

The City of Nowhere: Laruelle and Urban Studies

Tony Carusi and Stephen Zepke

Abstract: What happens to urban studies when it is confronted with the radical, yet non-relational immanence of François Laruelle's non-philosophy? This is not a simple question of illuminating the *and* of our title, because for Laruelle this *and* is a *non-*, forcing us to ask how we engage with the relations constituting both the urban and its various forms of study through an approach that denies and rejects the constitutive possibility of relation itself. This question gives us a sense of the radicality of Laruelle's thought, but also of the wreckage left in non-philosophy's wake. Non-urban studies, if there should be such a thing, does not have, or emerge from, a *relation* to urban studies, but from its denial and destruction. This is a process that does not produce romantic objects of aesthetic appreciation, as in Jacques Derrida's love of ruins, but is instead a violent ruination that seeks a *tabula rasa*, a scorched-earth-policy applied to the very foundations of philosophy. This will be the story told here, one that begins with non-philosophy's unusual version of radical immanence.

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What happens to urban studies when it is confronted with the radical, yet non-relational immanence of François Laruelle’s non-philosophy? This is not a simple question of illuminating the *and* of our title, because for Laruelle this *and* is a *non-*, forcing us to ask how we engage with the relations constituting both the urban and its various forms of study through an approach that denies and rejects the constitutive possibility of relation itself. This question gives us a sense of the radicality of Laruelle’s thought, but also of the wreckage left in non-philosophy’s wake. Non-urban studies, if there should be such a thing, does not have, or emerge from, a *relation* to urban studies, but from its denial and destruction. This is a process that does not produce romantic objects of aesthetic appreciation, as in Jacques Derrida’s love of ruins, but is instead a violent ruination that seeks a *tabula rasa*, a scorched-earth-policy applied to the very foundations of philosophy. This will be the story told here, one that begins with non-philosophy’s unusual version of radical immanence.

Laruelle offers a unique approach to immanence, detaching it from its previous philosophical examples, which, he argues, are unable to articulate the reality of the One, and in fact deny it. The problem is that the correlation of thought and being that for Laruelle invariably defines philosophy, “is not an *addition* of reality, but a *subtraction*.”¹ This correlation or auto-positioning of thought and being places Western philosophy in a prison of its own making, one that until now it has been unable to escape. Yet, as Laruelle points out, prison walls have always been “the great support for political writing,”² and non-philosophy over-writes the structural limits of human thought and feeling to produce an “unreflected experience”³ of the Real/One, an experience without relation that avoids its incarceration within philosophy, and frees the force-of-thought to exist as undivided but nevertheless individual essence. Laruelle’s sense of righteous outrage over philosophy’s “savage” and “murderous will”⁴ is therefore appeased, it seems, by his weaponization of the *non-* as the “extinction point . . . of philosophy as ontology or World-thought.”⁵ This is the “political scope” of non-philosophy’s “liberating

¹ François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 36.

² François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics / Photo-Fiction, une esthétique non-standard*, trans. Drew S. Burk, bilingual edition (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 125.

³ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 42.

⁴ François Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*, trans. Alyosha Edlebi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 5.

⁵ François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography / Le concept de non-photographie*, trans. Robin Mackay, bilingual edition (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2011), 90.

power.”⁶ It frees us from philosophy’s “enslavement of individuals to the world or to the philosophy that interpellates or represents them.”⁷ This is necessary, Laruelle claims, because philosophy “has always been conservative and authoritarian,”⁸ insofar as “new philosophical decisions remain enclosed within themselves, wrapped and encysted around the fundamental postulate that defines Greco-occidental thought.”⁹ This fundamental postulate is the correlation of thought and being, and the implications of Laruelle’s rejection of it for urban studies will be our concern for the rest of this essay.

Outside of philosophy’s hall of mirrors Laruelle’s task is “to think the unthinkable as unthinkable.”¹⁰ Laruelle’s unthinkable is the One, an “immanence foreclosed”¹¹ that requires non-philosophy—a mode of thought “degreased of philosophical domination”¹²—to think and embody it, theory and practice amounting here to the same thing. This is an act of rejection rather than revolution, “less a matter of questioning, fracturing, or displacing

objectivating or metaphysical representation, than of *resolutely thinking outside of it*.”¹³ Non-philosophy therefore starts prior to the philosophical correlation, from a new axiomatic genesis of the world announcing “the City of Nowhere.”¹⁴ Laruelle writes, “the axiom is a trace of language that also seems to come out of the void because as a burst, it has already reflected itself upon the cosmic wall and travelled this space that it fills as empty, a trace that it does not cease to return to and create as appearance of the void.”¹⁵ This void is “philosophically uncreated or non-constituted,” an “invisible, intangible, unobjectivable” reality, but One that is “perfectly thinkable.”¹⁶ This void of the City of Nowhere is the urban non-place of non-philosophy, unthinkable and unexperienceable according to any of philosophy’s assumptions. So how can we think it?

To think the One requires a “finite individual” without any reciprocal or representational relation to the One, because their immanence cannot involve any form of transcendence. This “ordinary human” is therefore “distinct from

⁶ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 35.

⁷ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 22.

⁸ Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*, xvii.

⁹ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 102.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹ François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 222.

¹² Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 26.

¹³ François Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*, trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet (Malden: Polity, 2018), 16.

¹⁴ François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 166.

¹⁵ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 40.

¹⁶ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 18.

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objectivated or empirical realities,”¹⁷ a thought/experience¹⁸ of the One-in-One. Such a thought begins from an axiom positing the One/Real as a “given-without-giveness” that is also a “phenomenon-in-itself,” but a phenomenon detached from its perception and therefore a “strictly immanent phenomenal experience *before* (and outside of) all unitary-philosophical prejudice.”¹⁹ Laruelle posits the axiom as “merely the truth, the real possibility of demonstrated truth; it is the scientific side of utterances.”²⁰ The axiomatic One is always and already radical immanence, not in and as its objects, but in an identity that contains them. This identity therefore has two aspects, immanence foreclosed and its thought by non-philosophy, what Laruelle calls a “uni-lateral duality,”²¹ quite appropriately for our purposes here, a “uni-city”²² where “the first determines the second in-the-last-instance.” This last instance is therefore, Laruelle explains, “that which is real in itself, that is to say that which has no need of existence [i.e., being and its correlate

thought] in order to be real.”²³ When something is determined-in-the-last-instance it is experienced in its unilateral duality, or uni-city, an experience that is “defined as strictly transcendental and no longer as *simultaneously* empirical.”²⁴

This “phenomenality devoid of phenomenological operations”²⁵ requires a strange and mysterious body, one capable of seeing and feeling without having a relation to anything, seeing and feeling only through and as itself qua One. “Precisely not the phenomenological body as part of the World,” Laruelle explains, “or as thrown-into-the-World, but an originary and transcendental arche-body that is from the outset ‘vision’ through and through; but an as yet unobjectivating vision.”²⁶ A body, in other words, without objects, the better to experience “phenomena as immanent givens rather than as still-transcendent intuitions.”²⁷ This is what Laruelle calls lived experience (*vécu*), or vision-in-One, a real rather than empirical

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Benjamin Norris calls this “an *experience of thought*” insofar as, as we shall see, what Laruelle calls the “force-of-thought” constitutes all aspects of human experience. Nevertheless, as Laruelle’s non-philosophy in many ways rejects the possibility of distinguishing experience and thought, we shall retain “thought/experience.” See Benjamin Norris, “*Expérience in the (Philosophical) Abyss*,” in *Superpositions: Laruelle and the Humanities*, ed. Rocco Gangle (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 103.

¹⁹ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 15.

²⁰ Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, 53.

²¹ François Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015), 47.

²² Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, 138.

²³ François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2012), 395.

²⁴ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 19.

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁶ Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, 12.

²⁷ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 15.

experience that does not follow the assumptions of Aesthetics because it perceives particles that, like those of quantum physics, “escape earlier modes of visibility and objectivation.”²⁸ It is, he says, “a lived experience (of) immanence that is enjoyed before every sensible or intellectual ‘intuition.’”²⁹ This is the beginning of “a Real Critique of Reason.”³⁰

In Immanuel Kant’s First Critique, the Transcendental Aesthetic establishes time and space as the a priori forms of intuition, and the Metaphysical Deduction of the a priori categories provide the conditions of judgement. This empirical-transcendental schematism, i.e., correlation, and its production of synthetic a priori judgements produces both objects of experience and knowledge about them, and is arguably the most influential account of how we represent the real. Laruelle’s system, on the other hand, is based on identity, evaporating the distance between concepts and intuition that in Kantianism acts as the condition of possibility of objects and their experience. As a result, Laruelle claims, “the Real as Given-without-giveness excludes any ‘phenomenological

distance,”³¹ and is experienced instead in “individual thought that gives up concrete representations, representation in all its forms, excluding any figuration whatsoever.”³² The radicality of this cannot be understated, for, as Laruelle puts it, “absolute lived experience is independent from ‘life’ itself.”³³

The human sciences (including urban studies), or what Laruelle calls authorities, only explore the “merely imaginary phenomena”³⁴ of our (so-called) World, hallucinations derived from the “phantasmatic projection of Greco-Christian ontological prejudices onto real man.”³⁵ This real man, or ordinary man as Laruelle more frequently calls him, gives rise to a new, transcendental, and rigorous science that is capable of seeing in a non-empirical way his real and “*non-circular essence*.”³⁶ Based on the One, this “non-empirical (non-worldly, non-historical, non-linguistic, non-sexual, etc.)”³⁷ science reveals a man without predicates, “*anterior even to relations, social or not*,”³⁸ a man determined in the last instance by and as the One. This man without predicates lives in the City of Nowhere, freed from all social relation, and

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ François Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie, non-psychanalyse* (Paris: Kimé, 1995), 45. We would like to thank Jeremy R. Smith for sharing his translation of this book with us.

³⁰ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 29.

³¹ François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 53.

³² Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 20.

³³ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 158.

³⁴ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 3.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

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indeed, the social itself. Such men “are invisible to the light of Reason or Intelligence,” enabling them to experience a “non-philosophical affect: rendering perceptible the immanent givens, the non-hallucinatory reality, *the finite transcendental experience* in man.”³⁹ As opposed to the human sciences that mix empirical with transcendental experience, then, a rigorous science of ordinary men thinks/feels the “true immanent givens, real essences lived in pre-political, pre-linguistic, etc., experiences.”⁴⁰ Ordinary men contemplate their real and immanent essence, just as a rigorous science gives “an immanent or unreflexive description (of) the phenomenal experiences that are the real content of the life of man and his relations to the World.”⁴¹ Laruelle’s rigorous science therefore “takes man as the real or lived experience of ordinary men,” and requires “an aprioristic indifference to the philosophical.”⁴² The contemplation of “strictly immanent phenomenal experiences *before* (and outside of) all unitary-philosophical prejudice” are real phenomenal givens and ground the latent phenomenology of non-philosophy, or a “phenomenality devoid of phenomenological operations.”⁴³

We might think, then, that Laruelle’s Real/One is a “return” to noumena, but if so, it is

dualized into an identity with phenomena, radicalizing and transforming Kant’s positioning of them. As Laruelle admits: “The Real is more like Kant’s ‘thing-in-itself: unknowable and even unthinkable, but with the difference that it is not so from transcendence but from immanence (the One and not the Other) foreclosed and that it consists in an experience or a knowing of the third type, the vision-in-One.”⁴⁴ Vision-in-One, as we shall see, is a strange kind of experience that gives neither a philosophical concept nor an empirical sensation, but rather a vision of and by the One. “Vision-in-One,” Laruelle tells us, “is the experience that the One is the absolutely sufficient element of thought.”⁴⁵ These passages indifferentiating experience and thought make it clear that vision-in-One no longer abides by the empirical-metaphysical correlation established in Kant’s First Critique, because the experience of a thought of the essence of the One never leaves the One; it is, Laruelle says, “a vision of philosophy from the One and ‘in’ it.”⁴⁶ Radical immanence.

Foreshadowing what the non- will do to urban studies, Laruelle affixes non- to an eviscerated Kantianism writing that:

³⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴⁴ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 222.

⁴⁵ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

Kantianism is more than inverted and gives place to a non-Kantianism: this is the in itself as phenomenon or given-without-giveness that limits every philosophical givenness and position. It cannot then concern either an ontic or empirical in itself, a simple (philosophical) object projected beyond philosophy; nor an in itself posed expressly by philosophy under the form of an essence of things or a metaphysical entity. But instead an in itself that manifests itself as a mode of FT [force-of-thought] itself and which, without being a philosophical operation, can reduce philosophy to the state of a simple a priori. This in itself that delimits philosophy is the *identity* of phenomena = X and philosophy. It has the following general concrete form: the *essence-(of)-X* or *thought-X* (essence-(of)-science, essence-(of)-art, thought-science, thought-art, etc.).⁴⁷

In a more ruinous register of non-Kantianism, Laruelle elsewhere describes non-philosophy as “the necessary destruction of the Copernican Revolution.”⁴⁸ From this destructive act, thought/experience proceeds aprioristically

from the axiom of the One in which “*the real conditions of experience and those of the object of experience are identical-in-the-last-instance*. This is the base from which non-philosophy is deployed.”⁴⁹ Laruelle’s shift to non-philosophy detaches experience and thought from any transcendental conditions of possibility (which enable representation to subtract phenomena from the real), making them radically immanent with the One. As a result, Laruelle offers a generalized Transcendental Aesthetic qua Givenness, as a “theory of ‘something in general’ insofar as it is given,”⁵⁰ and a generalized Transcendental Logic or formal ontology as a “theory of something in general insofar as it is posited.”⁵¹ Both contain the a prioris of Transcendence, Position, and Unity, which are the real “essences” of the “cloned identities” of the “One-real.”⁵² The One, Laruelle says, is “the immanent body *within* which we see and assemble the universal lines or aprioritic dimensions of the World.”⁵³ In this sense, Laruelle replaces the Kantian schematism with the “givenness/position couple”⁵⁴ as determined-in-the-last-instance by force (of) thought. “Thus,” Laruelle finally claims, “the circle which affects the Kantian and Husserlian

⁴⁷ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 257.

⁴⁸ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 14.

⁴⁹ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 8.

⁵⁰ Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 65.

⁵¹ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 280.

⁵² Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 66.

⁵³ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 42.

⁵⁴ Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 66.

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concepts of aesthetics and logic is broken.”⁵⁵ There are a prioris in Laruelle, but rather than being transcendental conditions, they are real essences: “By *real a priori*,” he writes, “I describe the essence of existent things, an essence that thought describes as determined in the last instance by the real.”⁵⁶ This is the base of what Laruelle calls his transcendental generalized Aesthetic and Logic, which are no longer correlated with each other, but are “*relatively autonomous*”⁵⁷ and simultaneously enable non-philosophy to proceed aprioristically and non-relationally clear of the wreckage of Kant’s transcendental subject, and correlationism more generally.

Laruelle consequently proposes a “Transcendental realism,”⁵⁸ but one, as Ray Brassier explains,

wherein the object is no longer conceived of as a substance but rather as a discontinuous cut in the fabric of ontological synthesis. It is no longer thought that determines the object, whether through representation or intuition, but rather the object that seizes

thought and forces it to think, or better, *according* to it. This objective determination takes the form of a unilateral duality whereby the object thinks through the subject.⁵⁹

The force of thought thereby “mimes its unobjectifiable opacity”⁶⁰ to produce a discontinuous or unilateralizing identity, a “syntax without synthesis”⁶¹ proper to an object’s “diachronicity rooted in the voiding of being-nothing.”⁶² As Laruelle nicely puts it, this is “the end of realism via an excess of the real.”⁶³ This discontinuous excess of the One remains in contact with what it determines-in-the-last-instance (what Laruelle will call, again referencing Kant, “object X”), their dualized identity revealing, Laruelle claims, “transcendence as the essence of philosophizing and more specifically as the essence of apriority. It [the object X] is determined-in-the-last-instance by the Real and takes on the noetic form of a ‘non-phenomenological distance’ deprived of its autopoitional doublet [i.e., correlation].”⁶⁴ Non-phenomenological distance describes the double-identity of the One-in-One, of the radically immanent One that remains foreclosed, and its

⁵⁵ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 282.

⁵⁶ Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy*, 395.

⁵⁷ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 280-82.

⁵⁸ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 43.

⁵⁹ Ray Brassier, *Nilhil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 149.

⁶⁰ Brassier, *Nilhil Unbound*, 138.

⁶¹ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 42.

⁶² Brassier, *Nilhil Unbound*, 149.

⁶³ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 21.

⁶⁴ Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 54.

clone that it nevertheless determines-in-the-last-instance.

Laruelle’s account of non-photography gives us a practical example of all of this: “Photographs are the thousand flat facets of an ungraspable identity that only shines—at times faintly—through something else.”⁶⁵ Here, we must emphasize the “flat” and qualify the “shines through” in order to reach the non-photographic instance by which we can, Laruelle claims, “‘see’ photography anew.”⁶⁶ To “see” in this way requires “*vision-force*”⁶⁷ or “vision-in-One,”⁶⁸ a non-phenomenological experience shorn of “external realism [and without] perception and any appearance of depth. It is taking a photo with one’s eyes closed,”⁶⁹ and “a discursive photography rather than visual ... intellectually optical,”⁷⁰ which determines-(appearance)-in-the-last-instance. Without duality the One cannot constitute itself, inasmuch as a self (what Laruelle calls the “Ego-without-giveness”⁷¹) is not separate or alienated from itself. The One (is) instead the finitude (object X) that thinks it, and determination in the last instance (DLI) operates on both aspects of that non-relation, determining the

thought/experience of the One according to its actual foreclosure. Force-of-thought objectifies this foreclosure in a thought/experience (object X, non-photography, vision-in-One, *jouissance*, etc.), but this does not alienate the One because non-philosophy thinks/experiences immanence foreclosed from within immanence.⁷² The One is therefore, according to Laruelle, “‘in relation’ (to) self, since auto-impression constitutes the self and more than self: the lived Identity which is that (of) lived experience.”⁷³ The self-sufficient given-without-giveness of the One is “a real ‘experience’ which is foreclosed to knowledge but not exterior or transcendent to it, and is therefore capable of determining it outside of every relation”⁷⁴:

the object X to be known must, *on the one hand*, be experienced as radically immanent (meaning seen-in-One, an object of the vision-in-One) so that it can, on the other hand, itself determine its own understanding under that form. This determination is a cloning by itself but as One or immanent, of its understanding. ... DLI fully deployed is the

⁶⁵ Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, vii.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 33.

⁶⁹ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁷¹ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 120.

⁷² Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 40.

⁷³ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁴ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 51.

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causality that makes it universally possible for any object X to determine for itself, *but in-the-last-instance*, its own “real” knowledge.⁷⁵

As a result, the transcendental subject is banished because knowledge is both subject and object in-the-last-instance, “knowing” itself beyond any duality or relation. Knowledge in this sense is both ontological and theoretical (experience and knowledge), because DLI qua dualysis is the immanent cause and object of its own theory, as “irreducible though undivided dualities.”⁷⁶ This is radical immanence as the chicken *and* the egg, or as Laruelle puts it: “The object X is identically cause-of-the-last-instance of its knowledge and a known object”⁷⁷ to posit the already-there—the One—and this posited “already” determines the object X in the last instance, or as Laruelle has it, “*being-foreclosed does not make knowledge possible but determines it.*”⁷⁸ This is what Laruelle calls “scientific knowledge” insofar as it implies a realism in excess of philosophical reality. This realism (that produced by DLI) allows the object X to be “a mode of the Real; that it be seen-in-One or ‘affected’ by the vision-in-One,”⁷⁹ but this is not,

however, an object of urban studies, and non-urban studies cannot, as a result, be compared with it, or considered a version of it. This is perhaps no better illustrated than by considering the well-known claim of Manfredo Tafuri that architecture remains in crisis insofar as its subjection to capitalist forms overrides any other architectural or social functions. While Tafuri claims that any criticism of this process must put itself into crisis, insofar as any genuine criticism attacks (capitalist) reality itself,⁸⁰ Laruelle goes further in claiming vision-in-One provides a pre-political experience that escapes the dialectical movement of crisis itself, making DLI completely transcendent to and autonomous from “the World or universal capitalism.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, this transcendent and autonomous operation of DLI is immanent in the World, and “vision-in-One can only clone an identity from the materials of the mixture that the capital-world provides for it,”⁸² not an escape from the urban, for example, but from the very conditions of politics itself. Laruelle proposes changing the World through its abandonment.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 121.

⁷⁷ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 52.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁰ Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans.

Pellegrino d’Acierno and Robert Connolly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 9-13.

⁸¹ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 53.

⁸² Ibid., 59.

For the unthinkable, non-relational One to be thought, Laruelle argues, it must pass through a special structure (non-philosophy) that detaches it from the (philosophical) correlation and therefore allows it to refer to itself immediately, through a knowledge (of) self that does not pass through the World, but is “an immanence that enjoys (of) self and solely (of) self without surpassing itself ... that it be self-*jouissance* without any relation to itself or any disjunction.”⁸³ This “*auto-impression*” or “immediacy (to) self” does not, Laruelle claims, offer a “topology for existence,”⁸⁴ but it does establish an interiority, in and as the One, a self, or what Laruelle variously calls the Stranger, ordinary man, “man himself as One-subject of science,”⁸⁵ or the human who enjoys “the most radical lived experience from the start, the lived (of) lived experience or what makes lived experience possess an inalienable immanent being.”⁸⁶ Nothing less, Laruelle writes, than an “empiricism (of the) Radical.”⁸⁷ The body therefore remains in play as the site of vision-in-One and the thought/experience that goes with it, but this is not the corporeal flesh of the phenomenological body, rather, “an originary and transcendental arche-body” made up

entirely of “an as yet un-objectivating vision.”⁸⁸ This is “perception without depth,”⁸⁹ an immanent empiricism detached from the self-contained body of a subject, an “insurrection” that “manifests itself by an effect of heteronomous subtraction, heteronomous precisely via its immanence, on corpuscular transcendence.”⁹⁰ To subtract the transcendent body from a purely interior vision-in-One, or the “non-positional self-vision-force,” is to unleash a “passive and impotent ... indivisible flux of vision,”⁹¹ a radical lived experience that is not without “*jouissance*.”⁹² What is interesting about this non-psychoanalytical affect of immanent *jouissance* is that its experience is at once mystical, therapeutic, and non-political (in the sense discussed above), evacuating human beings from the world of

pain and disquietude, war and violence that animate culture, language, society—and philosophy too, which adds to this malaise. It is from there that it can manifest and contribute to constituting a non-political democracy as the “transcendental order” of the Stranger and, in its specific order, the non-

⁸³ Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 36.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, 12.

⁸⁹ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹¹ Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, 13.

⁹² Laruelle develops his concept of *jouissance* in *Théorie des étrangers*, where he extracts it from its psychoanalytical usage, and distinguishes it from what he calls “the Enjoyed” (*Jouir*).

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analytic destiny of the “subjects of the unconscious” that we are.⁹³

When seen from the all-too-human perspective of the World, this non-political democracy and its generic humanity can seem like a program of infinite resignation, a continuous leaving of the world. While this is to a certain extent inevitable, inasmuch as non-philosophy necessarily begins as a process of extraction, the challenge remains to try to experience Laruelle’s immanent *jouissance* in a positive sense, and to describe it as such.

The difficulties, but also the rewards, of this at once extractive and positive program of non-philosophy can be seen by returning to our example of non-photography:

We shall thus eliminate from our method the point of view of styles and techniques: this is not our concern. We shall give a description, nothing more; we shall call “essence of photography” only that which we ourselves as vision-force can describe ... The essence of the photographic stance must not be conflated with its conditions of existence in perception, in the history of

styles and the evolution of techniques.⁹⁴

We have already traced some of the ways Laruelle severs perception from vision-in-One, and how this takes us far away from any of Kant’s conditions of possible experience. But this passage also illustrates the aggression of Laruelle’s stance, whose non- leaves nothing of its object standing, bar the terminology it has appropriated, ushering us into the non-place and its horizon of scorched-earth.

From what we have seen, Laruelle provides us with an in-utero theory of non-urban studies that would reject spatiality and temporality in favor of Givenness and Positing to discover and describe the ways the objects of urban studies are determined in the last instance. In this sense, non-urban studies would lead on to a generic science in Laruelle’s specific sense, “not as an artificial perception of the World (this would suppose the philosophical model of perception), but an artificial science or a technological simulation of science, supposing once more, one last time, the World in its transcendent reality.”⁹⁵ Science would provide a symbolization of the real that does not represent it, but rather imposes vision-force as the real condition of existence in order to create a

⁹³ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 5.

⁹⁴ Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, 6-7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

“scientific experience”⁹⁶ of the world. Laruelle calls this process an “artistic practice,”⁹⁷ no doubt because it is as creative as it is destructive. But its creativity is naïve, because it is not a representation or even expression of the World, but a “return to the body as undivided vision-force,” a return that is knowingly naïve in positing its absolute reality, and thus its “absolute disenchantment” from received knowledge.⁹⁸ In this sense, then, non-urban studies would not analyze, or even relate to the city, its streets and houses, its waterfronts and walkways, except subtractively through the non-. Instead, a non-urban studies supposes this strangely idempotent and asubjective body, “condemned to see according to itself and to remain in itself—but precisely without being, for all that, a rational subject ‘looking down on’ the World.”⁹⁹ Not a cartographer, then, but a solitary human without a subject. Laruelle calls this non-actor an “utopian body,”¹⁰⁰ and indeed its project is revolutionary, overthrowing transcendence in the city “and all the phenomena of Authority that follow from it.”¹⁰¹

Vision-force considers the same urban materials we all inhabit, the same buildings, people,

streets, cars, parks, etc., yet these “enjoy an absolutely different transcendental status,”¹⁰² and have, we might say, a different substance, i.e., a non-substance. As a result, non-urban studies refutes a city “normalized and coded” by the World, but rather addresses a new “quasi-space” entirely distinct from the World and from the object, a quasi-space that nevertheless is “the ‘in-itself’ of the object.”¹⁰³ This autonomous in-itself is not continuous with perceived being, and in fact is separated from it by an “unbridgeable abyss... a quasi-field of presence empty not only of present objects, but of all syntax, structure, or articulation,” a pure ideality, Laruelle will say, but without the limits imposed by philosophical Idealism.¹⁰⁴ On the one hand, this feels like a liberation, or at the very least a revelation, insofar as Laruelle’s genealogy of the correlation is convincing. But on the other, in tarring the entire history of philosophy with the same brush (“empirico-transcendental parallelism is the Greco-Occidental itself”¹⁰⁵), Laruelle often seems restricted to repeating the radicality of his own non-position and condemning the rest. As Brassier points out, Laruelle’s work

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁰⁵ François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle (London: Continuum, 2010), 17.

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is at once over-determined by the negative characterization of philosophy as decision, upon which it entirely depends, and... significantly insensitive to the vagaries of concrete specificity which, for all its faults, philosophical conceptualization is acute enough to register. Lacking the capacity for conceptual specificity... [non-philosophy] is too loose-cut to fit its object; too coarse-grained to provide useful conceptual traction upon the material for which it is supposedly designed.¹⁰⁶

While Brassier's criticisms seem plausible, at least from the side of philosophy that he is defending, they also seem to deny the intriguing and still largely unexplored possibilities of a non-philosophical artistic practice that creates knowledge/experience of the One in the realm of non-urban studies.

Hannah Hopewell has offered a compelling example of this in *Notes from the Urban Intertidal: A Paraontological Leaning*, which folds poetry,

photography, and theoretical reflection into a “non-philosophical encounter”¹⁰⁷ with the urban fabric. Exploring the generic urban,¹⁰⁸ Hopewell first of all abandons any genre sufficiency, utilizing a post-disciplinary approach that seeks to escape description or expression in favor of a radically immanent psychic geography of the non-Urban “experience”: “The lived,” she writes, “is experienced in reading terrain, but only as experience that offers no standing, nor standard for its own description or interpretation, yet troubles understandings of the City’s proper subjects and objects, even when both are radically miscalculated.”¹⁰⁹ This lived experience of the Urban, this city of *jouissance*, she argues, is an “aporic impossible” operating as an “aesthetico-political strategy that grafts the radicalized experience of non-time, of non-active resistance to capital-time’s notions of progress and linearity. This aporia equally, or correspondingly, names that mute non-space of the subject, quality of the human *before* the subject-of-enunciation.”¹¹⁰ Such an approach “forecloses representations of a recognizable city. At the same time, traversal

¹⁰⁶ Brassier, *Nilhil Unbound*, 132-33.

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Hopewell, *Notes from the Urban Intertidal: A Paraontological Leaning* (Doctoral Dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, School of Art and Design, 2019), 219, <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/13490>.

¹⁰⁸ The generic is an important concept in Laruelle, one that describes the state/process of the aprioric already, and its actual application to the World in the non-. In this sense, the generic is scientific in Laruelle’s sense, the state of something’s reality after the World has been subtracted from it.

¹⁰⁹ Hopewell, *Notes from the Urban Intertidal*, 151.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

consents me to the worklessness of ‘focusing’ the generic, without ever receiving perceptual clarity.”¹¹¹ This non-reception of the urban qua genre(s) opens up a new field of *generic practice* Hopewell calls *para-fictioning*, one allowing her to “think with urban waterfront landscapes, rather than about them, revealing a vantage that enables me to participate in transformations of the category of truth regarding the urban. The aim is not to develop a positional ontology from which to think, but to evolve a technology to think-with and, thus, to write-with.”¹¹² This approach seems to us full of possibilities, offering a non-relational resistance to urban studies.

Urban studies (to ventriloquize Laruelle) is a philosophical attempt to transcend the immanence of the One in order to supplant determination-in-the-last-instance with its own transcendent authority, a “confusion of the thing with logos ... [as] the core of contemporary thought.”¹¹³ Urban studies does this primarily under the conceptual system of the topological, which imposes the correlationist mode on every conceptualization and experience of place. As a result, Laruelle writes, “for a non-philosophy or a theory, we need a condition of objectivity that is not space/time.”¹¹⁴ Thinking

space as a condition of objects and subjects founds a geography-of-the-World that includes urban studies and assumes that the sufficiency of reason explains/determines the subject with/in topological place. In this sense, urban studies, and geography more generally, produce, ground, and constitute a transcendental topology-of-the-World, a hallucination of the already-built world as it is inscribed by centered and decentered relations, be they dialectical, rhizomatic, chiasmatic, or some other arrangement that urban studies abstracts into a topological form.

This autopositioning topology of urban studies orients flows, obstructions, stillnesses, and voids within and across city-space deciphering buildings, street corners, and bike lanes, but also direction, movement, navigation, and other modes of urban orientation. Yet non-urban studies has no orientation. In its uni-lation with the One (as opposed to re-lation), non-urban studies is oriented-without-orientation, avoiding a *telos* or horizon of any kind, for in its absolute immanence it obliterates the outside. This is not to say buildings, movement, direction, etc., are foreign to non-urban studies, but they must be experienced/thought as determined-in-the-last-instance, outside of space

¹¹¹ Ibid., 342.

¹¹² Ibid., 210.

¹¹³ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 114.

¹¹⁴ Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 117.

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and time. Taking non-urban studies in its reality, prior to any philosophical orientation towards, i.e., correlation with, the world suggests a unity of the urban untouched by philosophical sufficiency and indifferent to its subjects and objects. The non-urban is primitive, a *chōra* that “is determined by the finitude of the One and merges with the indifference of the One . . . towards the World, etc. It is the site as void, the void as em-placement, the void that is positive only by remaining immobile close to itself and excluding all movement.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps, then, the most difficult task of a non-urban studies will be to describe place as em-placement, that is, in its priority to the topological relations constitutive of the urban and its study. In other words, the task for non-urban studies is to produce a theory of the urban without constituting it as an object or subject, a task that only appears negative from the side of urban studies. This em-placement is not a privation but a positive void, “an irreversible order that removes the World from the subject”¹¹⁶ and the starting point of a non-urban studies.

Setting out for the “City of Nowhere” as a radical alternative to the city of urban studies, Laruelle’s city demands a previously unthought mode of habitation: a city irreversibly

determined by ordinary man, that is, by the unalienated human. A rigorous science of ordinary man removes the “philosophy-form” that “regulates the relations between man and the city”, or “being-in-the-city,” replacing it with “a unified theory of the Stranger.”¹¹⁷ As a result, the Stranger disengages from what Laruelle calls, “the processes of technological division that philosophy exercises over man as being-in-the-World and the-City, in History and Life.”¹¹⁸ This is the strange sense of Laruelle’s science: it “captures and interiorizes” the City and its human occupants “in a machine which is stranger to them, which withdraws from them for its own account a surplus-value of reality and authority, thereby universalizing them according to a mode of thought that does not violate them.”¹¹⁹ This process, Laruelle claims, establishes a “political science which is founded on the Given of man-as-Stranger(s); consequently, on a non-political Given.”¹²⁰

Laruelle clearly describes this non-political science in *Introduction to Non-Marxism*. “Marxism has necessarily confused the practical intervention into the World itself with the constitution of another city, a City of the Proletariat (of the Stranger), from out of the World and using

¹¹⁵ Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 117.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹⁷ Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 137-38.

¹¹⁸ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 24.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

it.”¹²¹ But, it must be remembered, these are materials that have been radically purified of the World, simply “necessary material from which man can construct a City for which there is no map in Society, Culture, or History. Let us say *a transcendental City of Men as uni-versal Strangers or as non-proletarians*.”¹²² This appeal to Marxism supports Laruelle’s advocacy of Democracy, even if “class struggle understood philosophically as division and contradiction are [merely] the occasions, materials, and models for a dual or uni-versal City that builds itself according to these entirely worldly and worldized [*mondaines et mondialisées*] cities, but built according to man.”¹²³ Clearly, class struggle is part of the World Laruelle rejects, and it is only through this rejection that he uses its material for his own project, one in which “only the democracy of Strangers is according-to-man and not against man.”¹²⁴

The City purified of philosophically (and, it seems, politically) tainted humans by a rigorous science is inhabited instead by a solitary Stranger, constituting a democracy of the radically indifferent. As Laruelle puts it, “every man, absolutely each man, philosopher or not,

is no longer an element of the All or the supposedly real City, but a solitary I that solitude neither does nor un-does *de facto*, and by drawing the theorem according to which it is, under certain conditions, also by right a Stranger in the multiple state.”¹²⁵ This multiple Stranger (or what Laruelle elsewhere calls the “Proletariat” or “non-proletarian”¹²⁶) constitutes Democracy not as an object of thought per se, but the essence of knowledges produced by the force of thought, which enjoy an absolute equality.¹²⁷ Whereas philosophy understands the relations between people living in a city as being equal and reciprocal, this is only possible if philosophy over-rides the radical immanence of the One, resulting in “an objective democratic appearance and a real anti-democracy.”¹²⁸ The Stranger cannot live under such conditions, appearing instead in a “void” of its own making, “it transcendently anesthetizes all types of (psychological, sociological) conditioning. The void is also fully positive *qua* identity of universal law, which is itself in flesh and blood. The content of this void is precisely a transcendental multitude, a non-autopositional democracy.”¹²⁹ The Stranger builds, we might say, a void-City, “a transcendental City that is not on

¹²¹ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 93.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 148.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Idem.*

¹²⁵ Laruelle, *Théorie des étrangers*, 75.

¹²⁶ Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 93, 148.

¹²⁷ Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 46.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

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this World without thereby being abstract, since they would be cloned from this World or the philosophical City. Democracy is the excess of the explication over what it must explicate: the default universal war of uni-versality, i.e., of identity.”¹³⁰

This war, however, does not involve inter-vention, as we have seen, and as such is wholly indifferent to the city of urban studies, which nevertheless provides its materials. The city of non-urban studies is rather the purification of its own mode of thought, liberating the thought-world from its philosophical over-determination, and enabling the construction of “a Utopian City of Heretics, built with world-materials.”¹³¹ This evocation of utopia establishes the futural place of non-philosophy, a radical “to come” whose arrival depends on our accepting its eternal and universal self-evidence. The axiom, Laruelle tells us, “speaks within the oracle that announces the future and does nothing but announce it, and acts by this ambivalent announcement.”¹³² This “mode of the Future of a City of heretics”¹³³ is radically separate, as Laruelle’s axiom must be, but at the same time, its oracle “needs a priest-subject to untangle the meaning”¹³⁴ and distribute it.

Enter the ordinary human of non-urban studies, a non-specialist and artist.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 143.

¹³¹ Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, 153.

¹³² Ibid., 53.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Idem.