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THE AUTISM OF REASON

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Inebriated and bastardized by Plato, liquefied and cogitated into concentrate by Descartes, moralized by Kant, whipped by Sade, devoured by Hegel, disgorged by Stirner, conscripted by Husserl, chewed out by Nietzsche, down the wrong pipe of Derrida, turned over by Heidegger, crapped out by Deleuze, thrown up by Laruelle. And it would ask for more if we let it!

Laruelle, "Obscénité de la philosophie" 123

With this litany, François Laruelle recounts the many crimes of the philosophers caught in the clutches of their depraved profession. Philosophy is, in Laruelle's words, "the oldest prejudice."¹ To do philosophy means to harbor a secret stance toward the world – pursuing it, eating and digesting it, beating it down, then building it back up again. And philosophy itself is forever a glutton for punishment, eager to be re-enlisted for future abuses. It will always come back for more if we let it.

Let us begin, therefore, by returning to first principles – that most emblematic philosophical chore, *to return to first principles*. In other words, what is philosophy? To ask the question what is philosophy? typically requires that the philosopher return to the origins of thought, to plumb the depths of being in pursuit of its foundations. This is what Kant does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, what Heidegger does in *Being and Time*, and even what Deleuze and Guattari do in *What is Philosophy?* But not Laruelle. This kind of question is the very kind that he refuses to answer, refuses even to pose. Not what philosophy, then, or how philosophy, or even where or when philosophy. If Laruelle asks anything, he asks *why* philosophy? And, more importantly, why not? Why not *no philosophy*?

alexander r. galloway

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Avoiding his own first principles, then, Laruelle passes instead to the last, the last principles, or more precisely the *last instance*. Where philosophy is always vying to be first, non-philosophy is content to be last. After all, Laruelle's One is no prime mover, no ultimate substance. In fact, it is quite the reverse: Laruelle's One is a "last mover," a finite and immanent real.

"The question *Quid facti?* is the object of *metaphysics*," writes Deleuze in his book on Kant.² What is the *fact* of knowledge? Not this or that particular piece of knowledge, what Laruelle calls the regional knowledges, but the very condition of knowledge itself, its *fact*.

From Kant to Foucault and beyond, the pervasive question of philosophy is not so much *what* something is, or even *how* something behaves, but *what are the conditions of possibility* for any *x* whatsoever? In other words, if Plato asks what is truth, Kant asks what are the conditions of possibility for truth? Kant makes the stakes known on many occasions: “How is metaphysics at all possible?” “How is cognition from pure reason possible?” “How are synthetic propositions *a priori* possible?” “How is pure mathematics possible?”³ Not so much what is philosophy, but what are the conditions of possibility for philosophy itself?

In the end, though, the two questions are the same, for as Laruelle defines it philosophy is synonymous with the decision to reveal the conditions of possibility for philosophy. In this sense, Kant would be, in Laruelle’s opinion, a philosopher *par excellence*, a philosopher raised to the second power, for Kant is not simply enacting the philosophical decision (and thus *doing* philosophy), nor reflecting on the philosophical decision (asking what is philosophy), but rather demonstrating the philosophical meta-conditions for any kind of philosophical reflection whatsoever.

This is why Laruelle never “returns to first principles,” as many philosophers are wont to do. He never seeks to found a new philosophy, or to reinvigorate an existing one by reflecting on its own specificity. He is no modernist after all. Instead, Laruelle seeks the “last principles.” And if anything, Laruelle’s work is a question of “last philosophy.” Deviating from the aspirations of Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, one might say that Laruelle’s project constitutes a series of *meditations on last philosophy*.

But Laruelle’s “last” is not a chronological last, nor is it “last” like a trump card (which is always played last). It is a messianic last. Laruelle’s last philosophy is last only in the sense of “the last instance,” an immanent and finite lastness that trumps nothing, supersedes nothing, and indeed is not a “meditation” at all in the proper sense of the term as reflection-on or consciousness-of. Rather, Laruelle’s in-the-last-instance means roughly “in the most generic

sense.” Laruelle’s messianism is therefore neither ancient nor modern, neither special nor particular. But merely generic. The last, the least, the finite.

How would Laruelle fare if it were possible to superimpose him onto Kant’s two-by-two matrix of *a priori/a posteriori* and analytic/synthetic?⁴ The answer is not entirely clear, not least because Laruelle would likely reject these dyads themselves as hopelessly philosophical, even as he conserves some of the terminology for his own purposes (particularly the terms analytic and *a priori*). The first difficulty is that the terms *a priori* and *a posteriori*, defined by Kant as “prior to or independent of experience” and “posterior to or dependent on experience,” do not make much sense within non-philosophy. Because of its correlationist overtones, “experience” is not a viable concept for Laruelle, so Kant’s use of these terms as they stand is essentially incompatible with him.

For this reason, and in the interest of making some headway with Laruelle, one might remove the term “experience” from the definitions and re-jig them to mean simply “from what comes before” (*a priori*) and “from what comes later” (*a posteriori*). Only as defined in this manner can we begin to explore the possibility of an *a priori* Laruelle or an *a posteriori* Laruelle.

Likewise the analytic/synthetic distinction is only partially applicable to Laruelle. To begin, the synthetic, defined by Kant as a judgment containing an additive predicate, is roundly refused by Laruelle. There are few concepts more antonymic to non-philosophy than synthesis. Laruelle endlessly stresses the non-synthetic nature of the clone, or the irreversible logic of unilateral duality, or the mono-directional nature of determination-in-the-last-instance. The One does not enter into a synthesis with anything. Laruelle labels it “in-One” precisely because it is not synthesized into other things. The One is non-hermeneutical because it does not open up onto any interpretation; it is non-phenomenological because it does not reveal itself to a solicitous subject. In this sense, the One “has no holes” and thus cannot be a socketed and linked up with anything else that might produce a synthesis.

If Deleuze and Guattari meditate on the deterritorializing potential of the face (because, as they explain, it is the part of the body with the most holes), Laruelle does something quite different, instead singing in praise of the non-connectivity of the One, *in praise of the absolute and radical territorialization of the One*. The One is, in this sense, a mode of hyper-territorialization in which nothing can pass or communicate – a *prophylactic* ontology might be the best name for it, just as much of philosophy proposes an endless series of *promiscuous* ontologies. Thus synthetic judgments, on the face of it, would have to remain resolutely philosophical, not non-philosophical.

Likewise, the analytic, which Kant defines as a judgment that expresses nothing in the predicate that is not already known in the subject, would also not entirely qualify for non-philosophy. The issue here, however, is more of a technicality than a fundamental incompatibility: the One is not a judgment or concept nor is it the object of a judgment or concept, it is radically real and hence cannot constitute the subject (or predicate) of a proposition. So in a strict sense there can be no analytical judgments made about the One. And more pointedly, the process of non-philosophy is never the mere production of analytical claims made in or around some sort of primary “One axiom” that seeds all the rest.⁵

Yet in a more general sense the Laruellean universe is an analytic universe through and through. If Kant sought to expand the window of the synthetic *a priori* as wide as possible, and thereby steal some of the thunder of Hume’s own skepticism toward that domain, Laruelle seeks to expand the window of the analytic *a priori* as wide as possible. Indeed, just as Kant used synthetic *a posteriori* judgments to help generalize outward into the formal conditions of all cognition, Laruelle is using the conditions of cognition themselves (Kant’s synthetic *a priori*, Heidegger’s “foundations of metaphysics,” or what Foucault would call the “conditions of possibility” for knowledge) and cloning them into transcendental axioms and *a priori* dualities. Rather than root thinking in difference, as philosophy does, Laruelle roots

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thinking in *identity*, from the Latin *idem* meaning same. And as Kant reminds us, the two key poles of the analytic are identity ($n = n$) and contradiction ($n = \sim n$). The latter, contradiction, does not play much of a role in Laruelle’s non-philosophy, but identity is crucial, practically coterminous with all of non-philosophy itself. This indicates his affinity with the kingdom of the analytic.

Likewise, even the most cursory understanding of Laruelle’s One-in-One indicates the analytic, albeit a more unilateralized and generic version of the analytic seen in Kant and others. One-in-One refers not to a condition of ontological difference (One/Other) but of immanence and identity. The expression “One-in-One” contains no additive predicate and thus is analytical. (Of course “One-in-One” literally contains no verb or predicate at all and thus is not grammatically additive; yet even considering “in” as a predicative copula, the second “One” is not additive vis-à-vis the first “One.”)

For these reasons, one might describe Laruelle’s project as an extreme formalism, or extreme rationalism, albeit a gnostic or mystical rationalism. His is an eclipse of the world by the *a priori*, in which the domain of the *a priori* is splayed open as widely as possible. Laruelle is not so much inverting Kant as reshuffling his coordinates: instead of a certain portion of the human condition reserved for the *a priori*, Laruelle wants to widen the *a priori* window to include domains incompatible with previous philosophical formulations.

So at first glance it seems clear that Laruelle resists the synthetic (Kant’s primary interest) and roots non-philosophy entirely within the analytic.⁶ This would make it logical to assert the following, even if only in a naïve way: “Laruelle’s world is an *a priori* world,” or even “if Kant defines metaphysics as the synthetic *a priori*, Laruelle defines non-philosophy as the analytic *a priori*.” Such claims might not be controversial, however there is considerably more to be said about how Laruelle accomplishes such a reshuffling of the Kantian coordinates, and indeed whether they are reshuffled in precisely this way.

To see how Laruelle deviates from metaphysics, let us push further into Kant and his “grand bargain” between *a priori* truths, *a posteriori* judgments, and a more or less balanced relationship or correlation between man and world. Two main deviations are possible. In the most straightforward sense, if a thinker considers the universe to lie essentially within the synthetic *a posteriori* realm, the result is empiricism, the world of Hume that so inspired Kant to embark upon the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the first place. But if a thinker considers the universe to lie essentially within the analytic *a priori*, the result is something much closer to Laruelle.

Herein lies the secret of Laruelle’s strange thought. His goal is to articulate a pure analytical immanence of the *a priori*, and to do it in a way that is not overly simple or ultimately pointless (as Kant would have qualified such an endeavor; indeed, Laruelle is closer to Fichte than Kant in this regard, particularly Fichte’s interest in the purely ideal *a priori* realm).⁷

For this reason it is common to see Laruelle dwell on identities such as $n = n$ or the immanent identity of the One-in-One, attributing profound and lasting (and indeed practical) utility to them. For other thinkers, such expressions would remain classified as relatively meaningless tautology, or at best classified as part of the fundamental laws of analysis (e.g., the Law of Contradiction). Yet, surprisingly, expressions like $n = n$ are very powerful for Laruelle, because they ratify the law of identity necessary for the ultimate step into radical immanence (One-in-One). The tautology, in other words, gains a newfound respectability under Laruelle.⁸

To summarize, under classical Kantian metaphysics the *a priori* is the realm of the transcendentals (space, time, identity, scientific truths, etc.) and the *a posteriori* is the realm of the actuals, the real, the empirical (you, me, my thoughts, my body, this place, this world). Kant’s approach is to maintain a division between these two realms, to privilege the transcendental somehow of course, but also admit that the transcendental is just one component

of experience even if it perpetually infuses and subtends it.

Of course, many thinkers working in the wake of Kant have reconfigured these terms – for Deleuze the point is to flatten the division entirely, such that the virtual is real, and any transcendental categories are defined and experienced purely and immanently in the self-expression of matter. And Hegel, via Fichte and Schelling, emboldened the realm of idea into a pure logical science of self-expression.

It would be tempting to say that Kant is to Laruelle as Hegel is to Marx, the former producing a bourgeois idealism that must be inverted – Hegel was standing on his head, after all, so why not Kant too – into a new science, be it the science of political economy for Marx or the science of non-philosophy for Laruelle. But again, while seductive, this does not entirely capture Laruelle’s precise intervention into philosophy, Kantian, Hegelian, or otherwise.⁹ Under Laruelle, the realm of the analytic *a priori* is no longer the minority realm, but the majority realm. The *a priori* is no longer simply the transcendental but the real as well. Likewise, the things formerly considered real (you, me, my body, this place) are now transcendental, for they are the transcendental clones of the One.

To borrow a term of his own creation, Laruelle “apriorizes” the world. He reverses the real and the transcendental (from their Kantian positions), and recasts both real and transcendental as *a priori*. Hence the real, which Laruelle calls the One, is *a priori* by virtue of its being immanent: true immanence can only be obtained if the real is *a priori*. Likewise, the transcendentals are also *a priori*, from the subject, to axiomatic and theorematism claims, to non-philosophy itself. The only domain that remains steadfastly *a posteriori* is philosophy itself, and the regional knowledges and sciences that ape the basic philosophical conceit. They are the new “data,” the new empirical knowledge offered up for non-philosophical axiomatization and dissection.¹⁰

Granted, the use of *a priori* in the context of non-philosophy invites some confusion, since *a*

priori, defined as “from what comes before,” is inherently based on the concept of relation, in this case the relation of genetic or structural priority. But this is a red herring, one of the many false pitfalls that non-philosophy must weather as it navigates the vocabulary of philosophy. Rather, the sense of relationality inherent within the *a priori* must be recast, under non-philosophy, as a unilateral and determined relation or “non-relation.”

But Laruelle remains a good Kantian in one sense at least, for just as Kant located philosophy in the domain of the *a priori* (metaphysics as the synthetic *a priori*), so too does Laruelle locate non-philosophy in the *a priori* (non-philosophy as axiomatic transcendental identity and theorematic *a priori* duality).

It is now more difficult to assess whether or not non-philosophy is ultimately “synthetic.” For from one perspective non-philosophy is resolutely not synthetic, as it withdraws from all the various synthetic logics such as recombination, amplification, mixing, dialectical contradiction, difference, hybridity, and so on. Laruelle says on many occasions that non-philosophy is *not additive* vis-à-vis the One. Thus, using the strict definition of synthetic as “containing an additive predicate,” non-philosophy is not additive or ampliative in any way.

Yet in a different sense one might describe non-philosophy as “synthetic” (or, to lapse to Laruellean language, in the sense of a “non-synthesis” or a “synthesis-without-synthesizing”) by virtue of the way in which it brings forth non-philosophical axioms out of philosophical mixtures. Thus the various philosophical chimeras of Being/Other, Being/being, or One/Other are set into an identity with the One. The dyads themselves are not merged or deconstructed, but merely left intact as data. “Each one of these [dyads] is by and large treated as an *a priori* possessing an identity,” explains Laruelle. “For example, ontological difference becomes the unilateral duality of Being and being.”¹¹ So it appears to be at least minimally “synthetic” – and here the scare quotes matter – in the sense that it contains something in the predicate (the unilateral duality of Being and being) not already evident in the subject

(Heidegger’s ontology or any other ontology of difference). Yet Laruelle would ultimately not classify this transformation as additive, because the process of cloning philosophical data never produces a combination or mixture in the strict sense. It only produces a clone or dual, which is a transcendental identity vis-à-vis the One and the empirical world of philosophy that it unilateralizes.

Herein lies Laruelle’s curious use of the *a priori*. For on the one hand the philosophical chimeras of Being/Other, Being/being, etc. are taken to be *a priori*, just as Kant considered time and space to be *a priori*. But on the other hand Laruelle asserts that these philosophical chimeras *are themselves data*: they are what are given over to non-philosophy as a more or less empirical or worldly reality that must be cloned or dualized. Thus as empirical data “experienced” or processed by non-philosophy, philosophy occupies the realm of the *a posteriori*. So while philosophy may be *a priori* to itself, or for its own purposes, philosophy itself is also reduplicated as *a posteriori* data for non-philosophy.

This is further proof of philosophy’s promiscuous convertibility. The very things that are profoundly “pure and necessary” or *a priori* vis-à-vis philosophy – whether it be Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, or Parmenides’ similitude of being and thought – flip and reconvert into empirical assets that may be “measured” according to the methods of dualysis or cloning. The empirical assets of philosophy are translated one into each other, and what results is the “universal idiom” of non-philosophy. “Non-philosophy *is* this translation of Kant ‘in’ Descartes, of Descartes ‘in’ Marx, of Marx ‘in’ Husserl, etc.”¹²

Based on this, one might construct the following analytical hierarchy: (1) physics/empirical data, (2) philosophy/metaphysics, (3) non-philosophy. Each step exists as an *a posteriori* condition that renders up its data for the *a priori* claims of the successive steps. Hence (1) physical laws produce *a posteriori* data, that (2) are “possibilized” or abstracted into “conditions of possibility” constituting the *a priori* bounds of metaphysical cognition (Kant

et al.), which themselves (3) are brought forth according to the brute visibility of the One (the vision-in-One) as *a posteriori* data for the transcendental identities and *a priori* dualities of non-philosophy (Laruelle). Such a hierarchy is purely heuristic, however, since Laruelle insists that non-philosophy is not morally or structurally after, higher, or otherwise better than either philosophy or the empirical world.

To generalize, the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction in Kant is more or less *territorial*, meaning that the two terms aim to map out *realms* of cognition. Whereas in Laruelle the terms are *rational*, meaning that they exist at the level of *determination* or *messianic cause* (e.g., determination-in-the-last-instance, or force (of) thought). In fact the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction is precisely the kind of distinction that Laruelle would classify as irredeemably philosophical. Hence the distinction per se has little currency as such within non-philosophy. Like the Being/being distinction, it acts as data for non-philosophical analysis.¹³

But in the end it is the *a priori* that survives – the *a posteriori* does not play much of a role in non-philosophy – since the One is, in a certain sense, the radical *a priori*, shall we not call it the “prior-without-posterior,” and non-philosophy too is the realm of the transcendental *a priori* as it, perforce, clones the One’s own *a priori* status.

Granted, there is one sense in which non-philosophy can be understood as *a posteriori*: non-philosophy runs posterior to the One, which determines it. So just as Kant’s time and space constitute the conditions of possibility for a *posteriori* experience, one might describe the One as constituting the conditions of possibility for non-philosophy. However, this is merely to articulate things using the parlance of philosophy. In truth of fact, the One is not constitutive of anything, and thus could never “produce” the possibility matrix that would allow for the pure vs. the practical or the prior vs. the posterior. The One is not a “pure reason” that makes possible a “practical reason.” That would be to philosophize the One. Rather, as Laruelle insists over and over,

the One is immanent to itself, and thus can only be understood as “in” itself (i.e., as “in-One”). In this sense, the *a posteriori* is only ever a provisional category in Laruelle. For the most part he prefers to radicalize or apriorize the *a posteriori* into a pure transcendental rationality. (In this sense, Laruelle suppresses the *a posteriori* in the same way that Deleuze suppresses the negative: one might say that Deleuze produces an “absolute value” of the negative resulting in a cosmos of affirmativity; whereas Laruelle produces an “absolute value” of the *a posteriori* resulting in a pervasive transcendental *a priori*.)

So whereas Laruelle seems to collapse the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction, in essence *apriorizing* it, this does not necessarily mean that non-philosophy is the domain of the before, the pure, or the prior.¹⁴ On the contrary, non-philosophy is the domain of the *last*, not the first, as evidenced by its being causally determined in the last instance. Laruelle never summons us to *go back to first principles* or *determine the universal possibility of cognition*, as philosophers like Kant or Heidegger do. Rather, he entreats the non-philosophical subject to *withdraw from the decision, and dwell alongside the last, the least, the finite*.

So the usual laws of the *a priori/a posteriori* give way to reveal a new bizarre logic: non-philosophy is both *a priori* and *a posteriori* simultaneously. (And here we see some sort of kinship, however remote, with Deleuze’s concept of a metastable virtuality.) As a rigorously axiomatic and theorematic science, non-philosophy transpires exclusively within the *a priori*. Yet at the same time it is *posterior to* and determined by the One, and for that matter posterior to philosophy as well, making it *a posteriori* vis-à-vis its determining instance.

In sum, while Laruelle and Kant do not use their terminology in the same way, and indeed sometimes scarcely speak the same language, Laruelle has essentially achieved the very thing that Kant said was impossible: not simply the analytic *a priori* – which is not a difficult achievement, simply endorse identity – but the *analytic a posteriori*, something deemed impossible by Kant.

Where does this leave the modern transcendental subject, the kind found in Kant or Descartes? If there is univocal being, as Deleuze says, there must therefore be monaural existing. If being expresses itself in one voice, as Deleuze says, we must have one ear in our reception of the givenness of being. Laruelle says something similar, yet unilateralizes the Deleuzian condition into a more radically immanent conception of the human person. Laruelle's ethics is a monaural ethics. Not so much an ethics of the same, his is an ethics of the mono, an ethics of identity. As an exercise, then, let us run through Laruelle's method. Let us clone and unilateralize the transcendental subject and see what the result is. Laruelle does not begin from the One. Instead he begins from philosophy, from, say, the philosophical notion of the Ego. From the outset, the Ego may remain in a fully immanent state, what Laruelle calls the Ego-in-Ego. Or the Ego can also split into historically and philosophically specific conditions, the modern Ego, for example, as seen in the Cartesian contract between thought and being (*cogito ergo sum*). In this sense, the "transcendental dialectic" or "amphibology" between Ego and subject takes on a specific, regional profile, which is to say a *certain type of subject* grounded in the pact between thought and being. "The principle of 'Modernity,' of 'Spirit,' is the amphibious quality of the Ego and the subject, their reduction one to the other," writes Laruelle. "This subject is the synthesis – but more or less immediate or mediated than differentiated – of Being and thought."¹⁵ There are four terms at play: Ego and subject, but also thought and Being. When the Ego takes the form of the Cartesian subject, that subject consists of a riven core in which thought and Being are interrelated and "amphibiously" intermixed. Laruelle is offended by the local amphibology of thought and Being within the Cartesian subject, but he is also offended by the larger amphibology of subject and Ego. What Laruelle seeks is a theory of the subject rooted in an immanent Ego (the Ego-in-Ego). In other words the antinomy itself does not ground anything at all; its very auto-positionality – I am a subject in

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relation to the transcendental Ego, and the transcendental Ego manifests itself in individual subjects like me – is evidence of its vain and bloated self-sufficiency. The antinomy itself must be explained. And in this sense, the Ego-subject antinomy is the philosophical fodder that allows non-philosophy to begin its work. As Laruelle says, "we must explain theoretically why the philosophies of the Ego and the subject are enmeshed."¹⁶

Thus Laruelle does not begin from the One. He begins from philosophy, in this case with the Ego-subject relation in Descartes. Then, second, by virtue of the force (of) thought he asserts axiomatically the identity of both Ego and subject (something like $E = s$). This constitutes the first movement into non-philosophy proper. It asserts the transcendental identity that is "before" or "more generic" than both Ego and subject. "A theory of the subject is only possible on the basis of an invalidation of the confusion of the Ego with the subject or with the structure of the Philosophical Decision: the Ego is no longer subject but rather Real, and the subject is 'emptied' too of its mixtures with the Ego (but not of the Ego itself)."¹⁷ Asserting the identity of Ego and subject ($E = s$) is what invalidates the confusion. Only by virtue of Cartesianism being so auto-reflexive – the self as it orients back on the self – can Cartesianism indicate to Laruelle the way forward toward a generic identity of the Ego. In other words, the very narcissism of the Cartesian subject becomes the raw ingredients for immanence within the non-philosophical Ego. And finally, according to the principle of unilateral duality, he aprioristically converts the identity into a duality (i.e., converts $E = s$ into $E - s$). This is non-philosophy proper. During the process, the One never really enters in. It only appears "in the last instance," because at the end we have arrived at a condition of the generic real.¹⁸

So if it is indeed fair to label Laruelle's work a series of "meditations on last philosophy," a basic characteristic begins to emerge: Laruelle's is a *rational messianism*, or a messianism of reason – which he would likely further qualify as something like "the messianic without the

messiah.” With a stress given not to first philosophy but to last philosophy (as non-philosophy), Laruelle injects a messianic temporality into thinking. Under such messianic temporality non-philosophy dualizes, Deleuze might say virtualizes, the first and the last, the prior and the posterior, the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* into a metastable identity of after–before and before–after. Indeed as in Matthew 20.16, *the last shall be first, and the first last*.

...

First, second, last – what are the most philosophically important numbers? Heidegger evokes the fourfold; Deleuze and Guattari a thousand (but it could have been more). For Badiou, the multiple plays its role, as does infinity. For Hegel the triad and the operation of the negative. For Irigaray it is sometimes two, and sometimes not one. For others the binary. For others still the key numerical concept is simply nothing. But as we have seen, two numerical concepts are central in the work of Laruelle: the One and the dual.

As Laruelle explains, there is no synthesis or dialectic of the world, only the One and its various identities:

In immanence, one no longer distinguishes between the One and the Multiple, there is no longer anything but $n = 1$, and the Multiple-without-All. No manifold watched over by a horizon, in flight or in progress: everywhere a true chaos of floating or inconsistent determinations [...] Between Identity and Multiplicity, no synthesis by a third term [...] ¹⁹

In this way, there is an easy shorthand for remembering the three most important metaphysicians of the last half century: *Deleuze is $n + 1$. Badiou is $n - 1$. Laruelle is $n = 1$* . Deleuze is the thinker of propagation and repetition, of additive expression (never negative or dialectical expression). For Deleuze, the One is the additive product of pure multiplicity. Hence the plenum is Deleuze’s ontological terminus.

Badiou, on the other hand, is a subtractivist. The Badiouian event is never counted as part of

the situation, it is always subtracted from it, as something apart from being. Hence Badiou’s terminus is the void.

Laruelle, by contrast, is neither additive nor subtractive, his operator is neither plus nor minus, but equals. Laruelle is the great thinker of radical equality, what he calls identity (which again etymologically means “same”). He cares little for the plenum or the void; his terminus is identity, the One as radically immanent and same without ever having to go outside itself.

In sum, if Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of suspicion” framed critique as paranoia, and Deleuze and Guattari painted philosophy as schizophrenia, Laruelle renders non-philosophy as *autism*. Like an autistic child we have difficulty communicating with the Real. We cannot form real relationships directly with the One. Abstract philosophical concepts do not help much. The One is absolutely foreclosed to us. Instead we run alongside it, committed to its Sameness, a life “of science and of the reality that science can describe, naively in the last instance.” ²⁰ If Deleuze’s heroes are Spinoza, Hume and other philosophers of radical materialism, Laruelle descends from a different line, the autistic philosophy of Fichte ($I = I$) or Henry (ego).

“Yes, I am autistic in a certain sense,” Laruelle admitted, with a sparkle in his eye. “Like a particle that passes through a mountain.” ²¹



notes

1 Laruelle, *Concept* 123.

2 Deleuze 11.

3 Kant I, 24, 25, 26, 31 *passim*.

4 “Science and philosophy meet in the universality of the synthetic *a priori*,” writes Laruelle, giving credit to Kant’s centrality in modern philosophical discourse.

As an example of a non-philosophical undertaking, we focus directly on the problem of the *a priori*. We take the “synthetic *a priori*

judgment,” which Kant revealed to be the basic essence and algorithm of philosophy in the form of a hybrid between metaphysics and science, and treat it as our material. (See Laruelle, *Principes* 321, 314)

5 I am grateful to Ray Brassier for his ideas here and throughout. Needless to say, however, I take responsibility for the various claims, and possible shortcomings, of the present essay.

6 Why are additive/synthetic and non-additive/analytic the only two options? Indeed, a number of thinkers, among them Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, have demonstrated the limitations of the analytic/synthetic model. Instead of additive or non-additive predicates, such thinkers propose a different approach: a subtractivist model in which predicates are subtracted from subjects, not added to them. Using concepts like the “generic” or the “whatever singularity” these writers have essentially proposed an alternative mode irreducible to either the synthetic or the analytic. See, for example, the sections on the singular and the generic in Badiou, *Being and Event*, or the chapter titled “Whatever” in Agamben, *The Coming Community*. While he is not a “subtractivist” per se, Laruelle can, in a very general sense, be included in this tradition to the extent that he endorses a generic state of immanence, whether it be the real as One-in-One or humanity as Stranger or Man-in-person (*Homme-en-personne*). See, for example, Laruelle, “Generic as Predicate.” On the term “Man-in-person” see also Laruelle, *Future Christ* 2, 5, 20 *passim*, and Laruelle, *L’Ultime honneur* 26, 50 *passim*.

7 Laruelle discusses Fichte on a number of occasions, particularly his treatment of the “I” (the Self) and the relation “I = I” (Self = Self) only to dismiss Fichte’s I as an “intellectual intuition” unable to achieve true immanence within the real. See, for example, Laruelle, *Principes* 105–06, 168–85.

8 Recall that while tautology is merely useless for many, it is more malevolent for others, symptomatic of the depraved circularity of modern life. Marx, for example, begins his explication of the general formula for capital with the tautological expression M-M, or money-money, a contracted form of the C-M-C-M-C-M chain (commodity-money-etc.). This allows him to inject the concept of surplus into the chain, resulting in a

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cycle of M to M’ (money to money prime) where money is “not spent [... but] advanced” (Marx, *Capital* I: 249). Later, theorists like Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord would lament the closed circuits of society and culture precisely for their seemingly impervious, tautological and therefore repressive effects. “The spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical” (Debord 15, par. 13). Laruelle, for his part, is content to shrug off such nefarious connotations. Immanence is too seductive a prize for him. Laruelle maintains that the tautological identity formula (for example One-in-One) is the only true expression of immanence.

9 On the theme of Marxism, Laruelle is admittedly somewhat vulnerable to the same critique that Rancière makes of Althusser in *Althusser’s Lesson*. In that book Rancière indicts Althusser on the grounds of intellectual elitism, that Althusser, by making Marx more scientific, was only making Marxism “safe” for university professors and other elite technicians. See Rancière, *La Leçon* 35. We might be wary, therefore, of similar accusations made against Laruelle, something like “Laruelle’s Lesson.” There will be those who indict Laruelle on the grounds that he is transforming philosophy into the ultimate elite science, non-philosophy, available to few and practiced by almost none. But this seems to be something of a cheap shot, as it was in Rancière. So let the indictment be voiced here, merely paratextually, in the hopes of pre-emptively inoculating Laruelle of such a vulnerability in the eyes of others.

10 Laruelle uses *data* (an Anglicism, in fact, despite French being closer to Latin) to distinguish it perhaps from the more prosaic *données* (data). Regardless, the Latin origin of *data* – from the verb *dare*, to give – is revealing, particularly for its phenomenological overtones: *data* are the things having been given.

11 Laruelle, *Principes* 227, 228. One particularly interesting demonstration of this method of non-philosophical cloning is Laruelle’s short experimental piece “Variations on a Theme in Heidegger.” Starting from one of the most important and often-quoted passages in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, the section in which Heidegger describes the ontic distinctiveness of *Dasein* in terms of its *being* ontological, Laruelle repeats and modulates Heidegger’s language through sixteen successive paragraphs, like a musician circling back through

various motifs, until Heidegger's claims become more or less globally transformed into non-philosophy. As Laruelle summarizes at the end:

Two series of variations divide up the Philosophical Decision and open it up to "non-philosophy." On the one hand, variations on the circle or the circle as variation: Being-as-being, Saying-as-said, Logos-as-differe(a)n(e), Desire-as-lack, Everydayness-as-subject and even Difference-as-One [...] And on the other hand, in effect, variations that affect the ontical itself, either as being, as Other, as lack, as substitute – in short, as One [...] When at last man – through the Vision-in-the-One that he "is," prior to all comprehension of Being – sees the circle of circles pass by again, it's so he can glimpse it as it passes outside and under the One, above and even "over" him, like a cloud over the moon, or like the sun of reason over the inalterable opacity of man. It is then that philosophy floats, indifferent, through the air of "non-philosophy." (Laruelle, "Variations" 93–94)

12 Laruelle, *Principes* 273. Indeed, during his summary of the axioms and theorems of non-philosophy, Laruelle combines all of the following figures into a unilateralized, transcendental identity: Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Gödel (ibid. 276–77).

13 To be clear, *analysis*, defined as the process of dissecting something into its constituent parts, is typically held at arm's length by Laruelle, even if the realm of the *analytic* is attractive to him. In other words, analysis per se is no more appetizing than its complement, synthesis; whereas the analytic opens the door toward a purely immanent and generic condition of the *a priori*.

14 Admittedly, Laruelle speaks in such historiographic terms from time to time, as in his assessment of the Hellenistic and Hebraic wings of philosophy, both antedated by non-philosophy: "The 'historical' signification of non-philosophy is established thus in the following way: neither Greek nor Judaic nor the two combined, non-philosophy is the *ante-Greek* and *ante-Judaic* identity of thought, the experience of thought 'before' its Greco-Judaic disjunction" (Laruelle, *Principes* 211).

15 Ibid. 99.

16 Ibid. 97.

17 Ibid. 99.

18 The name of Laruelle has at times been associated with Speculative Realism, due perhaps to Ray Brassier's pivotal role in introducing Laruelle to an anglophone readership, and thus with Object-Oriented Ontology via its association with Speculative Realism. But it is here, with Laruelle's theory of the subject, that we see at least one incompatibility with the kind of realism espoused by Object-Oriented Ontology. One of the central tenets of that movement is the so-called "equal footing" thesis which states that all objects are on an equal footing. This includes man, who is just one object among all others. The "equal footing" thesis suggests essentially that man, with his outsize pride, has sinned and must therefore, as compensatory penance, be reduced to the level of all other objects. In other words, man, with his aggressive correlationism, has extended his tentacles too far into the workings of the world, and only a non-correlationist realism can unseat man from his privileged position as arbiter. But as Laruelle writes in a tantalizingly short piece titled "Theorems on the Good News": "It is not man who colonizes the planet, but the planet and the cosmos who transgress the lonely threshold of man" (Laruelle, "Théorèmes" 84). Hence Laruelle's realism is a very different kind of realism from that of the "equal footing" thesis. Philosophy has sinned, not man. The object world has sinned, not man. Philosophy and the object world are the progenitors of this depraved correlation, not man. If only they would leave us alone! Only then could man unilateralize the equality claims embedded in the "equal footing" thesis. And having accomplished that, replace this profane "democracy of objects" unloosed on us by the planet with a radically immanent object identity, a unilateral identity between man and object. That, according to Laruelle, would be a realism worth talking about.

19 Laruelle, *Concept* 99.

20 Ibid. 10.

21 From comments made by Laruelle during a panel discussion at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, 6 April 2011.

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