



# Dark Nights of the Universe

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***Remote: The Forgetting of the World***

Eugene Thacker

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**Preface to the Four Nights.** Last Spring, members of the Cascadian School gathered for a discussion on abattoirs, illumination, and misanthropy. Our findings tended not to reveal anything we didn't already suspect, which is as good an excuse as any for reconvening, one year later. And so Daniel, Nicola, Alex, and myself have gathered here for four nights, to talk about mysticism. Our take-off point is a short text by François Laruelle entitled *Du Noir univers*, published in 1988 in the journal *La Décision philosophique*. The text has four parts, and each of us have decided to speak alongside each of those four parts, on four consecutive nights. Our discussion will also extend outward to the installation elements presented here in the form of books, blanket, film, and sound.

And so I'd like to begin the first night, with the idea of the "Remote."

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**The Terrain of Philosophy.** Laruelle's text *Du noir univers* presents philosophy in terms of its terrain: the Earth, the World, and the Universe. It is a terrain criss-crossed by the proximity of the nearby or the far-off, a ground that is ungrounded, an underground that is also a geological secret. The cavernous straits of a philosophical optics, a tongue made of sand, the surface of a pool across which philosophy strides, in each of its peripatetic steps.

It is across this terrain that philosophy's optics casts its epistemic light - Earth, World, Universe. Laruelle says more about these terms. The Earth has a little to do with us as human beings, perhaps like an indifferent planet that has agreed to tolerate the performance of human drama on its surface. The World has a lot to do with us; the World is, in fact, the planetary surface rendered as theatre for human drama. And the Universe is related to the Earth and the World, but it is

not of the same order; it is neither near to nor far from, neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below. As Laruelle notes, the Universe is so intimate that its relation to us can only be one of passion. The Universe: the unilateral opacity of an intimate, anonymous suffering. If the Universe is passionate, the Earth is impassive, while the World earnestly mediates the gulf that joins them.

If the Earth is what tolerates us, and the World is that which is made in our own image, then the Universe is the “according-to-which” thought thinks these relations at all. To be acted upon, even when acting; to be spoken, even when speaking – to be thought, even in the moment of thinking the hair, mud, and dirt that thinks through me – this is the passion of the Universe.

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**On the Remote.** If the Universe has a special status for Laruelle, this is because it does not participate in the philosophical terrain of the Earth or the World, the empirical or the ideal, the in-itself or the for-us. A key term in Laruelle’s text is the French word *lointain* – the distant, the far-away, the far-off, the remote. Laruelle uses it as a noun (even, in his parlance, as a “first name” or *nom-premier*) – but there is no thing that is distant, far-away, or remote. Rather, it is the remote in itself. Added to this is Laruelle’s particular usage of the term Remote beyond its spatial or geographical meanings. Here one comes closer to Henri Michaux’s phrase *lointain intérieur* (remote interior), or the refrain of Baudelaire: *tout un monde lointain* (all a distant world). But Laruelle adds a further twist, in which the term Remote functions as a kind of logical operator, based on a contradiction arising from the proximal and distal senses of the word. Here the Remote is what makes the Universe at once inaccessible and intimate, the empty space of a dream that is also “accessible to us at each of its points.”

Thus, Laruelle notes: “L’Univers est la passion intérieure du Lointain.” “The Universe is the inner passion of the Remote.” But if the article for *Lointain* were shifted, we could also say, “the Universe is the inner passion for the Remote.” A subtle but significant difference.

In fact, this is the lesson of the Remote in Laruelle’s text – the point at which the passion for the Remote collapses into the passion of the Remote.

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**Forgetting the World.** Disoriented, wayward and wayless, cast adrift in quotidian moments of annulment, listless and derelict in one’s very own living corpse. Everything has become remote, as distant from experience as from intelligibility. This is the impression, at least. Having less to do with journeys or destinations, the Remote reveals a passionate emptiness so near it is easily forgotten. If there is a forgetting going on here, it is that we have forgotten that the world has already left us behind. We scramble and struggle to fix, to repair, to make reparations, and to forecast repercussions, but the world has already moved on – it is, quite literally, somewhere else.

Wittgenstein notes the following: “A philosophical problem has the form: I don’t know my way about.” Following Wittgenstein’s claim, we could say that philosophy goes about solving such problems – schools, methods, and professions are recruited in the process. Antiphilosophy dwells on such problems, without much care for a solution (in fact, it may be said that the antiphilosophical method is the studied and rigorous warding-off of solution). And nonphilosophy makes of this “not knowing one’s way about” an axiom – a groundless ground towards which one is fatally, or lovingly, drawn.

“I don’t know my way about” – this is the first axiom of the Remote. It grows out of a refusal, a no-saying that is not negative, a refusal of journeys, paths, itineraries and exercises, a refusal to either find oneself living yet again in the World, yet again active on the Earth, yet again pining for an enigmatic Universe. Where else to go, then, but into the desert? . . . And yet, it’s all a mirage. Even the desert soon becomes populated, even the arid expanse soon becomes a habitation – even there you have to deal with noisy neighbors, reptilian demons, and obtrusive hippocentaurs. And so it seems that there is nothing but working the Earth, living in the World, harboring the dim hermetic

thought of the Universe. Nothing left but the remoteness of refusal, nothing left but the desert.

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**No Desert Too Far.** The desert motif pervades mystical texts, not unlike the ocean, the mountain, and the clouds. In fact, it would not be difficult to assemble a genealogy of the desert, from the Desert Hermits of fourth century Egypt, to Dionysius the Areopagite, who juxtaposes desert wilderness with an inaccessible and dark divinity, to a range of mystics who utilize desert motifs in ambiguous ways – one thinks, for instance, of Mechthild of Madgeburg's evocation of the "twelve deserts" of God, or the "desert wilderness" evoked by the Beguine mystic Hadewijch. Then there is Meister Eckhart's terminology of an "inmost desert" that is, in his words, "more unnamed than named, more unknown than known." For Eckhart, the desert refers either to a hidden yet immanent divinity, or to the emptied and barren ground of the soul.

And this leads us to the modern deserts: from the deserts of silence in the works of Edmond Jabès, to the masses held in the Ordos Desert by Teilhard de Chardin; from Nietzsche's desert songs to Emile Cioran's formulation: "Deserts are the gardens of God."

But such a litany of people and texts would, at best, reveal the inconsistency of deserts – a site at once empty and yet never identical with itself. One of the central lessons to emerge from the Desert Hermits is the combined proximal and distal character of the desert, a hallow and hollowed-out midnight topography. In the fourth century, Evagrius Ponticus makes reference to the "inner desert," a phrase one also finds in Athanasius's *The Life of Antony*. Deserts are always remote, but the Remote is never simply far away. Laruelle again: "the Remote is accessible to us at each of its points."

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Deserts cover a third of the Earth's surface. Scientists tell us that sandstorms in the Sahara can cover an area the size of Britain, and rise

the Universe his secret.

to a dense wall of dust taller than the Empire State building. To seek – as the Desert Hermits did – an “inner desert” is no small feat.


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**Deserts of Solace, Deserts of Struggle.** To dwell *in* the desert is to dwell *on* the desert. And yet, the desert can only be a site of futility – even if one has especially good reasons for leaving everything behind. There is a desert of solace – an escapist desert, a desert of flight and fleeing, a desert never far enough away, no matter how far one walks. The desert of solace is remote and relative – one deserts one’s life, flees from people, and abandons a culture deemed barely worthy of the name. There is no real destination, only a departing. Politically unacceptable, morally reprehensible, threatening to collapse the still-fragile membrane between philosophy and its decision, this desert is as necessary as it is familiar – I would even say that whoever simply dismisses the desert of escape has not really lived, either in the World or on the Earth.

There is an inner desert as well, a desert not of escape but of confrontation, not abstraction but of purgation, not a desert of solace but one of struggle. While the Desert Hermits may begin in the desert of solace, they eventually discover a desert of struggle, a struggle beyond every opposition, contest, or conquest. This is the outcome of an image of the desert as a practice of noonday demons, swarming sands, and the arid expanse of impersonal clouds.

In the fourth century, Antony departs for the Nitrian desert, understanding – as all good hermits do – the spiritual vocation literally. One can only be made a desert, in the desert – the desert of solace. But, once there, Antony also confronts a desert of struggle, alternately populated by reptiles and demons and depopulated of all life, leaving only an emptiness as cold and pervasive as the desert night. This is the absurdist secret of the hermit’s life – one seeks solace, one finds struggle. The eremitic life: a spiritual comedy of errors.

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fails in the face of the rigor of its secret.

**Deserts of Silence.** There are deserts of solace and deserts of struggle, but one is always going *into* these deserts, placing oneself on a theological terrain, a terrain of sand and prayer. Here the desert is always where one is not. What of those instances in which one discovers that one is already in the desert? Not only the desert made a city, but the city made a desert. Should we say that, in addition to the desert of solace and of struggle, there is also a desert of silence? There's nowhere to go, because you're already there; nothing to say, because all language has already been emptied, a desert unintelligible precisely because it is accessible at all points . . . And yet, how disappointing this all is – it was right here, all the while, and life as it touches perfection appears just like anything else. Still, if we were to borrow the grammar of nonphilosophy, we could say that one is less “in the desert” than one is “in-desert,” or “in-desertion” (or even a “desert-without-desertion”). Eckhart uses the phrase *in deserto*. This is the furthest point of the hermit – the perfect overlapping of “life” and “desert.”

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**Desert Planet.** We know the general pattern of Antony's eremitic life – from his tutelage under an old man in the city, to his time spent in a tomb on the outskirts of the city, to the twenty years he passes in the deserts of Egypt, and finally to his enigmatic passage into an “inner desert” where he remains until his death, around the middle of the fourth century.

That the life of the hermit was distinct from other forms of religious life is shown early on, around the time of Antony's death. In the late fourth century, the theologian Jerome distinguishes between *remnuoth*, or small, informal groups leading ascetic lives within a city; cenobites, living in organized, communal monasteries apart from the city; and finally hermits, who undertake spiritual practice in isolation, apart from the city altogether.

Jerome's distinction broadly follows the trajectory of Antony himself, from city to desert. What we must add, however, is the immense growth of the eremitic lifestyle in the period during and after Antony. In fact, many hermits lived not in total isolation, but in clusters of

hermitages that developed into settlements, and in some cases, entire villages. Following the example of Antony, several hermits settled in the Nitrian desert, just bordering the Nile valley. One of these was a hermit named Amoun, who had settled there around 315, but soon had to move south due to the inordinate numbers of hermits coming into the region; unfortunately he ended up relocating to a mountainous region full of occupied caves known as Kellia, or “the Cells.” South of Nitria lay Scetis, situated near a lake which provided, among other things, palm trees used for the weaving of mats and baskets. Further along the Nile, and deeper into the Thebaid desert, more settlements. One account of the period by Palladius notes that by the end of the fourth century, there were around 5000 hermits residing in the Nitrian desert alone. The *History of the Monks of Egypt*, written around this time, goes so far as to say that there was no city in Egypt that was not surrounded by hermitages “as if by walls.”

Never has solitude been so populous as with the Desert Hermits. Never has the Remote been so populous as in the desert.

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**God is a Desert.** In his sermons, Meister Eckhart often refers to the divine in terms of the desert. There is the inaccessible divine in itself, and there is the divine immanent in each person. In one sense, the desert is what separates them, or what lies between them. But in a more important sense, the desert indicates the identity of the divine in itself and the divine in each person, of the divine-in-person.

But whereas the Desert Hermits find God *in* the desert, for Eckhart, God *is* a desert. Eckhart is, in this way, seeking not a union with the divine, but a studied affirmation of a divinity pre-existent in oneself. One might even say that Eckhart refuses God, in that what Eckhart seeks is that already-existing, common divinity that would render the very notion of a union meaningless. This unity-without-union is not a conjunction with any thing; it is a place one goes to, but also a place one is already in – what Eckhart calls the “silent desert” of no distinction, of stillness, of an inmost hovering. In one sermon Eckhart starkly notes: “If you could annihilate yourself in an instant (or

rather, quicker than an instant), you be everything that the desert is in itself.”

As far as we know, Eckhart never lived in a desert cave. All the same, one is tempted to recognize this silent desert within one’s own cavernous, cadaverous body.

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**Life Among Tombs.** The hermit represents a refusal so basic that it has already assigned itself to failure. We know that, even for the Desert Hermits of the fourth century, there was no desert so far, no landscape so desolate, that it could not itself become populous, turning back on eremiticism, and rendering it silent.

But the hermit is different from the monk, though they overlap in their practice of refusal. The monk, *monachos* (μοναχος), is defined by a solitude that is the product of having separated itself from society. But this solitude does not exclude a collective living with others, in collective solitude – it even requires it. The problems that do arise are not theological or philosophical ones – they are the problems of someone eating too loud, chanting off tune, showing off their ascetic prowess, all a kind of straight-faced and dour sitcom.

Are hermits any better off? The hermit, *eremites* (ερημιος), is not just solitary, but also uninhabited, abandoned, deserted. In fact, it is difficult to separate in the term *eremos* the literal and the figurative sense of being uninhabited. The hermit is not just a dweller *in* the desert, but a dwelling *as* the desert, living according to uninhabitation... which seems impossible . . . And so the desert itself mocks the hermit – there is never just one cave, there are always several, constellated next to each other, like tombs.

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**Notes for a Modern Hermitage.** The insight of the Desert Hermits is to have refused the dichotomy of the literal and figurative. The sayings collected in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* illustrate this. These hermits go into the desert driven by a

desertion already occupying their entire being, eclipsing every self-world relation.

We are, perhaps, too modern to comprehend this – either you get on a plane and fly to the farthest reaches of the Egyptian desert, accompanied by a tour guide and Googlemaps, or you stay indoors, bunkered in the city, going around grumbling in a pallid, scholarly imitation of the eremitical life. Still, I like to imagine a hermit theme park, complete with souvenirs, taking you to the exact caves of Antony and other Egyptian hermits, their sandals and partially-woven baskets still there, as if they had abandoned their cells on a sudden spiritual whim two millennia ago. Such a desert vacation could not be completed in a mere week – a full package would encompass at least thirty years or longer. All amenities would be provided – demons would be supplied in the form of trained lizards or animatronic puppets, and you would be courteously refused all requests for food or a WiFi connection. Maybe you would be allowed a notebook, for what good would such an experience be if it can’t be documented? Even the Desert Hermits knew this much.

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A desert theology can only ever be a non-theology. One goes into the desert not to give voice to one’s faith, and not to seek the silence of a silent God. At best, the desert hermit discovers an inner negation that itself produces a negative space that only the desert can accommodate. A desert rabbi in a book by Jabès puts it thus: “If you go to the desert, silence no longer envelops you. You yourself become such silence as makes the desert speak.”

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I’ve always found it curious that Antony would venture into the vast expanse of the desert, only to enclose himself in a cave. What amazing, sublime views he must have missed, each day and each night offering to him an unending vista of breathable emptiness and silent constellations. Of course, none of this takes into account the possibility



that Antony entombed himself in order to better see the desert. For every hermit, a hermeneutic.

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The desert hermit is the person who says: I have lived in the Remote for so long that no one will visit me, just the clouds slowly passing by. At first, it is said with all the *gravitas* of despair. After a while, it is said with the urgency of hope. Still more time passes, and it is said with the calm and quietude that one has when reciting a prayer, writing a poem, or telling a joke.

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For the hermit, there is no desert too far or too interior. Arrakis, the desert planet.

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**Ignoble Deserts.** In contrast to the city or the village, the house or the castle, the desert is void of human activity and the architectonic traces it is determined to leave behind. In contrast to the forest or the garden, the desert is void of life, be it natural or artificial, human, plant, or animal. And in contrast to the mountain or the ocean – two sites also common in mystical texts – the desert is concerned neither with sublime heights nor with flowing turbulence. In the desert there is only emptiness...well, not emptiness strictly speaking, but a landscape depopulated and derelict, an arid expanse enigmatically filled with sand. The sand dunes of a desert are an ocean that fails to flow; its hollowed-out rock and caverns are mountains that fail to ascend; if oceans flow and mountains rise, then deserts simply exist, or persist, or *desist* . . . and not even that, since there's nothing to see, nowhere to go, and nothing to do, except to desist, and ultimately that too is superfluous.

The desert is a wasteland that has never had the dignity of once being a city or a village. Deserts are ruins without origin.

He is answered only by the Universe,

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At some point, all hermits discover that they have already left.

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For the hermit, philosophy is the desertion of the human, by the human. What remains is just bare activity. No doubt this is why the Desert Hermits chose to weave mats rather than to write books.

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A central motif of the Desert Hermits is *hesychia*, often translated as stillness, quiet, or tranquility. If the monastic cell was the outer expression of an inner solitude, then *hesychia* was the means by which one inhabited such a solitude. The 14<sup>th</sup> century monk Gregory Palamas defines *hesychia* as that stillness or quiet that is arrived at through an ongoing, negative prayer, stripping away all proximal or distal relations, a prayer of remoteness.

Yet for *hesychia*, others are always too near, and even the solitude of a nearby hermit in a nearby cave is too close – ultimately, even knowing that somewhere, there is someone else, is too much to bear. Once, a novice living in the desert of Scetis asked an old hermit there for advice. The old man replied: “Go back to your cell, your cell will teach you all things.” The novice returned to his cell, perhaps having learned nothing.

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**Night, Cave, Tomb.** The desert’s true topography is neither sand nor sun – it is that which one cannot see or survey, but in which one dwells, like a hermit. (Call the curtain, raise the roof, spirits on tonight.)

For the Desert Hermits, the desert’s topography is that of Night, Cave, and Tomb. Three ways in which the desert itself deserts the world, through a topography of negation, emptying, and hollowing-out.



of view of Black as what determines color in the

Many hermits make the journey into the desert at night; in the cold, stark clarity of night, one holds vigil through a prayer whose stillness and quiet aims to be adequate to the desert night itself. A cave is what forms around this resonant stillness of prayer. The hermit closes off the cave in which they are in – but this is because they have, in a way, already departed. And this departing transforms the cave into a tomb – just as it makes of the body a spiritual topography, cross-crossed with the hermetic lines of time. Weightless and mesmerizing, the desert tomb results from a contemplation no longer separate from prayer. Following the example of Antony, every hermit knows that the desert night is a cave, and the desert cave is a tomb, and that none of these are in any sense enclosures. In fact, the *ascesis* of the Desert Hermits is the studied tracing of this terrain – Night, Cave, Tomb – within the impersonal melodrama of the corpse itself.

Rumors of the Desert Hermits – they carry a tomb with them, wherever they go.

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Many religious traditions make reference to the desert as a spiritual terrain for the eremetic life: there is Vanaprastha, the eremitic stage in life outlined in the Vedas, there is Lao Tze, who became a hermit at the ripe old age of a hundred and sixty, there is the Buddha's journey with the ascetics, the exodus of the Jews, Christ's confrontation with the devil . . .

But I don't believe any of this is enough to found a religion, much less a community. I like to think – though I know it's inaccurate – that the true intuition of the Desert Hermits was to seek a religion without people. Modern hermits like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche go a step further – a religion without God or people. (An occasion for despair, or joy, or both.)

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In the desert, the sky is superfluous.

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**The Incorruptibles.** Theologians often talk about the incorruptibility of the corpses of saints, corpses touched by divine intervention and miraculously impervious to the process of decay. The corpses of mystics such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila are counted among the Incorruptibles of the Catholic Church. By contrast, I would like to be absolutely corruptible – nothing of my body would remain, not even the skin I'm wearing or the notebook in which I'm writing. Finally all words and memories would evaporate, leaving not even a trace. It's fantastical, I know – but no less fantastical than the Incorruptibles.

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**Reductio ad absurdum.** The impulse behind the Desert Hermits is, I believe, universal; almost as if the condition of the human is the impulse to flee the human. Everyone anywhere at some point dreams of leaving, departing, deserting – and in a way that can't be resolved by a plane ticket or an open road. This is the condition of the eremetic absurd.

A hermit like Antony goes into the desert, fleeing from his fellow human beings and seeking solitude – only to have a string of others follow suit, some living in caves nearby. A pilgrimage, pupils, a marketplace, a village, a city...And so where the hermit leaves off, the pessimist begins.

Perhaps the key question is how to live remote from people, among people; how to live out of the world, in the world. An insight, perhaps, though still not yet a prayer.

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*Whylessness: The Universe is Deaf and Blind*

Daniel Colucciello Barber

*Escape From the World of Redemption*

"In the beginning there is Black—man and Universe, rather than philosopher and World." Thus the second part of "On the Black Universe" commences by marking the connection between beginning and black. Ambiguity revolves around this connection, just as it does around all beginnings. A beginning aspires to make manifest the new, it wants to create what is not already there. Everything about it connotes a break, an advance, a future. But this is difficult to pull off. And the reason it is difficult has to do with the impossibility of separating the advance from what is left behind, or the newly begun from the suddenly old. Such is the temporal difficulty of beginning, in which the creative emergence seems to depend on what it leaves behind, in which it defies its own novelty by measuring itself against what was already there, what was previously there, what was prior. We begin, the beginning tells us, only with the beginning—and yet the beginning compares itself to a time without beginning, a time before beginning, a time that, the beginning tells us, does not count. The beginning must have taken place, it takes a place, but where? So the temporal difficulty becomes spatial. Let us mark the beginning, let us draw a line at the place and in the place where the beginning takes hold, where the beginning begins ... when we do, we find that it divides into two sides: one side left in the wake of the other, which wants to begin. There is no beginning without a wake, nor is there a wake without a beginning. The beginning and the wake depend on one another, they need each other. They war with one another as well, precisely because of the competition implied in their mutual dependence, in the way they are defined by one another. Temporally speaking, then, to begin is to enter a war with what is left behind; spatially speaking, to begin is to enter a war with what is on the other side.

What does this have to do with the black universe? Or, more to the point, what is at stake when Laruelle says that there is, in the beginning, Black? The proclamation, "In the beginning there is Black," is a refusal of beginning, at least as beginning is normally imagined. Yet Laruelle

is not calling for a Black beginning, Black is not another, better way of beginning. He is instead insisting that in the beginning, whatever that beginning may be, however one wants to begin, there is Black. Imagine what you want, begin however you will, what you cannot change, what you cannot do away with, is the reality of Black. Nor is Black what is there in the wake of beginning. Black is no more beginning's aftermath than it is a specific kind of beginning. Just as black has nothing to do with beginning, so it has nothing to do with beginning's other side or with what beginning leaves behind. Black is in no way the effect of beginning, for it is beneath beginning, before beginning—precisely, it is before the war created by beginning. "In the beginning there is Black" ... what this means, ultimately, is that beginning, with its aspiration to create the new, is impossible.

This, of course, has never prevented us from beginning. But when we begin, we do so only from Black, and in doing so we forget beginning's impossibility. We forget the universe in the name of the world we have begun. *The creation of the world is thus the foreclosure of the universe*—a universe that is as inevitably and incorrigibly dark as the world is light. This foreclosure, however, is not just the effect of the world, it is also the effect of the philosopher. Just as the world is opposed to the universe, so the philosopher is opposed to man. The philosopher is the one, or anyone, who belongs to the creation and division of the world.

In order to track this sort of world-subjectivity, we need to address Christianity. This is because it is in Christianity that we find the vessel of so-called Western philosophy, and it is in Christianity that we find the dominant narrative of the creation of the world. It is not hard to imagine the terrible consequences of this creation. In fact, as an exercise in political theology, we could link Christian colonization's beginning—its obsession over the possibilities of the "new world"—with its narrative of the beginning of the world as such. In any case, what Laruelle forces upon us is a way of encountering that which is foreclosed by the world's creation, he sets us walking in reverse, an heretical pilgrimage. Such a pilgrimage belongs not to the Christian, nor to the philosopher, for both of them want us to see the light. It belongs instead to the heretical mystic.

Heresy with regard to the beginning is present in the story of the beginning, it is right there at the creation of the world, as if the writer of Genesis were haunted by the universe. This biblical text wants to tell us about the creative act with which God began the world, but it cannot do so without telling us about what was already there, before the beginning. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep."<sup>1</sup> We can easily imagine this deep as an indication of the Black that was there in the beginning. Soon after, God utters light into existence and sees "that the light was good."<sup>2</sup> God "separated the light from the darkness," and thus begins the war of light and darkness, the opposition that can never be settled, precisely because the two opposed sides belong to one another.<sup>3</sup> They belong together as effects of God. Light and darkness are separated but this separation points to a common origin. They belong to one another, even when they oppose one another, because they both belong to God. But does God belong to anything? Or is there anything that does not belong to God?

The answer to these questions is there in the text, it is there in the deep, which does not belong to God but is, on the contrary, before God. In fact, we could say that *God* belongs to the deep, to the Black—that God needs, depends upon, the darkness that was there in the beginning, before God starting laboring, before God put darkness to work, turning it into an employee. It is true that, according to the biblical account, everything in the world comes from God. All of the *world* is God's creation. But what is less noticed is that the biblical account lets on that not everything is *of* the world, not everything is *of* God. As long as one remains in the world, there is no escape from God—but *there is an escape from the world*. This possibility of escape is what Laruelle names when he says: "Black prior to light is the substance of the Universe, what

1 Genesis 1:1-2. All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version. For an account of the way in which the notion of "the deep" can transform classical understandings of creation, see Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

2 Genesis 1:4.

3 Ibid.

escaped from the World before the World was born into the World." We can escape from the world because black has already escaped it. But to escape the World is not to fight a war over the world. The point is not to pose black as the enemy of light, but to find the priority of black over light. This priority is real—even the writer of Genesis admits it—but it must be exercised by way of escape. And mysticism, if it means anything, must mean experimentation with such escape.

Escape, however, is not redemption—especially as we think of redemption in terms of light. If this section of "On the Black Universe" echoes the Hebraic creation story of Genesis, it likewise echoes the Christian redemption story of the gospel of John. Like Genesis 1, and like section 2 of "On the Black Universe," John commences with the phrase, "In the beginning." But John has something to add to Genesis, which is that in the beginning there was not just God, there was also the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."<sup>4</sup> He continues by asserting that everything that has come into being has done so *by way of* the Word, and he names this everything, taken together, as life: "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."<sup>5</sup> Light is thus allied with being, with life, whereas darkness is what people need to be redeemed *from*. In fact, the promise of John's gospel, its ontological basis for hope, is that, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."<sup>6</sup> No matter how dark things may appear, the last word is given to the Word of God, which is light. The light has entered into the darkness, and the darkness cannot subsume the path of redemption this light makes available. Yet this is not to say all people side with the light. John speaks of a "judgment," which is "that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the decision made by such people does not hinder the narrative of redemption towards, and by way of, the light.

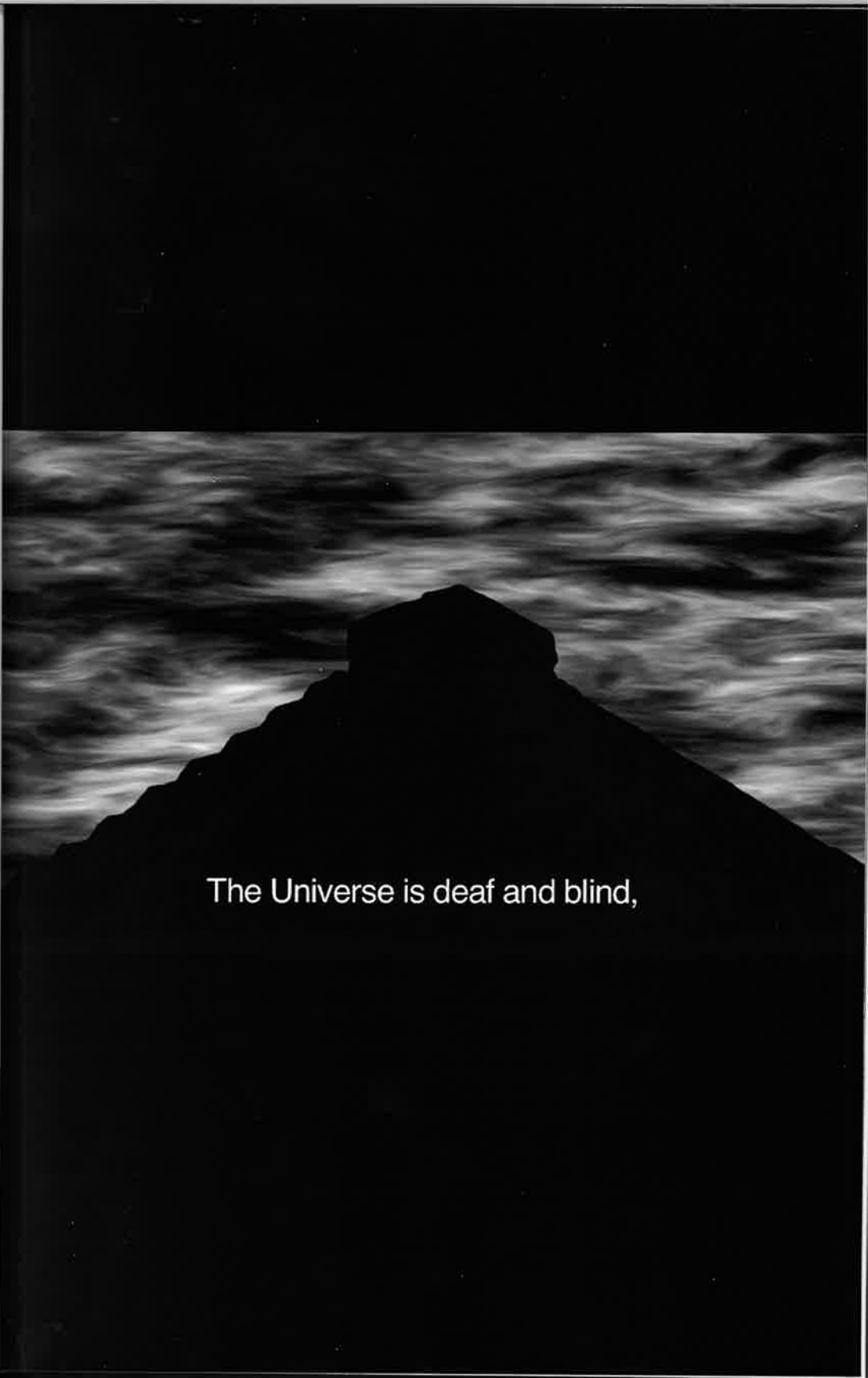
What is presented here, in John, is the paradigmatic example of the war between light and darkness, the war that Laruelle wants

4 John 1:1.

5 John 1:3-4.

6 John 1:5.

7 John 3:19.

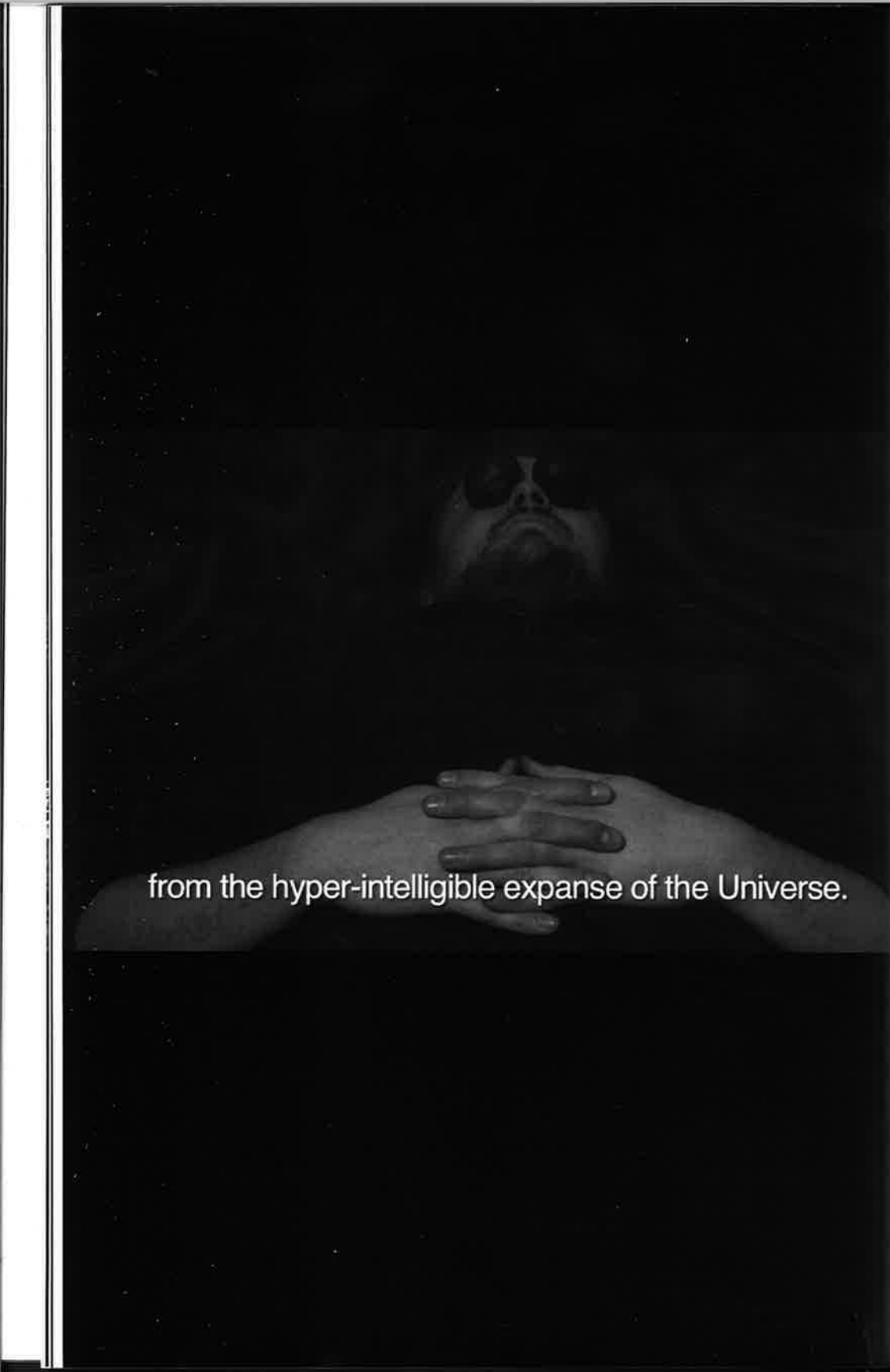


The Universe is deaf and blind,

to escape by way of the black universe. In this war, light is opposed to darkness, but asymmetrically so. It is not just that light and darkness are opposed, it is also that light is somehow primary; to be in and to see the light is to be in a condition that is superior to remaining in the darkness. So John's narrative is dualistic, but it is a dualism in which one side supersedes the other. Being, and life itself, are on the side of light, and what redemption names is the achievement of a condition that is properly in being, in life. Redemption thus names a solution to a problem, which is that we do not initially find ourselves in the light of being. In fact, the implication would be that we do not even initially find ourselves in life.

We, as commentators on John, need to attend not only to the operation of redemption as solution, we must also attend to the operation of redemption as problem—or as what creates a problem. There is no redemption without the problem, for it is the problem that generates the need, to which redemption responds. So how does Laruelle interpose himself in John's narrative? Laruelle's black universe should not be understood as siding with the darkness in its war with the light. His concern is to become, or to remain, indifferent to both sides. More to the point would be to say that the black universe opposes not the light but the redemption set forth by the light. As Laruelle puts it, "Light strikes the Earth with repeated blows, divides the World infinitely, solicits in vain the invisible Universe." When Laruelle looks at the light, from the vantage of the black universe, he does not see something that redeems. He sees, instead, something that "divides." The essence of the light is not to redeem but to strike with blows, and it is the consequently divided world that produces the milieu from which the need for redemption arises.

Our response to this division should be to leave it in place and to step outside of it, and we can do this only insofar as we see the light for what it is: something that divides the world, but that cannot solicit the Universe. We do not need to oppose the light, but we will be able to become indifferent to the light's war only if we are able to escape the light, or more precisely to escape the need produced by the light. Such escape is what Laruelle indicates when he pronounces that, "The Universe was 'in' the World and the World did not see it." Note how this



from the hyper-intelligible expanse of the Universe.

pronouncement both mimes the structure and undermines the force of John's own pronouncement that, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." For John, the light and the darkness are engaged in a war over the world; the world is enshrouded in a darkness from which light provides escape. For Laruelle, the world itself, in the totality of its bellicose oscillations between light and darkness, is defined by its failure to see the Universe that is always already there. It is as if Laruelle wants to reveal John's narrative of redemption as inescapably provincial. Light solicits the universe in vain, it is intrinsically unable to become adequately expansive or focused. Whatever goes on with the light—its divisions, its introduction of need, its labors of redemption—belongs to a game in which we do not have to participate.

Emphasis ought to be given to this fact of "not having to"—that is, of not needing to be or to become involved in the game. We are able to escape the world, but the reason we are able to do so is because we are already outside the world. The logic, then, is one whereby the place to which one goes is the place where one already is. Instead of searching out something within the oppositions of the world, one refuses to leave where one already is and thus discovers this place, which knows nothing of the world's need. Such a logic can be found throughout a variety of mystical forms, and so we ought to see Laruelle as a contemporary iteration of a much longer tradition. This tradition includes figures such as Rumi, the Sufi mystic, who claims that, "Mystics are experts in laziness. They rely on it, / because they continuously see God working all around them. / The harvest keeps coming in, yet they / never even did the plowing."<sup>8</sup> What mysticism here names is not the accomplishment of labor but the wherewithal to refuse work. To try to attain the harvest is actually to obstruct the harvest. We find a similar tendency in the Upanishads, which describe *brahman* as that which is already here and not at all as something to be found through active veneration. "Which one cannot see with one's sight, by which one sees the sight itself," or, "Which one cannot hear with one's hearing, by which hearing itself is heard—Learn that that alone is *brahman*."<sup>9</sup>

8 Jalal al-din Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks with John Moyne (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), p. 30.

9 Kena Upaniṣad 1.7. *Upanisads*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford:

Again, the sense is that mysticism operates by rendering unworkable every attempt to work towards something. In this instance, it is a matter of ceasing to look out and of turning around one's attention toward the already-inhering capacity to see. The common claim made by these representative mystical figures is that we do not need to achieve something. Mysticism, understood in this manner, revolves around the idea that we are not beings of need. Of course, mysticism does want to move us from one place to another, but the entire stock of images and range of logics associated with movement are undercut, even immobilized, by the fact that the place to which mysticism wants to move us is the place where we already are.

*"God and I, We Are One"*

The essential point of reference for this tendency of mysticism, within its Christian form, is the work of Meister Eckhart, to which Laruelle often refers. Eckhart has his own commentary on John, and it depends on the theologically orthodox claim that the Word, or the second person of the Trinity, is of the same substance as, is ontologically equivalent to, God the Father, or the first person of the Trinity. At the same time, this equivalence or same-substantiality harbors a connotation of precedence: the Word is equivalent to God, yet it remains the case that God gives birth to the Word—or, the Father gives birth to the Son. It is in this manner that Christian theology observed the differentiation of God and the Word, or the Father and the Son, without allowing differentiation to compromise their equivalence. Eckhart's mysticism is ultimately heretical in character, but it proceeds by accepting and affirming this theologically orthodox notion. What is compelling about this notion, for Eckhart, is its ability to undermine the appearance of division. It would appear, in other words, that Father and Son are not the same, given that we distinguish the terms from one another. Yet the theologically orthodox affirmation of their same-substantiality opens a space for theoretical experimentation—that is, it opens a space in which it becomes possible to affirm a commonality or univocity of being that would be more real than the division.

Oxford UP, 1996), pp. 227-228.



Yet if Eckhart is taking advantage of a theoretical space legitimated by theological orthodoxy, then in what sense is his thought heretical? In what sense can we see him as an advocate of mysticism, or even of the black universe, rather than as a defender of the one true religion? What puts Eckhart on the side of heresy rather than orthodoxy is the way he expands this theoretical space, or the way he refuses to delimit the already expansive nature of this space. Specifically, the heretical moment in Eckhart comes when he takes the logic of unification, which is at work in the Trinity, and extends it beyond the Trinity. Theological orthodoxy allows the logic of unification to be applied to the division between Father and Son, or God and Word; Eckhart extends this logic so that it includes the soul, which is to say that the relationship that obtains between God and Word now obtains between God and humanity. As Eckhart puts it, "The Father gives birth to his Son in eternity, equal to himself. 'The Word was with God, and God was the Word'; it was the same in the same nature. Yet I say more: He has given birth to him in my soul."<sup>10</sup> It is this "Yet I say more" that separates heretical mysticism from Christian orthodoxy; it is also what separates Eckhart's reading of John from the reading of John that Laruelle opposes. Does this mean Eckhart and Laruelle are in agreement?

On Eckhart's reading, there can be no redemption, for redemption presumes a need, and there can be no need for God if one is already unified with God. Eckhart continues by saying that God "gives birth not only to me, his Son, but he gives birth to me as himself and himself as me and to me as his being and nature."<sup>11</sup> This logic, often termed "the birth of the Word in the soul," articulates the self as undividable from God. Eckhart's logic of unification thus becomes heretical because it gives credit to the self, or it discovers the self's auto-credit, in such a way that the self no longer needs a loan, much less a gift, from anything outside of itself. If the self is radically unified with the divine, then there is no need for a mediator, for mediation presumes a kind of division that, on Eckhart's mystical reading, is not there in the first place. There

10 Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, ed. and trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), Sermon 6, p. 187.

11 Ibid.

is nothing to achieve. The redemption narrative of John is stillborn, not negated so much as nullified: its intention to convert those in the darkness to the light is ruined by the fact that there is no division. Over and over again one finds Eckhart criticizing mediation. "Every kind of medium," he says, "is alien to God."<sup>12</sup> To attempt to mediate one's relation to God is to miss God, and this is because one is not in relation to God, on the contrary one is God. "The more one seeks [God]," he says, "the less one finds [God]."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, "If you do not seek him, then you will find him."<sup>14</sup> It is the very attempt to find God, or to mediate one's relation to God, that prevents one from finding God. Thus Eckhart warns that, "One should not accept or esteem God as being outside oneself, but as one's own and as what is within one. ... Some simple people think that they will see God as if he were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one."<sup>15</sup> In fact, the existence of a relational God is the effect of the self. According to Eckhart, "if I did not exist, God would also not exist. ... if I did not exist God too would not be God."<sup>16</sup> This is to say that God, understood as a being to which we relate, exists only insofar as we exist, or more exactly only insofar as we imagine ourselves to exist as separated from God. The relational God is there simply because we imagine it to be there, simply because we presume ourselves—falsely—to be separated from it. And this division emerges sheerly through the act of addressing God. This division emerges even in prayer, which, because it looks and speaks to God, creates division. To address God is to alienate oneself from God. To mediate God is to deny God, and it is also to deny oneself.

On Eckhart's reading, then, the redemptive, mediatic narrative of John is undercut through radicalization of its account of a beginning in which God and the Word, Father and Son, are unified. The narrative

12 Ibid., "The Book of Benedictus: Of the Nobleman," p. 244.

13 Ibid., Sermon 15, p. 192.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., Sermon 6, p. 188.


16 Ibid., Sermon 52, p. 203. I have refrained from repeating the inverted commas that are used, in the translation of this text, around certain iterations of "God." They are interpolations that, in my mind, serve to obscure the force of Eckhart's proclamation.

of John ceases to be one of achieving identity with the light through the mediation of the Word, and it instead becomes a proclamation that one is already unified with the Word. The mediator no longer solves a problem, on the contrary he becomes a proclamation of what you already are. Everything that is said of the mediator is said of the self, and so there is no longer any mediator. Yet Eckhart does not just subvert, through mimesis, the gospel of John. He also at one point advances a counter-narrative, or a “before-narrative.” It is something like the condition of possibility enabling John to grasp what he does. Eckhart says,

When I stood in my first cause, I then had no God, and then I was my own cause. I wanted nothing, I longed for nothing, for I was an empty being, and the only truth in which I rejoiced was in the knowledge of myself. ... What I wanted I was, and what I was I wanted; and so I stood, empty of God and of everything. But when I went out from my own free will and received my created being, then I had a God, for before there were any creatures, God was not God, but he was what he was.”<sup>17</sup>

Eckhart thus gives us yet another account of how it was “in the beginning,” and this account is one that looks less and less like John’s, or even Genesis’, and more and more like Laruelle’s own account of the black universe. Instead of telling us how things began, Eckhart tells us how things were before the beginning.

In the accounts of Genesis and John, on the other hand, the beginning is presented as something to which we must relate, even something to which we must return. The beginning there functions as the crux of relation, the point around which all divisions are mediated. What Eckhart’s account reveals is a before-condition in which there was neither creature nor creator, in which one was what one was and God was what God was. This cannot be mediated, for mediation begins only once there is a beginning. When it comes to beginning and redemption, division is everywhere. But when it comes to before the beginning, as is the case with Eckhart, division never takes place. Narratives of beginning and redemption install separation along with the call to overcome separation. They do not work on or within the world, they are



and yet the Remote is accessible to us

17 Ibid., p. 200. Again, I have not repeated the inverted commas.

the world itself. On the other hand, narratives of *before* the beginning refuse this installation in its entirety, they deny the ultimacy of the world, they refuse both division and its redemptive overcoming, calling instead for escape from the world. And the place to escape to is where you still are, despite the world. For Eckhart, this “place” is unity with God, so much so that he can say, “God’s existence must be my existence and God’s is-ness is my is-ness, neither less nor more.”<sup>18</sup> For Laruelle, this place where you still are is the black universe, so much so that he can say that man, whenever he “approaches the World,” does so “by way of transcendental darkness, into which he never entered and from which he will never leave.”

*Without Knowing Why*


Laruelle’s black universe, I want to indicate, is articulated as a repetition of Eckhart’s unification of God and self. Both draw on the structure of John’s gospel in order to radicalize it, and both seek to reach, not the beginning, but that which is before the beginning. Yet having said this, it is important to see how Laruelle’s repetition of Eckhart is also a departure from Eckhart. And so we need to look more closely at the role that the concept of “life” plays for Eckhart.

For Eckhart, when we speak of the unification of self and God, the same-substantiality of their is-ness, we are speaking of life. It is life, he says, that “flows without any medium from God into the soul.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore the life of the self is God’s being. Eckhart asks, “What is life?” And he answers himself by asserting that “God’s being is my life.”<sup>20</sup> It is with life, then, that we find the point or place of indistinction between God and self. If we were to ask, furthermore, what it is that Christian orthodoxy fails to affirm, then the answer once again would be life. I have noted that Eckhart’s heretical character stems from the fact that he takes the unity of life, found within and beneath the Father/Son relation, and extends it to the soul. This is true, but it may cause us to miss something important—it may lead us to believe that the logic of unification was first discovered, or even constructed, by Christianity,

18 Ibid., Sermon 6, p. 187.

19 Eckhart, Sermon 6, p. 187.

20 Ibid.



it is what man sees in man,

and thus that Christianity's failure was that it did not pursue the logic of unification to its full extent. Yet the problem with Christianity is not that it discovered or invented a truth but just *pursued* it too narrowly. The problem is that it *stole* this truth, which was already there. The truth of unification, when it was taken up in the name of Christianity, when it was mediated through the Father/Son relation, was a delimitation of, and an alienation from, a truth that was already known. Christianity takes a universal knowledge and divides it up, posing it as something belonging to God and the Word, but not to all souls. The point, then, is not to *extend* Christianity's unification to the entire universe, it is rather to *undo* the division of unification that Christianity created.

It is this task that Eckhart pursues in his concept of life. What he needs is a word that one could discover within the Christian mediation, but that could be manifested as without division, or without Christianity. And this word is life. What is so profound about life, as Eckhart develops it, is its ability to resist mediation, to resist every tendency that wants to put it in service of something else. Life, in other words, does not leave itself, it is not something received from outside, it is, on the contrary, already there as soon as, or even before, one looks to receive it. Life serves nothing but life. Eckhart presents the following scenario: "If anyone went on for a thousand years asking of life: 'Why are you living?' life, if it could answer, would only say: 'I live so that I may live.'"<sup>21</sup> Life serves only itself. Or, more precisely, life finds itself unable to ask *why* it lives. As Eckhart puts it, life "lives without asking why it is itself living."<sup>22</sup> Note that in this scenario, life answers for itself only when it is asked, and the asking comes from outside. The key point is not that life asks itself why, and then answers by referring to itself; it is rather that life cannot ask why. And it is not that life is its own justification, it is that life does not need a justification—or even better, that life, by its very nature, is unable to present the need for justification. Life is not the answer to the question of why, it is the refusal of the why, it is the incapacity to ask the question: *life is whylessness*.

Yet a difficult question emerges. The question we must pose to Eckhart is whether life, even a whyless life, still functions as a

21 Ibid., Sermon 5b, p. 184.

22 Ibid.

beginning. Do not, Eckhart says, ask for a justification of life, for life is whyless. To introduce "why" into life is to leave life. Remain in life. But isn't life something into which we have *entered*? Can't we imagine something other than life, something that would be there, alongside life, maybe even before life? And furthermore, for Eckhart life is linked to the Word—he says that "the Son," the Word, is "life itself."<sup>23</sup> So, if life is linked to the Word, if the word life is linked to the life of the Word, then aren't we still caught in a mediation? Isn't it still the case that life is linked to the Word, that life takes the side of the Word, that life divides itself from what is *not* life?

Let's compare Eckhart's whylessness of life to Laruelle's account of whylessness. Laruelle says that "Man ... is condemned, without knowing why, to the World and to the Earth, and neither the World nor the Earth can tell him why. He is answered only by the Universe, being black and mute." The essential point of contrast has to do with the positioning of whylessness. For Eckhart, whylessness revolves around life, so that life, even as it is without why—or because it is without why—is inescapable. Life is unquestionable, but because of this, life is unquestionably there. Life survives. And its survival, too, is unquestionable. This means Eckhart's whylessness is not as vertiginous as it may seem. Of course, as long as one wants to give life a meaning, as long as one wants to ground life in something else, then Eckhart's whylessness will involve one in vertigo. This is because whylessness refuses the very desire for a ground of life, or for a meaning of life; it undermines the very frame out of which the question, "why life?", arises. But throughout all of this, note that life remains, unmoved. Life is not grounded by something outside of it, but it remains as its own ground. In fact, even though Eckhart tells us that life lives without asking why, he asks us to imagine a scenario in which we are asking questions to life. Life cannot ask questions, but it can answer our questions! Of course, the answer is not much of an answer, for life has no purpose, it cannot answer us with a purpose, but it does answer us, and it answers us with itself.

For Laruelle, on the other hand, there is no answer to be found

23 Ibid.

in life as such. According to Eckhart, life is something unto itself, life is in-itself, but according to Laruelle life is disjoined from itself. In fact, for Laruelle, there is no life, or life is not there when we look for it. In other words, not only is there no *why to* life, there is also no whylessness of life. What is there is the World and the Earth, and at the same time there is the Universe. But the World and the Earth, on one hand, and the Universe, on the other, are not there in the same sense. This is the disjunction. No life, only disjunction: we carry away the universe yet are condemned to the World and the Earth. And this condemnation cannot be softened, on the contrary it is heightened because we do not know *why* we are condemned. There is no way we might wrangle some sort of meaning out of this condemnation, there is no way we might become able to see our condemnation as a mediation, a means to achieve redemption. As long as we look to the World and the Earth for an account of why they are there, or why we are oriented towards them, we will continue to get nothing. There is nothing offered, nothing said, there is no answer, no *why*.

If we do want an explanation, then it seems advisable to turn away from the World and the Earth, to escape them—specifically, to escape them to the Universe, where we already are. Does the universe give us an answer? Laruelle says: “[Man] is answered only by the Universe, being black and mute.” This is an answer, but as was the case with Eckhart, the answer is not much of an answer. In fact, it would be wrong to say that an answer is given. For when we say that an answer is given, we mean that the answer is there for us, that it can be taken up or received by us. But what Laruelle is talking about is an answer that cannot be taken up. The answer, by being black and mute, cannot be seen and cannot be heard. It cannot be seen because it is without color, and it cannot be heard because it does not speak. The Universe does not *give* an answer, such that the answer could be divided from the Universe. The Universe answers *by being* black and mute. In other words, it is not the answer that is black and mute, it is the Universe.

#### *Baseless Love*

We are now able to draw a strict line between Laruelle and Eckhart. Laruelle’s remarks are deeply Eckhartian, but they eventually depart

from Eckhart. Specifically, we can say that Laruelle does not share Eckhart’s attention to life. For Eckhart, it is with life that we hit ground. There is no going behind or outside of life. For Laruelle, on the other hand, there is no life, there is only a disjunction, between a world of light to which we are condemned, and a black, mute universe to and as which we may escape the world. Furthermore, we can say that they present two genuinely different styles of whylessness. For Eckhart, whylessness leaves life in place, and even more important than this fact is the means by which he preserves life. Though life does not provide an answer to the question of *why*, we are still able to address it, and it is still able to respond to us. We do not know *why* life, but we do *know life*. This is to say that life, even in its whylessness, remains communicable. We cannot speak of life’s *why*, but we can speak to life about its whylessness, and life can speak to us about its whylessness. Life communicates. An answer is given to us.

However, for Laruelle, as we have seen, an answer is not given. Laruelle’s whylessness is without givenness, for there is no communication with the Universe. The Universe does not communicate an answer, it does not even communicate that there is no answer. The universe cannot communicate at all, for it is mute. And in case there was anything still left of a fantasy of communication, Laruelle extinguishes it by adding that “the Universe is deaf and blind.” So not only is the Universe unable to speak to us, it is also unable to hear whatever we might have to say to it. This incommunicability is matched by imperceptibility: not only is the Universe is mute and deaf, it is also black—without color—and blind. Unlike Eckhart’s “life,” then, Laruelle’s Universe is without relation. It is radically without mediation. Nothing is left in place, life does not survive.

What Laruelle is telling us, or what we may find in Laruelle’s departure from Eckhart, is that life, if it is something communicable, is not the universe. Life divides the universe, it gives the Universe an aim, the aim of achieving life. Life subjects the Universe to survival. This is a subjection effected by the theologian—even a radical one such as Eckhart—but also by the philosopher. It does not matter whether we see life in terms of Eckhart’s Word (the Light of the World) or in the terms of the philosopher’s logic (with its various figures of Enlightenment).

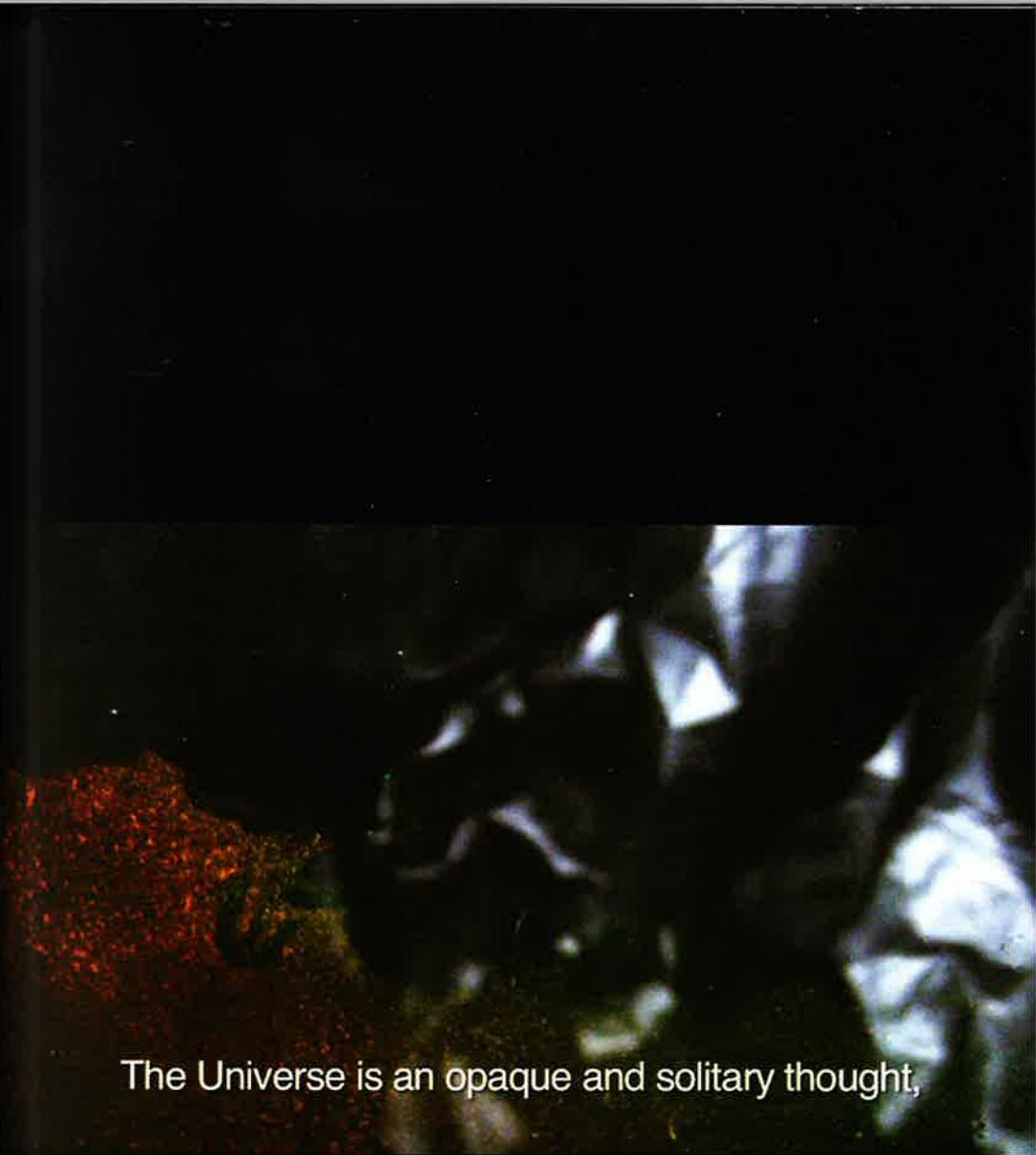
They constantly seek to make sure that life begins, that there is survival. But in the beginning there is not light, there is not life, there is the black Universe. Survival is the denial of the Universe.<sup>24</sup>

The implication of all this is not that Man should not act, but more exactly that Man should not act for survival. So how should Man act? Perhaps act is not the right word—Laruelle uses more specific verbs, namely “love” and “assist.” After proclaiming that, “The Universe is deaf and blind,” he adds that “we can only love it and assist it.” In fact, it is such action that defines Man’s essence: “Man is the being who assists the Universe.” This is, to be sure, a peculiar pronouncement. Why, in response to a radically whyless Universe, should we love and assist? Or, to put it more bluntly, on what basis should we love and assist it? It is impossible to answer this question, and this is because a basis for assistance is precisely what is lacking. To love and assist is not to mirror the nature of the Universe. There is, after all, nothing to mirror, nothing to hear, and nothing to tell. But it is precisely because there is no basis for love and assistance that we are truly able to love and assist. In other words, love that is based on something, or that mirrors something already there, is not love. There is love only when there is no foundation—love does not build upon, love assists without assurance. Love is, and must be, without why.

As a means of developing this idea, we can turn to the Kabbalist tradition in order to comment upon a text from the *Zohar*, which itself is a commentary on the biblical account of Noah. Specifically, the *Zohar*’s commentary addresses Noah’s response to God’s cluing him in on the flood. Rather than present Noah as a righteous man, one who on the basis of his piety stands apart from—and is thus divided from—other humans, the Kabbalist commentary focuses on his failure to keep in mind those others. After the flood, the text says, “When Noah came out of the ark / he opened his eyes and saw the whole world completely destroyed. / He began crying for the world.”<sup>25</sup> Noah has escaped the

24 My thinking about the connection between survival and denial is indebted to the comments made about this connection by Gil Anidjar, in his unpublished paper, “Survival.”

25 *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, trans. Daniel Chanan Matt (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 57.



The Universe is an opaque and solitary thought,

destruction of the World, but he does not feel good about it! Amidst his lament, he censures God for God's double-mindedness. Why create a world, and why create the human being, Noah asks, when you are going to destroy them? He then takes God to task for failing to show compassion. Using Laruelle's terms, we could say that Noah judges God for failing to love and assist. God's response, however, is to judge Noah for expecting that it is *God's* job to provide such love and assistance. According to the commentary, God answered Noah as follows: "Foolish shepherd! / Now you say this, but not when I spoke to you tenderly, saying / 'Make yourself an ark of gopher wood' . . . / As for Me, I am about to bring the Flood ... to destroy all flesh."<sup>26</sup> This, God explains, was Noah's chance to jump in and call for mercy. "I lingered with you and spoke to you at length / so that you would ask for mercy for the world! / But as soon as you heard that you would be safe in the ark, / the evil of the world did not touch your heart. You built the ark and saved yourself."<sup>27</sup> And further on in the commentary, the commentator sums up the essence of the matter: Noah "did not care and did not ask for mercy. / He just built the ark / and the whole world was destroyed."<sup>28</sup>

What we see here, among other things, is a dramatization of the baselessness of love. Noah's God is a God of Noah's survival. God is given as a basis for survival, specifically the survival of Noah. The *Zohar's* commentary, however, points out that depending on this basis, grounding one's survival by mirroring its command—build an ark and save yourself—is precisely to fail ethically. Even God was waiting for Noah to refuse God's command. In other words, even God asks Man to unground God; God waits for Man to turn baselessness against God. Yet Noah does no such thing, he attaches himself to God so that God will provide a why, a basis for Noah's survival. And Noah's ethical failure, we should add, takes place before the beginning, it happens before the flood of destruction begins. Let us not fail to see the flood as a beginning, for it divides the world into those who survive and those who are destroyed. Such a division takes place only if the flood begins, only if the flood, by beginning, divides itself from what was

26 Ibid., p. 58.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 59

Black is not in the object or the World,

there before—and Noah has the chance to preclude the flood, to keep it from beginning and thus dividing. God lingered, waiting in vain for Noah to cry out for all beings; God lingered so that Noah might love and assist the Universe. Noah, however, was happy to believe he had found a basis for his own survival. Noah subjected the Universe to his desire for life. Of course he did lament the flood's destruction, but only after it had destroyed, not before. Doing this allows Noah to survive, as well as to avoid responsibility for destruction, placing it on God and not on himself. As long as God is responsible for the flood, Noah does not have to assist the Universe, he is instead free to act by mirroring God.

Borrowing a term from Reza Negarestani, we might say that Noah imagines love of others only when he can "afford" to do so, only when he has made sure that love does not threaten his life.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, survival and redemption converge: survival amounts to the redemption from the fantasized loss of life. With survival, life appears as something to be achieved, something to be redeemed from destruction. To survive, then, is to achieve redemption, and in doing so to subject the Universe to the division between life and destruction—indeed, it is even to subject God to this division. What Noah fails to do is to become affected. To be affected, in the essential sense, is to refuse to divide what happens into an opposition between life and destruction. In this sense, to escape the world is not to get far away from the world so much as to affirm one's immediate proximity to everything that the world divides up, to love and assist every thing. In such proximity, no one thing excludes any other thing ... every thing, all things, are equally true, and if they seem to oppose one another this is only because the world is not being escaped, or because the universe, with all of its things, is not being loved.

For a sense of what such absolute affection might mean, we can return to Rumi, who proclaims: "This being human is a guest house. / Every morning a new arrival. / A joy, a depression, a meanness, / some momentary awareness comes / as an unexpected visitor. / Welcome and entertain them all! / Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, / who violently sweep your house / empty of its furniture, / still, treat each

29 See Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008)

guest honorably. / He may be clearing you out / for some new delight."<sup>30</sup> The point, then, is to refuse to condition or to mediate affect. Do not divide affection into that which redeems life and that which destroys it. Do not ask whether you can afford an affect. It may cost you your furniture, it may in fact destroy your self. But it cannot destroy the black Universe, for every affect is the black Universe. To refuse discourse with and perception of what affects you, to not begin speaking, to not begin hearing, to not look for a why, and instead to stay before these beginnings by being affected ... to love everything that affects you, to assist one's being affected, is to love and assist the Universe.

30 Rumi, p. 109.



| VISION-IN-BLACK   | Not-Seeing  | Not-Being   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Seeing</b><br><i>Vision</i> → <i>in</i><br>(movement,<br>exposure) | Seeing the unseen<br>(what no one sees,<br>where no one sees):<br>THEORIA | Seeing what is not<br>(what no one is,<br>where no one is):<br>DESERT |
| <b>Being</b><br><i>Black</i> ← <i>in</i><br>(dwelling,<br>enclosure)  | Being the unseen<br>(what no one sees,<br>where no one is):<br>HIDING     | Being what is not<br>(what no one is,<br>where no one is):<br>UNION   |

***Secret: No Light Has Ever Seen the Black Universe***

Nicola Masciandaro

[E]very visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany, that is, a divine apparition. For . . . the more secretly it is understood, the closer it is seen to approach the divine brilliance. Hence the inaccessible brilliance of the celestial powers is often called by theology "Darkness."

– John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*<sup>1</sup>

. . . almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all.

– H. P. Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*

<sup>1</sup> "[O]mnis visibilis, et invisibilis creatura Theophania i.e. divina apparition potest appellari; . . . siquidem . . . in quantum occultus intelligitur, in tantum divinae claritati appropinquare videtur. Proinde a Theologia coelestium virtutum, inaccessibilis claritas saepe nominator tenebrositas" (*De divisione naturae*, [Monasterii Guestphalorum: Aschendorff, 1838], III.19). Laruelle's *Du noir univers* was first published in *La Décision philosophique* 5 (1988): 107-112. An English translation by Miguel Abreu, "Of Black Universe in the Human Foundations of Color," was published in the catalogue *Hyun Soo Choi: Seven Large-Scale Paintings* (New York: Thread Waxing Space, 1991): 2-4.

This work, a commentary on seven statements from François Laruelle's *Du noir univers: dans les fondations humaines de la couleur*, proceeds in the form of commentary because commentary is the way of speaking according to **secret** (i.e. secret itself, without definite or indefinite article, neither singular nor plural, the true object of the mystical subject, who is named by Dionysius in the *Mystical Theology* as "neither oneself nor someone else").<sup>2</sup> Commentary alone clarifies **secret** because it knows how properly to stray, is familiar with the way of staying and wandering away in what is truly spoken, which is the only method of touching truth: with its own shadow. Commentator and mystic share an umbral identity. Each is located in the negativity of intimate otherness, in the non-reflective blackness of the text's shadow where truth speaks without talking, in the freedom and self-abandonment of being it. "Gloss this if you wish," writes Marguerite Porete, "or if you can. If you cannot, you are not of this kind; but if you are of this kind, it will be opened to you. You would already be profoundly annihilated if you had the means by which you could hear it, for otherwise I would not say it."<sup>3</sup> Spoken within the immanent beyond or present *al di là* of mystic identity, commentary's non-linear boundary refuses the interminably human correlational conflation of horizon with the limit of vision and dynamically establishes the one thinking within the speculative reality of essential mirage. Essential mirage is the space of vision beyond the visible by means of visibility's inherent deceitfulness. It is the real illusion that consists in seeing through the fraud of givenness according to the very twist of the given. Just as a mirage phenomenon may bring within seeing something outside of one's line of sight—allowing, for instance, a mountain beyond the horizon to appear above it—so essential mirage is a shadowing forth of the Real beyond thought via thought's own distortion and dislocation.<sup>4</sup> The principle is demonstrated in Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, a text that charts a new

2 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), *Mystical Theology*, 1001A.

3 Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), Chapter 111.

4 I capitalize *real* in order to signify the absolute reality of the real itself, the real real, or divinely real.

geopathic domain for the mystical by plunging the sublime into an abyss of neo-medieval alpine terror: "this Cyclopean maze of squared, curved, and angled blocks had features which cut off all comfortable refuge. It was, very clearly, the blasphemous city of the mirage in stark, objective, and ineluctable reality. That damnable portent had had a material basis after all . . . Of course, the phantom had been twisted and exaggerated, and had contained things which the real source did not contain; yet now, as we saw that real source, we thought it even more hideous and menacing than its distant image."<sup>5</sup> So Dionysius similarly understands that the infinitely-attributed nature of God, the One who "has every shape and structure, and yet is formless and beautyless,"<sup>6</sup> is superiorly figured in unseemly forms of negation and unlikeness, for these alone at once properly conceal the truth of this nature and provide authentic or do-it-yourself access to it: "the wise men of God . . . honor the dissimilar shape so that the divine things remain inaccessible to the profane and so that all those with a real wish to see the sacred imagery may not dwell on the types as true. . . . I myself might not have been stirred . . . to my current inquiry . . . had I not been troubled [*extorqueret*, twisted away] by the deformed imagery . . . My mind was not permitted to dwell on imagery so inadequate, but was provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world [*in supermundanas altitudines*, into supramundane altitudes]."<sup>7</sup> What worshippers and atheists (twin opposites of the true, practical mystic) self-constitutively ignore is the radically immanent identity between the cataphatic intensity of the this-worldly sublime and the apophatic extensity of the otherworldly divine—a khoric-tehomic<sup>8</sup> 'third' identity

5 H. P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 43.

6 *Divine Names*, 824B.

7 *Celestial Hierarchy*, 145B. Latin text cited from *Patrologia Latina* 122: 1014.

8 "And there is a third nature, which is space [*chōra*] and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended when all sense is absent, by a kind of spurious reason, and is hardly real—which we, beholding as in a dream, say of all

that always remains weirdly recognizable from beyond the explicable parameters of recognition. "If I were not, God would not be either. I am the cause of God's being God: if I were not, then God would not be God. But you do not need to know this," says Meister Eckhart.<sup>9</sup> Commentary is a way of staying open to this third *I*, this endless (k)*not*. Capable of continually twisting the text towards the superior purposeless truth of *what you do not need to know*, of deforming its meaning into the unnamable presence of the pure absence of falsehood, the impossible plenitudinous thing that overflowingly fills illusion and fiction when they are seen through, commentary is an art of producing and mapping essential mirages, of mystically opening **secret** by means of a text's truest distortions.

Why comment on *this* text? For millennia the thought-horizon of reality has confronted the mystic in the form of a dark mountain, a site of vision and ascent into the absolute, transhuman secret. The mountain of anagogical elevation invoked by Dionysius at the beginning of the *Mystical Theology*: "Lead us beyond unknowing and light up to the highest peak of mystic scripture where the mysteries of God's Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a

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existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence. Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them" (Plato, *Timaeus* 52b, my emphasis, cited from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961], 1178-79). "If we discern a third space of beginning—neither pure origin nor nihilist flux—its difference translates into another interstitial space: that between the self-presence of a changeless Being who somehow suddenly (back then) created; and the pure Nonbeing out of which that creation was summoned, and toward which its fluency falls. That alternative milieu, neither being nor nonbeing, will signify the site of becoming as *genesis*: the topos of the Deep" (Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 12).

9 Meister Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, trans. Maurice O'C. Walshe (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009), Sermon 87.

hidden silence."<sup>10</sup> The mountain of God's throne seen by Hildegard of Bingen at the beginning of *Scivias*: "I saw a great mountain the color of iron, and enthroned on it One of such great glory that it blinded my sight. On each side of him there extended a soft shadow, like a wing of wondrous breadth and length. Before him, at the foot of the mountain, stood an image full of eyes on all sides, in which, because of those eyes, I could discern no human form."<sup>11</sup> The mountain of spiritual experience whose summit is divine union, identified by John of the Cross at the beginning of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: "the summit of the mount—that high state of perfection we here call union of a soul with God . . . The darkness and trials, spiritual and temporal, that fortunate souls ordinarily undergo on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous and profound that human science cannot understand them adequately. Nor does experience of them equip one to explain them. Only those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they won't be able to describe it."<sup>12</sup> The dark mountain, location of the truest light, is the traditional form of the ultimate end, the all in all, seen *at the beginning*. It is the essential mirage of God, the real illusion that appears within the definitive and decisional moment when one starts to move or turn into divine Reality, as dramatized in the opening of the *Divine Comedy*, in which the wayfarer shows how the path to the illumined summit passes through hell: "A te convien tenere altro viaggio" (*Inferno* 1.91) [you need to take another way], the ancient poet tells him.<sup>13</sup> The way up the mountain, a place of indescribable exposure and dislocation, is not the one you want and not the way you think it is. Thomas Vaughn writes, in the *Lumen de Lumine*: "There is a Mountain situated in the midst of the earth or center of the world, which is both small and great. It is soft, also above measure hard and stony. It is far off

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10 *Mystical Theology*, 997A.

11 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 67.

12 John of the Cross, *The Collected Works*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 113-5,

13 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

and near at hand . . . In it are hidden the most ample treasures, which the world is not able to value . . . To this Mountain you shall go in a certain night—when it comes—most long and most dark . . . insist upon the way that leads to the Mountain, but ask not of any man where the way lies.”<sup>14</sup> This is simultaneously the way you alone—as an irreparable individuation of Reality—must go and precisely the way *you*—as a fundamental non-entity, a so-and-so you are afraid not to be—cannot. “To come to be what you are not you must go by a way in which you are not.”<sup>15</sup> These days—if you will permit me to pretend to give weight to the mass delusion that is the historical present—the dark mountain is exploded and transposed onto the cosmic abyss, a putatively post-hierarchical domain whose hyper-alpine dimensions remain fundamentally obscure. It is no longer the image of a dark mountain that haunts the thought-horizon of Reality, but an omnipresent dimensional blackness that is at the same time a sheer impenetrable blankness, the vision of something whose presence is nothing other than the form of its own non-visibility. All around us the general darkness of the observable universe understood via Olbers’s paradox coincides weirdly with the singular negative mirage of the black hole. Here the world’s summit, the untouchable touchpoint or threshold between the lived ephemeral present and the ultimate Reality that lies beyond, appears everywhere and nowhere, beckoning lightlessly in a space whose negative, astrophobic affect renders absolute enclosure and infinite exposure indistinguishable. Correlatively, human consciousness is now strangely dis-directed, incessantly following its own most wayward and worried advice: be someone, be yourself! Indeed, the whole visible material realm is itself currently installed as the very summit of being, a bright (yet actually how dim) peak (less than 1% of the measurable universe) positioned atop a mountainous cosmic mass of dark energy and matter—the backdrop of interminable *collective* fantasies, both humanist and nihilist, daydreams of a geocentric non-entity: the human and/or post-human *we*. Now I am confronted with black as a necessary object of contemplation, an inarguable index of Reality. The horizon of

14 Thomas Vaughn, *Works of Thomas Vaughn*, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (Kessinger, 1992), 261.

15 John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 111.



A phenomenal blackness entirely fills the essence of man.



No light has ever seen the black universe.

the universe is black—black is the horizon of the universe. The necessity of black as present term of mystic thought is composed of its *substantial negativity and imperceptible positivity*, according to which, in a purely non-arbitrary way, it is no less ‘out there’ than ‘in here’, equally internal and external to consciousness. Black is its own image and thus fulfills the criterion of intellectual vision as given by Augustine: “the third kind [of vision] . . . touches on things which do not have any images that are like them without actually being what they are.”<sup>16</sup> One does not see black without seeing black itself. There is no being without black. Black is the *matter of theory*. For mysticism, the discourse of humans who cannot live without **secret** and want to die awake, black is the universal essential mirage of the current age. In a world where the geologic and elemental domain recedes and melts into spectra, like the meteorite in Lovecraft’s tale, black is the present place where the primordially novel—something “from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it”—emerges, something whose obscurity is at once the veil of an unknown clarity—“this new glow was something definite and distinct, and appeared to shoot up from the black pit like a softened ray from a searchlight”—and the bewildering vista of even deeper black, the unimaginably intimate vision of something “whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes.”<sup>17</sup> Or, in the words of Isaiah, “Secretum meum mihi, secretum meum mihi, vae mihi” (Isaiah 24:16) [My secret to myself, my secret to myself, woe is me].

### III.1 LE NOIR UNIVERS EST L’OPACITÉ DU RÉEL OU LA « COULEUR » QUI LE REND INVISIBLE.

THE *BLACK UNIVERSE* IS THE OPACITY OF THE REAL OR THE “COLOR” THAT RENDERS IT INVISIBLE.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 12.6.15.

<sup>17</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, in *The Fiction: Complete and Unabridged* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 610, 616.

This is the primary definition of the black universe in this text. The use of italics for the term (and not the article) both highlights the logical procedure of positive naming and distinguishes the name from the semantically proximate senses it can be confused with, namely: 1) the black universe as the literal material cosmos (universe which is generally black); 2) the black universe as the universal set of blackness (universe of black itself); 3) the black universe as a dark subset of the universe (universe that is other than not black). Independent of the definite article yet proper it, the black universe is not this or that black universe, but the universe in its blackness in a sense that at once includes, exceeds, and perfects what we think 'universe' signifies. Essential to the formulation is its exposure of ignorance as to what we mean when we use the word *universe* (the unbounded place we find ourselves in? the infinity of reality? the present sum of all actuality and possibility?). The idea of the black universe isolates the profound, truthful stupidity at the center of the concept of universe, its obscure glow, and refocuses it into a definite illumination, a dark intelligible ray. In Part I, this visionary stupidity is identified in explicitly khoric terms, recalling the "spurious reasoning" (*logismo tini notho*) by which Socrates says we perceive without sense the "third nature" of eternal space, "beholding [it] as in a dream" (*oneiropolumen blepontes*): "L'Univers est une pensée opaque et solitaire qui a déjà bondi dans les yeux clos de l'homme comme l'espace d'un rêve sans rêve" (I.10) [The Universe is an opaque and solitary thought, which has already leapt through man's shut eyes as the space of a dream without dreaming]. The proper definition of the black universe in III.1 represents and expresses the objective realization of the truth of the dreamy khoric universe-thought, the disclosure of the non-transparency of the noetic sense of universe as the non-transparency of the Real itself, that is, the absolutely ineradicable radically immanent universal truth that is by definition beyond and foreclosed to thought. These two definitions—the definition of the universe as an opaque, solitary thought and the definition of the black universe as the opacity of the real—translate, across the space traced by the shift from opaqueness as adjectival property to nominal thing, between the sleep of mere conscious being to the wakefulness of knowledge or science. Where the universe

is a kind of thought that is present in the human simply by virtue of its event, an awareness-birth that bounds animally through its own advent and provides the dreamless dream space *wherein* man's eyes are opened, the black universe is the waking revelation of universe seen according to the Real, the blind vision through whose open eyes universe itself is shown to be a 'color' in an analogical sense, namely, an ontological blackness or truly existent appearance that demonstrates Reality's invisibility. Black universe is the substance of an analogy that may be clarified thus: *Black is to color as universe is to the Real*. Black is the color that is not (color). Universe is the real that is not (real). Here the positivity and priority of opacity becomes evident. Just as opacity is the condition of thought that discloses universe in the first place, so is it the 'means' whereby thought touches its universal object, seeing at once (and as if endlessly for the first time) *that* it is and that it cannot be seen. As black is literally a mystical or hidden color, the color seen where there is no color to be seen, black universe *is* the mystical, in the sense of an eclipse of *what* by *that* that reveals the universal Real: "Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is."<sup>18</sup> Equally internal and external, present in all three levels of vision (corporeal, imaginative, intellectual) and in all three universal worlds (gross, subtle, mental), black universe is analogous to the divine image, following Eriugena: "the Divine likeness in the human mind is most clearly discerned when it is only known that it is, and not known what it is . . . what it is is denied in in it [*negatur in ea quid esse*], and only that it is is affirmed. Nor is this unreasonable. For if it were known to be something, then at once it would be limited by some definition, and thereby would cease to be a complete expression of the image of its Creator, Who is absolutely unlimited and contained within no definition, because He is infinite, superessential beyond all that may be said or comprehended."<sup>19</sup> Black

18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C.K. Ogden (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 6.44.

19 John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, eds. I. P. Sheldon-Williams and Édouard A. Jeaneau, trans. John J. O'Meara, 4 vols. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999-2009), IV.73. Thomas A. Carlson explicates Eriugena's understanding of the *imago Dei* in relation to the theophanic principle that the "created world . . . is

universe is the place where mystical truth begins, or as the text later terms it, “la posture même de la science . . . ou son inherence au réel” [the posture itself of science . . . or its inherence to the real] (III.12-IV.1). The fact of black, a perfect vision of what is not there, reflects universe as the Illusion that sustains Reality.

**III.2 AUCUNE LUMIÈRE N’A JAMAIS VU LE NOIR UNIVERS.  
NO LIGHT HAS EVER SEEN THE BLACK UNIVERSE.**

Thought and the Real touch only in black, the color of vision itself. Black universe is the mystical domain of their secret sameness, a hyper-intimacy that no illumination can penetrate. “The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.”<sup>20</sup> Being the opacity of the real, the substance of its invisibility, the black universe itself is not seen through light, is not sighted, imagined, or known. **Secret** is seen only to itself and through itself and for itself. Black universe is the non-illuminated auto-medium of **secret**. If **secret** were something that has been illuminated, it would be not be **secret**. This does not signify that the black universe cannot be seen, or that you will never see it. It means precisely that black universe is always and only seen lightlessly, and

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the vision of God—in both senses of the word” (*The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and Creation of the Human* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 94). Here we may understand the relation between the darkness of the *imago Dei* and black universe in terms of intensive negation in the Dionysian sense, that is, negation not as the opposite of affirmation, but as that which produces or brings into presence the real that is beyond affirmation and denial. The created world is a vision of God in the mode of eclipse, a divine revelation via the miraculous absence of the divine. As Agamben says, “what is properly divine is that the world does not reveal God” (*The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 90)—a statement that only makes sense if understood as positively participating in own intensive negation, namely: ‘what is properly divine is that the world does not *not* reveal God’.

20 Meister Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, Sermon 57.

more literally, that any light that is has not seen black universe. Black universe is the world of vision, the dark domain wherein seeing sees itself. Black itself is the non-transparent and totally evident event of vision. Alternately, the statement does not mean that an unthinkable light, a light beyond light will not see the black universe. Indeed the past-tense is conspicuously formed—a reversed echo of “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness *did not* comprehend it” (John 1:5)—so as to open that possibility and simultaneously foreclose it as possibility per se, that is, to deny the event all virtuality as if it were in store somewhere in the universe. *Nothing is in store for you*. Black universe is not something that is there for you to see. The mystic is the one who exits the real stupidity of correlational captivation and says openly and with infinite curiosity to the world: What are you doing here? There is nothing to see! No illumination will reveal black universe to you. You yourself alone (in a secret manner of speaking) are the singular unthinkable light that sees black universe, that is, the light beyond light that is nothing other than your own blackening. All you—the philosopher—have done (and covertly do now) is play in the dark. We bring little lights to black universe and with the shadows cast by our own forms *think* to have illuminated it. Thought does not illuminate the Real, but projects its own real shadow upon what it cannot see. No light has ever seen black universe because its blackness composes the substantiality of darkness, is grounded in the principle that darkness is not the absence or privation of light, but light’s own body, the means of its existence. Light *is* only in darkness. “Where there is sunshine, there is shadow. Standing in the shade, we can observe the sunshine. In this way Light is known through Darkness . . . The ‘Is-ness’ or the Existence of Light is Darkness . . . That is, Darkness is the body of the ‘Is-ness’ of Light.”<sup>21</sup> As the ‘color’ black is the reflection of light’s blindness to itself, the impossibility of vision’s autonomous self-illumination, black universe is the mirror in which thought sees its identity with the Real by seeing nothing. Black universe is the dark body of the Real. Stop looking. Stand in black universe, and *see*. “Nigra sum, sed formosa” (Song of Songs 1:4) [I am black, but beautiful]. The beauty of black is the form

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21 Meher Baba, *Infinite Intelligence* (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 2005), 383.

of vision, the incredible delight of being seen by the Invisible, as John the Cross expresses in commentary on this line: "For though of myself I am dark, he so frequently fixed his eyes on me, after having looked at me the first time, that he was not satisfied until he had espoused me to himself and brought me to the inner chamber of his love."<sup>22</sup>

**III.3: NOIR EST ANTÉRIEUR À L'ABSENCE DE LUMIÈRE, QUE CETTE ABSENCE SOIT L'OMBRE OÙ ELLE S'ÉTEINT, QU'ELLE SOIT SON NÉANT OU SON POSITIF CONTRAIRE. LE NOIR UNIVERS N'EST PAS UNE LUMIÈRE NÉGATIVE.**

**BLACK IS ANTERIOR TO THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT, WHETHER THIS ABSENCE BE THE SHADOWS THAT EXTINGUISH IT, WHETHER IT BE IT NOTHINGNESS OR ITS POSITIVE OPPOSITE. THE BLACK UNIVERSE IS NOT A NEGATIVE LIGHT.**

The black text pronounces (what was implicit above) and we feel the truth of it: there is more to black than the dialectical opposition light defines it by. There rests the difference between black and darkness. Darkness is a property of black, but black is not darkness. Shadow, nothingness, void look black and black is something *before* shadow,

<sup>22</sup> John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 33.7. This representation of the perfective process as black's becoming more and more beautiful in being seen God may be compared to Meher Baba's description of perfection as a kind of impossible 'mixing' process of the Infinite and the finite: "Perfection does not belong to God as God, nor does it belong to man as man. We get perfection when man becomes God or when God becomes man . . . If by the Infinite we mean that which is opposed to the finite, or that which is away from the finite, and necessarily other than the finite, that Infinite is already limited by its being unable to assert itself in and through the finite. In other words. Perfection cannot belong to such an Infinite. The Infinite, therefore, has to discover its unlimited life in and through the finite without getting limited by this process . . . Thus we have perfection when the Infinite transcends its limits and realizes its infinity, or when the Infinite gives up its supposed aloofness and becomes man" (*Discourses* I.119-20).



Philosophy is thinking by way of a generalized "black box";



nothingness, void, where the dual sense of 'before' captures exactly the structure of immanence as anteriority of the apparent. The question to pose here is: How do we know the truth of this? What is the necessity of black's anteriority to light's absence? Answer: recognize the non-reductive significance of tautology and know black's anteriority via black itself, in the being-black of black. In seeing black, we see that it has always been there. This may be elaborated by saying that black, via whatever quality by which you wish to describe it (all-ness, none-ness, obscure purity, transparent filthiness . . . ) has absolutely everything to do with light (*lux*) and nothing at all to do with lumination (*lumen*)—the latter being the form of light proper to transparent bodies and the former being the form of light proper to opaque bodies, the form of light itself, which is unseen.<sup>23</sup> It is only the definitional thought of black, the attempt to shine light on it, to see it as a thing, that paints black into privative relation to light. It is true that black is what is seen in the absence of light. But black is not that absence. Black is its own presence, not the presence of the absence of light. Black is the opposite of white, not of the light. That black appears in light's absence, that it exists in the space of light's negation, has nothing to do with opposition. Light itself is 'black', in the sense of having no color. Now we can understand the significance of the double negation openly buried in the expression: the black universe is *not a negative light*. The formulation beautifully highlights the problem of apogogic truth (absurdity of the absurdity, demonstration via double negation) and the question of tautology to which it is logically tied (double negation, contradiction, law of the excluded middle are forms of tautology,  $X=X$ ). It addresses the question of double negation as already answered in color. Does black universe's not being a negative light mean that black is a positive light? Obviously not. Does it mean that it is not a positive light. No. The statement opens black without determination as the space of something obscurely non-negative, a positive unlight, a negative non-dark, a color that is light itself before all shining, an accident that is the very substance of

23 The *lux/lumen* distinction is elegantly explained by Alexander R. Galloway in "What is a Hermeneutic Light?," *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium*, eds. Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandaro, and Eugene Thacker (New York: punctum books, 2012), 159-72.



with the most venerable stones of the archeo-earth,

luminous void, even the unglimped light of what Eriugena calls “that invisible mystical earth and the dark intelligible abyss” [mystica illa terra invisibilis ipsaque tenebrosa abyssus intellectualis], the domain of the primordial causes of all visible things, which is “perceived by no intellect except that which formed it in the beginning.”<sup>24</sup> Like the divine image, this domain is “known only [as to] that it is, but not understood (as to) what it is” and Eriugena’s words read like a description of Laurelle’s vision, particularly with respect to black as “prior to light,” the “transcendental darkness, into which [man] never entered and from which he will never leave,” and black as colors’ “ultimate degree of reality, that which prevents their final dissolution into the mixtures of light.”<sup>25</sup> “[T]he primordial causes,” Eriugena writes, “are simple and entirely lacking in any composition. For there is in them the inexpressible unity and the indivisible and incomposite harmony universally surpassing the combination of similar and dissimilar parts.”<sup>26</sup> These “principal causes . . . both proceed into the things of which they are the causes and at the same time do not depart from their Principle . . . remaining in themselves invisibly by being eternally concealed in the darkness of their excellence, [they] do not cease to appear by being brought forth into the light.”<sup>27</sup> The invisible mystical earth is the hidden universal place that *provides*—in the literal sense of a before-seeing—the omnipresent hidden ocular hinge which articulates the ecstatic union between all things and the placeless Reality. The dark intelligible abyss is the originally blackened nature, the simple-most ur-immanence through which divinity remains in being by staying beyond it. As Dionysius says, “the very cause of the universe . . . is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything . . . and is enticed way from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity

24 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, II.551A. On luminous void see Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 91-5. NB: “Suhrawardī’s ontology of luminosity . . . renders irrelevant the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident” (94).

25 See II.11, 13, III.9.

26 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 550C.

27 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 552A.

to remain, nevertheless, within himself.”<sup>28</sup> Black universe is the primal medium of love. Or, black universe is the color (of) the universal continuum, the differential unity of the All whose most obvious actual inexorable expression is gravity, the occult bond of individual bodies whose unitary movement confounds the separateness of forces: “Pondus meum, amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror” [My love is my weight; wheresoever I am carried, I am carried by it].<sup>29</sup> The legibility of the mystery of movement as tracing of the universal continuum translates back into the text’s opening definition of universe as “la passion intérieure du Lointain” [the inner passion for the Remote] (I.2) and forward into the final figure of the rocket as becoming “sujet de l’Univers et présentes en chaque point du Lointain” [subject of the Universe and present at every point of the Remote] (IV.9). The *continuous remoteness* of movement, at each point a negation and affirmation of place via a somewhere that is neither place nor not place, is a ‘going by the way in which one is not’ that testifies to the continuum as what is logically conceivable only in negation as the difference or non-identity between X and  $\neg X$ . Their equation is the basis for the apogogic or indirect proof, which Kant notes “can produce certainty, to be sure, but never comprehensibility of the truth in regard to its connection with the grounds of its possibility,” calling it “more of an emergency aid than a procedure which satisfies the aims of reason.”<sup>30</sup> It is valid only within closed, finite systems, in “sciences where it is impossible to erroneously substitute the subjective for the objective.”<sup>31</sup> And that is precisely what black is, a literal theory or vision—all-at-once corporeal, phantasmatic, and intellectual—where this impossibility is impossible, not only in the weak blind sense that seeing black is a substitution of subjective for objective (a sense that would confine black to a relative perceptuality), but in the stronger dazzling sense that seeing black is itself the pure objectivity of vision into which consciousness is cosmically inserted:

28 *Divine Names*, 712B.

29 Augustine, *Confessions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 13.9.

30 Kant, A789-90/B817-18.

31 Anthony Winterbourne, *The Ideal and the Real: An Outline of Kant’s Theory of Space, Time and Mathematical Construction*, 117.

“Noir n’est pas seulement ce que l’homme voit dans l’homme, il est la seule « couleur » inséparable de l’étendue hyperintelligible de l’Univers” (II.5) [Black is not merely what man sees in man, it is the only “color” inseparable from the hyper-intelligible expanse of the Universe]. In the procedure of apophatic mysticism (negating what is not God), the indeterminacy of the apogogic, the gap between  $X$  and  $\neg\neg X$ , is figured in the recognition that the negation of the not-God does not produce God but leads only to the *place* of God and that a further negative leap beyond the opposites conditions divine illumination, which transcends both objective subjectivity and logical binarism, realizing a truth that, as Dionysius says in the *Mystical Theology*, is “beyond assertion and denial.” “Here,” he continues, “being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”<sup>32</sup> Essential to this deployment of the negative is the principle, contra Aristotle, that negation is *not* the opposite of assertion, but the assertion of what is beyond it, a term of intensification that negatively indicates what is in excess of the positive, such that “one might even say that nonbeing itself longs for the Good which is above being. Repelling being, it struggles to find rest in the Good which transcends all being, in the sense of a denial of all things.”<sup>33</sup> The topos of black universe is where the Real beyond assertion and denial appears. Black’s positive negativity—not a negative light—is logically equivalent to the radical positivity of tautology, the fact that  $X=X$  is a truth in inexhaustible excess of its redundancy, whether the excess is thought privatively, as in the Lacanian denial of tautology—“there is no tautology [because] it is in the very status of  $A$  that there is inscribed that  $A$  cannot be  $A$ ”<sup>34</sup>—or superessentially as in the name of God: “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14).<sup>35</sup>

32 1001A, 1048B.

33 Divine Names 697A. “Now we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this” (*Mystical Theology* 100B). “In it is nonbeing really an excess of being” (Divine Names 697A).

34 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book IX, *Identification* 1961-2, trans. Cormac Gallagher (unpublished), Seminar IV.

35 It is important to remember at this point that Dionysian

The unspeakable and absolute self-evident consistency of black—black is so very black—is the total indifference of these opposed inconsistencies, the substantial image of the Reality who needs no identity and no revelation. “The black tablet of vision, I hold dear for the sake / That to the soul, it is a book of the picture of the dark mole of Thine.”<sup>36</sup> As a form of essential difference between  $X$  and  $\neg\neg X$ , black is the negative color, the non-color that grounds the spectral continuum or founds the fact that between any two colors there is a third. Black is the inherent differential of color, the visible infinite minimum or open secret of color that *is* its continuum, its existence. And as a form of the incommensurable truth of  $X=X$ , black is the singular perfect color, the super-color identical with color itself. Black is color’s own self-evident truth or nameless proper name, the openly secret *word of color* that speaks the without-and-beyond-itself fact of its vibrational being. In sum, the non-negativity of black universe means that black universe is the body of **secret** in the sense of the mysterious identity of not-light and not-not-light, the universion or one-turning of these two dimensions of black: the full or visible black of night (not-light, what remains when you remove light) and the empty or invisible black of void (not-not-light, what remains when you remove not-light). Black universe is the

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mysticism corrects the ontological reading of the tetragrammaton from the Vulgate: “Ego sum qui sum” (Exodus 3:14). As Thomas Gallus notes, in commentary on *Mystical Theology* 1.3, “Take care lest one of the unbelieving or the inexperienced should hear those secrets. *I mean people* who firmly depend upon natural reasons or the love of *existent things*, thinking that there is *nothing above* being—understood as the subject of metaphysics and containing both created and uncreated realities, according to their opinion. And this they have from the word that is spoken in Exodus, *I am who am*. But this was spoken so that he might offer himself in a first understanding to us as a kind of reminder, that he might count himself to have being along with us, he who was completely above being” (*Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia*, ed. and trans. James McEvoy [Paris: Peeters, 2003], 25).

36 Hafiz of Shiraz, *The Divan*, tr. H. Wilberforce Clarke (London: Octagon Press, 1974), 86.3.

pure incomposition wherein the “manifold evolving universe arises from the mixing of the one Reality and ‘Nothing.’”<sup>37</sup>

**III.4 NOIR EST LE RADICAL DES COULEURS, CE QUI N’A JAMAIS ÉTÉ COULEUR OU ATTRIBUT D’UNE COULEUR, L’ÉMOTION QUI SAISIT L’HOMME AFFECTÉ PAR UNE COULEUR.**

**BLACK IS THE RADICAL OF COLOR, WHAT NEVER WAS A COLOR NOR THE ATTRIBUTE OF A COLOR, THE EMOTION SEIZING MAN WHEN AFFECTED BY A COLOR.**

The sense of black’s radicality, as simultaneously the root and the extremity of color, is already clear. What calls for commentary is the relation between this radicality and the emotion of color, which is now addressed as simultaneously the emotion of specific color and the emotion of color itself. The relation implies two meanings for black emotion: 1) the feeling of other-than-color at color’s root; 2) the feeling of other-than-color at color’s intensity. The seizure of black emotion is consciousness passing like a current between these poles. On the side of the object, black emotion is the affect of seeing that the thing itself, all that one does not see, is black. Here black is the unseen of the seen. On the side of the subject, black emotion is the affect of seeing that the image, all that one does see, is black. Here black is the seen of the unseen. In one direction black is the *not-revealed* of a color, the vision of there being more to see. In the other direction black is the *only-revealed* of a color, the vision of there being nothing seen. This epileptic emotion is a blackout, not a blackout of vision, but *a witnessing of the blackout that vision is*: the passionate suspension of vision within the endlessness of its never having been or actual impossibility. It is absolutely important, therefore, that the text says “*a color*,” signifying the complicity of black emotion with specificity, individuation, presence, facticity. This shows black is the *index* of color and the ecstatic character of black emotion, in the sense of an experience that refers to the impossibility of its own

<sup>37</sup> Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, 1967), I.45.



Cease having them compete with light,



does not save it from its status as attribute,

taking place, following Bataille: "THE OBJECT OF ECSTASY IS THE ABSENCE OF AN OUTSIDE ANSWER. THE INEXPLICABLE PRESENCE OF MAN IS THE ANSWER THE WILL GIVES ITSELF, SUSPENDED IN THE VOID OF UNKNOWABLE NIGHT."<sup>38</sup> Seeing in black universe reveals the cosmo-deictic dimension of vision, the fact that vision, far from being captured by the putative idiotic passivity of seeing—"I am just looking"—is in every moment an unimaginably projective and fundamentally impossible event of photography realized upon the infinite negative of individuated existence. Black, the color that is not one, exposes this fact—a blinding flash of the Real—according to the same logic outlined in Agamben's reading (via Hegel) of indication: "[T]he significance of the *This* is, in reality, a *Not-this* that it contains; that is, an essential negativity. . . . The problem of being—the supreme metaphysical problem—emerges from the very beginning as inseparable from the problem of the significance of the demonstrative pronoun, and for this reason it is always already connected with the field of indication . . . *Deixis*, or indication . . . is the category within which language refers to its own taking place."<sup>39</sup> What explains this experience of indication as universal crux, the ontological *experientia crucis*? What renders it a passion?<sup>40</sup> For Bataille it is the will, a "desire to be everything"<sup>41</sup> that finds only itself, impurely and incommensurably, within the cosmic night. Or I can say that the blackness of the will to itself, the opacity of its own reality, is the cosmic night of facticity, the *radical* darkness of universe being as it is. As Agamben says: "The root of all pure joy and sadness is that the world is as it is."<sup>42</sup> The equivalence between this passion of extreme indication and the emotion which is color's radical is beautifully legible within

38 George Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 45.

39 Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, K E Pinkhaus and M Hardt (trans), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, pp. 14, 16-7, 25.

40 Cf. "

41 Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1988), xxxii.

42 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 90.

Anaxagoras's color-inflected cosmology and his proof of the blackness of snow. For Anaxagoras, the cosmos is an eternal mixture of everything with everything whose apparent becoming does not substantially alter its original indifferenciation: "All things were together, unlimited both in amount and in smallness, for the small, too, was unlimited. And because all things were together, nothing was evident."<sup>43</sup> The inherently hidden or inevident reality of the all-in-all remains without diminishment inside every differentiation: "black is in white and white is in black."<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the visible does present the invisible eternal mix: "appearances are a sight of the unseen."<sup>45</sup> This is demonstrated in the mixing of colors: "For should we take two colours, black and white, and then slowly pour one into the other drop by drop, sight will not be able to determine the gradual changes, although in nature they are real."<sup>46</sup> We observe not reality but something unreal that is according to it. This is dramatized in Anaxagoras's proof of the blackness of snow, which nicely previews the fact that snow is indeed black in the infrared spectrum: "snow is frozen water, water is black, and therefore snow is black."<sup>47</sup> Anaxagoras's view thus touches the general radical sense of black as the paradoxical unseen of sight, an unseen identifiable as the ineradicable omnipresent *mix* of the Real, its perfect eternal auto-confusion. Leibniz saw this and elaborated upon Anaxagoras's argument as a literal illustration of black's radicality, arguing from the phantasmatic staus of color that "all opaque things in themselves are black."<sup>48</sup> Finding oneself at the very interface between the invisible root

43 *Anaxagoras of Clazomeane: Fragments and Testimonia*, trans. Patricia Curd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), B1.

44 *Anaxagoras of Clazomeane*, B10.

45 *Anaxagoras of Clazomeane*, B21A.

46 *Anaxagoras of Clazomeane*, B21.

47 *Anaxagoras of Clazomeane*, A97. "The source of all references to black water—not merely that of Anaxagoras(B)—must be the highly poetic and dramatic Homeric allusion to a pack of blood-sated wolves drinking from 'the surface of the black water from a dusky spring' (Iliad, XVI, 161)" (J. L. Benson, *Greek Color Theory and the Four Elements: A Cosmological Interpretation* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2000], 24).

48 "1) All color is an impression on the sensorium, not a certain

of blackness and the intensest vibrancy of a color is the passion of being **secret**, or, the feeling of the infinity of individuation whose ideal blind projection is the philosophical mirage of the thing-in-itself, that is, the object of what Nietzsche, who saw through it, calls "the biggest fable of all . . . the fable of knowledge."<sup>49</sup>

**III.5: À LA DIFFÉRENCE DU NOIR OBJECTIVÉ DANS LE SPECTRE, NOIR S'EST DÉJÀ MANIFESTÉ AVANT TOUTE OPÉRATION DE MANIFESTATION. C'EST LA VISION-EN-NOIR.**

**AS OPPOSED TO THE BLACK OBJECTIFIED IN THE SPECTRUM, BLACK IS ALREADY MANIFESTED, BEFORE ANY PROCESS OF MANIFESTATION. THIS IS VISION-IN-BLACK.**

Being manifest before the objectivity of seeing, vision-in-Black is

quality in things, but an extrinsic denomination, or, as Thomas Hobbes says, a phantasm. 2) Therefore, color is nothing not being perceived by us. 3) Blackness is not so much a color, as the privation of color, or [*seu*] we say that we see something black, when we see nothing. 4) All opaque things in themselves are black, by hypotheses 2 together with 3. Therefore, also snow. Anaxagoras, however, so that his paradox should be more remarkable, would take as the basis of his discussion especially what is held to be the whitest" (G. W. Leibniz, "A Conjecture Why It Seems That Anaxagoras Could Have Said That Snow Is Black, for Jacob Thomasius in a Letter Sent 16 February 1666," trans. Donald Rutherford [2004], <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/anaxagoras.htm>).

49 "The biggest fable of all is the fable of knowledge. One would like to know what things-in-themselves are; but behold, there are no things-in-themselves! But even supposing there were an in-itself, an unconditioned thing, it would for that very reason be unknowable! Something unconditioned cannot be known; otherwise it would not be unconditioned! . . . A 'thing-in-itself' just as perverse as a 'sense-in-itself,' a 'meaning-in-itself. There are no 'facts-in-themselves,' for a sense must always be projected into them before there can be 'facts'" (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Kaufman and Hollingdale [New York: Random House, 1967], §555-6).

describable only topologically, in terms of a there in which one finds oneself, a surrounding region through which one moves: *mi ritrovai per una selva oscura* (Dante, *Inferno* 1.2). Description of vision-in-Black is a filling out of the landscape marked by the hyphens around the preposition *in* (the place of the One) for which topology is neither allegory of something a-topological nor representation of a given landscape. What is describable of vision-in-Black is something clearer: the seeing of place itself, wherein universe is revealed to be actual allegory, the other-being of the Real. Vision-in-Black names the *scene* (from *skia*, shadow) of mysticism, the shadowy place of extensive non-difference between the negative darkening of knowledge and the black brilliance of seeing beyond light, the way or method of the “hallucinatory ‘science’ of the One.”<sup>50</sup> Vision-in-Black is the landscape in which truth travels securely, where one moves as the limitless *in* of the Real: **secret in secret**. Here is the topological union of mystical movement and dwelling, the paradoxically paradisaical way of wilderness wherein exposure and dereliction are perfect security and enclosure. The left hyphen, between *vision* and *in*, corresponds to the term of movement and exposure, the *extensive* vector of secret: seeing the unseen (what no one sees, where no one sees) [theoria] and seeing what is not (what no one is, where no one is) [desert]. The right hyphen, between *in* and *Black*, corresponds to the intensive vector of secret, dwelling and enclosure: being the unseen (what no one sees, where no one is [hiding] and being what is not (what no one is, where no one is) [union]. This double movement of **secret** is described by John of the Cross: “in darkness the soul not only avoids going astray but advances rapidly . . . To reach an new an unknown land and journey along unknown roads, travelers cannot be guided by their own knowledge . . . the soul, too, when it advances, walks in darkness and unknowing . . . persons who tread this road . . . are unable to describe it. They feel great repugnance in speaking about it, especially when the contemplation is so simple that they are hardly aware of it . . . Not for this reason alone do we call mystical wisdom ‘secret’ . . . but also because it has the characteristic effect of hiding the soul within itself . . . this mystical wisdom occasionally so engulfs souls in its secret

50 François Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique à l’usage des contemporains* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), 63.

abyss that they have the keen awareness of being brought into a place far removed from every creature. They accordingly feel that they have been led into a remarkably deep and vast wilderness unattainable by any human creature, into an immense unbounded desert, the more delightful, savourous, and loving, the deeper, vaster, and more solitary it is. They are conscious of being so much more hidden, the more they are elevated above every temporal creature.”<sup>51</sup>

### III.6 NOIR EST DÉFINITIVEMENT INTÉRIEUR À LUI-MÊME ET À L’HOMME.

#### BLACK IS ENTIRELY INTERIOR TO ITSELF AND TO MAN.

Black defines a double auto-interiority. On the one hand, black itself, as the color that is not, is interior to itself, endlessly inside itself. Black is the not-color of the color that holds itself entirely or ultimately within itself and that reserves all color for color’s beyond. Aesthetically, black’s self-interiority corresponds both to the sense of black’s spatial depth and to the sense of black’s color-potentiality, the perception of all colors as hiddenly *in* and emergent *from* black, as emblemized

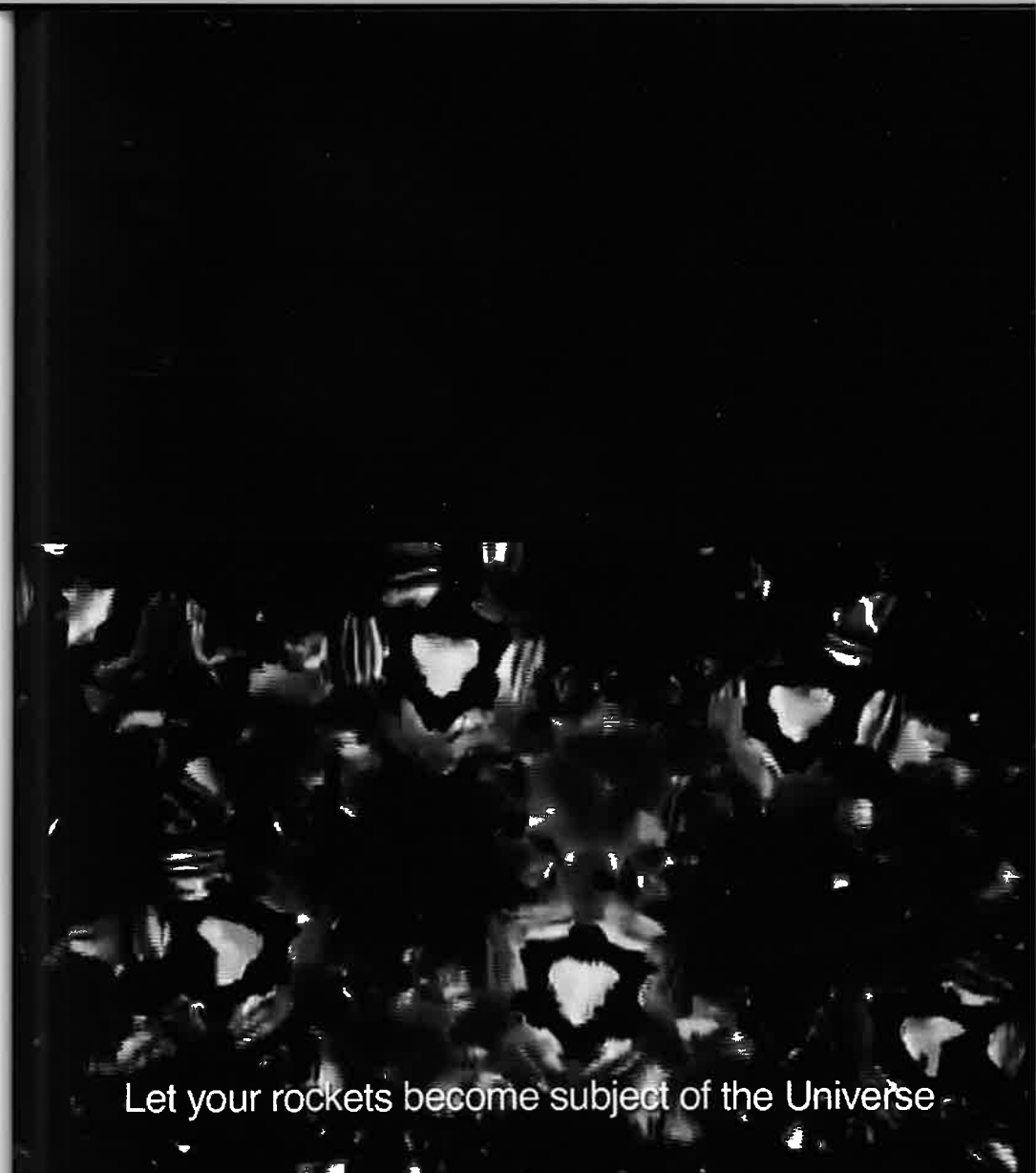
51 John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, 2.16.3-2.17.6. “It was about the dawning or daybreak when, tired with a tedious solitude and those pensive thoughts which attend it, after much loss and more labour, I suddenly fell asleep. Here then the day was no sooner born but strangled. I was reduced to a night of a more deep tincture than that which I had formerly spent. My fancy placed me in a region of inexpressible obscurity, and—as I thought—more than natural, but without any terrors. I was in a firm, even temper and, though without encouragements, not only resolute but well pleased. I moved every way for discoveries but was still entertained with darkness and silence; and I thought myself translated to the land of desolation” (Thomas Vaughn, *Works of Thomas Vaughn*, 243). “[S]he remained unknown to all and the more hidden she was, the more she was known to God alone. This is why Isaiah boasted, when he said, ‘My secret to myself, my secret to myself’ (Is. 24:16)” (Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina the Astonishing*, trans. Margot H. King and David Wiljer [Toronto: Peregrina, 2002], 25).

in the *cauda pavonis* [peacock's tail], the alchemical stage between *nigredo* and *albedo* when the colors appear.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, black is the self-interiority of man himself, as the text states earlier, "Noir n'est pas dans l'objet ou dans le Monde, il est ce que l'homme voit dans l'homme, et ce dans quoi l'homme voit l'homme" (II.4) [Black is not in the object or the World, it is what man sees in man, and the way (that in which) man sees man]. The interior of man is the space that his being encompasses and fills, the *in which* of his *esse*: "Un noir phénoménal remplit entièrement l'essence de l'homme" (II.14) [A phenomenal blackness entirely fills the essence of man]. The identity of these two forms of interiority, the singleness of their doubleness, is named in the text's singularly asyntactic line, "Solitude de l'homme-sans-horizon qui voit le Noir dans le Noir" (II.6) [Solitude of the man-without-horizon who sees Black in Black]. The non-omissive elision of verbal being, the sheer non-presence of any *is*, here signifies the superessentiality or being-beyond-being of **secret**, the horizonless 'negation of the negation' or 'third' domain that is the infinite *with* of the alone with the Alone. *Black in Black* signifies the convertible mutual interpenetration of the black interior of man (the individuated alone) and black universe or the opacity of the horizonless Real (the universal Alone). The identity of this irresolvably double auto-interiority of man and black is the truly limitless solitude or lonely pan-explosion of place wherein all is within without collapse. The definitive or limitless interiority of black is the meta-place of the One-in-One which remains the "unknown of philosophy," its constitutive eclipse.<sup>53</sup> As Laruelle writes in *Mystique non-philosophique*, "The identity of the *with* (the One with the One, God with God) is the true 'mystical' content of philosophy, its 'black box!'"<sup>54</sup> The whole process of non-philosophy as mysticism or non-philosophical mysticism is thinkable as an unfinishable theoretical exposure (as

52 See Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 141-2.

53 François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (n.p., 2009), 86.

54 "L'identité de *l'avec* (l'Un avec l'Un, Dieu avec Dieu) est le vrai contenu 'mystique' de la philosophique, sa 'boite noire'" (Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique*, 60).



Let your rockets become subject of the Universe





Yet, the cosmo-logical generalization of black

opposed to the philosophical photo which claims to *capture* its object) of the movement seized in Plotinus's last words, "phuge monou pros monon" (*Enneads* 6.9.11) [the flight of the alone to the Alone]. Negating philosophy's decisional closing of the Real's foreclosure to thought, the operative fact of philosophy as the "organon . . . [or] *a priori* form which, giving us the World, forecloses the mystical experience which intrinsically constitutes humans,"<sup>55</sup> non-philosophical mysticism offers the way of turning the transcendent vector of flight from World to One into the most radical immanence *without reduction whatsoever*, of truing World to One via unbounded or non-decisional translation of the meaning of Plotinus's *pros* from 'to/toward' to 'with', which it may also signify, as in the beginning of the gospel of John: "*kai o logos pros ton theon*" (1:1) [and the word was with God]—translatable also as 'face-to-face' or 'at home with'. Non-philosophical mysticism is the speculative labor of theorizing the archaic One to phoenix-like death from within, of *seeing through* the hallucination of philosophy, its "simulation of immanence by auto-reflexive interiority [*la simulation de l'immanence par l'interiorité auto-réflexive*]," and opening forever "the true immanence or identity . . . rejected in the shadows of the black box [*la véritable immanence ou identité . . . rejetée dans les ténèbres de la boîte noire*]."<sup>56</sup> Seeing within the universal interiority of immanent black, man speaks with his ownmost solitary voice—"interior intimo meo et superior summo meo" [more interior than my innermost and higher than my highest]<sup>57</sup>—the words of the famous Sufi hadith, "I was a hidden treasure who loved to be known." Elaborating upon this line, Ibn Arabi writes: "The Reality wanted . . . to see His own Essence . . . For the seeing of a thing, itself by itself, is not the same as its seeing itself in another, as it were in a mirror."<sup>58</sup> Black, non-reflective and doubly interior, is the mirror itself, the place of the seeing and being seen of the Invisible One.<sup>59</sup>

55 Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 53.

56 Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique*, 66.

57 Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.9.

58 Ibn Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 50.

59 As exemplified in the monastic

**III.7 NOIR EST SANS CONTRAIRE: MÊME LA LUMIÈRE QUI TENTE DE LE TRANSFORMER EN SON CONTRAIRE ÉCHOUE DEVANT LA RIGUEUR DE SON SECRET. SEUL LE SECRET VOIT DANS LE SECRET, COMME NOIR EN NOIR.**

**BLACK IS WITHOUT OPPOSITE: EVEN LIGHT, WHICH TRIES TO TURN IT INTO ITS OPPOSITE, FAILS IN THE FACE OF THE RIGOR OF ITS SECRET. ONLY THE SECRET SEES INTO THE SECRET, LIKE BLACK IN BLACK.**

The rigor of **secret** is the ruthlessness of the Real, its inexorable inevitable impossibility. **Secret** will out—only via **secret**. “You cannot do better than to place yourself in darkness and unknowing . . . No need to call to Him from afar: He can hardly wait for you to open up. He longs for you a thousand times more than you long for Him: the opening and the entering are a single act.”<sup>60</sup> The oppositeless singularity of black is (the) body of One without number, the indivisible duality of the non-dual, as seen in the *Mirror of Simple Souls*: “[S]he is alone in Love . . . She is the phoenix who is alone; for this Soul is alone in Love who alone is satisfied in her.”<sup>61</sup> Far from the superficial concept of secrecy as object of knowledge, and farther still from the banal aporia of secret (that there is no secret), the secret of black is exactly that there is **secret**, that **secret is**. **Secret** is what remains freely and impenetrably itself, sits securely above intellectual capture, stays

60 Meister Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, Sermon 4.

61 Marguerite Porete, *Mirror for Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 89. Porete translates the principle of monastic solitude (fr. *monos* alone) beyond the literal. Cf. Athanasius’s modeling of Mary: “Mary does not desire to be seen by anyone, but she prayed that God might be her examiner. She did not desire to leave her home. She knew nothing of public places; rather she remained assiduously within her home, living a withdrawn life, like a honey bee . . . She prayed to God, alone with the Alone” (*De virginitate*, cited in Jean Prou, *Walled About With God: The History and Spirituality of Enclosure for Cloistered Nuns*, trans. David Hayes [Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2005], 33-4).

outside of opposition as the infinitely open *dual* of light.<sup>62</sup> Color of a positively abyssic self-possession, the essence of black is the universe of uncreated divine freedom and the index of the real secret human who never was, is not, and never will be “a servant of oneself,”<sup>63</sup> who occupies the ‘negative’ unconditioned space which ethics, insofar as it is bound to the management of second natures (*ethos*=habit), can only see in terms of ontological error: “The just man serves neither God nor creatures, for he is free, . . . and the closer he is to freedom . . . the more he is freedom itself. Whatever is created, is not free. . . . There is something that transcends the created being of the soul, not in contact with created things . . . not even an angel has it . . . It is akin to the nature of deity, it is one in itself, and has naught in common with anything.”<sup>64</sup>

62 As Laruelle explains, this true, foreclosed secret holds the human future of mysticism: “L’Un-en-Un n’a pas besoin de l’intellect, pas plus d’ailleurs de l’intellect que de l’amour. C’est à cette condition de l’être-forclos de la vision-en-Un, un secret intrinsèque et donc intrinsèquement ‘négatif’, sans positivité, insondable à force d’immanence, que le mauvais mystère représentationnel de la mystique peut être éliminé et l’union devenir l’opération de la connaissance mais non du Réel. La pratique future renonce à prétendre penser l’Un par l’Un, ou avec l’Un, et pense le rapport au mystico-philosophique *selon* l’Un, elle expose le Secret qui fait les Humains par axioms et theorems” (Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique*, 61) [The One-in-One has no need of intellect, no more than of love. It is by this condition of the vision-in-One’s being-foreclosed—an intrinsic and thus intrinsically ‘negative’ secret, without positivity, unfathomable by the force of immanence—that mysticism’s bad representational mystery may be eliminated and that becoming-one [*union*] may become the work of knowledge, but not of the Real. The future practice renounces pretending to think the One by the One, or with the One, and thinks the mystico-philosophical relation *according* to the One; it exposes the Secret that makes Humans through axioms and theorems] (*Mystique non-philosophique*, 61). Note the significant double sense of this expression: a) thinking according to One as exposure via axioms and theorems of the Secret that makes humans and b) thinking according to the One as exposure of the Secret whereby axioms and theorems make humans.

63 *Mirror of Simple Souls*, Chapter 48, p. 127.

64 *Complete Mystical Works*, Sermon 17.

**Secret** grounds the absolute asymmetry of the gaze between light and black, the curvature of an incommensurable and anagogic above-within which is necessarily intangible to the Euclidean optic, as dramatized in Laruelle's illustration of immanent heretical struggle, the way of "the *radical* which . . . thinks and struggles within the strict limits of the Real without transcendence," the refusal that "face[s] the Adversary too closely to *not* be misconstrued by philosophical opinion and, more so, 'intellectual' opinion."<sup>65</sup> For this refusal, "It would be necessary to reassemble philosophy and religion, theoreticism and terrorism, under a *Principle of Arrogance* and oppose it to a *justified humility*. In order to make out the face of the Adversary, it is necessary to mix with him and to suffer the extent of his gaze to the point that he believes to have grabbed hold of you. Of the two of you, however, only you [i.e. black] know that the gaze is nothing, that you are free from the mirror and the speculation and that you are just playing with that haunted gaze which wants to capture yours."<sup>66</sup> **Secret** is the solitary auto-seeing to which all light is blind. Like Black in Black, **secret** is of the order of an *immanent hiddenness*, an available inviolable depth: "Il n'y a plus de secret ou de mystere 'caché' telle une boîte noire au cœur de l'Un ou de Dieu, en réalité au cœur du Logos. Mais un secret qui reste tel qu'un secret que ne transforme pas sa révélation 'formelle' puisqu'il est déjà révélé. Un révélé-sans-révélation, un secret (de) l'Un déjà donné pour le Monde, secret de l'humilité que sa communication n'entame pas" [No more is there a secret or a mystery 'hidden' like a black box at the heart of the One or of God, actually at the heart of the Logos, but a secret that remains like a secret that does not alter its 'formal' revelation because it is already revealed: a revealed-without-revelation, a secret (of) the One already given by the World, a secret of humility that its communication does not cut into].<sup>67</sup> Long identified with earth—"Black is the proper color of elements in process of transmutation"<sup>68</sup>—black universe is the presence of the radical openness of **secret**, the inexhaustibility of its

65 François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (New York: Continuum, 2010), 17, my italics.

66 Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 17-8.

67 Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique*, 61.

68 Aristotle, *De Coloribus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 781a.

remaining within itself. In tune with the "radical past" of mysticism, the element of it "which does not pass in being-in-the-Past,"<sup>69</sup> the meta-tautology of Black in Black targets a telos that is neither achievement nor consolation, but the intensive infinitization of arriving search, as if to find that reality itself is absolutely mystical: "since that which human nature seeks and toward which it tends, whether it moves in the right or the wrong direction, is infinite and not to be comprehended by any creature, it necessarily follows that its quest is unending and that therefore it moves forever. And yet although its search is unending, by some miraculous means it finds what it is seeking for: and again it does not find it, for it cannot be found."<sup>70</sup> Black universe is the term of this 'miraculous means', the secret of **secret** through which, like blackness in black, the revealed and the hidden, the given and the foreclosed intimately open to each across impassible distance. On the one hand the secret of **secret** is the abysmal hiddenness or absolute foreclose that **secret** reveals, as shown in Francis of Assisi's hesitant disclosure of his seraphic vision, which only unveils a more secret secret: "Although the holy man used to say on other occasions: "*My secret is for myself*," he was moved by Illuminato's words. Then, with much fear, he recounted the vision in detail, adding that the one who had appeared to him had told him some things which he would never disclose to any person as long as he lived."<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the secret of **secret** is simply the given itself, the inexplicable fact of identity, as communicated by Ibn Arabi: "*The secret of the secret*: That by which the Real One is isolated

69 Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 18.

70 Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, PL 122:919, translation cited from Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 118. Cf. "*Seek his face always*, [Psalm 104.4], let not the finding of the beloved put an end to the love-inspired search; but as love grows, so let the search for the one already found become more intense" (Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, 6 vols. [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003], VI.186).

71 Bonaventure, *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 13.4, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds. 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 2001), 2.633.

from the servant."<sup>72</sup> "He prevented the real secret from being known, namely that He is the essential Self of things. He conceals it by otherness, which is you."<sup>73</sup> The place of passage between these two senses of the secret of **secret**, the locale of its immanent hiddenness, is the topology defined in the word *secret* itself, substantive of the verb *secerno* (to set apart, sever, disjoin). Secrecy is dislocation, severed place, topological severing. Thus at the summit of its literal significance, we find **secret** as the universal word written within the interior of the mystic's self-dislocating body. For example: the literally falling apart, limb from limb, of some Indian Sufis in the presence of God<sup>74</sup> and the disjoining Angela of Foligno experiences when God withdraws from her at Assisi and in a vision of the Crucifixion: "The bones and sinews of his most holy body seemed completely torn out of their natural position; and yet his skin was not broken . . . At the sight of the dislocated limbs and the painful distension of the sinews, she felt herself pierced through even more than she had been at the sight of the open wounds. For the former granted her a deeper insight into the secret of his passion [*magis intimabatur animae videntis passionis secretum*] . . . The sight . . . stirred her to such compassion . . . that when she saw it, all her own joints seemed to cry out with fresh laments."<sup>75</sup> Only the secret sees into the secret.

72 Ibn Arabi, *al-Istilah al-Sufiyyah*, cited in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* III (1984): 52.

73 Ibn Arabi, *Bezels of Wisdom*, 133.

74 "In the increased proximity brought about by the *dhikr* [recollection of God] of the heart the seeker becomes, eventually, completely heart; every limb of his is a heart recollecting God . . . We may place here the grotesque stories told about several Sufis of India. Their limbs became separated from them during the *dhikr* and recollected God each in its own way. This experience is known from Shamanism, but was apparently not rare among later Sufis, mainly in the Subcontinent" (Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975], 173).

75 Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 158. Cf. "[T]he soul then knows that God is truly present . . . When this happens all the members feel a disjoining [*disiunctionem*], and I wish it to be so. Indeed such is the extreme delight that I feel that I would want to always remain in this state.



Stop making them climb the extreme walls of the world.

To conclude my commentary on these seven lines from *Du noir univers*, here are seven theoremtic notes whose significance may already be clear:

1. Black is the dislocation of the universe. Black universe is the body of **secret**. Black is the *matter of theory*.

2. In **secret** lies the apotheosis or real glorification of *problem* (something to be concerned about, to want to figure out), the perfection of the fact of all problems whatsoever and the pure determination-in-the-last-instance of there being any problem at all. Whence the apophatic structure of mystical drunkenness: “And she is inebriated not only from what she has drunk, but very intoxicated and more than intoxicated from what she never drinks and nor will ever drink.”<sup>76</sup>

3. Mysticism, living discourse of the hidden, is the practical (i.e. paradisaical) science of eternally eliminating all problem *from within*, from the radically immanent grounds of a vast and terrifyingly true intuition: that *you* are the only problem. Or as Laruelle says, “the heretical struggle is not born from terror or the specular-whole, which it practically undoes, it is born from the being-separate of man that is in-Man.”

4. No color is brightened by the addition of black. Likewise, there is no such thing as an *application* (corporeal, imaginative, or intellectual)

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Furthermore, I hear the bones cracking when they are thus disjointed (Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, 158). John of the Cross explicates the phenomenon mystical disjointing in relation to Eliphaz the Temanite’s experience of hearing of a “hidden word . . . in the horror of a nocturnal vision” (Job 4:12-3) [*verbum absconditum . . . in horror visionis nocturnae*] (Job 4:12-3); see *The Spiritual Canticle*, 14-15:17-8. On secrecy and dislocation, see Nicola Masciandaro & Anna Klosowska, “Between Angela and Actaeon: Dislocation,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 50 (2010): 91-105.

<sup>76</sup> Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, 28.

and with eyes opened can we conceive to enter it.

of mysticism or science of **secret** to the problem(s) of the world. The only politics of black universe is black itself.

5. *Dixit insipiens in corde suo: Non est Deus* (Psalm 14:1) [The fool has said in his heart: there is no God]. In other words: one thinks black is a color; another thinks that it is not; the real fool (fool of the Real) leaps into black universe and proves that both are wrong.<sup>77</sup>

6. The non-philosophical joy of black: seeing in oneself the truth and the falsehood of Paracelsus's warning, the brilliance of its eclipse: "He who does know what makes black is the *philosophus*. He who does not know this, but only knows that something happens to be black, is nothing, and can be expected to do nothing but swindle or paint by means of the color black."<sup>78</sup>

7. The space of **secret** is an intimate expanse between two facts:

77 "[C]an there be any greater delight than to see . . . *here and now* before us a vast lake of bubbling pitch, and swimming about in it vast numbers of serpents, snakes, and lizards and many other kinds of fierce and fearsome animals, while from the lake comes a plaintive voice [*una voz tristísima*]: 'You, O Knight, whosoever you may be, beholding this dread lake: if you wish to attain the good hidden beneath these black waters, you must show the resolve of your dauntless breast and cast yourself into the midst of the dark, burning liquid [*negro y encendido licor*], else you will not be worthy to see the mighty marvels contained in the seven castles of the seven fairies that lie beneath its murky surface?' And what of our delight when the knight, almost before the fearful voice [*la voz temerosa*] has ceased, without giving his situation a second thought, without stopping to consider the peril to which he is exposing himself, or even shedding the burden of his armour, commends himself to God and to his lady and hurls himself into the boiling lake and, all of a sudden when he least knows where he is bound, finds himself amidst flowery meadows, far finer than the Elysian fields themselves?" (Miguel De Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford [New York: Penguin, 2000], 456).

78 Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541), *Essential Theoretical Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151.

- 1) That Black is *both* true and false.
- 2) That the One is *neither* affirmed nor denied.

Universe is the black celestial rose of the One: a real illusion and illusory real that is without *why*.<sup>79</sup> Black universe is your dark night, your secret, yours alone.



79 "The rose does have no why; it blossoms without reason, / Forgetful of itself, oblivious to our vision" (Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Wanderer*, trans. Maria Shradly [New York: Paulist Press, 1986], 54).

***Rocket: Present at Every Point of the Remote***

Alexander R. Galloway

Hang gliding, bungee jumping, ice climbing. Hulk Hogan, Jessie Ventura, John Rambo. In a world of extreme sports and extreme weather, of super-sized portions and long tails, is anyone really surprised by the advent of "extreme philosophy"? François Laruelle has arrived in America, but couldn't we see this coming? Like when the CIA funded the Afghani mujahideen during the cold war, only to have it come back to haunt them, we funded post-structuralism in the 1970s and '80s and are today engulfed in the ultimate blowback. You planted the seeds of destruction, and Western metaphysics was shaken to its core. But nothing could have prepared you for what would come next. You thought Derrida was extreme, *but you ain't seen nothing yet...*

Although Laruelle's so-called extreme position might not be that extreme after all. He simply refuses to participate; he refuses *to make the decision*. Like Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" or the Occupy movement's "we have no demands," Laruelle refuses to participate in philosophy, likewise refusing all structures or relations that mimic the basic philosophical stance. But a refusal is not a withdrawal, that much is clear. "Philosophical technology has been withdrawn mimetically from the World, in order to reflect and reproduce it," he writes in our text "On the Black Universe," but "such technology is inadequate for thinking the Universe."

Technology or science? The technology of rockets or cars is mere technology, not science. It merely provides an avenue for transit or mediation in and out of things. So too is philosophy a mere technology. If it were a science it would remain immanent to itself, never transiting anywhere, nor needing to reflect on anything. For it would remain where it is, in the dark. But philosophy, always quick to prove its illuminating potential, is never *in the dark*. "Our philosophers are children," Laruelle reminds us, children "who are afraid of the Dark." So forget your rocket ships and rocket cars. Leave behind the scaffolding of reflection and meditation. "Do not think technology first... Think science first."

First Recitation: *Philosophy is thinking by way of a generalized "black box"; it is the effort to fit black into light and to push it back to the rear of the caverns.*

Shall we begin by listing some of the great explorations of black in art? Chief among them would be Ad Reinhardt's black paintings, or some of Stan Brakhage's films with their murky darkness, or Guy Debord's notorious film "Howls for Sade" (1952), which uses its blackness as a kind of weapon. But is the black screen in Debord truly black?

If he were here, Laruelle would point out that all these heroic avant-garde experiments are no more black than a bright summer day. As attempts to capture black they are abject failures, and all the worse for trying to be so avant-garde, so utterly modern. For these meditations on the color black are quickly revealed to be what they are: *meditations*. Black appears only in alternation with white, just as quietude is punctuated by noise, and immobile finitude by infinite mobility. The black screen in Debord's "Howls for Sade" is not black, but a black box. The film offers us blackness, but only in as much as the blackness can withdraw from other things, in this case from whiteness or from the audible voice. These are all works of *alternation*, of oscillation into and out of the black. Thus they are properly labeled "reflections" on black—even "howls" for black—since black never appears in these art works, only the optical alternations of black-against-white, black-against-color, or black-against-sound.

Deleuze explains:

"The absence of image," the black screen or the white screen, have a decisive importance in contemporary cinema...they no longer have a simple function of punctuation, as if they marked a change, but enter into a dialectical relation between the image and its absence, and assume a properly structural value... [...] Used in this way, the screen becomes the medium for variations: the black screen and the under-exposed image, the intense blackness which lets us guess at dark volumes in process of being constituted, or the black marked by a fixed or moving

luminous point, and all the combinations of black and fire; the white screen and the over-exposed image, the milky image, or the snowy image whose dancing seeds are to take shape.<sup>1</sup>

Reinhardt's paintings are the ultimate false lure. What appears at first glance to be black, is quickly revealed to be a complex economy of micro shades of black, each with a different tone and luminosity. There is thus nothing black about these works, just as there is little silence in that notorious John Cage composition in which the musicians play no notes. Instead, they are works of division and alternation, of contrasted extremities, of absence appearing as presence and presence returning to absence. And hence these are meditative works, reflective works, great metaphysical works, great philosophical works even. But at the same time, "only" reflective, and "only" philosophical. "Philosophers have divided up the undivided simplicity of the nothingness and the all," Laruelle reminds us, "but human eyes have never divided up the unique night" ("Biography of the Eye," 96, hereafter BE).<sup>2</sup>

The universe is, in this sense, a night universe. And to look at the universe means to look into the darkness of the night. "Vision is foundational when it abandons perception and sees-in-the-night" (BE, 96). In other words, vision is never vision with the lights on. Vision is only vision when it looks avidly into the pitch black of night. And perhaps art will never be art until it ceases to represent and begins to look into the Stygian monochrome, that blackness that has yet to be exposed to any living light.

But, you ask, is this all "just" another flavor of modern nihilism? Just another existentialism even? Laruelle answers no: "The philosophical eye wants to see the nothing in man's eye rather than see nothing. The philosopher wants to look man's nothingness in the eye rather than be a nothingness of vision" (BE, 97). Nothing in man's eye, versus seeing nothing--what is the difference? Recall those horrible

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 200.

2 François Laruelle, "Biographie de l'oeil," *La Décision philosophique* 9 (1989): 93-104.



nothing worlds of the existentialists. The existentialist can see *man* as nothing; the existentialist might even be able to see *the world* as nothing. But he can not yet see *nothing* as nothing.

Philosophers have long asked why there is something rather than nothing. For Aristotle the question was always, why is there *something* rather than something else? For Nietzsche or Kierkegaard it was why is there *nothing* rather than something? But for Laruelle the question is poorly formed from the outset. For Laruelle the question might rather be: Why, in looking at nothing, do we still never see *nothing*? For as Parmenides said, *nothing* comes from nothing. "Man is this middle between night and nothing" writes Laruelle. Or rather, "[l]ess than this middle: nothing which is only nothing; night which is only night" (BE, 99).

Second Recitation: *Science is the mode of thought in which black determines in the last instance white. [...] Our uchromia: to learn to think from the point of view of Black as what determines color in the last instance rather than what limits it.*

"Our uchromia," which is to say, our *non-chromia* or *non-color*. What does this mean? As Laruelle would say, color always has a *position*. Color always has a *stance*. The color palette or the color spectrum provide a complex field of difference and alternation. The primary colors reside in their determining positions, while other colors *compliment* each other as contrasts. Hence the color posture: purple complimenting yellow, red complimenting green, the primary colors' posture vis-a-vis the palette, and ultimately the posture of color itself governing the continuum of light and dark, as colors take turns emerging into a luminous and supersaturated visibility, or receding into a sunless gloom.

Laruelle uses *photography* as a way to explain these never-ending quests into and out of things. "Platonism is perhaps born of the absence of a photo," he writes, proposing a provocative anachronism, "from this we get the model and the copy, and their common derivative in the simulacrum. And Leibniz and Kant alike--the intelligible depth

of the phenomenon as much as its trenchant distinction--find their possibility in this repression of photography."<sup>3</sup>

Photography has long been held captive, forced to choose between two unappetizing options: "philosophy on one hand (consciousness and reflection), psychoanalysis on the other (the unconscious and [automatic drives])... The photo is then neither a mode of philosophical reflection--even if there is plenty of photography integrated into philosophy--nor a mode of unconscious representation or a return of the repressed. Neither Being nor the Other; neither Consciousness nor the Unconscious, neither the present nor the repressed."<sup>4</sup>

Photography, then, which requires that light penetrate an aperture and write itself on a sensitive surface, resulting in *prints* which, in turn, reflect light back to viewers, is an ideal candidate for Laruelle's intervention. "Philosophy remains an optics," he writes. "Transcendental no doubt, but specular: intuitiveness is its unavoidable structure. The eye is first an external empirical sense; then it is divided and doubled, the introduction of the other gaze constituting an *a priori* optical or specular field; then the gazes knot themselves together, form a chiasmus, and constitute a transcendental speculative field..." (BE, 98).

This is precisely what Laruelle seeks to avoid. Using the language of optics, we could say that Laruelle exhibits an *extreme dioptrics*, in that he rejects absolutely the reduplication and extension of the eye, in favor of an immanent transparency of identity.

"[T]he multiplication of the eye into a recursive spiral does not suppress it," he reminds us, "for the eye is the intuition that now gives the other eye; the gaze that opens upon the other gaze--such is the kernel of all transcendental aesthetics" (BE, 98). Is this not the great phenomenological gambit, that physiognomy is destiny, that our eyes and senses orient ourselves into a world, toward phenomena which orient and reveal themselves back to us?

So the philosopher says: we can see, so we must devote ourselves

3 François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2011), 77.

4 *Ibid.*, 34.

to seeing, and *seeing well*. Just as Heidegger said about thought: we are the creatures endowed with thought and the ability for self-knowledge, but even in this most thought-provoking time, *we are still not thinking*. The philosopher always says: don't just look, try to *really* see; don't just listen, try to *really* hear. As people often say--You're listening to me, but I don't think you *really* heard me.

But Laruelle says: the decision is never between looking and seeing or between listening and hearing. That is no decision at all. The true decision, the decision already made implicitly by philosophy, is to see and hear in the first place. We decide each time we open our eyes.

In other words photography is always understood as *color* photography, *black-and-white* photography even, but never *black photography proper*. Rather than these other color photographs evident in phenomenology, psychoanalysis, or philosophy at large, Laruelle writes that we need photography (now recast as *non-photography*) as science or Identity, harkening back to the Latin etymology of the term (from *idem* for "same"). But what would "Identity photography" mean? Identity photography is black photography. And thus identity photography is the only kind of photography that could leave an inscription of the black universe. Laruelle calls such photography a "hyperphenomenology of the real"; it follows a logic of *auto-impression* not expression.<sup>5</sup> Not a "*cliché*" snapshot, but an immanent identity of the Real. "One does not photograph the World, the City, History," Laruelle reminds us, one photographs "the identity (of) the real-in-the-last-instance."<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, while color always carries itself in terms of a "posture" or "*stance*," black is immanent to itself and thus can only be an *in-stance*, an instance, or as Laruelle says, the *last instance*.

"Simplify color!" says Laruelle. "See black, think white!" Don't *see*, be a seer. Stop seeing and start visioning--be a visionary. Watchers and lookers are the ones who see white, who see the thing that they know they will always see. The one who sees black is the true clairvoyant. The black seer is the the oracular prophet, what we call "a medium." And hence to understand media--or, shall we even say, to "do" media theory-

5 Ibid., 95, 12.

6 Ibid., 47.

for your rockets too can realize the more-than-psychic,

-is to start visioning purely in the black universe. Never to see visions, never to hallucinate (for that is what philosophers do), rather to *see vision*. This is what Laruelle means when he says that vision “abandons perception and sees-in-the-night” (BE, 96). And hence his deployment of that thorny non-philosophical term of art “vision-in-One.”

Third Recitation: *[T]he rocket passes through infinite distances. [...] Let [it] jump over the cosmic barrier and enter into the hyperspace of the Universe. [...] Let your rockets become subject of the Universe and be present at every point of the Remote.*

Laruelle’s short text on the black universe, which has guided our gatherings this weekend, was published in an issue of his journal *The Philosophical Decision* [*La Décision philosophique*] dated April 1988. Since its inaugural issue the journal was organized in two sections, a more-or-less straight forward opening section, followed by a shorter, more informal ending section dubbed “Experimentation; Fiction; Hyperspeculation.” If the opening essays in the journal were more traditional attempts to grapple with philosophy from the point of view of argumentation and analysis, the ending section was meant to feature actual examples of what it would mean to do non-philosophical writing.

“On the Black Universe” appeared in this hyperspeculative, experimental section of the journal, and in that issue it was bundled in the pages *immediately after* a five page “Letter to Deleuze,” in which he scolds and castigates Deleuze on his treatment of Spinoza, and then proceeds to lecture him on the differences between philosophy and non-philosophy by way of a thirty point summary of its basic terms: “by philosophical decision I mean... by real I mean... by finite I mean...” and so on. But Laruelle’s 1988 letter to Deleuze was just a warm up; a more thorough “Response to Deleuze” appeared in 1995 outlining Laruelle’s rather dim opinion of his brother-in-immanence.

(For how could anyone with his name on a book called *What is Philosophy?* ever come out alive? Deleuze and Guattari had mentioned Laruelle briefly in that book, a reference most certainly intended as a kind of tip-of-the-hat to Laruelle, then at best a cult figure in France and almost entirely unknown outside of France. But despite Deleuze’s

Look instead, like in the depths of a closed eye,

friendly intentions, Laruelle considered it the lowest insult to be brought “into the fold,” for as we know Deleuze *was a philosopher*. Clearly no good deed goes unpunished. A similar thing could be said about Laruelle’s treatment of Badiou in his recent book *Anti-Badiou*. Here the two most important living French theorists finally meet head to head, Badiou the best known and Laruelle the least. What results is a true disagreement, the first in a very long time. But don’t expect the usual insults: Badiou as anachronistic Maoist, or Badiou as unrepentant Platonist. Laruelle’s dagger is sharper and more deadly, for he is Badiou *the philosopher!*)

Laruelle’s squeamishness toward Deleuze aside, shall we not pose the question directly: is Deleuze a friend of Laruelle or not? Is Deleuze *really* a philosopher, in Laruelle’s terms? We know that Laruelle has always held Deleuze at arm’s length. But in some senses there are few other thinkers as close to Laruelle. Think of Deleuze the philosophical realist who so valiantly resists metaphysical logic. Think of Deleuze the thinker of immanence, a deep commitment to immanence surpassed only by Michel Henry, and surpassed eventually and most definitively by Laruelle himself.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze’s book on the break down of cinematic representation after World War II, he introduces the term “peaks of present” as one of a handful of ways in which post-war cinema was able to suffer the collapse of the earlier visual schema and invent a new mode of vision in the ashes of the old. He doesn’t spend much time with the term, and can’t seem to dig up too many cinematic examples to flesh it out, reverting to the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, imported from literature, and his collaboration with Alain Resnais on the 1961 film *Last Year at Marienbad*. Yet in Robbe-Grillet, Deleuze sees a very specific treatment of time, a kind of pan-temporality, in which all points of time are treated in terms of their own present, and then superimposed into a simultaneity of presents. As with the pandemonium of “all spirits,” Robbe-Grillet produces a pan-chronology of all times merged together, “a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past.”<sup>7</sup> For Deleuze this produces a kind of vertigo, an indiscernibility

7 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press,

that “make[s] time frightening and inexplicable.”<sup>8</sup>

Now compare this pan-present to Laruelle’s image of the rocket, a rocket which refuses to blast off or to land, but somehow flickers directly into the blackness of deep space:

*[T]he rocket passes through infinite distances. [...] Let your rockets become...present at every point of the Remote.*

Does Laruelle’s “*present at every point of the Remote*” have anything to do with Deleuze’s “present at every point of time”? Yes and no. Yes because they are both dealing with the *virtual*, to borrow a term from Deleuze that Laruelle doesn’t use. No because Deleuze’s pandemonium is a virtuality of time, while Laruelle’s pandemonium is a virtuality of space. Or at least it appears to be space. We might expand the claim and make it slightly more pointed: a virtuality of fact. Deleuze says the virtual is real; Laruelle never quite says the real is virtual, but nevertheless the real, while remaining immanent to itself, is present at every point, and thus in some basic sense, “virtual” to every point. Further, Laruelle’s real is never in a relationship with its virtualities, and thus Laruelle will never speak in those Nietzschean tones of forces and counter-forces so common in Deleuze (action-reaction, actual-virtual, territorialization-deterritorialization). Our rockets may be present at every point of the Remote, but in strict Laruellean terms the story is slightly off: the *Remote*, as Real, is present unilaterally and ultimately at every point of the *rocket*.

Fourth Recitation: *Simplify color! See black, think white! See black rather than believe “unconscious.” And think white rather than believe “conscious.”*

This brings us to the final lesson, that Laruelle’s black is not simply a theory of the universe, but also a theory of the *subject*, what he calls the human or the person. The black universe allows for a mystical justice that is irreducible to either Christian morality on the one hand

1989), 100, emphasis removed.

8 Ibid., 101.

or liberal ecumenicalism on the other. "All philosophical speculation is communication, and communication is always speculative," writes Laruelle, articulating what we now commonly call, thanks to Quentin Meillassoux's popularization of it, the "principle of correlationism" (BE, 99). The correlationist logic is so troublesome (in the opinion of those like Laruelle and Meillassoux) because it limits the discussion to one of two scenarios: either we speculate for or on behalf of *the other*, or we speculate for or about *ourselves*. We're either reflective or introspective. We're either too nosy about others or too vain about ourselves. These are the two great maxims of philosophy: "1. to see for itself by seeing in the place of the other; 2. an-eye-for-an-eye" (BE, 99). This is why metaphysics is described by Laruelle in terms of *vengeance*. Either "an eye for an eye," the symmetrical, retributive justice of the Old Testament. Or what he calls "*Eye-for-the-Other*, as hostage-of-the-Other-eye" (BE, 99): the universalization of liberal relativism where we promise to see for the Other, or even, in our infinite wisdom, to step back and let the Other try to see for itself. Either way, the eye is held hostage, vision is vengeance, and *vengeance is ours*.

Instead the black universe allows for a mystical subject (capable of mystical justice) because it eliminates speculation. No more eye-for-an-eye, and no more eye-for-the-other. No more exchange of looks, and no more commerce in vision. Instead an absolutely determined and unidirectional vision, a kind of visionary vision that looks without looking.

If you open your eyes *part way* you see white, but if you open them all the way you see black. Don't let the philosophers draw you out of the cavern and into the light, only to be dazzled by the first rays of the sun. But at the same time, don't douse the light and dig deeper into the abyss, in an attempt to spiral lower, darker, into your gloomy soul. Laruelle's human is one who opens its eyes in the night, not to look or speculate but to *know*. "The night is this human, the human who does not speculate about man. Who am I, me who is? I am neither this reason nor this way of thinking, neither this question nor this speculation. I am this night..." (BE, 102).

**ON THE BLACK UNIVERSE**  
**In the Human Foundations of Color<sup>†</sup>**

*François Laruelle*

I.

In the foundations of color, vision sees the Universe; in the foundations of the Universe, it sees man; in the foundations of man, it sees vision.

The Earth, the World, the Universe have to do with man: the Earth a little, the World a lot, the Universe passionately. The Universe is the inner passion for the Remote.

Man works the Earth, lives in the World, thinks according to the Universe.

The Earth is man's ground, the World his neighbor, the Universe his secret.

The Earth is the strait through which passes the light of the World;

I.

Dans les fondations de la couleur, la vision voit l'Univers; dans les fondations de l'Univers, elle voit l'homme; dans les fondations de l'homme, elle voit la vision.

La Terre, le Monde, l'Univers ont à faire à l'homme, la Terre un peu, le Monde beaucoup, l'Univers passionnément. L'Univers est la passion intérieure du Lointain.

L'homme travaille à la Terre, habite dans le Monde, pense selon l'Univers.

La Terre est le sol de l'homme, le Monde est son voisin, l'Univers est son secret.

La Terre est le détroit par où passe la lumière du Monde, la langue de

<sup>†</sup> The English edition of this essay was first translated and published by Miguel Abreu as "Of Black Universe in the Human Foundations of Color" in the catalogue *Hyun Soo Choi: Seven Large-Scale Paintings* (New York: Thread Waxing Space, 1991): 2-4. It has been reproduced here with a few slight modifications. The original French essay, titled "Du noir univers: dans les fondations humaines de la couleur," was published in *La Décision philosophique* 5 (April 1988): 107-112.

it is the tongue made of sand and water upon which, standing, man strides against the World.

The World is everything too vast and too narrow for the Earth, and again too narrow for the Universe.

Man gropes around the World and the World floats in the Universe unable to touch its borders.

Into the World of narrow-minded thoughts, man brings the emotion of the Universe.

The Universe, an object greater than the World, is not the object of thought, but rather its how or its according to.

The Universe is an opaque and solitary thought, which has already leapt through man's shut eyes as the space of a dream without dreaming.

The Universe is not reflected in another universe, and yet the Remote is accessible to us at each of its points.

The World is the endless confusion of man and Universe, the Universe treated as man's object.

sable et d'eau sur laquelle, debout, l'homme marche contre le Monde.

Le Monde est tout ce qui est trop vaste et trop étroit pour la Terre, et une seconde fois trop étroit pour l'Univers.

L'homme glisse à tâtons dans le Monde et le Monde flotte dans l'Univers sans pouvoir le toucher à ses bords.

L'homme introduit dans le Monde aux pensées étroites l'émotion de l'Univers.

L'Univers n'est pas l'objet de la pensée, un plus grand objet que le Monde, c'est son comment ou son selon.

L'Univers est une pensée opaque et solitaire qui a déjà bondi dans les yeux clos de l'homme comme l'espace d'un rêve sans rêve.

L'Univers ne se réfléchit pas dans un autre univers, et pourtant le Lointain nous est accessible en chacun de ses points.

Le Monde est la confusion infinie de l'homme et de l'Univers; l'Univers traité comme un objet de l'homme.

The forgetting of the essence of the Universe is less noticeable than the forgetting of the World.

L'oubli de l'essence de l'Univers est plus inapparent que l'oubli du Monde.

The forgetting of man as One(-of-)the-Universe and the Universe as One-through-man is less noticeable than the forgetting of being-in-the-World.

L'oubli de l'homme comme Un(-de-)l'Univers et de l'Univers comme Un-par-l'homme, est plus inapparent que l'oubli de l'être-au-Monde.

## II.

## II.

In the beginning there is Black--man and Universe, rather than philosopher and World.

Au commencement il y a Noir--l'homme et l'Univers plutôt que le philosophe et le Monde.

Surrounding the philosopher everything becomes World and light. Surrounding man everything becomes Universe and opacity.

Autour du philosophe tout devient Monde et lumière; autour de l'homme tout devient Univers et opacité.

Man, who carries away the Universe with him, is condemned, without knowing why, to the World and to the Earth, and neither the World nor the Earth can tell him why. He is answered only by the Universe, being black and mute.

L'homme, qui emporte l'Univers avec lui, est condamné, sans qu'il en connaisse la raison, au Monde et à la Terre, et ni le Monde ni la Terre ne peuvent lui dire pourquoi: seul l'Univers lui répond en étant noir et muet.

Black is not in the object or the World, it is what man sees in man, and the way in which man sees man.

Noir n'est pas dans l'objet ou dans le Monde, il est ce que l'homme voit dans l'homme, et ce dans quoi l'homme voit l'homme.

Black is not merely what man sees in man, it is the only "color" inseparable from the hyper-intelligible expanse of the Universe.

Noir n'est pas seulement ce que l'homme voit dans l'homme, il est la seule « couleur » inséparable de l'étendue hyperintelligible de l'Univers.

Solitude of the man-without-horizon who sees Black in Black.

Solitude de l'homme-sans-horizon qui voit le Noir dans le Noir.

The Universe is deaf and blind, we can only love it and assist it. Man is the being who assists the Universe.

L'Univers est sourd et aveugle, nous ne pouvons que l'aimer et l'assister. L'homme est l'être qui assiste l'Univers.

Only with eyes closed can we unfold the future, and with eyes opened can we conceive to enter it.

Nous ne pouvons déployer le futur que les yeux fermés et croire y entrer que les yeux ouverts.

Light strikes the Earth with repeated blows, divides the World infinitely, solicits in vain the invisible Universe.

La lumière frappe à coups redoublés la Terre, divise infiniment le Monde; sollicite en vain l'invisible Univers.

The Universe was "in" the World and the World did not see it.

L'Univers était « dans » le Monde et le Monde ne le voyait pas.

Black prior to light is the substance of the Universe, what escaped from the World before the World was born into the World.

Noir d'avant la lumière est la substance de l'Univers, ce qui s'est échappé du Monde avant que le Monde ne vienne au Monde.

Black is the without-Ground which fixes light in the remote where man observes it. Here lies the crazy and catatonic light of the World.

Noir est le sans-Fond qui fixe la lumière dans le lointain où l'homme l'observe. Ci-gît la lumière folle et catatonique du Monde.

Man approaches the World only by way of transcendental darkness, into which he never entered and from which he will never leave.

L'homme n'aborde au Monde qu'à travers de transcendantales ténèbres où il n'est jamais entré et qu'il ne quittera jamais.

A phenomenal blackness entirely fills the essence of man. Because of it, the most ancient stars of the paleo-cosmos together with the most venerable stones of the archeo-

Un noir phénoménal remplit entièrement l'essence de l'homme. Par lui les étoiles les plus anciennes du paléo-cosmos, comme les pierres les plus vénérables

earth, appear to man as being outside the World, and the World itself appears as outside-World.

III.

The black universe is the opacity of the real or the "color" that renders it invisible.

No light has ever seen the black universe.

Black is anterior to the absence of light, whether this absence be the shadows that extinguish it, whether it be its nothingness or its positive opposite. The black universe is not a negative light.

Black is the Radical of color, what never was a color nor the attribute of a color, the emotion seizing man when affected by a color.

As opposed to the black objectified in the spectrum, Black is already manifested, before any process of manifestation. This is vision-in-Black.

Black is entirely interior to itself and to man.

Black is without opposite: even light, which tries to turn it into its opposite, fails in the face of the rig-

de l'arché-terre se montrent à l'homme comme si elles étaient hors du Monde, et le Monde lui-même se montre comme hors-Monde.

III.

Le noir univers est l'opacité du réel ou la « couleur » qui le rend invisible.

Aucune lumière n'a jamais vu le noir univers.

Noir est antérieur à l'absence de lumière, que cette absence soit l'ombre où elle s'éteint, qu'elle soit son néant ou son positif contraire. Le noir univers n'est pas une lumière négative.

Noir est le Radical des couleurs, ce qui n'a jamais été couleur ou attribut d'une couleur, l'émotion qui saisit l'homme affecté par une couleur.

À la différence du noir objectivé dans le spectre, Noir s'est déjà manifesté avant toute opération de manifestation. C'est la vision-en-Noir.

Noir est définitivement intérieur à lui-même et à l'homme.

Noir est sans contraire: même la lumière qui tente de le transformer en son contraire échoue devant

or of its secret. Only the secret sees into the secret, like Black in Black.

The essence of color is not colored: it's the black universe. Metaphysical white is a simple discoloration, the prismatic or indifferent unity of colors. Phenomenal blackness is indifferent to color because it represents their ultimate degree of reality, that which prevents their final dissolution into the mixtures of light.

Philosophy and sometimes painting treat black and white as contraries, colors as opposites; they mix them, under the authority of light as the supreme mix.

The human science of color is founded on the blackness known as the "universe." They cognitively unify man, the Universe, and color theory--and their potencies in Black, which is their common reality, but in the last instance only.

A human science of color makes the black universe the requisite that is real or immanent to their physics. Black is the posture itself of science and of its "relation" to color.

la rigueur de son secret. Seul le secret voit dans le secret, comme Noir en Noir.

L'essence des couleurs n'est pas colorée: c'est le noir univers. Le blanc métaphysique est une simple décoloration, l'unité prismatique ou indifférente des couleurs. Le noir phénoménal est indifférent aux couleurs parce qu'il est leur ultime teneur en réalité, celle qui prévient leur dissolution définitive dans les mélanges de la lumière.

Philosophie, et peinture parfois, traitent le noir et le blanc comme des contraires, les couleurs comme des opposés; elles les mélangent sous l'autorité de la lumière comme suprême mélange.

La science humaine des couleurs est fondée sur le noir dit « univers ». Elle pense ensemble l'homme, l'Univers et la théories des couleurs--et leur teneur en Noir qui est leur réalité commune, mais de dernière instance seulement.

Une science humaine des couleurs fait du noir univers le requisit réel ou immanent de leur physique. Noir est la posture même de la science et de son « rapport » aux couleurs.



## IV.

Science is a way of thinking in black and white which studies the light of the Cosmos and the color of the World: black, by way of its posture or its inherence to the real; white, by way of its representation of the real. A way of thinking where white is no longer the opposite of black, but rather its positively discolored reflection.

Science is the mode of thought in which black determines in the last instance white.

The black universe transforms colors without mixing them. It simplifies color in order to bring out the whiteness of understanding in its essence of non-pictorial reflection.

Our uchromia: to learn to think from the point of view of Black as what determines color in the last instance rather than what limits it.

Philosophical technology has been withdrawn mimetically from the World, in order to reflect and reproduce it. Such technology is inadequate for thinking the Universe.

We are still postulating that reality is given to us through the paradigm of the World. We perpetuate the inhuman amphibology that confuses

## IV.

La science est une pensée en noir et blanc qui traite de la lumière du Cosmos et des couleurs du Monde. Noire par sa posture ou son inhérence au réel, blanche par sa représentation du réel. Pensée où le blanc n'est plus le contraire du noir, mais son reflet positivement décoloré.

La science est le mode de pensée où le noir détermine en dernière instance le blanc.

Le noir univers transforme les couleurs sans les mélanger. Il simplifie la couleur en vue de produire la blancheur de la connaissance dans son essence de reflet non-pictural.

Notre uchromie: apprendre à penser à partir de Noir comme ce qui détermine en dernière instance les couleurs plutôt que comme ce qui les limite.

La technologie philosophique a été prélevée mimétiquement sur le Monde, pour le réfléchir et le reproduire. Elle est inadéquate pour penser l'Univers.

Nous postulons encore que la réalité nous est donnée par le paradigme du Monde. Nous commettons l'inhumaine amphibologie

the World and the Universe. We believe that reality is horizon and light, aperture and flash, whereas it resembles more the posture of an opaque non-relation (to) light. When exploring the uni-versal dimension of the cosmic, we remain prisoners of cosmo-logical difference. Our philosophers are children who are afraid of the Dark.

Philosophy is thinking by way of a generalized "black box"; it is the effort to fit black into light and to push it back to the rear of the caverns. Yet, the cosmo-logical generalization of black does not save it from its status as attribute, quite the contrary. Black alone is subject and may render manifest the philosophical interlocking of concepts.

Do not think technology first: rocket and the lift off of the rocket. Look instead, like in the depths of a closed eye, into the opacity of knowledge where, forming one with it, the rocket passes through infinite distances. Think according to the knowledge that steers the rocket as if in a dream, heavier and more transparent than the boundless night it penetrates with a silent thunderclap. Think science first.

Stop sending your ships through the narrow cosmo-logical corridor.

qui confond le Monde et l'Univers. Nous croyons que la réalité est horizon et lumière, ouverture et flash, alors qu'elle est plutôt la posture d'un non-rapport opaque (à) la lumière. Au moment d'explorer la dimension uni-verselle du cosmique, nous restons prisonniers de la différence cosmo-logique. Nos philosophes sont des enfants qui ont peur du Noir.

La philosophie est une pensée par « boîte noire » généralisée, la tentative d'emboîter le noir dans la lumière et de le repousser au fond des cavernes, mais la généralisation cosmo-logique du noir ne le sauve pas, au contraire, de son statut d'attribut. Noir seul est sujet et peut rendre manifeste l'emboîtement philosophique des concepts.

Ne pensez pas d'abord technologie: fusée et envoi de la fusée. Regardez plutôt, comme au fond d'un oeil clos, dans l'opacité du savoir par lequel, faisant corps sans distance avec lui, la fusée franchit d'infinies distances. Pensez selon le savoir qui la dirige comme en rêve, plus lourd et plus transparent que la nuit illimitée où elle pénètre pourtant dans un tonnerre silencieux. Pensez d'abord science.

Cessez d'envoyer vos vaisseaux par l'étroit couloir cosmo-logique.

Stop making them climb the extreme walls of the world. Let them jump over the cosmic barrier and enter into the hyperspace of the Universe. Cease having them compete with light, for your rockets too can realize the more-than-psychic, postural mutation, and shift from light to black universe which is no longer a color; from cosmic color to postural and subjective black. Let your rockets become subject of the Universe and be present at every point of the Remote.

Ou de les faire monter aux parois extrêmes du Monde. Laissez-les franchir la barre cosmique et entrer dans l'hyperespace de l'Univers. Cessez de les mettre en concurrence avec la lumière, car vos fusées aussi peuvent opérer la mutation plus-que-psychique, posturale, et passer de la lumière au noir univers qui n'est plus une couleur; de la couleur cosmique au noir postural et subjectif. Laissez vos fusées devenir sujet de l'Univers et présentes en chaque point du Lointain.

Simplify color! See black, think white!

Simplifiez-vous les couleurs! Voyez noir, pensez blanc!

See black rather than believe "unconscious." And think white rather than believe "conscious."

Voyez noir au lieu de croire « inconscient ». Et pensez blanc au lieu de croire « conscient ».

See black! Not that all your suns have fallen--they have since reappeared, only slightly dimmer--but Black is the "color" that falls eternally from the Universe onto your Earth.

Voyez noir! Non que tous vos soleils soient tombés--ils sont déjà revenus, un peu plus pâles--, mais Noir est la « couleur » qui tombe éternellement de l'Univers sur votre Terre.

*images Aaron Mett *  
*On the Black Universe*  
*in the Human Foundations of Color*  
2012 HD video trt 11:00

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