

Thinking the Political By Way of "Radical Concepts"

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1. Overture: Thinking in Accordance with the Real

There is always already a Real of the political discontent and it is one that is trans-millennial, beyond history and always already founding the very possibility of (a) History. The Unthinkable itself, the Uncanny enveloping any nameable existence in this or any other World – the Real, is the kernel of (political) life and (political) death. The Real (the "Void," the "Event," the "Tuché") not only participates in the political but also grounds the very possibility of its heterogeneous origin. And here I am referring both to the Real in the Laruelian and to the Real in the Lacanian sense of the word. Although the two respective conceptualizations are different, they share one trait and it consists in the Real's immanent tendency to elude signification, meaning, Language. In both Laruelle's and Lacan's work the Real is the kernel of that "being-out-there": it is the identity-in-the-last-instance of any and of all "existence" always already escaping naming and signification. It is the remainder that Language can never grasp and control. It is also a term congruous with Alain Badiou's notion of the event (or the Void).

Yet the Real remains an abstract instance in the work of the aforementioned authors: one fails to see how the epistemological possibility of "thinking in accordance with the Real" can be applied in the context of a political critique or for the purposes of developing a political theory. Slavoj Žižek is the only thinker today

who has openly called upon producing a political thought in accordance with the Real as the sole potential of creating a revolutionary stance and an entirely new political horizon. This paper is inspired by this call and Žižek's arguments of its liability. It is dedicated to exploring the epistemic possibilities of thinking the (political) Real by recourse to the few thinkers today who argue in favor of a "theory in accordance with the Real" and shall thereby attempt to determine the epistemological viability of the "realist thesis" advocated by Žižek. We will undertake a close reading of François Laruelle's "realist" or non-philosophical epistemology (primarily his theory of non-Marxism), but will also take a look at the epistemological possibilities for a political realist theory that can be found in the works of Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux.

In the theoretical universes of these authors, the always already conceptually (discursively or linguistically) constituted World is something radically different from the Real. One would say even opposed to it. And yet, the opposition in question does not consist in mutual exclusion, in contradiction. It is rather an opposition consisting in a resistance to the uncontrolled, chaotic and engulfing powers of the Real unless mediated, disciplined, articulated through – Language. The Real always already evades Language, Conceptualization and Meaning, i.e., what François Laruelle calls in one word – the Transcendental (1989 *passim*; 1992: 92ff). Yet again, in spite of this evasion-in-the-last instance, the Transcendental renders the Real livable by way of transposing it into a Sign and thereby re-producing it into and for the "World." Both according to Laruelle (1995) and to Lacan (1998) the function of Language is, through the figures of the "Stranger" (Laruelle 1995: 76-77) or the "Signifier," respectively, to mediate the stupefying, overwhelming presence of the Real.

The task of Language is to transpose the "in-itself" of the "out-there" into a structure of names, of assigned meanings, of signification that mediates the network/the rhizome/the lump of traces of experiences of the taking-place-of-the-Real. It is the inescapable, unstoppable effort to reflect in the literal sense of the word, the desire to mirror the taking-place of the Real (the Event) against the plane of the Transcendental (of Signification). And this process marks the moment of constitution of reflection (in the cognitive sense of the word), reflexivity which constitutes the World and the Subjectivities that inhabit it.

In the context of François Laruelle's non-philosophy, the terms "Transcendental," "Philosophy" and "the World" are synonyms (1989 *passim*). Reflection produces the Transcendental, which always already produces the figure of Philosophy. In other words, the Transcendental institutes (and perpetuates) a World that "makes sense," that is – a (or: the) Philosophy. A universe of meanings – that is

what a “World” and a “Philosophy” is (Laruelle 1989, *passim*). The latter are radically different with respect to the Real and they are so in a unilateral way: they do not establish a relation of mutual inter-conditioning. The Real is radically indifferent to the World (the Thought, the Transcendental, the Language or the Philosophy), and this indifference is what grounds unilaterality in its inevitability. Regardless of Thought’s (Philosophy’s) pretension to found the Real – the “Thing-in-itself” or the “Thing-out-there” – the Real remains stubbornly indifferent (Laruelle 1989). This is what renders Thought – any thought – inevitably unilateral. The phantasm of bilaterality is necessarily the result of Thought’s duplication (*dédoublement, redoublement*), of its refolding (*repliement*) over itself (Laruelle 1989: 62).

In his *Après la finitude* (2006), similarly to Laruelle, Quentin Meillassoux undertakes rigorous critique of philosophy’s “redoublement,” arguing for a thought which strives to think the “Absolute” (the Real) – or rather the Real’s rendition as “factuality” – without “correlatively” constituting it. The term “correlative” refers to the supposed mutually constitutive relation between the Real (or the Absolute) and the Thinking Subject, to the always already supposed inter-mirroring of the Real and the Self.

In his book, Meillassoux subjects to a radical critique what he terms the Kantian legacy in today’s philosophy, present in the “correlationist” claims according to which it is impossible to know “the-Thing-out-there,” according to which one is always already trapped in one’s own representation of it, in one’s own perception or imaginary constitution of the “World-out-there.” All theoretical positions, including the poststructuralist, according to which cognition is nothing but a process of *correlative* “re-creation” of the world out there (i.e., an imaginary creation of it appearing as the result of our encounters with the always already inconceivable Real), are termed “correlationist.” Meillassoux insists that what “correlationist” philosophies inadvertently imply is in fact their own fundamental opposite. Insisting that there is an “out-there” that we can only imagine, that we can only fantasize to know – but never actually know it – is, in fact, a claim about the existence of an Out-There that is Absolute. What this means is that the Real is ungraspable, inconceivable, inaccessible through knowledge, that it is a certain “in-itself,” indifferent to our pretension to know it, that it is – a self-sufficient transcendental. Moreover, that it is *the* Transcendental. It is *the* Real that stands for the endless myriad of encounters with different instantiations of the Real that the Thinking Subject undergoes during a process of scientific or philosophical cognition. So Meillassoux’s claim is that the thesis about the radical split between knowledge and the absolute object of

knowledge implies that the Real is an “in-itself,” an “out-there” which, in its inaccessibility, gains the status and performs as – the Absolute.

The Cartesian legacy, on the other hand, claims the function of knowledge to be the understanding – or rather, to be the reflection – of the Absolute. Nonetheless, Meillassoux shows that it is precisely this philosophical legacy, through its pretension to reflect the Absolute, implying the inter-mirroring of Reason and the Absolute, which “correlatively” constitutes the Absolute.

In order to avoid the vicious circle each of these two traditions of thought finds itself in, Meillassoux proposes a third way. Drawing on the philosophical implications of the modern scientific practice, Meillassoux concludes that there is a category of Absolute’s rendition that makes it susceptible to our aspiration to know it – the “factuality” (*factualité*). Factuality is: “[the] non-factual essence of fact as such, which is to say, its necessity, as well as that of its determinate conditions.” (Meillassoux 2008: 79)

2. Attempting to Think the Real of Political Discontent and Change

2.1. The Political as the Product of Language and the Real Intertwining

The Political is by definition a discursive, “worldly” phenomenon. Yet, we shall claim that, apart from its inherently discursive character, the Political is not only conditioned by the Real but it also takes place because of the Real and through the instance of the Real. It acts as the Real – it works according to the Rule of the Real. The Political is an automaton of signification *par excellence* (Lacan 1998: 54-55), but it also takes place as accident(ia), as an unpredictable throw of the dice – as an event, as the destabilizing void within the discursive, as a *Tuché* (Lacan 1998: 54-55).

The endless multiplicity of singular actualizations of the Real, or rather the constant taking place of the contingent Real – instead of the absolute “being there” of the transcendental category of *the* Real – is what happens to the Political and what the Political happens for. The Political is the uninterrupted effort to deal with – to grasp, and to control – the Real, that is, the sheer-taking-place or the event, by organizing it into a meaningful Universe. The Real is the Traumatic *par excellence*. Language – discourse, or the political (the human universe) – is the instance of transformation of the unmediated experience (i.e., the trauma) into the bearable – intelligible and controllable – Signification.

Consequently, the political transpositions of the Real return as real – as events, as realizations of ideas – to the World (of the Political). Events – that in themselves are the purely experiential, the sheer “taking place,” the unmediated Real, that is, the Traumatic – happen to the Political order. The latter is constantly reinvented and repeated – i.e., perpetuated – in order to counter the overwhelming, engulfing, traumatic effect of the Real. The Void within the Situation (Badiou 2005), the Kernel of the Real at the heart of the Political (Žižek 2006) is what conditions the Political. Language is re-invented in order to respond to these occurrences. The effects of the Real are nameable – discursive re-inventions take place in order to counter them (Župančič 2000: 235).

The event of another form of discursivity and normativity taking over power, another Discourse becoming dominant or normative, the event of *REAL*ization of a Discursive (political) Project – even through discursive means primarily – is an occurrence of the Real. When a new form of discursivity *takes place*, when a new discourse acquires a hegemonic status, it is an event – it is an instance of the Event. The World of the Political takes on its aspect of the *evental* or – the Real.

The taking place of political action or of clash of actions, the occurrence of implosion of dissatisfaction (triggering action) into the Real is the instance of the purely experiential, the instance that is non-linguistic in-the-last-instance – it is the sheer event at the heart of the Situation (Badiou 2005: 173 ff). The latter is linguistically constituted and opposed to the purely evental which, in its own turn, originates from the “Void” itself (Badiou 2005: 173), from that which is always already beyond the discursive, radically and irreconcilably different from it, says Alain Badiou (Badiou 2005: 174-175; 2001: 129).

Yet, these non-discursive instances are conditioned by discourse, by historicity, by a fidelity to a certain (political) Truth which implodes into/as the Real (as an Event). In other words, the (political) revolution, which is the incursion of *Tuché par excellence*, happens as the result of a certain fidelity to a political truth, to a certain discursive. Also, it is the Real (of violence), it is the Trauma which calls upon action, upon *real*-ization of an opposing (political) Truth. As one takes part in such an event, one finds oneself utterly submerged into it, drunken by the sensations produced by the rising tension of the Event taking place – one becomes an aroused body, and one’s thought becomes a bodily sensation. The body becomes the individual site of the political *event* taking place. The subject of political action realizing itself as an unadulterated event – founded by the void of the evental, while the discursive merely mediates it – is a body in the Spinozian sense. It is a direct continuation of the cognitive, i.e., of the discursive or of the “ethical,” and vice versa

(Spinoza // 13p, 13n). It is around (the contingency) of the (or: an) Event in the midst of a (political) situation that one generates one's own – or “the new” – political Truth, explicates Alain Badiou (2005: 173ff). The event is always already pre-discursive: as soon as it finds its transposition into Language, the event ceases to be (what it is in the last instance, a “taking place” *par excellence*). And it is a single body that can undergo these transformations, a single human subject of a body and mind.

The Event is a Void in the midst of a Situation that is linguistically intelligible and socially regulated (Hallward 2003: 120). It is a Void as far as Language is concerned. It is that Kernel of the Pre-Linguistic *always already* escaping Symbolization, the Real that *always already* underlies and yet escapes Signification. And it is precisely around that unique, unutterable experience of pure Event, around that Experiential-in-the-last-instance that a new (political) Truth is generated and established fidelity to, around which Language is re-invented. The new political Truth, reinvention of political discursive possibilities is brought about by a process, a course of action, a cause that is beyond (*au-delà*) the Linguistic. However, it does take place within a Setting – or, according to Alain Badiou's terminology, a *Situation* – which is discursive. Thus, in its identity-in-the-last-instance, the Event which is a non-linguistic category *par excellence* is nonetheless discursively induced.

The challenge I set here for myself is to establish a certain insight into – to arrive to a certain vision and knowledge of – the possibilities of interrogating the modes of participation of the Real (the “Event,” the “Void,” the “Tuché” or the “Trauma”) in the production of a (new) Political Truth. (The latter is – we shall argue – a product of the interplay between the Discursive and the Real. In this endeavor I will adopt the epistemic posture of thought proposed by François Laruelle's non-philosophy consisting in theorizing in correlation with the Real that is unilateral, non-thetic and does not attempt to reflect or mirror the Real (1989: 50). It merely correlates with it by way of acknowledging it to be the decisive instance of legitimization of the produced truth. The Real in non-philosophy is synonymous with “immanent,” “radical” and “identity in the last instance.” The political thought (theory and activism) it advocates is one produced in “the immanent way” (*de la manière immanente*), a political thinking founded upon radical concepts (Laruelle 2000, 21, 61 et al.). Radical concepts are those that establish as direct as possible a link with the identity-in-the-last-instance of the explored social-political phenomena, with their “instance of immanence.” In other words, it is the conceptual, the transcendental that corresponds with the Real.

2.2. The Syntax of the Real

The correspondence of the Transcendental with the Real is confirmed by *coincidence*: a concept is affirmed as one correlating with an instance of immanence by virtue of experience – by the instance of the Lived which, in the form of a symptom, confirms that a concept correlates with it (Laruelle 1989: 57). Theory as “thought (of) force” (Laruelle 2000, 48 et al.) should spring out of its determination in the last instance (*la détermination-en-dernière-instance*, or DDI), that is, out of a radical concept correlating with the instance of immanence or the Real.

The Real imposes its own syntax – it cannot and does not establish perfect correspondence with a doctrine (a “philosophy”), it cannot be reflected by or reflect an entire theoretical universe. The Real, inasmuch as it is “the Lived,” produces a “syntax” consisted of the symptomatology it displays in its uniqueness; the “behavior” of the Real can be “cloned,” says Laruelle, into and from a concept. The Concept (the “Transcendental”) and the Real belong to two entirely different orders, the first to that of Transcendence and the latter to that of Immanence. The two can never be reduced to one another – the Transcendental can attempt to “describe” (to “clone”) the Real by virtue of acknowledging that it can never have the “same structure” (Laruelle 1989: 50).

In other words, having affirmed that the Real possesses a different status (that of immanence) in relation to Thought (which is always already the transcendental), one strives to think the Real by means of transcendence. The Thought can correlate (unilaterally) with the Real, following the “syntax” it dictates, it can attempt to describe this syntax without the pretension to reflect it (Laruelle 2000: 46-47; 1989: 50). In the following quotation from *Introduction au non-marxisme* (2000) the operation of establishing a thought in an “immanent way” (de la manière immanante) is presented:

The ‘real’ solution to the problem of the DDI as the object and cause of its own theory should avoid Hegelian idealism better than it has been done by materialism. Neither a cause in exteriority nor a dialectical identity of contraries, the Real is the cause by virtue of immanence and determines cognition of its own syntax, of its own causality, through a process that one would call ‘cloning.’ [...] Suppose there is an object X to be cognized. Provided it is affected by immanence or susceptible to DDI, that is seen-in-One, it also can clone “itself” from the material that is its transcendence. (Laruelle 2000: 47)

The Real is an effect of trauma, of a violent thrust into the automatism of the chain of signification. Put in Lacanian vein, it is the *Tuché* (the accident, the throw of the dice) which happens to the Automaton. Or in Lacan's own words:

We can succeed in unravelling this ambiguity of the reality involved in the transference only on the basis of the function of the real in repetition. What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs – the expression tells us quite a lot about its relation to the *tuché* – *as if by chance* ... Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it – in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? (1998: 54-55)

The Real is what happens, and what takes place as sheer happening, sheer experience – an *event*, unmediated by Language. That is why it is traumatic – it is the uncontrollable, meaningless (not yet mediated as a meaning), brutal incursion of the overwhelming Real into what “makes sense,” into the meaningful world made up of discursivity, i.e., into the realm of signification or Language, into the “automaton” that the signifying chain is.

Accordingly, the Real is an effect – it is the Lived (Laruelle) or the *traumatic* (Lacan), or “the-taking-place-of,” i.e. and Event (Badiou). Such an effect can be produced by Discourse as well (and not exclusively by instances that are pre-discursive in their identity in the last instance, such as sheer violence, or the mute force of the “material”). Discourse that instills normality, discourse that brings about revolution, discourse that exerts power is *lived* as trauma. Discursive power is assumed through an act of violence, or rather – the act of discourse instituting itself as power is in itself a traumatic, i.e., violent or forceful event (regardless of the fact that the taking over of power may be exerted via discourse exclusively). The taking place of discourse produces the effect of the Real.

3. Naming the Real as the Condition of Fundamental Political Change

There is an instance where the Discursive and the Real are indistinguishable from one another, constituting a heterogeneous kernel of political force and action. I am subscribing to the claims Žižek makes in *Interrogating the Real* (2006) as well as in his contributions to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000) that only a thought in correspondence with the Real can be the source of radical political critique and change.

Antagonism is a nameable effect of the Real – an effect that bears a “political name” (that of antagonism) – and it is what provokes political movement, processes (of change) in the symbolic field. Žižek applauds Laclau and Mouffe for their advancement of the thesis about antagonism as the kernel of the political (2006: 249-250). However, he criticizes them for not having “radicalized” the concept sufficiently, for having omitted to notice that antagonism is an instance of the Real. His main remark is that they have failed to arrive at a concept of a subject as one constituted by antagonism in the (epistemologically) radical sense of the word, i.e., for “conceiving the subject in a way that characterizes ‘post-structuralism,’ from the perspective of assuming different ‘subject-positions’” (2006: 250) Instead of the latter, Žižek proposes the following epistemic possibility:

We must then distinguish the experience of antagonism in its radical form, as a limit of the social, as the impossibility around which the social field is structured, from antagonism as the relation between antagonistic subject-positions: In Lacanian terms, we must distinguish antagonism as *Real* from the social *reality* of the antagonistic fight. And the Lacanian notion of the subject aims precisely at the experience of ‘pure’ antagonism as self hindering, self-blockage, this internal limit preventing the symbolic field from realizing its full identity: the stake of the entire process of subjectivization, of assuming different subject-positions, is ultimately to enable us to avoid the traumatic experience. (Žižek 2006: 253-254)

Antagonism as Real or, rather, the Real as antagonism is what conditions the Subject, what grounds its very possibility. The Subject is born out of the very necessity to incessantly strive to avoid the traumatic experience – the immediacy of the Real. Pure antagonism (as the internal or external limit) is an instance of the Real which has a political function and a political name. It is the origin of the “entire process of subjectivization, of assuming different subject-positions.” It is the origin of the political. And in the confrontation between different discursive stances, in the antagonistic interaction between political discourses, it receives different empty shapes that bare a name or names and give birth to different usages of the Language, to different discourses.

In other words, the Real is not merely an abstraction – an instance beyond Language, and, therefore, irrelevant for theory or for the Discourse in general. According to Žižek, the Real is not the pure Negativity (of or with respect to Language). It is rather an effect that is nameable, and one conditioning the reproduction of the Symbolic (such as, e.g., the effect or the “lived” of antagonism).

In his exchange with Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau published under the title of *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000), Žižek insists that fundamental

political change – installing of a new “hegemony” – can take place only if political language is re-invented around a name that corresponds most immediately with the node of traumatic experiences, i.e. the Real. The symbolic order is structured – viz. the hegemonic political discourse – around a certain Real that it mediates and whose traumatic effect it incessantly strives to moderate. Radical change can take place, entirely new hegemony can occur, only if – let us resort to Laruelian terminology for a moment – a new “radical concept” is invented in an “immanent way,” “cloned” from the experience of the real with the help of the “transcendental material” at hand.

Or, in Žižek’s words:

[...] the determination of the Real as that which resists symbolization is itself a symbolic determination, that is, the very gesture of excluding something from the Symbolic, of positing it as beyond the prohibitive Limit (as the Sacred, Untouchable), is a symbolic gesture (a gesture of symbolic exclusion) *par excellence* ... In contrast to this, however, one should insist on how the Lacanian Real is strictly *internal* to the Symbolic: it is nothing but its inherent limitation [...] (2000: 120)

The fact that the Real is an “inherent limitation” to the Symbolic does not mean that the Real is “beyond symbolization,” that it is some absurd, mute instance that disables speech, language or symbolization. On the contrary, it is the reason for symbolization to occur – it conditions and enables it.

Precisely because of this internality of the Real to the Symbolic, it *is* possible to touch the Real through the Symbolic – that is the whole point of Lacan’s notion of psychoanalytic treatment; this is what the Lacanian notion of psychoanalytic *act* is about – the act as a gesture which, by definition, touches the dimension of some impossible Real (2000: 121)

Similarly to these claims made by Žižek, in his reinvention of Marxism termed “non-Marxism,” Laruelle invokes the necessity of radical concepts in order to arrive to “thought (of) force” –theory that works as “act,” and from which political action issues in a way which is immanent, i.e., in correspondence with the Lived (*le vécu*) that the Real is. Radical concepts depart from the determination-in-the-last-instance (DDI), which is the minimum transcendental established in accordance with the Real. Considering that, also according to non-philosophy and non-Marxism, the Real underlying a “political universe” (=hegemony, the Symbolic) is a symptom (Laruelle 2000: 7), DDI is checked against the plane of the Lived (or in psychoanalytic terms, the experience of trauma). In other words, the accuracy and operativeness DDI should be checked by its functionality in the lived social reality, instead by that within a doctrine or a philosophy.

When the DDI is the cause or the immanent object of its own theory, one would say that this theory *is* the *force (of) thought*, the theory of the force (of) thought is itself in-the-last instance [...] Object to knowing, while remaining the known object, should also be capable of determining its cognition [...] Let us suppose that the 'labor force' is finally capable of its own 'proletarian' theory, without the Hegelian idealism, or has become the restricted model of the universal instance of the force (of) thought. (Laruelle 2000: 48)

Instances of the Real are always already "lived" (*vécu*) from within a "World" (in Laruellian sense of the word similar in meaning to the Symbolic Order or "hegemonic discourse") and, therefore, they receive names, they produce "radical concepts" – *thought (of) force* issues from radical concepts founded in their DDI. Similarly, Žižek argues that one should tackle the kernel of the Real – or in Laruellian terms, the "determination in the last instance" – behind the political hegemony of today, and envisage a "World" based upon a different "radical concept" issuing from a radically different "lived" (i.e., instance of the Real).

And my point is that in so far as we conceive of the politico-ideological resignification in the terms of the struggle for hegemony, today's Real which sets a limit to resignification is Capital: the smooth functioning of Capital is that which remains the same, that which 'always returns to its place,' in the unconstrained struggle for hegemony. (Žižek 2000: 223)

Thought (of) force is what enables fundamental political change, viz., demise or abandonment of the old and birth of a new hegemony. Both Laruelle and Žižek (and Badiou as well), in their own, different vocabularies, claim that such change is possible only by virtue of thought in "unilateral correlation" (Laruelle) with the Real. The Real is not an abstract, external to the "World" (Laruelle) or to the Symbolic order (Lacan) Transcendental. It is not a static *per se*. Rather it is the Lived, the experience *par excellence*, it is a concrete instance of trauma that receives a name, that it enveloped by a "meaning" (i.e., that is subject to signification) from within the "World" and the Symbolic order.

Žižek claims that *antagonism* is the Real of the Political *par excellence* (and that which defines in the last instance); Capital is the name of the Real underlying and structurally conditioning all political discourses of today (even those of performativity and radical democracy). Laruelle insists that the Real of Marxism is determined in the last instance by virtue of the radical concepts of "labor force" and/or "proletariat." Both claim that the accuracy of the Real's determination in the

last instance is authorized by the instance of the Lived (Laruelle) or the *acted* (Žižek/Lacan), viz. through political action (Laruelle 2000: 91-92) never opposed to theory, or by virtue of an empirical proof provided by the methodology of psychoanalytic therapy (Žižek), respectively.

In order to arrive at a political theory that enables re-invention of hegemony, birth of a new hegemonic concept and utopia, one is bound to step out of the vicious circle of “auto-fetishization” of philosophy (Laruelle); one is called upon establishing a posture of thought in accordance with the Real which manifests itself as symptom, and is verified through the sheer experience (of trauma). One is called upon establishing a map of symptoms displayed by the body(/ies) of Multitude(s) in its (their) reaction to the power exercised by way of the ruling discourses of our times, and produce *thought (of) force* responding to the cry of this body (or, these bodies).

The proximity to the “Lived” renders radical concepts descriptive and devoid of theoretical rigor. Nonetheless this does not mean that a political theory developed departing from a radical concept cannot be rigorous. On the contrary, as the model of science and scientific production of theory has proven, departing from descriptive presuppositions derived from empiric examination ensures greater rigor of interrogation than the solid transcendental concept backed up by the authority of a doctrinal system.

Exactitude is the characteristic of a theory. It is a quality pertaining to Language or to the Transcendental, and indeed the Real cannot be “exact.” Yet, it is a theory’s correspondence with the symptoms of the Real that proves it “true” or “relevant.” For a political theory “to work” – to make sense and to be able to introduce change – its correspondence with the Lived needs to be proven.

4. Monstrously Hybrid Concepts

Thought does not and cannot reflect the Real, but it can *describe* it, says Laruelle (1989: 50; 2000: 47). The work of description is done by means of transcendental material by means of which the Real is “cloned.” The object of cognition is one “affected by immanence,” claims Laruelle. Immanence is susceptible to determination-in-the-last-instance. The latter is a transcendental minimum, language bordering with the Lived (Real). Departing from the determination-in-the-last-instance (describing the “Lived” that the Real/the immanence is), one “clones” the experience of the Real behind the object of cognition by means of transcendental material (2000: 47)

Having made this claim, one faces the quandary of how the direct link between the Real and the Language/Thought is established, and of how fidelity of the latter to the former is maintained. Or, put in Laruellian parlance, how does one know that the object of cognition (the “object” which is a representation, a mental, cognitive or “transcendental category”) is “affected by immanence”? How does one know one is not fully entangled in the web of the “World,” how does one know that the object of cognition in question is not affected exclusively by the Transcendental rather than by Immanence?

4.1. François Laruelle: Naming the Real is Always Done By Way of Radical Concepts

The Laruellian Real builds on the Lacanian while non-philosophically reversing its meaning. The aim of this reversal is overcoming the split at the heart of the Real, overcoming Dualism (between Thought and the Real) sustained by Philosophy (any philosophy of any epoch, according to Laruelle) in which Lacanian psychoanalysis participates. Instead of declaring the Real an Impossibility or Unthinkability, non-philosophy claims one can and should think in accordance with the Real while affirming its radical difference and the impossibility of Thought to grasp and explain the Real in its totality. The Real itself does not have an identity-in-the-last-instance. It does not have a *diferentia specifica* determining and fixing its “meaning”-in-the-last-instance. The Real is a symptom or an instance or a modality of immanence rather than an identity. Nonetheless the identities theory explores do have a reality – they are in the last instance determined by the order of the Real (Laruelle 1992: 91).

Laruelle proposes an epistemological stance according to the scientific model: science thinks, he explains, according to the “real order” (*l'ordre réel*), moving *from* the Real *toward* the Phenomena, unlike the Philosophy which does precisely the opposite (Laruelle 1992: 91). “Phenomena” are of transcendental material – they are full-fledged representations – and so are the “objective facts” (they are mental, cognitive products). Taking the so called “objective facts” as points of departure rather than “what takes place” in the register of the Real is what philosophy usually does narcissistically dealing with itself instead of the world *out there*, says Laruelle.

Laruelle maintains that, according to what he claims to be the epistemic model of science, the “real object” of study is a quadruple postulation a priori consisting of reality, exteriority, stability and unity (Laruelle 1992: 92). (Unity is meant in the sense of oneness or singularity. In contrast, the unity which is the result of dialectics or of any other form of unification or uniting is based on dualism/duality and spilt and the latter is what the entire project of non-philosophy argues against, aiming

at its overcoming.) The object of cognition is one necessarily belonging to the register of the transcendental, and science inevitably thinks its object via the transcendental while “succumbing to the real” as the authority in the last instance (1992: 93).

Theory that assumes the non-philosophical posture of thought (homogeneous to that of science, according to Laruelle) does not “objectify the real” (1992: 91). It is “non-thetic”: it issues from “an experience of reality” and consists in a “rigorous description of the latter” (1992: 94) always already by means of the transcendental material. It corresponds with a realism which is “local,” “finite” and “in-the last instance,” deprived of metaphysical certitude and it rectifies its representations on the basis of its submission to the Real rather than to (a) philosophy (1992: 98). Non-philosophy or a theory in terms of the Real manifests itself as more primitive and more elementary than the philosophy (1992: 101). Just like the science it thinks the Real “at once” (*en-une-fois*), without splitting it and without splitting itself: that is why it thinks the multiplicity “at-once-each-time” (*chaque-fois-une-fois*), as a “veritable multiplicity in undivided terms or as chaos” (1992: 117).

When it is the “World” (in the Laruellean sense of the word), i.e., the political or social reality, which is explored, when one theorizes the reality of human experience, in order to establish an object of cognition which succumbs to the Real as its ultimate authority one must resort to “radical concepts,” claims Laruelle (2000). They rely on a determination in the last instance. The latter is necessarily “affected by immanence” (2000: 47). Being affected by immanence is checked by the concept’s correspondence with an experience of reality – the experience or the “Lived” is the authority that gives legitimacy to the concept.

The radical concept that is a transcendental minimum describes the Lived, and it is “more primitive” than a philosophical definition. Description is the work/the practice of mediation (via language) of the experience, the experienced and the experiment. It does not pretend to define, to convey or give (ascribe, assign = “give”) an essence, to establish possession of the Real itself. It is a rudimentary (“primitive”) practice of mimesis – by means of Language – aiming at conveyance to the Other/mediation of what takes place in the order of the Real. Mimesis inevitably implies/speaks of the radical difference – unbridgeable fissure – between the Real and Language. Consequently, sheer descriptiveness guarantees and irrevocably affirms the insurmountable-in-the-last-instance abyss between the Real and Thought.

Non-philosophical posture of thought does not confuse its ambition to explain a certain reality with the metaphysical desire to close this ontological gap (between Real and Thought). It produces knowledge of that certain “local” and “finite” reality without feeling an obligation to make sure this knowledge corresponds with a certain

ontological decision vis-à-vis a metaphysical anxiety. The particular truth of a particular reality does not need to conform with any ontological outlook. It is irrelevant if it contains contradicting ontological implications. What is relevant is whether the produced knowledge is confirmed by the experience of reality, or by the “Lived.”

I will argue that assuming a posture of thought in accordance with the Real – informed by Laruelle’s non-philosophy – does not imply passing a decision about the irrelevance of ontology all together. Laruelle, for that matter, argues against any ontology simply because it is always already derived from the notion of the Being which he considers to be the source of philosophy’s intrinsic corruption with dualism and auto-fetishism (1989: 17). My own position on the matter is somewhat different: I would claim that “being” does not have to be seen as the spectral duplication of the Real; thinking the “being,” creating a theory of the “taking place,” of how certain categories of “being” (of taking place and of ceasing to be there) relate to each other and of how they establish a “universe” is not irrelevant. On the contrary, it is a pertinent theoretical endeavor that should be undertaken in radical terms, by recourse to a “thought in accordance with the Real.”

4.2. Some of the Many Names of the Real

Returning to the question of a political theory in terms of the Real, based on a methodology of radical concepts (conditioned by the determination in the last instance), I will reaffirm the position that it is the instance of the *Lived* that is the ultimate authority legitimizing the produced knowledge. Proximity to the Real of the (radical) concepts is ensured by their descriptiveness. Radical concepts describe the Real without ever attaining it. They describe the Lived (that the Real is). The Lived is the Experience. The pure Lived is anterior to Language: it is the mute experience before it takes recourse to transposing itself onto the Transcendental Plane, prior to the effort of making sense. Description of a sheer taking place is always a very rudimentary linguistic act. Descriptiveness (at least in the context of a theoretical endeavor) is about resorting to use of an impoverished (transcendentally minimal) language. Hence, it is “primitive.”

It also borders with that which is radically different, with the radical exteriority, with the “out-there” – with the Real. Julia Kristeva claims this is something that produces horror, disgust or terror (1982). Adopting this claim, we will call this instance of bordering a “*thērion*,” a monstrosity. Besides being the characteristic of scientific discourse, description of experience (rather than experiment) or the impoverished account of the Lived (which by definition is rich) can also be defining of

the Poetic. In Vico's vein, we could claim another instance of monstrosity, the one originating from the bordering between the Scientific and the Poetic. Radical concepts produce "monstrous" discourses: "monstrosity" of political thought and action is that which can radically undermine the existing discursive possibilities and bring forth a new political utopia.

Such "monstrous concept" is the "Poor" we find in Negri, Hardt (2001) and Rancière (2004). It provokes uneasiness by its directness (i.e., by its radicality), it embarrasses by its shamelessness echoing of poetic expression, yet it is very exact. It is a term susceptible to determination-in-the-last-instance and to exact scientific investigation (far more so than a term such as "class"). It provokes a sense of convocation (and recognition via the *Lived*) rather than interpellation. Similar things can be said about the Schmittian terminological dyad of "friend" and "enemy." And such is the name of "Capital" which, according to Žižek, is the determination in the last instance of the political hegemony of today, i.e., liberal democracy.

The notion of "Capital" possesses the status of the Real in all of the variations of the hegemonic discourse, including the most subversive ones, i.e., the ones aiming at radical critique of hegemony, claims Žižek. He finds that "capitalism" is one of the indispensable elements, a condition, founding presupposition of Laclau's and Mouffe's project of "radical democracy" as well as of Butler's feminism (Žižek 2000; 2006). In liberal-democratic discourses, "Capital" is a term that is rarely used. It is always already presupposed but almost never directly referred to; as if it needed constant re-signification, in order for it to "mean something"; as if the term "Capital" meant nothing unless it was developed in a more complex concept such as "free market economy"; as if the concept of "Capital" were the Real itself facing us in its absurdity.

"Capital" is a radical concept indeed: it borders with the Real, it is a transcendental minimum determining in the last instance a constitutive aspect of the global hegemony of today. Finally, it is "primitive," it is overly descriptive and confirmed by and derived from the *Lived*. Yet it is an indispensable concept of the economical sciences. Radical critique departs from and is constantly realized by means of radical concepts.

"Gender" is another radical concept enabling radical critique, and it is the source of *thought-(of)-force* – put in Laruellian parlance – in Judith Butler's writings. Butler's theory operates with the concept of "gender," one dangerously close to the Real rather than with that of feminism which is an entire political-ideological project. Again it is a transcendently minimal concept which must be affirmed and confirmed by the *Lived*. Namely, any political or theoretical project, discourse generated around

“gender” must gain legitimacy from the instance of the *Lived*. Concrete, singular realities (that can be voiced collectively) need to confirm the validity of a gender equity related political project in order for it to come into reality. Laruelle gives an account of his dream of a (non-)Marxist project that would receive its legitimacy directly from the proletariat which should be able to recognize it as its “thought-(of)-force.” It seems that in the gender equity related movement(s) this is something that normally takes place.

In the polemical exchange with Žižek that tackles, among other issues, the question of universality versus particularity, Butler (2000) demonstrates that this dichotomy is false and that it is precisely the presupposition about the grounding status of a universality which gives rise to a political reasoning in terms of “particularities.” In other words, it is precisely the “universals” which produce “particularities,” whereby the former is always already a transcendental ideal that the latter fail to “fill in” without a remainder (Butler 2000: 144). Žižek’s insisting that the universals are founding of the Symbolic order and that they are in this respect purely formal and never fully embodied by “particular” individuals is a transcendentalist claim according to Butler, which she opposes by evoking Hegel:

Of course, the reply from even my most progressive Lacanian friends is that I have no need to worry about this unnamable sexual difference that we nevertheless name, since it has no content but is purely formal, forever empty. But here I would refer back to the point made so trenchantly by Hegel against Kantian formalism: the empty and formal structure is established precisely through the not fully successful sublimation of content as form. (Butler 2000: 144)

Butler explains that the universal of “sexual difference has a transcendental status even when sexed bodies emerge that do not fit squarely within ideal gender dimorphism.” Concurring with Butler, I would claim that it is her concept of “gender norms” that works as a radical term since it enables bypassing transcendentalism of the notion of “sexual difference” and it is one that incessantly petitions confirmation from the “Lived,” the experienced by the sexed bodies. Knowledge or theory of gender gains legitimacy and authority only from the particular realities of “sexed bodies.” Conversely:

It would not matter whether sexual difference is instantiated in living, biological bodies, for the ineffability and non-symbolizability of this most hollowed of differences would depend on no instantiation to be true. (*Ibid.*)

Butler's *Psychic Life of Power* (1997) disassembles bodies of knowledge, i.e., corpses of different doctrines, turning them into a *chôra* of transcendental material she operates with irreverently with respect to the schools of thought they may represent (or rather, are represented by). In this study, the concept of gender (norm) works as a radical term since it succumbs to the authority of the experienced (by a sexed body) rather than to the ideal of coherence of a philosophical system (or "World", i.e., a discursive universe).

5. Instead of a Conclusion: The Question of a "Realist" Utopia

If we retain fidelity to the epistemic choice of thinking in terms of radical concepts we cannot propose an ideology or utopian universe based on a single ("master") radical term that would be unifying of everything else that inhabits (all other terms and all instances of experience) that universe. Unification under a master signifier is precisely the opposite of a political theory (and activism) based on radical concepts. Radical concepts enable radical critique irreverent of the master-terms (such as capital today) of hegemonic discourses, and they can inadvertently – or advertently – depose them. On the basis of an experienced affinity, alliances of political critique based on radical concepts can be established. However it is arguable whether an alliance of affinities based on radical concepts exclusively can establish a discursive universe called utopia.

Utopia is founded upon a teleological and eschatological desire. It is a dynamic transcendental system driven by an eschato-teleological aspiration. I maintain that a utopian horizon of thought is indispensable for creating and carrying out of a political project. The two necessities, i.e., that of a utopia and the one consisting in the choice to think in radical political terms, do not have to exclude one another. Eschatology, I would claim, does not have to be subsumed under a single master signifier and it can be the product of a number of concepts that establish affinity and that are continually confirmed by experience or by the "Lived."

In *La lutte et l'utopie à la fin des temps philosophiques* (2004) Laruelle argues for a utopia that is transcendently impoverished, ideologically minimal and radical in the sense of being "affected by immanence." In fact, his utopian project is founded upon the single, minimal goal of creating a "World," a political universe that would be "affected (as much as possible) by immanence." It is a goal endowed with universality which is so transcendently and ideologically impoverished that one cannot expect it to be universalizing or subsuming of other concepts. It cannot be a universal establishing dominance over particulars; it cannot be a culturally

hegemonic term since it is too transcendently minimal to contain hierarchy of concepts and to be able to propagate hierarchies that could be considered cultural. Any discursive universe, any “World” (vis-à-vis the Real) is suspended in this utopian dream, except the ascetic yearning for a life in a world “affected by immanence.”

It seems arguable whether such a stance can be called political or utopian rather than merely methodological one. Utopia or any other political project is all about establishing a “World” of human relationships, of signifiers and meanings – it is a linguistic or “transcendental” phenomenon *par excellence*. And it is the “Wold” that we inevitably live in – a pure dwelling in the purely Real is impossible. Without its domestication brought about by a “World” (a discursive universe), the Real is uninhabitable.

A utopia which is produced by a radical (non-philosophical) political thought is also transcendently rich: it is a phantasmatic plenitude, which is indispensable for the production of radical concepts. The latter are indeed determination in the last instance established in accordance with the Real – radical concepts are “cloned” from the Real, yet they remain products of the transcendental. Thought is always already transcendental regardless of the fact that it succumbs to the Real as the (radically, irrevocably heterogeneous) authority in the last instance. Utopia that is transcendently rich yet legitimized in the last instance by the Real is what the thinking in terms of radical concepts can argue for.

The utopian dream which seeks its determination/s in the last instance to be transcendently impoverished radical concept/s always already confirmed by the Real is a transcendently rich universe, yet submitting to the authority of the Lived. The fantasmatically rich utopian world is born out of radical concepts. One distinguishes radical concepts from the ones that are transcendently multilayered concepts by way of being able to make a determination-with-the-last-instance (as explained above). In other words, the Laruellian Real can be operative in the theorizing of the political only if coupled by the Žižian model of interrogating the effect of the Real as one always already and unavoidably transposed into the realm of the fantasmatic.

It is the desire circulating through the vessels of the fantasmatic which makes a utopia politically functional, i.e., which makes of a utopia an object of desire that constantly eludes but is unavoidably pursued. One cannot either attain or possess the object-in-the-Real; nonetheless, the only way of extracting radical political pleasure is when the pursuit of desire, the repetitive desiring act follows and/or is followed by a symptom of the Real. It entails, by definition, a certain traumatic aspect but it is the obsession with that traumatic which gives birth to any or all fantasmatic producing

and sustaining the flow of the Real in its most brutal aspect, in its direct form of the “Lived” – the Desire itself.

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