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“Neither God, nor World”: on the One foreclosed to transcendence

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ABSTRACT In recent years, in the field of philosophy of religion, François Laruelle’s “non-philosophy” has opened up a path out of the battles between secularist philosophies and resurging Christian theologies. It has done so by theorizing the radical immanence of the Human (or, as he writes, Man-in-person) separated from and foreclosed to simultaneously the (philosophical) enclosure of the World and the (theological) transcendence of God. This paper explores the way Laruelle’s 2007 work *Mystique non-philosophique à l’usage des contemporains* further articulates radical immanence by engaging with materials from the traditions of mysticism and mystical theology. *Mystique non-philosophique* diagnoses the ways traditional mysticism remains complicit with philosophical operations by enchainning the radical immanence of Man-in-person or the One, making it desire, need and work for divine transcendence. In contrast, it proposes the practice of “future mysticism”, which seeks to subvert all conceptual mechanisms that subjugate the Human and render it servile to operations such as dialectical synthesis, conversion or desire for the Other. This approach underwrites Laruelle’s critique of Meister Eckhart’s thought for its enclosure of the Human within the Neo-platonic grammar of procession, conversion and return, and for the way it retains an emphasis on transcendent super-essentiality in its discourse of the God(head) beyond God. The paper suggests, however, that Eckhart’s sermons, despite deploying such inherited philosophical vocabularies, already articulate radical immanence that undermines the necessity of mediation and work, through mystical *topoi* such as poverty, humility and “without a why”. In so doing, the paper not only proposes the necessity of a more generous hermeneutic framework for non-philosophy, but also offers the possibility of de-emphasizing the name of “Man” in the theorization of radical immanence. As the paper shows, Eckhart’s conceptuality of poverty, humility and “without a why” points not only to the capacity to subvert transcendence, but additionally to articulate radical immanence decoupled from any Human figure. The radical immanence of the One, however, is not just foreclosed to the World, but, as *Mystique non-philosophique* makes clear, also entails a messianic dimension: the text repeatedly proposes donning “Christ-subjects” or “Future Christs” who are not of the World but “for the World”. The final part of this paper argues that it is necessary to read such messianic concepts or “first names” without reverting to economic thinking, without, that is, re-introducing the mechanism of transcendence and specular enclosure. The real subversion of the World lies not in the affirmation of divine transcendence, nor in the nihilism of the desert, but in an immanent One, which is foreclosed to the World but nevertheless messianically displays its insufficiency. Finally, the paper suggests interpreting the radical immanence of the One as an undercommons of the World and (eschatological or divine) transcendence taken together, an undercommons that indexes the mobile lives, generic uncountable forms of living and anonymous forces that pose a perpetual danger to the order enforced by the World and its Gods. This paper is published as part of a thematic collection dedicated to radical theologies.

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Non-philosophical mysticism

In recent years, the thought of François Laruelle has been actively taken up in the Anglophone theoretical world across a number of disciplines (Mullarkey and Smith, 2012; Greve and Gangle, Forthcoming). Scholars have found in his “non-philosophy” a productive way to question the self-sufficiency and supremacy of philosophy, and develop a new conceptual lexicon and mode of engagement that allows for a democracy in thought.¹ Laruelle’s “non-philosophy” has been especially productive in rethinking the interaction of philosophy and religion, allowing contemporary thought to escape the impasses set up by the divide between staunchly secularist philosophies and newly militant Christian theological perspectives (Smith, 2010; Smith and Whistler, 2010). It has done so primarily by thinking according to the radical immanence of the One separated from and foreclosed to the (philosophical) enclosure of the World and the (theological) transcendence of God.

What has not received as much attention is the way that, while articulating the conceptual logic of non-philosophy across decades of theoretical production, Laruelle has repeatedly engaged the topic of mysticism. For example, one of the key formulations of this theoretical enterprise, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, draws the distinction between *la mystique* and *le mystique* (Laruelle, 2013: 55–57).² *La mystique* “is an experience of the soul’s identity with transcendence”. It names the various mixtures of immanence with transcendence, including, most centrally, that of a soul experiencing or uniting with a transcendent God. *Le mystique*, by contrast, names a radical immanence that excludes all transcendence, all of its ruses and imperatives. *Le mystique* “is not in front of us, far from us, or close behind, virtual or potential, demanding reversal, conversion, return or turn. It is in-us or rather it is us who are actually in it, *en-mystique* or in-One as the One itself” (Laruelle 2013: 56). At stake in the latter concept is the articulation of immanence that would be foreclosed to and not co-opted or co-optable by any form of transcendence, one that would not be enclosed in or destined for the transcendent apparatus set up by either the World or the divine. A similar distinction is offered earlier in *Philosophies of Difference*, which differentiates *la mystique*, as the assertion of the immediate givenness of the (transcendent) Other, and *le mystique*, as naming “the immediate givenness of the One, as well as of the Other in this radical immanence of the One” (Laruelle, 2010: 154).

The import and theoretical stakes of this distinction are fully elaborated in Laruelle’s 2007 text *Mystique non-philosophique à l’usage des contemporains*.³ Using an altered vocabulary, *Mystique non-philosophique* elaborates on the distinction between the deployment of immanence within the tradition of Christian mysticism, which in various ways combines immanence with transcendence, and a form of “non-philosophical” mysticism oriented fundamentally around rejecting such amalgams and resisting the insertion of immanence into operations of mediation.⁴ The text is not fundamentally a hermeneutic enterprise concerned with keeping alive a pre-existing tradition, as a modern Christian theologian might reactivate forgotten schemes and moves within medieval mystical theology. Rather than engaging mysticism as a completed or closed tradition, one that would be relegated to religious or theological authorities who curate its contents, *Mystique non-philosophique* attempts to enact a transformation, offering a novel use and conceptual logic of mysticism. It seeks to articulate a new mysticism, a “future mysticism” or “mystic-fiction”, of radical immanence on “the radical base of the Real redefined as ‘Man-in-Person’” (8), not speculatively captured in the apparatus of alterity and transcendence, of mediation and subjection.

One of the cornerstones of Laruelle’s non-philosophy has been its diagnosis of the ways that philosophy has repeatedly set up the

One as a problem and a goal. The One has always appeared in the guise of authority and totality, a unity to be achieved. It has been presented as an over-arching One, taking on a conquering guise, the pinnacle of hierarchy. As Laruelle (2010) puts the diagnosis in an earlier work, “that the One would still be thought as capable of *sur-mounting or amounting to a return, that is, of operating an immanence in the mode of transcendence*, is the most certain sign of the failure of philosophy, whether contemporary or otherwise, to think the essence of what the One’s immanence really is” (31). And philosophy is not the only culpable discourse. *Mystique non-philosophique* demonstrates the ways in which much of Christian mysticism has taken up, incorporated and even extended this philosophical apparatus of the One positioned as something transcendent, as something to be achieved.

One can detect this in an emblematic way in two complementary schemas prominent in tradition of Christian mysticism. In both Neoplatonic and Dionysian mysticism, there is never simply a One, but always an apparatus of the One–Other, in which the One is mixed with transcendence. According to the Neoplatonic schema, the One is primarily positioned as the simplicity to which one must return to, through the overcoming of difference and alterity. By contrast, what Laruelle terms the Dionysian schema (but what can be seen more generally as the schema of *apophasis*) stresses the movements of negation as way to affirm the absolute alterity of God. In other words, whereas the first can be written as One–(Other), and exploits the positive element, the latter is written in the reverse, as the (One)–Other, and exploits negativity.⁵ Both schemas, however, are grounded in and profit from the split of the One into mixtures of the One and the Other. As a result of this scission, processes of negation and mediation, unification and synthesis become necessary. The One is only achievable, if at all, by means of operations of conversion and negation (be that negation apophatic, ascetic or ecstatic), as the synthesis appearing at the end of a process. Mysticism becomes a system of dynamic and variegated topologies that put the human to work, in order to achieve an equality, identity and unity with God as the One. It is a discourse that makes the human desire and labour for a transcendence, creating for her the numerous mystical paths, divine ladders of ascent, moments of break and conversion that render (im)possible the interaction with God. So many ecstatic conversions, mystical intermediaries and hierarchical planes mapping relations between the soul and its creator, between Man and God, making “of mystical union a philosophical servitude for man” (36). And non-philosophy’s concern is precisely such servitude, the instrumentalization and subjection that arises when mysticism, like philosophy, begins with two terms and sets up impossible apparatuses of mediation, which act as “a form of enchantment of man” (55).

Indeed, if philosophy, in Laruelle’s diagnosis, repeatedly encloses and subjects the human to the World and its authorities, the predicament is only intensified when mysticism is introduced into the equation. For when the philosophical apparatus is modulated by mysticism, “it subjects [*assujettit*] the human to God as well as to the World, it subjects it to the divine Conformity” (222). Indeed, one of the names Laruelle gives mysticism as it has been traditionally conceived is *mystique-monde*, or World-mysticism. Such a formulation might sound counterintuitive insofar as mysticism throughout its history has repeatedly trafficked in the rejection of the World as a means of attaining a relation with God, formulated variously as experience, union or the achievement of equality. Laruelle’s critical gesture is to insist that mysticism, by posing God as a transcendence, hardly subverted the enclosure of philosophy, but only extended philosophy’s reach, acting as its ultimate consummation. If philosophy creates a World as an auto-enclosing structure that it can think, (rendering philosophy a “World-thought”) and dominates over humans as a result, mysticism allows for certain

intellective, affective and spiritual transgressions of the limits of philosophy without ultimately subverting them, acting instead as philosophy's culmination and crowning capstone. "World-mysticism is always a mélange under the hegemony of transcendence" (49). If mysticism breaks with the World, it does so to affirm a surplus transcendence, experiencing it as a unification that yields "the fusion of World and God" (222). Moreover, it actualizes that transcendence by producing an experience of it and by articulating modes of communication with it—mechanisms of mediation from celestial hierarchies to spiritual ladders attest precisely to this.

One of the key textual sites on which *Mystique non-philosophique* enacts its mutation is the work of fourteenth-century mystic Meister Eckhart.⁶ In some ways, Eckhart is presented as the very epitome of the amalgamation of philosophy and mysticism. Such a perspective on Eckhart is not uncommon, given that he was initially recovered for modern readers in the nineteenth century precisely as a speculative mystic, and his discursive identity (Is he a philosopher? Is he a mystic?) has remained contested to this day.⁷ Eckhart's collusion with philosophical grammars is visible in a number of aspects: in the fact that, for example, he employs the classic Neoplatonic conceptual topology that embeds the creature into schemas of flux, procession and outgoing, conversion and return. Laruelle highlights as well the way that Eckhart's discourse follows the path of dialectical negation, subjecting the human to an apparatus that attempts to establish an impossible equality between Man and God.

Eckhart's works deploy as well the schema that prioritizes the apophatic movement of negation, one that intensifies and ultimately affirms transcendence. For Laruelle, Eckhart's mystical language is fundamentally bound up with transcendence, a transcendence of *Gottheit* beyond *Gott* (60). Transgressing the positivity of onto-theology, it affirms an apophatic beyond, pushes the positivity of God towards a nothingness that remains an over-nothingness. The positivity of God is lost, but the traditional grammar of transcendence is preserved and intensified. Remarking on the hyper-transcendence in Eckhart's mystical topology has not been an uncommon refrain, as both Derrida and Deleuze have stressed the hierarchical and transcendent inclinations of negative theology, especially as it relates to Eckhart (Derrida, 1978: 337 n.37; Deleuze, 1992: 169–186). The following passage captures some of Laruelle's critical appraisal of Eckhart and his relation to philosophical grammars:

By a clearly visible paradox, the most philosophical mysticism abandons philosophy's most positive metaphysical fetishes, it undertakes ascesis and a sobering from being and Being and not only from the "World," and reaches nothingness by the two extremes of all philosophy, by the nothingness of the creature and the superessential nothingness of God, which is nothingness or godhood [*déité*] and has nothing *exclusively* positive and ontological about it. ... This nothingness is charged with "surpassing" and thus "interiorizing" positivity; *la mystique* is an enterprise of conserving Being, which it places above being thanks to nothingness. ... Eckhart and Hegel only wanted to know One by mediation of nothingness and its redoubling, as if redoubling nothingness hyperbolically could make us be done with Being. (219)⁸

This diagnosis of Eckhart's mysticism comes with two essential retorts. Whereas mysticism traditionally remained complicit with philosophy insofar as it enchaind the radical immanence of the One, making it desire, need and work for divine transcendence, the practice of "future mysticism" seeks to subvert all conceptual mechanisms that subjugate the human and render it servile to

operations such as dialectical synthesis, conversion or desire for the Other. Future mysticism "resides in an initial act intended to break the vicious circle of the triad and of convertibility, and finally the circle of conversion" (67). This initial act structures non-philosophical mysticism precisely in posing "the One no longer as transcendence and as God but as immanence of a vision-in-One" (67). The effect of the posture of the vision-in-One, or the position of radical immanence foreclosed to the appropriative and enclosing operations of philosophy and theology, is to "cease to want to be unified to a transcendent and super-transcendent being" (42). The question is of subverting the One as something to be achieved, affirming it rather as the ante-ontological, prior-to-the-first Real, and thus disrupting the philosophical grammars, narrative arcs, and mystical itineraries premised on alienation and its overcoming, on the mediation of a duality into a complex One. "Future mysticism proceeds by the vision-in-One, which is without transcendence and separated from the World, which it unilateralizes as Outside of immanence" (49). The question, then, is not of recovering the One, at the end of a process of reduplication that renders the One into a project, but of establishing it as radical immanence that precedes and undermines the very divisions into World and God, Being and Otherness.

The second, intimately related, retort is the association, which has been central to Laruelle's thought throughout his writing, of the One or the Real with the names Man, Man-in-Person, or even Man-in-Man. "To be liberated from the infernal sufficiency of philosophy and theology united, is to redefine the One no longer as God, but, outside-definition, by the first name of the 'One-in-One' or 'in-person', the last essence of Man. ... To convert man to the experience of One as God, this is the mysticism of old. To subvert this old mysticism by the experience of the One as Man-in-person, this is the future mysticism" (36). If traditional mysticism puts the human to work, no longer only within the World, but in excess of the World, in relation to God, enchaind the human within a mechanism of double transcendence, future mysticism enacts a fundamental inversion of the syntax, and ascribes "primacy to the Real as Man-in-Man rather than to God or the Godhead" (8). The human Real is given another name, the neologism *Humanéité*, which should be read as an inversion of the Eckhartian elaboration of *gottheit* (rendered *déité* in French; Godhood, Godhead or divinity in English). Future mysticism is a human mysticism, offered not as a basis for an anthropology or a humanism, a way of defining and organizing the human, but as a name for a fundamental inconsistency that undermines the structures of desire for unity and transcendence. "Why would it desire the God-world and the servitude under God if it is already a One-without-union?" (56) What is suggested here is not a surpassing repetition of the grammar of interaction between Man and God, but the axiomatic formulation of a "radical poverty" (56) foreclosed to all transcendence, not only of the World and of philosophy, but also of God and mystical paths proposed by theology. And, on this basis, a form of mysticism no longer oriented to "the benefit of theological and philosophical capital, which is condensed in the name of 'God' and within the treasure of divine names" (109).

A mystical lexicon of radical immanence

Laruelle's thought draws our attention to the ways immanence is appropriated by and made to work within philosophical, theological and mystical apparatuses. At the same time, I would suggest that it sometimes prevents us from appreciating the ways in which mystical texts already articulate moments of radical immanence, in foreign sites, under hostile conditions, in furtive and dissimulated ways. I want to suggest that, if one reads

mystical texts, those of Eckhart in particular, generously, one can find them already enacting a discourse of radical immanence. It is notable that Laruelle's critique of Eckhartian mysticism highlights its Neoplatonic framework (hierarchy, super-essentiality, the movement of flowing out and return) more so than anything particular to Eckhartian conceptual syntax and semantics. And, though the presence of Neoplatonism (and Dionysian *apophasis*) in Eckhart's works cannot be denied, the question of their status and usage is hardly unequivocal. Indeed, I would argue, Eckhart deploys these inherited vocabularies against themselves, in a deeply subversive way, in order to articulate a position of radical immanence.⁹

To see what this entails, let us consider more closely the status of poverty and humility. In formulating non-philosophical mysticism, Laruelle asks: "Under what conditions of theory and language can one make, for example, of humility or poverty a real presupposition [*un présupposé réel*], the Real of the-One-man [*l'Un-homme*], rather than a concept or an attribute of a creature? By what grammar, syntax or procedure of thought?" (72). The task is to no longer take either poverty or humility as attributes or states of a creature, but rather as conditions of the One, "first names" that precede the very dyad of creature and creator. This would be something different than having them be levers within processes of dialectical negation, or moments in a machine of exchange between God and the human. Humility and poverty would no longer be mere ascetic moments of withdrawal or negation that yield the possibility of a surplus recuperated down the line, nor events or practices of the self that open up a horizon of unification with transcendence. This entails stripping them of the grammars of ontological process and dialectical constitution, unilateralizing them outside of all ontology and speculative mixtures. "Humility as Humanity will not have been implanted by a theoretical or conceptual operation into the ground of God or Man; it is rather the radical implanted from always as the in-One that inhabits the One ... Humility is the Real that does not have the force of beginning but through which a beginning of thought becomes possible" (76). Here, humility and poverty become names for the inconsistency of the One taken as a radical immanence, foreclosed to any determination by the World and any desire to unify with transcendence.

For a comparison, let us turn to Eckhart's (1981) Sermon 52, which explicitly picks up the question of poverty in spirit and probes the question of the "poor man [who] wants nothing, and knows nothing, and has nothing" (199). What at the outset might sound like a sermon exploring a Christian virtue quickly belies expectations, as it positions true poverty neither as an attribute, nor a virtue, nor a meditational mechanism between Man and God. In fact, Eckhart explicitly notes that ascetic penances attached to transcendence are not the poverty of which he speaks, nor is the desire to fulfil God's will, that is, to unite with God through a passivity that negates the self. Instead, "if a person wants really to have poverty, he ought to be as free of his own created will as he was when he did not exist ... a poor man is one who has a will and a longing for nothing" (Eckhart, 1981: 200). What true poverty entails for Eckhart is the abandonment of a thinking structured by the opposition of self and other, creature and creator. It situates true poverty not as a characteristic of the creature, but as the site of the subversion of the paradigm of the creature and creator as such. But it is, at the same time, an affirmation that the poor one lacks nothing: Poverty marks neither a self-negation nor a privation.

The sermon intensifies into its famous crescendo, "let us pray to God that we may be free of God, and that we may apprehend and rejoice in that everlasting truth in which the highest angel and the fly and the soul are equal—there where I was established, where I wanted what I was and was what I wanted" (Eckhart, 1981: 200).¹⁰

Poverty entails not the abasement of the self towards the (divine) Other, as much as the collapse of the very schema of transcendent alterity. Poverty is without a lack, because it is without an Other, without that in relation to which the human can be constituted as lacking. But this passage attests to something else as well. Through the affirmation of the equality of flies, angels and souls, this formulation of poverty also marks the subversion of hierarchy as organizing principle—a fact that, if taken seriously, belies the reading subscribed to by many (including Laruelle) that sees Eckhart's thought as crowning hierarchy through sur-essentiality and hyper-presence.

True poverty is less an experience than, as the sermon subsequently shows, a mode of living and knowing:

Sometimes I have said that a man ought to live so that he did not live for himself or for the truth or for God. But now I say something different and something more, that a man who would possess this poverty ought to live as if he does not even know that he is not in any way living for himself or for the truth or for God. Rather, he should be so free of all knowing that he does not know or experience or grasp that God lives in him. (Eckhart, 1981: 200–201)

A double rejection is at work here. The first is a rejection of the instrumentalization of life, the rejection of life as lived *for* something, no matter how commendable the telos might be. This point finds a starker formulation in Sermon 5b: "So long as you perform your works for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, or for God's sake, or for the sake of your eternal blessedness, and you work them from without, you are going completely astray" (Eckhart, 1981: 183). True humility untethers life, renders it inoperative, reveals it as a life without a why that rejects all mechanisms of spiritual subjugation or servility. At stake is not faith, an experience of transcendence, or unification, but an affirmation of a radical immanence and identity not split into a duality. But here he says "something more" and insists on a mode of knowing that would not be reflexive or specular, that would be, one could say, vectorial or unidirectional, avoiding the re-capture of poverty and its immanence within any redoubling apparatus.

The third form of poverty, "the most intimate poverty", is the poverty of dispossession, of the one who "has" nothing. But here again, the question is not a matter of moral injunction, asceticism or achieving unification with transcendence.

I have often said, and great authorities say, that a man should be so free of all things and of all works, both interior and exterior, that he might become a place only for God, in which God could work. Now I say otherwise. If it be the case that man is free of all created things and of God and of himself, and if it is also be that God may find place in him in which to work, then I say that so long as that is in man, he is not poor with the most intimate poverty Poverty of spirit is for a man to keep so free of God and of all his works that if God wishes to work in the soul, he himself is the place in which he wants to work; and that he will gladly do. (Eckhart, 1981: 202)

This passage thematizes a divergence of positions on the relation of the human and the divine. Whereas the first alternative still allows a minimum of externality and transcendence to remain insofar as it positions the human as the site for God's work and grace, the second alternative is radically different. Eckhart is not saying "something more"—here he says "otherwise". Poverty of spirit is not the receptivity towards the gift offered by transcendence, but precisely a poverty that is freed from the burden of transcendence and its operations.

The sermon ends with a famous intensifying repetition of the language of *causa sui*, and ultimately more than that, of *causa Dei*: “That God is God, of that I am a cause; if I did not exist, God too would not be God” (Eckhart, 1981: 203). One could ask, is *causa sui* not the ultimate metaphysical conceit? The final achievement of self-sufficiency? Laruelle says nearly as much. He insists for example that the humility of the One of non-philosophy is precisely not that one of *causa sui* that would be sufficient for itself and creatures (76). It is possible to read Eckhart in this way, but I would suggest that Eckhart is deploying the rhetoric of *causa sui* to articulate a thought that precedes and exceeds the grammar of transcendent relations between Man and God, through which to affirm the primacy of a dispossessed poverty and life without a why. He is deploying existent theological languages as materials to articulate poverty as a site of radical dispossession, which would no longer signify a lack—that would lack nothing—or be a property of any creature. Indeed, I would suggest that rather than seeing Eckhart’s *causa sui* as buttressing the ultimate form of sufficiency or prefiguring any sort of humanism, we can see it as a mechanism that helps articulate radical immanence without lack. Correlatively, rather than legitimating hierarchies, in this sermon, *causa sui* subverts them, down to the ultimate point of rendering God himself a kind of fiction. After all, “That God is God, of that I am a cause”.

Rather than seeing Eckhart as redoubling transcendence and embodying a cross-breeding of philosophy and mysticism, a different predicament becomes visible. Caught up in the double structure of philosophy and Christian theology, his works make a use of those preexistent languages in order to subvert the triad of authority, mediation and transcendence—thereby, in a way, partaking in the non-philosophical project *avant la lettre*.¹¹ Eckhart can be said to be grappling with precisely what Laruelle suggests when he writes, “To strip oneself for God, that is the old objective. To strip oneself of God himself and to think according-to-the-Stripped that we are, this is the new practice” (42). Eckhart’s life without a why is precisely a detached, empty life of dispossession, without telos and without lack, no longer aimed at anything transcendent with which to be united.

Mystique non-philosophique offers another name for this position of poverty that lacks nothing: heresy. “These poor, nonetheless, lack nothing, they do not lack ‘lack’, this is what distinguishes the future mystics as heretics” (58). It is well worth remembering that Eckhart’s thought and life were never far from heresy. His thought was censured shortly after his death, and many of his locutions are derived from Marguerite Porete who herself was burned at the stake for an unrepentant circulation of her heretical text.¹² The Bull *In agro dominico* declared many of his positions “tainted with heresy” including those that stressed the rejection of living for something (8) and of being under God (9), and the affirmation of the pure nothingness of the creature (26). But it was not only the content of his message, but precisely his unrestrained democratic approach, teaching speculative messages to simple souls, that aggravated the authorities. The Bull noted the question of material circulation of speech twice, in the incipit and the conclusion: Eckhart “presented many things as dogma that were designed to cloud the true faith in the hearts of many, things which he put forth especially before the simple people in his sermons” (Eckhart, 1981: 77, *trans. mod.*). Indeed, it is in the appraisal of heresy that non-philosophy is at its most generous for it recognizes in heresy a speech that unites the speculative and the simple in ways that undermine structures of authority, distributions of competencies, and the ontological hierarchies that legitimate them (85–87).

A generous hermeneutic can also be derived from Laruelle’s distinction of between dominant onto-theological regime of mysticism, which “speculates God in order ultimately to

re-appropriate the World, practicing a double negation, the divided and specular ‘no’” (39) and minor or minoritarian (heretical) mysticism, which takes radical (human) poverty as ultimately constitutive of the Real and gives it primacy over the World and God. A generous hermeneutics practice can arise out of the insistence that such minoritarian and heretical forms have always been there, however coopted, erased or deformed, and from the further acknowledgement that these traces of radical immanence are non-philosophy’s friends in struggle. This means that not all textual materials require the scalpel of non-philosophical dualism, that “practice identically immanent-and-heteronomous to its material, a relation-without-relation which is not possible except as unilateral duality” (29).¹³ If, additionally, we take seriously the claim that heresy is lived-without-history, without structures of authority of the World legitimated by God, then we need to see heretical voices, bodies, lives and struggles as comprising an impossible tradition, from all eternity.¹⁴ This would entail stressing not only that “the heretic knows [‘the without a why’] in an immanent manner without having need of knowing the why of this without-a-why” (155), but that the heretic always knew it, within the catastrophic meshes woven by history and its authorities, divine and worldly, while merely making “a use of life”.

Indeed, adopting a generous hermeneutics allows mystical texts to disclose an entire mystical lexicon of radical immanence: poverty, humility, without a why, indifference, simplicity. For Eckhart’s thought not only affirms a radical poverty and humility as radical immanence, but a state of detachment from the World and indifference to God, to all mediation and desire for unification and transcendence—precisely as Laruelle calls for. Yet, he elaborates this lexicon without prioritizing the name of Man, Man-in-Person, or *Humanity*. Leave God be, be the poor that you are, and in that poverty no longer be able to claim even the name Man. Eckhart (along with some of those branded by Henry Suso as the anonymous wild ones) poses a fundamental question to non-philosophy: how can you retain the name Man in radical immanence? He suggests by contrast: be an anonymous One, no longer countable, no longer in lack. What is “neither God, nor World” (204) is an indifferent One, who has forgotten to name or recognize itself as human. The poor one, the one without consistency and without a why is anonymous, without a name, even without the weak name, Man.¹⁵

Immanent messianism and the grammar of negation

Eugene Thacker, who has offered one of the few explicit engagements with *Mystique non-philosophique*, has interpreted the work through of the mystical figure of the desert. Thacker (2014) writes: “The desert, as a *nom-premier* or “first name” of the One, is neither figurative nor literal ... The desert is at once inaccessible and yet intimate, an immanence that can only be articulated as unilaterally opaque and yet always “in-person” (*en-personne*), here and now” (89).¹⁶ Such a stress on the centrality of the desert as a kind of an interior non-human silence perforating discourse and thought renders Laruelle convergent with the position of cosmic pessimism that Thacker (2010) has been developing in recent years. This captures an important element of Laruelle’s conceptual topology insofar as it stresses dimensions of barrenness and poverty at the heart of radical immanence, but such an emphasis remains partial because it entirely omits the messianic gesture at the heart of non-philosophy.

Mystique non-philosophique repeatedly emphasizes and elaborates a messianic dimension harbored by non-philosophy, which

is most evident in the persistent locution “for the World”. Laruelle writes, for example, Man “has the primacy of the Real over the subject but exerts itself for the World as subject”(18). Indeed, Laruelle’s theory of the subject is fundamentally a messianic one. Non-philosophy not only proclaims the World as unilaterally under-determined by the radical immanence of the One, but also announces the mystical birth of the subject through the operation of “cloning” by which the human takes on the status of a messiah or a Christ-subject, and its coming as a struggle for and against the World. The conceptuality of future mysticism stresses not only the primacy of the Man-in-person over the mixtures of World and God, but also, and just as insistently, its realization in the form of Christ-subjects or human messiahs.

One could suggest that Laruelle shows his hand here, attempting to save the World one last time, and one could simply reject such a desire, insisting instead on the necessary destruction of the World. Although I find the latter gesture a compelling one, in what follows I am interested in exploring a way of understanding the “weak force” and “utopian vocation” of human messiahs within non-philosophy that would nonetheless remain faithful to non-philosophy’s relentless diagnosis of the World’s power of subjection, persecution and extermination.¹⁷ After all, as *Mystique non-philosophique* makes clear through the intense production of names (human messiahs, Christ-subjects, future Christs, futures, along with a number of other locutions), the messianic dimension is not a contingent element, but carries a strong dose of conceptual necessity within non-philosophy. The messianic dimension is not a second gesture or a supplementary imperative, but rather the very performative dimension of non-philosophy: “the practice determined by Man-in-person is *this* struggle for the World” (216). This is to say, the One and the messianic subject do not form a dualism, but rather what Laruelle names “a unilateral duality”: the messiah is the One as it is revealed for the World. Without possible return or conversion back to any ontological homeland, the messianic subject is a “unilateral existence, a uni-que face, stranger to the World” (229). Rather than engaging with the World in a face-to-face struggle, the figure of the messianic is essentially one of exposure, a “being-for-the-World-without-the-World” (228). It is the messianic “weak force” of the Vision-in-One insofar as it voids the self-sufficiency of the World, marking the destitution of its structures of authority and domination.

To fully account for the messianic element of non-philosophy, however, one has to grapple with the fundamental questions over whether the World and its authorities, norms and structure of meanings have the final say over the distribution of affirmation and negation. The messianic gambit of non-philosophy is to answer the question with an unequivocal no. To take the World in-One is precisely to relativize its structures and judgments. I take this to be the ramifications of Laruelle’s insistence that the foreclosure of the Real must not be seen in terms of negativity in relation to the World, but rather as a unilateral openness or autonomy of immanence. Taking seriously Laruelle’s injunction of thinking from the One rather than thinking about or towards the One necessarily involves becoming aware of the messianic dimension in non-philosophy, precisely because the absoluteness of World’s perspective and judgment is relativized *vis-à-vis* the radical autonomy of the One. This is the power of Laruelle’s formalization of “One((-)Other/All)” (21). This formalization suggests that the All of the World and its relation to a transcendent alterity must be seen as part of a single complex mechanism in unilateral relation to the One. The messianic practice of non-philosophy affirms the primacy of the radical immanence of the One in relation to the combined forces of the (ontological) delimitation of the World and the (theological)

supplement of alterity. The World is not all there is, not because there is a God, but because the radical immanence of the One precedes and exceeds its delimitation.

I would propose reading this radical immanence as, deploying a term elaborated by Harney and Moten (2013), an undercommons of the World. Perhaps even more than that, an undercommons of the World *together with* the (eschatological or divine) transcendence that is supposed to be its only (im)possible savior, the undercommons of the World-God. The One is what comes under the World, indexing the mobile lives, generic uncountable forms of living, and anonymous forces that pose a perpetual danger to the order enforced by the World. As Moten (2013) argues, “the unmapped and unmappable immanence of undercommon sociality” rebels against the ontological establishment and the cartographic coherence of the World (752). The World cannot take on this mobile life, cannot approach the undercommons, except by coding it negatively, as a precondition for regulating and policing it, managing and subjugating it, when not outright exterminating and annihilating it. But the ontology of the World never exhausts the capacities of thought or life, however much it contends to: What is condemned by the World to being a stranger, to becoming a victim, to social death, to persecution and extermination, is not only what the World makes of it. That is to say, taking the One as the undercommons of the World-God complex entails a particular grammar of negation and affirmation. To think from the undercommons is to affirm the primacy of mobile life, of a common force that “comes under” the World, threatening its mapping, its structures of power, its civil and political society, its individuations and situation of bodies in grids of the proper.¹⁸ Such is the non-philosophical “strictly human rebellion” or “human messianism”: neither an acceptance of the World, nor a flight out of the World, but the rejection of this specular either/or decision in order to affirm the originary and ante-ontological force of the One as that which under-determines and undermines the World, by perpetually coming-under it.

The One or the Real of non-philosophy and the undercommons are names for what precedes the combat between enlightened secular reason and transcendent theological reasoning, affirming instead the lives, bodies and speech on which the World and its Gods perpetually reproduce themselves. These lives without a why, generic lives (“a life”, in Deleuze’s words, or what Laruelle terms the “lived-without-life”), uncountable (outside of the grids of individuation organized and enforced by the World), generic forms of livability, minoritarian pathways of the One without consistency populate the heresy of radical immanence and carry an affirmative force despite the World’s desire to subjugate and exterminate them. This is the power of thinking from the One: For all of the World’s determination to code it negatively, and only negatively, it carries a messianic upsurge, a force that is strange to the World, but nonetheless containing an originary primacy in relation to it. The World establishes the realm of possibility and valuation, but the messianic subject shows the force of radical immanence—across its worldly appropriations, disfigurements, disavowals and exterminations—as always there, to be lived differently, furtively, fugitively, messianically.

One can put it in relation to the recent discussions over the World’s anti-blackness: The World is built on anti-blackness, but the question remains on whether blackness has the power to unilateralize the World, its History, its Gods or whether it remains only the name for the social death that the World needs to perpetuate its phantasmatic solidity. I take Frank Wilderson to be the preeminent exponent of the latter position (Wilderson, 2010), but Moten’s theorization elaborates a lexicon of black sociality, of mobile life and of undercommons,

articulating a radical immanence that under-determines the World and withdraws from it the final power of distribution of affirmation and negation. The latter logic, I would suggest, converges with Laruelle's insofar as the One is radical poverty, without ontological solidity, persecuted by the World's hallucinations, but also, and even more fundamentally, without lack, needing nothing from the World, a life "without-nothing" (130).

It is worth noting that the consequences of positioning the One as radical immanence involves as well the sidelining of a dominant division within continental thought, between a univocal ontology found differently in Heideggerian and Deleuzian thought and the affirmation of alterity found in Levinas's work. This entails thinking of a univocity of the One immanently separated (separated-without-separation) from the World and God, a univocity, one could say, "below" ontology. For Laruelle (and, as I have argued elsewhere, for Eckhart) Being is not univocal, rather univocity holds before and below all ontological formation. "More than nobility, humility of the One is uni-versal in a univocal manner through detachment from being and Being [*de l'étant et de l'Être*]" (81). Univocity would then not be a characteristic applicable to the All, to the structures of the cosmos or the World, but to lives lived below and underneath the World, desubjectivated, anonymous, common lives.

Radical immanence subverts the World's structures of valuation, and it does so without any appeal for transcendent salvation. The messiah does not arrive from elsewhere, from a beyond, but rather appears from, or as, the immanent excess of the One in relation to the World. Therefore the affective schema of the messianic articulated by non-philosophy is no longer dominated by faith, waiting or hope. After all, immanence cannot be attained at the end of a process or posed as a telos without being rendered, in that very act, transcendent, and thereby once more firing up the machine of subjugation and servility. This is why Laruelle rejects any structure of thinking that places generic life or the lived-without-life "at the end of a process or of a transcendence, [rather than] as a mode of radical immanence" (249). At stake, then, is neither a culmination of history nor the inauguration of a new age, as eschatological messianism has frequently been seen as enacting by proponents and critics alike.¹⁹ Laruelle's human messianism, or what I would propose naming immanent messianism, rejects the logic of economy, in the theological sense of the economy as the fulfilment of a plan of salvation (Mondzain, 2005: 18–66; Agamben, 2011). It is not the completion of a movement from creation to redemption, or the fulfilment of a providential plan, in which the triad of History, World and God are mixed together to legitimate the powers that be. Such economic versions of providence are fundamentally underwritten by the ultimate philosophical structure of the One as problem and project, and not by the non-philosophical positioning of the One as radical immanence, which insists, by contrast, on the messiah as "unique", occurring each time anew, interrupting the flow of history.²¹

Immanent messianism thus offers a powerful rejoinder to the old charge of immanentizing the eschaton leveled at those who supposedly impatiently and inappropriately are unwilling to displace the realm of justice into an impossible and always-deferred beyond.²¹ Certainly, it rejects such deferral of justice into a transcendent future—seeing in that gesture nothing but the covert safeguarding of the structures of authority and domination already operative—but it does so without rendering any *eschaton* or telos immanent. It is precisely not premised on the fulfilment of eschatological projections, but rather on the "radical inversion of eschatology ... its uni-version" (Laruelle, 2012: 8). It is not a question of the fulfilment of a telos, whether in the guise of

spiritual pilgrimage or secular worldly progress, but the abandonment of teleological constructions altogether, and the affirmation of a univocal undercommons of radical immanence, which is fundamentally without all whys. This is the force of the Coming without promise and without deferral, a human messianity, which has been repressed no less by religion than by secular philosophy. Immanent messianism names a resistance to a fundamental displacement enacted in a concerted way by secular and religious apparatuses, all too complicit in displacing life and justice into a future, either through the *eschaton*-to-(never)-come or through a theory-of-(perpetual)-progress. In opposition to both, the messianic element of non-philosophy affirms the lives already being lived and the proclamation of justice as already occurring against the powers of World and God combined.

Notes

- For a discussion of the democracy of thought, see Laruelle, 2013. For an account of non-philosophy and an instantiation of the democracy of thought that it allows, see Smith, 2013: 59–110.
- The English translation of *Principles of Non-Philosophy* renders *la mystique* and *le mystique* as *mystique* and the *mystical* respectively, reserving *mysticism* to render *mysticisme*.
- Page numbers in the body of the essay refer to this text (Laruelle, 2007). All translations from French are my own.
- My engagement with *Mystique non-philosophique* has benefited from hearing Joshua Ramey's reflections on the text: (Ramey, 2014).
- Although the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius is itself frequently categorized as a Christian modality of Neoplatonism, the discussion above follows the exposition offered in Laruelle, 2007: 20–24.
- It should be noted that *Mystique Non-Philosophique* engages as well with hesychasm, gnostic, messianic, and heretical materials. Questions of heresy and messianism will be addressed in section II and III of this paper respectively.
- For an account of some of recent debates on this, see Largier, 1995 and Largier, 1998. For an exclusively philosophical reading of Eckhart, see, among others, Flasch, 1988 and Flasch, 1988b.
- Laruelle is just as critical of Eckhart's speculative claim of the equality of the divine eye and the human eye (which Hegel famously took up with approval) as setting up reciprocity and ecstatic exchanges between Man and God, see Laruelle, 2007: 49–55. For a different reading of the relation of Eckhart and Hegel, see Dubilet, *Forthcoming b*.
- For a fuller reading of Eckhart on this point, see Dubilet, *forthcoming c*.
- I follow Michael Sells in omitting from this passage the lexical marks inserted by editors that conservatively preserve the difference between divinity (God) and divine names ("God"), cf. Sells, 1994.
- Eckhart's subversion of mediation is most clearly seen in formulations such as: "Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden." (Eckhart, 1981, 183).
- For a classic account of the relation between Porete and Eckhart, see Hollywood, 1995.
- Rocco Gangle has interpreted Laruelle's thought as already operating according to a hermeneutics of generosity (Gangle, 2013: 172). The approach to Eckhart in *Mystique non-philosophique* signals that this is not always the case (and I would say the same holds for Laruelle's approach to many of his theoretical contemporaries), and I am suggesting that such a gesture of generosity should indeed be intensified at the heart of non-philosophy.
- This point converges with thoughts offered in Smith, 2014.
- I presented an earlier attempt at decoupling non-philosophical thought from the figure of Man or Man-in-Person in New York at the *Superpositions* Symposium. For the extended version see Dubilet, *Forthcoming a*.
- This converges with Thacker's interpretation of Eckhart, which stresses that "in Eckhart all mediation tends towards antimeditation of darkness and emptiness, giving us something like the apophatic desert." (Thacker, 2012: 92).
- This element is at the center of Laruelle, 2015.
- Laruelle deploys the term "*sous-venir*," which Jessie Hock and I have rendered in *General Theory of Victims* as "coming-under," and which carries a felicitous echo with the theorization of the undercommons.
- For an account of eschatological messianism along these lines, which traces its prevalence in the thought of Joachim of Fiore and Hegel, see Taubes, 2009.
- This is captured by Laruelle's locution "once each time" (*une fois chaque fois*). I have found it useful thinking this formulation in relation to Hannah Arendt's comment that, in the middle of revolutionary activity, councils as a form erupt "entirely spontaneously, each time as though there had never been anything of the sort before" (Arendt, 1972: 231).

21 Classically, see Voegelin, 1952. This logic is also present in a phenomenological rather than political key in Lacoste, 2004. For a powerful critique of this logic, see Meister, 2012.

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Data availability

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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