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After the Real

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ACTES DU COLLOQUE

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AFTER THE REAL

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"Bacon écrit l'*Instauratio magna*. Descartes écrit le *Discours de la méthode*. Kant écrit la *Critique de la raison pure*. Le triple linéament de la philosophie est fixé. Bacon prend pour point de départ le fait, et enfante la science. Descartes prend pour point de départ l'idée, et enfante la métaphysique. Kant marie les deux enfants. Il accouple idée et fait, métaphysique et science, âme et univers, sujet et objet. Il démontre que l'homme, étant le relatif, ne peut comprendre que le rapport. L'homme voit le phénomène à la surface de l'inconnu. Son œil ne va pas au delà; mais le phénomène résulte de l'inconnu; sans inconnu, point de phénomène; et le phénomène étant évident, l'inconnu est prouvé. Mais il ajoute: Qu'est-ce que l'inconnu? Le Réel. Dieu."
Victor Hugo¹

"Dasjenige, was das Ding selbst (in der Erscheinung) ausmacht, nämlich das Reale, muß gegeben sein, ohne welches es auch gar nicht gedacht werden könnte." Immanuel Kant²

"Wie kommt die Vernunft dazu, alle Möglichkeit der Dinge als abgeleitet von einer einzigen [possibility], die zum Grunde liegt, nämlich der der höchsten Realität, anzusehen, und diese sodann, als in einem besonderen Urwesen enthalten vorauszusetzen?" (*KrV*, B 609).

"Der Begriff eines solchen Wesens ist der von Gott.... Das Ideal der reinen Vernunft ist der Gegenstand einer transzendentalen Theologie" (*KrV*, B 608).

Introduction

To come or to be "after the real" can be modulated variously: I write, for example, after the event of the conference entitled "Re-inventing

¹ *Le tas de pierres*, in *Oeuvres romanesques, dramatiques et poétiques*, 1963, 318-319.

² *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1990, B 609. Hereafter *KrV*.

the Real," after hearing all the papers delivered yet also after having read them in the form they are published here. This volume came afterwards. This paper itself being also an "Afterword," it too is *after* the real, or main, contents of this *GRAAT* issue, akin to an appendix. "After the Real" is moreover a way of understanding what is at stake in the conference title, "Re-inventing the Real," for the title is not to be understood as "the invention of the real," but suggests a more forlorn belatedness: the reality constructed by the grand narratives having proven to be disastrous, our situation is not that of seeking after the real in all its virgin whiteness, but that of living after the demise or disappearance of any viable notion of the real, of reality, in the age of the virtual. "Aujourd'hui, on fabrique le réel, on ne se contente plus de le reproduire" (de Kerckhove, 1992, 39).

That the real is always already an invention was argued by Roland Barthes in his important essay, "L'effet du réel": "le baromètre de Flaubert, la petite porte de Michelet ne disent finalement rien d'autre que ceci: *nous sommes le réel*; c'est la catégorie du 'réel' (et non ses contenus contingents) qui est alors signifiée; autrement dit, la carence même du signifié au profit du seul référent devient le signifiant même du réalisme: il se produit un *effet de réel*, fondement de ce vraisemblable inavoué qui forme l'esthétique de toutes les œuvres courantes de la modernité" (Barthes, 1984, 174). The real is always already an effect created by language. Like verisimilitude or the *vraisemblable* analyzed by Tzvetan Todorov, the real becomes an aesthetic value in particular during the nineteenth century, perhaps as a sign of the beginning of its being shaken.³ Although we are wary of drawing any historical boundaries according to which one period is definitely one way or the other (the always already lost "real" is as old and as original, as archaic in a word, as the problem of representation, going back at least to Plato), it can be suggested and is implicit in Barthes that the "real" became the aesthetic paradigm in the century of tele-technological inventions, discoveries and applications (Morse code, telegraph, telephone, electricity, train travel, etc.): 1800-1900.⁴ Such appearance of the real would have coincided with the fact that it was already being eclipsed. As Pierre Gault, himself at the origin of the idea for the conference and this volume, postulated, certain contemporary fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, after the decidedly anti-realist and deeply ironic fiction of the 1960s and

³ "Etudier le vraisemblable équivaut à montrer que les discours ne sont pas régis par une correspondance avec leur référent mais par leurs propres lois, et à dénoncer la phraséologie qui, à l'intérieur de ces discours, veut nous faire croire le contraire" (Todorov, 1971, 93).

⁴ Barthes suggested it, "il est logique que le réalisme littéraire ait été, à quelques décennies près, contemporain du règne de l'histoire 'objective', à quoi il faut ajouter le développement actuel des techniques, des œuvres et des institutions fondées sur le besoin incessant d'authentifier le 'réel': la photographie ..., le reportage, les expositions, le tourisme" (Barthes, 1984, 173). All the work in Germany of (and in the wake of) Friedrich Kittler tells us volumes about how the apprehension as well as the loss of the real were made possible by technology. See for example, *Aufschreibesysteme. 1800-1900*, 1985.

1970s, might be characterized as attempting to "reinvent the real," understood in a nutshell as an attempt not to be utterly confined among and defined as simulacra.

Anti-realism and irony took the form of a certain distance towards the real in much twentieth-century art. As Guy Tosatto argues in *L'ivresse du réel. L'objet dans l'art du XXe siècle*,

Un lit, un aspirateur, un lampadaire, des tessons d'assiettes, une chaise, une botte de foin, une paire de chaussures, un fusil, une bouteille, des fleurs, un pelote de ficelle, une carcasse de voiture, une poubelle, une ampoule électrique, un coquillage, un métronome, des allumettes, un porte-bouteilles, une épingle, un journal ..., sont quelques-uns des objets, ou des fragments soustraits à la réalité que l'on trouve rassemblés ici [the catalogue]. Ils illustrent, dans leur profusion même, un des phénomènes les plus marquants de l'art de ce siècle: l'envahissement du champ artistique, et plus largement de l'imaginaire, par la réalité, une réalité quotidienne, banale, vulgaire. (Tosatto, 1993, 8)

The inclusion of the "banal" real in art brought about a breakdown in the "art"/"real" opposition: "L'art aujourd'hui semble dire que derrière le réel il n'y a rien de plus que le réel. Mais en même temps ce réel, une fois inscrit dans le champ artistique, est-il de même nature que celui que l'on côtoie dans la rue. . . . Il y a dans ce recours au réel opéré par les artistes au fil des décennies une forme d'enivrement qui les mènent à s'approprier toujours un peu plus les attributs de la réalité" (ibid., 8). The result is that, if the museum becomes more and more a place of the real exposed, the space outside the museum – so-called reality – becomes more and more a giant museum, for all those attributes of reality we – the museum visitor – see in contemporary art museums become, when we see them back at home, or out on the street, objects from an art museum. The "effect of the real," which Barthes saw in certain strategies of realist writing, would have as its direct counterpart an "effect of the imaginary," consisting in the degree to which the objects of everyday, "real," life are virtually turned into art by the requisite "frame". As Tosatto argues, Picasso and Braques placing objects such as fragments of cords or pieces of canvas in their otherwise traditional illusionary paintings led to the consequences that "le réel surgit non plus par la grâce du médium pictural, mais directement dans son indécente nudité, dans son insoutenable vérité" (ibid., 11). Such a real however undergoes numerous sub- or perversions. An example: Andy Warhol, banalizing by repetition real objects such as Coca-Cola bottles or electric chairs, suggests that the real Coke bottle or electric chair is for the modern consumer/citizen *a priori* occluded by its banalization. It is in response to such a situation that Pierre Gault conceived the syntagm "Ré-inventer le réel". It is no longer a question merely of the invention of the real but of its re-invention.

Nowadays, in the contemporary slang of the 1980s and 1990s, the imperative "Get real!" is a small testimony towards the fact that we have to be told to become real, to snap somehow back into reality and out of illusion, delusion. To get the real may however be the same as to forget the real – to reinvent the real means that we have forgotten what it is exactly and have to make a new one virtually from scratch. This condition of being for that reason "after the real" is one that has received different and powerful formulations in the hands of four writers of non-fiction, Jean Baudrillard, Clement Rosset, François Laruelle and Serge Salat. By dint of commenting on their respective diagnoses of the state of the "real" today, we will stress the plurivocality of being "after the real".

Beckett: nothing is more real than Nothing

We thus begin (our quest) *after* the real, in the position written by Samuel Beckett: "Ce Rien dont disait le farceur d'Abdère que rien n'est plus réel" (Beckett, 1965, 176). This Nothing of which it is said that nothing is more real. Ironically, this statement says something other than what it appears to say. At first glance, the statement says that what is most real is Nothing. Nothing, or Nothingness, would be the "essence," so to speak, of the real. There is not any thing that is more real than the Nothingness, the Insignificance, the Emptiness, the Absence which therefore reigns indomitably. Such an emptiness becomes more real than the real, as the first person narrator of Marie Darrieussecq's novel, *Naissance des fantômes* (1998), puts it, describing the becoming-real of the emptiness created by the disappearance of her husband: "Le vide autour de moi prenait comme une dalle, un ciment qui se solidifiait et devenait palpable, une certaine qualité de l'air, de l'ombre, du silence, une certaine immobilité des murs, une certaine verticalité des portes et des fenêtres" (83). The nothingness that occupies her apartment in the absence of her husband confounds the non-concrete of air, shade and silence with concrete itself, with cement blocks, reminding us that "concrete" is synonymous with "real": "concrete implies the reality of actual things" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, "real"). The husband, a real "thing," is replaced by the becoming-real of absence, the becoming-concrete of air, shade and silence. Nothing is more ineluctably real than the Nothing or Nothingness which could thus be thought of as the absence of something stable, objective that becomes more stable and objective than reality itself, henceforth absconded. Among all the possible things, there is not a single thing which is more real than the fundamental absence of thing(s).

Interestingly, in the quote from Beckett, the word "real" is opposed to "nothing," since "real" means "thing" (it comes from the Latin *res*) and "nothing" obviously therefore means *no* thing. This nothing (*Rien*), as opposed to something (*quelque chose*), is more real than any thing, but since the word "real" comes from the Latin word *res*, what is therefore "most real" is the un-real, the non-real, the non-thing, the non-

res. That which is most real (*res*, thing) is no thing, no *res*. There is no real, i.e., no *thing*.

Ironically, however, the statement asserts something different which is in contradiction with what it appears to say. For the statement repeats the word "Nothing" but with a difference, in the lower-case "nothing" of the superlative, "nothing is more real": we can re-formulate this as, "nothing is more real than Nothing". Assuming that the capitalization in "Nothing" functions to designate a signified different, however slightly, from what a lower-case writing of the word would have designated, then the statement, "nothing is more real than Nothing," can take on both the form of a superlative and also that of comparative. It can be understood both as proclaiming the supremacy of Nothingness (there is no thing more real than Nothing) and as asserting that "nothing is more real, more thing, than Nothing," as if there were a sort of "transcendental," or at least final, essential, Nothingness which would be inferior to everyday-used "nothing," "*rien*" or "*nichts*".

Either way, since what is most thing, most *of the thing*, is precisely what is not a thing, therefore that which is most real is the non-real. It is thus that in an era posterior to the writing of the generation of Beckett, the "real" is evacuated and its place filled by the simulacrum, that Platonic nothing par excellence.

Baudrillard: the becoming-real of the virtual

In *Le Crime parfait* (1996), Jean Baudrillard gives to this evacuation of the real by the simulacrum the name of "le crime parfait": "Ceci est l'histoire," writes Baudrillard on the back-cover, "d'un crime – du meurtre de la réalité. Et de l'extermination d'une illusion – l'illusion . . . du monde. Le réel ne disparaît pas dans l'illusion, c'est l'illusion qui disparaît dans la réalité intégrale." In what he calls "ce livre noir de la disparition du réel," illusion – the simulacrum, the no-thing – is the becoming-real.

"La grande question philosophique était: 'Pourquoi y a-t-il quelque chose plutôt que rien?' Aujourd'hui, la véritable question est: 'Pourquoi y a-t-il rien plutôt que quelque chose?'" (14: all Baudrillard quotes from this text). Baudrillard refers to, among others, Heidegger, who pursues this question in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*.⁵ Further on, he asks again,

la question devient alors, non pas, "D'où vient l'illusion?," mais "D'où vient le réel?" Comment se fait-il qu'il y ait même un effet de réel? Là est la véritable énigme. Si le monde était réel, comment se fait-il qu'il ne soit pas depuis longtemps rationnel? S'il n'est qu'illusion, comment peut

⁵ "Why are there essents [*Seiende*] rather than nothing? That is the question . . . 'Why are there essents, why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?'" (Heidegger, 1959, 1). The translator, Ralph Manheim, notes his neologism "essents" for *Seiende*, both deriving from the verb "to be," could also be rendered by "existents, things that are".

s'engendrer même un discours du réel et du rationnel? (30)

The provenance of the real is, however, precisely from illusion, from, in short, representation. The real is an effect of language, and Baudrillard's reversal of the question recalls our quotation from *Murphy*.

The fundamental state of things, according to Baudrillard, is the having-become-real of the image: "l'image ne peut *plus* imaginer le réel, puisqu'elle l'est. [L'image] ne peut *plus* le rêver, puisqu'elle en est la réalité virtuelle" (16, my emphasis). The change signaled by the "no more" or *plus* is the replacement by the "nothing" of the "something," of the real (the *thing*, the *res*). The image has become the reality, but a *virtual* reality, of the real, the consequence of which being that the real is but simulacrum. Were this change complete, were it what Baudrillard calls a "perfect crime," there would be no realization, no recognition of the change.

What Baudrillard is describing are two epochs. The first is that of the myth of an "original crime," the advent of representation, by which the real was lost. The "original crime" was never perfect, left traces: "nous-mêmes en tant qu'êtres vivants et mortels sommes la trace de cette imperfection criminelle" (56). The second is that of the "perfect crime," which would leave no trace, which would occur when nothing more will occur, when all events will cease to take place, when time and space will cease to exist, when, that is to say, the human is replaced by the machine, or at least, the genetically engineered clone.

The fact that we are aware that there is "nothing more real than nothingness itself" (to modify slightly our Beckett quotation) is the fact that the crime, as Baudrillard puts it, "n'est jamais parfait" (10). Perfection would be the utter and final de-realization of the world, the point where the image or simulacrum would be all that remains (which means the end of biology, of life without technology, of nature), and therefore the sole "reality": "Le crime parfait, c'est ... la solution finale, la résolution anticipée du monde par clonage de la réalité et extermination du réel par son double" (45). The question is thus, how far can the idea that "nothing is more real than Nothingness" be extended?

Le seul suspense qui reste, c'est de savoir jusqu'où le monde peut se déréaliser avant de succomber à son trop peu de réalité, ou inversement jusqu'où peut-il s'hyperréaliser avant de succomber sous le trop de réalité (c'est-à-dire lorsque, devenu parfaitement réel, devenu plus vrai que le vrai, il tombera sous le coup de la simulation totale). (17)

De-realization and hyper-realization thus amount to roughly the same thing: a fall ("succomber," "tomber"). De-realization is the taking over of the real by the virtual. De-realization thus leads to the taking over of the real by the non-real. Hyper-realization is the technological refinement of the image to the point of outdoing in matters of resolution the appearance of the real itself (be it in the sound, visibility, smell, etc. of

the thing – "Is it live or is it Memorex?" as the advertisement goes). Hyper-realization leads to the taking over of the real by the simulacrum of the real.

Baudrillard does not, however, suggest a "return to the real". "Le réel est ce à quoi il ne faut pas consentir. Il nous a été donné comme simulacre, et le pire est d'y croire à défaut d'autre chose. . . . Le réel, lui, n'est que l'enfant naturel de la désillusion. Lui-même une illusion secondaire. La croyance en la réalité est, de toutes les formes imaginaires, la plus basse, la plus triviale" (27). Given as simulacrum, the real is an invention. Always already an invention. The real is that product of language which passes itself off as not language, not representation, but rather as the thing itself, in immediacy, without any media(tion).

For Baudrillard, nineteenth-century metaphysical man, he who in the wake of Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer, maintained the interplay between real and imaginary, has been replaced by us contemporaries: "nous préférons l'illusion métaphysique du sujet et de l'objet, . . . du réel et de l'imaginaire, mais, dans une phase ultime, nous préférons encore l'illusion virtuelle, celle . . . d'une indistinction du réel et du référentiel, celle d'une reconstruction artificielle du monde" (67). Baudrillard does not speak of a "reinvention of the real," but rather of an artificial *reconstruction* of the world, of the real as solely product of the imaginary. The result is that the "real" is a remainder with which we do not know what to do: "La triste conséquence de tout cela, c'est qu'on ne sait plus quoi faire du monde réel. On ne voit plus du tout la nécessité de ce résidu, devenu encombrant. Problème du réel en chômage technique" (68-69). The problem presently is not (yet) the utter inexistence of the real, but rather its uselessness, its obsolescence. Perhaps the "reinvention of the real" seen by Pierre Gault among certain contemporary fiction writers (Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy) is, despite what Gault sees as the unnaive strategies of such writers, but a testimony to its obsolescence, to its disappearance as such, to its fetishization, as Baudrillard sees it:

Que faire de ce déchet [le réel]? . . . On ne se débarrassera pas plus facilement du cadavre de la réalité [que celui du chômeur]. En désespoir de cause, on sera forcé d'en faire une attraction spéciale, une mise en scène rétrospective, une réserve naturelle: 'En direct de la réalité! Visitez ce monde étrange! Donnez-vous le frisson du monde réel!' Peut-être existera-t-il plus tard des vestiges fossiles du réel, comme il en existe des ères géologiques révolues? Un culte clandestin des objets réels, vénérés comme fétiches. . . . Déjà l'objet ancien fait figure d'objet réel par contraste avec les objets industriels. (69)

Just as pre-historic objects can be carbon-dated although the society to which they belonged cannot really be understood on account of their utter difference, so, too, will our world in which the real remains still as remainder become as strange to the future as prehistoric man is to us.

Just as Cornelius Crowley concludes that the "real was only provisionally utterable,"⁶ Baudrillard also sees the real as a historical(ly past) phenomenon: "la réalité, le monde réel n'aura donc duré qu'un certain temps, le temps que notre espèce le fasse passer par le filtre de l'abstraction matérielle du code et du calcul. Réel depuis un certain temps, le monde n'était pas destiné à le rester longtemps. Il aura traversé l'orbite du réel en quelques siècles, et se sera très vite perdu au-delà" (71).

Despite the massive amount of work done about the way technological reproduction and representation has made all reality only accessible through mediums (and therefore definitively lost in its direct inaccessibility), there is still resistance to such an idea, first as if it were anti-progressive, and second as if it cannot be identified with. On an anecdotal level, a friend with whom I recently saw a theatrical production complained that it was not realistic (and indeed it was, on the contrary, precisely Elizabethan as well as postmodern, neither of which are based, like the realist theatre of the nineteenth century, on an "effet de réel". On the academic level, people like and in the wake of Baudrillard and Kittler are sometimes criticized for "taking away" or discrediting the reality of those who are struggling (the lower-classes, the Third World, women in certain societies). It is precisely because of the persistence of positivism and objectivity that goes back to Baconian science and learned societies such as the Royal Society, that the "real" is maintained against those who theorize the technologization, the digitalization, of the real (that is, of its becoming virtual, of the virtual becoming-real). According to Baudrillard, however, to think the real now involves a dual re-invention and discovery of it: "on ne peut plus penser [le réel] comme réel [i.e., belonging to our orbit, or natural world], mais comme exorbité, comme vu d'un autre monde – comme illusion. Songeons à l'expérience stupéfiante que serait la découverte d'un autre monde réel que le nôtre. L'objectivité de notre monde, nous l'avons découverte, comme l'Amérique, à peu près à la même époque. Or ce qu'on a découvert, on ne peut plus jamais l'inventer. C'est ainsi que nous avons découvert la réalité, qui reste à inventer (c'est ainsi que nous avons inventé la réalité, qui reste à découvrir)" (141, my emphasis). What one pretends to have "discovered" always has by that token an "objective" status. As "objective," it could not possibly be invented anew because one would not *invent* objectivity. Nonetheless, the characteristic of what Baudrillard calls our contemporary "Era of the Virtual" is that the real, the objective, is being digitalized, rendered utterly calculable: such is the sense of Baudrillard's writing that the real "reste à inventer". The discourse of "discovery" forgets that what we "discover" is, as Kant argued, already an invention, even if only an invention of the means of perception, that is, the perceptual apparatus that apprehends the "object" discovered (as in another civilization). Likewise, the "discovery"

⁶ See page 206 in this volume.

of America was a fiction, an invention, a narrative designed for what are alas the all-too well-known reasons (the attempts of individual nation-states such as France, Spain or England to increase their power vis-à-vis the others). However, there will always, as we shall now see, be those who will claim re-inventions (of the real) as its final discovery.

Laruelle: the transcendental Clone of the Real

It is precisely a "reinvention of the real" that François Laruelle attempts in his long (370 dense pages) *Principes de la non-philosophie* (1996). With nearly every page employing his renewed concept of the "Real," Laruelle's treatise of the (re-invented) "Real" by far surpasses any possibility of a sufficient treatment of it in this afterword. Nonetheless, since on the philosophical plane it is the most recent and certainly the most weighty attempt to "reinvent the Real," and since it contrasts with the project of Clément Rosset, a brief sketch of what his reinvention of the Real entails provides one framework for this volume as a whole.

Laruelle's reinvention of the real passes through a redefinition of philosophy as what he calls "non-philosophy," itself consisting in, as he puts it, "tout autre chose que les concepts et la tradition" of Western philosophy dating back to its origins and having reached, as Laruelle sees it, its final apotheosis in philosophers such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Levinas (whom Laruelle almost never names, but alludes to), Deleuze or Derrida. Philosophy has always been concerned with Being and with Identity, but, since Kant, Fichte, Hegel and others, it has taken account of non-philosophy, and has, in the hands of twentieth-century philosophers, put *being* and *identity* into constant relation with *otherness* and *difference*. Indeed, "Déconstruction" (which Laruelle capitalizes) is the best philosophy can do with non-philosophy (with otherness, with difference), while yet remaining philosophy. Laruelle writes,

[La philosophie] inclut [le non-philosophique], comme exclu, dans le philosophique et fait passer ainsi celui-ci de son état moderne à son état de post-moderne. Pourtant elle laisse le non-philosophique dans son état de marginalité, de minorité, de phénomène adjacent, confortant ainsi la puissance supérieure ou la suffisance du philosophique, réaffirmant sa capacité à le dominer et à le régler de manière ultime. . . . C'est là tout ce que la philosophie pouvait faire pour [le non-philosophique] et avec lui: au mieux, parfois, avec la Déconstruction, un certain équilibre du philosophique et du non-philosophique qui résiste à la maîtrise philosophique et fait symptôme. (3)

We do not here judge this portrayal of deconstruction as "symptom" (may it suffice to note that Laruelle never quotes any deconstructive writer, let alone Derrida, and in fact never quotes *anybody whomsoever*; he incessantly portrays different philosophers yet always in a purely

abstract manner). Rather, we note that Laruelle's "non-philosophy" is thought of as a break with philosophy, with philosophy's domination of and condescension towards "non-philosophy": it amounts to a re-invention of philosophical enquiry as non-philosophy promoted to a superior position and as "new practice": non-philosophy is "une nouvelle pratique de la philosophie, plus universelle que celle-ci parce qu'elle se libère de certains de ses postulats – en particulier de celui de sa correspondance au Réel, de sa convertibilité avec le Réel" (3).⁷

This new relation to the Real is the linchpin of non-philosophy. Non-philosophy reinvents philosophy by discovering (inventing?) a new relation to the Real. It is nothing if not a reinvention of the real. Defined as "scientific," as "non-Euclidean geometry," non-philosophy is "radical critique," that is, the "recherche d'une instance à la fois plus réelle et plus immanente que la Différence ou que l'Autre, et que nous avons trouvée dans l'Un' ou la 'vision-en-Un'" (4). This One or vision-in-One is the Real, and Laruelle had to reinvent the very earth (the real, if there ever were one) we stand on to bring about this new relation to the real: "C'est à un changement *global de terrain* que nous avons dû procéder, abandonnant celui de l'Être puis celui de l'Autre pour celui de l'Un ou de l'immanence radicale qui nous a paru le Réel même. Sur cette nouvelle base, c'est tout le *continent* de la pensée . . . qui s'est réorganisé" (4, my emphasis).

Laruelle's subsequent 365 pages narrate first why (French, lest we forget) philosophy of the post 1960 type (Levinas, Deleuze, Derrida, Badiou, etc.) is only a rebellion against philosophy by means of privileging the marginal against the center, the other against the self, and second why non-philosophy now emerges as an autonomous discipline possessing its own principles, rules, validation norms, "une syntaxe universelle," positivity, its objects (none other than philosophy itself), and "son expérience ultime du Réel (l'Un)" (5). We are no longer, as with Difference and Deconstruction (read, Deleuze and Derrida), in an ironic relation to the real (the deconstruction of the real, the showing how the real is always an invention), but rather in a non-ironic, sincere relation to the real, reinvented precisely as indestructible real. It is a project, to recall Baudrillard on invention and discovery, that would have its (re)"invention" be the true (final) "discovery":

Le problème est d'*inventer* et de *découvrir*, sans doute simultanément, une pensée qui, sans nier la philosophie . . . suspend seulement ses prétentions sur le Réel et fait d'elle un nouvel usage en vue de constituer un ordre de la pensée plus rigoureux et plus réel que le philosophique lui-même. Quelle expérience du Réel peut *déterminer* ainsi la pensée? (5, my emphasis).

⁷ Perhaps because Laruelle writes abstractly of "philosophy" without analyzing specific texts, his use of "philosophy" and "non-philosophy" becomes that of allegorical personifications.

Without being Heideggerian (Heidegger also dropped "philosophy" for "thinking"), non-philosophy uses philosophy as an object of study so as, *simultaneously*, to fabricate *and* reveal the already existent but never uncovered "Real". In this process, the reinvention of the real always risks denying that the real reinvented is an invention precisely because if it is "really real," then it would not be an invention but rather a discovery (in the sense of a radical, unmediated "apprehension").

Laruelle wants not the Real as "objective identity" but as "Identity in flesh and bone":

Supposons maintenant que le Réel ne soit pas cette identité objective . . . mais qu'il soit l'Identité en chair et en os, l'Identité telle quelle en son immanence in-objective, voilà le seul Réel qui puisse défaire les prétentions de la philosophie et déterminer la non-philosophie comme pensée transcendante qui se rapporte aux philosophies et aux sciences plutôt qu'à leurs objets. (9)

Such is Laruelle's answer to his question, "what experience of the Real could determine thought?" In changing lower-case letters to capitals, and adding stressed prefixes ("I" for "i" in "identity," "in-" before "objective"), Laruelle would define the experience of the Real. In fairness, the space of an afterword is inadequate for pursuing the suspicion that only typography and allegorical personification are at work in Laruelle's reinvention of the Real. Suffice it therefore to pinpoint one metaphor of Laruelle that establishes a connection/ contrast between him and Baudrillard. Because, *stricto sensu*, the real is off-limits, Laruelle has recourse to the "clonage du Réel," a sort of heuristic Real-substitute.

The "théorie du clonage" (34-38), or "clonage," *tout court*, is "une pièce essentielle de la non-philosophie" (35). It is a way out of the "quasi-contradiction" between "l'apparence" (phenomena, representation) and "le Réel inaccessible à cette apparence," quasi-contradiction which is an "aporia" that needs to be "solved" for non-philosophy to realize itself. The way?

Elle se résout par la production d'un clone du réel-Un, clone deux fois identique: en tant que clone et en tant que clone de l'identité par excellence. Ce clone [du Réel] est l'identité transcendantale qui, si l'on peut dire, 'est' le Réel ou est donnée sur son mode immanent mais qui n'apporte rien de réel au Réel, aucun prédicat, juste une fonction. (35)

The clone functions like the Real; we need a clone because the Real itself is off-limits. How does Laruelle clone something off-limits?

If that question is left unanswered, it remains that the theory of "clonage" is essential for the non-philosophical system to work: not the real, but a fiction which allows the system to function. Laruelle in fact wants to get rid of the giving of the given, and wants only to have the

"L'Un, le donné-sans-donation" (27): "Le Donné-sans-donation est un nom premier d'extraction phénoménologique pour le Réel" (24). In his previous book *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, Laruelle gave (no irony, he writes "donne") "le nom premier de Donné-sans-donation" to "L'Un comme Réel" (23). We will therefore not ask if the giving of a name tampers with the concept of the "Donné-sans-donation". The Real, for him, is the given, which is always lost by the act of giving and receiving (by which the given is entangled in representation). So, the clone is something he defines as given without a giving (*Donné sans donation*). It's a way of having the "objective" matter to study without having to deal with the fact that any object is in part the result of the subject's mode of apprehending the object. The reinvention of the Real (by dint of the clone) is a way of getting rid of fiction, of language, of idiom (his "universal language" is the riddance of language). In short, it is Plato all over again: expel the poets from the City.

The gesture is basically to capture the Real which cannot be captured, by means of a fiction, but to pretend that the means are in fact the end, that is, that the fiction *is the Real*, or well-nigh the Real because its clone. The problem for Laruelle remains that the Real cannot be thought and cannot be utterly denied (it is "absolument nécessaire," like a living body, "mais absolument insuffisant," a body alone is not enough), so

il s'agit alors avec cette identité ["une identité transcendante qui peut, elle, se dire de la transcendance"] d'un véritable *clone transcendantal* de l'Un ou, plus rigoureusement, du *transcendantal comme clone du Réel*: clone unique et originaire, essence (de) clone du clone. Ce clonage originaire de l'Un est la plus sûre destruction du doublage métaphysique [he means original/ copy, in short any of the binary oppositions which structure philosophy] ou des doublets philosophiques, c'est même, si l'on peut dire *l'identité telle quelle (du) double*. (166)

Laruelle is trying to get rid of the mirror, essential to philosophy, because any term in a system is the double of another and therefore of itself (163). Every term refers to itself and to another. The "miroir est la *forme commune* ou le *sens commun* médiateur de la chose et de sa représentation" (163). Laruelle's non-philosophy is the attempt to get rid of this mirror, to get rid of representation (he will invent/discover (?) a "reflet sans-reflété" to get around the act of representation [166]). His "clone of the Real" is the (fiction of a) reflection, doubling, of the Real, that is, a representation of a thing which as representation would however be a thing (be real), and not representation. Laruelle's whole system wants to have the thing, but he recognizes that as impossible. Therefore, he comes up with the idea according to which the representation of the thing could be the thing if you utterly suspend the representationality of the representation, leaving only the representivity. The clone of the Real would be the representivity without the

representationality (this is the same reason he wants to get rid of performative language, keeping only the "performé" [214]).

Laruelle's non-philosophy, his reinvention of the Real, by dint of his peculiar notion of the cloning of the Real, is a reinvention of the Platonic wheel, namely the expulsion of the poets in *The Republic*. In Laruelle's hands, the reinvention of the real has dictatorial and totalitarian overtones (despite his remarks about peace and democracy). The reinvention of the (cloned) real would get rid of difference.⁸ Such elimination operates according to what Laruelle coins *dualyse*: "la non-philosophie est très exactement, par la force (de) pensée, un *clonage transcendantal et une dualyse* du matériau philosophique" (226). *Dualyse* is a way of analyzing a binary opposition without separating the two (227). It is how Laruelle avoids the problem of relation, of *différance*: "Par exemple la différence ontologique [Heideggerian problematic in particular] devient dualité unilatérale de l'Être et de l'étant, ce qui exige une nouvelle syntaxe et de nouveaux contenus remplissant ces termes" (228). The reinvention of the real thus operates by a new language: "On dira par exemple que l'Être détermine-en-dernière-instance l'étant hors de tout rapport de différence" (228). Outside of any relation of difference, such is how the play of difference – of representation – is annulled. The finality of the "-en-dernière-instance" is how the non-philosophical reinvention of the real achieves closure, final stability. And just as Plato would have had Being superior to being, Laruelle not by accident has Being "determine" being, and not vice versa (it is thus also that he has the Real determine thought, and determine the virtual, rather than vice versa).

The irony (which he seems blithely to ignore) is that Laruelle must use the simulacrum – his metaphor of cloning – to bring about the reinvented Real.

La non-philosophie est une pensée non pas *du* terme – le terme *réel* ne pense pas [the first time Laruelle denies allegorical personification, for usually his terms have all the human qualities] ... – mais *selon* le terme (comme déterminant-en-dernière-instance). Le Réel ou l'Un donne le type et l'ordre des termes – des identités ou des clones transcendants – qui forment à chaque niveau le coeur des dualités. (228)

The Real determines what the terms of any duality are, but in such a way as there would be no play of difference between the two; rather, the two terms are locked into a fixed (non)relation: "Etant déterminant, [le Réel] *interdit* la relation ou la dualité comme déterminante, donc le choix unilatéral d'un terme plutôt que l'autre et le rejet ou l'exclusion de cet autre – ultime avatar de la hiérarchie philosophique" (228, my

⁸ Recalling Baudrillard, who writes, "avec le Virtuel, nous entrons non seulement dans l'ère de la liquidation du Réel et du Référentiel, mais dans celle de l'extermination de l'Autre" (1996, 155).

emphasis). *Différance* or the play of difference is not determinant. Laruelle's non-philosophy is an attempt, operating by prohibition, to go beyond the irony which deconstructive philosophy sees as the originary troubled origin of any duality (Derrida, 1967, 235-378), by dint of imposing unilaterality: "[Le Réel] exige la conservation des dualités de termes qui sont à la base de la philosophie, mais il l'exige alors comme unilatérale et simplement déterminée" (228). Non-philosophy reinvents the Real as that which blocks, stops, fixes everything in its place. It conserves "difference" – duality of terms at the "basis" of a certain *kind* of *Western* philosophy – but freezes it, locks everyone into their "given" place. And such an "order" ("interdit," "exige," writes Laruelle) is unquestionable, inflexible, absolute: "unilatérale et simplement déterminée":

Autrement dit la non-philosophie, qui cesse de faire des hypothèses transcendantales sur la véritable essence du Réel [which is henceforth left *hors jeu*, and *simply* defined, defined simply as Laruelle sees it to be so as to serve his argument] et de la philosophie et de décider par exemple entre les termes et les relations, internes *ou* externes – elle prend le philosophique tel qu'il se présente – , est une théorie et une pragmatique des *clones* qui supposent l'identité des termes, des relations *ou* des mixtes. Le choix philosophique transcendantal doit céder la place à la dualité transcendantale des identités et des mixtes, des clones et des doublets. Le clonage transcendantal plutôt que la répétition. (228)

This is a coded way of getting beyond or around *Différence et répétition* of Gilles Deleuze, not to mention "*différance*" of Derrida. In other words, getting around the conception of an opposition (such as Being/ being, Real/ simulacrum, etc.) in terms of difference but also in terms of a deconstruction of the difference whereby each term may be seen as implied in the other by means of their relation (*différance*) and thus as repetition of each other. Such philosophical conception must cede ("doit céder") its place to a non-philosophical conception of the opposition in terms of identity: the terms in an opposition would be clones of each other. Such a conception is pragmatic: it does not concern what is, but how non-philosophy will use the terms.

Laruelle contends that we must get rid of relation, of difference, and of *différance*. He gets rid of opposition, just as he got rid of representation (of the signifier, keeping only the signified; of *donation*, keeping only the *Donné*; of the performative, keeping only the performed). Such is why Laruelle is an advocate of stasis, fixity, the final freezing into place which would characterize the Virtual Age, which as we saw with Baudrillard, is but the same thing as the integrated Real. Laruelle is what Baudrillard fears, a proponent of the Virtual Age who wants the crime to be perfect.

After Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida, after the deconstruction of Being (the One) and the installment of the Two, the Double, etc. (re-presentation, i.e., the fact that Being is always already an invention, a product of language, etc.), Laruelle would re-invent the One, and it will go by the name of the Real. This Real will be a re-invented Being, but not succumb to the deconstructibility of Being. Laruelle re-invents the Real, since it is a new and improved version of Being, of the One, of that which is not only an effect of language. Such re-invention claims to be a discovery all the while admitting its only heuristic, pragmatic status. A fiction that would be a legal fiction, that allows itself what it denies everyone else. Unlike Laruelle, Clément Rosset proclaims a real without recourse to such a detour.

Rosset: the real is the real is the real is the real; or "earth's diurnal course, with rocks, and stones"

Clément Rosset receives the lion's share of attention here, since from 1976, with *Le Réel et son double*, up to 1997, with *Le Démon de la tautologie*, all his nine published books have had as their central "object" – if you will – of focus nothing other than the real.⁹ Akin to Laruelle's emphatic exigence of the unilateral is Rosset's declaration of the unilaterality of the world:

La réalité est idiote parce qu'elle est solitaire, seule de son espèce. . . . Il lui suffira donc d'être deux pour cesser d'être idiote, pour devenir susceptible de recevoir un sens. C'est le propre de la métaphysique, depuis Platon, que de comprendre le réel grâce à une telle duplication: de doubler l'ici d'un ailleurs, le ceci d'un autre, l'opacité de la chose de son reflet. Rendre au monde unilatéral, pour reprendre l'expression d'Ernst Mach, son complément en miroir. . . . [Le monde est] un être unilatéral dont le complément en miroir n'existe pas.¹⁰

The idiocy of the real is, for Rosset, its interest, and what makes it superior to anything one could think about reality (which can only, by definition, be wrong, "imaginary" as Rosset puts it). Meaning, doubling, reflection, mirroring, are all beside the point. The "real" is the unilateral, which is to be understood in the sense of Rosset's recognizing, or wanting, only one side of the issue (in the sense of his clear preference for the real, and his dismissal of the imaginary – see his unserious dismissal of the "modern Hegelians," [*Le Réel*, 50-64]). In the case of Laruelle, the "real" is the unilateral in the sense that, according to him, there is only one side, there are not two sides anymore: all is clone; therefore, all is copy; but since all is copy, the copy becomes real; the Real

⁹ His five previous books are not without relevance, but the works devoted to the real will be privileged here.

¹⁰ *Le Réel. Traité de l'idiotie*, 1977, 48-49. Hereafter, *Le Réel*.

is thus determinant, but it is a cloned Real which has utterly erased the pertinence of any pre-clone Real, were there ever one.

Similar to Laruelle's (albeit somersaulting) elimination of the double (by means of the double), his recuperation of the Real by means of the cloned Real, Rosset, too, would push out of his view the double. Trying to re-invent materialism (the real, that which would have been obfuscated by Idealism), Rosset writes, echoing Laruelle's relation to the double (the clone) and to the Fichtean legacy:

Fichte, à en croire Schopenhauer [Rosset's second and third books were studies of Schopenhauer] professait ... que, si le monde est ce qu'il est, c'est qu'il est constitué d'une façon telle qu'il ne peut manquer d'être justement ce qu'il est: autrement dit, le monde est bien le monde, mais seulement dans la mesure où il reproduit son image, laquelle est justement l'image du monde. Le matérialisme professerait d'ailleurs volontiers la même doctrine, à cette seule différence près qu'il fait l'économie du double. (Rosset, 1979, 96)

Re-invented materialism eliminates the very notion of the double, of the image.¹¹ While Laruelle admits the impossibility of saying anything that *really* concerns the real, and uses the double (the clone) but as if it were not the double and rather the real, Rosset would see Laruelle's recourse to the "clone" as *via negativa* to the Real, as a cop out, since "toute attente de copie conforme implique ainsi une dénégation radicale du réel" (ibid., 110).

Rosset refers to "ce fait – qu'il y ait quelque chose et non pas rien" which Laruelle and Baudrillard also address. The real, for Rosset as for Laruelle, is something, some thing, the fact that there is something, as opposed to nothing (whereas we saw Baudrillard and Beckett maintain that there is nothing, rather than something):

Nous disons que ce qui existe est insignifiant, que le hasard peut très suffisamment rendre compte de tout ce qui existe: cette thèse demeure ambiguë si l'on omet de préciser qu'elle vise ce qui se passe *dans* l'existence, mais naturellement pas le fait de l'existence elle-même, le fait qu'il existe quelque chose. De ce fait – qu'il y ait quelque chose et non pas rien – il est vain de penser qu'il est 'signifiant' ou 'insignifiant', car il est de toute façon vain d'essayer d'en penser quoi que ce soit. (*Le Réel*, 40)

The real is pure "*hasard*" in the way it occurs, not in the fact of its existence. Rosset defines the relation to the real in terms of this "qu'il y ait quelque chose". This relation is the love of, also called "allégresse" towards, the real, the love of the fact that there is something, not

¹¹ "Le réel . . . est justement ce qui est sans double" (Rosset, 1979, 110).

nothing: "L'allégresse ou amour du réel, si elle est indifférente à tout objet particulier, est cependant attachée à un objet propre, qui englobe d'ailleurs tous les objets existants et tous les objets possibles: le fait ontologique, le fait que le réel existe, qu'il y ait quelque chose plutôt que rien. Mais elle n'est liée à aucun autre objet" (*Le Réel*, 78). Such "allégresse" or love for the real is not the love of anything in particular, but the love of the fact that there are things, rather than there being nothing. Yet, cannot one ask whether the love of this fact amounts to the love of nothing? Given that it cannot love any one thing since any one thing – Rosset gives various lists, such as: life, a person, self, God – is invariably not what it is on account of its being only accessible through perception, which entails representation, and thus not the thing itself, all that Rosset leaves after erasing all *particular* things is the fact that there is something not nothing. But since he has done away with all things, to what extent is there still "something, the fact that there is something"? This turn of phrase, in the subjunctive in French moreover, "qu'il y ait quelque chose," if it makes one think of the many pages Jean-François Lyotard wrote of a similar phrase, namely "qu'il y ait de l'imprésentable," nonetheless is only a subjunctive hypothesis and by no means, of course, a presentation or demonstration.¹² Rosset thereby maintains a distance from the real. Even when he defines the real, he does not define it, and much – if not all – of his discussion of it is instead devoted to discrediting what others say about the real. What, then, is the "definition" of the real, according to Rosset?

The real, for Rosset, is what remains when *all* interpretation of it is subtracted:

le délire paranoïaque intègre sa perception du réel à sa manie persécutoire en ajoutant constamment à ce qu'il voit, à ce qu'il entend, une valeur, un sens, qui accordent la réalité à l'attente qu'il en a. En apparence (fait observé), mon voisin de palier descend innocemment, à 10 heures moins 12 précises, comme s'il allait acheter le journal; en réalité (valeur ajoutée), cette course est rien moins qu'innocente, et je ne suis pas dupe: il est évident qu'il descend l'escalier surtout pour me montrer qu'il se moque de moi. Il s'agit ici, naturellement, de projection paranoïaque et délirante: une signification imaginaire se superpose à la chose perçue sans même que l'observateur éprouve le besoin d'établir un lien causal quelconque entre la chose qu'il voit et la signification qu'il en déduit. (*Le Réel*, 35)

The real would be that which is independent of all projection. Put otherwise, the Real would be the uninvented, the unrepresented. Rosset

¹² Some of Lyotard's modulations of this phrase are in *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, 1988. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe points out that the phrase, "qu'il y ait de l'imprésentable," maintains the uncertainty about the existence of the unrepresentable (a reserve not found in Rosset). See his entry "Sublime" in the *Encyclopedia Universalis*, CD-ROM, 1996.

wants this uninvented Real to be the "insignifiant" (*Le Réel*, 35) insofar as outside the signifying system. Indeed, all signification for Rosset is "added value" to reality, to things, which themselves have none, other than what he calls (ibid.) the "rigorous nonsignification" of being necessary and not necessary. The reinvention of the real, even the description or re-description of the real, is always the thought, the dream, the image, the construct, the concept, the fiction (etc.) of what would never be thought, dreamed, imagined, constructed, conceived, fabricated (etc.), and what would be outside all that.

Rosset's real is also described in terms reminiscent of its description in other philosophical systems, such as that of David Hume. The real of Rosset is Hume's "impression". Rosset writes: "Le réel précède ainsi, le plus souvent, sa représentation, en sorte que la fonction de la représentation est d'évoquer non pas le réel tel qu'il serait contemporain de la perception mais de dévoiler un réel qui lui est antérieur, qui existe avec toute la force de la réalité sans avoir cependant été clairement enregistré" (*Le Réel*, 125). This is the notion of the Humean "impression," which precedes the "idea". And again: "La représentation la plus convaincante, la plus 'vraie', désigne presque toujours un réel déjà ancien, ou du moins un réel qui a commencé à être réel bien avant d'être reconnu en tant que tel - 'reconnu', c'est-à-dire connu seulement la 'seconde fois' (la première fois, qui ne vient pas à la surface de la conscience, était celle de l'émergence du réel lui-même)" (*Le Réel*, 126). Furthermore, what Rosset calls "valeur ajoutée" is what Hume called "custom". In the empiricism of Hume, the mind is impressed by various sensible objects but does not even know it has been until an idea is formed in the mind of such impressions. In fact, the impression, although it presumably took place, is so radically anterior to the idea formed of it that Hume suggests that the idea formed of it is more a function of, or comes more from, social custom than is it related to the impression. In short, what Rosset is describing is a very well-worn notion of the real.¹³ In the end, the "real" of Rosset is nothing other than the impression of Hume occluded by custom.

Moreover, the real is the *hors texte*: "Nous aurons donc au moins appris en cours de route que c'est le sort le plus général du réel que d'échapper au langage, et le sort le plus général du langage que de manquer le réel - qu'il existe par conséquent une chose, indépendante du

¹³ That also has undeclared affinities with how Freud defines the repetition of a symptom: "La représentation du réel est donc généralement tardive; mais cela ne signifie pas du tout que la réalité ne soit perceptible que par le biais de la *mémoire*. L'accès du réel à la conscience, qui intervient après coup, ne constitue pas pour autant un souvenir. C'est le réel qui vient ainsi à la conscience, plutôt qu'il n'y revient: pas en tant qu'il est passé mais bien en tant qu'il est réel, et même si sa réalité ne se manifeste ainsi qu'à la faveur d'un décalage entre le réel d'alors et sa perception présente. Dans de tels 'retours du passé', qui sont en fait des *arrivées du réel*, ce n'est pas le passé qui revient mais le réel qui apparaît" (*Le Réel*, 130). This is the symptom according to Freud. The real thus functions as symptom, as what happens always as original, whence its not being remembered, its peculiar repetitiveness.

nothing: "L'allégresse ou amour du réel, si elle est indifférente à tout objet particulier, est cependant attachée à un objet propre, qui englobe d'ailleurs tous les objets existants et tous les objets possibles: le fait ontologique, le fait que le réel existe, qu'il y ait quelque chose plutôt que rien. Mais elle n'est liée à aucun autre objet" (*Le Réel*, 78). Such "allégresse" or love for the real is not the love of anything in particular, but the love of the fact that there are things, rather than there being nothing. Yet, cannot one ask whether the love of this fact amounts to the love of nothing? Given that it cannot love any one thing since any one thing – Rosset gives various lists, such as: life, a person, self, God – is invariably not what it is on account of its being only accessible through perception, which entails representation, and thus not the thing itself, all that Rosset leaves after erasing all *particular* things is the fact that there is something not nothing. But since he has done away with all things, to what extent is there still "something, the fact that there is something"? This turn of phrase, in the subjunctive in French moreover, "qu'il y ait quelque chose," if it makes one think of the many pages Jean-François Lyotard wrote of a similar phrase, namely "qu'il y ait de l'imprésentable," nonetheless is only a subjunctive hypothesis and by no means, of course, a presentation or demonstration.¹² Rosset thereby maintains a distance from the real. Even when he defines the real, he does not define it, and much – if not all – of his discussion of it is instead devoted to discrediting what others say about the real. What, then, is the "definition" of the real, according to Rosset?

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The real would be that which is independent of all projection. Put otherwise, the Real would be the uninvented, the unrepresented. Rosset

¹² Some of Lyotard's modulations of this phrase are in *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, 1988. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe points out that the phrase, "qu'il y ait de l'imprésentable," maintains the uncertainty about the existence of the unrepresentable (a reserve not found in Rosset). See his entry "Sublime" in the *Encyclopedia Universalis*, CD-ROM, 1996.

langage, qu'on appelle ordinairement, faute peut-être d'un terme plus adéquat, la réalité" (*Le Réel*, 142). This conclusion to *Le Réel. Traité de l'idiotie* is a letdown from he who wants to revitalize materialism against what he saw in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the dominance of an idealist philosophical tradition, from Plato to Derrida. Ironically, Rosset's conclusion to *Le Réel* makes him accord with everything he ridicules and "criticizes" (Kant, Lacan, Derrida, etc.), in short with the most basic starting point of philosophy: the thing itself as mediated.¹⁴

Rosset's way out of this mediation is his tautological "definition" of the real. Of his oft-used tautology, "the real is the real," Rosset claims to offer a clarification in his recent *Le Démon de la tautologie* (1997). The book begins with an "Avant-propos" which says the book had as point of departure "l'idée de répondre brièvement à deux objections qui m'ont souvent été faites". The second not concerning us here, let us give only the first objection: "La première [objection] consiste à observer que je tiens toujours un peu le même discours . . . que ce discours lui-même est assez pauvre puisque se bornant à répéter que le réel est le réel; qu'enfin je ne me mets guère en peine de définir le sens précis que je prête à ce mot de réel" (7). The first part – always the same thing – Rosset does not deal with; the second – that he repeats a tautology – is the main point dealt with; the third is basically covered in the second.

"J'appellerai ici réel, comme je l'ai toujours fait au moins implicitement, tout ce qui existe en fonction du principe d'identité qui énonce que A est A. . . Si le réel est bien tel que je le définis, force est de n'en rien dire, sinon rien *que cela*, qu'il est réel. Le discours sur le réel sera *tautologique* ou ne sera pas" (11-12).¹⁵ Rosset however does nothing more than reiterate these assertions, interspliced with anecdotes having little to do with the assertions. His forty or fifty page "defence" has a brief discussion of Wittgenstein, then a very loose section on "lapalissade", pleonasm, and metaphor, concluding with mere reiterations of his standard assertions. He does retract upon his claim that a discourse on

¹⁴ Rosset claims that he is not trying to describe the Real, only criticize what others make out of it (he would make nothing out of it, merely describe it as what it is, "determined and fortuitous, therefore insignificant," without meaning): "Ces propositions . . . ne visent pas à décrire, encore moins à épuiser, la richesse du réel, mais à critiquer les appréciations portées sur lui" (*Le Réel*, 40). His strategy consists in positing something (the real) about which one can only say stupidities, or at least irrelevant catachreses, and then to criticize everyone for having tried to say something accurate about the real. In the end, however, in maintaining the real as always only mediated, he says nothing different than the "Idealists".

¹⁵ Rosset's definition of the real as what is simply what it is, or "the real is the real," in short, the tautological "definition" of the real seems to us akin to Laruelle's exasperated, urgent desire to expel representation, and akin to his desire to freeze "things as they are". The affirmation of tautology is an affirmation of radical conservatism: that things just be what they are. Neither Rosset nor Laruelle account for becoming as opposed to being. Eric Alliez argues (1996, 31) that Gilles Deleuze's philosophy sought for a systematic virtualisation of the history of philosophy as a mode of actualizing a new philosophy always virtual insofar as infinitely variable, changing. The "real" here is thought of as closure, end, the point where nothing remains to be said, the point where things equal words, collapse into words.

the real can only be tautological. This becomes: a discourse on the real should be inspired by tautology. It does not need itself to be tautological.

Rosset's "defense" of tautology always only consists in a repetition of tautology, repeating that "A is A" is the closest statement to the reality of A, adding that "A is nothing other than A". He asserts, "A est A est . . . la juste expression de toute réalité, qui a pour définition d'être ce qu'elle est et de n'être en rien ce qu'elle n'est pas" (34). His "defence" however calls the "A" after the verb "to be" a "re-enunciation," a "reproduction": "que tout ce qu'on peut dire d'une chose finisse par se ramener à la simple énonciation, ou re-énonciation, de cette chose même" (48). Is a copy, a reproduction, the same as its "original"?

Rosset's "answers" to these objections are assertions that beg the very same objections which they were supposedly to have answered, such as "Le monde est le monde et il n'existe rien d'autre que le monde. Tu es toi et je suis moi, sans plus et sans moins. Evidences que cela, dira-t-on" (50). Might we not nonetheless ask of such declarations, what is the world? Which world? The planet? Human experience? Animal experience? Ocean life? Am I not different depending upon what context I am in? Is Rosset sure that "I am that I am," that "you are who you are" are *self-evident*? Which of my "I's" would he choose for me? When pushed to answer the objection that he delivers only empty tautologies, Rosset only offers more tautologies, after a long *causerie* (19-37) about why "lapalissades," and pleonasm are not tautologies, and, most surprising, why metaphors are close to tautologies: "la tautologie est à la philosophie ce qu'est la métaphore à la littérature: le meilleur et le plus sûr indicateur du réel" (47). Unable to answer questions about the real, Rosset only offers assertions, which are as empty as his tautologies:

Il n'y a rien de plus précieux à penser que la réalité; or celle-ci ne fait qu'une avec sa propre identité; donc la parole philosophique qui rend le mieux la réalité est celle qui exprime le mieux son identité: à savoir la tautologie. (49)

Who says nothing is more precious to think than reality? What proof? Where is the demonstration? Why would speech ever be able to render reality, given that reality is not ever what Rosset calls "added value," that is, speech? Why is tautology the guarantee of identity? Already Rosset is not even sure what tautology is, given that he is hard-pressed to extricate tautology from pleonasm, "lapalissade", and, more problematic still, must define tautology by comparing it with metaphor. Although he does see tautology to be different from metaphor, he still needs the "other," metaphor, to identify the "same," tautology. This is hardly reassuring from the thinker of the real-as-defined-only-by-itself, and not by its other. (The difference with Laruelle is that for Laruelle the real is defined by its other, but its other is actually just itself. If for Rosset the real should be just itself, for Laruelle the real is everything: itself and the other.)

Rosset's assertions break down into arbitrary normative claims:

"Je veux seulement suggérer que le discours philosophique *le plus fort* est d'inspiration tautologique et que tout discours philosophique tenu à partir de l'inspiration contraire, c'est-à-dire de l'intuition dualiste, est *plus faible*" (47, my emphasis). Rosset gives absolutely no argument for the stronger or the weaker. The assertions are simply effects of presuppositions: such as "the fact that there is something and not nothing," which is not self-evident, it having been contested more than once, or such as identity being seen to consist in a repetition after the verb "to be," for example "A is A". Certainly never proven, they are at most metaphorized arbitrarily: "On pourrait ainsi imaginer un arbre généalogique de philosophes scindé dès le début en deux branches rivales et inconciliables: celle qui commence avec Parménide, pour la lignée légitime, et celle qui commence avec Platon, pour la lignée bâtarde" (47). The legitimate and the bastard is what Rosset endeavors to identify and separate, but he presupposes he knows which is which. And why would the bastard be less real than the legitimate?

Rosset admits that a tautological "argument", "n'argue en fait de rien" (49). Nonetheless, he thinks that tautology adequates best the real of any thing, what the thing really is. Philosophy must be of a tautological inspiration (47), "à tendance tautologique" (49), but never "se rédui[re] au discours tautologique" (47), not "se rédui[re] à l'énonciation tautologique" (49). Rosset is in a pickle: tautology best renders the real of the real – "the real is the real" – but philosophy, if it wants to argue, must not use tautologies. Arguing something means not delivering tautologies, but this would mean, at least, adding, "what makes the real be the real is what the real is not". This would make identity be determined by what it is not, by its other, and this is beyond where Rosset wants to go.¹⁶

Despite claims to its singularity, the real as envisaged by Rosset is no more singular than the totality (infinity?) of matter: "Tel est en effet le réel, et sa définition la plus générale: *un ensemble non clos d'objets non identifiables*" (Rosset, 1979, 23). The real, for Rosset, is simply everything, which is this open ensemble of objects which might seem to consist of particularities. However, insofar as "le réel est . . . étranger à toute *caractérisation*" (ibid.), its proper characteristic is to have no characteristic (making it sound like a chameleon): "*plus un objet est réel, plus il est inidentifiable*" (33). Thus, while Rosset writes that the real is the singular – "l'expression d'aspects du singulier' ne désigne ici rien

¹⁶ The epitome of tautology is of course the Biblical "I am that I am," which Rosset cites (48). Shakespeare shows, however, that the thought of tautology, or Being, is powerless, that God is more dependent (upon Moses), than the thought of becoming, exemplified by Iago ("I am not what I am," *Othello*, I.i. 69-70). If the Duke of York repeats "I am that I am that I am" (*Richard III*, I.i. 20-30), yet suffers the inversion of being a "dog" rather than "God," Sonnet 121, otherwise known as "one to one," sees its speaker's Godly claim of "being" (ll. 2) in "No, I am that I am" (ll. 9) utterly undermined by "seeing" (ll. 4) and other forms of *apparaître*, such as in the way the absent key word of the poem, "live," is present only in its anagrams "vile" (ll. 1), "evil" (ll. 13), and the idea of the veil (the acrostic G-O-W-N, ll. 6-9). Shakespeare's numerous modulations of this tautology "I am that I am" (*Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*) all show its inseparability from "I am not what I am".

d'autre que les aspects du réel" (ibid.) – such a claim seems to me contradictory. More an object is real, more it cannot be identified. To be not able to identify an object is not to be able to delimit it from anything else. If it blends utterly with everything else, it cannot be identified anymore because utterly dissolved. The real is thus nothing and everything. But Rosset's equation of the singular with the real suggests something delimited, with some borders. Yet if something has borders and limits, then it can be identified (distinguished from what it is not), thereby no longer being "réel".

Commenting Parmenides as well as Lucretius, according to whom what exists exists, what does not does not, and the nature of a thing consists in that thing, Rosset calls such *dicta* "ce retour forcé à l'un" (1991, 11). Rosset's re-inscription of the real is thus that of the one. Rosset's real – the one – is Laruelle's One – the Real. This real is one, according to Rosset, because it is only the real now: "*aucune réalité n'a jamais été sujette à l'altération, au passé ou au devenir*" (17). The real is now, as Barnett Newman said of the sublime ("the sublime is now"). The real is the present, Rosset cannot imagine how the absent could be real: "et en quoi pourrait bien consister 'l'existence' de ce qui n'est pas 'présent'?" (16 ["existent" = "real", 7]), which makes him unable to understand anything of psychoanalysis. The real is always "inaltérable, inengendré, impérissable, immobile" (17), because the present is always the present, never the past or future and in that sense unchanging. Such an idea comes across as sleight of hand logic, a game of definition, and makes Rosset emit an idea similar to the simulacrum-reality anticipated and feared by Baudrillard, insofar as Rosset denies the *existence* of the past or future (only the present is existent, is real). Baudrillard recounts the hypothesis of the English naturalist of the nineteenth century, P. H. Gosse, according to which all geological traces and fossils of the origin and evolution of animal species were a simulation of God when He created the world five thousand years ago. Baudrillard remarks that Gosse's hypothesis is in fact realizing itself, albeit without the hand of God, nowadays:

tout notre passé est bien en train de glisser dans le simulacre fossile, mais c'est l'homme qui a hérité du malin génie de l'artifice qui était celui de Dieu. La reconstitution virtuelle de la genèse de l'espèce est aujourd'hui l'œuvre de l'homme lui-même, et elle est en passe de devenir la réalité virtuelle de notre passé comme de notre futur. (1996, 41)

Simple example of this becoming-simulacrum of the past: with *in vitro* genesis of human life, the former *sine qua non* of new human life is reduced to a quaint old fashion, not necessary and, if the practice of *in vitro* ever became the rule, a simulation. Other example: with cloning, today possible and tomorrow custom, the present definitively snuffs out the past, reduces the past to *trompe l'œil*. With it, the One is achieved.

Rosset's game of logic according to which only the present – the

real – exists as unalterable, unengendered, imperishable and immobile, is compatible with the "perfect crime" of which cloning is a minor effect and of which Baudrillard fears the ineluctable accomplishment. For Baudrillard, "le monde est altéré dès le départ, jamais identique à lui-même, jamais réel. . . . Heureusement que nous vivons sur le mode d'une illusion vitale, sur le mode d'une absence, d'une irréalité. . . . Heureusement que rien n'est présent ni identique à soi-même. Heureusement que la réalité n'a pas lieu" (20-21). Whereas Baudrillard considers the "real" to be a lucky impossibility, Rosset considers it something to be sought for, and perhaps achieved.

Ultimately, the apex of the real is, for Rosset, death; or, more precisely, the apex of the real is the pure materiality which makes of the dead person a mass no different from any other inert mass, such as a rock, a stone or earth. One may suppose that Rosset conceives of the real as Wordsworth conceived Lucy dead and buried among earth and rocks or as Heidegger conceived of the rocks which the lizard sunbathes upon.¹⁷ The real is devoid of life. It is what is equal to itself, and in that regard it is like a rock. For Rosset, to be really real is to be dead. The real is death, is the absence of life in matter:

Ce double de moi-même qui m'est offert par mon cadavre est pourtant, on le remarquera, un double absolu, parfait, irrécusable, la plus fidèle image que je puisse avoir de moi-même: aucune différence matérielle, en effet, entre mon corps vivant et mon corps récemment décédé. Et en outre, ce corps mort est plus qu'une image parfaite, plus que mon double parfaitement reproduit, puisqu'il n'est autre que moi-même. (1991, 107)

Although it is questionable whether my dead corpse is still "me," gleaned from this passage is the essence, as it were, of Rosset's philosophy. Whereas throughout all his writing over the past twenty-five years, the double is the fly annoying the desire to be alone with the real, here the double and the real combine into one, if not the One.

This double, "my" dead body, is different from the other sort of double, which Rosset sees as non-existent, that is, non-real ("Le réel . . . est justement ce qui est sans double" [1979, 110]), and which is, in short, any imaginative product of who I am (be it a passport, my autobiography, my daydreams, etc.). Rosset's thought is based on the absolute opposition between the real and the imaginary. The fictions of who I am are not real. It is curious, then, to see to what extent Rosset conceives of life itself as the non-real, as spirit, as non-material, as what

¹⁷ "She neither hears nor sees/ Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,/ With rocks, and stones, and trees" (Wordsworth, 1980, 129). The gravity of Lucy is what Rosset calls "allégresse," which consists in "ne désirer rien d'autre" because oblivious to any otherness or any sameness; such state is utter non-awareness which he also defines as knowledge of the real, "*savoir du réel*" (1979, 102). Such knowledge however is simply being the real, that which has not the slightest trace of anything resembling consciousness but is rather simple inanimate matter, rock, stone earth round in diurnal course.

in German is called *Geist*. On the contrary, in Rosset's system the real, which is equal to the dead body, that is, matter devoid of life (rock, stone, earth), is one with this same matter which he dubs my "double". Life, in this system, is at best the madman's belief in ghosts. In the second part of *Principes de sagesse et de folie*, that is to say in the part devoted to "folie," Rosset's chapter "Le miroir de la mort" develops how, refusing to recognize that "I" am only my body of which the image of my dead body is the perfect, absolute (not different) double, man has recourse to the notion, in short, of spirit, of the ghost, so as to define the essence of the alive "I". Reconstructing the *folie* of such a notion's genesis through the adoption of a mad narrative I, Rosset writes:

Il manque [au cadavre] un élément qui était présent quand j'étais vivant et qui a disparu au moment de ma mort. Cet élément inconnu dont l'évaporation, au moment de la mort, assure la différence entre le vivant et le cadavre, c'est-à-dire entre le corps et son double, constitue, on le sait, le principal de la substance dont sont composés les *fantômes*. (1991, 108)

Thus far, Rosset in effect paraphrases (unwittingly, we assume) the mid eighteenth-century German philosopher Crusius's notion of *Geist* which Kant criticized in his book *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch die Träume der Metaphysik*. In a work opposing itself to popular superstition, Crusius collapsed the notion of ghost into that of spirit, *Gespenst* into the more noble *Geist*: "ein Geist ist also eine Substanz, welche denken und wollen kann, oder ein Geist ist eine Ideenfähige Substanz" (Crusius, 1964, 841). Crusius defines (rational) life as spirit. Rosset maliciously reverses Crusius, collapsing the notion of spirit – in short, life – back into popular superstition, into what Kant would call *Phantasterei*, the most childish, mad, or old wife's sort of a ghost (1977, 967). In the quote that follows, the narrative I is a *fou*, and we have taken the liberty of bracketing in the position of Rosset the *sage*:

Rien de plus nécessaire en effet, si l'on tient à maintenir une différence entre l'homme et son cadavre [which we may assume Rosset does not], que l'existence des fantômes. S'il y a dans l'homme vivant quelque chose qui n'existe pas dans l'homme mort [if there is, which means, but there is not], il faut bien que ce quelque chose qui manque au cadavre continue à exister quelque part. [Following this logic, which he does not subscribe to but is recreating as an example of one of the forms of madness] Donc, il y a dans l'espace des êtres constitués de cette substance dont le cadavre a été 'dépouillé'. Donc, les fantômes existent [the verb "exist" here is not what Rosset thinks exists – for him only the real exists, only the existent exists, only the real is real – but rather denotes only what the mad logic maintains]. On le voit, la croyance en l'existence des fantômes [sic] n'est pas, comme on le pense généralement, le fruit de l'imagination,

mais bien celui d'une certaine logique. (1991, 108-109)

The essence of life, for Rosset, is that it is *Geist*, spirit, and, in fact, merely the make believe of a ghost, having no *real* status. The essence of life, or life *tout court*, is, for Rosset simply not real, or as real as the ghosts madmen believe in (and the presupposition of all of Rosset is that madmen's ghosts are less real than rocks, stones and earth).

There is no real difference between the living and the dead, only an apparent, that is, non-real one. What only *apparently* distinguishes the living from the dead is this notion of a ghost, which, Rosset maintains, is merely a belief, and therefore does not belong to the real. Life is merely this illusion which he calls the ghost.¹⁸ Life, like the ghost, does not really exist. This confirms the hunch that for Rosset life is not of the order of the real, that the real is death or the dead, or more exactly the state of that which may have been alive but is now no different than materiality. Rosset equates the I "alive" with the dead body, says the I "alive" is the same "I" as the "I" dead: "Il est très difficile d'admettre que 'je' suis 'mort', que le 'je' d'aujourd'hui est toujours bien le 'je' d'hier, qu'à l'heure de mon enterrement ma personne se confond intimement, absolument, avec mon cadavre"; there would be an "identité foncière du vivant et du cadavre" (1991, 110). For Rosset, the real is death, and more precisely inanimate matter: "Présence du réel, qu'aucun regard sinon allègre n'est capable d'approcher de si près. En sorte que l'allégresse n'est pas seulement un mode de réconciliation avec la mort et l'insignifiance; elle est aussi un moyen de connaissance, une voie sûre d'accès au réel" (1977, 80). "Insignifiance," earlier name of the real, now is equal to death. The real is death, and the only *reality* of an "I" is its "cadavre".

After this vision of "man," curious in Rosset's "theory of the real" are the ways he exemplifies it: the real *alive* is a woman.

Un hégélien moderne, Eric Weil, se croit autorisé à déclarer d'entrée de jeu, dans un article précisément consacré à la réalité ('Sur la réalité'), que la réalité que nous pouvons expérimenter est dénuée de toute 'réalité réelle': 'Ce qui se donne immédiatement n'est pas réel'. On pourrait déclarer tout aussi crânement qu'une boisson qui se donne à boire

n'est pas une vraie boisson, ou qu'une femme qui s'offre aux caresses n'est pas vraiment une femme. (Rosset, 1988, 15)

The example here of the woman is not arbitrary. Why not a man? Why is the woman "immediate," and compared to an object I consume (a drink)? Rosset works with a classic eighteenth-century gender opposition according to which woman is the sensible (the materialist's real), man is

¹⁸ As John Donne put it, "how wan a Ghost this our world is" (1978, 34, 1427). Yet although we might think "life" where Donne writes "world," thus of an accord with Rosset, in fact Donne writes *world*.

the intelligible (the rational, the Idealist's real).

Indeed, the real for Rosset is the sensible, as opposed to the intelligible:

Si l'on interroge l'histoire de la philosophie, on s'aperçoit que la plupart des philosophies n'ont pu atteindre leur but, c'est-à-dire la proposition d'une théorie générale du réel, qu'à la condition étrange de dissoudre l'objet même de leur théorie, de le renvoyer à ce quasi-néant que Platon nommait le 'moindre être' . . . propre aux choses sensibles – c'est-à-dire aux choses réelles. (11)

Sensible things are real things. For Rosset, the "real" is "things": "Toute philosophie est une *théorie du réel*, c'est-à-dire ... un regard porté sur les choses" (9).

Elsewhere, woman is also stereotyped, necessarily so given the "realism" according to which sex or gender would not be historical or have a "historicity" but rather be simply what it is. In *La Force majeure* (1983), defining one of the emotions adequate to the real, "la joie," Rosset writes,

il n'est aucun bien du monde qu'un examen lucide ne fasse apparaître en définitive comme dérisoire et indigne d'attention. . . . L'étrange est que cependant la joie demeure, quoique suspendue à rien et privée de toute assise. C'est même là le privilège extraordinaire de la joie que cette aptitude à persévérer alors que sa cause est entendue et condamnée, cet art quasi féminin de ne se rendre à aucune raison, d'ignorer allégrement l'adversité la plus manifeste comme les contradictions les plus flagrantes: car la joie a ceci de commun avec la féminité qu'elle reste indifférente à toute objection (8).

Sexual stereotypes are unavoidable, given the theory of the real we have seen throughout.

The main problem with Rosset's "materialism," or "matter-realism," is that it stands for the acceptance of dogma, *doxa*: commenting upon why logic is inadequate when faced with reality, Rosset writes in *Le Choix des mots* (1995), "j'avouerai avoir toujours confusément estimé que la plupart des logiciens professionnels . . . souffraient d'une sorte d'angoisse ou d'incapacité native . . . à reconnaître sans quelque scrupule les évidences premières, à distinguer sans souci aucun la droite de la gauche, le blanc du noir, le pair de l'impair" (53). The real-ism of Rosset consists in not asking questions, in accepting things as they are. His philosophy, to use a Deleuzian term, is a *territorialization*.¹⁹ He accepts dogma, *doxa*, as real. The right is right, and the left is left; white white,

¹⁹ Alliez writes that, on the contrary, Deleuze is not opposed to the real but to the territorialized: "la virtualisation n'est pas déréalisation mais déterritorialisation" (1996, 51).

black black; even even, odd odd. One ought to be suspicious of these (innocently?) chosen examples. According to the postulate of *Le Choix des mots*, no idea precedes the word I choose. Signifieds are only effects of signifiers. Is that all implied in Rosset's choice here of words, and in their order? Right is with white and even, whereas left is with black and odd. Would there be no politics in such "pairings" of "choices"?

One ought to think here of what Kant – not a matter-realist writer and thus not a reference for Rosset (he in fact disavows Kant at the end of the *Les Choix des mots*) – writes in his essay "Was heisst: sich im Denken orientieren?": "I orientate myself geographically relative to objective data in the sky only by means of a subjective basis of distinction," which is "the feeling of a distinction in my proper subject, namely that between the right and left hand. I call it a feeling, because these two sides show outwards to intuition no remarkable distinction" (A 308).

And indeed, what is less certain than the difference between the right and the left (in a day when politically the right is always obliged to pursue a politics to the left of what it wants, and the left a politics to the right of what it wants)? Yet Rosset, in his desire to be done with it all and just accept the parallel right-white-even and the other parallel left-black-odd, would fix into place what he would have us believe are "obvious" (*évidentes*) parallels.²⁰ The social politics that form the pendant of such "accept-icism" (the contrary of skepticism) is one that tells the poor just to be happy by dint of accepting the fate of a sort of Thatcherite politics, and then they will not mind being poor: they must have a "désespérance à l'égard de tout secours extérieur qui viendrait conforter la réalité vécue et immédiate. Car cette absence d'espoir est aussi la force suprême qui permet de vivre à l'aise au sein de la pauvreté même, de s'accommoder de tout, y compris du pire. Qui ne compte sur rien est assuré de n'être jamais déçu et peut dès lors, sans réticence ni arrière-pensée, s'en donner à cœur joie" (1995 [chapter title "La joie et son paradoxe"], 156). One must abandon any hope of receiving the slightest help (we can imagine this means from, but not only from, the State). The absence of hope allows the poor to like poverty, to like and get used not only to poverty but to the *worst possible situation*. For Rosset, one must not only accept things the way they are, but moreover *not request* that

²⁰ There may be an irony unintended when Rosset writes, "l'évidence est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus difficile à penser" (1997, 51). Given that the "évidence" is the real, that about which nothing can be said because utterly self-sufficient, and that about which nothing can even be known since any knowledge of it is already no longer the same as "it," how can Rosset even say that it is "difficult" to think it? There is nothing to think. Rosset is obliged to add "peut-être," which testifies in fact to the sheer arbitrariness of the qualification. Moreover, when one assumes as "evident" precisely what needs to be questioned, it suggests a difficulty to think, an incapacity to think, or unwillingness. A different conception of the real is that of René Schérer: "Le désir, pas plus que le virtuel, n'est à retrancher du réel. Il le compose, il le complète, il exprime son mouvement même. La réalité, ce n'est pas seulement l'ensemble des possibles actualisés, mais les virtualités dites 'impossibles', laissés pour compte par l'histoire se faisant dans son imperturbable et aveugle avancée dominante" (Schérer, 1996, 14).

things be changed in any way. Furthermore, such despair will allow the poor (and those worse off than the poor) to be happy with their lot.

Not only is Rosset's philosophy fraught with questionable stereotypes or prejudices (and for necessary reasons, as we have seen), but two stylistic traits that characterize his writing, first a penchant for digression, and second an unabashed sufficiency, could be analyzed at length as functions of his tenets regarding the real, and also what classifies him with other great materialist, the Modern Hack in Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. Akin to the Modern Hack's experiment of "writing upon nothing" (Swift, 1986, 103),²¹ Rosset's writing upon nothing but the tautology "the real is the real," can only by definition proceed by digressing since his philosophy "n'argue en fait de rien." Rosset would probably not even deny that all he writes are digressions given his basic situation: having posed something you cannot by definition say anything about, everything you say is therefore not relevant, not pertinent, a digression from the subject which can never be confronted.²² Rosset's sufficiency (or pride) also makes him like the Swiftian hack. Replying to an apparently critical letter (it is not reproduced, so it is hard to say for sure) by writing *Le Choix des mots*, Rosset dismisses his contradictor's question from the start by qualifying it as "banal": "Avant de passer à l'examen plus approfondi de votre principale question (dont vous voyez que je la fais mienne et vertez dans un instant en quoi elle m'intéresse, malgré son caractère apparemment très banal)" (1995, 22). The questioner is "very banal," uninteresting. It is only thanks to Rosset that an uninteresting, very banal question can become interesting.²³

Finally, Rosset's critique of so-called metaphysical philosophers applies to his own materialism. In *Le Philosophe et les sortilèges* (1985), what he calls the incapacity of accommodating oneself to the real, and which he sees as unanimous among philosophical, political or literary discourses is a "symptôme d'un malaise" (8). According to him, this sickness manifests itself in philosophies of the other (one thinks he may have in mind Levinas) which refuse to define what they talk about: "La

²¹ Of course, the hack's text is most notable both for its "Digressions" which become or what William Temple called "digressions," and as Swift's satire on modern pride Moderns" (quoted in Swift, 1986, 158).

²² "Mais cela nous écarte un peu de mon sujet"; "Mais voilà qui décidément nous entrainerait trop loin de notre sujet"; "Avant de poursuivre cet examen de la tautologie, nous allons nous accorder une petite pause et en profiter pour nous intéresser à une histoire imaginée par le cinéaste René Clair dans un de ses films"; "J'ouvre ici une parenthèse, sans rapport direct avec mon propos" (1995, 16, 39, 37, 49).

²³ Secondary criticism has the sole merit of being so bad, uninteresting and irrelevant that it allows Rosset to return to the original text being commented upon and to "découvrir des richesses que je n'avais pas encore inventées" (1992, 19). This sufficiency is of course a function of the philosophy: "La pensée d'une insuffisance du réel - l'idée que la réalité ne saurait être philosophiquement prise en compte que moyennant le recours à un principe extérieur à la réalité elle-même . . . constitue un motif fondamental de la philosophie occidentale". Rosset proclaims, "en revanche, l'idée d'une suffisance du réel" (1995, 13-14).

force invulnérable de la pensée de l'ailleurs et de l'autrement consiste paradoxalement en son impuissance à se définir elle-même: à préciser ce qu'elle désire et ce qu'elle veut" (7). A Levinasian writing project, based on the idea of the "autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence," is indeed a "contestation du réel," to use Rosset's term, if "contestation" means of the self-sufficiency of the real. Rosset's objection to a philosophy or metaphysics of the otherwise or otherness is that it negates the real while managing to "parler de rien" (8). That is, talks about something unverifiable (the absolute other, be it God or other human beings, if not animals) and therefore frees itself from the possibility of being criticized (since no one can disprove the unverifiable), while rejecting what should, according to Rosset, suffice: "ce qui est présent et ici," in short, the real, the simple, the same, pure materiality. The problem with Rosset's objection about basing your theory on something undefinable is that it applies perfectly to everything Rosset himself does and says with his tautology "the real is the real is the real is the real" – tautology never "defined" but merely further repeated in the more recent *Le Démon de la tautologie* (1997). His definition, which is not a definition, also is powerless to say what it wants (in fact the real being what one "is," it cannot be wanted). Ultimately, one wonders whether Rosset works with a false opposition. Would one not find more persuasive accounts of the Real if one starts to consider language as a thing, as real. Reading Rosset, we never see explained why imaginative – in short, linguistic – representations "I" forge of a person walking down a flight of stairs are less real than the person walking down a flight of stairs.

Salat: Caesar salads, virtual cubes, "tout est réel/ rien est réel"

Serge Salat's ambitiously impressive *La relève du réel. L'art du chaos et du virtuel* (1997) is offered here less in conclusion than as a curious mixture of Baudrillard, Laruelle and Rosset, *mélange* that makes

no apparent attempt to avoid the contradictions we could reasonably expect from such a collage.

Salat's book has a double purpose: it is a sort of report on the status of the real in contemporary Western society after its modern history (Renaissance onwards), and it is also a theoretical statement that accompanies the artistic works of Salat and Françoise Labbé installed in many countries of the world. Although Salat's "real" position on the real is difficult to determine with exactitude, especially given the central tenet of Salat and Labbé's installations which is that one's position is not at all decidable but rather dispersed, refracted and multiple, it seems to come close to Baudrillard's: "de la relativité au chaos, des quanta au cyberspace, le réel a disparu, remplacé par une multiplicité d'univers virtuels et d'espace-temps complexes. Cette crise du réel dans la pensée du XXe siècle confronte la création artistique à un défi analogue à celui de l'invention de la perspective à la Renaissance" (9). Commenting their installations which are reproduced in the book, the

artists/authors write that, "ces œuvres confrontent le sujet à une disparition radicale de toute réalité tangible et l'invitent à dépasser toutes les limitations corporelles et spatiales" (9). The point of departure of the book is thus the fact that the real has already been departed from. Commenting their *Cubes virtuels*, Salat writes that they are not "une métaphore du virtuel [mais] une expérience de virtualité devenue réelle et envahissant l'espace réel jusqu'à l'annuler et se substituer à lui" (10). This echoes Baudrillard's idea of the virtual becoming real. The installations Salat and Labbé call *Cubes virtuels*, of which we cannot reproduce here an image, would be "une expérience de 'virtualité réelle'" (110). Salat and Labbé's installations "realize" what Baudrillard sees happening with the becoming-real of the virtual: there is only more and more "real," but a real that is the product of simulation. Simulation is that perpetual (re)inventing of reality whereby and so that the semblance of certainty, of a certain relation to things, would be attained. Baudrillard would not speak of a "reinvention of the real," but rather of a technological proliferation of its simulation. Salat writes, "il n'y a pas de crise de la réalité, bien au contraire: du réel, il y en aura toujours plus, puisqu'il est produit et reproduit par la simulation, et qu'il n'est lui-même qu'un modèle de simulation" (33). When Salat adds "tout est réel/rien est réel" (127), he echoes the logic of the perfect crime according to Baudrillard.

Unlike Rosset, for whom the real is the state of being dead, or at least not alive, not animate (without *anima*), Salat holds that the real is itself dead, which does not mean absolutely irrelevant because the real, for Salat, is now a sort of ghost, a sublimation, a *relève* as in the book title, *La Relève du réel*. This metaphor of death is used to characterize the paradigm shift in how perception is conceived in the wake of scientific change. In a chapter entitled, "Le réel est mort hier," and which contends that the "réel est mort hier avec Mallarmé, Einstein, Planck, Picasso et Duchamp" (45), Salat writes that "la science classique était la quête d'un référentiel absolu Pour Descartes et Newton, ce référentiel était réel" (33). After Mallarmé, Einstein, etc., the shift consists precisely in the fact that we have lost the belief in such absolute and real referent: "Avec la relativité einsteinienne et les quanta, [l]e rêve d'une plénitude du réel s'est effondré. Nous savons aujourd'hui qu'il n'y pas de toile de fond continue qui porterait les apparences" (33). Salat implies that the real has always been an effect of the ways we understand the world, the metaphors we use to apprehend experience. The paradigm shift by which he states the death of the real has meant that there are now new ways of understanding the world, new metaphors with which the old notion of the real no longer meshes: "La description quantique du monde est incompréhensible à l'aide des métaphores créées par l'homme en observant les événements à son échelle. Les notions d'espace, de temps, d'objet n'ont pas de véritable sens dans le monde quantique" (125). Exacerbating the disappearance of the real, or perhaps just an effect of such disappearance, is not only the obsolescence of the formerly fundamental concepts of time, space and object, but also of subject, of

the agent of perception: "Cette disparition de la réalité du monde a entraîné avec elle celle de la substance de l'espace, du temps et même de nous, observateurs douteux d'un monde à l'existence incertaine" (33). In fact, what has become explicit in our quantum epoch was already implicit in seventeenth century mathematics. Leibniz would have seen this already: "Pour Leibniz, le réel ne se propage pas dans l'espace et dans le temps, mais dans le virtuel. C'est cette intuition fulgurante que développera la théorie quantique" (125). Such a theory postulates a real that is a function of the apparatuses which apprehend it, and is thus variable and temporary: "Le monde que décrit la physique quantique est discontinu, intermittent. L'observateur crée le réel par son observation. Lorsque le monde n'est pas observé, il n'est pas réel" (101); "Quand il n'est pas observé, le monde est indéterminé" (33). For Salat, the real is thus the effect of observation. It is occasional: "Le réel est devenu intermittent"; "Dire que l'on observe la même particule à deux endroits et à deux instants différents n'a aucun sens. Une particule n'est pas une entité permanente mais plutôt un événement instantané" (106). We are no longer in the permanence of the real, as according to Rosset, "*aucune réalité n'a jamais été sujette à l'altération, au passé ou au devenir*" (1991, 17). The real according to Salat is intermittently, separated by intervals: "le 'réel' quantique n'existe qu'au moment où il change et ce changement est discontinu. L'intervalle qui sépare les événements et les instants n'est pas réel. Il est virtuel. Le réel est une poussière scintillante à la surface du virtuel" (106). The relation between the real and the virtual is thus twofold. On the one hand, "nous savons aujourd'hui qu'il n'y pas de toile de fond continue qui porterait les apparences" (33), that is the virtual is not stuck up on a background that we think of as "real". And on the other hand, Salat also reverses the image with the notion of the real as scintillating dust on the virtual "background" ("poussière scintillante à la surface du virtuel"). If the real is defunct, it comes back as a sort of halo, a refracted light, properly ghostly.

Indeed, Salat's theory of the real is a theory of the sublimation of the real: *La Relève du réel*. This sublimation takes two steps. First it consists in first attesting to the death of the traditional real (in short, the real of Rosset, materiality, as opposed to the illusionary or spirituality). Salat's first 192 pages do nothing if not attest to the evacuation of such a real by the virtual. Then, the sublimation of the real, the return or reinvention of the real, its *relève* or continued *relevancy*, effectuated by Salat consists, in contrast to the bulk of the book, in his final chapter and the epilogue. These last two sections restore, renovate, rehabilitate the real by reversing in fact the theory of Rosset. Salat's reversal consists first in embracing the Platonic logic of the real which Rosset never stops lamenting about as the origin of Western metaphysics, Western inability to be materialists, realists. For Salat, the real is elsewhere (always deferred, never here-present-to-itself) yet, and here he is in the wake of Baudrillard's perfect crime, given that such deferral or elsewhere is all there is, the notion of deferral or elsewhere collapses. If the real or the

referent is definitively snuffed out by the virtual, then the virtual becomes the real, because equal to itself (the condition of the real). In short, the sublimation of the real is its having become the virtual; or, the fact that there is only the virtual, there is therefore only the double and thus no double, only the real. Such is the *relève du réel*. Salat postulates:

Dans les *Ménines*, Velázquez a montré que la dissociation entre le réel et son double était l'essence même . . . du dispositif de la représentation occidentale depuis Brunelleschi. Cette duplication du réel est la structure fondamentale du discours métaphysique, de Platon à nos jours. Pour Platon, le monde n'est que le double trompeur de la réalité cachée des Idées. Pour Einstein et Duchamp, l'espace à trois dimensions n'est que l'image d'une supraréalité invisible à quatre dimensions. (193)

Thus far, Salat contends that the real is elsewhere. The real proclaimed by Salat is not what Rosset claims as the real against Plato's real, which for Rosset is illusion. Plato (or Salat) call real what Rosset calls illusion, and vice versa. But nowadays a shift has occurred by which there is *only the double*, the illusion. Yet since the double has become omnipresent, it becomes possible to renounce the double since the double is one with the real at that point. Salat continues:

La création du double dans l'art ou la science nous a fait perdre la singularité du réel et donc le réel lui-même. A partir d'une scission initiale entre le réel et son double peut se développer une monstrueuse prolifération des copies qui, comme dans les *Cubes virtuels*, finit par ensevelir l'original sous sa représentation.... Ce n'est que par la renonciation au double qu'une perception sans représentation peut retrouver la présence et la densité du réel. (193)

Salat's gesture consists in arguing that if there is only representation (the double, illusion), then representation becomes the real, the opposition collapses into sameness: "Si nous ne sommes que les reflets et les ombres d'une réalité supérieure, celles des Idées ou de la quatrième dimension, alors nous ne sommes pas plus réels que nos reflets dans les miroirs et que nos ombres plates qui dansent sur le sable du désert" (202). I am not more real than the illusionary image of me, which means of course that the illusionary image is not more illusionary than me but rather just as real. They are the same. Thus, Salat re-finds (reinvents) the real.

It is within this ambiguity or collapse of the real and virtual that his bizarre conclusion and epilogue must be read. Curiously, after two hundred pages of incessant affirmation of the obsolescence of the notion of the real because "enseveli" (207) under the virtual, Salat ends the book not only with a last chapter entitled "Le Réel et son double" and a last section of that chapter called "Le Réel," but also with an epilogue

entitled "Allégresse," all of which obviously quote Clément Rosset; more importantly, Salat returns to the classical notion of the real as the unrepresentable, the unrepresentable: "Le réel, c'est l'existence en tant que fait singulier, sans reflet ni double" (208). Real, for Salat, remains that which is unrepresentable, unrepresentable. "Le propre du réel c'est de n'avoir pas de double" (207). Such a statement echoes Rosset. Strange then is the apparent re-entry into the real, his closing sentence prior to the epilogue being, "je m'enfoncé avec volupté dans l'épaisseur du monde" (203), immediately followed by the opening sentence of the epilogue: "Si tout cela a été créé pour rejoindre le réel, pourquoi fallait-il le quitter et pourquoi cet immense détour?" (207).

If Salat seems to enact a "rejoining" to the real, he in fact concludes on the impossibility of any such return: "Le retour du réel demeure donc ici inachevé et comme avorté" (208). There is no return, because there is only a *relève*, of the real, that is its ghost. After most of a book that has embraced the perfect crime that Baudrillard shies away from – the murder of the real, or "C'est le virtuel qui produit le réel" (105) – , Salat concludes with an embrace of the real which he considers entirely compatible with its absence. Citing Yves Bonnefoy, Salat writes: "voir le réel . . . 'ce ne peut être qu'aimer'. L'amour du réel est indépendant de la mort du réel" (213). Regardless of the real's being dead, the love of the real is thus necrophilic, the melancholic embrace with a ghost. Giving the last word via allusion to Rosset, Salat's last sentence madly *espouses* such a real despite, if not because of, the previous two hundred pages where he proclaimed its death: "L'allégresse, c'est l'amour du réel, la certitude immédiate, folle et déraisonnable, que sous tous les doubles qui le voilent, le réel est là" (213), like a corpse. In such way, Salat attests the situation described by Baudrillard of the perfect crime while maintaining Rosset's opposition between real and illusion. In short, he agrees with both Baudrillard and Rosset; or rather, puts them into agreement with each other (we may imagine against their wills).

After all, there are thus multiple ways of being (coming, going) "after the real". Our purpose here has not been to find the "real" real, but rather to provide a context for "Re-inventing the Real," the philosophical context in which the likes of Baudrillard, Laruelle and Rosset, as well as various other writers and artists, have tried in the last quarter of the century to testify to a real, to what the real may be or may have been. Despite their differences, Baudrillard, Laruelle, Rosset and Salat all write as if the real were to be, *should* be or *ought* to be what is preserved, and moreover preserved as the term of truth in the opposition. The imaginary, the illusion or the simulacrum remains suspected, somehow disliked even if all four recognize its (regretted) superiority.

Without concluding the matter, one might however ask two questions. First, to what extent are all their investigations of the real (or its demise) too dependent upon a pre-supposition, a too rigid distinction between what is real and what is not real? Although Baudrillard (and

Salat) certainly testify to the break down of the distinction, they all presuppose that there is a real and a non-real. We might ask, however, whether the very opposition is not the product of a certain kind of thinking. It remains, for us at least, unargued why so-called imaginary constructs are not "real". The second question one might ask concerning the "Re-invention of the Real" and the apparently instinctive preference for the real, is: ought we not take precisely the contrary view? That is, in a day and age when the imaginary is threatened by (discourses of) economic reality, would we not need rather to re-invent the imaginary, an open imaginary, one of artistic, creative learning which is not enslaved to the sole concern of making money? At a time when and in a country where the study of English or other foreign languages, as well as the study of disciplines like philosophy, must yet once more struggle to exist with if not against the commercialization of the ends of education (according to the so-called realist dictum that "all our students want is only to get a job"), it may be more incumbent upon us to re-invent the viability and value of the imaginary than those of the real. Re-inventing the imaginary may thus be how to re-invent the real.

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