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Eros Beyond the Automaton of Commodification

When invited to imagine the cybernetic self we are usually expected to assume the necessary conditions of that new form of selfhood as somehow "natural," to operate with categories born in philosophy and theology without examining if they are indeed what ought to enter into the composition. The idea of self the contemporary philosophy has at hand, the authoritative understanding of the self (or the part any science should be concerned with) is "the subject." This concept, however, does not have a long history and, according to Nina Powers research on the topic (2007), it probably appears for the first time, in a sense similar to that we attribute to it now, in Kant's *Critique of the Pure Reason*. With the "linguistic turn" gradually holding sway in philosophy, in both the so-called "continental" and "analytic" philosophical traditions, "the subject" (and "subjectivity") has become a central category in the way we understand the self.

Nowadays it is the Lacanian sliding function of the signifying chain, an effect of the automaton called the language (and also the pleasure principle). But, according to Marx, the problem begins – or culminates as an inherently philosophical issue – in Hegel's philosophy. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General* (1932), Marx makes the following observation: "The self-abstracted entity, fixed for itself, is man as *abstract egoist – egoism* raised in its pure abstraction to the level of thought." Instead, we should pursue, according to Marx and in line with his project of communism, a shift in perspective and assume the objective one, as metaphysical, political and epistemic repositioning: in lieu of looking at things from the perspective of a subject, we ought to begin viewing reality in its aspect of an object, in "third person," starting with borders, limits and exteriority that delineate an object's position in the world conceived as structure or multifaceted reality. Let us note that this is not a proposition to see objects from their perspective of subject(ivity), it is not about how an object is an "agency" – as in such case the perspective would still be that of a subject, and its (postulation of) reality would be relationally conditioned by the subject. Such a gesture of thought would be a fallacy according to a to-the-letter-reading of Marx's proposal as well as according to Laruelle's non-philosophical defense of correlativity (vis-à-vis the real) and Meillassoux's critique of correlationism. (And the three are positions I endorse here.)

The Euclidian shift in perspective proposed by Marx is to look at the realities, including that of the self, "in relation to third objects" or objectively rather than subjectively (as subjectivities and from the position of a subject). (So, clearly, this is not positivist objectivism.) This is a form of realism, Marx says in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General* (1932) and elsewhere too. Laruelle's method of dualysis and the procedure of "cloning the real," as presented in the *Introduction to Non-Marxism* (2000) is to be seen as further formalization of Marx's original proposal. Both Marx and Laruelle advocate an exit from philosophy, but in a way which permits to further operate with philosophy or via philosophy. They both called their approach (to philosophy) scientific. Laruelle's proposal goes a bit further in methodological specifics by way of explaining how philosophy will cease to hold a privileged status which wards off any criticism that will address its very fundaments if treated as "mere material" of analysis or simply if we do philosophy radically differently, and, in doing so, we approach "philosophical material" similarly to the way in which science treats its subject matter. His proposal is to do away with the principle of "philosophy's sufficiency" whereby the reality is not only postulated but it supplants the real, and the postulation is treated as a fully organized universe constituting a "superior form of reality" (analogous to the infantile dream of all philosophy – producing a real more real than the real itself). The idea that truth and the real "are essentially" (or "are" as in "should be")

the same, and that the sublimation of the real into truth – engendering philosophy's only child "the Being" – is specifically philosophical. It is what establishes the circle of self-mirroring and self-sufficiency. To step outside of it is to affirm the real as radical, insurmountable outsideness, a conditioning externality vis-à-vis thought that is implacably foreclosed to the thinking self yet what thought correlates with and seeks to "clone."

Regardless of whether we agree with Marx's and Laruelle's proposal or not, it is evident that the notion of "the subject" is endowed with historicity, that it is not a "thing" that has been out there since ever, something we can import with philosophical spontaneity when imagining the post-humanist and technologically determined self. We can decide that it is an essentially philosophical category or we can conclude that it is a phenomenon to be looked at in purely materialist terms. Yet again, we still have to enter into some metaphysical deliberations: what is the self, is it necessarily a subject, and, if understood as subject primarily, is it in opposition to materiality? Finally, we will have to ask: does the artificial intellect necessarily constitute some sort of subjectivity or a self? Can it be a deterritorialised automaton of value production – or of signification – without the need of subjectivity? What constitutes the self beyond the old Cartesian dichotomy? In order to answer these questions in a manner that would be productive for science, for technological development but first and most of all for the "species being" of humanity, we have to decide how we treat philosophy and the philosophical material we operate with (such, for example, the concepts at issue).

My proposition is that we further formalise the categories we operate with in line with the method of non-philosophical Marxism or to opt for the epistemologically analogous approach of materialist theory of society without philosophy as its determination in the last instance. It is a post-philosophical treatment of "transcendental material" that submits to the real structured as experiment or empirical challenge to the postulate as its authority and determination in the last instance (rather than to a philosophical universe and its founding postulations). We can call this a post-philosophical position too, one which transcends the "principle of sufficiency" marking philosophy as form of cognition (Laruelle, 1989) and yet operates with it as conceptual material determining of reality. In short, the categories of full formalisation I propose are absolutised concepts which do not presuppose any absolute in the domain of the real but rather quite the opposite: a (probably) messy, "irrational" reality which is not reducible to "truth" whose operations and effects can be explained and described in a fully abstract manner. Thus, it is irrational insofar as Reason (*Ratio*) is an anthropologic category, a product of the mimesis of the humanist mind. That is why the real is "probably" messy too: the real as such is radically foreclosed to thought, yet its "syntax" can be cloned into language in order to be explained (Laruelle, 2000). In other words, we assume an "unruly real" whereas formalised thought configuring pure abstraction in explications of the real's "workings" maintains consistency (which can always be disrupted by the real).

Similarly to the method employed by Marx in his analysis of the capital and to de Saussure's structuralist explanation of language, I suggest we conceive the categories in question as materially conditioned while resulting into full abstraction in the process of analysis. Thus, instead of theorising in terms of the anthropologically (and philosophically) conditioned phantasm of a "digital subjectivity" or a "cyborg self," let us radicalise and absolutise the concepts of the material and the ideal (or the mind understood in opposition to the material), arriving to physicality, regardless of whether organic or synthetic, and the automaton of signification as our main two categories of analysis. Therefore, let us also note that the category of "automaton" implies we are not dealing with a form of cognition but rather of language or signification. It is through operation with these categories that we shall postulate the socio-political and economic relevance of the cybernetic development for the post-human society and

for the post-humanist self. The statement just made refers to a *de facto* political project, and it is impossible to arrive to results that would represent a fundamental change in relation to the humanist history of civilization/s without resorting to philosophical concepts.

The operation with the concepts at issue can, however, be non-philosophical or post-philosophical, i.e., from a position of a certain "non-" representing a pause in philosophical spontaneity. That is also a way of exiting commonsensical spontaneity too. It should be noted that as soon as the philosophical categories are fully formalised we end up with twofold sets of concepts, scientific and metaphysical. In a way, we can exit philosophy but not metaphysics itself. *In fact, I argue, the cybernetic era is about coming to terms with certain metaphysical questions and it moves beyond the logic of pragmatism and utility.* (This coming to terms can happen only without philosophy's principle of sufficiency or via post-philosophy as thus explained). We are facing an era of pure metaphysics, one without the determinant of philosophical sufficiency. In order to radicalise and fully formalise the discussion and theoretical exploration, which does not preclude but rather includes experimentation too, we need to strip it of its philosophical layers, and arrive to the naked metaphysics of object and subject in order to make a choice that is epistemically and politically productive. Both experimentation and theory are permitted depending on the plane and angle of analysis. However, in order to arrive to such opening of the discussion allowing a bifurcation that establishes a circuit of concept-generation that is both empirically grounded and abstractly innovative, a radical stepping out of the principle of philosophy's sufficiency is necessary. Taking a position on the subjective or the objective posture of thought, or on the decoupling of the two or on the possibility of revising their relation within the original philosophical binary (and whether they should at all constitute a couple), as Marx proposes to do, is about a metaphysical choice which when fully formalized is in fact conducted scientifically or rather non-philosophically. Luce Irigaray's radical critique of the speculative and specular reason from a feminist point of view is doing precisely that.

The question of love is unavoidably metaphysical too, but we can approach it as radicalised (instead of philosophical) metaphysics which implies more politics and less philosophy. There is love based on fetish, which is capitalist love, explains Irigaray following Marx. In it women (and gay men) inasmuch as fetish or currency are erased as "use value," and with it their materiality too. In the exchange system of patriarchy, Phallus holds a position similar to that of Capital in the market exchange system. Commodities or women-as-femininity – not real women as they precede value – are the relay of value or sign communicating with value and sign, autoreferenitally and according to the equation M-C-M which yields in M-M. The heteronormative chain of signification is perpetual repetition of the automaton P(hallus)-P(hallus) or hom(m)o-sexuality, explains Irigaray in *This Sex Which is not One* (1985). The fetish, or rather commodity, is not a subjectivity and it does not possess desire, argues Irigaray. Within the capitalist and patriarchal universe of the value exchange automaton or the automaton of signification, hom(m)o-sexuality engenders masculinity and reaffirms it as the only reality. Femininity remains the currency or the general equivalent that enables the endless multitude of the same tautology. Love caught up in the patriarchal-capitalist automaton of signification will remain atavistic regardless of the interventions of technology which neither guaranty nor imply transcendence of women's status as commodities and resource. Only a political reversal of the underlying automata (of capitalism and patriarchy) can enable change in input for the "post-human" or "non-human" agencies of pleasures and the trauma called love. Such political reversal cannot avoid coming to grips with the questions of subject and object, physicality and its opposites, the one and the multiple, the real and the fiction and the related binaries insofar as metaphysical rather than philosophical in their determinations in the last instance.

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