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THE FIGURE OF THE STRANGER:
A POSSIBILITY FOR TRANSCENDENTAL MINIMALISM OR RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

*L'homme est cet Idiot qui existe aussi
comme Humanité universelle ou Etranger (François Laruelle)*

1. The Stranger as a Radical Term and Fundament of a Radical Theory of Human Subjectivity

The question I would like to explore here is: What could the figure of the “Stranger “ mean in the contemporary debate on subjectivity, humanism, and its radicalizations in the forms of post-humanism, trans-humanism, non-humanism and other “humanisms with a prefix”? The anachronistic and metaphorical idea of the “Stranger” from the pre-structuralist period has been replaced by concepts of Subjectivity – indebted to the Lacanian theoretical legacy of the “barred Subject” – which share one fundamental presupposition: subjectivization is always already self-estrangement, implying that the wholeness of the true Self is an impossibility.

Following François Laruelle, I concede the idea of the “Stranger” is necessary for a rigorous and non-philosophical theorizing of the Self since it overcomes the dualistic split created by the dyad of the “Real” and the “Subject.” Here, I would propose that resurrecting the figure of the “Stranger” is a necessary *radicalization* of the idea of human subjectivity.

According to Laruelle’s non-standard philosophy, concepts are radical when they are minimally transcendental and essentially descriptive of the Real (Laruelle 1989, 50; 2000, 47). The Real is impossible to be grasped by thought in its fullness, thought does not *reflect* it – it merely correlates with it by assuming a unilateral position, since the Real is radically indifferent to Thought. (Therefore, there is no reciprocity, no inter-mirroring, no relation – merely

unilateral correlating of Thought with the Real.)¹ One of the “first names” of the Real is the *lived* (*le vécu*), explains Laruelle in his *Théorie des Etrangers*, first published in 1995. The Human-in-the-Human or the Human in its last instance (that of the Real) is made of the sheer lived (also called *joui-sans-jouissance*), and being a Subject means being made of “transcendental material,” thus being fundamentally *estranged* from the Human in its aspect of immanence (the Real). The Subject establishes a relation of exteriority to it (Laruelle 1995, 166)² and, seen in its last instance (or radically and inalienably),³ it is the “Stranger” at the heart of the Human-in-Human. This concept admits and affirms the Dyad between the Real, the lived or “le joui sans jouissance” (Laruelle 1995, 221-223) the Human-in-Human (or the Human-in-the-last-instance) is and the “Subject,” while remaining radically descriptive or minimally transcendental.

“Subject” or any other transcendentially loaded term attempts to *normalize* the experience of the Dyad, annul its lived effect by way of compensating through “meaning.” In the case of the post-Lacanian legacies of theories of subjectivity it all comes down to the realization that the estranged Subject is all we have, can possess and control, therefore – we are nothing but spectral subjectivities always already alienated from the Real. Laruelle’s unilateral affirming of the irreconcilable difference between the (mute) real and the (linguistic) subject aims at also affirming the lived reality of the radical estrangement as taking place in the Real. The lived (*le vécu*) is what takes place on – or makes – the plane of the Real. The estranging presence of the Subject (which is always already “philosophical,” says Laruelle) and the Subconscious (with its transcendentially conditioned contents) is experienced, lived in the “Ego-in-Ego,” which, insofar as it is the terrain of the Lived, can be understood as the Real (Laruelle 1995, 222).⁴ The Subject is always transcendentially informed; it is shaped by and for the World⁵ and if we want to radicalize this concept, which is done by way of correlating it with the Real or following the “syntax of the Real” (Laruelle 2000, 46-47), we would have to come to the most rudimentary, transcendentially minimalistic, descriptive of the Real (the lived) idea of the “Stranger.” And it is

¹ Evidently, Laruelle’s term “correlation” has not only different but also opposed meaning to Meillassoux’s idea of “correlation” which refers precisely the tradition of thought which considers the Real inaccessible to thought; Laruelle believes in the radical indifference of the Real, in the impossibility of Thought reflecting the Real, but he also argues that Thought can “describe,” theorize the Real while admitting its cognitive inaccessibility in the last instance.

² « Ce sont [les Etrangers] des points (d’) extériorité, ce ne sont pas de toute façon des « individus » ou des « sujets, » ni des corps empirico-idéalisés, toujours divisible, ni des « Dasein, » mais des phénomènes vécus-en-dernière-instance de l’extériorité à l’état-Multitudes. » (Laruelle 1995, 196)

³ « ‘Radical’ ne signifie pas autre chose qu’inaliénable ou que « de-dernière-instance » (Laruelle 1995, 196)

⁴ « Toutefois il est possible – c’est notre liberté axiomatique – d’identifier le Jouï et un autre ‘nom premier’, l’Ego’, si celui-ci est alors défini comme Ego-en-Ego : ce n’est pas ré-insérer l’analyse, au contraire, dans un contexte psycho-métaphysique. D’une manière général le Jouï est le nom premier – celui du Réel – et le type de réel qui explique que, s’il y a une pensée (‘inconsciente’) commandée par lui, elle procédera par ‘noms premiers’ philosophiquement et analytiquement indéfinissables et indémonstrables, comme le réel (du) Jouï lui-même [...] » (Laruelle 1995, 222-223)

⁵ “World” is Laruelian term which is analogous to the meaning of notions such as the “discursive universe,” or the Symbolic order (and the Imaginary it subsumes).

primarily as such, as the “Stranger” within ourselves, that the subject is lived or “enjoyed-without-enjoyment” (*joui-sans-jouissance*)⁶ in the Real we all are in the last instance, and therefore it is the term which is best in accordance with the immanence of the Real (Laruelle 2000, 47), descriptive (as science is descriptive) without any transcendental gesture added to it.

2. What is the Stranger Made Of, According to Laruelle

“The Strangers are radical subjectivities”, says Laruelle, rather than “persons, individuals or subjects in the technical transcendental sense of the word” (Laruelle 1995, 166).⁷ Although it is made of “transcendental material” – it is a subjectivity; therefore, it is made of concepts issuing from the thinkable world or the word of thinkability; it is radical since it is lived in the last instance as that “point of exteriority” at the heart of Ego-en-Ego (Laruelle 1995, 166).

Unlike Lacan’s barred Subject, the radical subjectivity (that is the Stranger), as defined by Laruelle, possesses a “concrete body” or a “flesh” which is not “empirico-metaphysical” (Laruelle 1995, 164). It is a body made of the “Multitudes of transcendental material” (Laruelle 1995, 166).⁸ The “empirical body” would be equally transcendental as the “metaphysical one,” since both are product of transcendental mediation of the effects of the fundamentally indifferent Real. Therefore, instead of endorsing doctrinally accomplished constructions such as the “empirical” or “the metaphysical,” Laruelle argues for their rendering *chôra*, which is an unorganized, sheer “transcendental material” the non-standard philosophical approach can make use of in ways which are not doctrinally predetermined but rather “succumb to the authority” of the unpredictable, unruly Real (Laruelle 1992, 93). Correlating with the Real, which is indifferent to Thought’s pretension to reflect it, describing it while affirming its unilateral difference and inaccessibility in the last instance, is fundamentally a scientific approach. This is why Laruelle insists that the “body” of the “Stranger” should be defined in terms of science (Laruelle 1995, 165). In fact, *Théorie des Etrangers* (1995) is a book that seeks to set the foundations of a science of the humans, a science understood precisely in the way just explained – by way of thought which expresses fidelity to the authority of the real rather than to a doctrinal legacy.

Non-analysis, which is the Laruellian, non-standard version of psychoanalysis, argues that the true object of its study should be the Real, which is surely inaccessible in the last instance, but is, nonetheless, accessible to thought which unilaterally attempts to describe it, theorize and/or

⁶ In Laruelle’s *Théorie des Etrangers*, “le joui” is yet another name for the lived (*le vécu*) the Real the “Human” in its last instance is, whereas *jouissance* entails the transcendental of/for the joui. Jouï is fundamentally traumatic, it is merely the lived, the experienced, the enjoyed which is free of quality -

⁷ « Concrètement les Etrangers ne sont pas des personnes, des individus ou des sujets au sens philosophique transcendant de ces mots ; ce sont bien de toute façon des subjectivités radicales, mais en dernière instance ; et ce qui leur tien lieu de corps - de corps transi par cette subjectivité -, est de l’ordre de ces entités sans différence et tissées dans la transcendance du vide. » (166 *Théorie des Etrangers*)

⁸ « On peut appeler « chair » les Multitudes transcendantales=X... » (Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers*, 166)

scientifically explicate its workings without aspiring to reflect it. The transcendental material which is the body of the “Stranger” – and the subjectivities that issue from it – represents a positive reality inasmuch as it is lived in the Ego, but only in the last instance (which is its radical or inalienable identity). It is the effects, workings for and in the Real taking place in the Ego-in-Ego – or the reality of the lived – that should be explained by non-standard psychoanalysis rather than the “Subconscious” which is a pure product of the Transcendental or of “idealism” (Laruelle 1995, 196).

One ought to strive to explain occurrences of the *Joui*, their effects and the causes of change they represent for the subjectivities, rather than the self-mirroring of *Jouissance* which is but a rendition of philosophy and works as an intervention of the transcendental into the Real or the *lived*. Such a posture of thought is one which will give results in explicating how *Jouissance* violates the realm of the *Joui* by usurping its territory. This usurpation takes place by way of *Jouissance* (the transcendental of enjoyment) claiming the status of the *Joui* (the Real or the Lived which is *le Joui*, independent from *jouissance*): even if the *Joui* results from the workings of *Jouissance*, it is a distinct phenomenon; its identity in the last instance belongs to the pre-lingual realm of the Real. As an occurrence in/of the Real, it ought to be viewed in its effect (and as a potential cause for the transcendental) as such (real) and in terms of scientific aligning with the syntax of the Real without the ambition to reflect it (Laruelle 2000, 46-47). It is something which can be accomplished by producing thought in the “immanent way,” which Laruelle calls “cloning” the Real into the “transcendental material” (Laruelle 2000, 47). According to this logic, the effect of *Joui*, as result of operations of *Jouissance*, should be cloned by resorting to the transcendental material provided by the “Order of *Jouissance*,” yet again treated as a “taking place” of the Real, impenetrable in the last instance by the transcendental.

The claim of non-standard psychoanalysis is that the Real of experiences of selfhood should be the subject of its study rather than the self-sufficient self-mirroring of philosophy (analogous to the concept of “World” explained above) reflected into all forms of transcendental configurations of the self (such as the Subject, the Ego, etc.). Certainly, the latter are subjects of study of Laruelian non-analysis; nonetheless, in non-analysis, they are viewed in the last instance as positive realities, as instances of the Real (Laruelle 1995, 165).⁹ The Subject, in its last instance, is the “Stranger” inhabiting the radically solitary and fundamentally vulnerable real of the “Human-in-Human” we all are (the Real each of us in his/her last instance is). It is this incursion of alien/ating presence into the exposed flesh of the radically passive Real in its aspect of the *Joui* I would like to look at more closely in the following, closing section of this article.

⁹ “[...] le mixte est unitérialisé sous la préposition de l’Etranger =x ? Que ce qui est dissous n’est pas le mixte compris comme imbrication sans réalité propre de deux dimensions comme unité-des-contraires, concept abstrait et purement syntaxique [...] mais le mixte comme spontané ou supposé suffisant [...] mais de suspendre son usage suffisant ou philosophique et de discerner le résidu-de-mixte tel du moins qu’il est alors vécu-en-Ego ou rapporte de l’Un (en) Ego. » (Laruelle 1995, 165)

3. The Gaping Certainty of Estrangement as the Real

If the Real is by definition what is neither Language nor Thought, the Subject, that sheer transcendental, is an alien instance living at its heart. It is an implantation that is not only alien by its status (transcendental) vis-à-vis the Real, which is of a radically different status (that of immanence), but also alienating. It is what *re-presents* the Real of the human identity in the last instance by way of mediating it via that which is radically alien to it, the Language. This estranging force is by necessity endowed with the pretension to be the “true Self,” whereby an automatism or spontaneity is established by which Truth replaces the Real – the former gains higher authority than the latter, becoming the “real reality” of the Real. Philosophical truth has always aspired to re-create the Real via “meaning” seeking to fix its status of “being real” by way of “legitimizing” it as the Real (via Truth). The Truth is that amphibological instance at which thought decides to take the place of the real by being the “truth of it.” It would seem that this essentially philosophical procedure¹⁰ implies that the Real would be less real if devoid of meaning and, hence, of truth (that mimicking of the Real by thought, resulting into the only recognized real – the “meaningful real”). Truth, therefore the transcendental, usurps the status of the Real, and it is at this point that estrangement begins to take place.

The Real is the only certainty of ourselves we necessarily experience as such, and that experience of certainty is made of “the sheer lived” we all are in the last instance. Thus, I am referring to the notion of certainty in its sense of immanence – of the inalienable, inalterable, inexorable “being there,” of the lived each “human-in-human” is in the last instance. This utter experience, this absolute Lived is overwhelming. It is invasive since it is an elemental force, or rather it is *pure force*. Therefore, it is necessarily *mediated*, and mediation is by definition a working of the transcendental (i.e., of signification or of Language). For the mediation to take place the human-in-human must execute the auto-alienating gesture of instituting the “Stranger” which will re-present and mediate the suffocating Real one is in the last instance. One is necessarily alienated. The instance of the “Stranger” is forcibly, by necessity, introduced as an inalienable instance (of alienation) at the heart of immanence. However, the usurpation of the status of the Real carried out by the transcendental (the material the “Stranger” is made of) is a violent gesture, or gesture of violence, consisting in the act of stripping the Real of its identity in the last instance (that of the immanently real). It is an attempt toward effacing the Real, i.e., the *Lived*, by substituting it with the spectral transcendental. The sense of utter estrangement, of auto-negation of the immanence one is in his/her last instance, is the source of the experience of undergoing a process of violence – of violation of that vulnerable instance of passivity the Real is and an alienation marked by transcendence rather than immanence (which *is* the source of that primary gesture of establishing the instance of the “Stranger”).

¹⁰ Philosophical, in the sense of Laruelle’s established equation between the World and Philosophy (the discursive, lingual universe laying out the Laws according to which we first understand ourselves in this world and than live according to these understandings and the “meanings” of life as prescribed by World=Philosophy).

If one resorts to the unilateral affirmation of the identity-in-the-last-instance of each of the elements of the Dyad, by virtue of resisting to any desire to unify the two and efface the reality of dualism, one is not caught into the sense of a “split self” since Unity of the Two (the transcendental and the Real) was never either desired nor expected. Therefore, the threat of the violent experience of the “split I,” of self-alienation (in both Marxian and Freudian sense of the word) is sidestepped. The “Stranger” is radical subjectivity and, considering that “radical” comes down to the “inalienable” (Laruelle 1995, 196), it is experienced in its unilaterally established identity in the last instance, in the sense of the *real* of its determination in the last instance –an instance of the transcendental *correlating* with the Real or “affected by immanence” (Laruelle 2000, 47).

The mute Real we are molded from and into, is inalienably and invasively there – and unilaterally so. And it necessitates the “Stranger” to transform the *stoicheion* it is into the controllable and translucent instance of Death sinking its teeth into the unstoppable force of the Lived in order to render it bearable. Unilaterally affirming the “Stranger” in us – or the “Stranger” that we are – without an attempt to transcend its radical alterity vis-à-vis the Real, without an attempt to efface the difference in the last instance between the real of the human and the transcendental of the world, produces thinking and acting in fidelity to the Real. This fidelity, which Laruelle also calls “thought affected by immanence,” enables us to evade the sense of being subject to the threatening alienating force of the doubly transcendentially constructed “strangers” (the modern men and women are, according to the variety existentialist views) invading “our true self”: The truth of ourselves is never ours, whereas what is ours (the Real, the *lived*) is always indifferent to any truth.

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