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Freedom is a Point of Departure, Not a Horizon¹
Gilles Grelet, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, trans. Amy Ireland and Robin Mackay
(Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2022).

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Like the eponymous mountain hermit of Nietzsche's famous work, the solitary sailor personified by Gilles Grelet has returned to the land of culture after ten years at sea. The first of Grelet's published (anti-)books to be translated into English, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* is a radical attempt at expressing anti-philosophy as rigorous gnosis, an endeavor in marine *herethics* (heretical ethics) in navigation. The solitary sailor, as both Grelet and the back matter attest to, steers in the same direction as François Laruelle's ordinary man and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's solitary walker. Whereas the former's ordinary man is the one who draws an inalienable essence from him/herself and the one who proclaims the right to rebel against philosophy, and the latter forced into exile seeking out love through tranquility, the solitary sailor as anti-philosopher loves the radical human, the nothing-but-human and weaponizes theory to

¹*Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 29.

attack the worldly at its most radical root: sufficient s(p)ecularity, the hegemonic reflection and spiritualism of the world. That the solitary sailor is recognized directly within human life against the world's grand conformism, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* offers a two-fold apparatus: 1) a canon (or can(n)on, as both a norm and an explosion at once), a theory of method, of circumscription as anti-politics, and 2) an organon, a method of theory, of sailing as anti-erotics.

However, unlike Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Grelet's solitary sailor is neither for no one nor for everyone as he himself confesses. It is too nautical for intellectuals and too theoretical for seafarers. It is not for the theorist who is nothing but a tourist, spectating in their contemplation with the safeties and privileges guaranteed by their distance. Nor is it for the spiritualist watchdogs of the established order. Irreducible to theoreticism, tourism, or terrorism, Grelet's *theorrorism* (*théorisme*) is elsewhere defined as "the method (of) the one who has the world as an enemy and emphasizes no collaboration with the enemy."² Because *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* continues in this vein, such a return to the land of culture is not a simple coming back to dock at its ports, or a reversion back into the accustomed readership alongside the beach shores. Pithy, laconic, incendiary, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* is a message in a Molotov cocktail cast back at war with the world. It is sovereign heresy enacted.

² *Le théorisme, méthode de salut public* (Montreuil: 2006), 31: "Le théorisme, action directe de la théorie, dans la théorie, et pour elle (à travers son peuple), est la haine méthodique de la pratique, le refus en acte de la prostitution (dont la raison est le cache-sexe et la transaction le nom usuel). Bref, le théorisme est la méthode (de) qui a le monde pour ennemi et met son honneur à ne pas collaborer avec l'ennemi." Translation is my own.

Theorrorism is the name of Grelet's method. I say method rather than practice, for, according to Grelet, practice is the matrix of the semblant.³ In stark contrast to the philosopher who is the watchdog of the world, the *theorrorist* or anti-philosopher is a gnostic who struggles against all forms of mastery, even (non-)philosophy, which I will discuss further below. Philosophy is the world and the world is philosophy, except that a first rebellion, the ultimate rebellion, is not of this world. It is of and within people, and its writing is impossible "[...] except to bypass the practical dimension of it, to invent a writing without substance, without worldliness."⁴ *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* is the realization of direct action within theory, of a rebellion that would not be of the semblant.⁵

In his anti-book that performs the very anti-philosophy he sets out, Grelet presents twenty points (and a zero-point identifying the solitary sailor) that shed light on the rebellious gnosis of humans who are in the world but not of it. The first ten points deal with the anti-political can(n)on and provide the materialist side of Grelet's anti-philosophy. They are, according to Grelet, the prolegomena to Brittany, this gnostic nowhere made up of Breton solitudes, a Brittany that is humanity itself. The second ten points that conclude the book pertain to the organon of

³ Ibid, 19: "La pratique est la matrice du semblant, le principe de la mondanisation de l'homme ou de la réalisation de (r), la fabrique du réel réalisé, de l'homme comme être du monde." English translation: "Practice is the matrix of the semblant, the principle of the worlding of man or the realization of the (r) [the real], the factory of the realized real, of man as a being of the world."

⁴ Ibid, 32: "Le théorisme rend l'écriture du théorisme impossible, sauf à en court-circuiter la dimension pratique, à inventer une écriture sans substance, sans mondanité." Translation is my own.

⁵ See Grelet's "Anti-phénoménologie," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 194 (2) (May 2004), 211-224; "Anti-Phenomenology," trans. Kris Pender <https://www.academia.edu/4624766/Gilles_Grelet_Anti_Phenomenology>.

an aleatory gnosis⁶ within that of the finisterre⁷ of the boat and Brittany, allowing for the creation of a people of angels to "[...] be a true cultural revolution whose impasse would have been commensurate with the force of its reversal into the worldly."⁸

Part anti-biography and, if you will, anti-Tractatus, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* belongs to the period Grelet nominates Theorrorism II.⁹ According to Grelet, Theorrorism I "[...] combatted sufficient s(p)ecularity and the circles of the world whose principle it is, by opposing to them the straight line, in one direction, with no turning back[...it] did not exit from philosophy [...] because it took philosophy's ring road, mistaking it for a Route 66 of thought."¹⁰ Unlike the first period, which saw non-religious gnosis both in the company of, and being sparred with – rather one-sidedly – by Laruelle in *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*,¹¹ this second period has inscribed non-philosophy in its place: *within* philosophy, a remark that may unsettle non-philosophers and seasoned Larualiens. The second Theorrorism "[...] opposes to sufficient s(p)ecularity the specularity of sailing, whose movement is that of mystery: development via self-devouring, flush with the all-devouring."¹² Indeed, anti-philosophy is definitively anti-philosophy as much as it is ante-philosophical, ante-worldly, and not another philosophy as non-philosophy is in its nomi-

⁶ A term coincidentally evoked by Jacob Vangeest and I in our article, "Aleatory Gnosis, In(ter)vention, and Quantagonism," *Philo-Fictions* 5 (2022), 103-117.

⁷ Deriving from the Latin, *finis terrae*, or "end of the earth."

⁸ *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 51

⁹ Ibid, 86.

¹⁰ Ibid, 60.

¹¹ François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012); *La lutte et l'utopie à la fin des temps philosophiques* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2004).

¹² *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 60.

nation as “human philosophy.”¹³ Yet, what is singular of *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, along with Christian Jambet and Guy Lardreau’s gnostic cynegetics of the semblant, is writ large thematically. As with Plato’s remark that the ordinary man’s soul takes three thousand years to gain its wings,¹⁴ Grelet’s angelism provides two wings, a materialist and gnostic wing, for humans to take flight once more from this world.

One may be intimidated by reading Grelet in English for the first time, with or without knowledge of his writing and the milieus that he traverses without necessarily sojourning to them. This fear is immediately palliated with the stylistic presentation of *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*. Littered throughout the pages are quotations from philosophy, poetry, fiction, sailing travelogues, cinema, mystical meditations, militants, and Bretonists, ultimately as a means to present the anti(-auto)-biographical account of the author’s *I* who is crossed by himself, the one who is drowned in this deep of the sea’s specular void. Beyond the thrill of reading the material in its anti-philosophical development point by point, the reader may find some ease flipping back and forth from the body of the work to the endnotes. More than ease, even: it makes the reading more meditative, rigorous, focused.

With Grelet, one may see the need to invent a finisterre, an organon that circumscribes the solitary sailor. The finisterre is perhaps invented as a means to prevent the world’s encroachment, but to Grelet, it is a theorem of radical

movement transformed from Xavier Grall’s statement: “I am the seamark of my own errancy.”¹⁵ One likewise learns about Grelet, his life in this anti(-auto)-biography, along with the method of his aleatory gnosis. Herethics, devoid of its non-ethical origin,¹⁶ allows for the right distance one can hold in sailing: “far enough from the world not to be sucked in and crushed, close enough not to fall into the void.”¹⁷ The solitary sailor is a new experience of the radical Two without the One nor the Multiple nor even the unity of the One and the Multiple, a Two that is the solitude of the subject and their boat, a loneliness with the boat.

Is this anti-book, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, a prototypical finisterre? I would like to think so, perhaps something of a pedagogical organon into radical, human simplicity beyond wealth and poverty. By inhabiting a finisterre through (anti-political) place and (anti-erotic) ritual, one is able to “[...] equip oneself with an organon of the end of the world, a theory and method of solving the problem posed to life by the world.”¹⁸ This anti-book is a means for which a community of solitudes may arise: an orientation into the radical Two, and an occidentation in worldliness.

To appreciate the development of Grelet’s work as a whole, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* offers the possibility of further

¹⁵ *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 61.

¹⁶ François Laruelle, *Éthique de l’Étranger: du crime contre l’humanité* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2000), 367-368: “Si la conception techno-philosophique du corps permet des divisions antinomiques insolubles éthiquement, des identités en soi ou des différences opposées, la conception non-éthique autorise des activités de séparation, des activités (*her*)éthiques qui respectent les identités-de-dernière-instance.” English translation: “If the techno-philosophical conception of the body allows for ethically insoluble antinomic divisions, of identities in themselves or opposed differences, the non-ethical conception authorizes activities of separation, (*her*)ethical activities that respect identities-of-the-last-instance.”

¹⁷ *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 66.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid*, 78, 87 n.12b. See also François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), 27-30.

¹⁴ *Phaedrus*, 248e-249d.

translations to be done. That would include investigating *theorrorism* in its first implementation in works such as *Déclarer la gnose*¹⁹ and *Le théorisme*, and essays featured elsewhere such as his edited volume *Théorie-rébellion*,²⁰ in Non-Philosophie, Le Collectif's *Discipline hérétique*,²¹ and "Un théorème rigoureusement gnostique."²² Doing so may also alleviate the issues that previously happened with other thinkers whose earlier works were left untranslated for a number of years, leaving readers no chance to appreciate what was at stake earlier on. If this task is pursued following *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, the original anti-philosophical stakes can be evaluated by a wider audience, to see further mutations potentially advanced. Amy Ireland and Robin Mackay's joint translation ought to be praised for initiating that conversation.

Some factors nevertheless remain, leaving me, as a reader of non-philosophy, desiring more. This will perhaps be seen as a fault on my end and others turning to it: because of, and/or despite one's, (un)familiarity with Laruelle. Anglophone readers will only know of Grelet through the lens of *Struggle and Utopia* and through the few translations of his work.²³ That expectation should be tossed aside. The

¹⁹ *Déclarer la gnose : d'une guerre qui revient à la culture* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 2002).

²⁰ *Théorie-rébellion: un ultimatum* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 2005). See "Tract(atus) des sans-philosophie," 148-149.

²¹ Non-Philosophie, le collectif, *Discipline hérétique : esthétique, psychanalyse, religion* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1998). See "Un bréviaire de non-religion," 182-216.

²² In *Cahiers de la Torpille* 4 (Paris: Éditions Kimé, March 2000), 116-118.

²³ For instance: originally published as "Anti-phénoménologie," in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 194:2 (2004), 211-224; "Theory is Waiting," with a translation by Ray Brassier, in *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, Volume VI, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010), 477-479, republished as "Tract(atus) 23: Theory is Waiting" in *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 15 (1-2) (2018), 104-111, with translations from Ray Brassier (English), Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa (Spanish), and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp or MuKHA (Dutch). "Proletarian

reader must chart a new course without that theoretical tourism and voyeurism involved, without that X-marks-the-spot attitude expecting a treasure to be found. Instead, read Grelet's concision:

Lean on the abyss. Do not start from the world, even from its nullity as nihilism does, in order to detach yourself from the world. Inscribe the consistency of rebellion in the very void itself, in the very radical inconsistency to which the human holds, lose yourself in it—for otherwise the world will always have won by serving as a support for that which refuses it. And the abyss, it grows by devouring itself. It is a matter of working flush with the abyss. Of failing: of holding fast to the real, not yielding to reality.²⁴

I agree with Grelet that non-philosophy is another philosophy: a human philosophy. There is some sense of redemption in this type of philosophy, to be redeemed by people who do not need it to be who they are, to no longer have their essence be defined by philosophy. Yet, if philosophy *tout court* is the world, the world-form par excellence, what happens to non-philosophy following the angelic blaze of the aleatory gnostic can(n)on or the TNT (*transcendance non-thétique*)? Is non-philosophy unable to be a finis terre because of its status as a four-headed counter-philosophy, hypo-philosophy, anti-philosophy and (human) philosophy? Is even the cretinous idea of a "human world" that is not of *this* world a semblant?

The "[...] radical independence from philosophy" or "[...] the] sovereign traversal of all philosophy"²⁵ in the form of

Gnosis," trans. Anthony Paul Smith, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 19.2 (June 2014), 93-98.

²⁴ *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, 75.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 78.

anti-philosophy is issued from the same declaration that it is right to rebel against philosophers. But the charted course, its destination, is elsewhere than in a philosophy that would present itself as human and elsewhere than in a human science that knows the nothing but human. It is the rigorous gnosis within people, the people as they are, the people who are a gnosis, the subjective that non-philosophy steers closer to in anti-philosophy. The objective, in the form of the organon that is no longer reducible to a prosthetic as with the back of the hand,²⁶ a finisterre that makes it *gnostic* – that’s what is missing. The solitary sailor is not the non-philosophically desired new figure of man: the superposition of the water-fish or the immanent swimmer.²⁷ At least on the surface of the sea with his boat, the free man will always cherish it.²⁸ It is a hope that the compactness of this short anti-book blows a gust towards the independence from this world, for us to take flight from it with these wings, for us to know that we may be in it, but we are not of it.

²⁶ François Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*, trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 119-121; *Une biographie de l’homme ordinaire: des Autorités et des Minorités* (Paris: Aubier, 1985), 131-133.

²⁷ François Laruelle, “The Tsunami and the Myth of the Water-Fish,” trans. Jeremy R. Smith, *Oscillations: Non-Standard Experiments in Anthropology, the Social Sciences, and Cosmology* (2021) < <https://oscillations.one/Assets/Publications/The+Tsunami+and+the+Myth+of+the+Water-Fish+-+A+Short+Essay+on+Fantastic+Zoology%2C+to+Add+to+Borges+and+Schr%C3%B6dinger> >; “Le tsunami et le mythe du poisson-eau : Petit essai de zoologie fantastique à ajouter à Borges et Schrödinger,” in *Philo-Fictions: La revue des non-philosophies* 2 (2009), 7-15.

²⁸ Charles Baudelaire, “L’homme et la mer,” *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

