

# Subjectivity without physicality: machine, body and the signifying automaton

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**Abstract** The concept of the subject relies on humanist presuppositions. Regardless of whether purported to be decentred and posthumanist, the subject conceived in poststructuralist and philosophical terms remains anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. There is something irrecoverably Cartesian in the poststructuralist idea of the subject. Physicality, both bodily and that of the materiality of the machinic prosthesis, is barred from the constitution of the Self, as the real is barred but also foreclosed to it. The subject, therefore, is yet another philosophical phantasm, which in its material actuality is determined as an instance of the signifying automaton. I argue that the “posthumanist” self, if conceived in Marxian and non-philosophical terms, ought to be viewed as the radical dyad of the signifying automaton and the real. It renders Haraway’s notion of the Cyborg more radical and unravels its inhumanity rather than posthumanity.

**Keywords** Feminism · Automaton · Physicality · Non-human · Marxism · Non-philosophy

*[...] the world of the symbolic is the world of the machine  
(Lacan, The ego in Freud’s theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis).*

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## Introduction

Between the “immaterial self” or subjectivity and the body there is certainly a material, cognitive and affective continuity, and the philosophical dualism underpinning the two is false. There is a material(ist) continuity between the two instances, as Lisa Blackman explains in her *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (2012). I concur with the thesis about the physical continuity between the body and cognition and will try to approach it here in terms of Karl Marx’s critique of philosophy and François Laruelle’s method of non-philosophy. Both thinkers endorse realisms that are fundamentally deferent from all preceding forms of philosophical realism: they are both founded on an exit from philosophy while retaining use of its “conceptual material” (Laruelle 1989). We will refer to the notion of the physical in line with the early works of Marx where physicality and the real appear as synonymous and are to be understood in the sense of what Marxian legacy terms as “materiality”.

Presupposing that humanism is inherently embedded in philosophy, while following Laruelle’s and Marx’s method of analysis, I infer that it remains entrapped in philosophy’s “principle of sufficiency” (Laruelle 1989) or grounded in a self-sufficient abstraction as Marx would identify it. Considering the principle of philosophy’s sufficiency or its circularity has not been called into question by poststructuralism of authority, in spite of the fact that Derrida’s deconstruction leads to the threshold of such possibility, humanism as a philosophical projection remains postulated on it. The prefix “post-” is not sufficient for radical decentering of the human in the poststructuralist discussions of the body and subject dialectics and the role technology plays in it. Anthropomorphism continues to shape the discussions of posthumanism including those gravitating around Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg.

The notion of subjectivity or “the subject” remains anthropomorphous, which, I will try to demonstrate in the pages that follow, is the result of a “philosophical spontaneous faith” (Laruelle 1989, p. 27) and therefore it unwittingly undermines not only the radical potential of Haraway’s notion of the cyborg but also the Lacanian legacy poststructuralism (and its variant of posthumanism) relies on. In Lacan, the subject is but an effect of the “signifying automaton” and the real is its constitutive otherness, whereas the body is the first manifestation of the real (Lacan 1998). Poststructuralism engages in philosophisation of the subject thus conceived through a post-Kantian move of declaring the real and its effects on the automaton “meaningless” due to the fact they are beyond language, as Laruelle and Meillassoux have demonstrated in their critiques of “philosophical amphibology” (Laruelle 1989) and “correlationism” (Meillassoux 2008) respectively. Instead, a further radicalisation of the concept should be pursued. Such would be a non-philosophical procedure, or a properly Marxian one—to operate with “philosophical material” in a non-philosophical or “scientific manner”, i.e. in a fashion and by a principle of thought’s submission to the real rather than the other way around. Both in Marx and Laruelle this is what defines scientific posture of thought. This principle will be explained in



more detail below, mainly through application of Marx's and Laruelle's method on the problem discussed here: the dialectics of signifying automaton and materiality or, more precisely, the real.

Our main argument is that an analysis of the opposition automaton/real is more productive when it comes to the question of selfhood in a digital era than that of technology/body as the latter emulates and obfuscates the atavistic Cartesian opposition of body and mind. In the context of current poststructuralist and posthumanist discussions, the self remains fundamentally not only humanoid but also philosophically humanist. It remains so in spite of the fact that the use of the notion of the subject is mainly indebted to Lacanianism which is supposed to be formal. I propose that we consider its further formalisation or complete radicalisation of what Derrida would call deconstruction while Laruelle and Marx would term a procedure of arriving at a "determination in the last instance". Let us operate in terms of the pure or absolute categories of "automaton" and the "real" in order to examine the full potential of Haraway's proposal to see the cyborg as "the inhuman". We will be establishing an analogy between the inhuman and the concept of the non-human of the non-philosophical tradition as formulated by Laruelle and John Ó Maoilearca (2015).

Therefore, for the purposes of an analysis of subjectivity from a non-philosophical perspective I will propose here, we will need to "absolutise" the notions central to our discussion, i.e. attempt to rigorously operate with formalised categories of the signifying automaton and the real as conceived by Lacan. In doing so, we will seek to abide to the non-philosophical principle of grounding the discussion in such way that it is the thought that submits to the real, or, as Marx would say, to praxis, rather than the other way around. Such principle has the status of an axiom in non-philosophy. At this point, the proposal sounds rather abstract, ambitious and generalising of philosophy. Nonetheless, the presupposition is simple and productive: without negating its multiplicity and the inherent pluralism, according to non-philosophy and Marx's "critique of philosophy in general" (1932), all philosophy has one thing in common and that is to bend the real to fit a philosophical account. It is the core of the problem of "principle of philosophical sufficiency" that Laruelle raises in his non-philosophical project, aligned with Marx's problematisation of philosophy's self-inauguration as a circular, auto-referential and self-sufficient reality we read of in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General*, his writings on Feuerbach, in *The German Ideology* and in *Grundrisse*. The non-philosophical solution to the stated problem will be demonstrated as we move along with our discussion on the dialectics between the automation of signification and physicality and its relevance for the self in a digital era. We shall attempt to demonstrate that "the subject" is a sterile concept clothed in vestiges of humanity and that it is more productive to speak of a self that we shall term the non-human or the inhuman than of "the subject". This concept, based on a combination of Laruelle's and Haraway's theories, has already been proposed in a germinal form in the *Posthuman Glossary* edited by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova published earlier this year (Kolozova 2018, pp. 199–201).



## The non-human or the technologico-animal reality of the self

One of the major consequences for the constitution of the contemporary subjectivity brought about by cybernetic development is, according to the German theoretician Davor Löffler, the “phenomenological” reconfiguration of the “outside” or of the instance of exteriority (Löffler 2017, pp. 17–18, 2018, pp. 14–18). Departing from the Marxist materialist epistemology of Sohn-Rethel (1978), I argue that the phenomenon of incorporation of the “outside” in the contemporary self, as noted by Löffler, is not a new ontology, but rather a new occurrence in the history of cognitive paradigms. The incorporation of the “second outside” in the self, “on top of and through” the first one (Löffler 2017, p. 19) is another instantiation of the real in addition to the primary one determining the constitution of the self, that of the organic body. When it comes to the constitution of subjectivity and the role of the real in that process, only (the fallacy of) reification of the real could produce the opposition between technology and the physical (usually reduced to the organic body).

The monstrosity of the human selfhood produced by the hybridisation of the real as material (regardless of whether it is thought as organic or inorganic) and subjectivity as pure signification (or as philosophisation) is what Donna Haraway calls “inhumanity”. Monstrosity, however, is further complicated by Haraway’s claim about the affinity between “the animal” and “the machine”, which constitutes the material situation for the posthumanist subject. As previously mentioned, Braidotti also insists on the continuity between the machinic and the animal in the uninterrupted current of materiality which determines the self. This is one of the possible hypostases of the one that “glues the subject together”, Braidotti was in search of in *Metamorphoses*. *I would argue that at the heart of what glues the non-human self together lives the (presubjective) automaton of signification*. Haraway’s concept of the inhuman is homologous to that of the Laruelian non-human or the other way around. Namely the inhuman and the monstrous are designations that refer to the continuity between the animal and machine Haraway insists to be the material and objective core of the posthumanist human or the cyborg. The *Cyborg Manifesto* originally published in 1985 is declaredly and in its substance a socialist and materialist project, and as such it displays fidelity to Marx’s naturalism and physicalism. It argues for affinity and continuity between the animal and machine, between nature and means of production beyond philosophical humanism and within the utopian horizon of communism. A materialist view at the continuity between the two does not aspire to their unification into a “making sense” or a truth as a “higher form of reality” (Laruelle 1989), but rather, in its aspect of materiality and the real, remains senseless and indifferent to thought. Marx’s proposed naturalism results into a materialist political-economic vision for the human “species-being”, in which the means of production and technology serve the goal of a society that has not commodified nature and one’s own animal body either as labour or as resource.

Laruelle’s concept of the “human-in-human” refers to the real behind the subject yet establishing a certain material continuity with the signifying self, i.e. with



signification as automation. The real the human in the last instance is, or simply the human-in-human (in Laruellian terminology), remains indifferent and numb vis-à-vis signification, as any form of the real does with respect to transcendence according to Laruelle's theory, yet the agency of both signification and the body is a radical dyad of continuity we call the non-human. The hybrid constituted by signification, on the one hand, and the real moulded into the "bestial" continuity of machine and the animal body, on the other hand, remains a radical dyad called the inhuman in Haraway and non-human or human-in-human in Laruelle. The inhuman or the monstrous is the real and the materiality of constructedness that neither becomes sense nor truth as philosophically sublimated reality.

The dyad remains radical as it escapes unification into truth or meaning; it is the unruly real of the non-human or the inhuman constituted by the two that never become one. From the viewpoint of subjectivity, physicality, regardless of whether living or machinic, remains that exteriority which serves as support and material substance of language and its subject. From "objective perspective", in the sense of Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy (1932), i.e. when realities are seen in the structures and networks and interactions established by linking limits of exteriority, even subjectivity is seen "objectively" and as such it plays part in the constitution of the non-human or the inhuman.

To summarise by way of combining Laruelle and Haraway, let us restate that the radicalised dyad of technology as the automation of signification, on the one hand, and the physical insofar as organic body and artificiality of *prosthesis*, on the other hand, can be called "human-in-human" (Laruelle 1989), the cyborg (Haraway 1985) or inhuman (Haraway 2016). Insofar as radical, the dyad cannot be reduced to a philosophical truth: there is no meaning that vindicates this hybrid existence. In other words, its social and economic function escapes all constructions of imagined philosophical teleology including new forms of subjectivisation. It escapes all teleology and theology as it remains radical in its duality—the two are never unified in a sense that surpasses and heals the rift. The rift is senseless too. There is no philosophical consolation for it, no "meaning" or "truth" that will bridge the caesura. There is no circumscription of the dissonant reality into a truth–reality or reality–truth that will give meaning to the mess created by the real regardless of whether of organic or machinic origin (or, for that matter, of the both) and its impossible relation to the signifying automaton and its subjectivisations. The human-in-human, which is a cyborg, escapes philosophy or the reduction to a "truth of the real" as a real that pretends to be more real (perfect) than the real itself. It is monstrous along with the animal, the machine and the darkness of the out-there that will always escape reason.

The human radical constructedness is grounded in the radical dyad created by materiality, or rather instances of exteriority or the real, on the one hand, and the specular activity or the processes of signification, on the other hand. Seeking for unification and dialectical resolution is seeking to naturalise and anthropomorphise the hybrid. The non-human remains a dissonant mess of physicality regardless of whether machinic or natural as an instance of the real and of "subjectivity" as instance of the automaton, i.e. language and philosophy. The participation of technology in the dyad at issue does not make it more rational and less vulgarly material. The presence of the machinic does not make it less animal-like or less grounded in



“senselessness” (or rather: in a certain beyond sense) the real is. As demonstrated, the machine and the animal participate in the radical subjectivity on the side of the real constituting the outside that is never really absorbed by the “subject” insofar as an effect of language and, consequently, of the transcendental and philosophy. What Marxism has been warning against since its very inception is the unsustainability of the signifying automaton’s pretension to exhaust all reality or constitute the only reality we should care about. Regardless of whether in the form of speculative finance economy, patriarchy or commodified and fetishised sexuality, the automaton of value production that treats physicality or materiality as resource for surplus value is founded upon a capitalist principle. The homology with the principle of sufficient philosophy is evident. Its Marxian realist response, one grounded in materialism-without-philosophy, is, I propose, the following: to conceive of the posthuman society, both from an individual and a collective perspective, as predicated on the non-human selfhood rather than subjectivity accompanied by identitary configurations as essentially humanist residuals of a posthumanist era.

### **Subjectivity is a linguistic-philosophical projection**

Before we proceed with elaboration of the proposed argument, I would like to remind the reader of Nina Power’s article in *Parrhesia* laying out the genealogy of the concept of the subject and its rather brief history (2007). Apart from being problematised by Marx as the concept that is the crux of philosophy’s detachment from the material reality, subjectivity does not have a noteworthy prior history as a notion designating the (human) “self”. The “Subject” owes its dominant position in contemporary considerations of the human self mainly to structuralism and post-structuralism. One could safely argue that the subject is the product of the linguistic turn in philosophy. The preceding history of philosophy spoke of the “Self” or “the Human”. Structuralist linguistics and the concept of the “subject” it engendered, elaborated in structuralist psychoanalysis, through its derivations such as constructivism and poststructuralism, has secured the position “the subject” currently holds.

Considering the body does not participate in the (post)structuralist subject except via its construction as signification, the formulation “subjectivity without physicality” sounds like a tautology. Yet again, there seems to be an irresistible philosophical spontaneity to presuppose a role for the body in it: for poststructuralism, it is the barred instance of the subject. The (post)structuralist subject is made possible by the constitutive absence of the body in its aspect of the real. The absence is compensated by the Imaginary’s recreation of the real, via representation that assigns the role of the Other to the body. Representation or signification substitutes the always already absent real. As a result, it creates the auto-referential reality of the subject or the (post)structuralist self, the self-mirroring reality or speculation as the only possible reality. Such is the self that is nowadays called the subject, the product of the linguistic turn in Western history of ideas. Philosophy, argues Laruelle, does not mediate the real, it substitutes it (1989, pp. 19, 232), comes in its stead and declares it non-existent if deemed fundamentally inaccessible to thought. And such is the poststructuralist or the post-Kantian position, as Meillassoux demonstrates in



his critique of correlationism (2008). The real is senseless, therefore, it is not. In poststructuralism, the real is existent only insofar as it is non-existent, only via its absence—such is the reading of Lacan’s theory of real’s radical foreclosure (Kolo-zova 2014). Thus, its presence—the question of whether there is such thing as “the real”—is relationally determined. The problem of inaccessibility of the real as such, in its fullness of presence and “truth”, is solved by its cancellation instead of an account on its mediation (= thought).

Unlike the scientific thought that subjects itself to the vicissitudes of the real, philosophy strives to discipline it and transform its imperfections and meaninglessness into a truth (of it). “Truth” is a higher and essentially philosophical form of reality originally called *tò òn* or the Being, explains Laruelle in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy* (1989). It compensates for the lack of perfection of the real and, in particular, for the lack of perfection of the physical (or the material). “Perfection” is a transcendental category, therefore the real is radically foreclosed to it. Poststructuralism, or critical theory, knows this and in a subterfuge gesture circumvents the classical philosophical naivety: it declares the attempt at mediation (of the real) impossible, blinded by metaphysics, and, as a result, proposes cancellation of (the relevance) of the real. François Laruelle calls this gesture “fuite en avance” (an escape in advance) into fiction, whereby the equation real=fiction is reversed, but the equation nonetheless remains (Laruelle 1989, p. 231). The non-Euclidian shift in the approach to this question Laruelle proposes consists in thought’s radically unilateral or non-relational positioning with respect to the real. The impossible riddle of real’s inaccessibility to thought is not to be solved—the real as such remains inexorably barred for the thinking subject. Nonetheless, the real as an exteriority vis-à-vis language and subjectivity affects the thinking subject in the form of trauma inflicted upon the hybrid I will call the non-human, i.e. the material reality of body, machine and the automaton of transcendence (i.e. subjectivity) inhabiting that materiality. According to Lacan, the real intervenes only as a symptom or trauma manifested as an interruption in the signifying chain, an intervention of meaninglessness in the unstoppable chain of production of signification—it is the *tuché* disturbing the *automaton* of the signifying chain (Lacan 1998).

The automaton is quite simply language in psychoanalytic and linguistic sense, also as a capitalist exchange system of values (or market) or a patriarchal system of the exchange of women (Irigaray 1985). Computing is no more and no less language too (Turing 1950). In other words, the automaton does not inhabit the synthetic physicality or the materiality of the machine only. It also participates in the constitution of the “natural self”, the one made of a body or organic physicality and the automaton of a natural language. The automaton constitutes the domain of signification in the generic sense and can be regarded as an autonomous instance or plane of reality regardless of whether embodied by natural or organic physicality or by the technological and synthetic one (or, for that matter, their union too). The automaton of signification is unstoppable be it a natural language, an instance of the psychoanalytic signifying chain as a “pleasure principle” or a computer. It is the infinite cycle of a finite system *unless* intervened into by the real defined as exteriority vis-à-vis the signifying chain. Subject(-ivity), or the instance of transcendence, is placed on the side of language or the automaton



regardless of whether seen individually or collectively, as centred or decentred. The politics of input provide the modes of subjectivisation of the automaton. In the Capitalocene, all ruling forms of automaton are predicated on that of capital. In the explication of the automaton of computing, Turing compared the computer and the alienated wage-worker in the following way:

The class of problems capable of solution by the machine [the ACE] can be defined fairly specifically. They are [a subset of] those problems which can be solved by human clerical labour, working to fixed rules, and without understanding (Turing 1946, pp. 38–39).

Market and the value exchange system in capitalism work according to the same principles as the language in its generic sense of automaton: the input of transcendental worth serves the autogeneration of value (Marx 1894). And so does any value production automaton that operates through commodification, such as that of patriarchy:

[...]The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he “pays” the father or the brother, not the mother...), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another (Irigaray 1985, p. 171).

The automaton is in all these instances a different substantiation of the signifying chain, the auto-production of transcendence, which is also the pleasure principle (the real or the trauma is by definition outside of it). It is the unstoppable production of spectral existence of signs which is only now and then reminded of the outside or the real by the intervention of *tuché* in the form of trauma preceding language yet affecting it with anxiety (the real as symptom, according to Lacan). The machinic physicality and the living body, the support or “the hardware” or that which escapes automation, is *tuché* to the automaton of subjectivisation, and it “lives” at the heart of the self while remaining its outsideness. Regardless of whether organically or technologically physical, materiality enters the constitution of the self or, for that matter, the plane of technologically founded reality (Fuller 2007, p. 11). This “self” is, I argue, following Laruelle and Haraway, non-human or inhuman exceeding the narrow limits of subjectivity proper.

Laruelle adheres to the Lacanian basic structure involving the real and the acts of signification only to subject it to a non-Euclidian adjustment of perspective. The real and the signifying automaton constitute a dyad that nonetheless is not a duality dialectically reconciled through unification. The dyad at issue is not about the paradoxical acknowledgment of the “tragic truth” of the unsurpassable split, because a reference to a split as the determination in the last instance implies that there should have been an original unity. The celebrated paradox of the constitutive split is again about unity, a unity found in embracing the impossibility and arriving at its truth as meaning added to reality, thus creating the philosophical amphibology of real and thought that results into the concept of Being or Truth. The hybridity of the real, substantiated as both the organic body and the physicality or materiality of the machinic support, and the signifying automaton,



substantiated as subjectivity or the self, constitutes a radical dyad. The dyad is radical thanks to the non-relation of the two elements or to their “unilateral relation” (Laruelle 1989, pp. 93–95).

Duality as such is radicalised by way of affirming its materiality and status of the real and is neither reduced nor reducible to a unification or unity insofar as philosophical truth. Such duality that relies on the unilateral non-relation of the two components will be called the radical dyad. Dialectical reconciliation of the two through successful or failed unification or through any other form of conceptual unity, is about a transformation of the senseless real into a truth, i.e. into a unity between the real and the truth of it whereby the latter subsumes the former. Such is the founding philosophical gesture and its founding paradigm—“the being” (amphibological substitution of the real and the truth), argues Laruelle (1989, p. 19). The two are neither a pair nor “one divided into two”, but discrete instances of the one in interaction producing a minimal structure, similarly to the “digital metaphysics” of the one and its limit rather than of the “split one” (of the pair) as Galloway sees it (2014). The socialist feminist project of the cyborg proposed by Donna Haraway, resonating with other materialist feminist philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, Lisa Blackman and Shulamith Firestone, implies a dyad of the non-philosophical kind, i.e. one that does not presuppose any unification of the two elements while yet again relying on the material continuity of the radical hybrid. What was initially called “the cyborg” gradually and via the instance of “bestiality” (Haraway 1991, p. 152) evolved into “the inhuman” (Haraway 2016). But before we address this proposition more closely, let us consider the epistemic possibility to think the self in “terms of the one”, following the non-philosophical method, without presupposing or desiring unity inside the dyad as conceptualised by Laruelle. This is the prerequisite to think the non-human in its materialist continuity and the realist determination in the last instance of the subject(ivity).

## **Genealogy of the (non)-unitary subject according to poststructuralism**

The concept of the “unity of the subject” as we meet it in the poststructuralist legacy of its critique represents a peculiar synecdochic construct. Namely it seems that the poststructuralist conceptualisations of unity for the subject necessarily carry out an unavoidable reduction to the attributions of “totality”, “fixity” and “exclusion”. These *pars pro toto* identifications regularly appear in the form of a conceptual totality, which, I argue, is problematic and occurs due to the fact that poststructuralism permits only one possibility of conceptualising unity.

The ideological minimum of the “project of the non-unitary subject”, as advanced by poststructuralism, is most prominently indebted to the Foucauldian–Butlerian constructivist thesis and to Derridean deconstruction. It is important to note that the deconstructive-constructivist critical composition termed “non-unitary subject” seems to silently refuse subjecting itself to deconstructive examination. Such possibility is always already impeded by two axiomatic presuppositions: (1) that unity can be conceived only as a product of a unification of differences, rather than as an instance of singularity or as a unilateral one/ness, (2) that the unitary subject



is defined by the opposing term that poststructuralist critique postulates for itself (as point of departure in the critique), by its constitutive other, which is the classical metaphysical conception of oneness as cosmological unity or as unity of certain organicity.

Conversely, let us consider the possibility that insofar as the poststructuralist subject is an ideational conglomerate it is as susceptible to a procedure of deconstruction as any other transcendental complexity. With this assumption made, what remains is to engage in a heuristic reading of the economy of the discourse at issue. Let us endeavour to reconstruct the traces of power distribution through acts of naming that are founding or central to the poststructuralist (and postmodern) theory of the non-unitary subject. The principal question in this sense is the following: is there a term that holds a hegemonic position among others within the conceptual complex of “poststructuralist non-unitary subject”?

I will argue that there is such hegemonic signifier—it is the empty place of a term, the absence of a name. The absent term in question is more than just an “empty signifier”. It is a barred name, the name of “the one”. The cancelled one/ness presides over the subsidiary concepts of the dismissed totality, stability, autonomy, exclusiveness and so on. In effect, they are the automatic deduction of the one; they are also its automatic reduction. Hence, the autogeneration of the poststructuralist synecdoche of the non-unitary subject happens via the grounding gesture of barring the one. The one is normally conflated with some of the possible negative consequences of elevating it to the highest politico-philosophical *arché*, such as the procedures of totalising and exclusivist universalisation. The problem of poststructuralist metaphysical spontaneity, however, lies in substituting one *arché* with another (that is, the one with the multiple), rather than abandoning its logic altogether. A materialist and postphilosophical theory and science permits analysis of both the aspect of multiplicity and that of oneness or singularity without treating any of them as *archai* or principles. As a consequence, they are not mutually exclusive regardless of temporality. They are either exact or inexact identifications depending on the framework of interpretation: they are not moral principles to be favoured or rejected.

However, currently, the subject as possible oneness, or as the possibility of unity, is still unavoidably identified with the (Kantian) modern(ist), autonomous, self-sufficient subject of exclusion. Venturing into an ontological discussion over the one and the multiple and the dichotomy they form is not my intention here. Instead, I would like to address the question of exclusion and censorship of the “name of the one” in poststructuralism, the question of the political and epistemic consequences of a barred signifier. It seems that in the poststructuralist antimetaphysical philosophico-ideological legacy, there is a tacit aprioristic expulsion and moral condemnation of any position from the perspective of the one and, thus, of the unity as singularity (not as unity of differences). Both terms are inescapably related to and degraded by the notions of totality (and totalitarian repressiveness) and universality understood as hegemony.

Within the ruling academic discourse of the anti-Cartesian critique of the unitary subject, inspired and theoretically corroborated by poststructuralism as epistemic and ideological orthodoxy in its own right, any claim to realism centred on the notion of oneness is a priori considered universalistic in the sense of totalitarian,



exclusive, (neo)colonial, static and, therefore, reactionary. The critique provided by speculative realism, in particular that of Quentin Meillassoux dedicated to the theme of post-Kantian “correlationism” (2008), the challenges to poststructuralism put forward by the feminist new realism (Van der Tuin 2014) have not been able to seriously destabilise the almost unshakable institutional authority of poststructuralist and constructivist epistemology, especially when it comes to the issue of unity for the subject/subjectivity.

The place of the “one” in the signifying chain of the politico-theoretical language of the postmodern world is an empty place. I would like to call for a restoration of the position of the “one” within language. Moreover, this retrieval should be accompanied or even enabled by the simultaneous reclaiming of the “right of the name (of the one)” *not* to be identified in the aforementioned reductivist manner. My contention is, thus, that in the deconstructivist and constructivist critique of the unitary subject, the *use* of the term “unitary” is insufficiently examined with regard to its conditioning relation to the favoured “non-unitary”. Or differently put, it sometimes seems to be functioning as an almost magic utterance of condemnation, a sort of anathema of the non-absolutistic era, since, in the discourses professing the non-unitary subject, “unitary” automatically, that is to say, with no critical pausing, also entails stability, totality, fixity and so on.

The poststructuralist critique of the unitary subject, self-defined in its brief tradition as “marginal”, is nowadays rigidified and solidified in a position of dominant academic authority. From within a position thus defined it can only produce the pure opposition of its own constructed other. The position of its theoretical other is fixed and its conceptual content unchangeable: “the one” belongs to the old metaphysics that is presumed to be surpassed thanks to the linguistic turn. Poststructuralism is stabilised in its position of the rebellious other, in its position of criticality of the multiple and decentred self. As such, it has gained legislating authority in contemporary academia: the cynical result is, however, that it has fixed itself in the position of movement, transformation and multiplicity and has stabilised those states through procedures of reification (Marx 1973, p. 687). Thus it has cancelled the very possibility of thinking in terms of the one and oneness that would not be totalising and static while simultaneously stabilising and totalising the possibility of transformation through *Verdinglichung* of particular subject positions.

In Rosi Braidotti’s *Metamorphoses* the reader arrives more than once to the aporetic and inhibiting situation specific of poststructuralist feminism in which the argument in favour of the non-unitary subject is installed on the grounds of excluding any possibility of a new form of non-totalitarian, non-hegemonic or non-exclusionist unity and coherence for the subject (2002, p. 39). It is precisely the exclusion and the suppression of the one as thinkable (beyond its totalitarian postulation) that creates this situation. Braidotti seeks to transcend or bypass this aporia, to establish some insight into the substance and the ways of the “glue” that holds together the “subject-which-is-not-one”, without abandoning her post-structuralist positions. Braidotti takes all precautions not to betray her adherence to the vision of the non-unitary subject, while she actually continues with the search of “that which holds together that-bundle-called-subject” (Braidotti 2002, pp. 39–40), or a search for its “magnets, building blocks or glue” (Braidotti,



2002: 40). She also seems to grant a certain legitimacy to the notion of “essence”. Thus, by *reinventing* the notion of “essence”, she takes the argument further in the direction of some idiosyncratic reclaiming of a subject of unity.

Some might find Braidotti’s position contradictory. However, it is not. Her line of argumentation and inference is impeccably consistent. She is arguing for the existence of some unifying processes in certain aspects of the subject, whereby the subject itself is *ultimately* non-unitary. Braidotti’s argument, sublimated in the way I just proposed, consists in the claim that the coexistence of unity and non-unity is made possible by the simple fact that the constitution of each of the two rests on a different “ontological” level or instance of reality and invites a different, distinct epistemological approach.

What, in Braidotti’s text, produces those rhetorical swings of overly alert vigilance regarding the possibility of being misread as someone who propounds an idea of subjectivity different from that of the poststructuralist notion of the non-unitary subject? In other words, can we trace an intention to *identify* with a particular school of thinking that involves ideology appended to epistemology? The open self-declaration of belonging to a determinate line of thinking (about a specific issue) within the same discursive and textual act (on virtually the same page) that contains a claim which can be interpreted as being in opposition to this declared belonging is a statement of disavowal of any connection with a different theoretical lineage. It is an act of ideological self-identification and renunciation of any association with a different theoretical school. The repetition of the statement of self-identification is a performative act of subjectivisation in an ideology. The defensive language of Braidotti’s argument for (some) unity of the subject, reflected in those repetitive self-declarations, speaks of the importance bestowed upon the question of theoretical-ideological belonging at the expense of epistemic consistency. This cautious language is voiced most audibly in the little words such as conjunctions, adverbs and so on. For example, it can be traced in the “however” and “still” in the sentence “it cannot produce a workable vision of a non-unitary subject which, *however* complex, *still* hangs somehow together” (Braidotti 2002, p. 39). But it also speaks of inhibition. Unlike science, philosophy necessarily involves some form of moralism that points to its not yet completely severed links with theology.

When the existential lacuna appears out of the absence of any (new) sociopolitical position, what re-emerges in the place of the old “I” is not some new “I” or different state or nature of the “I”, but “some new possibility”, argues Judith Butler in a collection of dialogues with young scholars from Eastern and Central Europe titled *Conversations with Judith Butler* (Kolozova and Trajanoski 2002, p. 29). Thus, in the lacuna of crisis, it seems that there is no “I”, as if there is no “I” of crisis, no “I” of the “space” between different sociopolitical and cultural subjections, no “I” without the philosophically competent awareness of its social and political position, since, if there were any, it would be that “thing” which, in Braidotti’s own words, “glues” the subject together. If there were any, there would be some unifying principle presupposed. *The* a priori exclusion of any possibility of (allowing) a mode of unity within a concept of a subject that is, in a different instance or ultimately,



non-unitary is, through its dichotomous restrictiveness, inhibiting of thought and pushes the discourse into the clench of *aporia*.

## Beyond the dichotomy

One of the possible approaches to the non-exclusive and non-oppositional theoretical repositioning is the critical situating of thought proffered by François Laruelle's non-philosophy. It begins with the founding gesture of radically stepping out of any form of theoretical self-circumscription or conceptual autoreferentiality as essentially philosophical. This means performing a doctrine-unattached leap of abandonment out of the enclosure of thought within the tradition of a certain discourse and the epistemological and political obligations of adherence. The leap itself, made on the basis of a mere "non-", one unequipped with the certainties of doctrinal adherence, is a leap of considerable risk. However, the act of stepping out, while producing itself, creates an opening for rigorous and ideologically uncensored theory.

Such a gesture of radical abandonment of any scholastic belonging is, however, not possible without abandoning the stance of self-sufficiency or of self-circumscription within a theoretical universe, which is by definition a philosophical gesture. The non-philosophy of François Laruelle proffers a methodological possibility of radical stepping out with respect to philosophy and its "principle of sufficient philosophy" (*principe de philosophie suffisante*: PPS), as he puts it (1989), while still operating with philosophical concepts as object and means of analysis. The principle of PPS refers to the grounding gesture of autopositioning of philosophy based on "[...] its being animated and entangled by a certain faith or belief in itself as the absolute reality, intentionality or reference to the real that it pretends to describe or even constitute, or to itself as the real itself" (Laruelle 1989, p. 17). Differently, scientific thought submits itself to the effects of the real, which first manifest themselves as utter senselessness that develops into sense as soon as thought provides (scientific) explanation of its laws or relations seen "objectively" (rather than subjectively, i.e. from the perspective of the subject) as Marx would put it (1932).

Therefore, Laruelle concludes: "This is its fundamental autopositioning, that which one could also call its autofactualisation or its autofetishisation—all that we assemble under the principle of sufficient philosophy (PPS)" (Laruelle 1989, p. 17). We should note that in Laruelle's terminological apparatus the notion of "philosophy" and the notion of "the world" are interchangeable, synonymous. The term "the world" is used in a sense analogous to the notions of "discursiveness", "the language", "the transcendental" or the "conceptual world" of a society in a particular time in history. Without going any further into a technical explication of the non-philosophical method of suspension of the "principle of sufficient philosophy" (PPS), let us only draw the analogy that the thinking subject's stance of fidelity in the last instance to a discourse and ideology rather than to the immediate effects of the real prompting linguistic reorganisation implies the self-sufficiency in question. Such self-enclosure of thought, a circular autocompletion resulting from the pretension of having consensually marked the horizon line of "the thinkable" inhibits the investigative rigour.



Let us briefly consider the question of our theoretical positioning in a “certain outside” of the dichotomy. Where is this position to be “located”? Or what constitutes it? If one assumes that the two do not create any division, that their simultaneous workings do not imply any exclusion of each other, the thought is then situated beyond duality. Duality implicates dualism if it resides in the founding assumption that there is no possibility of thinking the two beyond their *relation* of two.

Thinking, however, beyond relation and relationism is thinking in terms of singularity or unilateral difference. The minimal form of relationism is the binary. The situation of non-relatedness is one of radical solitude. Such can be only the instance of oneness. This is a situation of thought in which even relations are being thought beyond relationism or non-relatively. In other words, the reality of a certain “relation” or interaction is seen in its singular positivity. Therefore, the position of non-dichotomous thinking is located in and constituted by the *one*, as one of the “first names of the real” (Laruelle 2010, p. xxvi).

The one I am attempting to (re)claim here, with the help of the epistemological apparatus proffered by François Laruelle’s non-standard philosophy, is exempt from exclusive debts to any particular philosophical legacy. Any relation to such a legacy, any referring to a philosophical tradition of thought and its implication in our invocation of “the one”, will inevitably render it totalising and totalitarian or, conversely, particularising. This is the prime mover of poststructuralism’s vehement rejection of any discourse in terms of oneness or unity and, consequently, universalism (Kolozova 2014). The philosophical one(ness), according to Laruelle, is always already unitary or a unity of differences whereas thinking in terms of the one understood as the real is by definition non-philosophical or a scientific practice of philosophy (Laruelle 1989).

Thus, let us conceive of the one as an instance of the singular rather than unity or participation in a discursive universe, i.e. as an instance of insurmountable solitude. Its determination in the last instance is its solitude and radical isolation. It is the generic oneness and its substance is its isolation unmitigated by relation. The only opposition it establishes in a non-reflexive way—thus through the absence of relation—is that to the pure and non-reified exteriority. The general exteriority is not an abstraction in the philosophical sense, it is a generic instance endowed with materiality. It is what Sohn-Rethel would call “real abstraction”. Furthermore, let us conceive of this singular position as absolved from any responsibility to be relative to another truth or utterance, similar to an operation according to the digital logic of the one and its absence—the building blocks of signification. This, however, is a mere analogy aiming to help illustrate a point: in its substance, the real is fundamentally different from signification (in spite of the fact that its matter can sometimes be language or physicality of some kind). Therefore, let us imagine it and conceptualise it as void of relation, since any sort of relationally determined viewpoint is, in its minimal instance, always already a gesture of constituting a *couple* (with another concept).

Let us attempt to conceive of an instance that will pre-emptively undermine the process of coupling and the production of dichotomy, which is described by Laruelle in the following way: “The one is a *nonthetic* [*non-thetique*] Identity in general, that is to say, at the same time nondecisional (of) itself and nonpositional (of) itself:



without will for essence [sans volonté pour essence], without topology for existence, without the contest for movement forth [sans combat pour moteur], without space or figure for manifestation... The one is the transcendental minimum, the minimal petition of reality—that is to say, the reality presupposed by any petition in general” (Laruelle 1989, p. 42).

So, let us resort to Laruelle’s method of thinking in terms of non-thetic one(ness) and postulate a unity within the self that would be neither in an exclusive nor in an oppositional relation—nor, for that matter, in any sort of binary relatedness—with the subject’s aspects of multiplicity and non-unity. The assumption that there is an instance of unity or oneness for the self does not exclude the presupposition that there are also instances of non-unity and the other way around. *In other words, “truths” can be plural but the real insofar as sheer exteriority is one in its stubborn foreclosure. Thought meditates the real, and a realist and materialist thought succumbs to its diktat, seeking to clone its effects and submitting to its limiting and, as a consequence, formative rule. In other words, due to its foreclosure, the real determines thought that, on the other hand, can correlate with it (i.e. with the real) and thereby describe it.*

The “unitary subject” we can invoke by drawing on the theoretical resources of François Laruelle’s non-philosophy is not unitary in the sense of a cohesive unity of organised differences. Rather, it is unitary in the sense of a persistence of “a certain one” of stubborn sameness, underlying the identitary and subjective transformations. That instance is the radical subjectivity or the hybrid of the non-human in its aspect of materiality or the selfhood in its aspect of the real. It is a radicalised dyad of transcendence (signification) and the real, whereby the former establishes a unilateral (non-)relation with the latter. The real remains radically indifferent while in its utter passivity determining thought which succumbs to its diktat. The dyad is radical because there is no resolution of the contradiction produced by the two and no ontological unity to attain, no eschatological unification to pursue. The real remains radically exterior to the subject and yet determines it unilaterally and in the last instance. In this oneness of materiality, the machinic and the physical as organic participate in the constitution of the radical and non-human self and, while remaining exterior to the signifying automaton, they nonetheless constitute material continuity with the real of signification (or with signification as practice, i.e. materiality). On transcendental level, they maintain unilateral difference, whereas immanently speaking, material continuity is sustained.

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