Tim Hyde’s summary of *Tool-Being* is both vigorous and largely accurate. On the whole, his review displays a balanced sense of what my argument actually achieves and what it merely hints at without yet having the means to complete. His overview of the book is certainly lucid, but of even greater importance is his willingness to grapple over basic philosophical issues: a trait widely eroded by the stylistic credo of continental philosophy, which understandably prefers to appreciate the total legacy of great philosophers rather than slicing them up into isolated propositions. The first half of Hyde’s article contains no serious inaccuracies, and it would be pointless to quibble over minor disagreements. But the latter portions of his account do misread the book in at least one significant way. More seriously, they are based on a philosophical prejudice for which Hyde offers no clear defense, and which serves to undo most of the positive steps in *Tool-Being* that he claims to appreciate. Since our chief disagreement is expressed by Hyde himself in the section entitled “As-Is,” I will confine my remarks to that section.

Hyde accurately identifies the two most important systematic points in *Tool-Being*: the reading of Heidegger’s fourfold, and the radical expansion of the as-structure to include wild beasts, plants, and inanimate objects rather than human Dasein alone. But while Hyde is persuaded by my reading of the fourfold as an intersection of two great axes of the world, he has serious objections to my account of the as-structure. In an especially clever twist, he even holds that the double axis of the fourfold already serves to undercut what he regards as my needlessly flat version of the as-structure. This leads Hyde to reject the “hyperbolic” claim of *Tool-Being* that this structure can be extended beyond the human sphere. In this way, he enters into strategic alliance with a more traditional view of the privileged human subject, and even with some of the more mainstream Heidegger commentaries (though he otherwise endorses my wish that they not be encouraged). The whole of Hyde’s argument hinges on whether his vision of the as-structure is more true to the world than my own. That is the question that ultimately needs to be addressed in these remarks.

Hyde further identifies two major features in my model of the as-structure, and lodges objections against both. First, there is my claim that the difference between as and non-as is absolute, so that the gap between an object and any access or relation to it would have to be infinite. Second, there is my assertion that the as-structure cannot support a distinction between different types of comportment: since the as-structure is present everywhere at all times, and since it is always a distortion of that to which it is related, it provides no way to distinguish between theory, praxis, the creation of artworks, animal instinct, and sheer causal interaction. Hyde is correct that both of these notions are among the very pillars of the book. My perception of a volcano is indeed hopelessly distant from the dark reality of volcano-being, no matter whether I conduct diligent geological research or merely take a superficial stroll along the edge of the crater. In addition, the same difficulty haunts inhuman relations as well, since the whole of the volcano’s reality is also not unlocked by the rocks or sunlight or bewildered moths that vanish into its cone. Against the first point, Hyde objects that the distance between things and relations cannot possibly be infinite, since otherwise we would never be able to talk about objects at all. Against the second point, he insists that human Dasein must retain its privileged status in philosophy, and that I will need to modify my “wild” and “outrageous” position in a more traditional direction (assuming that I am granted at least three additional years of sur-
vival and sanity to pull off the job, as Hyde kindly wishes). But both objections are weak, and cause Hyde to become immobilized in a worn-out philosophical position that ought to bore anyone possessing the degree of mental energy and wit displayed in his review. In what follows, I will urge him to reconsider his position.

Before discussing the status of the as-structure, it should be mentioned that Hyde does misrepresent my argument in one significant way: namely, it is not my claim that all objects in the world are initially part of a single all-devouring contexture, and that we must discover the way by which this monstrous apeiron is then broken up into individual pieces and local termini. Quite the contrary. Chapter One of Tool-Being does describe the individual pieces of a bridge being swallowed up into the bridge as a whole, and then this bridge being swallowed up into still larger contexts, and so on to infinity. But this is never described as my own position; instead, it is framed explicitly as a thought-experiment and reductio ad absurdum of Heidegger’s holistic exaggeration that there is no such thing as “an” equipment. This impossible position is the exact opposite of my own, and is included in the book solely for polemical purposes. Hyde is eloquent and concise when he says that the problem for holism isn’t just how there could be objects at all, it is rather how there could be objects and relations. But this merely restates the guiding theme of Tool-Being as a whole, so that I am startled when he says that Harman understands this but for the most part ignores it. Even if Hyde read the example of the bridge differently from how it was intended, I fail to see how he could still regard me as some sort of monist after the concluding Chapter Three, whose central concept is the idea of a vast army of individual vacuum-sealed objects existing in such utterly pristine isolation from one another that their only hope of communion is to revive some form of occasional cause. If anything, the book has more problems trying to explain relations than to explain objects—which is precisely why the sequel, Guerrilla Metaphysics, has the sole mission of trying to describe how objects can communicate with one another.

But this is a side-issue, since our real point of dispute concerns the as-structure. Hyde’s primary complaint is that my model of an infinite gap between objects and relations does not allow us any way to talk about objects. Focused above all on the human sphere, he fails to note that it would also not allow for any causal interaction among atoms, flames, emeralds, or moons. But in fact, the entire point of Tool-Being is that there must be some way for separate objects to interact despite their infinite distance, which is precisely why occasional cause (or as I now call it, vicarious cause) is specified as the theme of future inquiry. Hyde knows this. His real objection is that he thinks the solution to the problem is already available in Dasein’s encounter with the missing, which for him already goes beyond mere presence-at-hand to make visible the unready-to-hand. In other words, only part of the as-structure is delivered over to sheer presence-at-hand, while another part already allows direct access to things by alerting us to their absence. In the aforementioned crafty maneuver, Hyde even suggests that my own theme of the second axis (between a thing’s sheer existence and its abundance of qualities) should already have alerted me to this. I should have focused not on relations, which come in only two flavors, but instead on references or assignments, which allow access to the full multitude of missing objects.

Hyde is right to say, as I myself say, that there must be gaps within the world at all times. The universe cannot be formed solely of entities sleekly assigned to one another, for then there would be nothing but pure instantaneous action without any individual objects or regions of the world at all. There must always be disruptions or malfunctions within reality. I am again puzzled when Hyde claims that I think such breakdowns happen only every now and then, since the absolute core of my book is the constant tension between objects and their relations. But this misreading of my views is harmless when compared with Hyde’s truly disastrous philosophical step. In his own words: “something has to be missing somewhere at all times... The structure of always re-ordering, always dealing with something missing, is called Dasein. Dasein is the principle of finite resistance, which prevents everything from be-
ing done at once.” Reminiscent of Slavoj Žižek, he adds that “there is necessarily a ‘gap’ between world-being and broken world. Dasein can thus be thought of as the failed movement to transcendence in this ‘gap.’” But nowhere does Hyde offer the faintest trace of an argument that human Dasein alone is capable of instituting such gaps in the world, even though he is reviewing a book that made the diametrically opposite claim over the course of several hundred pages. He simply pulls privileged human existence from his pocket like a magic canary, not an especially original trick, since it has dominated the history of philosophy since Kant.

Consider the case of a fire raging through some unexplored valley of Tibet. Here there is no instantaneous inferno that chars the entire valley, in a flash, into some homogeneous glowing ember. Instead, there are numerous specific objects scattered in the valley, each of them resisting the fire with different levels of tenacity; the fire also needs time to work its way from the point of origin toward its more distant victims. In short, this situation like any other is riddled with gaps and with a full array of individual objects, even though human Dasein is nowhere to be found. Either these objects exist independently of Dasein’s presence and enter into conflict with one another, or they do not. Either the fire and the leaf have integral reality apart from human being, or this reality is somehow generated by the presence of humans; either they truly act against one another in themselves, or they do so only as correlates of human experience. There is no middle ground available. Hence, it is false sophistication when Hyde tries to avoid falling into the idealist trap by saying that of Dasein were not, objects neither would nor would they not be. This is a simple cop-out, bordering on a word game. Hyde tries to reassure me that I have nothing to fear from his position, since “the objects uncovered by Dasein, are [nonetheless] uncovered as they were beforehand.” In other words, the fire going on right now in the Tibetan valley neither exists nor fails to exist, since none of us are there. But if one of us travels there to survey the damage, we are still somehow not summoning the valley into existence for the first time à la Berkeley, but rather uncovering it as it was beforehand. (The pro-

viso that it need only be possible for Dasein to travel to the valley simply confuses the picture further with Schoolman-like subtlety, while solving nothing.) Contra Hyde, there is plenty to fear from this model, since it entails that the subterranean reality of objects is not possessed independently by those objects, but is merely some sort of gap or excess posited by human being beyond its immediate perceptions. And this is the view of Žižek, not of object-oriented philosophy.

I do not blame Hyde personally for all of this, since it is precisely the same trick that allows virtually the whole of contemporary philosophy to suppress the autonomous reality of the world while disingenuously denying that this process is underway. Those who deny that the difference between realism and idealism is meaningful always claim to be above the fray, and yet strangely enough, they always end up taking sides with idealism against what is supposedly the only alternative: scientific naturalism. (To give just one example, this is the founding hypocrisy of phenomenology, as shown in the opening chapter of Guerrilla Metaphysics.) All of the rhetorical posturing that surrounds the debate over realism should simply be ignored in favor of a simple litmus test that can be performed on any philosopher. Namely: does this author have anything to tell us about the interaction of two inanimate objects in isolation from human experience? The answer for Heidegger is a resounding “no.” The answer is equally negative for Žižek, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Husserl, Wittgenstein, and most others along the superhighway stretching back to Kant and Hegel. Among recent philosophers, perhaps only Whitehead can claim to have accounted for the life of non-human objects, though his position is haunted by other serious difficulties. The problem is that everyone wants to avoid the naive versions of realism, but they also don’t want to be driven into the patent absurdities of solipsism, since it is far safer not to adopt any metaphysical position at all. Having painted itself into a corner on this issue, contemporary philosophy is left with the sole emergency measure of inventing sophisticated compromise phrases such as “internal realism,” “quasi-realism,” or “the mad human subject positing the very gap between real and

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ideal.” But all of this reduces reality to its effect on humans: a position better known simply as idealism. What is most shocking is that such predictable middle-of-the-road formulations are always advanced with an air of ingenuous breakthrough, as though the age-old paradox of real and ideal had finally been unmasked as meaningless, when they really just state the unspoken default position of ninety percent of philosophers working in both the analytic and continental traditions.

The way to escape from this deadlock is not to scoff at the very question of the real world: beating up reactionaries in the street is never a very high calling for intellectuals, and in the present case it is doubtful whether “naive realism” even poses a threat anymore. Instead, we need to radicalize our notion of what reality means. Instead of returning to the naive realism of present-at-hand slabs of objective matter (a model no longer followed even by physicists) we must enter a landscape in which the collision between rocks, paper, flame, cosmic radiation, nuclear submarines, crocodiles, federal judges, and centaurs is not a story of inert interactions between physical forces. Rather, it is a metaphysical drama in which each of these objects withdraws infinitely into its private depths while also somehow extending probes, tendrils, or electrical infrastructure toward its neighbors in order to make mutual influence between objects possible. And this clearly requires that all objects are on the same footing, with no privilege whatsoever for human Dasein: an object is an object, whether human or not. There is no such thing as a special “reflexive” relation belonging to humans alone, since Dasein’s awareness is no different in kind from any of the other distortions belonging to the as-structure. At least I have given a lengthy argument for this view in the book, whereas Hyde opposes it only via pistol shot, with the arbitrary dictate that my position is too strange to be true. His efforts to “modify” the argument of Tool-Being only tend to soften the book, and to push it back toward the increasingly stale mainstream of Heidegger studies.

To conclude on a positive note, what I most enjoyed about Hyde’s review is his willingness to discuss actual metaphysical issues, a process that has been accelerating in analytic philosophy in recent years, but which is still viewed as strangely gauche in the continental circles in which Hyde and I apparently both travel. Hyde’s article takes a clear stand as to the nature of reality. He sticks his neck out to as great a degree as I myself did, and for this he deserves nothing but gratitude. Is it too much to expect further exchanges of this kind in the decades to come, not only with Hyde himself but with many others? This would require a massive shift of tone in the continental philosophy movement, which continues its fatal obsession with language, perception, power, texts, hermeneutic circles, social constructions, conditions of possibility, impossibilities of possibilities, fantasy projections, and other drug paraphernalia of the philosophy of human access. The truly refreshing countermove would be to discuss the things themselves, and not some meaningless notion of “things themselves for us” which is the central concept not only of Tim Hyde, but also of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception and dozens of other celebrated works of contemporary philosophy. To modify Tool-Being in the direction of such watery quasi-realism would be to strip the wildcat of its claws, at precisely the moment when its claws most need to be sharpened.

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