

# AXIOMS OF CHOICE

*Or, what post-continental philosophy has to say  
about the lived axioms of decision-making*

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We commence here with an axiomatic assumption: All forms of historical reporting are employed from an empty frame as in set-theory. From there it is possible to say that history can be treated as an object of historical analytic but only from an ahistorical genealogical standpoint, a decidedly null point. Once this is allowed, by proceeding from a hyper-real point of singularity, a decision to elect a point of beginning from among existing, even non-existing, non-localized points and multiplicities, we can build an algorithm of the motion of points within a local domain of narration.

Historians of philosophy can then singularize the contemporary turn of philosophy towards a more attentive discipline. Philosophy has never been this attentive and sensitive until it starts to acknowledge that there are forces at play cognizable in principle but still pose a challenge to thinking in terms of concretizing them via a generic form of abstraction. Genealogically speaking, philosophy has acknowledged the existence of these forces from a transcendently non-philosophical standpoint that expresses the ahistorical, axiomatic frame from which any singular history like philosophy can be objectively recognized.<sup>1</sup> Yet, on the side of

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<sup>1</sup>Our non-philosophical standpoint is inspired by François Laruelle, the originator of the concept itself (non-philosophy). Among other places where he discussed the concept at length, we are quoting the following passages describing the relation of non-philosophy to philosophy in a yet unpublished English translation of one of his major works *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (the following translation is from Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith which became available to the author in the course of an online seminar on Non-philosophy):

“When non-philosophy ceases to designate a simple philosophical relation to the extra-philosophical in order to designate a relationship to the philosophical itself in its

the ahistorical, the singularities that make up the philosophical tradition from the ancients (the Orientals and the Greeks) to the contemporaries are brought to light in the sense that the generality of philosophy as a discipline can now be recognized to be simply a *virtual synthesis*. What actually bring the synthesis to bear on our conception of a unity of philosophical tradition are the disjunctive and conjunctive points of singularities, pure multiplicities enfolded into creative assemblages, each has its own line of origin, a line of flight, as Deleuze would have it.<sup>2</sup> The same applies to our conception of life. From the standpoint of the existence of pre- and non-human singularities, their invisibility if not tacit visibility on the horizon of meaning the human is constituted—

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identity and ceases to be an attribute in order to become a subject, it speaks of a thought which, without being subsumed again into philosophy, is no stranger to it, of a new relationship to it and of a new practice of it. It is philosophy which then becomes an object of non-philosophy, of a pure and no longer metaphysical or ontico-ontological “non” transcendental...It is concerned with a new practice of philosophy, more universal than this, because it has liberated itself from certain postulates of philosophy—in particular that of its correspondence to the Real, of its convertibility with the Real” (François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith, unpublished).

<sup>2</sup>Gilles Deleuze describes a line of flight in terms of its immanent relation to something posited as impossible: “Without a set of impossibilities, you wouldn’t have a line of flight, an exit into creation” (Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. M. Joughin [New York: Columbia University Press, 1995], 8-9). On other occasions Deleuze also describes a line of flight as deterritorialization (See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987]). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari define a plane of consistency in a creative yet tensional relation to non-objectified multiplicities, how the complete strangeness and chaotic nature of multiplicities can be singularized into lines of flight where multiplicities are brought into play, creatively tamed, so to speak: “Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialisation according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities” (9).

the human from the side of what does not impose itself upon the continuum of human perception, the entirety of things with their own lines of assemblages that are yet to be reduced to correlates of thought, to presence-at-hand.<sup>3</sup> As long as nature allows this non-interference of the force of pure multiplicity, the immensity of Chaos, so to speak, we are guaranteed of relative stability in our everyday life in terms of sheltering the infirmity of human existence, at least for now.

Similarly, what in Heidegger is described as the taken-for-granted 'ready-to-hand' structure of things here becomes constitutive of that which affords epistemological consistency to presence-at-hand. Presence is guaranteed by absence. In the following passages, Graham Harman summarizes the relationship between ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand, which divides Heidegger's and Husserl's conceptions of the 'thing' (Husserl is more accustomed to reduce the thing to a correlate of consciousness, ontologically splitting the thing into the conceptual and the real):

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<sup>3</sup>In describing the origin of the analytic of being as presence in the ancient notion of *parousia* or *ousia* Heidegger takes note of the correlation of outwardness and evidence as key operational principles that render being as presence: "The outward evidence of this—but of course only outward—is the determination of the meaning of being *parousia* or *ousia*, which ontologically and temporally means "presence" [*Anwesenheit*]. Beings are grasped in their being as "presence"; that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time, the present" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time. A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. J. Stambaugh [New York: State University of New York Press, 1996], 22). As strictly correlated to present and outwardness, being becomes a correlate of thought/consciousness that projects being into the outside world in a mode of reflection that proceeds from the world and towards the world in a way that enhances our conscious relation to it. In Harman's reinterpretation of Heidegger, presence is argued to be connotative of a more fundamental operation of withdrawal. Harman summarizes his own interpretation of the notion of withdrawal as follows: "Instead of thinking extra-mental reality is founded on what appears to consciousness, we must join Heidegger in concluding the opposite, while also agreeing with him that what withdraws from consciousness are not lumps of objective physical matter. Instead the world in itself is made of realities withdrawing from all consciousness access" (Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* [Alresford, Hants, UK: Zero Books, 2011], 37).

At any rate, present-at-hand and ready-to-hand are not two different *types* of entities. Instead, all entities oscillate between these two separate modes: the cryptic withdrawal of readiness-to-hand and the explicit accessibility of presence-at-hand...Whereas for Husserl the hidden hammer-at-work might be brought into consciousness whenever we feel like it, Heidegger finds it impossible *in principle* to make the withdrawn reality of hammer fully reveal its secrets. There will always be a subterranean depth to the world that never becomes present to view.<sup>4</sup>

For quite some time, thought has accustomed itself to identify these unknown assemblages as chaotic and therefore must be strictly avoided by depriving them of sufficient planes upon which their supposed consistencies as assemblages can take shape. But with philosophy's turn towards more "attentiveness to the letters"<sup>5</sup> the historiography of thought is now compelled to take the autonomy of objects or things into account. What sets this attentiveness to work within the tradition of philosophy, nonetheless, is beyond Heidegger's intuitive *break* from the humanistic preoccupation of phenomenology. The "other beginning" of philosophy that Heidegger announces in the *Kehre* should in fact be the hyperreal, axiomatic beginning of Thought, a thought-without-philosophy, what in François Laruelle is axiomatically described as the "True-without-truth," genealogically speaking, the truth that "does not want" Man.<sup>6</sup> But instead of framing it within a quasi-Nietzschean genealogy, Laruelle places this axiomatic standpoint of truth within a more generic location, in the full radicality of Man, Man as the possessor and implementer of genericity: "Genericity is the property of being able to communicate

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<sup>4</sup>See Graham Harman, "Technology, objects and things in Heidegger," in *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (2009): 3.

<sup>5</sup>See Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 242.

<sup>6</sup>François Laruelle, "The Generic as Predicate and Constant: Non-philosophy and Materialism," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne, Australia: re. press, 2011), 253.

truth or rather the True-without-truth to a thought that does not want it.”<sup>7</sup> Here, Laruelle is positioning himself within a post-phenomenological view that dispenses with the idea that Man will always be correlative of truth. Where the correlation is at stake, Man is condemned to communicate the truth but is also already condemned to conditions of expressing it of which he has no control (in both Kant and Heidegger, the over-all condition is finitude).<sup>8</sup> Laruelle’s provocative stance rather puts Man on the side of the unilateral indifference of the Real but only to the extent that the Real has to be developmentally uncovered to be Man himself. The notion of Man-as-Real eliminates the problem of phenomenology by assigning Man its radical singularity, irreducible to even the words this Human utters, irreducible to truths. At the same time Man is also uncovered to be the real generic standpoint according to which any notion of transcendental reality makes sense as a result of an objectification.

Laruelle, nonetheless, avoids getting into the age-old Cartesian hang-up by taking this objectification to be devoid of any truth-value. Man-as-Real becomes an axiom of decision that does not expect any form of redemption. The Man-as-Real is the last-instance objectified material of Man’s generic self-reduction in light of the discovery that there is nothing beyond this objectification. “The human is therefore without-Being (or without-World) but it determines-in-the-last-identity the subject-in-struggle with that which, from Being or from the World, can alienate it.”<sup>9</sup>

Laruelle does not deny that there is reality out there, independent of the Human. The point is that *that* reality is indifferent and is unilaterally touching us without promising anything, which beyond all

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Lee Braver has authored an important work on the enduring influence of Kant on this aspect of human finitude as it has transformed the way Western philosophy has understood ‘realism’ or undermined its own attempt to be realistic. See Lee Braver, *A Thing of this World: A History of Continental Anti-realism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>François Laruelle, *The Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (New York and London: Continuum, 2010), 9; emphasis mine.

logical expectations provides an ontological incentive to humanity to confuse its hallucinations (its way of visioning the Real) with the Real itself. Finally, having this impasse in mind, Laruelle says:

Human beings have a problem which only they can solve: what to do with the World? Salvation or rebellion? Exploitation or therapeutic? Consumption or consummation?<sup>10</sup>

### **A Decision On the Side of the Void**

How not to change tone? Yet more, for the past months we have been digging in our heels to a tough vision called ‘epistemic community.’ What to make of it? How to dig it with a hammer?

The words to dig, the keywords to hammer out are all familiar to us now—“clearing the paths while laying new foundations towards building an epistemic community.” These words are put to use chiefly against the background of ‘want’ and ‘scarcity’, which have ‘molecular’ implications on ‘performance’.

‘Molecular’, ‘performance’—another keywords that have influenced the lexical terrain of recent continental thought, courtesy of the Deleuzian century, though more inclined to unmask the “retro” dynamics of sexuality and the new war machine against culture, against the Name-of-the-Father, against the signifier, against Oedipus. Those keywords (“molecular,” “performance”) now constitute the new semiotic machine that will take us to a new plateau of existence against an infinite number of plateaus that would have found territorial spacing in one Man’s vision of PUP, as Deleuze found his Body without Organs against an infinite number of lexicons to choose from.

In more practical terms—important steps (words are steps, ‘exits’ to creations) for the University to make a significant presence in global transformations.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 113; emphasis mine.

From a strict axiomatic standpoint, a certain level of imagination is required: To start from degree-zero, from an empty set of existence.

Ray Brassier, building on Alain Badiou's difficult mathematicized presentation of ontology in his phenomenal work *Being and Event*, summarizes (among other places, in a footnote) what this empty set means in relation to ontology, the study of Being: "Being is simply a proper name—that of an empty set,  $\emptyset$ —for the unrepresentable."<sup>11</sup> Badiou renders this empty set to be unrepresentable as "space or extension," but "can be qualified as unique (...) as a punctuality."<sup>12</sup> (In mathematics punctuality is defined as a point in space, which we can interpret in Deleuzian terms as a singularity). Badiou is here reacting to the Aristotelian dismissal of the existence of the void, the unrepresentable empty set.

The reason for this dismissal is that it is unthinkable for him (Aristotle) to completely separate the question of the void from that of the place. If the void is not, it is because one cannot think an empty place. As he explains, if one supposed the punctuality of the void, this point would have to 'be a place in which there was the extension of tangible body'. The in-extension of a void does not make any place for a void.<sup>13</sup>

But why start with the Void? It is here where Brassier summarizes the materialist position of philosophy (a unified theory of science and philosophy on the side of materialist metaphysics or speculative physics) premised on the idea that nothing is guaranteed—"The principal task of contemporary philosophy is to draw out the implications of the logic of Enlightenment," this logic being that which summons materialist

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<sup>11</sup>See Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 250, n. 10.

<sup>12</sup>Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 77.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

metaphysics “to uncover the objective void of being.”<sup>14</sup> A more helpful guide originally came from Nietzsche—because God is dead nothing is guaranteed except that which allows Man to start all over again from the void. The objective void that Brassier identified to be the task of philosophy to uncover is in Badiou the equivalent of in-extension, the unrepresentable, presentable but rather in-consistent. Nonetheless, it is the in-consistent/non-being that makes any consistent/being thinkable. Any consistency or being always supposes a radical outside. The possibility of being is realistically speaking the result of an impossible operation involving the handiwork of non-being. Only impossibility can make the possibility of something like being. “[It] is necessary to think, under the name of the void, the outside-place on the basis of which any place—any situation—maintains itself with respect to its being.”<sup>15</sup>

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Expressed in terms of a localizable void, the foundation of an institution in time and space is subtracted from an empty-set, yet already counted as a set that precedes the rising forth of a proper set that institutes the formal beginning of the count. Counting from its empty-yet-counted-as-one-foundational-set, the University, a localizable void, is counted as a 108-year old institution, which can be held in common sense thinking as a set of ‘multiple, one-hundred-eight, counts’. Lorenzo Chiesa’s essay on Badiou helps us radicalize the connection we are pursuing here:

For Badiou, the one is not, yet it exists as an operation, the count-as-one. The count-as-one is not a presentation either: what presents itself, a situation, is multiple. However, every situation is *structured* by means of the operation of the count-as-one. Thus, the relation between the multiple and the one is *retroactive*: the multiple will have preceded the one only after having necessarily been structured by means of the count-as-one.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 25.

<sup>15</sup>Badiou, *Being and Event*, 77.

<sup>16</sup>See Lorenzo Chiesa, “Count-As-One, Forming-Into-One, Unary Trait,

The beginning of the count in the present erases a memory in the past in favor of the axiomatic founding memory where the count ought to authentically begin. From where the count necessarily divides the past and the present, an aleatory time is considered as the point of beginning, a time that is neither past nor present, even still, not a future. The founding as counting of the beginning of the University changes the absolute memory of its origin in 1977 into a hyperreal, authentic origin in 1904. The beginning of the University 'was' set from an impossible point in the future (in 1904) which necessarily 'suspends' the time at which it made a decision (in 1978, the year PUP was officially named as Polytechnic...). The time at which the decision is made is therefore split into an active (the founding in the present) and passive moment (the founding in the past). The time at which the decision to found is made is the time-between, the in-between time, itself necessarily folded. This is the fold that Deleuze spoke of: The fold as the impossible site of creation.<sup>17</sup>

Thus stated, the succeeding stages of the count will always be deducible from the first (rather inconsistent but axiomatically decided) count by means of a radical practice of imagination as the count is arbitrary relative to a fundamental metaphysics of time.<sup>18</sup> The decision qua count is an act of creation, the act of voiding what precedes the count: what precedes it is also necessarily counted already. Anything that disrupts the count is necessarily no longer a part of the continuum of the axiom of choice. Imagination is therefore expected to exhibit its fidelity to a founding force of thought/count. In a similar Badiouan conceptualization, Brian Anthony Smith connects the axiom of choice

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SI," in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2, (2006), 1/2: 70-71.

<sup>17</sup>I rely entirely on Deleuze's Foucault for this conceptualization of the Fold. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>18</sup>The law of the count is therefore a "metastructure, another count, which 'completes' the first in that it gathers together all the sub-compositions of internal multiples, all the inclusions." Badiou further stressed: "The power-set axiom posits that this second count, this metastructure, always exists if the first count, or presentative structure, exists" (*Being and Event*, 83).

to “a forcing of its own failure” in which a radical form of imagination is required in order to sustain an original decision by forcing its continuity:

The proof of the independence of the Axiom of Choice clearly falls into the correct use of the Axiom of Choice; it inaugurates a subject through an intervention...[The] Axiom of Choice is a necessary axiom in the forcing of its own failure, but this does not stop it from being a valid instance of a set of theoretical forcing.

The forcing of the failure of the Axiom of Choice works by adding non-constructible sets of a certain type to a situation.<sup>19</sup>

A university administrator is thus compelled to keep the myth of the empty set functioning, auto-generating. In the same manner the future of an administration will rest on either its fidelity or infidelity to a fundamental axiomatic imagination, which will always take the form of a decision, either in favor or against it, a form of subtracting the axiomatic kernel of fundamental imagination from the Event that Change tosses on the plane of immanence or Life. This will have enormous implications as to how a university, necessarily compelled to take on the aleatory, the ‘uncertain outside’ it is obliged to enfold to itself, forced by Change to create an inside of the outside, can reflexively accommodate that which can potentially disrupt the continuum of its foundational axiom of choice.

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<sup>19</sup>Brian Anthony Smith, “The Limits of the Subject in Badiou’s Being and Event,” in *Cosmos and History*, vol. 2 (2006), 1/2: 155-56. In a previous passage, Smith underscores fidelity in the following Badiouan formulation: “The task of the subject is to make the truth of the event consist within a situation, to build the relation between the indiscernible and the undecidable...The key example is the proof of the independence of the Continuum Hypothesis, by demonstrating that there is a consistent situation in which this hypothesis fails. For Badiou, this process is experienced immanently from within the situation, a subject whose endless task is motivated and completed by this external supplement” (Ibid., 149).

## Folding the Outside in the Inside

We can reasonably state here that the problem with past approaches to academic response to global change is that they exhibit a certain form of naive captivity to the mantra of globalization, a kind of naivety that exults in the positivity of the *telos* of human activity, an offshoot of scholasticism, at the expense of the importance of 'process'.<sup>20</sup> What is clearly missed out by this approach is that globalization is not about carving out a virtual space or virtual proximity to fashionable zones of possibilities, which have assembled into spectacular constellations of possibilities drummed up by globalization gurus, constellations of global production and management of knowledge that break the traditional barriers of time and space, that which aim to perfect human freedom. From the standpoint of the molecular (in Deleuzian terms), constellations are no less constitutive of concrete individual possibilities, possibilities of making one's life, one's cause, one's vision or program, even one's symptoms relevant, useful and beneficial, yes, in this age of constellations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Here, our inspiration is Alfred North Whitehead whose neglected process-philosophy is gaining renewed attention in light of the earth's deepening ecological crisis as a result of human hubris. Humans tend to ignore the autonomous process of things as they continue to supplant their internal temporal structure in favor of a positive time measurable by technical values. It is interesting to note here that Whitehead is a strong influence on Harman. For a dependable introduction to Whitehead's process philosophy see C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup>Deleuze and Guattari alert their readers: "Keep everything in sight at the same time—that a social machine or an organized mass has his/her own pack unconsciousness, which does not necessarily resemble the packs of the mass to which that individual belongs; that an individual or mass will live out in its unconscious the masses and packs of another mass or another individual" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 35).

Indeed the passion to imitate the universe is the mimetic structure of the logic of human survival that has never been more plastic and transparent—‘mimesis’ as a technique of coming-to-be reminiscent of how the universe came about, and is continually coming to be. This includes how the universe disposes of its physical wealth, immediately in the form of ‘solar capital’ from which all forms of capitalization become possible, from which all forms of general economies on earth are possibilized.<sup>22</sup> In this light, globalization is a local name (relative to our planet) that stands for that cosmic operation that continues to fascinate us from down below, from a sublunary but expedient point of observation.

The universe unfolds ‘there’ as it offers models of elaborating what constellations mean for subjectivities, how they can be localized into creating networks and assemblages, of regionalizing other possibilities for interaction among humans, even between humans and their radical alterities in objects and things.<sup>23</sup> The latter suggest of possibilities of interaction between humans and nonhumans (animals, stones, etc.), which suggest of the possibility of what in Marx’s unappreciated work *Grundrisse* may closely approximate the meaning of ‘general intellect’ as the capability of Man to fully synthesize with His radical alterity, a

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<sup>22</sup>Building on Georges Bataille’s theory of general economy, Nick Land exposes the immanence of death as the driving force of terrestrial life that is ironically dependent on the sun’s decomposition: “Life appears as a pause on the energy path; as a precarious stabilization and complication of solar decay. It is most basically comprehensible as the general solution to the problem of consumption. Such a solar- or general-economic perspective exhibits production as an illusion; the hypostatization of a digression in consumption. To produce is to partially manage the release of energy into its loss, and nothing more” (Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* [London and New York: Routledge], 1992), xviii.

<sup>23</sup>Deleuze would even extend this mimetic activity to the cinema. Bogue argues that the mimesis at work in Deleuze’s concept of the cinema is at best heuristic in purpose. The mimesis works, Bogue emphasizes, “by means of envisioning what cinema presupposes and brings into existence: the cosmos as a centered flux of image-matter” (Bogue, “Word, Image and Sound,” in *Deleuze’s Wake: Tributes and Tributaries* [New York: State University of New York, 2004], 121).

“species-being” (a position of Marx greatly influenced by Schelling).<sup>24</sup> Species-being is a unilateral duality of freedom and limitation whose final limitation, but also the opportunity for ecstatic liberation, is the point of absolute negativity in which the absolute does no more possess of a positive value worthy of thought to chase; indeed, a form of being at peace with a unilaterizing universe which can only be approached via a radical form of imagination vis-a-vis the power of the universe to withdraw from human access. In the final analysis: paradoxical possibilities for connecting to the Great Outdoors, the Universe from whose standpoint, the standpoint of the last instance, everything is unilateralized as a thing, that is to say, equal to zero.

### **Mimesis as Enfolding**

The mimesis at work here can be radicalized into a negative unilateralization of everything into the Thing. Negative insofar as it is the human mimicking the cosmos. More so, insofar as it is mimetically performed existentially wise, existence is returned to its radical source, to its being-unilateralized by the Thing—the Thing that affects us without the guarantee of truth, even of falsity, hence, the impossibility of redemption (=zero). In all histories of the material speculation of Thought, the Thing is said to acquire its first name, the One.<sup>25</sup> As One it is already counted, hence, the One as the Man-in-One where Man is counted-as-one. How is this?

Insofar as Man performs the count in mimicking the Cosmos His being counted-as-one is transcribed into the One, yielding a generic concept of Man-in-One where the in-One is the last instance determination of to ‘ex-ist’. ‘Ex-ist’ is here transcribed into in-One (the generic concept of the One is produced by an act of mimesis). Man-in-One is therefore the generic concept of the One/Real in terms of a radical mimesis of the One/Real. The act of mimesis is here transcribed by Laruelle as the visioning-in-One.

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<sup>24</sup>See Karl Marx, *Gründrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1963).

<sup>25</sup>See Laruelle, “General Formation of First Names,” in *Future Christ*, xxvii-xxx.

‘Other first names’ are well-known: God, State, Capital, or History. But all these names which carry no truth-value are derivative of the most radical visioning possible, the most radical practice of thought in the form of a vision-in-One, not *of*-One because the One is totally foreclosed to thought, therefore, cannot be held as a property. The One unilateralizes—it goes in one direction and does not return. The vision-in-One is the generic form of thinking from the One (or Real) which is not without a struggle “determined by Man who gives himself his reality and prevents it (his reality) from returning to him.”<sup>26</sup> The vision-in-One is a struggle to achieve knowledge of the Real which, as ‘real’, is unilateral. Laruelle also describes the vision-in-One as the knowledge of “unlearned knowledge,” the knowledge that we are unilateralized by the Real instead of constituting the Real. This radical form of knowing was insinuated by Socrates within the practice of philosophy but fell short of its genuine expression because philosophy is still premised on the hallucination that it can constitute the Real in terms of the apriori structures of philosophical reasoning (the *Logos*) vis-à-vis the unilateral reality that it is the Real that constitutes us. Genuine knowledge of the Real can only be non-philosophical, or accessed from outside the tradition of philosophy.

On the absolute side of the Real, the One is ontologically neutral. The vision-in-One, the ultimate form of philosophizing, pushed to its ultimate vector to extract a thought from the One, generates without being able to possess it the image of the Thing in its last determining instance, the One-in-Void, the being-nothing of Nothing. This ‘being’ of Nothingness is a positive axiomatic material, the final instance of the something-ness of nothing beyond which the ‘real beyond’ unfolds without an audience, but counted-as-One-for-the-future-audience, posthuman human.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 11; emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup>Laruelle’s notion of the Stranger-subject is close to the post-human sense we are pursuing here. See Katerina Kolosova, “The Figure of the Stranger: A Possibility for Transcendental Minimalism or Radical Subjectivity,” in *JCRT* 11 (2011): 3.

Nonetheless the logic of mimesis or ‘cloning’ through the vision-*in-One* is obscured by localizations into zones of territorialising, which necessarily involve decisions. Cloning is theoretically the ‘in-One’ of the vision-in-One.

More exactly, a thinking-*in-identity*. “In-One” says identically the transcendental clone as if received by way of the Other but not constitutive of the One... Only transcendental identity can be called “in-One” and also real “in-the-last-instance,” and the other (aprioritic) representations [philosophy and science and other regional knowledges] are only such within the measure of the transcendental that is their essence, under threat of inherence of an irreality of the Real in the Real. The a priori non-philosophical representations thus are not in-One except in-the-last-instance... “Determination-in-the-last-instance” tells us the only possible relation of the empirical or of philosophy to the Real which is not a refusal or a “forgetting” of being-foreclosed of the Real but a thinking based on that “criteria” of foreclosure.<sup>28</sup>

It is therefore according to how one decides to territorialize a mimetic model of the cosmos that outcomes of seizures, of appropriating the Event, the throw of the dice of Time that they become available to moral judgment. On the one hand, the ‘throw’ (from the unilateral place of the cosmos) is translatable into solar emissions, into multiplicities of options for appropriating solar waste which also correspond to multiple varieties of species on earth. On the other hand, the ‘throw of the dice’ (from the terrestrial site of the vision-in-One) may be translated into self-mastery and mastery of others in terms of the network of capital relations that are forged from the waste of the sun, which, as these relations are reducible to consuming goods manufactured from the solar anus, create paradoxical forms of self-stylization, an aesthetics of existence, of living on ‘end times’ as the sun is dying in the sense of its excessive emission. It is in the above sense that existence thrives upon the life-giving power of

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<sup>28</sup>François Laruelle, “Theory of Cloning,” in *Problematic of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (unpublished).

death. Existence, human or non-human, territorializes death that makes (existence) an existence.

In the same manner zones of possibilities are territorial which have built-in mechanisms to isolate those forces or relations of forces that have yet to form themselves into new zones of possibilities.<sup>29</sup> Seen in this light, globalization can easily wipe away those forces that have yet to develop 'creative folds' (in the same manner as the universe gobbles up weak gravitational spaces) or possibilities for creative intervention, for sorting elements of change from those that tend to unbind creativity from the zone one has created for oneself. The elements of change that are still unformed, unrelated, relations without purposes, without zonal territories in which they can take positive shapes, are those elements utilized by the unilateralizing agency of globalization that builds on the totalizing power of capital, namely, the singularity of market forces. Market forces are one but dominant and pervasive zone of possibilities whose function is to territorialize and enclose forces without zonal affiliation/inclusion. Yet zones of possibilities are as multiple as the forces of life are which no single zone can totalize. A *thousand plateaus* are still waiting to be formed into positive relations of forces.

### **Fidelity to an Empty Set**

The Fold, once again: a technique of folding the outside in the inside; a method of invaginating the inside from nonrelational singularities and multiplicities, transforming them into formalizable coordinates, self-localizable algorithms or fields of one's fulfillability, within which one exhibits her aleatory progress within a plane of inconsistent consistency, what with our perennial Deleuze is called the plane of immanence or life. Yet, the creation of the fold itself begins with a theoretically decided structure, a *substance* of which the world is made.

Expressed in terms of the University's vision and mission this substance is that into which its promotion of 'scientific humanism'

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<sup>29</sup>Bogue, "Deleuze, Foucault, and the Playful Fold of the Self," in *Deleuze's Wake*, 43-60.

necessarily results, that is to say, in service of the radical human.<sup>30</sup> From the standpoint of its vision and mission, the University has already decided what this substance is. It has already taken sides on what the world is. That world is a zone of possibility that the University has long ago created. It has preserved its substance in that paradoxical pair of statements, its vision and mission, forged from out of a certain notion of plasticity.

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<sup>30</sup>See Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 156. Negri and Hardt's rendition of the notion of the poor as definable in terms of 'possibility' rather than of 'lack' is closer to our preference for the use of Ordinary Man. (See also Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009], xi). "The poor, in other words, refers not to those who have nothing but to the wide multiplicity of all those who are inserted in the mechanisms of social production regardless of social order or property" (40). The 'wide multiplicity' here can be further radicalized in terms of the unilaterality of the Real. From the standpoint of the Real, humanity is a subject-in-struggle regardless of differences in class which defines poverty and richness in terms of property relations. More radically expressed, humanity is poor relative to the foreclosed essence of the Real whose unilaterality nonetheless is the source of infinite wealth (as we mentioned in a short passage from Bataille, *cf.* n. 22). One may not be surprised if we hear more of Negri and Hardt, stating: "In each and every historical period a social subject that is ever-present and everywhere the same is identified, often negatively but nonetheless urgently, around a common living form. This form is not that of the powerful and the rich: they are merely partial and localised figures, *quantitae signatae*. The only non-localisable "common name" of pure difference in all eras is the poor. The poor is destitute, excluded, repressed, exploited—and yet living" (Ibid., 156)! This looks like Negri and Hardt were insinuating the genericity of the poor. Laruelle has a similar quantum of thought in which the poor is rendered generic, nay, as the ordinary, the last instance knowledge of the humanity/subject-in-struggle through the vision-in-One/Real (we are also noting here that the struggle is in the last instance definable in terms of the objectification of the Real by knowing, in general, through philosophy and science): "[It] will be a question of rediscovering *the identity of the generic in a new combination of its two symptoms-sources, man coming from philosophy and the subject or object coming from science, both transformed, something like the identity of the human middle, of 'ordinary' man and, in particular, the labours of the latter*" (Laruelle, "The Generic as Predicate and Constant," in *Speculative Turn*, 239).

Plasticity is what is left in the aftermath of destructive and deconstructive reduction of reality, ‘destruktion’ and ‘deconstruction’ (in the Derridean sense) as another first names for that truth-procedure called invagination, folding the outside in the inside, taming its monstrosity into an aesthetic artefact that refracts any attempt at final reduction as it has become a pure image.<sup>31</sup> Plasticity is what is left after transforming a former void into a new void but this time within sight, within reach, within grasp.<sup>32</sup> Our beginning as a University is traceable to a point of radical zero, a beginning that takes its source to be that of the void, a foundational hypothesis of emptiness, of an *ex nihilo* kind, through which the possibility of every beginning unfolds, but which guarantees neither truth nor redemption. No doubt, institutions need to set goals for themselves—their visions and missions conjuring up their significance on the side of nothing.

Out of our paradoxical pairing of being-nothing, our vision and mission, is thus generated the image of the ordinary Man whose generative power owing to her closeness to natural life, her capacity to erupt, her power to determine a zone of possibility in the last instance, without being formally taught, demonstrates axiomatically, historically, and no doubt, praxiologically, why it is that she constitutes the very ‘fundamental possibility of every humanity’. The ordinary Man is the hypothetical axiom of expressive nullity—who has nothing to lose but her chain, the chain being a falsely abstracted condition of poverty that is not the poverty proper to human existence. The poverty she is forced to experience is not radical enough; it is a kind of poverty alien to her. The true axiomatic experience of poverty is the source of all human freedom—poverty before the Void whose richness is unbearable, whose wealth to offer is too huge to accommodate. The ordinary Man alone is in possession of this knowledge, the absolute knowledge that Socrates only discovered later—that one can know the radical source of knowing in being-nothing from which it is now possible to say one cannot know

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<sup>31</sup>See Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction and Deconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup>To a certain degree, also the general motif of Brassier’s book *Nihil Unbound*.

everything, where everything is still not-All vis-a-vis the unilateral void where the subject is in the last instance unnecessary.

But against the background of this unilaterality, Nick Land, reporting on Bataille's theory of religion, offers a therapeutic reading of the non-value of humanity (thus called a *negentropy* or *negating entropy* in the guise of forcing a value to human existence):

If the strictly regional resistance of everything that delays, impedes or momentarily arrests the movement of dissolution is abstracted from the solar flow it is interpretable as transcendence. Such abstract resistance to loss is characterized by autonomy (freedom), homogeneity (all-humanity is free), and ideality (the potentiality of the soul to become immortal)...

The inevitable return of constricted energy to immanence is religion, whose core is sacrifice, generative of the sacred...

... [But this] humanizing project has the form of an unsustainable law.<sup>33</sup>

The pessimism of Bataille, though powerful in its critique of Kantian morality, is only half-way to truth, half-the-truth-of-the-True-without-truth. Land, while sympathetic to Bataille, identifies a possible therapeutic location of human happiness in the knowledge that the Real is foreclosed. This knowledge is of an object-oriented kind, not necessarily in the order of things Harman gave of the in-themselves of things and objects, rather the kind of order in which everything saturated by matter, though equal to zero in the sense that nothing promises any kind of redemption, does not have to be necessarily null. That everything does not promise anything is understandable from the point of absolute contingency, chaos and complexity. It is the same absolute which tells us that everything does not have to be as it is. As Quentin Meillasoux puts it, if everything is contingent, nothing possesses of absolute reason

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<sup>33</sup>Land, *Thirst for Annihilation*, xix; emphases mine.

why it has to exist as it is.<sup>34</sup> As such, even solar decay cannot reduce us to real imprisonment in the world, ‘real’ in the sense that its unilateral combustion ascertains extinction. Land argues: “It is only because our bodies are weak and die that it is impossible for there to be a perfect cage, or for the sun to be interminably locked in fascist health. To be protected by something more than zero is the final term of imprisonment.”<sup>35</sup> An impossible thing happens here: we are in-existent or we are ghosts, in/consistent zeroes, un/presentable entities resulting from contingency. Paradoxically, because we can die, which is the ultimate source of hope, that which protects our existence from being “protected by something more than zero,” which means the possibility of living an eternal life, entropy cannot perfectly imprison us. Extinction is not-All; otherwise, if it is All, we must also be capable of living in eternity, an imagined logical necessity that is absolutely prohibited by the ultimate logic of absolute contingency.

### Excursus 1

Here, we should not be misled in re-committing ourselves to standard phenomenology. Things can only be left to themselves from a position of axiomatic nullity.

A thing is equal to ontological zero: indeed, insofar as any ‘thing’ “[withdraws] from mutual contact” with another, and “encounters [another] only as translations or caricatures.”<sup>36</sup> On the level of cosmic assemblages, any ‘thing’ mirrors the Thing-in-itself, not the Kantian thing, but rather an aleatory process that always precedes it (it even precedes the known universe still officially created out of the Big Bang); a pure Outside that persists diagonally opposite the enfolding of the outside in the inside, hence opposite the fold. That which precedes the enfolding is the pure Outside that is yet to be enfolded to creative singularity, the

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<sup>34</sup>See Quentin Meillasoux, *After Finitude. Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>35</sup>Land, *Thirst for Annihilation*, 139.

<sup>36</sup>Graham Harman, “Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation,” in *Cosmos and History. The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 6 (2010) 1: 14.

throw of the dice whose essence is derivative of the superimmensity of chaos that precedes territorial spacing, including human spacing of time as well as the becoming-time of space. Incidentally, this is what Derrida would describe as the very operational principle of deconstruction.<sup>37</sup>

But this only illustrates that deconstruction cannot account for the anteriority of a time before the territorial spacing of time from the standpoint of being-with-thought. The anteriority is the pure outside that is strictly undeconstructible precisely because there is no human in it. Deconstruction is possible only within a correlational reality where the subject thematizes the deconstructible conditions of its possibility at the same time that its irregularity and aleatoriness shape the outside world by invaginating itself from the pure Outside based on its belated self-unfolding.

The subject, due to its belated emergence, can only virtually affect things and realities. The same applies to nonhuman things themselves, yet due to a more metaphysical determination—these things operate on foreclosure. Altogether, no being can absolutely affect another, human being, nonhuman being like animal and stone. All are beings in the unilateral sense of being as that which non-causally affects another. Nonetheless one can attract another, thereof producing a virtual unity of affects as shown, for instance, in the synthetic combination of hydrogen and oxygen. Each is foreclosed to the other. Yet, this very foreclosure grounds the possibility of accidental attraction in a plastic material called water which holds two autonomous things together by the sheer force of process *qua* event, a sheer accident or chance. Water is the unforeseeable new that changes the degree of individual autonomy of hydrogen and oxygen. That each is foreclosed to the other proves quite intriguingly that only accident can make a unity out of them, yet a unity that is internally resisted by foreclosure. The unified material (subject or non-subject) always runs the risk of breaking apart.

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<sup>37</sup>Hägglund, however, asserts that Derrida ignored the radical potential of this concept. See Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2.

### Excursus 2

There are forces at play that sustain our conception of reality, forces that are by nature withdrawn from our view. Whereas for Heidegger this interplay of withdrawal and transparency would constitute the mystery of the Thing itself, for post-continental philosophers like Badiou and Žižek the total mystery is the Subject itself. In Heidegger and post-continental philosophy (at least to the degree that it is represented by Badiou and Žižek) the mystery can be resolved through human acts. For Heidegger, it requires a certain degree of human comportment to let the thing *thing* itself, to unfold its dimension other than its being enframed into presence-at-hand, its being a correlate of consciousness. For both Badiou and Žižek, the mystery on the side of the subject invokes human acts to seize an event, a quasi-Deleuzian folding of the outside in the inside with the intention of making events mutate, on a minimal pragmatic and technical level, from its nonfunctionality to a certain kind of functionality that can be inscribed for human purposes.

As these philosophers share one thing in common, specifically, about the role of the subject, the trajectories of human intervention are differentiated. For Heidegger the subject lets the thing *thing* in service of a much broader letting-be of being (*seinlassen*) in the form of *Ereignis*, the kind of unfolding of the Real with minimal historical intervention; for Badiou the subject seizes the opportunity in the form of an unanticipated event if only to exhibit fidelity to the conditions of truth according to which the subject exercises her being free for science, art, politics, and love.<sup>38</sup> The subject seizes the events to keep these conditions alive. Even so, we are not sure if Badiou is aware of the tautology of seizing the Event.

### Excursus 3

Any seizure is a particular occasioning of each of the four conditions of truth such that one seizes a scientific event, a political event, an artistic event, an erotic event. The subject is transcendently

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<sup>38</sup>See Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

predefined by certain conditions of expressivity. If one seizes a particular event to keep a corresponding condition alive, which demonstrates for Badiou a fidelity to a certain event *qua* a specific occasioning of freedom, it would seem then that an event is not completely unforeseeable. By deciding to keep the conditions of free thinking alive in each of the four domains of truth where one is existentially situated—science, politics, art, and love—the destiny of the event is partly foreseeable. The subject can in fact exert influence upon the actual shaping of the event—any kind of event can only come from a specific domain of manifestation of truth. What would strictly qualify as unforeseeable is the outcome of the seizure according to which one’s act may be proven to be faithful or unfaithful, but, just the same, it goes against the grain of the Badiouan fidelity to the event-in-the-last-instance: the subject is compelled to remain faithful to the special character of the event (whether scientific, political, artistic or erotic) regardless whether the event no longer communicates a linear relation to the domain from which it is supposed to emerge. The crux of the matter is that Badiou expects this linear relation. Thus, a forceful inversion is necessary. The subject must force that event to remain faithful. Here, the Maoism of Badiou rears its ugly head. Badiou affirms this inversion in the following passages from *Being and Event*: “That it is almost necessary to tolerate the complete arbitrariness of a choice, that quantity, that paradigm of objectivity, leads to pure subjectivity.”<sup>39</sup>

These passages are symptomatic of what is amiss in Badiou, his strategy of putting the subject in the last instance. This position of ours is not tantamount to rejecting our earlier formulation that the subject in its radicality can only be exposed as the last instance of the Real. Our position takes its source from that side of Badiouan fidelity to the Event which properly exposes, without hesitating to reduce it to a symptom, the full ir-responsibility of the subject vis-à-vis the Real that has no use for it. We contend that Badiou is unsure about the fundamental character of the subject as the generic enforcer of the indiscernible, an empty foundational set.

In Badiou, the subject is particularized in terms of its positionality in one of the four conditions of truth. Obviously, the subject cannot take

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<sup>39</sup>Badiou, *Being and Event*, 280.

all positions at the same time. It is rather realistic to say that the subject can be ideally faithful to an event within a single domain of truth. A realistic Badiouan subject is too limited to perform a generic forcing of the indiscernible, a voiding of the Void which requires a general and comprehensive view of the four conditions of occasioning the events of truths. One has to be realistically outside the constellation of these conditions, an option available to a mathematical subject. But the mathematical subject has its own limitations despite its universalizable property compared with other subject positions. Simply put, the mathematical subject has no formal event to be faithful to because it is purely a subject-without-conditions. Without an event to be loyal to the mathematical subject regresses into a floating signifier. The axiomatic project of Badiou is therefore incomplete.

The process of truth manifestation in Badiou's operation cannot sufficiently expose the radicality of the subject in the last instance. Rather, as Laruelle would have it, any truth process is fundamentally a result of an operation that precedes even the voiding of the Void from a particularized condition of truth that objectifies truth's last instance according to the unique algorithm of a particular occasioning of the Real. The reverse is otherwise affirmed by Badiou in the following passages from *Theory of the Subject*:

The subject is subjected, insofar as nothing is thinkable under this name except a regulated place--a splace. And also inasmuch as what the subject destroys is at the same time that which determines it in its being placed.

The fact that the subjective process occurs from the point of interruption indicates the law of the subject as the dialectical division of destruction and re-composition.

This is what guarantees that the subjective process in part escapes repetition. The effect of the Same is destroyed, and what this destruction institutes is an *other Same*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009), 259.

We can radicalize the post-evental affirmation of the Badiouan subject in terms of occasioning an ‘other event’ of the Event within its being-placed in a particular domain of truth into a subject that does not need to undergo this process in order that its radical strangeness can be perfectly guaranteed. *For us this is precisely the generic subject.* It does not even need to repeat itself differently in the full repetitive implication of destroying one’s being-placed in the form of being-other-than-oneself-as-being-necessarily-placed, which affords it the chance to affirm the condition that subjects it. One simply has to feel the brunt of reality when one’s desire for something is thwarted by forces she cannot explain. (That is why psychoanalysis is still important for any attempt to do ontology). It is precisely that experience of being-thwarted that repetition is set to work. The exact moment of the thwarting occasions the originary fold, a first-order invagination upon which all enfoldments of later experiences will build on. The memory of the first institution of memory, an absolute memory—this is the experience of radical strangeness that all forms of truth manifestation which culminates in seizing an event will seek to re-occasion.<sup>41</sup> The Badiouan point of interruption is precisely localizable in this site.

The interruptions available for radical experience across the domains of truth are derivative of the first enfoldment of absolute memory—the desire to repeat it which properly defines existence. In other words, human existence is not radical enough in the face of the Real that does not have any use for its repetitive, machinic replication. Human existence is always an existence that it can exist-for, namely, the conditions of truth. But juxtaposed to the unilaterality of the Void the *existence-for* of existing becomes superfluous. Hence, the ‘inexistent’ of Badiou, notwithstanding its proximity to the superfluity of the radical subject, which he describes as “being nothing,” cannot in the last instance

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<sup>41</sup>In principle any enfoldment allows for some degree of reterritorialization by the elements of the enfolded outside. In Bergsonian philosophy that which is reterritorialized is memory. Bogue summarizes this aspect of Deleuzian reterritorialization: “The Outside ... is retained as past, its retention constituting a folding of the Outside, and its forgetting as unfolding. One may say, then, that the forgetting or unfolding of the present is that which is folded within memory” (Bogue, “Deleuze, Foucault, and the Playful Fold of the Self,” in *Deleuze’s Wake*, 58).

communicate the axiomatic nothingness proper to existing-for.<sup>42</sup> As Badiou would insist, “an inexistent argues for its multiple-Being in order to declare that it shall be absolutely.”<sup>43</sup> But the multiplicity of being is a needless excess, a solar waste, an irremediable fate. Its multiplicity is derivative rather than a proto-reality attributable to the unilaterality of the Void. What Genet said of his personal triumph over the global, molar and arboreal character of existence, “My victory is verbal!”<sup>44</sup> (which Badiou took to be an example of the radical inexistent), is shy of the radicality it claims to be, in that we can oppose to *Genetian* verbal assertion of positive multiplicity against global existence the statement that inexistence is not the existence proper to the voiding of the Void. What Badiou did not see is that the kind of existence proper to the voiding of the Void is the one that ex-ists outside the conditions of truth, namely, the existence of the stranger-subject.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, this radical subject that suffers a certain form of disinclination on the part of Badiou becomes in the hands of Žižek an iconic regression to Kantianism via a curious Hegelian *Aufhebung*. For Žižek, the subject seizes the event to keep herself away from the entrapment of desire that *desires* the total experience of the Thing, or the absolute comprehension of primordial Being vis-a-vis the ontological fact that *that* Thing/Being only exists in as far as it is invested in the symbolic order of language. (We will discuss Žižek at length in Excursus 5).

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<sup>42</sup>Alain Badiou, “Homage to Jacques Derrida,” in *Adieu Derrida*, ed. Coustas Douzinas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 45.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>45</sup>The stranger-subject is originally developed by Laruelle. We are thus departing from the academic and professional rivalry (between Badiou and Laruelle) that has exacerbated their differences at the expense of exploring the common thread that sutures each other’s undeclared affinity to the same concept of the Event (for Badiou, that which is unpredictable, for Laruelle, to a certain degree, that which is unpredictable by virtue of a more generic occasioning of the Real that is foreclosed to human thought).

Excursus 4

The aleatory process that has the capacity to hold the universe together is itself a result of the natural voiding of the Void, a pure physical process that is not in our power to comprehend yet, but that it is 'there' does not discount the fact that it is knowable *contra* Kant. The Void is unilaterally released to human wonder, which has reached us from a scientifically unimaginable point of anteriority, a 'beyond' but a *diagonal* beyond, not the painfully unreachable beyond of Kant. It is an epistemic assertion of a beyond that by its own axiomatic decision refracts an eschatological invitation to embrace the mystic's position. It is a beyond that itself withdraws from our assumption that it withdraws (it withdraws from a thetic kind of withdrawal, an activity that thought assumes on behalf of that which withdraws), but also allows us, by virtue of the alterity that defines its self-withdrawal, to recognize a certain rising forth that gives itself to be seen as pure withdrawal, the pure as the not-All seen as the last-instance-objectification of a subject to whose gaze the Thing it desires does not promise it any form of actual redemption, hence, the pure withdrawal as the last instance this subject can extract of the Thing. But everything here if it must sink in to thought has to be axiomatically decided. Thought can hold on to axioms so as not to lose itself, faced with the serious task of thinking.

Excursus 5

The Thing-in-itself is the thing that ex-ists from its own condition of self-foreclosure; its existence is a self-legitimizing act on the side of nothing.

This 'withdrawing essence' provides philosophy a tool to understand what is at stake in our attempt to comprehend our relation to things. Kant did not have an idea of this withdrawal but rather an assumption that understanding is always already situated within finitude. Finitude is always already wrong if not ignorant of the essence of things in themselves. This argument simply exposes the illogicality of a leap from finitude to infinitude. To avoid that kind of illogical leap Kant had to fall back on finitude, this time to thematize what would appear to be its own infinite conditions of possibility, but infinite only

to the extent that in light of the possibility of getting it all wrong or the possibility of real ignorance vis-a-vis the unknowable an immanent form of infinity need be introduced: Infinity can be immanently attained by the three postulates of moral reason (freedom, immortality, and God's existence).

Moral reason becomes, what in Lacanian psychoanalysis stands for the "metonymy of desire," an objectification of the impossibility of penetrating the Thing-in-itself by reducing it to the function of the Symbolic.<sup>46</sup> Such trajectory for Kant reassures philosophy that more work has to be done by objectifying the "metonymy" of the impossible or the unknowable as a stand-in for the noumenon. What is clearly emphasized here is the possibility of breaking the impasse that confronts finite knowing that has prematurely posited an absolute limit to its capability to radicalize thought. Nonetheless, we can treat this to be a special case of thinking rather than what might suggest itself to be a topological form of premature non-ejaculation, if such a thing exists. But as a way of transposing this Kantian problem to a properly Lacanian framework we can instead establish a topological similarity between the noumenon and the primal object of desire, the Thing/Real itself. Slavoj Žižek has an interesting take on this topological similarity:

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<sup>46</sup>Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for a Return to *Différance* (with a Minor Pro Domo Sua)," in *Adieu Derrida*, 130. Žižek also discussed this Lacanian concept in an unpublished lecture manuscript (which contained excerpts from his newest book *Less Than Nothing: Hegel in The Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*) that formed part of the summer school reading at the University of Bonn (Third Annual International Summer School in German Philosophy with the theme "The Ontological Turn in Contemporary Philosophy, July 2 to 12, 2012; henceforth, *Reader Summer School Bonn*). A colleague of mine who is starting to do her work on speculative realism via Lacan secretly provided me the copy. As of this writing she is at Bonn rubbing elbows with Slavoj Žižek, Markus Gabriel (who co-authored a work on German Idealism with Žižek), Martin Hägglund (who is working on post-Derridean philosophy, an avid critic of speculative realism), and three prominent members of the school of speculative realism, namely, Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Ray Brassier. Meillasoux, whose theory of correlationism set off speculative realism, did not make it to the seminar.

[Why] this constitutive withdrawal from reality of a part of the Real? Precisely because the subject is part of reality, because it emerges out of it.... We can also see in what way two lacks overlap in this impossible object (the *Real*): the constitutive lack of the subject (what the subject has to lose in order to emerge as the subject...) and the lack in the Other itself (what has to be excluded from reality so that reality can appear).... So the Real is not some kind of primordial Being which is lost with the opposition of subject and object (as Hölderlin put it in his famous *Ur-Fragment* of German Idealism); the Real is, on the contrary, a product (of the overlapping two lacks)...<sup>47</sup>

Žižek finishes off with a final blow:

The Real is the point at which the external opposition between the symbolic order and reality is immanent to the symbolic itself, mutilating it from within: it is the non-All of the symbolic. There is a Real not because the symbolic cannot grasp its external Real, but because the symbolic cannot fully become itself.<sup>48</sup>

With his correlationist stance in favor of the ironic lack that constitutes the subject—correlationism being the mutual dependence of the subject and object from the encompassing standpoint of the subject in which the subject can play the role of either the victor or the victim, the strong or the weak, the master or the slave, etc., which in the last instance grounds the lack that is also constitutive of the Thing/Real, the radical trans-inclusion of the subject in the object which legitimates the expression that the Real is not-All because the subject is in it—Žižek ends up supporting Kant, that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, but in a way that radicalizes what Kant missed in his own brand of correlationism, that the thing-in-itself is simply unconscious of itself.

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<sup>47</sup>Žižek, “How to Break Out of Transcendental Correlationism,” in *Reader Summer School Bonn*, pagination not applicable.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

Francois Laruelle, the originator of non-philosophy and a rather difficult theorem of the One-in-One, is more to the point when he states that the Real is the Man-in-Man (contrary to Žižek's subject-in-Real, or Man-in-Real): the in-Man being the product of the doubling of Man's self-objectification of the Real in which the doubling proceeds from Man to the Real whose foreclosure and anterior temporality deflect/return the objectification to Man performing the vision-in-One.<sup>49</sup> By arguing that the Real is the product of two overlapping lacks (the subject and the Thing itself) Žižek proposes to solve the Kantian dilemma by simply demonstrating that there is no such thing as an independent reality in the sense that it is foreclosed to the subject. Žižek would also appear to deny that there is a pure Outside such as the existence of an observable physical dimension called the Universe—an unpredictable result of the temporal eventuation of the throw of the dice.<sup>50</sup> Schelling and Badiou are

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<sup>49</sup>This notion of doubling is initially worked out by Laruelle on his now accessible book *Philosophies of Difference* in terms of how this doubling has caught the entire tradition of philosophy under a notion of philosophical decision which, in a nutshell, constitutes philosophy's illicit election of transcendence into a position of singularity that transcends even its own ground, the ground it grounds that it believes to be inferior to the transcendental deduction. The election of an autonomous transcendence is possible in terms of an operation (in philosophy, that which constitutes the kernel of its decision) that eliminates the pre-transcendental ground and arrogates it to itself which gives philosophy the privilege, not without an obvious degree of hallucination, to constitute the Real. See François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle (New York and London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>50</sup>Žižek relies heavily on Karen Barad's reading of the philosophical implications of quantum mechanics. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Elsewhere in *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek quotes Barad, which exposes his bias in favor of an enigmatic Real that to him psychoanalysis is in a position to address: "There is simply no outside to the universe for the measuring agencies to go to in order to measure the universe as a whole... since there is no outside to the universe, there is no way to describe the entire system, so that description always occurs from within: *only one part of the world can be made intelligible to itself at a time, because the other part of the world has to be the part that it makes a difference to*" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 350-51). Anyone familiar with Žižekian ontology can immediately identify

more subtle; for them the pure outside constitutes a proto-reality in the form of pure multiplicity, an atemporal void that breaks out of itself by sheer absolute contingency towards which human knowledge behaves in the form of acknowledging the un-reason that underlies everything, namely, that everything has no reason not to exist otherwise.<sup>51</sup>

Žižek wants us to believe that the Universe in the transcendental ontological sense of the Real is the product of the failure of the symbolic order (our speech, our writing, knowledge in general) to become fully symbolic. Our stance is clear: there is the Real, an independent reality, but contrary to metaphysics, this Real is not absolutely unknowable which metaphysics (and the parallax as a recent addition) defend on the assumption that our finitude is incapable of making a fully symbolic leap, which is also another way of saying that there is always the possibility of ignorance, a limit imposed on knowing the very origin of which as a technique of regulation, or what Foucault would not hesitate to say as a regime of truth-making, can be traced to the motives of the early prophets who wrote the Bible—only God knows. But if only for a fully symbolic leap we can properly make the necessary leap to infinity or absolute knowledge relative to what can be temporally ex-posed as knowable by the Universe that as Real unilaterizes objective reality by affecting it through the throw of the dice. This is explainable in chaos theory which demolishes the principle of sufficient reason that metaphysics attributes to the Universe. One simply has to radicalize or accentuate the full symbolic or speculative direction of thinking. In this light, Meillasoux has an interesting formulation:

The unequivocal relinquishment of the principle of reason requires us to insist that both the destruction and the perpetual preservation of a determinate entity must equally be able to occur for no reason. Contingency is

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these lines with his own brand of philosophical quantum, namely, the subject-in-Real. For an introduction to Žižekian ontology see Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

<sup>51</sup>Meillasoux, *After Finitude*, 54; also, Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 66-7.

such that anything might happen, even nothing at all, so what what is, remains as it is.<sup>52</sup>

Rather than the principle of sufficient reason inscribed by the correlation of subject and object (in Žižek, always from the standpoint of an incomplete subject, yet a subject in the last instance that must decide to be a subject vis-à-vis the Real) contingency or unreason allows what 'is' to be what it is. The very contingency or the withdrawing essence of the Real allows the subject to either objectify the Real through the Kantian-Lacanian metonymy of the Void/Noumenon or negate the autonomous persistence of the Real *ala* Žižek. The 'symbolic failure' of the symbolic order only comes later, indeed, as a unilateral excess of the Real-as-the-objectified-material of the vision-in-One, which only unequivocally proves that the Real unilateralizes/affects the subject without redemption. The subject has never been in the Real *contra* Žižek.

More to the point—Žižek's transcendental correlationism (the subject-in-the-Real, the kernel of the parallax) becomes an unwitting defender of culture industry that ensures the steady supply of fantasmatic objects that generate a kind of fetishism analogous to necessary illusion. Central to this Žižekian apology is the Lacanian differentiation of 'object-loss' (where the drive is central in displacing desire from its fixation on the Thing to the enjoyment of its stand-in) and 'object-cause' (where the drive is radically seduced by desire, also a drive but one that attempts to move beyond the pleasure principle, to seek the Thing itself, to seek more than enjoying partial objects).

To put it more pointedly, the object of the drive is not related to the Thing as a filler of its void: the drive is literally a counter-movement to desire, it does not strive towards impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, gets stuck onto a partial object as its remainder—the drive is quite literally the very drive to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded, to introduce a radical imbalance into it, and the difference between drive and desire is precisely that, in

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<sup>52</sup>Meillasoux, *After Finitude*, 57.

desire, this cut, this fixation onto a partial object, is as it were “transcendentalised,” transposed into a stand-in for the void of the Thing.<sup>53</sup>

Žižek was reacting to what he believes is a wrong notion (apparently by Freud himself) that there is such thing as pure death drive, a drive that can ecstatically radicalize itself into self-annihilation, an im-possible will to self-destruction. In short, the drive guarantees the preservation of a unique psychic force of sanity.

The drive is not a universal thrust (towards the incestuous Thing) checked and broken up, it is this break itself, a break on instinct, a break on “stuckness”... The elementary matrix of the drive is not that of transcending all particular objects towards the void of the Thing (which is then accessible only in its metonymic stand-in), but that of our libido getting “stuck” onto a particular object, condemned to circulate around it forever.<sup>54</sup>

But is not the persistence of ‘partial objects’ onto which the subject is necessarily stuck, which keeps its symptom at a sustainable level on the side of the “metonymic figurations of the void,” itself the kind of persistence that sutures the experience of ‘object-loss’ to the unbroken chain of consumerism?

### Excursus 6

All these varied forms of subject intervention (Heidegger’s poetic subject, Badiou’s axiomatic in-existent, Žižek’s parallax, and Laruelle’s stranger-subject), give and take their potentials for excess and rhetorical strengths, are herein acknowledged as radical approaches towards the

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<sup>53</sup>Žižek, “How to Break Out of Transcendental Correlationism,” in *Reader Summer School Bonn*.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

Real, the Outside, the Event, from an over-all minimalist ontological framework.<sup>55</sup>

This minimalism is not to be confused with a certain weakness or refusal to engage with the outside world, rather, the opposite. Minimalism is a radical form of doing ontology. Until Badiou introduced the significance of axiomatic decisions in post-continental philosophy minimalism was a kind of logical opposition that favoured the inscription of a higher function over the weaker, a form of relationality endorsed from above, from a transcendent function looking over the superficiality of immanence. With Badiou a certain subtraction starts to operate: The immanent subtracts from the transcendent that disrupts its hegemonic presence. But there is more. On the side of transcendence, transcendence becomes not-All, its rule is questionable. On the side of immanence, subtraction reveals the revolutionary character of lower functionality. Whereas in principle transcendence cannot transcend itself or it will self-destruct (transcendence necessarily adheres to an internal economy), immanence can transcend itself by infracting its correlational dependence on transcendence.

One can notice the Hegelian flavor of this subtractive ontology in terms of the master-slave dialectic which culminates in the negation of the negation (*Aufhebung*) whose resultant relation becomes one of absolute negativity. This negativity is expressed in terms of another form of correlation: the self-satisfaction of the slave is inversely proportional to the master's loss of self-meaning. Its difference with Hegel rather lies in the Badiouan postulate of the Void that is more transcendent than any form of transcendence. For Badiou it is the Void that subtraction proceeds from, an impossible operation that only reveals the radical side of the subject performing subtractive ontology. In Hegel, the Void is simply the equivalent of Nothing that Being necessarily absorbs by way of negating itself in terms of the exercise of self-alienation essential to the consciousness of the Absolute, the unity of Being and Nothing which is

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<sup>55</sup>This is the subject of Sam Gillespie's pioneering exposition of Badiou's philosophy. See Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics* (Melbourne, Australia: re.press, 2008).

not exactly a unity of two ontological opposites but a unity within Being that splits itself into two entities in a dialectical fashion.<sup>56</sup>

It is now possible to say here that Being is not-All because it is fundamentally inscribed in a non-relation to the Void. This Being that is not-All is precisely the subject. It does not matter whether this subject is that of the master or slave. Both master and slave are generic subjects. The revolutionary character of subtractive ontology nonetheless lies in its attempt to correct the conservative outlook that the master has the sole privilege to become a subject but also to repair the assumption that the slave has the moral privilege to be so. Historically, subtractive ontology is a partisan of the generic right of the slave for it is they who have been most deprived of the experience of genericity. The free conditions of being, its being-free-for science, art, politics and love are the exact conditions that subtractive ontology champions on behalf of the genericity of the slave. Even so, the full force of criticism falls on the side of this practice of genericity for it is there where the seizing of events are most vulnerable to malpractice. Isn't it that all revolutions were initiated by slaves who later became masters?

But there is also the side of criticism that falls on the generic complacency of the master. It is here where Derrida is right in criticizing Hegel: The Hegelian *Aufhebung* in the last instance serves the purpose of the master; its loss of self-meaning is reappropriated in the practice of amortization.<sup>57</sup> The master loses itself, but risks a radical part of itself,

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<sup>56</sup>The famous opposition between being and nothing can be retroactively understood to be an identical relation. Jean Hyppolite observes: "But that is due to the fact that it is the self that has posited itself as being and that this positing is not tenable; it engenders a dialectic. The self is absolute negativity and this negativity shows through in its positing itself as being. If the self is being, that is because being as such negates itself, and if being is the self that is because it is in-itself this negation of itself" (Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology*, trans. Samuel Chernak and John Heckman [Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974], 590).

<sup>57</sup>In *Glas* Derrida takes a swipe at Hegel: "The *Aufhebung* is the dying away, the amortization of death. That is the concept of economy in general in speculative dialectics...The economic act makes familiar, proper, one's own, intimate, private. The sense of property, of propriety, in general is collected in the *oikeos*..."

by loaning, by lending a part of its constellation of meanings that has yet to be penetrated by the absurdity of his historical situation. That way the master believes there is still a chance to escape his superfluous existence. One can also say here that the master loans a part of himself before the full force of absurdity gobbles him down. The master also loans a fraction of his wealth to the historical refinement of the “true-without-truth” (through sponsoring public enlightenment and education, read: commercialization of education), ironically, the truth that “does not want” the master for truth is an ontological excess indifferent to the subject-for-truth, that which claims what does not want it.<sup>58</sup> The master leases his private space to create public spaces for the propagation of this emancipatory knowledge by sustaining his excess as a subject-for-truth (the truth chased by the master hoping to find redemption compared to the happiness of the slave in *Aufhebung*).<sup>59</sup> This subject-for-truth has become the single encompassing narrative of all narratives of modern progress—that humanity is measured against the rule of truth which states that truth wants humanity, in that humanity must chase this truth, must give itself to a measure of perfection. All these become clear from an ahistorical, axiomatic, genealogical standpoint that exposes this single narrative thread from outside the historical standpoint of truth, what else but the history of the master justifying his meaning against the background of the dialectical dissolution of meanings.

One can recall with Hegel that the slave’s happiness in absolute negativity would have given the master unquestioned right to transcendence. The slave accepts her fate. However, the master’s recourse to amortization, which shows that he still chases after truth, desires to

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The *Aufhebung* [becomes] the economic law of the absolute reappropriations of absolute loss” (Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986], 133).

<sup>58</sup>Laruelle, “The Generic as Predicate and Constant,” in *Speculative Turn*, 253.

<sup>59</sup>The school, the factory, the halls of justice, the judiciary, the congress, the senate, etc., which are all transcendently mediated by a certain practice of truth and its production and consumption, its distribution and circulation within a network of signs, symbols, and enunciative sub-fields of rationalisations that in the last instance are codified into valid experiences.

become the subject for truth despite the truth that ‘truth does not want it’, proves that the master is irredeemable. On both sides, however, it only shows that *Aufhebung* is a historical process to which no one could gain access and of which no one has control.

In light of subtractive ontology, the kind of historical transcendence that is at work in the master-slave dialectic can now be reinscribed in terms of the autonomy of the Real itself. But this autonomy as Nick Land argues is premised on the fact that “we can die.” This is how the autonomy works: the chaotic essence of the Void allows the non-absolute unilateral moment of the Void as this moment reaches the subject yet always in a late en/folding which corresponds to the belated emergence of the subject that enfolds. In this sense, the Void cannot absolutely void the subject—the Void is slow in reaching us, but it will reach our planet anyhow—besides the fact that the subject is mortal which renders the void’s threat of extinction logically useless.

### **Back to Things Themselves**

As we have previously emphasized, the withdrawing essence of the thing itself constitutes for thought an anomalous process. As such, a pre-existing universe, the being-nothing of the Void, surprises thought: It is the limit to the inconsistent objectification of thought’s self-professed poverty. Socratic humility is not enough to fully understand this poverty for what lies at the heart of this in/consistent humility is a consistent withdrawal from the thought of ordinary man that he claims to champion.

The thought of the ordinary man, her generic character, radically articulates the essence of poverty proper to thought’s relation to the Thing. The ordinary man is the kind of person that is always already extracted in the last instance as the most basic model of substance as a decision, echoing Badiou’s Spinoza. The radical subjectivity of this ordinary man is that which makes her the first name of the Real itself, the “Human-in-the-last-instance.”<sup>60</sup> The last instance that makes her genericity rise forth as axiomatic knowledge has something to do with

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<sup>60</sup>Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 9; Kolosova, “Stranger Subject,” in *JCRT*, 60.

the same comportment she exhibits in relation to the One-Real, a certain attitude that determines the One in its last instance. Obviously, it is a form of determination that may first be executed with a force proper to thought but in the end is also an occasioning of the Real in the form of exposing the weak unilateralized status of the subject that the One *actually* determines in terms of demonstrating its decisively foreclosed essence, which becomes intelligible by the retroaction of the force of thought that sought to determine the One according to some active force of thinking.

Knowledge started with the Heraclitean maxim that “nature loves to hide herself” to which Laruelle, our ambivalent guide here, responds by stating the obvious: “Because it (*physis*) is foreclosed to thought, the Real or Man loves to open itself.”<sup>61</sup> The Real is Man herself. Her generic character is already present for acknowledgement in the ancients but was obscured by historical denials of the questionable status of Man (the illusion of anthropocentrism). The knowledge of this genericity in the last instance is raised to its idempotent character, its capacity to remain unchanged even when already needlessly multiplied in terms of diverse multiplication of the powers of Man, from the objectifier of stone to the subject that replaces the position of God who is dead, a subject who is hailed as the subject for Truth, who has so much interest in Truth. But as Laruelle wonderfully puts it, this subject-in-subject, the Man-in-Man has the property of genericity, “the property of being able to communicate truth or rather the True-without-truth that does not want it.”<sup>62</sup>

This inimitable power of the ordinary man nonetheless always risks itself being made into an object-cause of the politics of truth by the non-ordinary subject of non-axiomatic politics, by contrast a subject who is deeply involved in truth, the activist of truth, one whose self-proclaimed mission is to represent the genericity of the non-truth subject by means of exhausting his concept of truth to the last political instance. In contrast, the University risks representing the ordinary Man by reclaiming her ordinariness from non-axiomatic truths through re-

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<sup>61</sup>Laruelle, “The Generic as Predicate and Constant,” in *Speculative Turn*, 248.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 253.

training the soul in the autonomous light of the Real. It is in this sense that the absolute goal of the University is to redeem ordinary men, make them reproduce their authentic radical possibilities.

### **Voiding By Way of a Conclusion**

Axiomatically we can now speak of the ordinary Man as humanity's possibility, as the possibility of erupting from a condition of non-relationality, of being unformed, unstated, unspoken. Her condition before the fissuring of the Void—that is what the singularity of market forces aims to signify into a category that requires an external operation. By taking a stand in favor of the generative power of the ordinary man, the real and unquestionable poor whose poverty is also the poverty of Humanity, the University has chosen its fate to defend and nourish a zone of possibility for a section of this underprivileged; empower them with tools of developing creative folds, techniques of invagination, accommodating the outside in the inside from the outside; also, modes of conscious subjection to a set of norms and body of truths as useful fictions, modes of elaborating one's participatory relation to the preservation of substance as an *epistemic community*—a community that is axiomatically an inconsistent clone of the One/Void.

Yet zones of possibilities are not eternal. They are better sustained by the same passion of eidos that has caused their very possibility to erupt from a condition of nonrelation. As they take the place of the traditionally conceived substances, eidos are acts that engage change in the form of subtracting themselves from the events that this change brings forth like a throw of the dice, unpredictable yet determinable in terms of their being properly objectified as 'last instances', namely, as 'challenges'. For quite some time, relative to our academic life, the passion of the eidos has calmed down, threatening to dissolve our creative assemblages, our ways of justifying our existence as a result of an empty meaning, a hypothesis of the null which has given us the radical possibility to determine our destiny deducible from a foundational empty set. The idea here is that by desiring to be recognized as a globalized university we have created unnecessary planes of consistency and modes of subtracting the relevance of our substance from Change. This is objectively expressed in terms of the demand of techno-singularity, a powerful side of globalization, that

is, to leave the eidós to their ideal worlds, separate them from the life that has made them capable of gathering us as a unified substance as if eidós truly belong in these worlds. These eidós are now deprived of their proper planes of consistency.

The disregard for discourse in terms of narrowing the space for creative and spiritual engagement with the eidós is obviously a generous response to this separation. The machination goes on: Indifference to paradoxicalities, lines of flight that attempt to speculate the noncapitalized unformed Outside, the untested, the unspeakable, the unimaginable. From the standpoint of sterile eidós, these are unprofitable, non-viable ways of subtracting the meaning of our substance from what else but the voidal power of substance out of which life is axiomatically, mathematically, erotically, *sin/thomatically* decided (a play on the word 'symptom' which enhances here the subtle emancipatory meaning of 'sin').

## EPILOGUE

What then can we find here? What can take place here if not a sort of appeal: To revive a culture of fidelity to an empty meaning, or, nothing will have ever taken place.

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