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About Gilles Grelet's latest book and all related

Review essay

It is not an easy task to write a review of anything written by Gilles Grelet, and it is an even harder one when attempting to write an academic review of his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* published by Urbanomic in 2022. Grelet invites complete honesty when engaging with him, your most vulnerable naked "self" (whatever that might be). This is a prerequisite to meaningfully engage with both Gilles the man and the author Gilles Grelet, Doctor of Philosophy and a sailor of many years.

Our first misunderstandings as to how much "authenticity" is possible began when years ago, maybe decades ago, he demanded my contribution to "Les sans philosophie" be more of an ultimatum. I was unable to write an ultimatum to the World, as I did not think I was better than "the world," nor that I knew what was most beneficial for me and the other bodies populating "the world." Both Gilles and I use the term "the world" in the Laruellean sense – it is the universe of constant chatter that cannot help itself but being philosophical.

The world is always philosophy, insists Laruelle, and the terms philosophy and "the world" (le monde) are synonymous. There is no need to cite any particular work by Laruelle to support this claim, because this has always been the thesis in his entire opus of non-philosophy as well as that of the stage of non-standard philosophy. The axiom is: the real is always already foreclosed but it inevitably invites

thought to produce language of it; in that process, philosophy seeks to establish perfect unity between thought and the real in the form of Truth, whereas non-philosophy does not decide (in advance) of the real but rather correlates to it while seeking to follow its syntax. Non-philosophy establishes knowledge of the real not in an absolute sense and not with a full certainty, but "as good as it gets," as John Ó Maoilearca [puts it](#).

To pose an ultimatum to the world presumes completed detachment from the world or from philosophy, i.e., speaking from a position of purity with respect to "world's chatter" (a concept Gilles Grelet mentions often in his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*). This impossible position would be that of choosing to be with the real, presupposing one can speak from that most truthful position which precedes language that stemming from the real itself. That is why, once he begins his life journey of a sailor, Grelet commits himself to silence, allowing the elemental force of the sea to be the "language" or the manifestation of the real itself. After a while, or exactly two years of such silence, Grelet concludes that this empty position is empty in the most banal sense – one becomes simply obtuse or rather hollowed out from within where the soul is supposed to be.

In the little cell of light which, far from the stereoscopic gaudiness of the world, I had made my home, everything began to resonate hollowly; to reason flabbily. My face-to-face with the sea became a brainwashing, my soul flushed out and swallowed up. (G. Grelet, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* [2.12])

So, Gilles Grelet comes to the realization that has been François Laruelle's presupposition or perhaps the foundation stone of his project of non-philosophy: one can operate with negativity on philosophy and suspend its ambition to become the voice of the real, but one can never fully exit philosophy. Also, one can never fully abandon the need to produce an account of the real, albeit one must admit and submit one's account to the voiceless real. Real does produce sound or noise and perhaps has "its voice" but it is not one to share anything with us, it is not a sound of communication, and it is not a language in any sense. However, the field of immanence, as Laruelle explains in his *Introduction to Non-Marxism* (Univocal, 2014), does have its own syntax as does the material world whose "language" sciences constantly seek to decipher. The non-philosopher and non-Marxist (which is Laruelle's term for a Marxist practicing non-philosophy) produces language attuned to that syntax, never reaching perfection, but always as good as it gets, as John puts it.

However, "as good as it gets" has never been good enough for Gilles. Many years ago, as the heretic within the Laruealleian heresy, Gilles Grelet wrote of "proletarian gnosis" (Gilles Grelet "Proletarian Gnosis," Angelaki 19, no. 2 (2014): 93-98). One could obviously no longer be a Marxian (too much philosophy) but one could have pure knowledge of the proletarian cause, which would be called gnosis (in line with Laruelle's Philosophie III) enabled by removing oneself from the world as much as possible:

How can we be neither living (client or agent of this whore-house-world), nor dead (or too quickly lethal, particular-

ly for oneself)? Proletarian gnosis offers a solution to this problem: be a living-suicide. A saint without any glory except some ravaged intensity much like the sovereign in his act of being. Go to the sea. (Grelet "Proletarian Gnosis," [16])

Gilles seeks a language unadulterated by language. Yes, language is always of the world. Gilles seeks to hear the real speak: the real does not speak to us, we speak of it or to it as madmen screaming in the desert. Maybe real leaves traces and clues that we may recreate as "syntax of the real" but they are in the world, and they are made of philosophical material. Gnosis may lead one to their own individual transcendence, spiritual elevation and social salvation. The proletarian however is a collective self, and one needs to speak from within or to the world if one seeks to create and share "proletarian gnosis."

True, class consciousness is too polluted with philosophy, and some distance from it or a certain *epoché* is indispensable to build class consciousness as closely attuned to the real as possible, understood, as Gilles puts it as both "angelic" and "materialist." Let us quote from the book of the Solitary Sailor to illustrate what is meant here: "Angelism is materialism and radicalism (of the real and not of the worldly) is angelism."

It seems that in his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* Grelet finally admits to François that indeed "some language" or "some philosophy" is nonetheless necessary. After so many years, I read Gilles ceding to the non-absolute and submitting to the real. Nonetheless, he does not fall back

into the trap of poststructuralist dogma, the episteme ruling our era, on the left and on the ideological both caught up in culturalist constructivism, the latter unwittingly so. He resists the postmodern inertia and proposes a formulaic language:

It is in this way that the speech of silence, as abundant as there are points to hold to, is on every occasion a minimal speech, in the most compact form possible: a formula; formulaic speech.

Formulaic, the speech of solitude is silence held, held back from making world: *theoria* rather than *logos* and the void of *logos*. An anti-dialectic of which, often, the writing of light is more capable than that of words. (Grelet, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, [3.13])

Let us restate: the theory of proletarian gnosis or that of the solitary sailor is both materialist and angelic, and in doing so Grelet remains a non-philosopher or his version of it – an anti-philosopher. Philosophy is still somehow there – as it is in Laruelle's non-philosophy – but Grelet poses a challenge or in fact enacts an opposition to it, the "non-" is replaced by "anti-." He opposes dialectics as too much of the world or philosophical. Instead he proposes a view and a political stance he calls "theorrorism," theory as silent being with the sea witnessing the horror of the real and a radical opposition to the madness of "worldly chatter."

Finally, it does not make sense to debate Gilles. You can either love him or hate him. In spite of the disagreement

I carefully present above, I have always loved Gilles, as I love his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*. Gilles, I still disagree with the discourse of ultimatums, and I still think your ideal position of solitude is an intended idealism. Nonetheless, I cannot but agree with you when you say "angelism is materialism and radicalism (of the real and not of the worldly) is angelism."

