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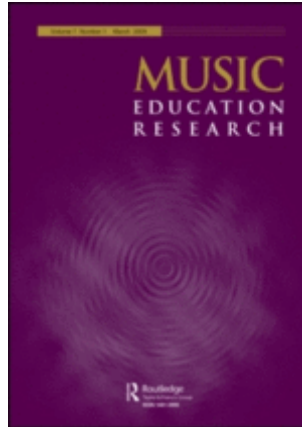
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OOO, Guerrilla Metaphysics, and the Allure of Children's Musical Play

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Anonymised revised version

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Anonymised revised version

Abstract

Inspired by Graham Harman's philosophy of human access, and within the "flattening ontology" of Object Oriented Ontology, Ring o' Roses is speculated about as a finite object with ontological independence from humans, repertoire, song, utility, and cultural context. Ring o' Roses playfully dances us through an introduction to OOO, and on to the idea of young children's early musical play as something different from a bunch of qualities and benefits. Indeed, the reality of musical play can be speculated about as ontologically irreducible, and as having a weird and vast, yet fragile, interior which is announced by allure. Allure is composed of charm, courage, and humour, and is responsible for causation.

Keywords: Object Oriented Ontology, OOO, Harman, children's musical play, allure, charm, causation

Introduction

Since the 1990's a cogent, rational view of the extraordinary value children's musical play has been hard fought-for. Analyses of musical play have noticed observable and algorithmic characteristics such as rhythm, melody, sound exploration, and movement repetition and exaggeration (Alcock 2008; Moorhead and Pond 1941; Nakata and Trehub 2004; Delalande and Cornara 2010, Young 2003), and these data appear to correlate positively with desirable developments in children's behaviour, sociability,

and learning (Zachariou and Whitebread 2015; Kirschner and Thomasello 2010; Brink-Fox, Liu 2012; Paquette and Rieg 2008). The causative relationship between children's musical play and its utility in wellbeing, education, and therapy is well-researched (Barratt 2011; Ilari 2002; Haslbeck 2014, Trevarthen and Malloch 2000), and children's musical play is regarded to be a fun and useful activity (Koops 2017). A regrettable unintended consequence is that musical play's usefulness can be over-harvested leading to a new paradigm of musical play being known, instigated, or designed-for based on conceptual schemes, or systems of representation which are remote from the child, from music, from the plaything, and most importantly, from play. It is not the intention here to dwell on an ecological calamity that beckons when play is presented exclusively as a utility-based activity (see Sutton Smith 1997, or Lester and Russell 2014 for critiques), neither is it the intention to wag a finger at neoliberal policies which contribute to the promotion of compellingly positive psychological, biomedical, or developmental views of music making, as one might find in Hallam and Himonides (2022), or Henriksson-Macaulay (2014), (see Young and Ilari (2019) for complementary insights). Instead, the potential of a philosophy of human access (see **Note 1**) is played-with as a way to think about the world of musical play and its reality beyond human access to it. This is not as a metaphysical critique of how things are known but a compelling, maybe cheerful, explanation of how things such as microprocessors, teddies, glaciers, songs, and musical humans *are*, and how allure is responsible for change in everything, not just humans.

Reading and writing about ontological aspects of reality beyond human access, particularly in relation to music education and research, is a challenging occupation. Engagement in play for no apparent useful reason whatsoever (as opposed to play for a specific purpose extrinsic to that play) is also challenging, and shares significant similarities with philosophising (Huang and Ryall 2018). Towards contemplating the

existence of things in a posthuman world, it seems that a playful approach helps, partly because the concepts are elusive and complex, but also because such contemplation prepares us for momentous and inevitable shifts away from human exceptionalism in a charming, honest, and maybe cheerful, way. Whilst putting posthuman philosophy “to work” sounds a little bit like hard work, putting posthuman philosophy “to play” sounds more appealing and requiring the attuned sense of wonder that is commonplace amongst those playing, and those playing musically, alongside young children (do objects muck about for fun?). The wonderful, and the weird, lies behind musical play’s sounds and appearance, before any human perceives it and harnesses its utility, and the wonderful and weird has as much right to exist as the useful.

As philosopher and game designer Ian Bogost suggests, we can use philosophical lab equipment to do carpentry with philosophy, to slice with or across the grain, to fabricate new constructions and to try to capture an experience which can never be fully understood, in the hope that normative thinking is disrupted (Bogost 2012, 100). To mashup an unlikely group of thinkers’ terminology, all of whom will be explored here, this article uses philosophical laboratory equipment in an artfied way within the laboratory of the possible.

The title of this article was inspired by Graham Harman’s 2005 book “*Guerrilla metaphysics: phenomenology and the carpentry of things*”. Harman employed the term “Guerrilla Metaphysics” in response to his frustration with the restriction implicit in a posthuman philosophical position of everything being interrelated. Harman’s speculative philosophy allows for a reality to exist independent of human thought or influence, whilst Barad’s, for example, argues that matter and meaning is entangled (Barad 2007). For Barad, humans and matter are not autonomous and are co-constituting. For Harman, humans and matter, and assemblages of things, can be

autonomous, and not identifiable by its relations, and if they do relate, can relate vicariously, at a distance (for Harman's position on Barad's philosophy, see Harman 2016).

Harman holds that it is possible to consider a thing as capable of being apart from its relations, not as an empty bare lump of unity (or congealing of agency, as Barad might say), but a thing of "irreducible unity and colourful particularity" which remains apart in its own private vacuum (Harman 2005, p83), existing equally to any other thing, even if it exists differently from other things. For anyone who is not quite prepared to shrink or equalise the hard-won recognition of music in early childhood in academia, Morton (2023) insists that the fact that something exists in the same way as something else has nothing to do with its right to exist. The point being that the world does not require a human observer in order to exist (Morton 2013) and an Object Oriented Ontology is a "flattening ontology" and not flat ethics or flat politics (Morton 2021).

For this article, "Guerrilla" seemed appropriate, because it brings to mind an approach which is interested in the impromptu, improvised, aesthetic acts of things at play which exist and operate regardless of mainstream, or even human-based, notions of music or play, and regardless of any telos to the play. This might be the clock's quirky ticking, the baby's improvisation on motherese, or an impromptu group-devised song about soup. All of these activities are unplanned, and bubble up from somewhere for no particular reason. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, "Metaphysics" comprises an attempt to reach fundamental truths about the abstract nature of, in this case, the being of things at musical play, including the things which are music and play.

The allure of musical play in this article explains how objects are bewitched into being drawn into another object's being. Because allure, like all other objects, is

irreducible to its relations and effects we, like all objects, cannot access allure directly therefore Harman uses metaphor to demonstrate how allure happens in language, when a good metaphorical phrase drives straight to a feeling about something with only a tenuous reference to the original object (see **Note 2**). According to OOO, charm, along with humour, is a part of allure. Charm here has little to do with “charming” as one’s response to a young human attempting adult music, impeded by oversized equipment or overly-challenging repertoire, yet delightfully exceeding one’s expectations. Charm is to do with the *bewitching* quality of the musical play activity, which is in turn related to the play’s shadowy sensual qualities. However, it is allure which causes “quantum leaps from one state of reality into the next by generating a new relation between objects” (Harman 2005, 244). Allure is the key to all causation, where allure is “a general term to cover both the comic and charming ways of encountering the sincerity of objects” (ibid, 142).

To assist in the introduction and application of a relatively new and complex philosophy to children’s musical play, Ring o’ Roses is used as a plausible example of musical play which carries us through the ideas. It is chosen because of its vast ontic reach beyond early childhood music and into disciplines of philosophy and folklore, and for its structure which guides us through introduction and assembly, proclamation, and dispersal.

1. Ring a’ ring o’ roses,
2. A pocketful of posies,
3. A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
4. We all fall down.

1. Ring a' ring o' Roses

What follows is a “quick and dirty” introduction to Object Oriented Ontology, and an indication as to *how* Ring o’ Roses is an odd and real object, with an existence equal that of Martians and mushrooms. Considering *how* Ring o’ Roses exists does not mean thinking about how the song-activity exists for our utility or pleasure, merely how it vicariously reveals itself to us, or to other objects’ sensual qualities.

Object Oriented Ontology (“Triple O”, or OOO) is a branch of Speculative Realism which is a contemporary philosophical movement developed by Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassoux (Mackay 2007), and comprises a growing number of scholars and artists including Timothy Morton, Ian Bogost, Levi Bryant, Patricia Ticineto Clough, and Jane Bennett. Adherents of Speculative Realism critique, and speculate beyond, the “narrow bandwidth” of philosophy restricted to the human-world correlate which is the view that meaning is only possible between a human mind and its thought (Morton 2013a). Harman, whose philosophy of human access is applied here, adheres to a “naïve realism” which holds that a world independent of human thought exists outside that mind, and that we can know this world (Harman 2012). This position aligns with the Kantian philosophical position of the noumenon as an object independent of human thought, and the phenomenon as the object perceived by the senses. However, OOO applies Kant’s position to all things – unicorns, puff pastry, oceans - and not just humans. Harman holds that it is a matter of fact, not dogma, that humans think, and the human-world correlate is a fact, but the human-world correlate does not have to be a necessity because things can exist outside of human thought (Harman 2005, 79). Things exist, and appear to other things, and humans might, or might not, have partial access to this reality. Partial access is the basis of OOO, which Harman developed into a theory of

objects, including horses, which are withdrawn from their relations with humans or anything else (Harman 2020, 21). Harman's PhD thesis "Tool-Being: Elements in a Theory of Objects" (Harman 1999) built on a thorough consideration of Heidegger's tool analysis which illustrates how things withdraw from our access. All things, to paraphrase Heidegger, are fundamentally withdrawn, revealing themselves selectively to other things under different conditions, and Heidegger famously used the example of a hammer to illustrate this point (Heidegger 2010). Harman's is a "weakly correlationist" position, and other positions are available, and are debated hotly (Harman 2020a).

Harman created some useful neologisms which describe our attempts to get to know things as slippery objects. For example, one can refer to the object which is Ring o' Roses by singing the song, describing typical accompanying actions, and finding a reference to it in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Opie and Opie 1997). These helpful descriptions, which could go into great detail, would be "undermining" the object, describing its qualities. Or one can refer to Ring o' Roses, through the effects which come about through its use, such as a coordinated musical performance by children, enculturation, or time being passed agreeably, which would be "overmining" the object. One could do both of these things for a more thorough analysis, which would be "duomining" the object (Harman 2011).

None of these analytical activities, singly or all together, "exhausts the object" because objects stubbornly remain unified but irreducible, and withdrawn, entities. To illustrate; the most careful observation of an episode of musical play can only generate data about an episode of observed musical play, and the brain activity of one person at musical play can only generate data about one person's brain at musical play. The most respectful process of rationalisation of musical play does not reveal the "being" of the

play itself, because the primary dualism is not between the real object and the human mind, but between the real object and the sensual qualities of other objects in ways which are not recognisably physical (Harman 2010). Real objects are for appearances only, and the totality of the object's being is not identical to its surfaces (Davies 2019), or in OOO terminology, the real object is more than a bundle of qualities and relations.

To illustrate this last point; a 1950's radio transmission of Ring o' Roses might have travelled over seventy light years away from earth by now, retaining its essence within an electromagnetic wave-song, and have been received by a creature whizzing by in a spaceship. The Ring o' Roses object has the same essence as when it was sung to a microphone for radio transmission on earth but now, being part of the alien's being, appears to be an alien-received-electromagnetic-wave. It's still Ring o' Roses, and now it is a timeless and fond memory, a plausible story, and an infection in the form of an alien's earworm.

Ring o' Roses can be considered as a real object (a thing which cannot be exhausted by under-, over-, or duoming, and which withdraws from access) which has real qualities which essentially make it what it is and not something else. This real object - real quality tension is responsible for anything at all happening, or causation (Harman 2005 and 2020; Morton 2013), because if everything were the same, then change would be redundant. Yet objects are different from one another, and change happens. Whilst an object's infinite inner life is relatively unaffected by bumping into other objects, objects do cause change by entering into causal relationships which might entail nurture or damage (Harman 2005, 73). Why objects bother to enter into causal relationships which might nurture or damage is because they are lured into relations, not with the real object, but with the sensually hidden depths calling out from the object's core. Harman developed Heidegger's "das Geviert" (objects' internal fourfold structure)

to explain the object's internal structure (Harman 2010). Harman holds that there are two types of object – real and sensual, and two types of quality – real and sensual, which constitute the fourfold “structure”. OOO is built on the tensions between real and sensual, and between objects and qualities. The real object (which is not necessarily composed of matter) “withdraws” in the Heideggerian sense, and cannot be exhausted by under- or over-mining methods. Sensual objects cannot be autonomous because they generally exist within the interior of a real object as the correlate of a real object (Harman 2018, 80), yet sensual objects have their own sensual qualities, notes and profiles which surround the object which is being experienced (Young 2020). Real qualities are indicative of the real object's essence because there are certain qualities which make the object what it is, in whatever way it is being apprehended. Sensual qualities are in tension with the sensual object. The sensual quality – sensual object tension is phenomenological “time”, which need not be remotely eventful. Temporality, according to Harman, is “the play of objects and qualities through which everything, or nothing, occurs (Harman and Witmore 2023, 101). As alluring as that comment is to someone interested in musical play and temporal art forms it is allure, and not time, which is the tension associated with the intermittent splitting away of the real object from its sensual qualities. It is allure which “splits an object from its sensual notes” (Harman 2005, 245), where notes are a plurality of qualities private to the object. If an object is split from its *real* qualities, it is destroyed, but if an object is intermittently split from its sensual qualities or notes, the object can undergo a revolution, either gradual or profound.

In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, Harman describes allure as how objects announce their presence to one another: the object's “original implicit, compressed, sensual notes which had occupied a single point of unity now fragment and are drawn towards the

deep real object to which they seem to belong” (ibid). Allure facilitates “quantum leaps” from one state of being to another by generating new relations between objects (ibid, 244). Indeed, allure accounts for causation and for the creation of new real objects - new art-objects and new song-objects, and the destruction of previous objects.

2. *A pocketful of posies*

Whilst contemplating Ring o’ Roses’ potential as a real object, it is worth mentioning how weird it is for some that Ring o’ Roses is considered to be children’s musical *play*. For many, the reality of Ring around the Roses is a great distance from, or in OOO-speak, highly buffered from (or only marginally nuanced by) play. In other words, play and Ring o’ Roses are related, but not in a way important to play. Play scholar Bob Hughes’ taxonomy of play does not feature “musical play” as a play type (Hughes 2002). Hughes was of the opinion that music was an example of a highly specialised activity which, “like jewellery-making or candle-making...invariably has to be supervised and taught to children” (Hughes 2001, 50). He questioned whether such activities, which require adult supervision or, presumably, an adult to lead the play, should be in a play space, being better suited to a school environment. Even Wittgenstein had an opinion on “Ring-a-ring-a-roses”, because it was the singing game that came to his mind when considering family resemblances between children’s games (Wittgenstein 2001, 66). Bernard Suits disagrees with Wittgenstein’s assessment, through the words of a narrative character Grasshopper in “Games, Life, and Utopia”, that “Ring Around the Rosie” is “simply a kind of dance to vocal accompaniment, or a choreographed song. It is no more a game than Swan Lake is” (Suits 2014, 98; 200). The point here being that Ring-a-ring-a-roses might be more representative of ludus (the rule-bound game) than paidia (spontaneous play) according to Caillois (2001; 1958), or representative of a performance.

Yet we know that Ring o' Roses and other traditional games or songs can be heard in children's self-initiated or spontaneous play, emerging in play amongst siblings and peers with no adult input (Koops 2010; Countryman 2014; Marsh 2017; Custodero et al. 2016). However, traditional rhymes *are* taught in early childhood settings and schools through music educational pedagogical approaches as introduced by Kodály (Campbell and Alvarez 1990), and for specific benefits such as self-regulation (Zachariou and Whitebread 2017). An emphasis on accurate music reproduction can be play undertaken in seriousness which has “acquired a kind of cultural gravitas and esteem” (Bateman (2011, p54). However it is hard to reconcile curious, messy play alongside this dance-organised play, because play disequilibrates (Marks-Tarlow 2010, 38-39) being constantly in search of novelty and arousal, and play questions the dominant normality (Eichberg and Larsen 2019).

To present a unique summary of Ring o' Roses: Ring o' Roses is a real object, and as a real object it resists being “known” via under-, over-, or duoming, and it reveals itself partially and selectively to other objects via something like Husserl's “adumbrations” (Harman 2013), in perspectives and viewpoints, or a version of “sampling” (Morton 2013, 145), in small pieces. Also as a real object it has locally manifest real qualities, which distinguish it from other singing games like “Round and round the garden”, from behaviour management, or from a kettle. Regarding allure, this might or might not happen, but if its sensual qualities should split away, and cause change, real objects die and new real objects emerge. When sung, the song might “song” the child, and the child might “child” the song because these objects are:

“inscrutable holes of withdrawn energy [and they] somehow still emit fragrance or radio signals by way of the notes that ought to have collapsed entirely into their dark and unified cores, but have not done so.” (Harman 2005, 184).

It is clear that the notes of fragrance or radio signals from Ring o' Roses' interior are alluring to some children, a few philosophers, fewer scholars of play, and an unknown quantity of aliens, who all apprehend those notes uniquely.

Some of Ring o' Roses' qualities are moderately tolerant to change, indicating that there are some inessential, or accidental qualities which can shift and change yet the real object remains recognisable. For example, sung in a different key, Ring o' Roses remains the same song. Some of Ring o' Roses' other qualities are essential qualities which might be relevant to the music or the play which, if shifted too far, might alter, or maybe destroy, the original real object. The Ring o' Roses real object meets the sensual qualities of the child in a buffered way which prevents it from fusing into an undifferentiated new object. Or the child's sensual qualities can form a vicarious cohesion, facilitating a new undifferentiated object – maybe the song-child. This new song-child is a newly-formed real object, with a new aesthetic encircling it, and it is a memorial to the former, disappeared song-child.

3. A-tishoo! A-tishoo!

The charm of children's musical play is magical, bewitching, and weird, and it is charm which lures carers, social scientists, and educators into its embrace. "How charming!" is a typical response to a child playfully and happily creating music, or joyfully engaging in a tuneful game of Ring o' Roses, but this is not the "flavour" of charm that is sought here. Nor is it the charm synonymous with "cute", specifically the "aww" factor which arises from a power differential between the cute thing and how that thing is apprehended. One can also reject for now the cuteness which can be appropriated as an appeal to engage emotionally in social behaviours including companionship, cooperative action/play and communication through emotional reactivity according to Dale (2016), an academic researching cuteness.

Let us say, because we are engaged with ontology, that musical play bewitches and charms things into certain ways of being, and in musical play the curiosity-driven disruption of play is precariously balanced with the patterning of music. This is a charmed way of being, affected by judgements of music, play, and children, and is a “tainted” judgement according to Kant (Kant and Walker 2008). It is unlikely that Kant was foreshadowing the (often lewd) term “taint” as a modern portmanteau of “it” and “ain’t”. But we are not charmed by the point-at-able “it, it, it”, of the play’s surface features. We are charmed by what the play “ain’t”; by what is beyond the known and the scientific. A contemporary description of this particular affected state could be “bewitched”. Music charms the baby and the onlooker in the Middle English etymological sense of charm being an incantation or magic spell which lures us towards something magical.

For humans, and all objects, allure is related to charm and also humour and courage, and it is responsible for rearranging an object’s comportment, and possibly attraction, to other objects. In *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, Harman describes allure as “a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing’s unity and its plurality of notes somehow partially disintegrates” (Harman 2005, 143). This disintegration seems to allow for access straight to the sensual, and an object to be lured directly in to another object’s interior, which is exactly what a good metaphor does. That which we find charming is often something which remains what it is, yet has itself been charmed, or innocently absorbed by something else (Harman 2005, 137). This absorption is easy to observe in children’s musical play, particularly when the child appears to be engaging in that play both effortlessly and seriously, and it is equally and oppositely difficult to observe in inanimate objects. The charmed, and charming, child

at musical play is being what it is, a child at musical play, even if that being involves the child's aesthetic striving (Nguyen 2020) to sustain that being.

Charming play is a sincere collusion between objects doing what they do, moving and being moved with accompanying sounds and vibrations in the local brave, sincere, humorous style, and it appears to be a compellingly interesting and alluring "foreign land" to the charmed observer, whatever they might be. Charm, positioned in OOO as a part of the tension between any real object and its sensual qualities, means that Harman has neatly sidestepped Kantian formalism (Harman 2020, 39), and the human is demoted from being the sole authority on aesthetics. As part of this package, "charm" is liberated from judgement of human taste or morality.

Harman defines charm as "an elixir...objects' innocent absorption in being just what they are...packed deeply with sincere agents" (Harman 2005, 137). In this way, musical play is not music-plus-play even though music and play are part of the activity, because both music and play have become a new object and assume different qualities in their new combination. Charm, within this combination, is allied with courage (Harman 2005, 141). Musical play is not free-form noise and thrashing about, instead musical play is the ability to steadfastly retain one's core being, whilst manipulating the world, with humour and courage, into new objects such as sounds and shapes which lure and charm.

4. We all fall down

If charm is the symptom of the object's sincere, serious, courageous, and humoured actions, then allure is the reason. Allure, according to Harman is the relation between the real object and its sensual qualities. Real objects cannot make direct contact, but can interact through the mediation of the sensual. In the sensual realm, nothing can happen and the real object persists, or something can happen, and the real

object changes, or is replaced. Time is created when things happen, yet one cannot assume that anything happens just because “time passes” (Harman and Witmore 2023, 102-124). It is in this sense, that Ring o’ Roses is apprehended indirectly and aesthetically, and it is aesthetics that does the heavy lifting of vicarious causation where aesthetics, according to Harman (2020b, 24), is the general theory of how objects (the real and sensual) differ from their own qualities (real and sensual). In play this relationship between the real object and its sensual qualities can be straightforward and unremarkable in an invisible present-at-hand way, or in an artful play activity such as musical play the relationship is alluring, charming, maybe weirdly familiar and novel, and in all likelihood, paradoxical and difficult to pin down as play.

Pinpointing a paradox in musical play, ethologist Ellen Dissanayake coined the term “artification” to explain how the somewhat musical properties, or temporal aesthetic operations, of formalisation, repetition, exaggeration, and elaboration within an impromptu exchange of mother-baby communication, contributes to the making of *ordinary* bodies, vocalisations, movements, and surroundings, into something *extraordinary* (Dissanayake 2017). Dissanayake recognised that artful behaviour operations are used in ritualistic practice as well as in diverse art forms, and pointed out that people “artify” things they care about, or consider important, utilising temporal aesthetic operations which perfectly convene as a paradox of the ordinary extraordinary. Dissanayake left this well-defined paradox hanging, tantalisingly. The “ordinary extraordinary” cannot be easily accounted for by any “power of play”.

From a play perspective, an excess of order such as my-turn-your-turn or a well-rendered song tips the balance of the activity away from play and into social ritual. As play scholar Henricks explained, play is marked by being a voluntary activity of exploration and transgression, whilst ritual honours rules and boundaries. There are

differences between a sense of play which is about exploring the possibilities of life in careless ways, as a pattern of individual action featuring forming, de-forming, and re-forming of circumstances (Henricks 2008, 176), and a sense of play which as a careful exploration of, and experimentation with, musical figures and rhythmic movements. One can argue that musical play comprises artful forms in its sounds and movements, but its purpose is not perfection or accurate reproduction; rather, the play's success depends on how well the players strive to be playfully curious about, and to experiment with, possibilities within the restrictions of musical figures. Therefore musical play, to be paradoxical in Dissanayake's sense, is a modality of being which requires a sincerity and a courageous charm within which objects have the space and lack of theory (as in acceptance of the weird and magical) to dwell in their aesthetic, sensual realm.

Again!

Returning to the notion of Ring o' Roses as a real object with locally manifest qualities is slightly out of kilter with Karen Barad's philosophy. Karen Barad states clearly that individuals do not pre-exist their interactions. Rather, individuals emerge through, and as part of, their entangled intra-relating (Barad 2007). Harman's position on real objects suggests that entities absolutely do pre-exist their relations, albeit as a shadowy, masked version of themselves. Both positions agree on the decentring of humans from meaning production, and differ in that Barad's Agential Realism has entities being continuously re-formed by intra-actions, whilst speculative realism has entities which pre-exist any form of interaction (Harman 2016), before being re-formed or maybe destroyed. Both philosophers are using realism within an ontology which allows for the existence of things, and for meaning independent of human thought but, as Harman remarks, if everything is entangled as Barad suggests, then the human mind is part of everything and therefore there cannot be an entity autonomous of human thought (Harman 2016).

Bogost agrees, suggesting that we pay too much attention to things which happen to appear easily to our senses, and not enough to the “murky mists of the really real”, and that many forms of Posthumanism might not be posthuman enough (Bogost 2012, 8). As such, there is a quibble with the flavour of realism to which Harman and Barad adhere - one in which entities can be independent (OOO and speculative realism), and one in which entities cannot (agential realism). In OOO an object which pre-exists its relations is simultaneously a part of another object, and is an independent object in its own right (Bryant 2011), as has been playfully implied by separately utilising four lines of the Ring o’ Roses rhyme. As Timothy Morton jests, there is no “Object Police” (Littlefair 2017), and there might be an infinite number of objects jostling around, or just one object - a remark which brings Barad and Harman back together again, in potentially one “object” of Morton, the cosmos, black holes, Ring o’ Roses, and racing pigeons (see **Note 3**). Harman maintains, in *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, that causation is “always, vicarious, asymmetrical, and buffered” (Harman 2005, 200). Real objects do not confront each other directly, but only through a shared, sensual meeting point. That meeting is unequal owing to being between a real and a sensual object, and the apprehension is cushioned, protecting the original real object, unless something calamitous or reality-changing occurs.

Again Again!

Being is a dangerous occupation. As objects are formed by new relations, others die. As Morton says, “the aesthetic dimension, in other words, is where death happens (Morton 2013, 188). One could say that tuning-in to being musical in this way has to cease before tuning-in to being musical in another way, and the first way disappears, leaving only sensual impressions and memories which fade, or prick and prod. This cessation can be a good thing. Both play and music can be dark and cruel, and there is no reason

to think that musical play is always a positive experience, or responsible for desirable outcomes. Our attempts to ameliorate the risks of dark and cruel play are themselves risky. We attempt to rationalise the paradox, charm, and magic within the play at great risk to their existence. Once these features are rationalised and contextualised, they can cease to exist, just like the humour of an explained joke.

Being is also a magical thing. Musical play has a vast ontological excess beyond the functional, and the musically functioning, and on into the weird. Musical play plays with causation by creating conditions for allure. The play plays with what could happen, and things disappear and become other things – as the drum becomes a pot of polar bear stew, or the music a warm blanket – with no magic wand required.

Campbell acknowledged that older children's enthusiasm for musical play indicated that something "magical is happening", and Campbell attributed that magic to the child's desire for music learning (Campbell and Alvarez 1990). It is quite possible that the music educator regards children immersed in their work of learning as "magical", but magical creation in play, or in Object Oriented Ontology, infers the necessary death of music or play objects. Maybe Dissanayake's "extraordinary ordinary" is evidence of adults' attempt to control magical life and death. Magical rites are usually used for the purpose of overcoming uncertainty (Moeran 2017), so the use of recapitulating musical qualities of formalisation, repetition, exaggeration, and elaboration which work so well for bonding with and settling of a baby, and for older children's socialisation, coordination, and communication, is related to how we aesthetically coordinate the vastness of objects' interiors in a way that is sincere and charming, and we hope for the best.

Conclusion

Object Oriented Ontology, as outlined in “*Guerrilla Metaphysics*” (Harman, 2005), is a philosophy which decentres the human as the arbiter of reality, and has been playfully applied here to speculation about the realities of the song-game-activity Ring o’ Roses, and of early childhood musical play. OOO’s sometimes “dizzying” ideas (Bennett 2012) were played with congruently, in a manner akin to Caillois’ ilinx play (Caillois and Barash 2001), to disrupt normative, utility-based, human-centred thought, and to focus on the magical allure of musical play.

Harman gives us terminologies (under-, over-, and duoming), which indicate how we currently tend to examine musical play by its qualities and uses (see **Note 4**). The philosophy Harman advocates, Object oriented ontology, helps us to appreciate how we might apprehend children’s musical play as a weird reality in a charmed universe caused by allure, partially accessible by metaphor, and jostling with nested objects such as song-child, melody, rhythm, effort, and (well, why not?), magic. The musical play object has a vast interior where one can dwell and vibe differently, aesthetically, beautifully, as Ingold might say (Ingold 2022), and in a manner which is only accidentally useful, and entirely magical. This commentary aims to contribute a baby-step, a baby “guerrilla”-step, towards a new story, a new mythopoesis, of children’s musical play which is recalibrated away from human utility and lured towards a charmed, aesthetic life with fellow objects.

Notes

Note 1 Graham Harman coined the descriptive term “philosophy of human access” for his take on OOO. The alternative term “correlationism” was coined by Quentin Meillassoux. Both are concerned with the Kantian notion that knowledge is exclusively based on how the world correlates with human thought, and both consider this limiting to thought. Meillassoux accepts

that “to be is to be a correlate” (Meillassoux 2008, 28), and correlationism is inevitable and comes in different intensities (Young 2020). Harman suggests that correlationism, or finitude, is not exclusively human, but is inevitable for all objects. As such, objects, without any help from a human, take part in each other’s sensual engagement (Yoran 2021).

Note 2 Harman employs metaphor to express the tension between perceived objects and their manifold tangible properties. To observe something is not to be something, but to observe something is to be an executant actor of that thing. Furthermore all objects, including inanimate objects have their own “I” as they execute themselves. As Harman writes: Ortega’s “the cypress is a flame” is thus the poetic creation of a new object without tangible qualities which draws us into the sensual tree (Harman, 2005).

Note 3 Bogost coined the term “Latour Litany” for lists of objects within OOO writing (Bogost 2012). Bryant suggests that the lists perform an object-oriented epoché (Bryant 2010), so that the reader resists the notion of one object standing in for all objects.

Note 4 There is much more to explore on the topic, in that aesthetic interactions of musical play, these artified interactions, are responsible for the creation of space and time (Harman and Witmore 2023).

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