

# Waking the ruin: Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology, photogrammetry and the dami of Imbros

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## ABSTRACT

Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology (OOO) finds increasing interest across the arts and humanities, and offers a number of novel ways to rethink our relationship to architecture. Within the context of a philosophy that prioritises objects and stresses the looseness of the bond between objects and their own qualities, Harman's recently articulated focus on 'zeroing' form and function in order to engage the withdrawn reality of buildings on an aesthetic level offers a case in point. Applying Harman's metaphysics in conjunction with 3D photogrammetry treated as an aesthetic technique, this article interrogates a type of ruin – dami (plural damia) found on the North Aegean Island of Imbros/Gökçeada – with a view to stimulating them 'awake'. Courtesy of a metaphor created to act as a guide, plus the production of a new sensual object – a digital 3D photogrammetric model acting as a proxy for the scanned entity sat atop a hillside – the article provides a detailed framework for allowing an engaged beholder to reimagine the damia in new and unexpected ways, contributing to the literature concerning how Harman's OOO may be practically applied.

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## Introduction

The idea described in this article is the same one that guides it: *waking the ruin* is a metaphor that directs our aesthetic engagement with the damia of Imbros/Gökçeada –abandoned ruins/unacknowledged heritage of a displaced population found on a North Aegean island.<sup>1</sup> To enable this engagement, we employ Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology (OOO) as a method of reimagining these ruins through the lens of photogrammetry treated as an aesthetic technique, with a particular focus on the idea of 'zeroing' form and function in relation to architecture (Harman, 2017). The article will discuss our engagement as a means of showing how Harman's philosophy can be practically applied to topics of architectural interest, working in a manner not dissimilar to other creative investigations where the role of aesthetics emerges as a key concern (Graham 2023).

By combining OOO's metaphysical framework with 3D photogrammetry, *waking the ruin* practically engages Harman's notion of zeroing by using photogrammetry to enhance the looseness between objects and their qualities that his philosophy insists upon. The resulting point-cloud models serve not merely as documentary evidence, but as proxy entities: they become aesthetic objects that serve to conflate built structures with their immediate environment while simultaneously indicating zones that remain hidden, allowing interested beholders to reimagine the damia in unexpected ways. This approach builds upon recent developments in heritage studies, particularly the work of Þóra Pétursdóttir and Bjørnar Olsen on ruination as a mode of being or becoming (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014). It also utilises the realist understanding of image-based 3D modelling as espoused by the architect Micheal Young (2022).

Our primary contribution lies in demonstrating a practical application of Harman's architectural ideas through photogrammetry, an area currently underrepresented in the OOO literature despite the turn

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towards architecture that Harman has taken (Bedford 2020). In considering Harman's theory of zeroing in detailed terms, we also join a small but growing cohort of technical analyses dedicated to unpacking specific parts of OOO (Howdyshell 2020; Wilde 2020). By offering a proxy dami for contemplation in place of the physical ruin, we establish how our metaphor *waking the ruin* can guide beholders toward an aesthetic encounter that acknowledges both the withdrawn reality of these structures and their ongoing engagement with non-human entities. This theoretical framework provides new ways to appreciate similarly unacknowledged heritage sites, while simultaneously advancing an understanding of how OOO can be deployed in practical architectural analysis (Figure 1).

### **Damia**

Historically known as Imbros, Gökçeada was once home to a majority Greek-speaking population – the Imbrian Rums. Damia are the derelict summer houses built by them: simple two storey structures made of stone, often adjoined by gardens and animal pens. Found scattered across remote hilltops, these dwellings once served as yearly retreats for Rum farming communities, including their livestock, to escape the heat of the valleys below. However, over time the population of the island deliberately changed hands from this indigenous population to settlers brought over from the Turkish mainland, specifically during the 1960s and 1970s when the last major exodus of Rums from the island occurred (Ercan 2020).

Belonging to this displaced islander community, damia present themselves as abandoned buildings and as potential architectural heritage, given they remain formally unacknowledged by any heritage conservation board. Following the Rums' departure, these buildings stand dotted and unoccupied across the landscape. Gradually they have been turned into ruins, or in some cases, become completely destroyed by new constructions erected by the Turkish state (Ercan 2023). The little of them which visibly remains is strewn across the landscape, roofs gone, walls collapsed, gardens no more than traces in the soil. This stands in contrast to much of the rest of the island's building stock, which has become a part of conservation sites, acknowledged as cultural heritage and/or settlement development plans. Yet when considered as unacknowledged heritage assets, these sites of ruination are similar in many respects to Gavin Lucas' and Christopher Witmore's notion of 'untarnished ruins', in the sense of being structures 'released from any sense of purpose, any plans for management' and which suffer from local ambivalence, neglect



**Figure 1.** Photograph of a dami on Imbros/Gökçeada, 2017.

and being ‘not quite worthy of the title “heritage”’ (Lucas and Witmore 2022). In considering the damia as unacknowledged heritage we are provided with room to reconsider the damia *themselves* in ways anew.

As will be described, this process entails utilising photogrammetry to generate a new sensual object – a seductively digitized 3D photogrammetric model of a dami which sits quietly ruined on a hilltop – with which an interested beholder can engage on an aesthetic level. In seeking to represent depth through the use of images, the model offers the opportunity to indirectly appreciate a reality which remains hidden within these structures, generated as part of the process of mapping those surfaces which readily appear. Like Michael Young we consider this a feature of the technology, understood as its ability to loosen the connection between surfaces palpably engaged and blind pockets, gaps in the data, or simply ‘zones hidden from the scan’ (Young 2022, 50). Not coincidentally, it is on this very same basis that Young agrees with Harman: reality *withdraws* (Young 2022, 43).

In prioritising the role of objects as the basis of all that exists, OOO represents a compelling departure from traditional philosophical frameworks that have long privileged human subjectivity and consciousness as the central arbiter of reality. At its core, OOO proposes a radical shift in perspective by insisting on a tension between an object and its own qualities, and by elevating objects to a position of ontological significance equal to that of ourselves. The version of OOO promulgated by Harman also insists on the centrality of aesthetics to philosophy. Given the importance of this point for what follows, we begin by offering a fuller account.

## Aesthetics as first philosophy

Aesthetics demands close attention toward an object. It refuses to analyze it or transcend it. It grants objects all of their sensorial reality and all of their withdrawn depths. It focuses on the tensions between qualities received and implicated allusions. It allows leaps from attention into the speculations of alternate realities. For aesthetics to do all this requires abstraction. We experience the world habitually, as a background. Aesthetics refers to the moments in which this background is engaged in an alternate manner. The estrangement of the background is often created through the devices of abstraction (Young 2019, 145).

## Objects and qualities

While the above quote from Young indicates a similar path to the one we are taking, the allusive nature of how aesthetics operates in this regard can be hard to grasp. As Young elsewhere indicates, Harman’s bold claim that aesthetics constitutes first philosophy sounds like a bit of a stretch (Young 2019, 131). Isn’t aesthetics a branch of philosophy, one that is – at best – explained by more important philosophical concepts like ontology, epistemology and ethics? Yet Harman’s process of philosophical reasoning underpinning OOO has long been firm on this point, suggesting those wishing to employ this metaphysics in practical terms ought to be familiar with why this is the case (Harman 2007).

With that in mind we begin by clarifying what Harman means by the term *object*, itself a much broader understanding than one normally associated with mid-sized lumps of durable matter. The object for Harman is actually a *form*, given that what typifies objects is that they always have either structure or form (Harman 2016). It names any entity/thing that is neither synonymous with what it is made of, either compositionally or historically, nor with the effects it creates (Harman 2022, 3). To reduce the object to being synonymous with its constituent parts is labelled undermining, while to reduce it ‘upwards’ to being synonymous with its effects is labelled overmining. To reduce them in both directions simultaneously is labelled duomining. The reason Harman resists such kinds of mining procedures is simple: all of them deny the hidden surplus to objects that OOO insists upon, and which allows for both emergence and change. Although he acknowledges undermining and overmining are the only two types of knowledge available to us concerning the nature of things, Harman’s object-oriented philosophy is seeking neither. Instead, it proceeds by appreciating philosophy in a Socratic vein as *philosophia*, indicating love of wisdom rather than wisdom itself, which Harman interprets as supporting ‘a form of cognition *without* knowledge’ (Harman 2020, 2). Art is held to be a paradigmatic type of such cognition, given it indicates a domain where the object is appreciated as a form deeper than any kind of knowledge pertaining to it. But OOO insists on this position across the board: the object is an ultimately

unknowable yet unified entity, with discernible yet changeable qualities encountered in the phenomenal realm. To question how unknowable objects withdrawn from direct access interact with one another brings us back to the topic of aesthetics.

As Young points out, 'to resist undermining and overmining is to privilege aesthetics as the first mode of relation between things' (Young 2019, 132). Claiming objects are withdrawn from direct access means accepting they can meet each other only indirectly, i.e. *aesthetically*, which in turn involves a process Harman labels 'vicarious causation' (Harman 2007). This intriguing interpretation of causation posits that objects meet one another only by proxy within the interior of another object, or as Harman describes it, 'objects hide from one another endlessly, and inflict their mutual blows only through some vicar or intermediary' (Harman 2007, 174). The 'vicar' in this early quote refers to the *sensual object*, abbreviated SO in many of Harman's texts. This palpable entity acts as the proxy/intermediary enabling a *real object* (abbreviated RO) to indirectly meet another real object on the interior of a third (Harman 2022, 108). Putting aside for the moment the metaphysical nature of this meeting and the entity which hosts it, we can assert there are basically two kinds of object to contend with in the context of OOO, the real and the sensual. As each of these maintain a loose relationship with two sets of qualities (*real qualities*, abbreviated RQ, and *sensual qualities*, abbreviated SQ), Harman posits a 'fourfold' or four-sided structure underpinning each and every kind of entity in the cosmos. What this entails is that every object as encountered is actually a composite made up of RO, SO, RQ and SQ, although only the SO and SQ manifest themselves in palpable terms.

While elements of this beguiling structure will be unpacked in relation to the dami a bit further on, it is worth stressing here that what is encountered as palpable within the context of OOO is actually a distortion: due to the aesthetic nature of their meeting, what objects really encounter of one another is no more than a translation or caricature that takes place within the phenomenal realm. Interestingly, our everyday experience of such distortion is what Harman means by the term *literalism*. Harman negatively cites David Hume's theory that an object is merely a 'bundle of qualities', with no underlying reality to speak of, as a prime example of literalism occurring (Harman 2022, 172). As a passionately antiliteralist theory, OOO stresses the strict separation of literalism and aesthetics, on the basis that 'literalism means that an object is misidentified with a bundle of qualities, whether known or unknown, thereby neglecting the powerful looseness of their relation' (Harman 2022, 152). Focusing on such purported looseness is an exercise that Harman claims represents the entire point of OOO in practical terms, on the basis that 'such looseness can be accentuated by various aesthetic techniques' (Harman 2022, 172). It is amongst such techniques that we claim photogrammetry can be counted.

This preamble on the role of aesthetics helps appreciate why metaphor is so important to OOO, and why both the arts and architecture are of prime interest to Harman. Just as no artwork can be paraphrased by an explanation of its meaning, and 'no building is replaceable by any prose description of its appearance and program', so no form of literal knowledge about something will ever exhaust the withdrawn reality of that thing (Harman 2022, 4). To be guilty of literalism is to confuse an object with the bundle of qualities we perceive, rather than to accept, as Harman declares, the primacy of aesthetics within which the object-quality relation remains necessarily loose, and the object lies deeper than any possible relation we or anything else might have with it. (Harman 2022, 172; Figure 2)

### **The fourfold**

Having established that the object is a form encountering other forms in a purely aesthetic manner, something more needs to be said about the basic structure of this form before elements of it resurface in rethinking the dami as an architectural ruin. To recap: real objects (RO) only meet one other indirectly as translations, courtesy of palpably encountered objects (SO) that interact within the phenomenal realm. They also enjoy an unusually loose relationship with their own qualities, both palpable (SQ) and non (RQ), all of which leads Harman to posit a quadruple ('fourfold') structure of the object, one which he goes to great lengths to unpack in many of his books (Harman, 2011). Composed of four poles (RO, SO, RQ, SQ) which exist in tension with one another, the nature of this structure is philosophically complex but highly relevant to grasp if OOO is to be productively employed. Described in terms of the dami, it can be outlined as follows.



**Figure 2.** Image of the 3D photogrammetric model.

The metaphysical dami-in-itself is the real object (RO). This dami – the only real one as far as Harman is concerned – remains resolutely cut-off and unknowable in direct terms, although its existence can be indirectly intuited. Not just cut off from human access vis-à-vis the Kantian thing-in-itself, but cut all from access by *all* entities, this being a key innovation of OOO. The ivy that forces its way through hairline cracks in the busted stone walls is no more able to engage the withdrawn dami-in-itself than us as beholders or anything else. Yet at the very same time there exists a unified entity made of stone, brick and tile sat peacefully on a hilltop on Imbros/Gökçeada, palpably encountered in different ways by said ivy, plus the birds, bees, raindrops and all those intrepid explorers who elect to make the trek up there and stand admiring it in the sun. This palpable dami is named the sensual object (SO), meaning the ruined entity encountered in the phenomenal realm as a unified form. It is named in reference to Husserl's *intentional object* of thought, judgement, perception etc, not least in view of the fundamental tension that both exhibit as unified things composed of discrete properties (Harman 2005, 28). Not unlike the abandoned herring station detailed by Pétursdóttir, the thingly character of this ruin shines forth in fragmented fashion when appreciated as a sensual object (Pétursdóttir 2012). That is to say, as OOO inspired beholders we are called pay attention to the manner in which the dami has become interwoven with its immediately palpable environment of rocks, stones, tulips and grass, simultaneous to acknowledging the inherent unity of it as an autonomous object that persists in our experience.

Strictly speaking this sensual dami never fully reveals itself to us either: encountered in a temporal manner, we apprehend it via a sequence of sensual qualities (SQ), named in recognition of what Husserl memorably called 'adumbrations' (*Abschattungen*) (Harman 2010b). Both terms operate in recognition of the shading that occurs within phenomenal experience: namely, there always remains a side of the dami we cannot gain from our current standpoint, or an experience of it we are yet to have, and this lack goes for all entities, human and non. Although the sensual dami is not hiding as such – Harman is firm on this point – palpably encountering it in both a temporal and perspectival manner means we effectively posit its existence as the ideal principle of a series. Sensual qualities describe the sights, sounds and surfaces of the dami as encountered: the warm glow of sun-bleached timber and the buzz of flies, cut stone and the crunch of broken glass that all present themselves to explorers as a sequence of events, and from which they intuit they are dealing with a unified thing – a dami – and not a random pile of unrelated bits. The final pole concerns the Husserlian/Leibniz inspired real qualities (RQ) which each object must possess to satisfy identity criteria i.e. without them, the object would cease to be what it is. Unlike Husserl, who thought you could hunt for such underlying qualities via a process called 'eidetic variation', Harman demurs from this claim: he claims real qualities exist, but cannot be known in

any direct sense (nor are they seemingly describable via example without becoming sensual in the process, but this is not a concern to take up here) (Bedford 2020, 105).

Important to note for what follows is that any form of representation made of this dami, be it a single photograph or a 3D photogrammetric model, also constitute sensual objects when encountered by a beholder. In Harman's system the real object is never directly encountered, and no ontological priority appears to be given to the physical dami sat upon the hill over the image made of it: both are only ever encountered as sensual objects, no more, no less. And this brings us back to the topic of vicarious causation, wherein we can start to appreciate the mechanism by which real objects encounter one another within the phenomenal realm.

We begin by examining the various names Harman gives to the tensions which bind the four poles of the fourfold together, with a focus on one in particular. While some of these names are famous in themselves, for example *space*, *time*, *eidos* and *essence*, the one which concerns us here is the tension named *allure*, given as the 'opening of a fissure' between a real object (RO) and its sensual qualities (SQ) (Harman 2020, 34). It does so for the simple reason that the tension named allure (otherwise abbreviated RO-SQ) is the most important tension to consider within the context of OOO aesthetics, given it identifies the manner in which the banal, default bond between an encountered entity and its palpable features breaks down and an occluded reality becomes at issue. Described in other terms, allure lets us appreciate how two real objects meet indirectly within the interior of a third, whereupon one of the real entities (us) becomes obliquely aware of this event occurring. To the extent that allure either occurs or not, it resembles laughter, which is one of the reasons why Harman uses both humour and metaphor to explain how it functions. For practical reasons we employ the latter option here (Figure 3).

### Metaphor

Steven Shaviro memorably describes allure as naming 'the attraction of something that has retreated into its own depths,' and while this neatly summarises the encounter from the perspective of the one who experiences it, it does elide an otherwise important philosophical distinction: namely, the real object remains forever absent and is never directly encountered by a beholder, it only *seems* to be (Shaviro, 2011, 289). In early writings allure is described by Harman as rendering a 'strange sort of interference between two moments of a thing's being' (Harman 2005, 143), and while he has never abandoned the concept, it has gone through a number of developmental changes (Taxier 2020).

Chief among these is the introduction of a *theatrical* basis to the aesthetic framework of OOO. Harman's early argument glides over the fact that the tree which the beholder finds alluring by making



Figure 3. Image of the 3D photogrammetric model.

the 'visible seem withdrawn' is never that of the genuine tree-in-itself (Harman 2005, 162): After all, as Eric Taxier indicates, 'an encountered object is always a *sensual* one' (Taxier 2020, 603). So this raises the question: given the beholder only ever touches a sensual object which only *seems* to withdraw, where is the RO that pairs with the SQ? This puzzling situation leads Harman to his theatrical conclusion: the only real entity present on the scene is *us*, the beholder of the experience, be it a poem, painting, photogrammetric model or anything else which ignites our aesthetic interest (Harman 2016, 108). A stirring chord progression or the capers of a movie character may be fictions, but if we elect to take seriously the cardinal claim of OOO that they bring reality indirectly into play then we need to locate the site of that reality, which is *us*. Like method actors we theatrically 'live the musical passage or film scene as the music or movie' (Taxier 2020, 603).

In short, Harman's theatrical interpretation of metaphor offers a way to locate the real object which is missing from earlier accounts of allure, which in turn describes how aesthetic experience operates within the context of OOO. Metaphor details how we become enchanted by the enigmatic presence of certain objects over others and theatrically perform the role of the absent object during our encounter with whatever is alluring. It also offers a clearer way to appreciate the mechanism by which allure occurs, wherein the everyday, banal sincerity of things is momentarily ruptured, and the remarkable looseness between the withdrawn reality of an object and its bundle of palpable qualities becomes apparent.

To say this encounter takes place within the interior of a third object is simply to present the meta-physical structure of the aesthetic object as Harman understands it, whereby we and the alluring dami become a compound entity that 'exceeds both parts individually', meaning we are enclosed by it (Harman 2020, 45). But describing how we theatrically engage the metaphor in the manner outlined above requires us to consider the means by which the conditions for doing so are created in specifically architectural terms. In other words, it requires us to detail how allure is made explicit as a gulf or fissure which opens up between the withdrawn dami ruin and qualities of the ruin as palpably encountered. This introduces the topic of zeroing, which we combine with photogrammetry, whereby a dami ruin becomes an alluring aesthetic object by virtue of both its form and function being, as Harman says, 'de-relationized', meaning de-contextualised or zeroed (Harman 2022, 45). It is this process which we suggest generates a self-contained compound unit capable of being woken via theatrical engagement of some kind.

## Speculative photogrammetry of unacknowledged heritage

### Zeroing form and function

Harman's latest work on architecture takes issue with the way in which form and function are understood. Rather than go along with the oft-expressed maxim that 'form follows function', Harman considers them both to be examples of overmining, at least when deployed in the traditional sense, and so guilty of reducing buildings in a manner that fails to do them justice (Harman 2022, 4). If we try to reduce a building to being synonymous with the range of actions that made it possible, we overlook the fact that not all these remain important to the building itself. Equally, a building is like any other entity in having emergent properties not found in its compositional or historical components, meaning a reduction in that direction is also wide of the mark: no detailed record of the buildings construction methods and materials, or factual account of its history, will ever give us the building itself. Instead of undermining or overmining the building in such a manner, Harman contends the means by which the building-in-itself (RO) ought to be appreciated is by de-relationizing or 'zeroing' form and function.

As Harman understands it, form usually indicates the visual 'look' of a building, thereby missing the deeper form that makes such appearances possible, while function reduces a building to its current relations or specific role, thereby avoiding the 'deeper layer of function that precedes any specific commitments' (Harman 2022, 5). He uses the terms 'zero-form' and 'zero-function' to refer to the de-relationized/de-literalised versions of both. Before we say more on either topic, it is important to clarify why we introduce the topic of zeroing here: namely, zeroing form and function describes how the kind of alluring aesthetic experience outlined in the previous section is to be created in specifically *architectural* terms.

*Waking the ruin* is a step on the path towards taking the idea of zeroing seriously. Ruination is but one means by which this can occur, whereby non-human encounters with the dami are brought forward for contemplation by an interested beholder in the same moment that a concern with human-oriented form and function recede. In our case, we use the photogrammetric model to accelerate the process of zeroing, in the sense that the dami ruin becomes estranged (de-familiarized) as a seductively digitised object, and a newly mediated 'background of reality' gets brought indirectly into play (Young 2022, 49). Although we previously outlined how allure functions via Harman's theatrical description of metaphor, Harman originally articulated this framework in relation to visual art, meaning it remains unclear how it is understood in the architectural context of a ruined building treated as an aesthetic object. In short, we employ the process of zeroing in order to help emphasise the alluring potential of the dami to an engaged beholder, drawing attention to the powerful looseness of relation between the withdrawn RO and its palpable qualities in specifically architectural terms. Rather than expect them to traverse the hilltops of Imbros/Gökçeada looking for a dami to physically encounter, *waking the ruin* is an aesthetic act that requires a beholder's theatrical engagement with the photogrammetric model of the dami (SO) presented in our study, whereby they step in for the missing real ruin (RO) and 'perform its abandoned qualities', as Harman elsewhere puts it (Harman 2022, 85). The question of how they are expected to perform such a role is related to the particular way in which the dami's form and function are zeroed (Figure 4).

### Zeroing function

We begin with the topic of zeroing function, for the simple reason that the damia of Imbros/Gökçeada are already moving steadily along this path: they are abandoned buildings whose heritage values are unacknowledged, meaning they greet us as entities for whom the topic of utility – in relation to humans – has long been receding from the scene. Treating abandonment and ruination in the manner articulated by Pétursdóttir, who similarly advocates acknowledging the thingly '*being-on-their-own*' and '*for-themselves*' of ruins (Pétursdóttir 2014, 340), we de-familiarize the dami by treating them first and foremost as abandoned objects which nevertheless continue to hold something in reserve. In *Architecture and Objects*, Harman acknowledges that zeroing function is harder to fathom than zeroing form, on the basis that function for him means 'any sort of relation, not just the technical kind' (Harman 2022, 68). Nevertheless, the core concern of zeroing function pivots upon acceptance of the fact that buildings must be registered as being deeper than any and all relations they currently entail, including those associated with



Figure 4. Image of the 3D photogrammetric model.

the architectural program that designed them. To that end Harman advocates finding a way to ‘monumentalize’ function as a means of zeroing it.

Despite their immediate negative connotations, ruination and decay in relation to the abandonment of architectural objects have long been seen as a process of adding value, aesthetic quality or a sense of depth (Simmel, 1958; DeSilvey 2006). According to Georg Simmel, unlike other forms of art, architectural ruins offer a new unity of different forces instead of a reduction of a whole object (Simmel 1958, 380). Likewise, Caitlin DeSilvey claims ruins can be understood through ‘the application of a collaborative interpretive ethic, allowing other-than-human agencies to participate in the telling of stories about particular places’ (DeSilvey 2006, 318). Pétursdóttir and Olsen develop an understanding of ruination and decay as a mode of being or becoming, allowing for a thing-oriented perspective that also helps rethink the issues of heritage in relation to ethics and aesthetics (Pétursdóttir and Olsen, 2014, 5-17).

Our approach is similar in some respects to that advocated in the context of archaeology by Olsen and Pétursdóttir, for whom the chance to consider buildings in their ‘abandoned being’ means allowing them the opportunity to be released from being ‘*things-for-us*’, conversely becoming more engaging (alluring) as a result (Pétursdóttir 2014, 339). In her consideration of an abandoned Icelandic storage house, Pétursdóttir calls for an awareness of it that is free from functional concerns, from being encountered in terms of ‘for-the-purpose-of’, and instead allows for a new mode of being: something she terms ‘*out-of-handness*’ (Pétursdóttir 2014, 348). In letting abandoned things sit comfortably as useless and unrecognizable things out-of-hand, Pétursdóttir’s aesthetics of abandonment advocates allowing such sites to show their autonomy and independence from our control. This is the way that the *damia* are zeroed in terms of their function. It involves a shift change in the way that they are experienced. Ruination thus reveals layers of different memories and meanings, many of which may only be grasped when utility is withdrawn (Pétursdóttir and Olsen, 2014, 11-12).

In the context of archaeology this object-oriented approach to ruination and ruins is known as *symmetrical archaeology*. It supports a balanced approach on the basis that all things perform, meaning they all intervene and play different roles in shaping the matter at stake (Olsen and Witmore 2015). As firm advocates of this approach, Olsen and Witmore claim ‘the past lingers on and gathers as material durations now coextensive in the present’, meaning the past-now-present is no longer an outcome purely of human management but transforms itself according to its own ‘diverse material trajectories’ (Olsen and Witmore, 2015, 191). In other words, things like ruined and abandoned buildings are able to presense the past by virtue of the fact that they do not simply preserve a record of human entanglement or contact with non-human entities, but also of themselves and their ‘own irreducible, individual being’ (Olsen and Witmore, 2015, 194). In terms of *damia* ruins, such an approach allows the exchanges between them and the weather, between ‘bones and acidic soil’, to remain as beguiling to consider as the interactions between the *damia* and those who abandoned them (Olsen and Witmore, 2015, 191).

Informed by this approach, an object-oriented analysis of ruins as architectural objects shows that the process of ruination is first and foremost a way of zeroing function. We do not need to ‘do’ anything practical to the *damia* in this regard – they are already ahead of us, taking the lead in freeing themselves from the banality of meeting utilitarian expectations in their active embrace of deterioration and decay. Adopting this attitude means we can appreciate that whatever past function(s) the *damia* were designed to fulfil passes into a concern with the deeper function that makes such possible; while acknowledging the current array of functions it provides to all manner of non-human entities may in time be replaced by others as yet unknown.

This presents us with the first indication of an alluring gulf or fissure opening up. We recognise via this process that the pale moss growing and proliferating year after year between cracks in the stone walls is binding them together at the same time it is provided shelter to do so, which in turn delivers food and refuge to entities up and down the scale. Thinking of objects working alongside and with other objects implies an endless array of *objects within objects*, and a depth to any and all that cannot exhaustively be known. But recognising the zeroing of function of an object in a ruined state also brings us closer to the idea of deeper or zeroed form, and with it, the idea that we as beholders may be able to offer something in return (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Image of the 3D photogrammetric model.

### **Zeroing form**

[T]he zeroing of form will initially take two steps. First, the evident form must be zeroed into a 'deep form' that resists any outward glance; second, this deep form can be strung together with others, yielding surprising combinations that generally work best if they maintain a certain memorable simplicity (Harman 2022, 173).

Harman's suggested route towards the zeroing of form can be enacted in a number of ways. What remains important to keep in mind, however, is the necessarily loose relation between objects and their qualities which OOO insists upon, and furthermore, that the looseness of such can be, as Harman says, enhanced by several aesthetic techniques (Harman, 2022, 172). With the ruined damia as our subject, we claim that 3D photogrammetric modelling can be deployed as an aesthetic technique to achieve such ends, alongside its more traditional role as a provider of documentary evidence of structures and environments.

Young clarifies how architectural digital imagery can be understood in this way, particularly photogrammetry and lidar. For Young, these technologies capture and process information in an effort to perceive as many qualities of environmental surfaces as possible, giving them spatial depth (Young 2022, 50). Crucially, this process is described by Young as the technology 'trying to *touch* reality' (Young 2022, original italics). In terms of zeroing the damia's form, photogrammetry used as an aesthetic technique does two things. In the first instance, the point-cloud models we build of the damia help to conflate the building with its immediate environment, rather than not. As both Harman and Young acknowledge, conflation in these terms can be understood as a 'flattening of hierarchies and distinctions between what was formerly considered as the architectural and the non-architectural' (Young 2022, 12; Harman, 2011, 139).

In our case, the flattening of hierarchies has already begun with the process of ruination to which the damia have been prey. In the withdrawal of prior and current (human-oriented) function due to the ongoing degradation of these sites, the damia are appreciated as things passing into a new relationship with their immediate environment, something which scanning technologies like photogrammetry and lidar enhance as an aesthetic understanding. As Young clarifies, in attempting to resolve the question of presenting three-dimensional spatial depth onto a two-dimensional surface through the use of discrete points extracted from the pixel data of digital images, photogrammetry scans the 'energetic information' of the environment, wherein errant points are not necessarily errors, but 'the energy of the environment captured regardless of its meaning for humans' (Young 2022, 196). For Young, such informational 'noise' can be considered a kind of realism *that has yet to be fully engaged*. In other words, it offers a way to appreciate the conflation of objects with their environments on the basis that, 'in photogrammetry there

is no assumed hierarchy between architecture, furniture, vegetation, vehicles, vases and people' (Young 2022, 196). This process is a step towards appreciating the 'deep form' of the dami that resists any outward glance, as identified in Harman's indented quote above: the dami is evidently *still there* in our 3D photogrammetric models, but aesthetically speaking, the technology reveals it sitting within its environment in a manner that conflates its presumed importance as the subject with its reality as one object among many.

In the second instance, although we would demur from claiming such scanning technology can directly 'touch reality', in trying to it offers another way to appreciate the reality that withdraws by signalling a zone which remains deeply hidden. As Young summarizes, photogrammetry also works by maintaining a linear relation between the capturing source and the surface struck, meaning it occludes all that exists behind and beyond it. These 'blind zones', as Young calls them, can be described as 'shadows, *skiagraphias*, invisible to data collection, dark pockets looming on the other side of the scan' (Young 2022, 50, original italics). As a mode of tactile mediation photogrammetry utilises points rather than lines, with the result that there remain gaps. For Young these gaps consist of what 'lies outside the thresholds of detection as much as what hides behind visible surfaces' (Young 2022, 51).

Both concerns – the conflation of the object with its immediate environment and the idea of blind zones sitting beyond the threshold of the surface struck – point to a reality that remains occluded within a form that resists an outward glance. This in turn presents an alluring entity for contemplation, given it is now recognized as being much deeper than initial appearances: if we take Young's claims seriously alongside Harman's then we cannot accept the dami 'ends' with the palpable profiles it presents to us as humans, much less the one(s) it presents to non-human entities found elsewhere on the scene. On the contrary, what we are allowed to encounter through the 3D photogrammetric model treated as a palpable object (SO) is an entity lying much deeper than palpable form and function. Put into the terms used to explain allure as metaphor earlier, it means we are using the various sensual qualities which the model presents to consider the absent real object: an alluring example of the RO-SQ relationship which has become unquestionably loose.

This brings us to the second step advocated in Harman's indented quote above, wherein the zeroing of form requires deep forms to be strung together in surprising and, ideally, memorable combinations. It also brings engagement by the beholder more firmly to the fore, given that the real object which is hinted at remains thoroughly absent from the scene. Important to note is that, when considered in an architectural context a beholder does not have to be a *human* beholder. On the contrary, as we have seen there are all manner of entities who continue to engage ('behold') the dami of Imbros/Gökçeada according to their various sensibilities, different for each. This is a fact which the photogrammetric conflation of objects and environment serves to support and reinforce as an understanding. And, as Young reminds us, digital images are also 'information captured by machines for machines', and thus operate in ways that will forever elude human perception (Young 2022, 49). But in working with a photogrammetric model as our sensual object, rather than the physical dami sat upon a hilltop, it is still sensible to argue these digital images present a dami-for-us as human beholders, rather than a dami-for-raindrop, dami-for-moss or dami-for-lizard, given these entities hit/grow along/climb the hilltop dami, not the digital model made thereof (Figure 6).

## Conclusion

To summarise, *waking the ruin* is a metaphor designed to enable interested beholders with the means to performatively engage the dami of Imbros/Gökçeada on an aesthetic level, according to the following points. Allure, given as the tension between a withdrawn real object and its palpable qualities describes the OOO aesthetic framework through which beholders can encounter the dami *differently*. It names a rupture that occurs in ordinary experience, by which a thing appears to stand at some kind of distance from itself. We consider each dami ruin a thing encountered ('beheld') by entities other than us, in ways other than ours, and our aesthetic framing of the situation is set up to emphasise this fact to human beholders who elect to engage them, rather than not.

We facilitate this event occurring via the medium of 3D photogrammetry treated as an aesthetic technique, whereby a proxy dami, an image-based model acting as the sensual object, is offered for



**Figure 6.** Image of the 3D photogrammetric model.

contemplation in place of the physical ruin sat atop a hill. The metaphor helps us to frame an aesthetic encounter with this proxy by allowing us to establish what constitutes the RO and SQ at either end of the tension: ‘waking’ indicates a palpable set of *qualities* (SQ) applied to dami ruin as withdrawn *object* (RO). To be specific, our metaphor follows Harman’s suggestion that it ought to operate as a *guide*, detailing how the loose relationship between the palpably encountered model and the absent real object be engaged.<sup>2</sup> In practical terms, this means we are asking interested beholders to try and perform waking qualities in the manner of a ruin. But how should this speculative notion be interpreted?

One suggestion begins with Harman’s observation that deep forms ought to be strung together in a manner which ‘retains a certain memorable simplicity’ (Harman 2022, 173). As he suggests, the temporal aspect of architecture can help facilitate this step by allowing dissimilar forms and functions to be cojoined in sequence. This temporal aspect can be performatively engaged by a beholder who, for example, elects to engage our 3D photogrammetric model of the dami in a deliberately unhurried way, perhaps courtesy of an immersive VR experience which allows them to walk through and around it, appreciating how the building’s underlying form emerges as a result of its partial collapse. *Waking the ruin* guides this embodied engagement, permitting a series of memorable profiles or impressions to emerge in consecutive fashion as the digitised structure blurs and blends with its immediate environment, dissolving and resolving itself in new and unexpected ways. Moving through different viewpoints slowly as if emerging from sleep, certain features of the model come into focus while others remain indistinct, or else remain occluded entirely: ‘blind zones’ created by the scan suggest hidden depths, just as other architectural elements become more prominent through decay. In short, by allowing their attention to drift when considering the dami’s past and its present degraded state, coupled with considering the question of how non-human actors (plants, weather, animals) might interact with it, the same interested beholder would be provided the room they need to reflect on the deep and inaccessible form and function of this beguiling building, and the ongoing transformation of the ends towards which it is aimed.

## Notes

1. The notion of waking an object was originally inspired by Harman’s theory of ‘dormant’ or sleeping objects, in particular the description outlined in Chapter 6 ‘The Sleeping Zebra’ of *Circus Philosophicus*. However, given this class of entity entails an object that has no effect on anything else, nor perhaps any discernible relation to anything else, it lacks a firm basis for application in relation to the damia. For further information on dormant objects see Graham Harman (2010a) and Graham Harman (2010b): 15.
2. Much like the manner in which Harman elsewhere claims the title of an artwork operates. See: Harman (2020), 30.

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