Skirmishes
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INTRODUCTION

The original plan for Skirmishes was drawn up some years ago, though for various reasons it fell through the cracks of expanding professional obligations. My first idea for the book was to respond in alphabetical order to nearly everyone who, by that point, had written a critique of Speculative Realism (SR) or Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). That plan is no longer feasible, given the now sizable literature — both positive and negative — on these closely related philosophical currents. What I will do instead is spend Part One on a quartet of books devoted in whole or in part to OOO, and Part Two on a series of shorter engagements with critics. The ordering of sections in Part Two is neither chronological nor random, but arranged in a way I hope will be useful to the reader.

Let’s speak first about Part One. The year 2014 was as a milestone of sorts for my colleagues and me. In that year, the first four monographs on SR and OOO were published. From most to least favorable in tone, they are as follows:

- Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism*
- Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*
- Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*
• Peter Wolfendale, *Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon’s New Clothes*

As subway officials might say, this map is not to scale. Shaviro is barely more negative than Sparrow, while Wolfendale’s ISIS-like assault is far more openly hostile than Gratton’s smirking and eye-rolling account. The first three books on the list are slim volumes and quick reads, but the fourth is a tome so massive, and so awkward in typeface and physical form, that I would never dream of taking it to a coffee shop with the others. Yet considered together, they offer a good sampling of the range of attitudes towards SR and OOO found among those contemporary philosophers who have paid some attention to these trends. Ideally, I would have written a quick response to all of these books shortly after publication, so as to maintain the rapid pace of debate once found in the now-dormant blogosphere; against all expectations, it took longer than expected to sit down and finish these pages.

In Part Two, I have added briefer accounts of other critics of OOO. To name them in order of appearance, I will cover Alberto Toscano, Christopher Norris, Dan Zahavi, and Stephen Mulhall. There are others who could also have fit but were excluded for one reason or another. Of these, I especially appreciate the efforts of Ian James in *The Technique of Thought*; maybe I will have the chance to respond to him elsewhere. The critiques of OOO by Elizabeth Povinelli and Adrian J. Ivakhiv have also been on my radar, and I will try to deal with them in the near future if the opportunity arises.

If we provisionally accept the claim of José Ortega y Gasset that a generation lasts exactly fifteen years, then the explosion of critical responses in 2014 came a full generation after the birth of OOO. To name them in order of appearance, I will cover Alberto Toscano, Christopher Norris, Dan Zahavi, and Stephen Mulhall. There are others who could also have fit but were excluded for one reason or another. Of these, I especially appreciate the efforts of Ian James in *The Technique of Thought*; maybe I will have the chance to respond to him elsewhere. The critiques of OOO by Elizabeth Povinelli and Adrian J. Ivakhiv have also been on my radar, and I will try to deal with them in the near future if the opportunity arises.

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of Object-Oriented Philosophy in my Chicago apartment and roughly a half-generation after the Speculative Realists first met in London.³ We are no longer outsiders who hope for a hearing, but recognized enemies of those who prefer the settled older discourse of 1990s Anglophone continental philosophy, with its ceaseless prayers to Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and a handful of related authors — nearly all of them native speakers of French or German. Further evidence of the ripening public discourse about OOO and SR can be seen in the fact that the four book authors of 2014 all basically know what they are talking about, even in those moments when I find them off the mark. By contrast with our worst-informed critics, even the caustic Wolfendale shows a praiseworthy diligence.

Warm thanks are due to Eileen A. Joy for recruiting me to write this book for punctum and for patiently enduring the unforeseen delays in completing it. And while I’m at it, I am grateful to Lily Brewer for giving the manuscript a remarkably thorough edit, and to Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei for producing this beautiful object.
