

Object-Oriented Ontology and Its Critics

André Arnaut*

Precariousness and Philosophical Critique: Towards an Open-Field Combat with Harman's OOO

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2019-0024>

Received May 31, 2019; accepted August 21, 2019

Abstract: Philosophical critiques are prone to relapse into a sort of entrenchment in which the basic elements of a philosophy are kept from exposure, so that instead of advancing, philosophy easily becomes compartmentalized into specific trends. This article thus seeks the conditions of a non-entrenched, open-field philosophical critique in general and, in particular, of an open-field critique of Harman's OOO (object-oriented ontology). For that purpose, the idea of precariousness is introduced, which is then confronted with some ideas concerning philosophical critique and practice, in particular those of François Laruelle. Since we can find in Harman's OOO an outline of what we call here an open-field critique, the field of combat against Harman will be the one concerning the idea of an open field itself.

Keywords: metaphilosophy; critique; metaphysics; flat ontology; non-philosophy; Graham Harman; François Laruelle

Critiques of philosophies often engender a situation akin to a trench war: the critique itself is built upon a certain philosophy in such a way that basic elements of that philosophy are kept entrenched, safe from the risks of the combat; since the criticized philosophy diverges on precisely those basic elements, it too becomes entrenched as soon as it tries to defend itself. Thus, neither of the sides is able to gain territory against the other, and what was meant to be a clash that could result in the advance of philosophy as such can easily foster the compartmentalization into philosophical trends. In what follows, I will examine under what conditions a critique of Graham Harman's version of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) could avoid such entrenchment and be placed in open-field combat;¹ in order to do so, it is first necessary to think the conditions of open-field combat in general, where I introduce the idea of *precariousness*. Since we will see that one can already find in Harman's OOO an outline of this "open-field," the open-field in which to place it will be found precisely in the clash concerning the way in which this very field should be thought.

We will assume here, however, that a critique of a philosophy can only be made from the background of some philosophy. That is to say, there is no completely neutral critique, i.e. one that does not previously make some commitments. To be sure, however, efforts are made towards such neutrality. For instance, one could attempt to criticize a philosophy by drawing a parallel with another one, in order to show that both are equally acceptable. Also, an internal critique could be used, in which one would assume the basic elements of a philosophy only to criticize this very philosophy, reducing it to absurdity. Yet another supposedly neutral procedure can be found if one simply puts skepticism to work in an attempt to make no commitment.

¹ See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 156-159, for an use of this image of trench wars and open-field combat in the context of a discussion about skepticism.

*Corresponding author: André Arnaut, University of Brasília, Brasília, Brazil; E-mail: r.arnautdf@gmail.com

But in all these cases, there are silently operating philosophies: namely, one that allows us to make use of arguments in general, and then to put into action a *reduction ad absurdum* and skeptical arguments; and one in which we base ourselves when we claim that what a philosophy states is not the case, i.e. one that allows us to say that the world should be determinately thus and so. In what concerns arguments, we could resort for instance to what Latour says² about the reductionism that is present in intending to arrive at conclusions from premises; as concerns a world of determinations, we could resort to Hilan Bensusan,³ who shows us how such manner of thinking the world is due to the metaphysics of the primacy of the necessary.

Nevertheless, the most basic elements of a philosophy do not appear to it as something it must simply assume, as an opacity beyond which it has no means to question. These elements are not floating in the air; rather, they are in some way anchored in an inaugural moment, even if this must have sense only in light of some other philosophy. Instead of an indefinite regression towards more basic elements, which at the limit would arrive at an opacity, what matter to us here is that in this inaugural moment, we can find the possibility of the critique in open-field without appealing to a supposed neutrality, since this moment can only be such from inside another philosophy.

Thus the correlationist philosophy,⁴ for example, does not take its basic idea that “only the correlation between subject and object and not the things-in-themselves can be thought” as something that cannot be questioned. Indeed, there are reasons for that basic idea and therefore, at least in principle, these reasons can be questioned by the correlationist. Such reasons can occur only inside a philosophy that is silent from the point of view of correlationism, but that does not mean that it has to remain silent. The reason is that the inaugural moment of a philosophy is something in principle completely intelligible for it, since it is a moment of *contact* between it and another philosophy. In other words, it is the moment in which the philosophy is on an open-field, that is, the place where the philosophical critique that we search for should occur.

Harman's OOO is a philosophy that brought to light this contact between correlationism and another philosophy. According to him, the problem with correlationism is not the rift between humans and things, but the assumption that this rift is enough to classify humans and things into distinct ontological types.⁵ Thus, instead of the difference between humans and things being conquered by an ontology, it is just assumed beforehand,⁶ and as something that follows precisely from that rift. The incapacity to access the things-in-themselves is then seen as what is proper to the relation between humans and things, and not as what is proper to the relation between any things whatsoever. A first open-field, in the form of a third philosophy with which both OOO and correlationism can establish a contact, is thus proposed; namely, the one that is a philosophy from whose interior we can ask about the criteria for the classification into ontological types.

It should be noted here, however, that this first open-field is proposed by OOO as its inaugural moment; therefore, correlationism could disagree about this being the point wherein the open-field is to be found. But in this case, it would not be necessary to return to a trench war situation: instead, we could have a “hyper-open-field”, in which the war or dispute occurs as to which philosophy should be the means by which the contact should be established – but in that case a contact, or more precisely a hyper-contact, has already been made. If we wish to keep the warlike image, we could say that at that point of hyper-contact we disagree about the territory that will be the target of the dispute: correlationism could think that the delimitation by OOO already invades its legitimate frontiers, whereas OOO could argue that any

² See Latour, “Irréductions”, 267-272. Since his “principle of irreduction” is that “nothing is by itself reducible or irreducible to anything else” (Ibid., 243; translation is mine), the position according to which things are by themselves reducible or irreducible to other things could be called “reductionism”. Thus, when we suppose that the conclusions are already contained in the premises, we are taking the conclusions to be reducible to the premises, i.e. we are being reductionists.

³ See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 137-138, 161. According to his view, things as determinately thus and so are as such kept safe from being affected by anything else, and thus they are in this sense necessary.

⁴ Meillassoux defines correlationism as follows: “By ‘correlation’ we understand the idea according to which we have access only to the correlation between thought and being, and never one of these terms taken in isolation. We shall call from now on *correlationism* any trend of thinking that hold as insurmountable the correlation thus understood.” (Meillassoux, *Après la Finitude*, 18. Translation is mine).

⁵ See for example Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 44-46, 118-122, 136-137.

⁶ See for example Harman, *Dante's Broken Hammer*, 230-231.

other delimitation would be spurious. If what is intended is a legitimate gain of territory, in the sense that we could speak of an advance of philosophy as such, then the debate at the hyper-contact will occur and the entrenchment will be avoided. If such a debate happens, then both disputing sides are in search of the open-field and thus willing to take the risk of being defeated.

An open-field critique is therefore always symmetrical: a philosophy is only able to expose an inaugural moment of another one if it also leaves exposed that moment that belongs to it, since this is how contact is established. Accordingly, if a philosophy that deals with the criteria for a classification in ontological types is established as the open-field between OOO and correlationism, then OOO too runs the risk of having its inaugural moment dismantled.

Let us be clear that there is not only one open-field for criticizing a philosophy. Depending on the result of the clash that occurs at the hyper-contact in the hyper-open-field, another open-field could be delimited. We could also expect that many hyper-open-fields are possible between two philosophies, inasmuch as a philosophy can diagnose the inaugural moment of another one in several different ways. Besides that, the open-field is a different one according to the philosophy that does the criticizing. Finally, the very delimitation lying in the background of the identification of a philosophy can be made in countless ways.

Concerning the last two cases above, let us take again the example of correlationism. As mentioned above, when the question of a classification in ontological types is posited as the open-field between OOO and correlationism, an inaugural moment of OOO is brought to light. Nevertheless, the “correlationism” label blurs not only the nuances of the philosophies thus framed, but, more importantly, also the fact that the problem of correlation is just a snippet of what is at stake in them. Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida could then be considered correlationist from Harman’s point of view,⁷ since the relations between things are never thought by them as independent of their mediation by a human element, which can be *Dasein* (Heidegger), the *I* as what lies behind the Same (Levinas) or the text (Derrida); but there are other philosophies that could be thought as covering all these thinkers. For example, largely following François Laruelle’s description of “philosophies of difference,”⁸ one could say that it is here a matter of an anti-reactivism, that is, an opposition to the philosophies whose procedures are somehow already programmed by the reaction to a principle or mechanism, which are themselves taken for granted.⁹ Such anti-reactivism¹⁰ would have: (i) begun with Nietzsche, who sees the anti-reactive in the activity of the will to power and its perspectivist affirmation against the nihilistic reactive negation behind both the idea of a “true world” and Hegel’s sublation; (ii) been developed in Heidegger, who thinks Nietzsche could still be described as a nihilist (a reactivist, in our words) because of his negation of transcendence from the starting point of presence, in such a way that Heidegger sees the anti-reactive rather in a Nothing that is transcendental in relation to the very negation; (iii) passed through Levinas, for whom the neutrality of that transcendental nothing (the “there is,” in his terms)¹¹ would be attained from inside an *arché*,¹² i.e. reactively with respect to it, so that the anti-reactive should be found in what is not inside an *arché*: the Other as infinite, incommensurable alterity; and (iv) found its possible apex in Derrida, who thinks the Levinasian Other (the “Judaic”) as still relative to the Same (the “Greek”) so that according to Derrida, the other cannot but be relative to the logos, yet in a “relation without relation,” in a way that is neither Greek, nor Judaic, and both, in a juxtaposition that both avoids the other as an absolute and also dodges the return to the reactivity of the Greek by means of the eschewal of relation. (Laruelle himself can be understood as a continuation of this anti-reactivism, since he places the non-unifying One of his “non-philosophy” against “philosophical syntax,” which articulates philosophical discourse reactively in relation to the *aporia* resulting from the struggle to unify the contraries – indivision and division – that come from

⁷ See for example Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 74, 39-41, 109-110, and *Bells and Whistles*, 231-232, 281-282.

⁸ See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, throughout.

⁹ It is a reaction in the sense that it is a passivity in relation to the already given principle or mechanism. But that does not mean that the active is what opposes the reactive, as Heidegger and Levinas would have shown against Nietzsche – see below.

¹⁰ What we call here “anti-reactivism” is the philosophical struggle to avoid reactivism. The “anti” here should not be taken without some reservations, for if it is a matter of opposition, it is one of a special kind, because anti-reactivism cannot merely be a *reaction* to a principle in virtue of which reactivism would not be recommended. Incidentally, the motor of philosophy in the anti-reactivist line is above all the denunciation of a supposedly anti-reactivist philosophy as still being reactivist.

¹¹ See Levinas, *De l'Existence à l'Existant*, 93-105.

¹² See Levinas, *Autrement qu'Être ou Au-delà de l'Essence*, 14-15, 156-162.

the “philosophical decision” that splits the One.)¹³ It is thus easy to see that the open-field between Harman and these philosophers differs according to its being established from the point of view of the delimitation between reactivism and anti-reactivism, or from the point of view of that between correlationism and anti-correlationism.

Indeed, Harman's philosophy can be understood as an anti-reactivist philosophy. In order to free the thing-in-itself from its Kantian interpretation, Harman resorts to the Heideggerian tool-analysis, which according to him shows that things do not primarily occur in the mode of presence, but rather in withdrawal,¹⁴ so that he inherits from Heidegger the cut or rift of a nothingness that is transcendental with respect to the reactivity of the nothingness of the negation of presence. Harman avoids a Heideggerian correlationism by refusing to see in this withdrawal a ground for classifying humans and non-humans into two ontological types, by way of Latour's irreductionism,¹⁵ according to which nothing is what it is by itself but always by others. The Latourian reduction of the by-itself to the by-the-others¹⁶ can be understood as an attempt to go further in the anti-reactivist orientation, since it allows us to see the procedure of the by-itself as what lies behind a principle that governs the reaction (to what is governed by it, it is seen as necessary or by itself, as what is not open to the interference of the by-the-others¹⁷). The ontological classification in humans and non-humans can then be seen as reactive, since humans and non-humans, just like everything else, are not by itself but by others. On the other hand, since Harman adopts the Heideggerian withdrawal, he thinks the by-the-others without reducing it to reasons as with Latourian actual occasions, forces, actors or networks. Thus, in Harman, something always withdraws or is “irreduced” to its reasons, whether mereological or efficient. From the point of view of anti-reactivism, we could thus say that the Latourian reduction to reasons or relations would still be reactive and thereby still in the by-itself. Indeed, as an opacity of this kind, reasons would work as the principle in front of which philosophy becomes a reaction.

We thus arrive at Harman's objects. Since they always have parts (their mereological reasons), they are by others. But objects are irreducible to their parts, as well as to their efficient reasons (and to any relation into they enter).¹⁸ Since these *irreductions* are a way to avoid the by-itself, we can conclude that in Harman the by-the-others can only be such if there are these irreductions. In other words, the by-the-others can only be kept if the withdrawal from reasons is maintained: that is, if the by-the-others is already also an in-itself. In short, the rejection of the by-itself implies the preservation of the in-itself. This Harmanian by-the-others does not reduce the reasons; rather, it is their very irreduction: they remain at a level irreducible to what withdraws from them. But that there is something that withdraws from reasons is different from there not being something of this sort, and that difference is precisely the radiation¹⁹ that one level radiates over the other.²⁰ Such a radiation, when radiated over the reasons, makes them “weird.” For according to Harman,

¹³ Laruelle's non-philosophy will soon be discussed in more detail.

¹⁴ See for example Harman, *Tool-Being*, 3-4, 18-34.

¹⁵ See for example Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 14-15, 127.

¹⁶ See Latour, “Irréductions”, 243-266, 286-288. Latour acknowledges that adopting the principle of irreduction (see note 2 above) while at the same time saying that there is nothing but relations between forces (see *Ibid.*, 286) (i.e., the by-the-others) can be seen as a paradox; indeed, irreductionism would then not be able to avoid this reduction to the by-the-others. But even if irreductionism itself reduces, it is still not a reductionism (see *Ibid.*, 287-288), since its reduction, contrary to reductionism, is one that “pays the price” (see *Ibid.*, 285), i.e., it is one in which “the forces at work and the major works of domination are seen in broad daylight” (*Ibid.*, 285. Translation is mine). Thus, the issue for irreductionism is not so much to avoid reduction no matter what, as to bring to light the costs involved in every reduction. Incidentally, this can already be seen in the principle of irreduction, since for this principle it is not a matter of nothing being reduced to anything else, but of not being reduced (or irreduced) *by itself*.

¹⁷ See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 56, and throughout, for an approach of the necessary as what is not open to interference.

¹⁸ See for example Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 7-13, 19. Harman calls this first reduction the undermining of objects, while the latter one he calls the overmining of objects.

¹⁹ See Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 184.

²⁰ We can say that Harman's objects amount in the last instance to absolutely irreducible levels – and not reducible or irreducible by others, as in Latour. This absoluteness means the in-itself as vacuous actuality (see Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 81-82), since the in-itself is in duality with relations. Nevertheless, the vacuity of this actuality, far from being a nullity to be discarded, means a distortion or radiation over the level from which it withdraws. Note also that the individual character of the objects is nothing but the individual character of the levels, which comes from their absolute irreducibility, which means that we stay with neither the lower nor the upper level, but with the “mezzanine” (see Harman, *Bells and Whistles*, 21). Such a mezzanine is not an intermediate level, but rather the *multiplicity* of levels, in the sense of an indefinite number of *individual* levels.

the lesson to be drawn from Kant is not the Meillassouxian view that there is no reason whatsoever for things being what they are, but the lesson that comes from no longer taking the problem of reason in an all or nothing sense: namely, the one that admits that reasons can be (mereologically) sufficient, although already distorted by what escapes them completely²¹ – in a word, *weird*.²²

Thus, instead of proceeding reactively in relation to reasons, Harman's OOO would be open precisely to what escapes a government of reasons – or, we might say, any government,²³ since the Harmanian irreductionism cannot accept a by-itself. It would not thereby be appropriate to critique OOO by saying that it merely moves the reactive towards the one that reacts to a “radiation”; indeed, that weird radiation is the distortion of the non-reactive over the reaction. And if someone insists on seeing here a reaction, it is precisely because the reactive remains in its irreduction, so that here it is a question of focus: when we focus on the reactive and thereby lose the distortion of its irreduction, we lose the anti-reactive. Accordingly, the anti-reactive as such does not reduce the reactive, and the by-others as such must have its “by” understood as weird reasons.

Hence, if the delimitation between philosophies is the one between reactivism and anti-reactivism, Harman's OOO is placed in another open-field: namely, the one that, seeing in Heidegger still the reactive under the form of the by-itself of the distinction between human and non-human, also sees in the by-others of mere (non-weird) reasons just another facet of the by-itself. It is then no longer the case of an open-field in a philosophy that thinks the criteria for a classification into ontological types: such a philosophy could, at least in principle, proceed reactively to what is seen as the reasons for such criteria. Since the open-field critique is symmetrical, Harman's OOO also leaves exposed its inaugural moment (from the point of view of *its* characterization of the open-field), which consists here in the irreduction of reasons in favor of anti-reactivism (Latour could describe the open-field in another way, but then we could have here a hyper-open-field, as seen above). It should be noted, though, that this open-field is intra-anti-reactivist, since it indicates a flaw in Latour's anti-reactivist project. An open-field able to establish a confrontation with anti-reactivism as a whole would probably have to be one between Nietzsche and Hegel, if we suppose that the Hegelian point of view could agree with its Nietzschean description as being reactivist or “nihilist,” or at least that it would be possible here to establish a hyper-open-field. Or maybe we would have to resort, as in Heidegger and in Nietzsche himself, to an inaugural moment of reactivism or “nihilism” already found in Greek philosophy.

What matters to us here, however, is the indefinite multiplicity of open-fields for any philosophy, which already implies a *precariousness* that lies behind the establishment of those fields and hyper-fields, and that seems even more dramatic due to the countless ways in which we could delimitate the philosophies in combat. Someone could contend that some delimitations are more rigorous, more embracing or more radical than others, but such contention would have itself to occur in an open-field: that is, inside a third philosophy in which the contact between philosophies that diverge on this point occurs, and thus we are again in precariousness.

Such precariousness,²⁴ by the way, must have caught the reader's attention from the very first moment we talked about “trenches” and “open-field,” about how a philosophical critique should occur if we expect an advance of philosophy itself, etc. Indeed, nothing was said about the grounds for such a characterization of philosophical critique in general. We will not defend ourselves from anyone who asks about those grounds; rather, we will acknowledge our own weakness and precariousness, and throw our weapons on the floor. Strictly speaking, though, there never was any weapon – there are no means to the combat. And yet as we will see, there are conditions of precariousness; moreover, in a similar vein to the

²¹ See Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*, 157. The link with Kant lies in the radicalization of Kantian finitude, thus expanded to relations between things whatsoever. Indeed, the gap between things (which is reinterpreted by Harman as Heideggerian withdrawal) means also that a thing is not “touched” or reduced to its reasons (see *ibid.* 131-137).

²² Harman sees the reality of that which withdraws as weird (see Harman, *Weird Realism*, 51 and Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism*, 125).

²³ See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 41-44, 63-67, and throughout, for an approach to metaphysics through the idea of government.

²⁴ From now on we will refer to *this* precariousness simply as *precariousness*.

Harmanian radiation of what withdraws,²⁵ precariousness is reflected or radiated over philosophies. Just as the weakness of vacuous actualities distorts, as weakness or vacuity itself, the levels from which they withdraw, we will see that precisely because it is precarious, precariousness too is like a void that must have some kind of influence over philosophies.

Regarding the conditions of precariousness, i.e., of the very impossibility of grounding any characterization of philosophical critique, it should first be noted that the philosophical critique as such cannot itself be thoroughly conceived in terms of any philosophy; otherwise, that philosophy would become entrenched by positing itself as the condition of any critique. Without a philosophy that it could adopt, precariousness thus does not have any means to ground anything. But it is not here a matter of recognizing in precariousness a “meta” level in relation to philosophies – we should not consider it, in this sense, a “metaphilosophy.” For a meta-level can only be admitted in light of a certain philosophy, namely, the one that thinks (contrary to Latour)²⁶ that a level can be by-itself different from another one. Indeed, if a level differs by others from others, this “by others” means that everything is placed on the same plane (precisely, the plane of the by-others) so that there is no meta-level. Nevertheless, it is not that precariousness is on the same level in relation to philosophies: that too would characterize precariousness by assuming a specific philosophy, in this case, an anti-reactivist one or a “flat ontology.”²⁷ In other words, the question between the meta and the non-meta only occurs inside a philosophy, and thus is not suitable for characterizing precariousness.

Nevertheless, the anti-reactivism of flat ontologies should be credited for outlining the idea of precariousness. Since there is no level by itself different from the others, there is no privileged level that could govern all the others, no level to which philosophy should *react*, and thus no grounding of philosophical critique in general. Precariousness could thus be understood, under this anti-reactivist bias, as that which does not proceed by reaction, by submission to a government, so that it would be “up in the air”, to speak like Bensusan.²⁸ This is our praise for flat ontologies, and for OOO in particular – and that will be the reason why our way of thinking precariousness bears certain resemblances to OOO. However, precariousness cannot be characterized by a specific philosophy. It will do no good to claim that this circle would be precisely what would make precariousness precarious, since flat ontologies would then become entrenched: in short, if philosophical critique is understood always in terms of flat ontologies, then they foreclose themselves to any critique beforehand.

Indeed, Harman has to refuse the meta-level,²⁹ and then cannot but take philosophy itself as an object or a creation of objects.³⁰ Thus, his thinking still operates inside the alternative between meta and non-meta, so that if we are to proceed following his flat ontology, the precarious must be in the non-meta. It is true that his recent book *Dante's Broken Hammer*³¹ could be read as an attempt to think a metaphilosophy in which “meta” has a modified sense: namely, the meta as it is in the opening of love to *specific* objects – an opening derived from the idea of the selective character of intentionality. Thus, philosophy should be object-oriented, for otherwise philosophy would be nothing but a fraud, since it would make love divert away from objects. If we understand that as a metaphilosophy (since it tells us what philosophy should be) we should notice that the meta here is not intended merely as the one of a privileged level that governs all the rest. Rather, we could say that it is like an outline of an anti-reactivist meta. For the love of specific objects, which Harman takes from Max Scheler's phenomenological ethics, can be considered anti-reactivist to the same extent as the phenomenological project of a *return* to “*the things themselves*.”³² Accordingly, although this

²⁵ We will see below that precariousness bears non-accidental resemblances to Harman's OOO and to anti-reactivist philosophies in general.

²⁶ See Latour, “Irréductions”, 248, 270, and Latour et al., *The Prince and the Wolf*, 67.

²⁷ The coining of the term “flat ontology” is usually attributed to Manuel DeLanda.

²⁸ See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*, 41.

²⁹ See Latour et al., *The Prince and the Wolf*, 50.

³⁰ See Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 248, Harman, “On vicarious causation”, 204-205 and Harman, *Tool-Being*, 79-80.

³¹ See Harman, *Dante's Broken Hammer*, 145-147, 159-168, 243-249.

³² The phenomenological epoché in this sense could be understood as an attempt to put out of action that in relation to which philosophy is reactive.

modified meta could perhaps mean a rejection of the alternative between the old meta and non-meta, what matters to us here is that the novelty of this meta is to be anti-reactivist – and then we have once more a philosophy occupying the locus of precariousness, and entrenchment returns.

Since in precariousness all philosophies are levelled at the scenery of trenches and open-fields, we could perhaps describe it as the placing of all philosophies on the same plane, for no philosophy is privileged over the others. But then, that which puts all philosophies on the same plane is not itself a philosophy; thus, Harman's OOO or any other anti-reactivist philosophy should themselves be on that plane. Here someone might say they are nothing but this very placing on the plane; however, anti-reactivism is a philosophy inasmuch as it could be defended as well as attacked, i.e., inasmuch as an open-field between it and reactivism is possible. The weakness, the non-availability of weapons to precariousness is not the same as placing itself in opposition to reaction. And this is not the same as claiming that anti-reactivism must relapse into reactivism: the combat between them is entirely legitimate if it occurs in an open-field. But *the very fact that such combat can take place* already means that there are weapons available to anti-reactivism, as non-reactive as they may be. In short, we will say that anti-reactivism is not precarious, since it works as a ground for philosophy to be what it intends.

Precariousness is not thus on the same plane as philosophies (for here it is not a matter of being non-meta), but rather is the placing of philosophies on the same plane. Since philosophies are, according to our warlike image, on a battlefield (with its trenches and open-fields) it is on this plane of the battlefield that every philosophy is to be found. Just as combats are not reduced to the battlefield, philosophies are not reduced to this plane, and this plane in turn is not reduced to philosophies or to any philosophy whatsoever. To speak like Harman, we could say that this plane is composed of philosophies, in such a way that it withdraws from them, inasmuch as there is here an irreduction. This withdrawal does not govern philosophies, but in this very non-governing executes over them a distortion or radiation: philosophies are thus seen under a new light, a weird light. Still using Harman's vocabulary, we could say that philosophies are the reasons for the plane of precariousness, but weird ones, since the plane is not reduced to its reasons. Accordingly, as a compound that is not reduced to its parts, precariousness could be seen as if it had left the perspective of the combat and seen the war scenario as a whole, then returning and throwing a new light on the combats. It is not the light of one who has seen each of the combats, nor the one that intends to reduce them in the name of the broader scenario, but rather the one that enables us to see something new through the very irreduction between whole and parts – in other words, the light of the weird radiation of withdrawal or irreduction.

As we have already indicated, it is not by accident that we use the anti-reactivist vocabulary of Harman's OOO to speak of precariousness. Indeed, precariousness cannot govern, and anti-reactivism offers a logic that can be used to think outside of what governs and what is governed. But anti-reactivism as a philosophy that enters with reactivism in the battlefield is not of interest to precariousness; accordingly, anti-reactivism must be undressed of its philosophical character and work for precariousness only as a logic – and a provisional one, since although we know precariousness cannot be described in the framework of what governs and what is governed, much of what it cannot be still remains in obscurity. While this sort of “negative characterization” of precariousness will be enlarged below, we cannot expect it to be exhaustive. We cannot exhibit precariousness negatively, as if it were a transcendent realm that could be more or less glimpsed inasmuch as it is stripped of what it is not. After all, this would be too much philosophy: namely, one wherein it makes sense to speak of “transcendence,” “realm,” “negative,” “glimpse” etc. Nor can we characterize precariousness positively: for the same reason as given above, it is not a reality or any other thing subject to “positive characterization.” But the *failure* of its characterization, both negative and positive, does not make of precariousness a mere nil to be discarded; indeed, to do philosophy in the light of this failure is not the same thing as to do it without taking it into account. This failure appears as a weird radiation over philosophies – or rather, since the anti-reactivist logic of radiation is provisional, as a radiation over the very radiation, if we could see in this duplication not a recursivity, but the insufficiency or failure of the very idea of radiation.

Thus, instead of pre-empting any philosophical critique for conceiving its working in the terms of a certain philosophy, a philosophy under the radiation of precariousness is inclined to open-field combat.

Without that radiation, the clash in the open-field degenerates into mere benevolence or urbanity, wherein there is a so-called “coexistence” with other philosophies, without taking them seriously enough – something like juxtaposed bubbles instead of real contact, or as some kind of respect to the uninitiated, the ones who unfortunately are not yet able to understand that in the very making of their philosophies they inadvertently already presuppose the philosophy of the initiated. Furthermore, here there is also an appeal to philosophical “choices” that would be more or less profitable, so that one hopes to do justice to precariousness by means of an idea of “choice,” without however being really open to critique, since the criteria of profitability are still established on the interior of a philosophy.³³

As we have already pointed out, ignoring precariousness and thereby getting entrenched is not a gratuitous mistake by Harman's OOO. Indeed, OOO tends toward it not only by still thinking inside the framework of the meta/non-meta alternative, but mainly by being an anti-reactivist philosophy that tends to take the place of precariousness, since precariousness cannot proceed by reaction. But precariousness cannot proceed by way of anti-reaction any more than by way of reaction. Rather, it is the placing of both reactivism and anti-reactivism on the same plane, not in order to make them coexist in a pluralism, but to make them enter into open-field warfare. It is true that “anti-reactivism” is only one of the possible labels for OOO, but on the one hand, this is in accordance with precariousness itself, and, on the other hand this does not mean that another label could avoid this mistake by OOO. For if there is a particular tendency of anti-reactivism to take the place of precariousness, that does not mean that other philosophies would be more capable of thinking it properly.

Indeed, someone could resort here to Laruelle, who provides us with a way of seeing how philosophy itself is doomed to entrenchment. However, we cannot agree with his position, and soon we will see wherein lies the tendency of philosophies to entrench themselves. In Laruelle, however, philosophies have this tendency because they are as such already programmed to result in a hard kernel as the condition of all critique. Let us see why. First of all, for Laruelle it is a matter of finding radical immanence, finitude and autonomy,³⁴ as is largely the case in what he calls the “philosophies of difference” (Nietzsche and Deleuze on the one hand – the ones who are still too metaphysical and do not take finitude seriously enough – and Heidegger and Derrida on the other, who bring finitude to the fore).³⁵ But the point for Laruelle is that philosophy cannot be radical enough, i.e., cannot get to a really radical immanence, finitude and autonomy. And this is precisely because of its programming; indeed, philosophy then betrays autonomy - since it is submitted to its programming -, finitude - since it is then not something radically left to its own devices, but rather attached to the programming -, and immanence - since the programming obviously occupies a privileged, transcendent position. But in what precisely does this programming consist? In Laruelle, philosophy is programmed by the aporias engendered by the struggle to unify contraries.³⁶ What these contraries are depends on the philosophy adopted in each case: it could be Being and beings, the one and the multiple, the transcendental and the empirical, and so on. The problem with unification is that it is always itself taken as a contrary in relation to that which it unifies (the Being that unifies beings, the One that unifies the multiple, the transcendental that unifies the empirical) so that in unification the duel of contraries is always preserved. On the one hand the contraries are forced to coincide, while on the other they repel each other. In other words, philosophy seeks a unification, but cannot permit the unification to be affected by the unified, since they are contraries; in short, it seeks an impossible coincidence of opposites – and here is the aporia that moves philosophy, programming it, making of it above all a syntactical thinking (“syntactical” in the sense of a way of articulating a language).³⁷ It is thus that, for instance, the unifying pre-Socratic element is denounced as affected by its contrary, i.e., as conceived in the terms of its contrary, so that what was in the multiple is elevated to the status of a unifying principle: water, air, fire etc.; and in

³³ Someone could think that the dispute over the criteria of profitability could play the role of the open-field or the hyper-open-field; nevertheless, that the profitability should itself be a criterion for philosophy is already something internal to a philosophy, which thereby takes the place of precariousness.

³⁴ See Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, position 1787-1810, 2069, 591.

³⁵ See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 39-41, 135.

³⁶ See *Ibid.*, 6-7, 11, 14-17.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 2.

the problematic of post-Kantian philosophy, philosophy is moved by the denouncement of the empirical affecting the Kantian transcendental distinction.³⁸ As for the various “philosophies of difference,” on the other hand, it is neither a matter of an all-unifying element, nor even of a reality merely divided into chunks (which would still be, despite everything, a unified vision of reality), but rather of indivision as already division and division as already indivision (in a word, *difference*)³⁹, as it is the case of a plane of immanence in its Nietzschean-Deleuzian version, but also in its Heideggerian-Derridean version.⁴⁰ Thus, the philosophies of difference do not merely dwell inside the ceaseless movement of philosophies replacing each other as is dictated by the philosophical aporias; instead, they attempt a rejection of the duel of contraries. But in them there is never a rupture with the aporia as such: it is only made pure, the condition or superior form of all philosophical aporias,⁴¹ i.e., the aporetical form of the One in which indivision is already division and division already indivision. For this reason, the philosophies of difference, although in a different way, are still programmed by philosophical aporias. It is thus in the philosophies of difference that we can find the most (philosophically) positive delimitation of what Laruelle calls “philosophical decision,”⁴² i.e., the decision that is made as a distribution of the contraries available beforehand⁴³ and is thereby at the basis of the philosophical syntax. And then philosophies of difference, as a result of the philosophical aporias or the programming of philosophy, entrench themselves as the condition of all (philosophical) critique (which of course could only make use of this very programming), without ever calling into question the philosophical decision itself.

Against the programmed One or immanence of the philosophies of difference, Laruelle’s non-philosophy posits the One not as contrary or in duel with this other One, but as in a duality or unilateral difference with it. Thus, the One of philosophies of difference (i.e., the One of philosophical decision itself) is affected by the One of non-philosophy, but the latter is not affected by the former.⁴⁴ It is non-unifying, “unary,”⁴⁵ and not in a mere opposition (the one of contraries) with the philosophical One. It is through this unarity that Laruelle intends to find radical immanence, finitude, and autonomy.

But in light of the battlefield of precariousness, this “non-philosophy” is still a philosophy. Indeed, what matters to us if we want to avoid entrenchment is just that an open-field can be established – and whatever could enter into this open-field will be called here “philosophy.” After all, if precariousness wants to distinguish some of those in war as philosophy and others as not, then it cannot be precariousness anymore, since it is not anymore the open-field but rather a combatant (for this distinction can clash with another one). In other words, the delimitation of philosophy does not concern us; what we want is to be able to place philosophies – or whatever they are – in the open-field. That “non-philosophy” is still a philosophy from the point of view of precariousness is clear if we consider it an anti-reactivism, since anti-reactivism can enter into combat with reactivism, as we have seen. Furthermore, we could identify an open-field inside a third philosophy in the interior of which the dispute concerning the existence of this “philosophical syntax” could occur. On the other hand, a hyper-open-field could also, in principle, be established in the case of “non-philosophy” not agreeing with its characterization as anti-reactivist.

It is true that “non-philosophy” could say that if there is a “philosophy” in the interior of which one can discuss this syntax, then this philosophy is already outside this syntax: that is, is already non-philosophy, so that the combat does not take place. “Non-philosophy” could also say that that from which

³⁸ See *Ibid.*, 16-17.

³⁹ See *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁴⁰ In Heidegger, according to Laruelle, the indivision as division and division as indivision would be in the cut of the transcendental nothing that is not a mere division from the negation of presence, and in Derrida in the relation without relation between the logos and the cut, the Greek and the Judaic, wherein there is not the mere division of exclusion, but rather a juxtaposition: not only the one of the “both Greek and Judaic”, but also the one of the “neither Greek nor Judaic.” (See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, chapters 3 and 5).

⁴¹ See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 8.

⁴² See *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁴³ See Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, position 1672.

⁴⁴ See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 12-14.

⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*, 16.

it departs includes precariousness and the open-field; thus, the rupture with the syntactical would mean that there is no possible open-field between non-philosophy and the syntactical, since all war would then pass to the side of the latter. But precariousness, strictly speaking, cannot be characterized, so that it cannot be reduced to the syntactical; indeed, any characterization could, in principle, be fought. Harman inadvertently characterizes precariousness in order to stay with its betrayed form; Laruelle, on the other hand, transforms precariousness into a philosophy, in order to afterwards reject it as *the* philosophy. It is also true that according to Laruelle, the characterization of philosophy as a syntactical thinking is only for “the use of philosophers” and not a “real critique” of philosophy,⁴⁶ which according to him could only be made from the unary One, which incidentally does not “reject” philosophy in the manner of philosophy, but by means of some kind of generalization wherein the One is freed from the syntactical philosophical thinking. However, Laruelle of course does not understand the word “philosophers” as we do under the light of precariousness: that is, as combatants on the plane of war. From the point of view of precariousness, a critique that is still philosophical or “for the use of philosophers” is not a prelude to “non-philosophy,” but rather just *one* philosophy, which enters in conflict with others on the plane of war.

Laruelle thus makes the mistake of characterizing the non-characterizable precariousness in order to then reject it. This procedure occurs whenever one tries to reject philosophy as a whole. For example, when Levinas places the infinite relation of my exposure to the Other outside the game of philosophy as the game of an always future, loved truth,⁴⁷ since such a game would still be inside a Same as it is closed to responsibility for the Other. Similar to Laruelle, Levinas attempts to put his thought outside of the reaches of philosophical critique by reducing it and thereby ignoring the precariousness of the plane of war. We can see once again a similar procedure in the philosophies of language of the pragmatic turn; indeed, in them precariousness is often mistaken for one language game among others. If precariousness thus transformed is not rejected by the pragmatic turn, it is at least reduced to a *mere* game, which in its turn reduces philosophies. This is an important point, since the idea of *precariousness* may suggest that there is a certain gratuity in philosophies, for we would be proceeding from a starting point of agreement concerning what our practices are when we do philosophy (namely, that it is an issue of being able to advance and not merely get entrenched, etc.). Indeed, *in a sense*, when we speak of a battlefield we expect the reader to “agree” that this more or less reflects our philosophical “practices.” We should not, however, give philosophical “weight” to these words; we should not think that we could thus *reduce* (something that one can only do, under the light of precariousness, using a philosophy) philosophies to the frivolity of the practice of a war *game*. Precariousness does not mean that we should despair of philosophies – we only think like this if precariousness is mistaken beforehand for a philosophy and its expectations. The failure inherent to precariousness is such only from a philosophical point of view, which relapses into error when it spreads itself towards that which withdraws from it. Despairing of philosophies is still just one more philosophy, which thus can be placed in principle in an open-field, and if at the present moment we cannot see how any combat could be fought against this desperation, it is probably because entrenchment has occurred at the level of the betrayed precariousness. Thus, the radiation of precariousness over philosophies, inasmuch as it can avoid the entrenchment is, contrary to the practical and to games, precisely what enables any hope in philosophies. It would not be right even to say that precariousness means, if not a reduction to games, at least an undecidability concerning philosophy, since all philosophies would be on the same plane of war. To the contrary, putting them all on the same plane means that the one that posits the others as undecidable (or as worthy of a skeptical attitude etc.) is precisely on the same plane as the others. In short, precariousness remains untouchable by any philosophy or combatant, no matter how hard the latter tries to conceive itself as outside any combat.

Against Laruelle, we will therefore say that the tendency of philosophies to a hard kernel as the condition of all critique consists not in being a thinking that works by the articulation of a syntax, but rather in philosophies being combatants that compose the battlefield, without however reducing it. Accordingly, the battlefield withdraws from them, in a withdrawal whose radiation is not comprehensible from the strict point of view of the combatants, that is, from the point of view of the pair failure/success. Similarly to

⁴⁶ See *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴⁷ See Levinas, *Autrement qu'Être ou Au-delà de l'Essence*, 16-25, 48-54, 168-169.

Harman's real objects,⁴⁸ from which other real objects withdraw in such a way that what they touch are only their caricatures or sensual objects, philosophies too can only touch caricatures of precariousness or the battlefield. Thus caricaturing it in its own terms, a philosophy tends to take it by itself, thereby posing itself as the condition of all critique. But if philosophies cannot touch precariousness, this does not mean that they are condemned to entrenchment; indeed, it still remains the alternative of the radiation coming from what one does not touch, from what withdraws, from the irreducible.

Someone could insist here that this is nothing but Harman's philosophy as an object or creation of objects. For since they are objects, philosophies are neither reduced to nor reduce the object that they compose, just as occurs with combatants on the plane of war. Nevertheless, let us say it once more: Harman's OOO offers us only a provisional anti-reactivist logic for us to talk about precariousness; indeed, if precariousness is not reactivist, *it is not anti-reactivist either*. However, it is still undetermined *in what way* it is not anti-reactivist (as it is still undetermined how anti-reactivist the logic that we extracted from OOO is). In short, what precariousness *is not* is still undetermined, and so must it remain indefinitely, since it withdraws from philosophies, whose perspective we cannot leave when we say what precariousness is not. This is why the logics of precariousness are always provisional. Yet this withdrawal that radiates as the provisional status of these logics is not the withdrawal of OOO; instead, it is the radiation specific to precariousness. Indeed, in precariousness it is not that the object composed by the philosophies throws over them the radiation of its withdrawal; also, strictly speaking, it is not that the plane of war withdraws from the combatants (this is just an image that enters in consonance with the logic we use here for precariousness; other images could be used, for example the one of a collaboration of philosophies, or a dialogue aiming at advance). Rather, it is the withdrawal not of a reality which could be characterized positively or negatively, but one that concerns the provisional status of all ways to speak of precariousness.⁴⁹

Another objection might be to say that there would be a point of contact between Harman's OOO and other philosophies (such as the one with correlationism, or the one with reactivism) so that even while becoming entrenched at one end – namely, the one of philosophy as an object – Harman's OOO would open itself to open-field combat at the other end – namely, that of one of its inaugural moments. Nevertheless, *there is no open-field without the radiation of precariousness*, since philosophies would thus follow their tendency to posit themselves as the condition of all critique.

Finally, someone could think that with precariousness we do the same as philosophies: that is, we provoke entrenchment by positing it as the condition of all critique – with the addendum that we illegitimately intend that precariousness is not philosophy. To that we answer that precariousness is indeed the condition of all critique, but only if we understand “critique” as one which is a sincere opening in an open-field, and not a false dispute protected by trenches. In other words, it is the condition of critique not because all critique should suppose it so as to guarantee its own security, but rather because it thinks the combat in the open-field itself. The difference of focus here is important: it is a matter of an exposure of philosophies in the open-field, and thus affirming them, instead of rejecting them in the name of a supposed beyond of philosophy or in the name of a specific philosophy that posits itself as the condition of the very doing of philosophy. If it is difficult to see that precariousness is not another philosophy, it is because actually precariousness cannot be seen or accessed; it manifests itself through the invisible radiation of its withdrawal from all philosophy – and it is from the inside of a philosophy that we expect, wrongly, to “see” precariousness.

Precariousness radiates over philosophies as an appeal to non-entrenchment, to cooperation, to dialogue (keeping in mind that, through the radiation of its provisional status, such images should, sooner or later, be substituted). In light of all that was said above, the answer to this appeal should mean: (i) above all, not reducing philosophies, whether for preserving them in reduced form or for rejecting them; (ii) taking the delimitation of philosophies in combat as itself the result of a philosophy and therefore as also subject to the combat; (iii) acknowledging that the combat between two philosophies occurs inside a third

⁴⁸ See for example Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 47-49, 75-78.

⁴⁹ Let us make clear, thus, that the work of saying what precariousness is not does not suit to negatively characterize it, but rather to enable its logic to be substituted.

philosophy, which of course is also subject to a combat inside another philosophy and so on, indefinitely; (iv) not taking this indefinite regression as grounds for despairing of philosophies – it is just a manifestation of precariousness, so that transforming it into a reduction that despairs of philosophies is not legitimate; (v) seeing in the disagreement between two philosophies concerning their delimitations not the inevitability of the entrenchment, but the very possibility of hyper-contact in a hyper-open-field; (vi) realizing that the critique in open-field is always symmetrical, since one can only attack if it is also exposed to being attacked; (vii) acknowledging that any philosophy has the tendency to entrenchment, since it always caricatures precariousness – recognizing caricature is also a manifestation of the radiation of precariousness; (viii) not taking one logic of precariousness as definitive; (ix) “developing” precariousness, that is, going further into what it is not, so that its logic can be substituted; and (x) from a new logic of precariousness, rethinking what it means to answer the appeal of precariousness.

We wanted to find *an* open-field wherein Harman's OOO could be placed; nevertheless, thanks to Harman, we had to seek the open-field *as such*, and thus we arrived at precariousness. Indeed, with his idea of philosophy as an object or creation of objects, Harman's anti-reactivism already outlines the idea of open-field and its precariousness; and from an anti-reactivist line, in a particularly radical way, since it denounces the reactivism in Heidegger in such a way that the anti-reactivist path is diverted from its continuation in Levinas, Derrida and Laruelle, placing it on the path of Latour and going beyond it by means of his idea of withdrawal. In short, we could say that we have found the open-field of the combat between us and Harman's OOO in the dispute concerning what idea of the open-field should be adopted. Indeed, it should be remembered that we are always inside a philosophy, in the sense that precariousness is always caricatured. But Harman's OOO encloses itself in a trench if it does not see that, stuck in the caricature, it cannot be more than a provisional logic of precariousness, for thus it ends up ignoring precariousness and reducing philosophies.

Lastly, let us be clear that we do not expect our idea of precariousness to be accepted, criticized, or admitted as a “beyond” of all critique. For this would be to focus attention on precariousness, which means forgetting that when we focus on it, we caricature it. What we want instead is for precariousness to radiate. Indeed, it can only throw its radiation over philosophies if we look not at it, but at philosophies themselves. as always opened to sincere critique. It is that which makes philosophies expose themselves in an open-field, instead of merely seeking a shelter to continue existing, detrimentally to dialogue, collaboration and the advance of philosophy itself.

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