

THE RECOVERY OF THE ONE. KATERINA KOLOZOVA,
*CUT OF THE REAL: SUBJECTIVITY IN POSTSTRUCTURALIST
 PHILOSOPHY* (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014)

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In her new book, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy*,¹ Katerina Kolozova—professor at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Research in Skopje, Macedonia—seeks to recover the concepts of the Real and the One for contemporary poststructuralist and feminist philosophy. Drawing upon the non-philosophy of Francois Laruelle by using non-philosophical materials, Kolozova provides a corrective for the poststructuralist overemphasis on multiplicity, plurality, and heterogeneity, in the domain of the subject.

Kolozova begins her book by identifying Speculative Realism as indicative of “the need in twenty-first-century continental philosophy to traverse the postmodern or poststructuralist limits of thought.”² Citing the correlationist position that the Real is outside of access by thought, Kolozova calls for a return to the possibility of thinking the being of the world through terms such as ‘the Real’ or ‘the One’. Francois Laruelle introduces the book with a non-philosophical treatment of the distinction between sex and gender. Laruelle’s non-philosophical critique seeks to undermine the confidence of philosophy by pointing out that philosophy supplies itself with its own sufficiency and its own assurance when in fact the terms that philosophy employs “do not manage to determine their object precisely.”³ Following from Laruelle’s preface, the introduction to *Cut of the Real* situates the book against the threefold backdrop of Meillassoux’s critique of correlationism, Zizek’s argument for a Lacanian version of the Real, and Laruelle’s attempt to think the One outside of the auto-legitimation of traditional philosophy. Elsewhere, Laruelle writes that “[p]hilosophy continuously talked about the One, presupposed it, invoked it, but without properly thematizing it.”⁴ This observation that “the One is an object at the margins of philosophy” and that philosophy suffers from a “forgetting of the One” then leads Laruelle to the proposal “to think the One ‘itself’, independently of being and the other” and in such a way that attempts to “think according to the One rather than trying to think the One.”⁵ In this way Kolozova can be seen to be extending Laruelle’s imperative to rethink and recover the One.

Kolozova’s argument begins with several explanations of Laruelle’s terminology, one of which is “Vision-in-One”. Vision-in-One, for Laruelle and Kolozova, prevents the simple equivocation of thought and the Real,

while permitting thought to access the Real through the circumlocutions of the non-philosophical vocabulary. Laruelle’s grammar of thinking is difficult, and it turns in upon itself (intentionally or unintentionally) with the goal of providing a rigorous manner in which to bring thought in line with the Real. Laruelle’s “rigorous” and “scientific” approach attempts to aggressively critique the self-sufficient auto-legitimation exhibited by much contemporary philosophy. Kolozova’s critique is much narrower, despite the fact that she uses the same resources, and her critique of philosophical thinking focuses on feminist poststructuralist discourse, and the discourse on and of ontology.

Laruelle critiques the intercontamination of thought and the Real (‘amphibology’) for foreclosing the possibility of “rigorous theoretical investigation”.⁶ Kolozova extends this critique, arguing that the inability of contemporary philosophy to think of the Real as meaningless indicates a tautologous affirmation of the principle of identity (A=A). Levelling a critique of transcendence against the mixing of thought and the Real in a term such as “being”, Kolozova suggests (with Laruelle) that the transcendental representation of being should be made immanent by a particular nominative gesture which understands “‘the One’ as one of the ‘first names’ of the Real.”⁷ The second half of her introduction extends the use of non-philosophy for the purposes of critiquing “the mainstream legacy of poststructuralist feminist philosophy”—a critique which straddles investment in the discourse, and a posture which is external to that discourse.⁸ One way in which Kolozova critiques from within and without, is by identifying the tendency, in poststructuralism, to crystallize the binary form. She writes,

...there seems to be a consensus concerning several binaries of asymmetrical opposing terms. One of the two elements of the binary is always negative and excluded (as meaningless) from the explanatory apparatus of what is deemed and recognized as postmodern theory of authority. It is excluded not only as meaningless, irrelevant, inoperative for the postmodernist and poststructuralist stance in interpreting Reality but also as a politically reactionary and morally wrong notion.⁹

This critique of asymmetry is certainly in the spirit of feminist poststructuralism, and it is this critique of asymmetry which Kolozova reverses on three accounts: (1) the critique resists the equivocation of the One with totalitarian thinking, (2) the critique resists the restriction which asserts that the One is off-limits to thought, and (3) the critique rejects the reduction to language of thought’s access to being.¹⁰ These three critical points are outlined at the outset and then approached in different ways throughout the text of *Cut of the Real*.

Departing from the conditions of poststructuralist thinking, such as the critique of binary thinking, Kolozova critiques the common resistance to stability and universality by objecting to the connection between politics and epistemology in poststructuralist thinking. The intercontamination of the political resistance to any universalization with the ontological and epistemological registers too readily shuts down the possibility of “conceiving of new forms of universalism that do not have to be totalitarian.”¹¹ For Kolozova, the way towards a universalism without the violence of totalitarian thinking is through Laruelle’s radical concepts, and more importantly through her own argument for “a radically universal solidarity” which “correlates with the Real of women’s subjugation and gendered violence.”¹² This type of universality, more developed in the fourth chapter of her book *The Lived Revolution: Solidarity with the Body in Pain as the New Political Universal*,¹³ aims to be both “categorical and minimally transcendental,” without the imperialistic reduction of differences exhibited by totalitarian thinking.¹⁴

The first chapter of the book, “The One and the Multiple”, presents an inspiring challenge to confront the automatic self-assured legitimacy of one’s own scholarly discipline, and Kolozova then proposes a radical questioning of the unseen axioms inherent to poststructuralism in particular. In this spirit of a “free and uncensored movement of thought” she questions the “essentially nonunitary nature of the subject” and its widespread acceptance in poststructuralist thinking.¹⁵ Against this fundamental axiom Kolozova asks,

Doesn’t this proposition’s very stability render it exclusive? Doesn’t the stabilization of this particular truth introduce binary, oppositional, and dualistic thinking into the constitutive layers, into the

very tissue of the discourse?¹⁶

This resistance to the restriction of identity to multiplicity and dispersion also informs a subsequent critique of the hegemony of textual thinking. Kolozova writes that “[p]raise of the paradox propagates yet another unending flux of the much praised unrestrained textuality.”¹⁷ This critique of deconstruction is again aimed at its treatment of the binary relation. Kolozova claims that instead of diminishing the role of binary oppositions, the insistence on a nonunitary subject “perpetuates a more insidious variety of dualistic thinking” in the automatic dismissal of even the possibility of a unifying principle.¹⁸ In response to the dualistic treatment of the One and the Many, Kolozova seeks to complicate dualistic thinking in her suggestion that the “dichotomy between *either* and exclusively metaphysical and unitary *or* and exclusively nonmetaphysical and nonunitary thinking about the subject creates a vicious circle whereby each of the two mutually exclusive positions reciprocally generates its other.”¹⁹ Under the conditions of her argument, the nonunitary subject itself is in need of the deconstruction from which it arose, and part of this deconstruction of the nonunitary subject is a call for honesty about the ways in which the subject really is cohesive. Instead of only thinking that the “multiple is the truth of the one” Kolozova provides a corrective in the reverse, that the One is also the truth of the Multiple.²⁰

In her search for the ways in which the subject retains unity and cohesion after its deconstruction and dispersion, Kolozova identifies the ways in which deconstruction has avoided deconstructing its own “language economy”, especially on the question of the “Name of the One”.²¹ The name of the One has suffered under a reduction to its negative consequences, and therefore terms such as unity, stability, and cohesion have been conflated with “totality, fixity, and exclusiveness”.²² This conflation is the central object of Kolozova’s critique in the first chapter of the book, and she pursues this task first through a reading of Rosi Bradiotti’s attempt to recover the notion of “essence” outside of any reductive tendency, and second through a reading of the possibility of ‘continuity’ in the subject, in the work of Judith Butler.

In the second chapter of *Cut of the Real*, “On the Real and the Imagined,” Kolozova addresses the question of sex and gender, stating that the “dichotomy between sex and gender reflects and reproduces the opposition between the real and the unreal”, or reality and fiction, or being and nonbeing.²³ The reinforcement of these ontological dichotomies by the couplet of sex and gender causes Kolozova to ask the question: “Is sex to gender as reality is to fiction?”²⁴ Through Butler, Deleuze, and Laruelle, Kolozova argues for a reaffirmation of the Real, but not in such a way that falls either into correlationism or an affirmation of an essentially nonunitary subject.

The third chapter, “On the Limit and the Limitless,” seeks then to reaffirm the Real as a positive category through a discussion of territory, boundary, and limit. Instead of perpetuating the postmodern spirit of “crossing”, Kolozova seeks to recover the possibility of an “utter limitation”, a “ban”, a “no”.²⁵ After discussing Badiou and Lacan, Kolozova returns to Laruelle and outlines his critique of the poststructuralist treatment of the binary relation. Where poststructuralists claim to transcend dualisms and binaries, Laruelle and Kolozova hold that what often occurs is that one of the two terms (usually the dominant one), is replaced by the other.²⁶ This critique is sharp, and it calls even Kolozova’s work into question, given that she is providing a corrective to the treatment of the subject as nonunitary. The critique of the nonunitary subject risks falling prey to the aforementioned critique because of its desire to elevate stability, unity, and cohesion, over instability, nonunity, and dispersion. This corrective impulse always carries within it the possibility of overcorrection, and so Kolozova’s echoing of Laruelle’s critique is important not only for her argument in chapter 3, but also as a check and balance for the trajectory of the whole work.

In chapter 4, “The Real Transcending Itself (Through Love)”, while contrasting Badiou and Laruelle, Kolozova outlines the radical critique of transcendence offered by nonphilosophy. In doing so she reiterates and clarifies her thesis: “[t]he one, as already said, is neither totalizing nor total. Rather it is the minimal, the densest and irreducible quantity of the radical (or of pure immanence). It is not the universalizing One in the sense of the reductivist idea of a unity of differences either.”²⁷ Kolozova then extends this thesis, which has run throughout the book, towards an affirmation of the mediate role of love as “the compulsory mode of being for the Real” –

a concept that itself rests upon radical solitude.²⁸ Kolozova sees the human attempt to overcome the solitary nature of the Real as being grounded in love, and love’s own desire to surpass the radical solitude of the self.²⁹ Kolozova then writes that “[i]n spite of the split within thought that has been produced by the vision of the inconsolably asymmetric duality, the real inescapably reiterates its desire to transcend the state of radical solitude.”³⁰ Love, solidarity, mediation, and relation are the key themes of the fourth chapter, which concludes with a particular description of an experience of radical solitude: Kolozova’s experience of the loss of her father. This unexpected expression of particularity shows Kolozova’s own situatedness as an author of a philosophical text. Her own description of grief and trauma bring the appropriately abstract discussions of discursivity and ontology, to the immanent and existential concreteness of human experience.

In the final chapter of *Cut of the Real*, “The Real in the Identity,” Kolozova summarizes the previous discussions of unity, limit, and gender, and develops a concept of radical identity defined by a recovered sense of singularity in the Real.³¹ This recovery of unity and singularity attempts to overcome the problems identified in the earlier critique of replacement, in the critique of binary terms. This attempt to rethink the relation between terms which are commonly thought to be dichotomous initiates a “search for the points where the two meet, intertwine, and coproduce realities.”³² This complication and problematization of the precritical treatment of binary terms is a vital resource for the maintenance of a critical methodology in any discourse, and here Kolozova shows one key way in which non-philosophy can assist thinkers in the radical critique of their own disciplinary and discursive formations.

In summary, *Cut of the Real* is more significant than its popular construal as a mere introduction to the thought of Francois Laruelle (although it is effective in this task), and its theses should challenge discourses beyond feminist poststructuralism. Kolozova not only provides a valuable critique of the discursive grammar of contemporary continental philosophy, but also points the way beyond critique towards new constructive iterations of the concepts of the One, and the Real.

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NOTES

1. It is important to note, from a bibliographical perspective, that while *Cut of the Real* is advertised as a new work, an earlier version of the text was published as *The Real and "I": On the Limit and the Self* (Skopje, Euro-Balkan Press, 2006). This earlier version lacks the foreword and introduction that are found in *Cut of the Real*, as well as the references to Speculative Realism, which has become more relevant since the initial 2006 publication. This book, however, did influence Speculative Realist discourse in the meantime, being used favourably by Nick Srnicek, in his essay "Capitalism and the Non-Philosophical Subject" *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne, re.press, 2011), 173 and 177. See also Michael O'Rourke's essay "'Girls Welcome!!!" Speculative Realism, Object Oriented Ontology and Queer Theory" in *Speculations II* (Brooklyn, New York: Punctum Books, 2011), 306-307.
2. Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 1.
3. Francois Laruelle, "Foreword: Gender Fiction" in Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, Trans. Anthony Paul Smith, x.
4. Francois Laruelle, "A New Presentation of Non-Philosophy" Organisation Non-philosophique Internationale. <<http://www.onphi.net/texte-a-new-presentation-of-non-philosophy-32.html>>
5. Francois Laruelle, "A Summary of Non-Philosophy" in *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Edited by Robin Mackay. (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2012), 286. See also Francois Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2013), 37-39.
6. Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, 7.
7. Ibid, 7.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, 8.
12. Ibid, 8-9.
13. Katerina Kolozova, *The Lived Revolution: Solidarity with the Body in Pain as the New Political Universal* (Skopje, Euro-Balkan Press, 2010).
14. Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, 9.
15. Ibid, 14, 15.
16. Ibid, 15.
17. Ibid, 16.
18. Ibid, 18.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid, 19.
21. Ibid, 21.
22. Ibid, 20.
23. Ibid, 52.
24. Ibid, 55.
25. Ibid, 85, 86.
26. Ibid, 95.
27. Ibid, 111.
28. Ibid, 114.
29. Ibid, 119.
30. Ibid, 121.
31. Ibid, 138.
32. Ibid.