

# ‡ WONDER WITHOUT DOMINATION

## *An Introduction to Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*

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*A singular figure among contemporary theorists whose work poses a direct challenge to many of the practices and presuppositions of Western philosophy, François Laruelle has been referred to as “the most important unknown philosopher working in Europe today.”<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called his philosophical project, which involves a ceaseless attempt to unfold new ways of making use of philosophical material, “one of the most interesting undertakings of contemporary philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> Although it is only recently that Laruelle has entered the consciousness of theorists in the English-speaking world, his impact has been profound, influencing such thinkers as Ray Brassier, Eugene Thacker, Alexander Galloway, John Mullarkey, Anthony Paul Smith, Katerina Kolozova and others associated with the new philosophical movements that have been called Speculative Realism. Undeniably forbidding in its terminology, Laruelle’s writings are prohibitively difficult, verging on obscurity. The following introduction attempts to clarify, frame, and condense some of the main strands of Laruelle’s Non-philosophy in order to set the stage for the encounter that takes place between it and the thought of Derrida in “Deconstruction and Non-Philosophy,” the essay here translated by Nicholas Hauck. This introduction further endeavors to prepare the ground for the consideration of non-philosophical practice and pedagogy that is taken up in depth in “On Dismantling the Master’s House,” an essay by Roshaya Rodness. The intention of this project is not to adjudicate between Laruelle and Derrida—it is not our goal to displace deconstruction or supplant it with non-philosophy, as if such an operative gesture of overcoming were even possible, much less desirable. On the contrary, our aim is to read non-philosophy as an undertaking that emerges out of the same impulse that activates deconstruction: the desire to practice a form of thought that is uncompromising in its pursuit of justice and productive of new possibilities for reading and learning.*

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1 Ray Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy: The Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle,” *Radical Philosophy*, 121 (2003): 24.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 220 n5.

Plato informs us that the exhilaration and awe which attends opening oneself to the unknown is what supplies philosophy with its prime motivation. “[W]onderment,” Socrates tells the young Theaetetus, “this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else.”<sup>3</sup> This seductive origin story, which suggests that philosophy is inaugurated by a practice of marveling, is what the work of François Laruelle urges us to hold in suspension. Is it really the case that philosophy sprouts from the fertile ground of deferential awe? Do the procedures of the discipline substantiate the claim that philosophy begins with a sort of meekness toward its subject matter? Laruelle’s provocative response to these questions is a resounding *no*: despite posturing as the only discipline able to approach objects on their own terms and to let reality *be*,<sup>4</sup> philosophy is plagued by an irremediable narcissism and an insatiable will to dominate. At the core of philosophical practice, he claims, is a hidden presumption, to which philosophy itself is inherently oblivious, that surreptitiously endows the philosopher with sovereignty over that into which she inquires.<sup>5</sup>

*The Principle of Sufficient Philosophy*

Socrates’ words to Theaetetus supply an important clue to understanding the problematic that Laruelle identifies at the core of philosophical practice. After declaring wonder to be the site of philosophy’s genesis, Socrates muses that, “the man who made Iris the child of Thaumas was perhaps no bad genealogist.”<sup>6</sup> This ostensibly off-hand rumination, which is never again taken up in the dialogue, is unexpectedly revealing. As John M. Cooper explains, Thaumas is a god whose name means “wonder,” while Iris, like Hermes, is a messenger of the gods, whose rainbow links earth and heaven, conjoining the province of humanity with the realm of the divine.<sup>7</sup> Significantly for Socrates’ stated view of philosophy, this means that wonder eventually supplies access to that which by all rights should be foreclosed to human

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3 Plato, “Theaetetus,” *Collected Works of Plato*. Edited John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 155d.

4 Recall, for example, Heidegger’s celebration of *gelassenheit*, the capacity to let things in existence be as they are. See Martin Heidegger: “Conversation on a Country Path,” *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J.M. Anderson, E. Hans Feund (New York: Harper Collins, 1969).

5 François Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*. trans. Ray Brassier, (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 25.

6 Plato, “Theaetetus,” 155d.

7 Plato, “Theaetetus,” 173 n12.

awareness: the progeny of wonder is, quite literally, a correlation between human apprehension and celestial knowledge. Socrates' casual aside betrays his faith in what Laruelle calls "*the principle of sufficient philosophy*":<sup>8</sup> the belief—unthinkingly held by each and every philosopher, in Laruelle's view—that philosophy has the potential to open all doors, overcome all boundaries, and address all things. This principle secures philosophy's status as a discipline that "cannot be defined,"<sup>9</sup> a mode of thought and a practice of inquiry that can potentially take any subject matter as its object. It enables the ease with which we are able to accept the possibility of a Philosophy of Mathematics, a Philosophy of Film, or a Philosophy of Dance, while, at the same time, causing us in all likelihood to remain hesitant about the prospects for a Mathematics of Philosophy, a Film of Philosophy, or Dance of Philosophy—i.e., anything that would attach restrictions or conditions to philosophical practice. For Laruelle, this principle "expresses philosophy's absolute autonomy and self-sufficiency, its essence as *self*-positing/donating/deciding/grounding... [The principle of sufficient philosophy] ensures philosophy's domination of all regional disciplines and sciences. Ultimately, [this principle] articulates philosophy's idealist pretension as that which is able at least to co-determine the most radical real."<sup>10</sup> Buttressing philosophy's confidence in its own independence, the principle of sufficient philosophy endows philosophical practices with a kind of sovereignty over all of existence. It guarantees that there is a correlation between the philosophical subject and reality,<sup>11</sup> while simultaneously separating philosophy from that which is philosophized. The principle of sufficient philosophy operates as a kind of universal land grant, which bequeaths the entirety of existence to the uses of a philosophical subject. Yielding to philosophy the means to regard existence as from a superior transcendental vantage, the principle of sufficient philosophy grants philosophy the ability to articulate a judgment or unfold a *decision* about the essential nature of reality.

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8 Laruelle, "A Summary of Non-Philosophy," 25.

9 Bertrand Russell, *Wisdom of the West* (New York: Crescent, 1987), 7.

10 Laruelle, "A Summary of Non-Philosophy," 25.

11 In this respect, Laruelle's figuration of the principle of sufficient philosophy is an uncanny precursor to Quentin Meillassoux's recent exposé of "correlationism," "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other." Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), 5.

*The Philosophical Decision*

“Philosophical decision” is Laruelle’s term for a “hybrid structure that combines transcendence and immanence,”<sup>12</sup> a structure which identifies the real with some particular blend or *mixte* of the transcendental and the empirical. Decision always takes the form of what might be called a *tripartite dyad*, composed of a philosophical binary and the distinction between the two opposed terms, which is understood as a third term in its own right. As Ray Brassier explains, this third term “is simultaneously intrinsic and immanent to the distinguished terms *and* extrinsic and transcendent insofar as it is supposed to remain constitutive of the difference between the terms themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Presumed to be both auto-positional and auto-donational—i.e., already given, prior to the appearance of the particular philosophy that gives it expression—a decision posits the concomitant separation and immanent unity of empirical phenomena with the *a priori* categories that are supposed to condition them. In other words, it makes out of disparate objects, entities, and ideas, “a World”<sup>14</sup>—that is, a totality or generality capable of being reflected by philosophical discourse and captured within thought. The decisional philosopher understands this supposedly self-positing unity not simply to represent, but rather to *reflect*, *co-constitute*, and *ensnare* the real itself. This unity corresponds to the “firm and immovable”<sup>15</sup> Archimedean point that philosophy requires in order to ensure the validity of its own conjectures. Via decision, philosophy “hallucinates”<sup>16</sup> the real, imagining that its own discourses and inventions articulate the definitive truth of reality. Decision constructs a world of artifice—a created realm of categories and concepts, substances and schemata, forms and philosophemes—which it then treats as an explanatory paradigm for the whole of existence. By enabling the fantasy that philosophy can enter into a reciprocal relationship with the real, and obtain and communicate the supposed truth of it, decision establishes

12 François Laruelle, “Controversy Over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*, trans. Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 89.

13 Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy,” 26.

14 François Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia and the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (New York: Univocal Press, 2012), 4.

15 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17.

16 François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic Press, 2011), 16.

“the domination of philosophy over man [sic].”<sup>17</sup> Decision relegates human beings to the margins, positioning the accounts of reality that result from the contemplations of philosophers as more real, more fundamental, than the individuals who experience reality. Exalting philosophy as superincumbent over both the subjects who practice it and the objects of philosophical study, decision upholds the discipline as the most privileged mode of thought, which alone is capable of “reading the book of nature” and dictating its contents to humanity. Philosophy may begin in wonder, Laruelle rejoins Socrates, but it ends in mastery.

The Theory of Forms that emerges out of Plato’s *Republic*<sup>18</sup> provides an exemplary model of the structure and method of decision, which Laruelle suggests is typical of philosophy as such. Although its characteristic act is the generation of unity, philosophical decision is in fact composed of three distinct components, which are conjoined via a series of three sequential “moments.” In *The Republic*, the first element of decision, *empirical data*,<sup>19</sup> is constituted by the bottom half of the divided line, the visible world of sense perception and belief [*pistis*]; the second element, *a priori metaphysical categories or conditions*,<sup>20</sup> by the multitude of Forms [*eidoi*] that make the qualities of particular objects and concepts in the sensible world intelligible (the Form of Piety, the Form of Justice, the Form of Beauty, etc.); and the third, *an overarching transcendental structure*, by the Form of the Good. The first moment of philosophical decision entails the splitting of reality into the first two components: this step is taken as soon as there is a differentiation between objects as they

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17 François Laruelle, “Theorems on the Good News,” An und für sich.[blog] trans. Alexander Galloway. <http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/pdf/Laruelle,%20Theorems%20on%20the%20Good%20News.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2013).

18 In restricting my archive to the Republic, I consciously avoid confronting the problem of whether Plato revised or abandoned the Theory of Forms. My intention is solely to illustrate Laruelle’s theory of philosophical decision, not to intervene in debates concerning Platonism.

19 Laruelle at times refers to empirical data as “the transcendent,” in order to emphasize the manner in which philosophy presumes “the continua of common experience or experience which is scientific, perceptual, linguistic, etc.” to be, in essence, the correlate and derivative of a higher, transcendental schema. François Laruelle, “The Transcendental Method,” in *From Decision to Heresy*, trans. Christopher Eby (London: Urbanomic, 2012), 144.

20 Laruelle refers to this component as “transcendence,” to highlight its role in conditioning and giving form to “the transcendent.”

are experienced and the conditions that structure them.<sup>21</sup> Socrates does this early on in *The Republic*, when he distinguishes between ostensible instances of justice—such as Cephalus’ example of “speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred”<sup>22</sup>—and the *logos* of justice, which determines all of its contingent manifestations, making them appear as such. The second moment of decision involves the incorporation and amalgamation of all of the disparate *a priori* conditions within some one transcendental master term, entirely removed from lived experience, which is understood to be already given, auto-positional and auto-donational.<sup>23</sup> Socrates proffers the Form of the Good as just such a master-term, claiming that, “not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good but their being is also due to it, although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power.”<sup>24</sup> Standing apart from ordinary existence, just as the sun remains aloof toward the creatures that make use of its light, the Form of the Good is that which allows all of the lesser Forms to be recognized as such, supplying them with intelligibility and substance. All Forms are subsumed within the Good, even as it remains irreducible to the multitude of Forms.<sup>25</sup> The third and final moment of decision occurs when this transcendental master term returns the assortment of abstractions bound together in the second moment to the realm of the empirical,<sup>26</sup> securing the existence of an essential correlation between lived experience and the *a priori* conditions of experience. In other words, the transcendental term fastens together that which was split in the first stage of decision, providing assurance that the two seemingly opposed entities are in fact immanently unified, forming together what Brassier calls an “identity-in-

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21 François Laruelle, “The Transcendental Method” in *From Decision to Heresy*, 147.

22 Plato, “The Republic” in *Collected Works of Plato*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 331c.

23 Laruelle, “The Transcendental Method,” 147-50.

24 Plato, “The Republic,” 509b.

25 As Socrates explains, “it is right to think of knowledge and truth as good-like but wrong to think that either of them is the good—for the good is yet more prized,” Plato, “The Republic,” 509a.

26 This return is absolutely essential for the functioning of philosophy, Laruelle explains, insofar as it provides the basis for philosophy’s supposed capacity to account for both empirical and metaphysical reality. “That the transcendental conditions the transcendent [i.e., the empirical] is the condition for responding to the question of a knowledge in general and, in particular, of a speculative knowledge or one that transcends the limits of experience.” Laruelle, “The Transcendental Method,” 145.

difference.”<sup>27</sup> At this juncture, decision fully unfolds “the co-belonging and co-penetration of a syntax and an experience of what [philosophy] calls the ‘real.’”<sup>28</sup> In *The Republic*, the Form of the Good not only unifies all of the myriad Forms into a single universal unity, it also brings this abstract collection of ideas “down to earth,” ensuring that these *a priori* transcendences cohere immanently with the empirical data they are supposed to condition. A consummate decisional postulation, the Form of the Good is co-constitutive of the real, insofar as it functions as the necessary condition both for ordinary empirical experience *and* for the *a priori* metaphysical accounts or *logoi* obtained by philosophy which are presumed to organize ordinary empirical experience. As that which catalyzes and impels philosophy, the Form of the Good is also responsible for obliging philosophers to “return to the cave,” and re-enter the sensible world of empirical experience and opinion. In the process, it validates the principle of sufficient philosophy, providing assurance not only that all things are attainable by philosophy, but also that philosophers are able to make comprehensible inhuman knowledge, and to distribute it amongst humanity like Prometheus or Agni bringing down fire from the gods.

Laruelle’s account of philosophical decision not only offers good reason to be suspicious of the validity and import of the truth-claims obtained by philosophy, it also provides an invaluable tool for understanding the history of philosophical disagreement in the West. Laruelle demonstrates that decisional philosophies are inherently *dogmatic*, insofar as the bedrock upon which their philosophical systems and assertions are erected—the transcendental term which guarantees the union of thought and being, and which conjoins immanence and transcendence—is ultimately *arbitrary*. As Brassier notes, “there is a sense in which explanations of phenomena couched in terms of philosophical Decisions explain nothing because the formal structure of the explanatory theory, the *explanans*, already constitutes the content of the thing to be explained, the *explanandum*, and vice versa.”<sup>29</sup> To put in a slightly different register, decision is the unacknowledged process by which philosophers create the conditions that are meant to determine the validity and soundness of their own claims. This tautological kernel at the core of philosophical

27 Ray Brassier, “Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter” (Diss. University of Warwick, 2001), 170.

28 François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, trans. Rocco Gangle (New York: Continuum, 2011), 5.

29 Brassier, “Alien Theory,” 115.

practice renders it impossible to adjudicate effectively between contradictory decisions, given that each imagines itself to offer the exclusive key to the transcendental framework that knots all of reality together through a kind of circular, self-aggrandizing logic. Philosophical “progress” thus, in Laruelle’s view, almost exclusively involves not the actual advancement of thought but rather the substitution of one decisional framework for another—this is what occurred, for example, when Plato’s Form of the Good was, by and large, supplanted within Medieval philosophy by Aristotle’s notion of Substance. By unveiling the circular operations of decision under the surface of philosophical discourse, Laruelle purports to show that all philosophies are inherently *anthropocentric* and *idealist*—including theoretical frameworks, like Marxism, which identify themselves as materialist. Decisional philosophy cannot but presume that its own assertions are adequate the real, and that the human-made terms, concepts, and structures it employs provide an accurate rendering of reality as it exists apart from human beings. For philosophy, decision amounts to the delusion that reality is essentially determinable by the human mind, that human vocabularies are, in some way, perfectly fitted to the universe they attempt to explain, and that the real is somehow concerned with its apprehension and instrumentalization by philosophical subjects. Decision cannot elide its association with a kind of ethical or political absolutism: it is unavoidably a *sovereign* decision, a unilateral exertion of power over everything that philosophy takes to be its object—which is to say, anything at all.<sup>30</sup> Laruelle’s uncovering of decision exposes philosophy for what it really is: not the deferential outgrowth of wonder that Plato’s Socrates imagines it to be, but rather a highly refined mode of narcissism.

*Critique of the Philosophies of Difference*

At this stage, one could question, with some justification, the exigency of Laruelle’s critique of decision. Are not his observations thoroughly belated? Is “decision” not just another term for the metaphysics of presence, the foil of “Continental” philosophers since Nietzsche? Do not these latter thinkers—who steadfastly refuse the claims that existence constitutes a unity,

30 In this sense, Laruelle’s critique of decision inevitably evokes Carl Schmitt’s decisionist political philosophy, specifically Schmitt’s claim that political acts ultimately depend not upon legal principles or precedents, but upon the decisions of an unaccountable sovereign. Laruelle illustrates that a kind of Schmittian absolutism is at work even within philosophies that, on the surface, seem diametrically opposed to that of Schmitt.

that there is some single, logocentric ground, structure, or sameness binding experience together, and that philosophy can obtain absolute truths—unsettle Laruelle’s indictment of philosophy *in toto* as irreparably decisional? On the contrary, Laruelle suggests, despite the apparent radicalness and indisputable innovation of philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze and Derrida, all of these thinkers continue to adhere to a decisional rubric, one which no longer articulates itself by means of some unitary construct like Form or Substance, but rather under the “anti-Hegelian banner of ‘Difference.’”<sup>31</sup> In Laruelle’s usage, “Difference” is distinct from “difference”—a contingent state of dissimilarity or uniqueness—in that it functions in the decisional philosophies of Nietzsche, Deleuze, Heidegger and Derrida not as an adjectival quality, but rather as an explanatory *sine qua non*. Laruelle always self-consciously capitalizes “Difference” *qua* decisional postulation in order to emphasize its imagined universality, self-sufficiency, and auto-positionality. To reiterate: decision occurs whenever some transcendental concept is presumed in order to make our conditioned experiences of reality coalesce with their philosophically identified conditions, whatever they may be—this transcendental term does not need to be static, logocentric, or metaphysical to be the product of philosophical decision. In all of the diverse forms it has taken throughout history, decision just is that which is presumed by philosophy in order to answer what Laruelle calls “the oldest Greco-Occidental question... how to think the unity or the passage from one contrary to the other.”<sup>32</sup> For Nietzsche, Deleuze, Heidegger and Derrida, Laruelle argues, *Difference* is both the self-positing transcendental fabric that weaves reality together as a discontinuous and dynamic heterogeneity, and the self-legitimizing syntax that organizes experience and thought. Through its syntactical primacy, Difference guarantees the authority of the philosophers who invoke it, preserving philosophy’s status as the measure of all things.

Calling it “the most general philosophical horizon that has been ours since Nietzsche and Heidegger,” Laruelle regards Difference as “the major problematic lending its dominant hue to twentieth-century philosophy, as ‘history’ and ‘dialectic’ did to that of the nineteenth.”<sup>33</sup> Whereas previous systems of thought constructed metaphysical binaries, only to privilege one

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31 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, xiv.

32 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 6.

33 *Ibid.*, xv.

term over the other—e.g., Plato’s championing of the intelligible over the visible, the Forms over the senses, the in-itself over the for-us—the philosophies of Difference “affirm the superiority of [the two terms’] combat, of their coupling and hierarchy over the content of the embattled terms...rais[ing] aporia to the truth of essence.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, rather than claim that one aspect of a binary provides the truth of the other, “lesser” side, the philosophies of difference posit the conflict of the terms itself—i.e., the very process of differentiation—as fundamental. The philosophers of Difference are defined, in Laruelle’s eyes, by their commitment to the primacy of contradiction, demarcation, and disunity. While these philosophers regarded as indefensible the claim that a stable, unitary metaphysical substratum or identity—such as God or Substance—underwrites the diversity of experience, they felt it was acceptable to assert that a dynamic, non-fixable interplay of differences could constitute a universal condition. *Aporia*, undecideability, *differenz*, *différance*, deferral, eternal recurrence, the plane of immanence, the double bind, the body without organs...these are examples of decisional terms the philosophies of Difference invoke in order to explain how our experiences of reality are structured, and to safeguard philosophy’s privilege of ascertaining the thresholds of thought. As Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic explain, “These supposedly self-critical philosophies are in fact insidious exaltations of philosophy’s power to know its own limitations and to preemptively incorporate all forms of extra-philosophical thought.”<sup>35</sup> The philosophies of Difference still naively presume that the fundamental states of reality are graspable, conceptualizable, *philosophizable*. By subsuming the clash of opposed binary terms within the rubric of Difference, they incorporate that which is supposed to be outside of philosophy, the unthinkable itself, into philosophy, capturing it like wind in a jar.

Laruelle is careful to specify that, although all are decisional in a similar manner, the philosophies of Difference are far from homogenous. The work of Jacques Derrida, in particular, constitutes a special case for Laruelle, who calls him “the thinker who carries philosophical decision to the limit of aporetic dislocation, and who yet, through a virtuosity of the endangered tightrope-walker, undertakes to seize decision again one last time

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34 Ibid., 8.

35 Gariel Alkon and Boris Gunjević, “Introduction,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*, 1.

and to maintain its possibility and truth, refusing to take the final step.”<sup>36</sup> To his credit, Derrida acknowledges the fundamental limitations of philosophical inquiry, emphasizing its irremediable disunity, inconsistency, and deconstructibility. By making visible the undecideability and overdetermination that undermine the coherence of all philosophical assertions and unravel the consistency of all philosophemes, he also, in a sense, suspends the sufficiency of philosophical decisions. However, Laruelle cautions, these virtues do not entail that Derrida is not also, in his own way, complicit with decision. While Derrida “avows” philosophy’s “primitive incapacity to assure its real and rigorous unity with itself,” he nevertheless remains locked in a kind of death grip with decisional metaphysics, and accordingly “refuses to unknot... decision and conserves it despite everything as aporia.”<sup>37</sup> Although he has done more than perhaps anyone else to undercut the presumed sovereignty and self-sufficiency of philosophical discourse, Derrida is simply unwilling to let go of philosophy—which is also to say, unwilling to give up decision. This unwillingness prevents deconstruction from ever fully subduing the persistent violence of logocentrism, instead ossifying it in the form of, to borrow Laruelle’s provocative phrase, an “unlimited or continued logocentric dictatorship, built upon the continuous ruin of its most immediate forms.”<sup>38</sup> To Laruelle, Derrida demonstrates not only that philosophical decisions are inconsistent, incoherent, and deconstructible, but also that they are, in a sense, everlasting, indomitable, and inveterate. Deconstruction helps to preserve the reign of logocentric decisions by allowing them to persist in spite of their contingency and incoherence. Put differently, it permits logocentric philosophies to survive, provided that they make available the implements of their own demotion and debasement.

At this juncture, it is worth taking a step back from Laruelle’s critique of Derrida’s philosophical practice in order to reflect upon the methodology that informs his rendering of Derrida. It should be immediately apparent that Laruelle’s critique of what he refers to as “Deconstruction”—conspicuously spelled with a capital “d”—does an injury to Derrida’s thought without being merely thoughtless. Simply by discussing Derrida’s work as though it were homogenous, as though it could be captured by the singular term “Deconstruc-

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36 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 104.

37 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 104.

38 *Ibid.*, 132.

tion,” Laruelle transforms it into something directly contrary to Derrida’s intentions—i.e., an ideology that can be made fully present, a unitary system of thought. Deconstruction is *not* a consistent method or process, identical in all circumstances: one cannot speak of deconstruction in general, as though it had a single essence, without disfiguring it. As Laruelle notes in “Deconstruction and Non-Philosophy,” he responds to an “image” of Derrida’s philosophical practice, “one that allows for an easy comparison with Non-philosophy,” not the practice itself. Laruelle *fictionalizes* Derrida’s work in this way out of necessity. It is only by treating deconstruction as something unitary and totalizable that Laruelle is able to question the unstated conditions that make any occurrence of deconstruction possible. The work of fictionalization is justifiable, Laruelle holds, because all philosophical assertions and decisions take on the appearance of convenient fictions when their validity is put into question and they are examined from the perspective of the unphilosophizable. Casting his own theory against that of the thinker who informed him most, Laruelle disfigures Derrida in order to raise the heretical possibility that, *perhaps*, the global susceptibility of any given ideology, metaphysics, or text to displacement and deconstruction is itself a kind of universality—one decisional in nature. Non-philosophy can be regarded as the mature offspring of this wager.

In Laruelle’s analysis, Derrida preserves decision, and thus metaphysics, through the invocation of a notion of radical alterity that emerges out of Judaic philosophy, which proposes the transcendental primacy of radical discontinuity, separation, and scission.<sup>39</sup> Deconstruction unifies existence in a decisional manner via *disjunction*, positing aporia and contradiction, rather than consistency and coherence, as the fundamental syntactical structures that (dis)organize our empirical experiences and metaphysical conjectures. For Derrida, each and every ostensibly self-sufficient presence or totality is belied by an immanent *différance* that renders the apparent wholeness or consistency of the given term impossible or undecideable—which is also to say that subjects and concepts are irremediably different from and other than themselves. Although the precise character of this *différance* and the means by which it is made visible are particular to each specific context, the general

39 In Laruelle’s view, this mode of alterity represents a departure from the fundamental oppositions of Greek philosophy—of which Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Deleuze are the heirs, he claims—oppositions that include the singular and the many, the self and the other, the same and the different, and the synthesis or mixture of these terms.

process of impossibilization can be applied universally. As a consequence, Laruelle argues, “even if Deconstruction does not reform a closed and finite whole, it becomes an infinite whole, broken *and* infinite. This adjunction reforms a structure of ‘sameness,’ if not of identity.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, even though its characteristic procedure is to dissolve that which postures as total, *Derrida’s philosophical practice constitutes and constructs a kind of totality*. By refusing to allow binary oppositions to synthesize under any circumstances, the “absolute process”<sup>41</sup> of Deconstruction not only projects the continual reiteration, reinscription, and reconstruction of that which it inverts, displaces, and holds apart, it also assumes the infinite applicability of its own devices. This is only possible, Laruelle claims, if Deconstruction is predicated upon the existence of some positive identity, an ideal continuum of discontinuity and scission, one which he calls—in an unmistakable allusion to Deleuze’s plane of consistency—a “plane of dehiscence.”<sup>42</sup> Amalgamating the infinite multitude of local alterities or “traces” into a single, transcendental constellation via what Laruelle calls “the univocity of the system-of-the-other,”<sup>43</sup> this plane plays the same role as any other decisional postulation: it describes all experiences and concepts as being fundamentally constituted by the same rubric, in this case, the separation of contraries, *différance*. Incidents of deconstruction are impelled and legitimated, Laruelle claims, by the presumption of this originary, absolute rupture or intrinsic difference, comprised of the relation between two terms that are disjoined, non-related. Insofar as all texts are arranged and dismantled—constructed and deconstructed—by and through some particular iteration of this radical alterity, all are equivalently impressed upon the transcendental plane of dehiscence. What this means is that, despite Derrida’s protestations to the contrary, *différance* is a mode of Difference: the same decisional invariant that Laruelle suggests is employed by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Deleuze. Deconstruction is thus not the undoing of metaphysics, but rather its fullest—*qua* maximally supple, accommodating, and explanatory—realization, the most rigorous and bare articulation of decision yet conceived.<sup>44</sup> As Laruelle states:

40 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 122.

41 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 114.

42 *Ibid.*, 122.

43 *Ibid.*, 145.

44 I suggest that the “Radical Atheist” interpretation of Derrida’s work recently proposed by Martin Hägglund, which advocates the structural primacy of the trace, strengthens

The deconstruction of metaphysics is the ‘truth’ of metaphysics, the magnification and radicalization of what there is of the definitively insubstantial, unreal, purely fictional and indeed hallucinatory unity within philosophy in general... *the self-dislocation of philosophical decision is at the same time its becoming unitary, its self-ensnarement, its intrinsic self-inhibition—its paralysis.*<sup>45</sup>

Deconstruction’s emergence marks philosophy’s greatest humbling; it is the moment at which philosophy finally relinquishes any pretension it may once have had of being able to affix meaning to a unitary metaphysics of presence, which is exclusively given in all of its plenitude to the philosophical subject. At the same time, it also, in a way, signals philosophy’s maximal self-aggrandizement, wherein the discipline trumpets its own unreality and insufficiency, and yet still declares itself to be the arbiter of its own finitude: philosophy at last gives itself absolute truth, a truth which is both infinite and broken. For Laruelle, Deconstruction is to be commended for its nuanced disentanglement of logocentrism in all of its forms, but it is to be lauded chiefly for the “final step” that it gestures toward: namely, a way out of the decisional cage of philosophy itself.

*Toward Non-Philosophy: the One, the vision-in-One, and Unilateral Duality*

Although Deconstruction and the philosophies of Difference awaken philosophy from its logocentric slumber, they leave it still captivated within the reveries of decision and all of its attendant drawbacks—circularity, anthropocentrism, authoritarianism, and narcissism. Inasmuch as it continues to cling to the fantasy that it alone is capable of deciphering and co-determining the real, philosophy has hardly improved since the time of Plato. “I posit the equivalence of all philosophical decisions,” Laruelle tells Derrida, in a famous 1988 conversation between the two, “there is not a principle of choice between a classical type of ontology and the deconstruction of that ontology. There Laruelle’s argument. Häggglund’s claim, that Derrida’s corpus illustrates the conditioning effects of the constitution of time upon all concepts, experiences, and texts resonates with Laruelle’s assertion that a plane of dehiscence underwrites Deconstruction. The overarching structure of the trace, which Häggglund claims organizes all things via deferral and non-contemporaneity, amounts to another name for the plane identified by Laruelle. See, Martin Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

45 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 105.

is no reason to choose one rather than the other.”<sup>46</sup> From the perspective of the real itself—which, in Laruelle’s view, is indifferent toward all attempts at ensnarement and reification, and, in a certain sense, *is* this indifference—all decisions are equally contingent, equally circular, and equally violent. Against philosophy’s insistent attempts to establish the limits of thought, to delineate the boundaries of the knowable, and to ascertain the transcendental ground-work of cognition, Laruelle dares to ask the heretical question: “[D]o we still need a horizon?”<sup>47</sup> Although it has historically been the case that all varieties of philosophy seem to articulate some form of decision,<sup>48</sup> might it be possible to engage in a kind of theoretical practice that does not presume that thinking has a knowable underpinning? Non-philosophy is Laruelle’s term for just such a mode of thought. The prefix “non-” in this term functions not as a negation—it is not “anti-philosophy”—but rather as a generalization. As John Mullarkey explains, the “‘non-’ in non-philosophy should be taken in terms similar to the meaning of the ‘non-’ in ‘non-Euclidean,’ being part of a ‘mutation’ that locates philosophy as one instance in a larger set of theoretical forms.”<sup>49</sup> By suspending the sufficiency of decision—by refusing the presumption that philosophical discourse is a reciprocal correlate of the real—non-philosophy recasts philosophy as just one way of interpreting the real, not as an object-less master knowledge capable of ruling over all other disciplines. Another way to conceptualize non-philosophy is to think of it as a non-decisional use of philosophical material—viz. a “democratic” approach

46 Laruelle, “Controversy,” 83.

47 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, xix. Cf. Derrida’s effort to problematize philosophy’s attempts to give itself its own name, set its own limits, and determine its own other in “Tympan,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

48 It must be noted that, although it is certainly Laruelle’s position that all philosophy partakes of decision, it is questionable whether this is actually the case. Not only does Laruelle fail to take stock of non-European philosophies which can only uneasily be labeled decisional—such as the pragmatism of W.V.O. Quine or the Chan Buddhism of a thinker like Dajian Huineng—he also presumes that philosophy has a general structure that is somehow distinguishable from the multitude of particular philosophies. As Brassier notes, “Far from unmasking philosophy’s totalitarian propensities, the assertion that the contingent collection of texts and practices called ‘philosophy’ instantiates an auto-affecting whole... actually reiterates the Hegelian idolatry of philosophy which Laruelle claims to subvert.” Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 134.

49 John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 138.

to thought that refuses to consider itself either superior to the objects of its analysis or at parity with the real that provides the basis for its operations. Non-philosophy is the product of a non-reciprocal relationship with the real. The crucial “discovery” that makes this new approach to and use of philosophy possible is what Laruelle calls “the One.” This term is potentially misleading, and warrants some explanation. In origin, the One is a Neo-Platonic concept, which refers to a speculative transcendental unity supposed to preside over the visible and intelligible realms, determining them through emanation. In a move that prefigures non-philosophy’s dramatic reconfiguration of philosophical material, Laruelle saps this term of its transcendental, paleonymically disfiguring it almost to the point of unrecognizability. In his usage, the One functions as another name for the real,<sup>50</sup> for reality as it exists apart from our intellection of it, which is also to say insofar as it is “non-determinable by thought and language.”<sup>51</sup> The One can be thought of as a real without being, as an infinitely inclusive universe that is not some ontological or meta-ontological totality, a sum of atomic entities, or an immense assemblage of relations. Unlike the One of Plotinus, which is decidedly transcendental,<sup>52</sup> the One of non-philosophy is radical immanence itself, an immanence that allows for no trace of transcendence whatsoever. The immanence of the One “is not thinkable on the terrain of transcendence (ecstasy, scission, nothingness, objectivation, alterity, alienation, *meta* or *epekeina*).”<sup>53</sup> It is not immanent “in” or “to” anything other than itself, comprising an “immanence (to) itself without constituting a point or a plane; without withdrawing or folding back upon itself.”<sup>54</sup> In order to emphasize its radical immanence to itself, and to highlight its radical autonomy from and indifference to philosophical (tran-

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50 “The One” is an example of what Laruelle calls a “first name” for the real. It is non-conceptual—which is also to say, non-transcendental and non-decisional—symbolization or adequation of radical immanence. First names can be understood as philosophical concepts that have been emptied of transcendence and deprived of the decisional aspiration to capture the real. In their non-philosophical usage, first names are axioms, which are considered to be identical with the real in the last instance.

51 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 28.

52 Plotinus describes the One, in no uncertain terms, as a “transcendental unity,” the “All-transcending,” which exists “apart from all things.” Plotinus, *On the One and Good: Being the Treatises of the Sixth Ennead*, trans. Stephen Mackenna (Boston: Charles T. Branford, 1960), 155, 252, 143.

53 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 28.

54 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 28.

scendental) attempts to capture it, Laruelle often refers to it as the “One-in-One.”<sup>55</sup> In crucial contradistinction to the One of Neo-Platonism, which is unitary<sup>56</sup> and ineffable,<sup>57</sup> the One-in-One of Laruelle is non-consistent and infinitely effable.<sup>58</sup> In other words, it is both undifferentiated—in stark contrast to the absolute differentiation of Deleuze’s plane of consistency—and ceaselessly realizable. To borrow Timothy Morton’s description of the universe of objects that underwrites Object Oriented Ontology, the One is “an infinite non-totalizable reality of unique objects, a reality that is infinitely rich and playful, enchanting [and]...rippling with illusion and strangeness.”<sup>59</sup> The One has no positive identity of its own; it is not another name for the in-itself. “This non-consistency entails that the One is indifferent to or tolerant of any material, any particular doctrinal content whatsoever,” Laruelle explains, “although it has no need of them [language, thought, or philosophy], it is able to manifest them or bring them forth according to its own particular modality (*if* they present themselves).”<sup>60</sup> Given that it is radically immanent, and thus has no real “outside,” the One accommodates anything and everything that exists, has existed, or will ever exist, even if it is not reducible to the totality of possible objects. Yet, unlike the One of Plotinus, which produces the existence all things via the sufficient causality of emanation,<sup>61</sup> the One of Laruelle “in no way produces philosophy or the world.”<sup>62</sup> It is not the source of thoughts or beings, nor that which gives thoughts or beings, rather it is the already-extant, immanent identity of whatever should materialize—in other words, it

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55 François Laruelle, “The Transcendental Method,” 198.

56 “It is inevitably necessary to think of all as contained within one nature... all must be mutually present within a unity.” Plotinus, 144.

57 The One, Plotinus explains, harbors within itself “a wonderful, an ineffable beauty.” Plotinus, *On the One and Good*, 145.

58 As Laruelle explains, “it is devoid of ontological, linguistic, and worldly consistency. It is without-being and without-essence, without-language and without-thought, even though it is said to be thus with the help of being language and thought.” Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 30.

59 Timothy Morton, “Like an Illusion,” *Realist Magic* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2013), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/13106496> (accessed July 29, 2013).

60 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 30.

61 As Plotinus explains, the One “has produced Intellectual-Principle, it has produced Life, the souls which Intellectual-Principle sends forth and everything else that partakes of Reason, of Intellectual-Principle or of Life.” Plotinus, *On the One and Good*, 190.

62 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 30.

“does not give, it is the given.”<sup>63</sup> This is an important distinction, since if the One were to determine objects in existence sufficiently, it would function as a transcendental relative to them—as opposed to as radical immanence—and would consequently operate at a meta-level aspired to, or “graspable” by, decision. Significantly, the One exerts a non-reciprocal, unilateral causality that functions as a “necessary but non-sufficient condition,” or “a ‘negative’ condition or condition *sine qua non*”<sup>64</sup> for whatever material non-philosophy takes as its object. Laruelle refers to this causality as “determination-in-the-last-instance.”<sup>65</sup>

As a consequence of its radical immanence, the One cannot be proven or deduced, since to do so would require the assumption of a transcendental perspective with respect to it. Since the One admits of no transcendental perspective, it can only be posited *axiomatically*; it can only be presupposed as already given. What this means is that non-philosophy and all of its tenets are the fruit of a powerful “as if” statement, one to the effect of, “let us proceed as if the real is radical immanence itself and unfold the consequences of this hypothesis for thought.” Whereas decisional philosophy purports to deduce and determine the conditions of the real, and to render it reliant upon philosophical speculation in the process, non-philosophy refuses to assume that the real discloses itself to either thought or language. Non-philosophy is thus predicated upon a kind of leap of faith, a dive into unknown and unknowable terrain. The non-philosophical use of axioms is not a sign of weakness but of consistency, insofar as it proceeds from the realization that the real is neither dependent upon nor given to thought. The use of axioms becomes necessary as soon as the legitimacy of the principle of sufficient philosophy is put into question: if we acknowledge that not all things are philosophizable, that not everything can be grasped by the mind or guaranteed by symbols, we are obliged to admit that some things we say and think do not and cannot have a secure basis. What axioms allow for is the possibility that thought and language are capable of *adequating* the real, even if they do not co-determine, constitute, or engage with it reciprocally. I suggest that the very notion of radical immanence actually substantiates this possibility of adequation: although a radically immanent real may not be correlated with thought, it cannot be absolutely removed

63 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 29.

64 François Laruelle, “Determination-in-the-Last-Instance,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*, trans Taylor Adkins (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 170.

65 Laruelle, “Determination-in-the-Last-Instance,” 170.

from lived experience. If it were, it would be transcendental *a propos* lived experience, and thus no longer be radically immanent. In other words, if the One is radically immanent and utterly inclusive, accommodating not a shred of transcendental, thoughts are always already within it—even if they are posited axiomatically. While it is out of the question to think *about* the One, let alone articulate a decision that expresses its fundamental essence, it is still possible, in Laruelle’s view, to think *according to it*. Non-philosophy is just this practice of thought according to the One.<sup>66</sup> When it aligns itself with the One and thinks according to it, non-philosophical thought becomes what Laruelle calls the “vision-in-One,”<sup>67</sup> a manner of seeing whatever objects or situations appear—which may or may not include philosophical material—from the viewpoint of the non-objectifiable, non-reciprocal, radically immanent real.<sup>68</sup> The vision-in-One is the starting point for all non-decisional thought; it is a lingering with and within the One, a participation in its radical immanence. Inverting philosophy’s characteristic gesture of “proceed[ing] from the transcendental to the real,” non-philosophy employs the vantage accorded by the vision-in-One to move “from the real [the One] to the transcendental (and from the latter to the a priori).”<sup>69</sup> If philosophy—and its attendant decisional structure and transcendental form—should manifest itself, the vision-in-One is able to make visible its real identity in-the-last-instance<sup>70</sup> with the One (or, as Laruelle would more accurately say, in-One).

Laruelle makes clear that the One is not a substitute for philosophical

66 The peculiarity of Laruelle’s writing—which is rife with neologisms, prefixes (non-), modifiers (e.g., without-), hyphens, and brackets—can be explained as an attempt to register the effects of the One within his prose. Laruelle’s style emphasizes the retreat of the One from language and thought.

67 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 28.

68 Mullarkey suggests that we should understand the vision-in-One as “a necessarily situated glimpse, each variant or mutant of which bringing along its own logic.” John Mullarkey, “The Non-Consistency of Non-Philosophical Practice,” *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 2012), 157.

69 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 34.

70 Identity in-the-last-instance is a way of describing the relationship that exists between the real and the material of non-philosophy. Insofar as the latter, should it materialize, is already given by and already inherent within the real, from the vantage of the real—and, thus, of the vision-in-One—there is no differentiation between the two. It is only the material of the real, not the real itself, that regards the two as separate from one another. Identity in-the-last-instance is an effect of the particular mode of causality exercised by the real—i.e., unilateralization or determination-in-the-last-instance.

decision, nor is it a conjecture of a transcendental “something” beyond decision: its use by non-philosophy is “not a question of pursuing the same old game, of proceeding through substitution and proposing the question of the One in place of the question of Being, and in the same place.”<sup>71</sup> As a consequence, non-philosophy is not revolutionary with respect to philosophy, but rather *heretical*. The One is not *above* philosophy or *opposed* to philosophy, rather it exists in a unilateral duality *with* philosophy. The One and philosophy exist not in a dyadic, oppositional relationship, but rather in a *one-sided binary*, which Brassier describes as “a structure comprising non-relation...and the relation of relation and non-relation.”<sup>72</sup> Laruelle refers to this unique, dual relation as “[a] duality which is an identity, but an identity which is not a synthesis.”<sup>73</sup> What this means is that the two terms contained within the unilateral duality are, in a certain sense, *identical* (in-the-last-instance), insofar as the latter term (philosophy) is already inherent within the former. This is why it is possible to claim that it is a binary with only one side. From the perspective of the *unilateralizing* term in this association (the One and the vision-in-One), *there is no real distinction or relation between the two terms*. The One is utterly indifferent to any apparent demarcation or splitting of its unbroken radical immanence. It is only from the perspective of the *unilateralized* term (decisional philosophy) that any differentiation has taken place. This is what Brassier means when he calls it a “structure of non-relation and the relation of relation and non-relation.” It is important to note that the One does not generate philosophical oppositions; it is not the wellspring of philosophy. Rather, the One is the radically immanent identity of philosophical materials, should they appear.

Non-philosophy’s unilateralization of philosophy—or, to put it another way, its determination-in-the-last-instance of philosophy<sup>74</sup>—irreversibly obstructs the latter’s ceaseless attempts to resolve binary oppositions via dialectical synthesis or transcendental decision. It prevents philosophy from

71 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, xviii-xix.

72 Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy,” 27.

73 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 30.

74 Determination-in-the-last-instance and unilateralization are, more or less, interchangeable terms. Both refer to the One’s unique mode of causality, which is non-reciprocal (and thus, unidirectional), radically immanent, and non-sufficient. Determination-in-the-last-instance is, at times, a more useful phrase, insofar as it helps to index and clarify the peculiar form of identity that exists between the One which unilateralizes and that which is unilateralized—i.e., an identity only in the last instance, which is constituted by the unilateralized term’s already extant inherence in the real.

according itself a position of privilege or reciprocity *vis-à-vis* the real, which is fundamentally foreclosed to philosophical speculation. In other words, it reduces all philosophical claims to the status of thought experiments, positing an inviolable degree of separation between thought and its object. Within the unilateral duality of the One and philosophy, the One/real is characterized by an absolute autonomy, being determined in no way whatsoever by philosophy or anything else. Despite its being foreclosed to the One, philosophy nevertheless retains a *relative autonomy*—as opposed to the absolute autonomy it craves and pretends to—insofar as it is permitted to establish whatever conventions it will, decisional or otherwise, for its own practices, mechanisms, and structures. Philosophy retains authority over its internal organization, but it is no longer able to extend this authority into other realms. As the One does not sufficiently cause *anything* to come into being, philosophy is regarded as the *occasional cause* of the vision-in-One—in other words, as the *catalyst* for the non-philosophical use of the One. Philosophy’s retention of relative autonomy is critical, in that it explains why non-philosophy is not a negation or delimitation of philosophy. As Laruelle explains:

Real immanence neither absorbs nor annihilates transcendence, it is not opposed to it, but is capable of ‘receiving’ it and of determining it as a relative autonomy. Real immanence is so radical...that it does not reduce the transcendence of the World—whether philosophically or phenomenologically—it does not deny or limit it, but, on the contrary, gives it—albeit in accordance with its own modality: as that being-given-without-giveness of transcendence which...acquires a relative autonomy with regard to the Real.<sup>75</sup>

The One’s radical immanence is limitlessly inclusive and accommodating. It is able to “receive” whatever mode of transcendence is decided upon by a given instance of philosophy, without itself becoming transcendental in any way. Once again, this is because the One is indifferent to its interpretation and demarcation by philosophy: from its perspective, the transcendental elements of philosophy are just other terms for immanence. Anything that appears is understood to be already inherent within the Real—in other words, to be “in-One.” In its receptiveness to and accommodation of all manner of philosophical decisions, the effect of the One is thus extremely subtle, almost

75 Brassier, “Alien Theory.”

to the point of innocuousness. However, in its delimitation of philosophy's power to dictate and determine the shape and quality of reality, its impact is radical. The constructed totalities, the Worlds, that philosophers make of the universe live on, but in a substantially different form than the thinkers intend.

The radical immanence brought to bear upon philosophy by non-philosophy does not in any appreciable way deform philosophical practice, it instead only exposes the latter's decisional hallucinations *as* hallucinations. When regarded from the vantage of the vision-in-One, any given philosophical decision can be seen for what it really is: to borrow the words of Mullarkey and Smith, "[as] neither the right or wrong *representation* of reality, but a material *part* of the Real."<sup>76</sup> Philosophy is a "part of the Real," insofar as its claims and inventions are always already contained within, and given by, the One. The One yields the internal consistency of individual philosophies, but it does not generate it. As a result, philosophy is not rendered useless by the postulations of non-philosophy. Rather, the chief effect of the vision-in-One upon philosophy is to short-circuit its presumption to sovereignty over all things. As Mullarkey and Smith note, insofar as "there is no explaining the Real, every thought is as good or bad... as any other—for they are *all* (non-summative) material parts."<sup>77</sup> Philosophy consequently remains as valuable as any other kind of knowledge. In a sense, it is only through the lens of non-philosophy that philosophy actually performs the mandate outlined for it in the *Theaetetus*: the axiomatic postulation of the One frames philosophy as the outgrowth of wonderment at the real that Socrates suggests it is. The Worlds that philosophers make of reality are not destroyed, but rather shown to be fictional, imaginary. Non-philosophy permits philosophy to become a practice of marveling, not mastery, construing in it a new fashion of wonder-without-domination, a knowledge-without-superiority.

*The Arrival of the Stranger: Man-in-Person and Non-Philosophical Practice*

One of the most significant consequences of non-philosophy's evacuation of philosophical domination is that it precipitates a reconfiguration of

76 John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, "Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle's Knowledge Without Domination," *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1.

77 John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, "Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle's Knowledge Without Domination," *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 3.

the relationship between philosophy and the subjects who make use of philosophy. Laruelle suggests that perhaps the most pernicious effect of philosophical decision is its violent subjugation of human beings. Although decision is anthropocentric—inasmuch as it is predicated upon the dream that human language and thought are elementally correlated with or fitted to the real—it is also profoundly *anti-human*, in that it considers humans to be ultimately subject to the transcendental postulations of philosophy. Forcing people to become components of the Worlds that it creates, decision invariably conceives of humans in essentialist philosophical terms, describing their identities in ways that are ultimately dependent upon and subordinate to its own trappings. Like a deceptive lawyer, decision tricks human subjects into adopting philosophical judgments about themselves, convincing them to conceptualize the human as a rational animal, a being-for-itself, a being-in-the-world, etc.—each of which constitutes a philosophically determinable essence. For decisional philosophy, Laruelle claims, “man [sic]... [is] a denatured animal one must re-establish or to which one must re-attach new chains.”<sup>78</sup> In order to liberate humanity from the shackles placed upon it by philosophical decision, Laruelle once again invokes the radical immanence of the real, symbolizing this immanence through the first name “Man-in-person [sic].”<sup>79</sup> This name is meant to index the primacy of humans’ identity in-the-last-instance with the One over the multitude of reifications of human essence advanced by decision.<sup>80</sup> The modifier “in-person” emphasizes that the real is not removed from or transcendental to lived experience, but is rather “in the flesh,”<sup>81</sup> so to speak, insofar as all people are always already in-One, inborn within radical immanence. When human subjects understand themselves in this way, as be-

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78 Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia and the End Times of Philosophy*, 3.

79 Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia, and the End Times of Philosophy*, 6.

80 Brassier persuasively points out that there is a significant problem with symbolizing the real with the first name “Man-in-person”: namely, that it threatens to reinscribe the privileged status of human beings with respect to the real that philosophy presumes via decision. “Laruelle’s insistence on identifying the unobjectifiable immanence of the real with ‘the human’ surreptitiously re-ontologizes it,” Brassier observes. “For while it may be perfectly coherent to claim, as Laruelle does, that I am identical-in-the-last-instance with radical immanence, or that I think in accordance with the real and that my thinking is determined-in-the-last-instance by it, it does not follow from this that I am the real qua One.” Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 136.

81 François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), vii.

ings identical in-the-last-instance to the real, they cease to be components of the World and instead become what Laruelle calls “Strangers,”<sup>82</sup> the subjects of non-philosophy.

Laruelle refers to the subject who extricates herself from decision according to the vision-in-One as “Stranger” in order to index her estrangement from the World constructed by philosophy. The Stranger is “strange” in that it is absolutely ordinary, generic, anonymous—in other words, non-determinable by philosophical or ideological language. Constituted as an effectuation and agent of the vision-in-One, the Stranger exists in a state of permanent “struggle”<sup>83</sup> with this World, with decision. The struggle of the Stranger is part and parcel of the unilateralization of philosophy by the One. While philosophy incessantly tries to encompass all things, including the Stranger, within itself, the Stranger faithfully upholds the indifference of the real, and her own identity within this indifference. The Stranger’s struggle consists of a refusal to be subordinated to or subsumed within philosophical categories, as well as a steadfast maintaining of anonymity. Unlike a philosophical subject, the Stranger does not presume to possess a privileged position *vis-à-vis* the real: she can know it no more than anyone else. Indeed, the Stranger subject of non-philosophy does not even face toward the real: as a consequence of the One’s unilateralizing causation, the Stranger irremediably gazes unidirectionally toward the World and the philosophical material that occasions it. In other words, the Stranger is defined less by its way of relating to the Real, and more by its manner of seeing philosophical texts, ideas, and objects otherwise. The Stranger approaches philosophical material like an archaeologist who unearths the artifacts of an ancient scientist: she treats this material with care and generosity, discerning much of value within, but she does not presume that the material provides an accurate or privileged account of the world. Aligning herself with the vision-in-One, the Stranger instead treats philosophical material as the unilateralized effect of radical immanence by employing a method that Laruelle describes as a practice of “cloning”<sup>84</sup> or “dualysis,”<sup>85</sup> and that Brassier calls “Laruelle’s Razor.”<sup>86</sup>

82 François Laruelle, *Future Christ*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (New York: Continuum, 2011), 41.

83 Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia, and the End Times of Philosophy*, 15.

84 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 32.

85 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 26.

86 Brassier, “Alien Theory,” 111.

In a sense, the Stranger is indistinguishable from the implementation of this method.

Even though they refer to the same method, each of the names bestowed upon non-philosophical practice emphasize a different aspect of its treatment of philosophical material. The term “cloning” emphasizes that philosophical material is identical in-the-last-instance with a real that is radically autonomous with respect to it, and that this identity does not constitute a sameness. That a “clone” is identical to that which it is cloned from neither means that it is the “same” as its prototype, nor that it has any relationship with its predecessor whatsoever. When the Stranger “clones” the One on the basis of a particular instance of philosophical material, she shows the transcendental component of philosophical decision to be identical in-the-last-instance with the real, and causes the real to assume a transcendental function *a propos* philosophy. Although the One is unaffected by this cloning, philosophical decision is irrevocably altered. Via cloning (the effectuation of the radical autonomy of the One by the Stranger subject), decision is deprived of its pretension to be able determine the real and to synthesize the empirical and the *a priori*. By combining and undercutting the concepts of “analysis” and “duality,” the term “dualysis” alludes to the new manner in which the non-philosophical unilateralization of decision construes philosophical binaries of the empirical and the *a priori*. Whereas philosophy invariably regards such binaries as oppositional, and consequently posits a third, decisional term in order to provide the truth of this opposition, non-philosophy reinterprets them as being without conflict and without synthesis. “Laruelle’s razor,” to borrow Brassier’s term, accomplishes this reinterpretation by cutting open the “mixture of empirical immanence, *a priori* transcendence and transcendental immanence”<sup>87</sup> that characterizes decisional philosophy.

Through the unilateralization of decision, the non-philosophical subject suspends the correlation that philosophy claims exists between empirical experience and the supposed *a priori* conditions thereof. In the process, it transforms a relatively immanent, empirical term in a philosophical binary—the immanence of which is contaminated by its being sutured to the transcendence of the philosophical *a priori*—into a radical contingency called “the (non-)One.”<sup>88</sup> The “One” in this term signifies its identity in-the-last-in-

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87 Brassier, “Alien Theory,” 116.

88 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 199.

stance to the real, while the “(non-)” references its philosophically occasioned “mutation”<sup>89</sup> of the real’s radical immanence, which remains foreclosed to philosophy. In a similar manner, the Stranger uses unilateralization to expose the *a priori* component of a philosophical dyad as a fantasy of transcendence precipitated by the indifference of the One toward philosophical thought. After its supposed correlation with the real is dissolved by the vision-in-One, this fantasy becomes recognizable as what Laruelle calls “non-thetic transcendence.”<sup>90</sup> Non-thetic transcendence, Laruelle explains, “supposes the simple ‘support’ or vehicle of [the empirical] given without forming...with it any philosophical decision, since it forms rather the condition of philosophical decision as such.”<sup>91</sup> Unlike the transcendence of decisional philosophy, non-thetic transcendence is not presumed to be auto-positional or auto-donational. Non-thetic transcendence is instead regarded as “a mode of the special real that is the (non-)One,” it is a choice which “renders possible every ‘essential’ decision.”<sup>92</sup> Whereas the differentiation of the empirical and *a priori* is, for decisional philosophy, the first step toward articulating the essential structure of reality, for non-philosophy the distinction between the two is contingent, in that it has no essential connection with real, which remains utterly foreclosed. From the perspective of the Stranger, non-thetic transcendence is transcendence within philosophy and nothing else: as with everything, its real identity (in-the-last-instance) is radical immanence. As such, non-thetic transcendence is a kind of fictionalized account of philosophical transcendence, one which maintains philosophy’s power to catalyze thought, but which ultimately subordinates this power to humanity’s real identity with the One. By modifying the constituents of decision in this way, the Stranger converts any given philosophical binary into “a theorem that is—at least temporarily—philosophically uninterpretable because it cannot be dyadically circumscribed or ‘decided.’”<sup>93</sup> As a result of non-philosophy’s interruption of its capacity to interpret and determine the real, philosophy is compelled to acknowledge its own shortcomings, reinvent itself, and discover new, more inclusive modes of decision. Non-philosophy helps us to regard the worlds projected by philoso-

89 Anthony Paul Smith, “The Philosopher and the Heretic: Translator’s Introduction,” *Future Christ*, xvii.

90 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 202.

91 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 202.

92 Ibid., 203.

93 Brassier, *Alien Theory*, 31.

phy, art, and science with the eyes of an outsider and hold in suspension the inherited ideas we may possess about truth, coherence, and legitimacy.

## *Conclusion*

Laruelle's non-philosophy is the product of a rigorous attempt to construct an approach to thought that refuses to dominate its subject matter. Its significance does not have anything to do with the accuracy or "truth" of its postulations. The desire for truth is a decisional aspiration, one which non-philosophy happily does without: Laruelle freely admits that his claims are axiomatic, and thus unverifiable. His aim is not to construct accurate accounts of reality, but instead generative philo-fictions and suggestive "as if" statements that reconfigure established ways of knowing in new, unfamiliar ways. It is tempting to dismiss Laruelle's readings of other philosophers as incorrect, overly simplistic, or selective, but it is important to remember that his intention is not to get the theories of others "right." Rather, it is to help make other theories more inclusive, more generous, more democratic, and to exorcise as much as possible the traces of absolutism that continue to dog contemporary works of philosophy. Non-philosophy should not be evaluated on the basis of whether its axioms articulate a correct representation of the real, but rather on what new avenues for thought its disposition toward philosophical (and extra-philosophical) material makes possible. As Brassier explains, "although non-philosophy does not have a goal, it does have a *function*. And although it cannot be legitimated in terms of some transcendent teleological horizon, non-philosophical practice is *for* something: it is for philosophical decision."<sup>94</sup> Although Brassier's contention that non-philosophy is only useful insofar as it aids philosophy problematically reinforces the very principle of sufficient philosophy that Laruelle attempts to undermine, it indicates something of the value of non-philosophical thought. Non-philosophy is meant to raise difficult, probing questions about the hidden premises within even the most apparently inclusive theoretical frameworks. It gives itself as a tool to whatever modes of thinking will make use of it, enabling scholars and intellectuals of all disciplines to wonder: to what degree do we automatically presume that the objects of our scholarly investigations are accessible, that, with enough effort and theoretical rigor, anything we turn our minds to will eventually disclose itself to our critical gaze? What becomes possible when we

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94 Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy," 34.

put the notion that all things can be grasped into suspension?

Laruelle and his commentators—myself included—often encounter great difficulty when writing about non-philosophy. The injunction to generate self-conscious fictions, as opposed to treatises that pretend to some privileged view of reality, demands that we alter not only *what* we write, but also and especially *how* we write. The enduring influence of philosophy is such that it continues to influence the style of prose, even in attempting to write about or practice non-philosophy. As a consequence, most non-philosophical work has been and continues to be written in a philosophical register. Laruelle responds to this dilemma in his work by mutating philosophical terms, miming the style and tone of the philosophers he critiques, drawing inspiration from the sciences and putting punctuation to new uses. However, it must be acknowledged that the results of this attempt are decidedly mixed. Laruelle often writes as though he comes from another world, replete with its own foreign and radically abstract standards of truth, clarity, and beauty. His writing can have a profoundly alienating effect upon its readers, who may be led to view non-philosophy as a regressive (even reactionary) rendering of extant philosophical material, or even as a fall into obscurity.

Even if the idiosyncratic and intensely abstract methods and vocabulary of non-philosophy may seem self-indulgent—if not entirely outlandish—it is worth pondering why Laruelle feels that it is necessary to proceed in the manner that he does. Even our understanding of what constitutes “radical” scholarship is, perhaps, contaminated by the presupposition that no limit can or should ever be placed upon what thought and language are capable of grasping. Anything that elides the principle of sufficient philosophy will invariably come across as irreparably abstract. Thus, Laruelle’s use of philosophy is necessarily abstract, since its material is. Laruelle’s suggestion that thinking is not infinite, that there are some things indifferent to our speculations and dreams, is audacious to the point of heresy. This project maintains that this heretical claim is worth dwelling with.

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