Online journals

• *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities. Angelaki* is a cutting-edge journal of theory that has featured a few articles by Speculative Realists, for instance Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani, who is the author of *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. This journal is not open access, however Routledge does currently offer volume 12, issue 2 for free as an online sample. *Access:* http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713405211.

• *Pli—The Warwick Journal of Philosophy.* A journal of contemporary philosophy that frequently publishes articles by one of the founders of Speculative Realism, Ray Brassier, and "nonphilosopher" Jacques Laruelle, whose theories are of interest to the movement. Volumes 12 (Materialism) and 19 (Sense and Nonsense) in particular focus on pertinent issues. The topic of the forthcoming Volume 22 deals with Quentin Meillassoux's work, which is largely identified as foundational to Speculative Realism. However, it should be noted that this journal is not open access. *Access:* http://www.warwick.ac.uk/philosophy/pli_journal/introduction.html.

• *Speculations.* An open access journal run by Paul Ennis, who also runs Another Heidegger Blog. *Speculations* is very young, having been founded in 2010 with its first issue due out in June or July of this year, but it promises to be the first journal specifically devoted to Speculative Realism and related enterprises. *Access:* http://www.openhumanitiesalliance.org/incubator/index.php/speculations/index.

• **Urbanomic—Collapse.** Urbanomic is the publisher of the *Collapse* journal, whose second issue was specially devoted to Speculative Realism and which regularly features writings from various figures associated with the movement. *Collapse* is unfortunately not open access but the Urbanomic Web site can operate as a source of citations and related information. *Access:* http://www.urbanomic.com/index.php.

Blogs

• **Another Heidegger Blog.** This blog, run by the editor of the *Speculations* journal, is most notable for its interviews with contemporary philosophers. Both the aforementioned Levi Bryant and Graham Harman have been interviewed, as well as two of the bloggers behind the Speculative Heresy Web site and several other scholars who are unassociated with Speculative Realism. Another Heidegger Blog is also a good place to look for current events such as calls for papers and upcoming conferences. *Access:* http://anotherheidegger-blog.blogspot.com/.

• **Complete Lies.** The Complete Lies blog ranges in depth from posts fleshing out intricate philosophical concepts to providing links to entertaining videos. Like most of the blogs listed above, this one is excellent at summarizing ongoing debates and providing a slew of links to different parties' arguments as they develop online. The tag cloud for Complete Lies is particularly useful, as one can click on "speculative realism" or a particular philosopher's name and all topical entries are retrieved. *Access:* http://buymeout.wordpress.com/.

• **Larval Subjects.** This is the blog of Levi Bryant, author of *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* and co-editor along with Harman of the forthcoming *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Bryant's blog is often a source of discussion and cross-blog conversation on Speculative Realism. Written in a surprisingly accessible style for someone handling such sophisticated topics, the blog also features an extensive blogroll that denotes blogs associated with Speculative Realism with an asterisk. *Access:* http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/.

• **Object-Oriented Philosophy.** This is the blog of Graham Harman, author of *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* as well as *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. Harman's writing is quite prolific, as he often updates Object-Oriented Philosophy several times a day. The blog encompasses more than just Speculative Realism, ranging from advice for would-be philosophers and graduate students to recent news and in-depth updates on Object-Oriented Philosophy. *Access:* http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/.

Conferences and events

• **Philos-L.** Philos-L is perhaps the widest-ranging and largest philosophy electronic list by number of subscribers, claiming some 4,000 members in 60 countries. While the discussion list is run out on the United Kingdom, it is a useful tool for scholars located anywhere in the world. Searches in its archive of messages reveal releases of the journal *Collapse,* a few pertinent calls for papers, numerous Speculative Realism seminars and workshops, and details of the April 2007 conference held at Goldsmiths College in London from which the Speculative Realism movement derives its name. *Access:* http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/archives/philos-l.html.

• **Philosophy Conferences Worldwide: Upcoming Events in Philosophy and Related Fields.** This Web site lists upcoming conferences in philosophy as well as interdisciplinary conferences, which would be relevant to those interested in philosophy, starting with the present month and moving up to a year ahead. Since all the functions are listed on the same Web page, one can search through the text of all conferences for key terms and phrases, but Philosophy Conferences Worldwide has no ordering principle other than chronology. *Access:* http://www.conferencealerts.com/philosophy.htm.

Other specialized resources that did not quite qualify for appearance in Table 2 but for which use is essentially flat throughout the year include the Web of Science, ISI Proceedings, Inspec, NTIS, and most of the FirstSearch resources that are bibliographic but without full-text. High specialization *(Early English Books),* the provision of data that will be meaningful only to sophisticates *(Journal Citation Reports),* and purely bibliographic content about library holdings (RLG, OCLC) characterize the few databases for whose use the academic calendar appears to be largely irrelevant.

Experienced methodologists will recognize the risk of committing the ecological fallacy in making inferences about the behavior of individuals based on group differences (in this case, the population of active Virginia Tech users in the summer as opposed to that in the spring). However, political scientists, marketers, and others do routinely draw fairly confident, if hedged, conclusions about individuals from group data, and it would be very difficult to build an argument for the differential patterns we see in the use of these library resources that did not rest on the well-known distinctions in purpose, niche, and intended audience that differentiate many of the online resources that libraries offer. No academic librarian knowledgeable about the offerings of his or her own institution would find it difficult to identify local resources that vary widely along these same dimensions.

So what?

It's natural to ask whether these data suggest any changes in library practice. One policy implication is that although it makes sense to reduce reference staffing during slow times, there are always people working with our more complex and specialized resources (perhaps even faculty thinking "When the students leave, I can get some real work done on my research?"). Some of our most dedicated users do much of their work when we tend to be lightly staffed, so we should at least make sure that online help is available all the time.

Individual libraries may profit from looking at these ratios in their own cases, and perhaps in making comparisons across institutions. If, for example, a library were to find that a resource it acquired to support general undergraduate instruction is not seeing highly seasonal use, it may indicate that the resource has not been sufficiently promoted to its intended clientele.

The extreme degree of these differences is a useful reminder of just how differentiated our user populations are. We offer a wide range of resources to all, but they are used in highly different ways and to highly different degrees. The data underscore the point that each academic library has user populations, not a user population. And it's not just the parking situation that changes as the year progresses. ℘

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fiction, edited by Lynn Stegner (New York: Penguin, 2002).

6. E-mail with Cycholl, July 16, 2009.

7. Theodore Roethke to Morton Dauwen Zabel, P*oetry: A Magazine of Verse Records,* Box 40, Folder 15, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

8. E-mail with O'Leary, July 10, 2009.

9. E-mail with Scappettone, January 3, 2008. ℘

• ***Philosophy Now*–Events.** The "Events" section of the Web site for the magazine *Philosophy Now* has an extensive list of upcoming conferences, workshops, and seminars arranged by geographic location. The list is quite comprehensive in that regularly occurring informal coffee shop meetings are included alongside national academic conferences. However, it is not possible to limit the Web site's search function to only the events section, and occasions are not indexed other than by location. *Access:* http://www. philosophynow.org/events. ℘