



# 2012: Towards an object-oriented photography

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'2012' is an event, a brand, a spectacle, a geographical space, a cultural and media practice, a political and economic assemblage. As "Big Build", "London 2012" or "legacy", '2012' is a panoply of human and unhuman, material and virtual, real and imaginary objects: athletes and activists; journalists and websites; sponsors and contracts; TV rights and logos; ideologies of 'participation' and 'regeneration'; Siberian pine velodrome planks and toxic chemicals; database algorithms and surveillance drones... and photographs.

'2012' is, in part, being built and imagined online. There are the official images but also the distributed montage of photographs, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Instagram images; those taken as the East End has been transformed and those which will form part of the documenting of the Games and its legacy.

The JPEG protocol is one of the software and imaging actants (as Bruno Latour would call them) in play in that imagining of '2012'. As the most popular codec for photographs online, the standard that underpins the 300,000 photographs uploaded every second to Facebook's Timelines (Beaver 2008), it enables searches, geotagging, embedding and viewing of the images or imaginings (what we might call 'imag(in)ings') in browsers, apps and mashups: the social imag(in)ing of 2012.

The images on the following pages are part of a practice-research project exploring that protocol and the imag(in)ing of 2012. My project uses the object-oriented philosophy (OOP) of Graham Harman (2011) as a way of both understanding that assemblage and imaginary and as an impetus to new imaging.

In brief, OOP holds that all objects - whether real or virtual, human or unhuman - have an equal ontological position. They are all equally present and actual. Further, they have different dimensions. In a Heideggerian sense they withdraw - we can never access their full reality, there is always more. As with Heidegger's famous hammer, an object's reality remains hidden until something goes wrong and it breaks, suddenly emerging into consciousness. In a Husserlian sense they have a sensual dimension that we encounter as different instantiations or a myriad of qualities accessible in particular moments and spaces. The JPEG protocol slips out of reach. All we ever encounter are its instantiations as it encodes dot jpg files.

My project understands the distributed web of imag(in)ings on Flickr, Facebook, Twitter and the infinite archives of Google's cache as a mesh (as Timothy Morton calls it (2010)) of objects connecting and reconnecting in a myriad of ways. The images, the things they capture, the photographer, her camera's CCD, the software, the server on which the image sits, the browser that understands that data, the social network's business strategy... are all objects. They connect and reconnect, forming new objects (the 'Photo Stream', the 'data-open-to-datamining', the 'archive', '2012').

As well as offering a way of understanding distributed imag(in)ing networks, computational assemblages and cultures, OOP offers a way of approaching practice. What I am calling 'object-oriented photography' (OOPh) looks to imag(in)e with a flat ontology (a 'democracy' as Levi Bryant calls it (2011c)) of object-actants. Here the objects in front of the lens, behind the lens and within the camera, as well as in the wider computational, scopic assemblage are all in play within the photography. The JPEG protocol, myself as photographer, the silicon in the chip, the WiFi router, browser, Facebook's server farm as well as the 2012 Fence I photograph are all complex, multi-faceted objects connecting and reconnecting within new objects for Facebook to datamine, Google to map, the State to surveil and you to share. The photographs themselves are only one object in that assemblage.

I look to photograph with and through that mesh. In concrete terms, following Jane Bennett's call to pay attention to 'Vibrant Matter' (2010), I photograph objects around the Fence that still surrounds the Olympic site in East London. Litter, laminated notices, workmen's gloves, cable ties, the mooring rings on the canal from a previous industrial era, plants enfolded with the wire... any object. Part of the liminal spaces of 2012. These are not merely 'representations' of '2012'. They are active players with an 'agentic capacity'. They have a materiality. The molecules in the glove react with those of the Fence. The concrete has a carbon footprint. That materiality is part of 2012's presence in the East End and its purported legacy. Just as my digital image-data has a materiality and a carbon footprint as it exists on server farms and an agentic capacity as it circulates and collides with other data on mobile networks.

As well as 2012 objects, I look to include 2012 imaging objects. The pinhole allows a direct connection between the photons that cross the Fence - that had an existence before the bid was won and will have a presence long after legacy has been forgotten - with the sensor and camera hardware. Similarly, by handholding a digital pinhole camera I created, I make my own object-presence apparent. The images carry the trace of my (human-object) breathing.

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The images are presented as pairs. As I photographed, I set my camera to encode the light hitting the CCD using two protocols simultaneously: JPEG and RAW. The same light-as-data was encoded in two forms, creating two image files - a dot jpg file and a dot orf file (the RAW format used by my Olympus camera). When it came to laying out the images whether online or in print, other software actants (PDF, Word, InDesign, HTML) could connect with the .jpg file but not the .orf file. One could be laid out or visible, one could not. By encoding the light-as-data through the two protocols simultaneously and presenting the results of those encodings side-by-side, I explore the relative powers of the protocol object-actants. One (JPEG) makes my light-as-data-as-imag(ining)e visible, social and shareable. The other (RAW) makes the same light-as-data-as-imag(ining)e invisible, proprietary and discrete.

Beaver, D 2008, 10 billion photos, facebook.com. Retrieved October 18, 2011, from [https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=30695603919](https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=30695603919)

Bennett, J., 2010, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology Of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Bryant, L.R., 2011, *The Democracy of Objects*, Open Humanities Press. Retrieved October 18, 2011, from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ohp;idno=9750134.0001.001>

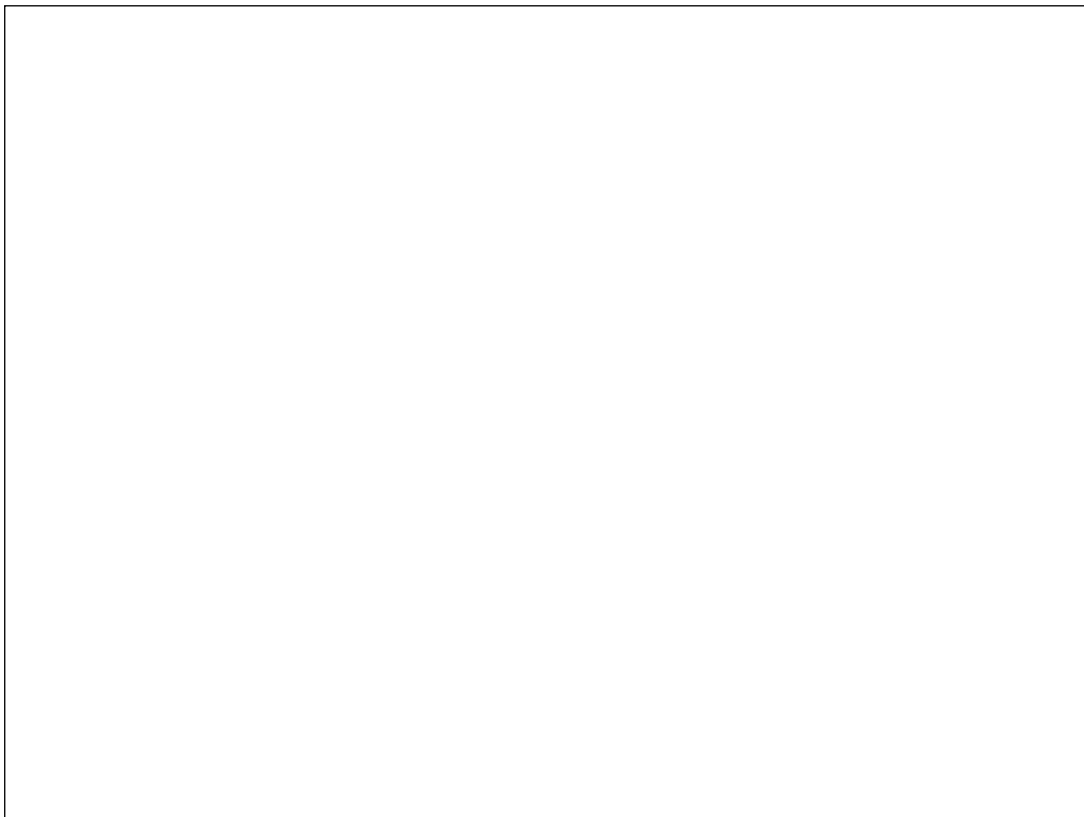
Harman, G., 2011, *The Quadruple Object*, Zero Books, Ropley.

Morton, T., 2010, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London.





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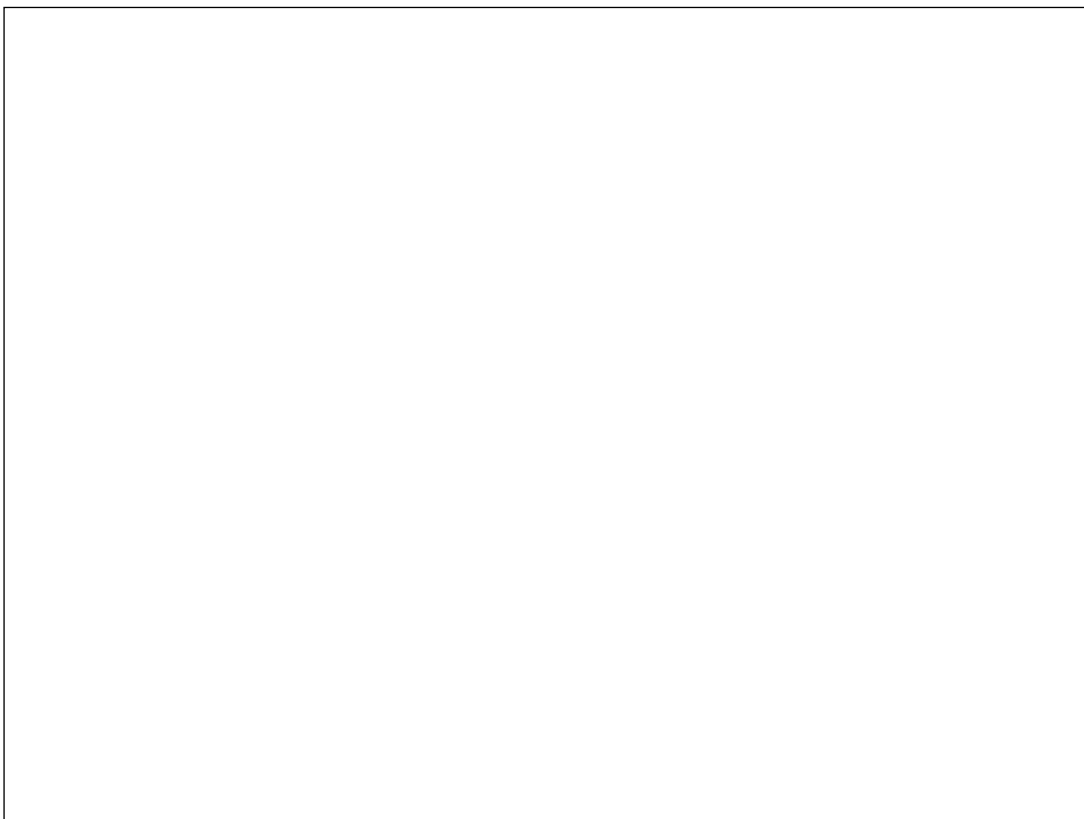


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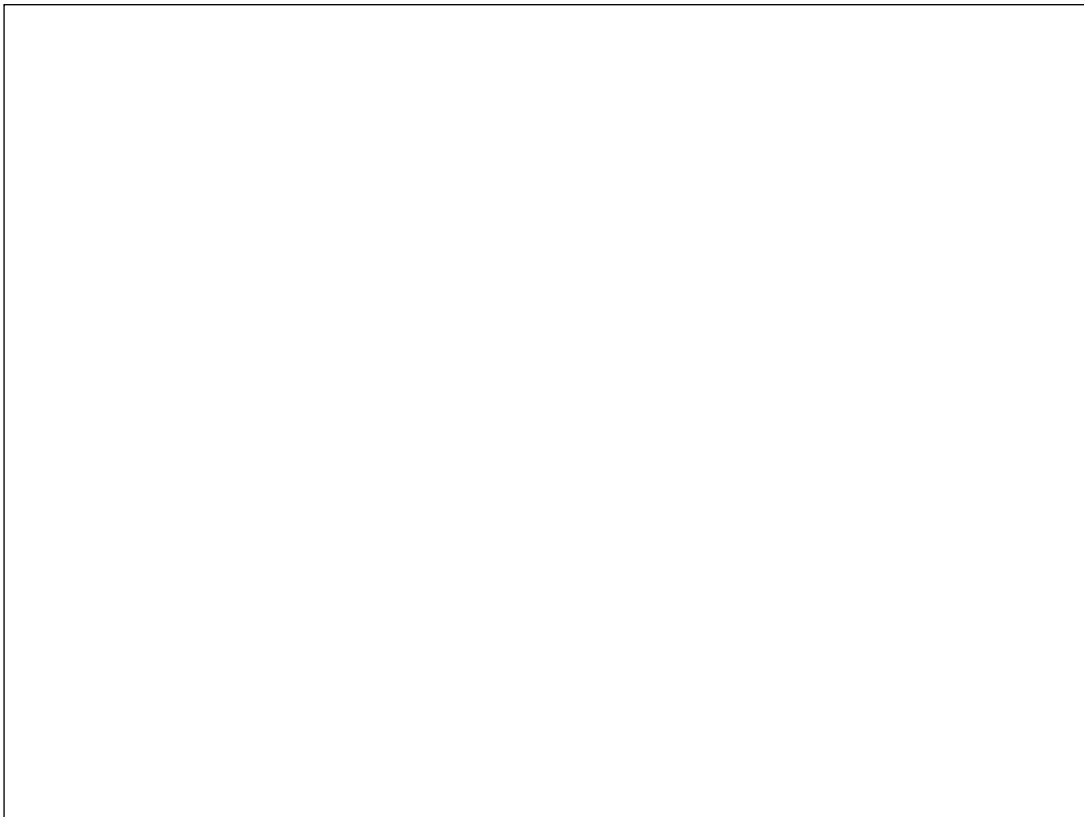


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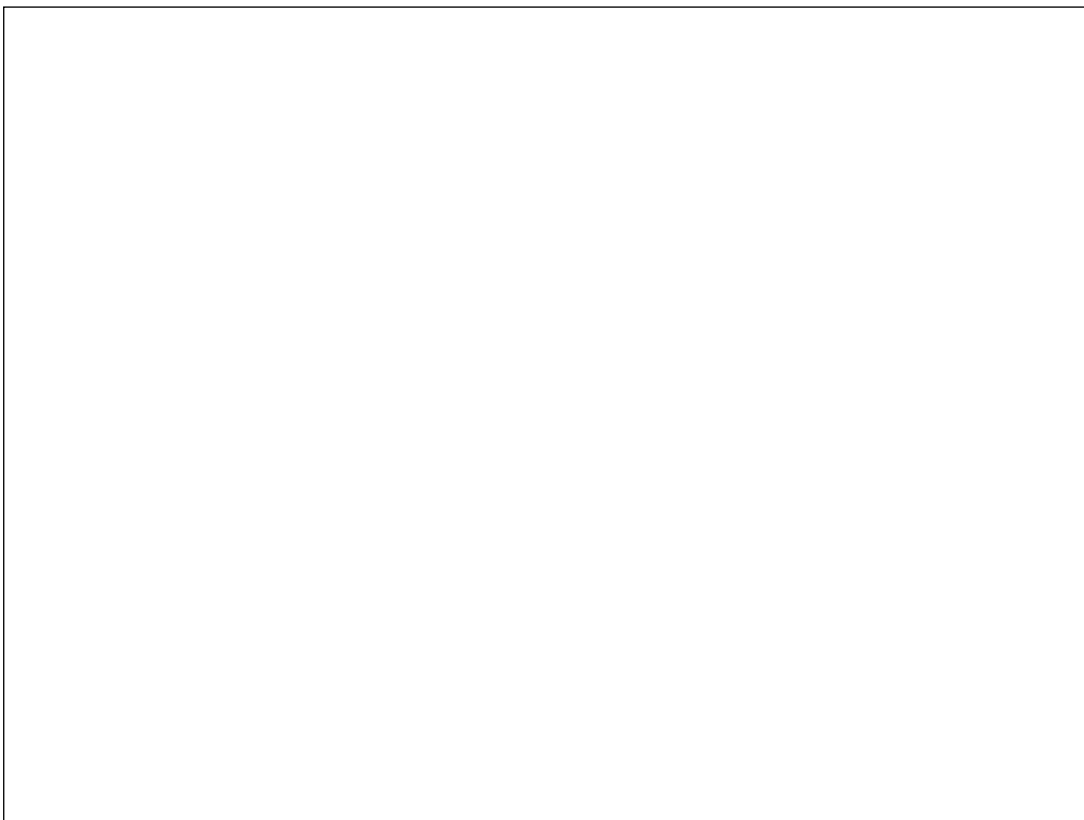


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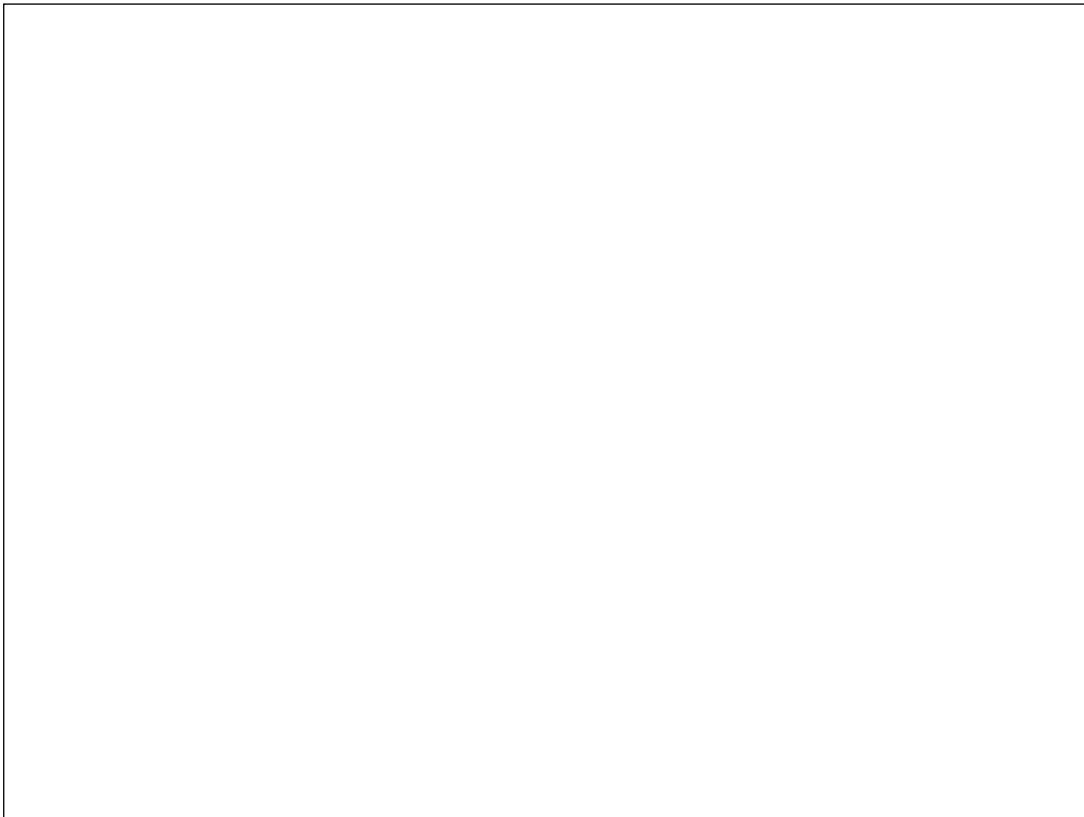


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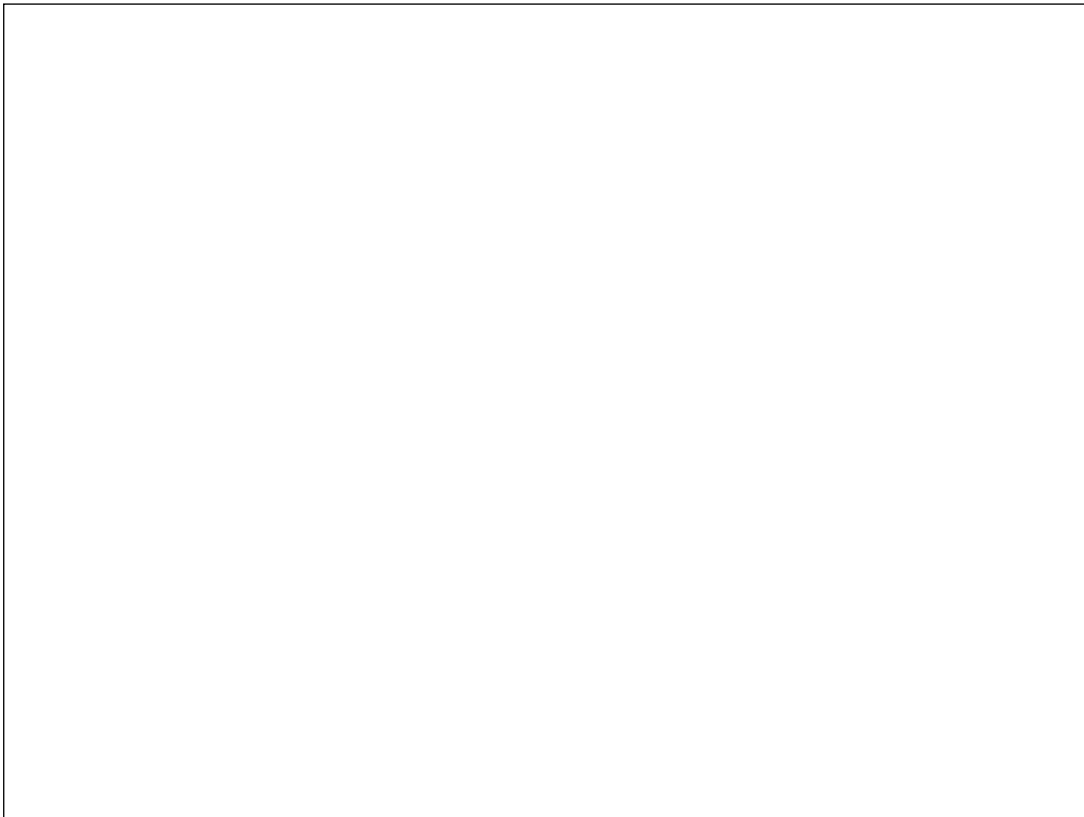
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