



#1

WHAT THE DOING OF THINKING  
DOES AND DOESN'T DO TODAY

Chiasma: A Site For Thought Vol. 1, Issue 1: What the Doing of Thinking Does and Doesn't Do Today

ISBN: 978-0-7714-3075-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-0-7714-3076-3 (Online)

ISSN: 2292-6887 (Print)

ISSN: 2292-6925 (Online)

Copyright 2014. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, of photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Layout and cover design by M. Curtis Allen.

# CHIASMA



## CHIEF EDITOR

Alayna Jay

## DEPUTY CHIEF EDITOR

Dru Farro

## REVIEW EDITOR

Ilya Merlin

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

M. Curtis Allen

## WEB DESIGN

Lora Salloum

## DEPUTY EDITORS

M. Curtis Allen

Jeremy Colangelo

Grant Dempsey

Eric J. Guzzi

Michael Ray Laurence

Kate Lawless

Sharon Lindenburger

Robert Nonomura

Mikhail Pozdniakov

Nathan Tebokkel

Andrew Weiss

Ben Woodard

## ADVISORY BOARD

Garnet Kindervater

University of Minnesota

Călin Mihăilescu

Western University

Julia Obert

University of Wyoming

Anthony Paul Smith

La Salle University

Joseph Winters

University of North Carolina Charlotte



*Chiasma: A Site For Thought* is housed in Western  
University's Centre for the Study of Theory and  
Criticism

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction <i>Alayna Jay</i>	6
ESSAYS	
A Time For Radical Hope <i>Eileen A. Joy</i>	10
Wonder Without Domination <i>Andrew Reszitaryk</i>	24
Deconstruction and Non-Philosophy <i>François Laruelle (translated by Nicholas Hauck)</i>	54
On Dismantling the Master's House <i>Roshaya Rodness</i>	64
Music in the Monopolization of Knowledge <i>Michael Mackenzie</i>	99
Political Percontation <i>Casey Beal</i>	113
Karl Kautsky's <i>Forerunners of Modern Socialism</i> <i>Roland Boer</i>	129

## REVIEWS

James Penny, <i>After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics</i> <i>Allan Pero</i>	139
Philip Tonner, <i>Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being</i> <i>Mazen Saleh</i>	144
Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, <i>The End of San Francisco</i> <i>Matthew Halse</i>	148
Rolf Kühn, <i>Individuation et vie culturelle: Pour une phénoménologie radical dans la perspective de Michel Henry</i> <i>Vincent Marzano</i>	152
Notes on Contributors	155

## ‡ EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Chiasma: A Site for Thought* was established in September 2013 as an annual, double-blind, peer-reviewed journal to further the disruption, generation and dispersion of theory. Each year we will feature invited essays, peer-reviewed articles, and solicited reviews of books and of academic fields, from both established and emerging scholars. While housed in Western University's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, *Chiasma's* editorial board and contributors are drawn together each year from disciplines within the arts, humanities and social sciences to a common site—theory—where we pursue the breakdown and reconfiguration of what, how and why we think in theory.

The theme of our inaugural issue is “What the Doing of Thinking Does and Doesn't Do Today.” Starting from the name of hip-hop artist KRS-ONE—**K**nowledge **R**eigns **S**upreme **O**ver **N**early **E**veryone—this issue's Call for Papers asked contributors to respond to any of these three interrelated problems: Who is excepted by the “Nearly” of “Nearly Everyone,” or, what, if anything, maintains a power of sovereignty in the face of “Knowledge”? What are the political or intellectual costs of a “conflict of knowledges,” and how are technologies and the doing of thinking implicated in such conflicts? How, when, and why does or could one resist, or advance, “knowledge”?

Responding to this call, we are delighted to feature invited papers from Roland Boer and Eileen Joy, peer-reviewed articles from Andrew Reszitaryk, Roshaya Rodness, Michael Mackenzie, and Casey Beal, and a premiere English-language translation of a text by philosopher François Laruelle from Nicholas Hauck.

Eileen Joy inaugurates our issue by addressing the impact of digital

technologies on current trends in academic publication and the library as an institution in her bracing article, “A Time for Radical Hope.” After surveying the dialectic of institutionalism and anti-institutionalism in contemporary art and scholarship, and proceeding from her deep commitments to style and the utopian, Joy argues that if future publics and para-institutional spaces desire to live, with Foucault, “counter to all forms of fascism,” and, with Derrida, to embrace “the university without condition,” then they—and we—in the doing of thinking today must accept the responsibility of using the opportunities that these new technologies present to actualize the potential for freedom of thought, and to preserve the possibility *of* possibility.

Then, the three-part work of Andrew Reszitaryk, Nicholas Hauck and Roshaya Rodness on François Laruelle’s non-philosophy contributes to contemporary scholarship on the distinctions between non-philosophy and the principle of sufficient philosophy, and how the technologies of philosophy and philosophical *praxes* can be used. Andrew Reszitaryk’s “Wonder Without Domination” provides an overview of the core tenets, arguments, and terms of non-philosophy. This assists the reader in approaching the first English-language translation of Laruelle’s essay “Deconstruction and Non-Philosophy,” which appears here courtesy of Nicholas Hauck. In “On Dismantling the Master’s House,” Roshaya Rodness then completes the triptych by examining the retooling of Laruelle’s vocabulary, arguing that the relationship between theory and practice must be rethought—that the aim of mastery must be set aside for non-philosophy to be practiced.

In “Music in the Monopolization of Knowledge,” Michael Mackenzie takes up Glenn Gould’s turn from live performance to broadcast media in the context of Gould’s engagement with Marshall McLuhan’s work and the post-war top-down structuring of Canadian media. Taking three of Gould’s television programmes as case studies, Mackenzie uses Harold Innis’ and Benedict Anderson’s theories to argue that CBC Television incorporated viewers into its emerging monopoly of knowledge while working to build an imagined community, and that Gould, at the nexus of music and media, embraced his privileged and political role in the formation of the Cold War era discourse of Canadian national identity.

Casey Beal examines the significance of the form-content dichotomy and the idea of “rupture” for political theory, aesthetics, and philosophy in “Political Percontation,” responding to our questions with a series of his own.

Finally, in “Karl Kautsky’s *Forerunners of Modern Socialism*,” Roland Boer discusses Kautsky’s historical materialist work on the revolutionary (and heretical) tradition of early Christian communism. Boer argues that, in the course of his extended examination of the conflict between political and theological thinking during revolutionary times, Kautsky draws closer to Engels’ assertion that theology is a language for expressing political aspirations, while still preserving a greater distinction between politics and theology as means of thinking and knowing.

In addition to the above articles, this year’s review section includes book reviews from Allan Pero, Mazen Saleh, Matthew Halse, and Vincent Marzano. Allan Pero reviews *After Queer Theory*, arguing that the text offers a serious critique of the identity politics and emerging nihilism of academic queer theory. *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being* is reviewed by Mazen Saleh, who questions if the vocabulary of univocity and analogy is the most adequate to Heidegger’s work. Queer theory is taken up again in Halse’s review of *The End of San Francisco*, and Marzano closes the section with a review of Rolf Kühn’s French-language book on Michel Henry’s phenomenology, originally a lecture series, entitled *Individuation et vie culturelle*.

Thanks are due to the faculty of the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, especially Dr. Călin Mihăilescu, for their support of this project; to the members of our Advisory Board, for their advice and encouragement; to the invited authors, for their generosity; to the contributors, for their enthusiasm and dedication; and to the editors of this inaugural issue, for surmounting every obstacle that a conflict of faculties, knowledges, and technologies could offer on the way to publication.

Alayna Jay  
Chief Editor



# ✚ ESSAYS

# # A TIME FOR RADICAL HOPE

*Freedom, Responsibility, Publishing, and Building New Publics*<sup>0</sup>

EILEEN A. JOY

*Professional Challenges. Amateur Solutions.*  
—The Bruce High Quality Foundation

*For what may we hope? Kant put this question in the first-person singular along with two others—What can I know? What ought I to do?—that he thought essentially marked the human condition. With two centuries of philosophical reflection, it seems that these questions are best transposed to the first-person plural. And with that same hindsight, rather than attempt an a priori inquiry, I would like to consider hope as it might arise at one of the limits of human existence [such as the collapse of an entire culture]. What makes hope [in the face of such a collapse] radical is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.*

—Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*

---

<sup>0</sup> I want to thank Alexa Huang (Digital Humanities Institute), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Medieval and Early Modern Studies Institute), and Geneva Henry and Karim Boughida (Gelman Library), all at The George Washington University, for inviting me to give this talk on the state(s) and future(s) of open-access publishing at Gelman Library in November 2013. This essay represents an augmentation of that talk, which also appeared on my blog, In The Middle, November 19, 2013:

<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2013/11/a-time-for-radical-hope-freedom.html>

The Bruce High Quality Foundation<sup>1</sup> is an anonymous collective and unaccredited art school, formed in 2004 by graduates of Cooper Union art school in New York City, who wanted to “foster an alternative to everything,” especially in New York City’s rarefied art world. Bruce High Quality is their whimsically invented figure-head: a sculptor who supposedly perished, along with all of his works, in the 9/11 attacks, and whose memory and legacy the collective seeks to maintain. One of their first interventions, or acts of institutional critique, happened in 2005 when the Whitney Museum wanted to honor the legacy of the illustrator Robert Smithson by constructing an actual “floating island” based on one of his drawings, “Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island.”<sup>2</sup> The constructed island, complete with living trees, was pulled by a tugboat around New York Harbor. The Bruce High Quality Foundation responded to the event with their own performance, titled “The Gate: Not the Idea of the Thing but the Thing Itself,” in which members of the collective pursued the Smithson island in a small skiff carrying a model of one of the orange gates by Christo and Jeanne-Claude that had been displayed in Central Park earlier that year.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, they donned football gear and “tackled” public sculptures. They also produced a film in 2008 in which zombies take over the Guggenheim, and the Bruce High Quality Foundation fights them with the actual art collections (for example, decapitating the zombies with Brancusi sculptures while the art critics hide and cower in the museum’s cafeteria). In 2010, and despite the Bruce High Quality Foundation’s efforts to remain anonymous and iconoclastic, they were included in the Whitney’s 2010 Biennale.<sup>4</sup> We’ll call this the “coming full circle” narrative, from inside the institution (Cooper Union) to its radical Outside and then back in again (the Whitney).

I open with this brief anecdote about the Bruce High Quality Founda-

---

1 On the Bruce High Quality Foundation and their various public art projects, see their website here: <http://www.thebrucehighqualityfoundation.com/>.

2 See Robert Smithson, “Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island,” Robert Smithson: Earthworks [website], <http://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/floating-island.htm>.

3 See Christo and Jeanne-Claude, “The Gates,” Central Park, New York City, 1979-2005, Christo and Jeanne Claude: Artworks [website], <http://christojeanneclaude.net/projects/the-gates-.UycqKl4ge5d>.

4 See “The Bruce High Quality Foundation,” Whitney Museum of Art: Exhibitions [website], <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2010Biennial/TheBruceHighQualityFoundation>.

dition to call attention to some of the really interesting movements, events, and projects (including new galleries, schools, journals, zines, presses—a whole host of what I will call alt-cult, or “alternate-cultural” organizations) that have been founded in the past 10 or so years by students but also by post-grads without secure footholds in the academy (or museum) proper who are just deciding, with some faculty and other collaborators, to make things happen: things like the Brooklyn Institute of Social Research, the Organism for Poetic Research (in New York City), *continent.*, *Speculations* and *TAG* (three of the most exciting new multidisciplinary journals run by graduate students and post-grad adjuncts spread out around the globe), The Public School New York, the Department of Eagles in Tirana, Albania, the Confraternity of Neoflagellants (in Edinburgh, London, and Montreal), the Art School within the Art School (in Syracuse, New York), the Dublin Unit for Speculative Thought (D.U.S.T.), Silent Barn (a performance-incubation space in Brooklyn), the Leeds Weirdo Club, the Vancouver Institute of Social Research, and one of my personal favorites, The Hollow Earth Society, a group of artist-scientists based in Brooklyn who believe in the application of scientific rigor to dreams. I have been interested in these groups and projects for a long time now, especially for the ways in which they mine, from historically-invested perspectives, the interstitial spaces of institutionality and also bring into being new para-institutional spaces. These are not groups who reject the museum, the gallery, the conventional publishing world, or the university—rather, they seek to inhabit the position of the ‘para-’ (the ‘beside’), a position of intimate exteriority, or exterior intimacy.

I have personally been inspired by the energies and projects and products of these groups, while I also worry over their long-term sustainability. It may be that the ephemeral nature of such movements and group formations is perfectly all right—think of something like the anti-gallery and anti-museum Fluxus network in the 1960s and 1970s (which included figures such as John Lennon and Yoko Ono), which produced many “happenings” and important ephemeral art projects. The Fluxus network no longer really exists, but it did help to found SoHo, after all, and institutions such as The New School for Social Research also arose out of such rebellious and radically innovative alt-cult social formations.<sup>5</sup>

---

5 On this point, see Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (London: Academy Editions, 1998), Richard Kostelanetz, *Soho: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony* (New York: Rout-

At the same time, I'm keenly interested in seeing how we might create new institutions for fostering such innovative work and helping it to thrive, because I believe we need such creative provocations right now regarding what we do "in here," because I would like to provide some dose of radical hope for the youngest members of our humanistic professions and trades who are currently grasping for increasingly inhospitable space within our institutions (of higher education, of the fine arts, of the cultural industries, etc.), and because I believe, with Jonathan Lear, that hope requires courage. And courage is a collective affair—it is an action or an event that (following Aristotle) "aims at what is fine," but also "paradigmatically involves the serious risk of serious loss and of enduring certain pains,"<sup>6</sup> and yet nothing could be so necessary now within our current institutional situation. So, on one level, punctum books was founded to respond to the "siren call" of these groups, and to try to devise some sort of institutional and corporate shelter for them that would *not* impinge in any way on these groups' radical energies and creativity, which partly depend on, frankly, being anti-institutional. But let's pause to reflect as well that there is almost no act of anti-institutionality that does not also aim at a reform of the institution, and therefore also represents some sort of investment in, and even *love* for, that institution. In other words, institutional critique, and even occasional radical departures to the Outside, are forms of love *for the institution*. Take Diogenes, for example, our original Cynic. If he hated Athens so much and thought it was so corrupt, why did he set up shop in a large jar in the marketplace where he could be seen and heard haranguing the citizens of Athens all day long?

Regarding what goes on within the institution, punctum books was also founded to respond to what I hope we can agree is a sort of crisis in academic publication (with "publication" here understood not only as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of our thinking, but also as the production of actual publics, without which intellectual and cultural life cannot flourish nor be shared<sup>7</sup>). We are currently witnessing a period of unprecedented tech-

ledge, 2003), and Craig Saper, *Intimate Bureaucracies* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2012). See also Peter M. Rutkoff, *New School: A History of The New School for Social Research* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

6 Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 110–11.

7 On this point, see Paul Boshears, "Open-Access Publishing as Para-Academic Proposition: Besides OA as Labor Relation," *tripleC* 11.2 (2013): 614–19.

nological innovation (that promises substantial benefits for the production of our work, its dissemination, its analysis, and its safekeeping *as archive*, or *memory*), while we are also experiencing the rapid and austere contraction of financial and other forms of support for producing the most rigorously evaluated, closely edited, and aesthetically appealing scholarship. You don't have to search too far to find all sorts of examples of this contraction, even sometimes embedded in announcements for the most newly innovative publishing platforms.

We might survey some recent experiments by university and commercial academic presses to cultivate and produce shorter-form e-books and “gray” literature (e.g., Princeton Shorts, Stanford Briefs, University of Minnesota Press’ Forerunners, and Palgrave Pivot),<sup>8</sup> that are intended to “pull in new readers for serious scholarship,” and at a time, moreover, when “academic libraries have ever-smaller amounts of money and space to lavish on [longer] books, which often have more pages than they have readers.”<sup>9</sup> Paul Harvey, the new director of Stanford University Press, explains that these books will be “accessible but not simplified, and should be digestible in one or two sessions—bite-sized—and not require a month of reading”<sup>10</sup> (*as if that’s a bad thing*). At the same time, we are witnessing the launching of new (and frankly, exciting) academic publishing initiatives, such as Anvil Academic, a platform for “born-digital” and “born-again-digital” “post-monograph” (non-book) research that is pinning its hopes for the future of academic publishing on networked and “digital-only” environments that would “free scholarly argument from the limitations of the printed monograph and allow authors to bring the full force of technology to the presentation of their work.”<sup>11</sup> So now,

---

8 See, for example, *Princeton Shorts: Short Takes, Big Ideas*, <http://press.princeton.edu/Princeton-Shorts/>, and “‘Bite-sized’ Reading from SUP,” Stanford University: The Dish, May 17, 2012, <http://news.stanford.edu/thedish/?p=19315>. There is something delightfully silly in how the titles of both these book series conjure up images of men’s underwear, and it also reminds me that not many university presses are run by women. See also Danielle Kasprzak, “#UPweek: Announcing Forerunners,” University of Minnesota Press [weblog], November 12, 2013, <http://www.umn.pressblog.com/2013/11/upweek-announcing-forerunners.html>.

9 Jennifer Howard, “Ditch the Monograph,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, last modified October 14, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/Ditch-the-Monograph/135108/> (accessed March 24, 2014).

10 “‘Bite-sized’ Reading from SUP.”

11 See “About Anvil Academic,” Anvil Academic, <http://anvilacademic.org/about->

somehow, the monograph is a limitation (?), as opposed to a unique genre of scholarly writing that might still serve particular purposes alongside other sorts of new genres that might be activated through newer technologies.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, under pressure from the UK government and the recommendations of the Working Group on “expanding access to published research findings” (otherwise known as the Finch Report<sup>13</sup>), all faculty at UK research universities must now publish *only* in open-access platforms (and actually won’t receive credit for their work in the national research exercise unless they do). We’re thus seeing the rise of initiatives such as Open Library of Humanities (where, full disclosure, I serve on the Editorial Committee), which has decided that the so-called “bound codex,” and even the PDF, are dead, or almost-dead, and which has placed all of its bets on a PLOS (Public Library of Science)-style megajournal where we would simply upload our research to a sort of open-access cloud-like entity, but with “filters” (i.e., some

---

anvil-academic/. See also Adeline Koh’s interview with the head editor of Anvil, Fred Moody: “Digital Killed the Analog Star: An Interview with Fred Moody Anvil Academic,” ProfHacker [Chronicle of Higher Education weblog], last modified September 24, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/digital-killed-the-analog-star-an-interview-with-fred-moody-of-anvil-academic/42936> (accessed March 24, 2014). I will note here that Anvil was conceptualized and is admirably (collaboratively) managed by a consortium of institutions (such as the Council on Library and Information Resources [CLIR], the National Institute for Technology in Library Education [NITLE], and University of Michigan Library’s MPublishing office, which is also partnered with Open Humanities Press), university scholars, and academic librarians, and is partly funded by various universities with an intensive interest in the digital humanities (such as the University of Virginia, Washington University in Saint Louis, and Stanford University, among others). I must pause to note here that Anvil Academic, along with [Open Humanities Press](#), is actually my favorite digital publishing initiative, because rather than building one particular type of digital platform and asking authors to shape their work within that platform—whatever it might be—they have taken the riskier move of offering infrastructure and other types of support services that would be uniquely designed to meet the desires and needs of whatever creative and complex types of born-digital scholarship might be conceptualized by individual scholars, and I consider that incredibly progressive and exciting.

12 For an important conference held at the British Library in July 2013 on the possible futures of open-access monographs, see “Open Access Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences,” see: <http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/JISC-Collections-events/oabooks-conf/>.

13 On the Finch Report, see Alok Jha, “Open Access is the Future of Academic Publishing, Says Finch Report,” The Guardian, June 19, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/jun/19/open-access-academic-publishing-finch-report>.

sort of specialist gatekeeping), and then afterwards, we can all “aggregate” this material however we like into “overlay journals” or Mendeley-style shareable databases.<sup>14</sup> This is a groovy, almost Napster/Pandora/Spotify way to publish and share scholarship, but I worry that too much attention is being spent on how to navigate platform and coding costs, with the assumption that so-called “editing” isn’t really necessary (as long as certain experts determine what gets in and what doesn’t—this is now called, again, “filtering”), or that if it is necessary, it will remain as the service work it always has been (a system that is seriously broken in certain respects), and what falls away here is the idea that certain groups of scholars and their students—call them associations, societies, groups, fields, specialties, whathaveyou—might need specific sorts of platforms, infrastructures, modes and genres of delivery, and specific products around which certain types of communities would not only gather, but flourish and thrive, as well as produce distinctive styles of scholarship. Herein lies the critical link between publishing and publication, or the making of distinctive publics which must needs be diverse, each with their own voice, values, modes and styles of enunciation, and so on. CONFESSIOIN: I am concerned with style, especially as it is not just an adornment laid on top of content: it is, in fact, what generates content. Another way of putting this is: form matters, and a diversity of genres and forms of writing helps to guarantee a diversity of thought, without which, knowledge doesn’t accumulate. “One megajournal to rule them all” is a phrase that sometimes disturbs my sleep at night.<sup>15</sup>

Now, Open Library of Humanities, admirably, is faculty- and library-driven (indeed, OLH favors library-partnership-subsidized article processing charges over the author-pay model that PLOS uses<sup>16</sup>), so how, then, are commercial publishers in the UK responding to the open-access mandate? Palgrave recently announced Palgrave Open, which allows individual authors and

14 See Open Library of Humanities’ website here: <https://www.openlibhums.org/>. See also the Public Library of Science’s website here: <http://www.plosone.org/>.

15 To see how Open Access initiatives are shaping up within the University of California system and also at Harvard, see Jennifer Howard, “Open Access Gains Major Support in U. of California’s Systemwide Move,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2013. <http://chronicle.com/article/Open-Access-Gains-Major/140851/>, and “Harvard Open Access Project,” Berkman Center for Internet and Society, <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/hoap>.

16 See “Most Common PLOS ONE Questions,” PLOS | Blogs, <http://blogs.plos.org/everyone/authors/qa/>.



institutions to pay to have their work published in open-access form: \$2,600 + VAT for individual articles, \$12,000 + VAT for shorter-form Pivot books, and \$17,500 + VAT for monographs. That’s Gold Open-Access. (Please insert a pregnant pause here.) Or, you can go with Green Open-Access, which is a bit of a misnomer, because it means that Palgrave can keep your material locked behind various paywalls for a certain length of time (they call that an “embargo”), after which authors are allowed to place, or “self-archive,” their work in a repository at their university where it can be shared with that university’s users, but the self-archived version must be “the original pre-peer-reviewed version or the post-peer-reviewed pre-copyedited version of the manuscript.” (Please insert another pregnant pause here).<sup>17</sup> And who will pay for this? In the UK (and also in Europe)—where it has to be admitted academic research is better supported than in the US—there are research councils that will dole out money for these publication fees (and you can’t entirely blame publishers for charging them—how else are they to sustain their enterprise?), and while the pool of money is in the millions, everyone agrees that it is still not enough to fund each and every researcher’s publications, and thus we have a situation where researchers will have to compete with each other over access to publication. This feels financially untenable and, quite frankly, wrong in the extreme.

I share this admittedly woefully brief and selective overview of current trends in academic publishing initiatives simply to highlight their austerity of imagination as well as their “heavy” managerial structures.<sup>18</sup> For even

17 On Palgrave Open and its different levels of access, see “Frequently Asked Questions,” Palgrave Open [website], <https://www.palgrave.com/open/faq.asp>, and “Open Access at Palgrave Macmillan,” Palgrave Open [website], <https://www.palgrave.com/open/openaccess.asp>. On the dangers of the ways in which corporate interests are more than willing to capitalize on “open-access” platforms, see Christopher Newfield, “Corporate Open Source: Intellectual Property and the Struggle Over Value,” *Radical Philosophy* 181 (Sep/Oct 2013), <http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/corporate-open-source>.

18 I would note here that I am in deep admiration of the work of Open Humanities Press (<http://openhumanitiespress.org/>), and am especially keen on their experimental writing and publishing modes as evidenced in their Living Books About Life series (<http://www.livingbooks.aboutlife.org/>) and Liquid Books imprint (<http://liquidbooks.pbworks.com/w/page/11135951/FrontPage>), edited by Clare Birchall and Gary Hall, as well as in some of their journals, such as *Vectors* (<http://www.vectorsjournal.org/issues/index.php?issue=6>). From my vantage point, OHP has been consistent in thinking “outside the box” of traditional university and commercial academic publishing and they have published

while I applaud the *initiative* of these initiatives (I am a pluralist, after all), I also despair a little at the ways in which they are each, in their own way, also locked into certain structures (whether corporate, academic, technological, or even ideological) that determine in advance what is and isn't (supposedly) possible and what is (supposedly) necessary *now*—such that, for example, the monograph is now “out” and shorter books (or serialized e-extracts from longer works) are “in,” e-texts are more desirable (and supposedly cheaper to produce and disseminate) than traditional print media, it is necessary to shift (and even dispense with) certain publishing modes to meet the demands of currently popular text-delivery technologies (such as iPads, Kindles, and smart-phones), expert and specialist peer review of a certain traditional stripe is still necessary for “legitimacy” yet isn't well-supported, multiple layers of hierarchical and bureaucratic academic-managerial oversight still obtain while at the same time certain layers of important editorial care and curatorship drop away (due to lack of time, lack of staff, lack of money, lack of readers' attention spans, lack of space, etc.), and further, the material archive (the dream—or is a nightmare?—of Borges' Babelasian library or even Richard Feynman's 24 million library volumes etched on the head of a pin<sup>19</sup>) should simply be abandoned, and so on.

CONFESSION (#2, if you're counting): I am an unrepentant utopianist who is also a recovering medievalist. And here I want us to reflect on the fact that the relation between publication (the dissemination of our research but also the creation of publics) and what a university is, and does, is extremely important.<sup>20</sup> One of the most ancient institutions in human culture (at Alexandria in ancient Egypt, it was housed within the Institution of the

---

some of the most radical new thinking in the humanities (albeit somewhat slowly), but they cannot be viewed as completely “independent” of the university milieu from which all of their Editorial and Open-Access Board members, as well as the members of their Steering Group and Partners, hail. I simply seek a more radical, even anti-peer departure out of the academy for so-called “academic” publishing, while at the same time I support the idea of the university as one place among others where more radical publishing modes might be cultivated (as is the case with Anvil, OHP, Stanford Shorts, etc.).

19 See Richard Feynman, “There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom,” *Engineering and Science* 23.5 (February 1960): 22–36. Available here: <http://www.zyvex.com/nanotech/feynman.html>.

20 On this point, see Paul Boshears' comments in “Discussion Before an Encounter,” *continent*. 2.2 (2012): 136–47. Available here: <http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/92>.

Muses where it served as both universal memory *and* the hive of scholarship), the Library (here capitalized to indicate its status as Ideal) plays no little role in this relation as well, although that fact is often obscured by the fact that less and less people are actually going *in* to the library anymore (except to get coffee at Starbucks and to pick up books ordered through the online catalogue), and thus are also becoming less and less aware of the library's function as a sort of thrumming brain of the university, and also because many of the university library's functions have been taken over, quite literally, by corporate and other types of pirates. But libraries, as orderly and ordered as they may appear, with their neat rows of books and catalog numbering and storage protocols and databases and so on, are also beautiful messes—great, unmoored galleons—that contain within all of their ultimately fragile and incomplete systems of control and order, the most baroquely disorderly house of wild thought ever built that could *never* be domesticated. That is also my working definition for the humanities, the sciences, and the university more largely: these are the very sites, par excellence, for anything being possible at all. And this is what we need to protect. And this is where the utopianist and recovering medievalist part of me comes in, because I believe that if we have today more technological tools than we have ever had before, then what we should be doing now is maximalizing what it is possible to say, do, and publish, and in as many material forms as possible, and not winnowing down, or streamlining, the possible modes and platforms for our work and its dissemination, or else we risk turning our enterprise into Amazon.edu. One size never did fit all, and where did that expression come from, anyway? Sounds like a bad sales pitch to me.

One of the fibs modernity likes to tell itself is that supposedly we have more choices, and more things, and more modes of expression, and more platforms for the delivery of the things we want to express and produce *now* than we ever did in the past. But the reverse is true: in the Middle Ages there were more genres of writing than there are now. It would take me hours to list all of them, whereas I could tell you how many genres of writing predominate the world book market in about twenty minutes. In modernity, we like to figure out what works best, and most efficiently, and most cheaply, and then we throw everything else out the window. History is filled with the junk heaps of discarded forms, and one of the jobs of a publisher, I really believe, is to keep all forms in play, precisely because it is in keeping all forms in play—forms

which are themselves always being reshaped in some fashion as they come into contact with each other—that creativity has the widest possible purchase on *how things might turn out*. This means that publishing, as a system, must also always be open to productive errancy. Punctum books and punctum records, for example, have both partly been designed, as enterprises, to attract work that both recuperates discarded forms (the medieval breviary, for example, or the cassette tape, or the inter-office mimeographed memo, or the epic, and so on) and also requires modes of delivery that did not exist until particular works called them forth.

For a very long time, and especially in my academic-activist career as it currently manifests itself in my work with the BABEL Working Group, punctum books, and more recently, punctum records, my vision of the university and the public commons the university helps to constitute has been inspired by words written by Michel Foucault in his Preface to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*.<sup>21</sup> These are, as it were, the starting premises for what might be called as-yet still unrealized futures for cultural-intellectual life and thought and the publishing enterprises that might nourish those. In his Preface, Foucault argued that “the art of living counter to all forms of fascism [...] carries with it a certain number of essential principles,” such as,

- Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization.
- Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.
- Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant . . . .<sup>22</sup>

What I want to pose now is the hypothesis that the future of academic publishing, as well as its ability to create and sustain more capaciously-imagined and also radically innovative publics, rests upon its willingness to take

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the mission, history, and ongoing projects and events of the BABEL Working Group, see: <http://www.babelworkinggroup.org> and <http://babelrabble.tumblr.com>. See also punctum books (<http://punctumbooks.com>) and punctum records (<http://punctumrecords.com>).

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, “Preface,” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xv–xvi.

up these principles in direct embrace with what Jacques Derrida called “the university without condition,” which he believed would “remain an ultimate place of critical resistance—and more than critical—to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation,” and which had special safekeeping by way of the humanities, entailing the “principal right to say everything, whether it be under the heading of fiction and the experimentation of knowledge, and the right to say it publicly, to publish it.”<sup>23</sup> Derrida’s university “without condition” is, in some important respects, a guarantor of the *freedom of thought*. For Derrida, it was always a futural project, one that Derrida claimed *could take place tomorrow*, but that tomorrow, as far as I am concerned, is now. The future, of necessity, needs to remain always open to the unforeseen—this is the matter, and the determinative *time*, of justice—but there is no reason to defer everything. Certain decisions can be made (every day, in fact) that can be designed to keep the future productively open, which is also a way to keep the Now creatively messy and unsettled. This will also mean understanding that the other critical term here, in addition to freedom, is *responsibility*. Someone, or some distributive collectives of someones, needs to take responsibility for securing this freedom for the greatest number of persons possible who want to participate in intellectual-cultural life, and for enabling the greatest possible number of forms of such life, thereby also ensuring the creative robustness of the larger social systems within which we are all enfolded together, whether university, whiskey bar, apartment building, city park, subway car, kitchen, church, cruise ship, bedroom, or *polis*. A publisher is a person, or a group, or a collective, or a multiplicity, or a consortium, or a desiring-assembly, who accepts responsibility for this.

---

23 Jacques Derrida, “The Future of the Profession or The University Without Condition (Thanks to the ‘Humanities,’ What *Could Take Place Tomorrow*),” in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26 [24–57].

## Work Cited

- Boshears, Paul F. "Open Access Publishing as Para-Academic Proposition: OA as Labour Relation," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*. 11.2 (2013): 614–19. <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/529> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- . "Discussion Before an Encounter," *continent*. 2.2 (2012): 136–47. <http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/92> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- Christo and Jeanne-Claude. "The Gates: Central Park, New York City, 1979–2005." Christo and Jeanne Claude: Artworks. <http://christo-jeanneclaude.net/projects/the-gates> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Future of the Profession or the University Without Condition (Thanks to the 'Humanities,' What Could Take Place Tomorrow)." In *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, edited by Tom Cohen, 24–57. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Feynman, Richard. "There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom." *Engineering and Science* 23.5 (February 1960): 22–36, <http://www.zyvex.com/nanotech/feynman.html> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- Foucault, Michel. Preface. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol. I*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Translated by Robert Hurley, Helen Lane, Mark Seem, xv–xvi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Friedman, Ken. *The Fluxus Reader*. Chichester, West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998.
- Howard, Jennifer. "Ditch the Monograph," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 14, 2012. <http://chronicle.com/article/Ditch-the-Monograph/135108/> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- . "Open Access Gains Major Support in U. of California's System-

wide Move,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2013. <http://chronicle.com/article/Open-Access-Gains-Major/140851/> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Jha, Alok. “Open Access is the Future of Academic Publishing, Says Finch Report,” *The Guardian*, June 19, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/jun/19/open-access-academic-publishing-finch-report> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Koh, Adeline. “Digital Killed the Analog Star: An Interview with Fred Moody of Anvil Academic Press.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/digital-killed-the-analog-star-an-interview-with-fred-moody-of-anvil-academic/42936> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Kostelanetz, Richard. *Soho: The Rise and Fall of an Artists’ Colony*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Newfield, Christopher. “Corporate Open Source: Intellectual Property and the Struggle Over Value,” *Radical Philosophy* 181 (Sep/Oct 2013). <http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/corporate-open-source> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Rutkoff, Peter M. *New School: A History of the New School for Social Research*. New York: Free Press, 1998.

Saper, Craig J. *Intimate Bureaucracies: A Manifesto*. Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2012.

Smithson, Robert. “Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island.” Robert Smithson: Earthworks. [http://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/floating\\_island.htm](http://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/floating_island.htm) (accessed March 24, 2014).

# ‡ WONDER WITHOUT DOMINATION

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

ANDREW RESZITNYK

*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.*

---

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

---

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.

---

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

---

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-

---

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

---

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

---

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-

---

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 groundwork 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-

---

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

---

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 transcendentality, 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-

---

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-

---

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 exorcize 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

---

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.

## Works Cited

- Brassier, Ray. *Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter*. Diss., Warwick University, 2001.
- . “Axiomatic Heresy: The Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle.” *Radical Philosophy* 121 (September/October 2003).
- . *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Gangle, Rocco. *François Laruelle’s Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2011.
- Heidegger, Martin. “Conversation on a Country Path.” In *Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Hägglund, Martin. *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Laruelle, François, and Jacques Derrida. “Controversy Over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy.” In *Non-Philosophy Project: Essays*, edited by Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjević. New York: Telos Press, 2012.
- Laruelle, François. *The Concept of Non-Photography*. Translated by Robin Mackay. Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2011.

- . *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*. Translated by Anthony Paul Smith. London: Continuum, 2010.
- . *Non-Philosophy Project: Essays*. Edited by Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjević. New York: Telos Press, 2012.
- . *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*. Translated by Drew Burk. Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012.
- . “The Transcendental Method.” In *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, edited by Robin Mackay. Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2012.
- Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Morton, Timothy. “Like an Illusion.” In *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2013.
- Mullarkey, John, and Anthony Paul Smith. “Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle’s Knowledge Without Domination.” In *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, edited by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- . “The Non-Consistency of Non-Philosophical Practice.” In *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Mullarkey, John. *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline*. London: Continuum, 2006.
- Plato. *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997.
- Plotinus. *On the One and Good, Being the Treatises of the Sixth Ennead*. Translated by Stephen Mackenna and B. S. Page. London: Medici Society, 1930.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Wisdom of the West*. New York: Crescent, 1987.

# ‡ DECONSTRUCTION AND NON-PHILOSOPHY ‡

*François Laruelle*

TRANSLATED BY NICHOLAS HAUCK

In order to determine the characteristics of non-philosophy, we frame it in opposition to an image of an established paradigm: Deconstruction (as suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy in *La deconstruction du christianisme*).<sup>1</sup> We comment on this image, we add to it, we transform it. It is a simple image of Deconstruction, one that speaks for itself independently of all textual techniques or mechanisms, yet it allows for an easy comparison with non-philosophy: it allows us to identify clearly their different objectives and respective methods. In the text below, the first number refers to the various themes of Deconstruction and non-philosophy that are compared; the second, which is always binary, refers first to Deconstruction (1), and then to non-philosophy (2).<sup>2</sup>

1.1 Deconstruction gives itself a notion and its context, a text and its corpus, a set of doctrinal beliefs (Christianity, for example), in such a way that these givens spontaneously present themselves as “philosophical” assumptions. Deconstruction is thus auto-donational. It supplies both the material to be de-

1 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

2 By emphasizing the binarity of the number scheme, Laruelle alludes to his argument concerning the structure of philosophical decision. In his view, philosophy invariably purports to be a duality, but is in actuality a tripartite schema consisting of empirical experience, its metaphysical conditions, and a transcendental, decisional term which fastens the two together. By contrast, non-philosophy is a real unity—insofar as it is already given in-One—which is discernible as a binary composed of the Real and its clone, or of the vision-in-One and its material. Laruelle’s decision to discuss Deconstruction first is likely meant to emphasize that philosophy functions as the *occasional cause* of non-philosophy.

‡ All footnotes are those of the translator.

constructed and the method of deconstruction, the latter of which is derived from this material and therefore affected by a symptom of otherness that has yet to be determined. These givens, or assumptions, are examined from both the exterior and the interior.<sup>3</sup> They are subjected to a partial authority, examined like an objective topology or mechanism that is spontaneously given or assumed. The subject is himself or herself a constitutive component of the system under investigation, albeit only partially. In order for something like philosophy to appear, exteriority or meta-language—two concepts that are themselves philosophical, through and through—are the necessary conditions.

1.2 The non-philosophical subject gives itself, or rather lets itself be given, a notion and its context, a system. It is a radically immanent donation. If, therefore, a meta-language is still necessary, it should not be considered to be constitutive of this immanence (but rather as, for example, a hallucinatory authority), without running the risk of it taking the form of the operations that the subject itself carries out on the given.<sup>4</sup> Deconstruction is not the *only* way that exterior and interior are able to organize themselves.

2.1 We consider deconstruction as a composition of terms or parts that mutually hold themselves together like a tightly knit system, but without any apparent or explicit play between the parts. This system ensures an *a priori* principle of “logocentric” enclosing or foreclosing.

2.2 First of all, the given to be examined is not a textual constitution that supplies its own principle of enclosure, which is in itself textual. It is not to be examined from the outside or from above with authority as though it were an organization of parts assumed to be self-sufficient or given in and for them-

---

3 Cf. Derrida’s discussion of the “two strategies” of Deconstruction in “The Ends of Man.” Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30.1 (September, 1969), 31–57.

4 Cf. Laruelle in *Struggle and Utopia in the End Times of Philosophy*: “There is no meta-language for saying what non-philosophy is or is capable of doing... We will not even claim, like deconstruction, that there are *effects* of meta-language, but that this meta-language of a philosophical origin is the material determined and transformed in-the-last-instance by the first Name of Man.” François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia in the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal Press, 2012), 55.

selves. The system to be examined is indeed constituted, but it is not just any textual system. Rather, it is philosophy as a system of thought, specifically as a principle of enclosure that cannot in any way be reduced to its texts. Above all, the system is a *material* constitution, for it is immanently given *prima facie* or *a priori* (in the vision-in-One). Because of its theoretical or phenomenal status, the constitution is both a *material* and a *symptom*. It is not an essential or fundamental point of departure that has authority over itself, nor is it an assumed and self-legislating symptom that needs to be deconstructed. The primary and immanent exclusion of all authority (not only “objectifying” authority but authority in the form of “actualization” or “realization,” or a “doubly objectifying” authority that posits the thing itself as independent or as being [*étant*]) amounts to the impossibility of a transcendental or metalinguistic account of radical immanence (which is nevertheless capable of thinking [itself] axiomatically or without reflexivity). This is the vision-in-One. The system’s *a priori* condition of being-given [*être-donné*] is the Whole that—even if it is indeterminate, imaginary, or illusorily self-sufficient—is identified as philosophizable. The philosophizable does not appear out of nowhere, since it comes in and as the form of a unilateral Outside specific to immanence.

3.1 A system that is subjected to the partial authority of a subject, for which meta-language has at least some constitutive effect, is predisposed to dis-assembly *en pointillé*—that is, to a rightful, proper disassembly—if it is not already disassembled. The text already includes within itself a first deconstruction, a deconstruction that has taken place prior to the intervention of any subject, which only needs to be resumed or revived by an additional act of otherness, by a supplementary work of writing. Greek otherness—the otherness of an opposite, an antonym, black vs. white—cannot exist without the need for a Judaic otherness<sup>5</sup>—the otherness of an alien script, or an infinite God compared to its finite creation. Judaic otherness is the eternal supplement to the Greek. Finally one last variation: Deconstruction as “Christian” (Nancy),<sup>6</sup> a blend of Greek and Judaic alterity.

5 Laruelle here distinguishes between the otherness of Ancient Greek philosophy—which is always opposed bi-laterally to some mode of sameness or selfhood—and the radical, non-binary alterity of Jewish philosophy. See Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, trans. Rocco Gangle (New York: Continuum, 2011).

6 Nancy raises the possibility that Derrida’s Joycean conflation of “Jew” and “Greek” as “jewgreek” at the close of “Violence and Metaphysics” may actually refer to Christianity.



3.2 What is primary is not the spontaneously given text with its spontaneous self-deconstruction, but rather its being-given *a priori* as material reduced in its philosophical sufficiency by the vision-in-One. The given to be re-deconstructed is not the self-deconstructive spontaneity of a system but the phenomenon of (the system of) philosophy itself, a system that exists prior to all implied deconstruction or the possibility of a textual deconstruction. The basis of non-philosophy is neither Greek nor Judaic, nor is it the exaggerated and excessive conjugation of the two. It is pre-eminently “Christian,”<sup>7</sup> a Christianity that is not simply the blend of its Greek and Jewish precursors, and therefore non-Christian in the non-philosophical sense of “non-,” which consumes Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

4.1 The system subjected to Deconstruction is rendered possible to the point of its own suspension or impossibilization. The system’s deconstruction is a way of showing what it truly was, a way of making its fundamental principles and presuppositions appear. The system’s deconstruction balances the possibility and the impossibility of the text, which are the same. This sameness is nevertheless unbalanced. It is an unbalanced balance that is always refined and adjusted by equilibrium.

4.2 Acting as an *a priori*, the vision-in-One is another combination of the possibility and the impossibility of philosophy. Its impossibility is immanent or radical, its possibility—or its *a priori* givenness as phenomenon—is unilateral and therefore a complete Stranger to auto-donational philosophy. The Stranger remains immanent. The balance between possibility and impossibility in the vision-in-One is an immanent equilibrium, which is not evened out

---

See Nancy, “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” 140.

7 Cf. Lyotard’s characterization of the Christian “narrative of love,” a radically inclusive genre of discourse, which accommodates and accounts for all events: “Any referent can be signified as a sign of the good news announcing that ‘we’ creatures are loved.” Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 160.

8 Laruelle does not suggest that non-philosophy is “Christian” in the sense of being an extension or symptom of the organized religion “Christianity.” Rather, he uses the term “Christianity”—or “non-Christianity”—*heretically*, as one possible first name for the non-consistent, radically immanent Real. See, François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (New York: Continuum, 2010).

by equilibrium. It is the *Grand Midi* of Man. The vision-in-One acts according to a radical unbalance, one without return, and it never ceases to come as Stranger or Messiah, as a permanent struggle against the philosophical spontaneity of the world. Thus we uphold and maintain that philosophy is given to subjects as the object of their struggle. We avoid the spontaneous and empirical self-donation of philosophy as a signifier to which access is only granted and assured by Writings and Texts—that also is to say by religion and perhaps religious sophism—because subjects have a rightful and legitimate access to philosophy as the object of their struggle. They have this access even without taking into account the aporias of entry, exit, and return.

5.1 Deconstruction consists in establishing play “between” the parts, in making them move in relation to each other. This relation between parts is absolute because of the supplement of an absolute Other. Deconstruction consists in undoing the enclosure or the foreclosure of a system without breaking it, in unbinding the organization of the set, in weakening the disposition [*systase*] of the system (Heidegger), in making disseminated strangeness appear.

5.2 Non-philosophy does not emphasize otherness or differences; it does not compound them through *différance*, and does not content itself with establishing play while conserving the deconstructionist’s *ex machina* authority (which amounts to the same thing as enclosure). It does not add to nor subtract from the immanent deconstruction of the thing (of texts); rather, it substitutes unilateralism for difference (*différance*), the structure of the immanent existing-Stranger for differing, and it breaks the enclosure, at least for the Real. If in the best of philosophical cases there is pure difference—a signifier in contrast to nothing, not even another signifier nor one that is absolutely removed from the chain, a “Greco-Judaic” signifier we could say—then there is a pure otherness that delimits, not in opposition to immanence (which has no limit), but a One-limitation that is opposed to the system as its possibilizing impossibility.

6.1 Since it does not come from any identifiable space, the play of distances in a deconstructed system cannot be attributed to any particular or unique part that would constitute an origin; such a part is precisely the point of effervescence or condensation of play, not a source. Difference (*différance*) appears to emerge from the core of the deconstructed system, as an unlocatable, at

once internal and external to the system, but finally external a second time, as an exaggerated otherness, a relative-absolute Greco-Judaic alterity, which is therefore twice external. Deconstruction is a supplement to Greek logic. It initiates the dominance of metalinguistic exteriority and logocentric enclosure relative to philosophical phenomena, but continues to situate itself in the last instance to this dominance.

6.2 Unilateralism has another structure than the one provided by an exaggerated and doubled otherness. It is indeed otherness, but in a unique sense. It is a unidirectional otherness. It is immanent without being relative to immanence. It is the “vision” in the vision-in-One, a unique intentionality driven by a single impulse, like a drive that renders philosophy impossible precisely because it expresses philosophy as *the* philosophy [*“la” philosophie*]. Unilateralism acts as a radically immanent One-Stranger that does not itself come from the system, nor from its immediate exterior like an enclosure beyond an enclosure, nor even from further afar like an otherness with Judaic emphasis. It comes from Nowhere and has No Time, the One-Stranger is utopic and uchronic, that is to say it is celestial (and not extra-terrestrial) and eternal (and not outside of time). It consists of an operation that is not internal/external but immanent in itself and therefore heteronomous for philosophy. This Outside is an immanent *a priori*, which makes an *a priori* understanding of the philosophizable unknown to and impossible for philosophy.

7.1 Duality, because there always is one, takes the form of a Judaic supplement of otherness graphed to and integrated in a Greek or weak otherness. It is a duality that begins in anonymity and transcendence, one that never ceases to be anonymous except as Judaic excess, except as its characterization as “*Autre homme*” (Levinas), or as “*epekeina*” [beyond].

7.2 It is philosophy that is dualized, not the Real itself. Duality belongs to the Real, which is immediately non-anonymous because it is Man, and it belongs to the transcendental subject. Man is a unilateral duality, without a divided One, whether in its capacity as Real or as subject. We cannot say that the subject is a supplement to Man’s Real. The subject is Real via the cloning of its essence, and the Real is subject when it is occasionally solicited by sufficient or non-reduced philosophy. The dyad undoes the system-form in two

unilateral temporalities. The philosophy-form is not a simple effect, as deconstruction would have it; it is, on the contrary, divided (transcendental-real and transcendental-empirical). Therefore there are two phases to the dualysis of philosophy: 1) Unilateral identity suspends, *a priori*, its sufficient form, or neutralizes it. This is the effect of the Real's impasse toward philosophical material; 2) This non-operation that results from the suspension of philosophical sufficiency is then treated as the condition that prepares the ground upon which dualysis disassembles, takes apart, or decomposes, this time strata by strata, the very structure of the philosophical system. This system has never been an indeterminate nor simply textual assembly, but rather a complex or transcendental structure (in order to call upon a "transcendental signified" to be deconstructed, the structure of the transcendental must be known). We therefore distinguish between the suspension that gives rise to the hallucination of philosophy and its deconstruction, and a new type of deconstruction or disassembly that acts not on the parts of the system but on the system's subjective or transcendental structure. Philosophy, a structure larger than logocentrism and larger than the text, is suspended a first time by the Real that gives it its *a priori* unilateral character and heightens its sufficiency. Philosophy is then suspended a second time by the strata-by-strata dismemberment of the very structure that was committed to the system. The operation of the dyad is purely oriented toward the structure of philosophy's transcendental system (and toward each of its parts as they express or condense the structure of which they are a part), but only as an operation that is materially given *a priori* as an intuition or as an immanent Outside. For the system or for its parts, the operation of the dyad appears as a heteronomous subject or Stranger. The non-philosophical dyad signifies a one-way otherness, and is therefore lacking any sense, encountering sense only as a symptom.

8.1 Deconstruction is not destruction or annihilation but a "taking apart" (*Abbau*, Heidegger) or a disassembling. However this disassembling is not a mechanical operation (this is the paradigm's insufficiency) but a spectral slipping. It leaves the parts of the system or even the system itself in a spectral state where the "play" is a form of *différance* that operates neither from part to part (as sign) nor from part to system. Deconstruction is a staggered and deferred starting-over of tradition as a whole, which is each time taken on in totality. Tradition is not destroyed in order to be restructured or perpetuated.

To deconstruct is neither to identify constituted materials, nor to find a way out of them into some external space, but rather a means to transmit them. It is an un-bearing, an offsetting, of tradition.

8.2 Non-philosophy leads to a philo-fiction<sup>9</sup> that consists not so much of disassembling an assumed and given system in a spectral dimension, but which rather starts by presenting the system as given under the auspices of human Identity<sup>10</sup> (an identity that is unknown and foreign to the system), and describes what is deduced as “deconstruction” from the structure of the philosophical system. On the one hand, the operation is less a spectralization of reality, less a real supplement to its idealization, and more a radical fiction, an evacuation of any mixed solution for a unique and simple unilateralization. On the other hand, the operation acts on the fundamental structure of philosophical systems. From there it eventually acts on the structure of the textual system, rather than starting with the text and then moving on to philosophy (there exists a distinct structure of philosophy apart from all textuality).

9.1 Coming from the interior and the exterior, play is an archi-possibility from which textual constitution is derived. The text conserves its own constitution as aberrant and unsuited, as if the text existed as already deconstructed *en pointillé* or as a spectre.

9.2 Non-philosophy does not conserve philosophy or its structure, whether incomplete or misused, thinned out and spectral, ghostly and hidden by the supposedly given system. It is a philo-fiction and it has certain characteristics of the spectre. It is immanent in its principle, and penetrates and encompasses the system, finding subtle support in each of its parts, brushing up against them where necessary without lingering, settling, or becoming attached. Yet, the philo-fiction is never simply hidden or covered by the philosophical system. It is not the role of non-philosophy to unearth the philo-fiction that was always already there. For the Real there is no philosophical appearance, only a hallucination that philosophy has identified or produced; for the non-

9 “Philo-fiction” is a term Laruelle has recently used to designate the unilateralized clone effectuated by non-philosophy. See, for example, François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. Drew S. Burk (Minneapolis: Univocal Press, 2012).

10 “Human Identity” here functions as another name for what Laruelle elsewhere calls “Man-in-Person.”

philosophical subject however, there is a transcendental illusion that is already more consistent. Ubiquitous in its cause, philo-fiction penetrates and encompasses all systems, each time at a point that is no longer nodal but unilateral. For the non-philosophical subject, the philosophizable *a priori* constantly threatens to reclaim its sufficiency and to “recharge” from its philosophical pretenses; it hides the real *a priori* and confirms spontaneous philosophy. Philosophy perpetually wants to claim the philo-fiction as just more philosophy. But all bets are off; the Lived-life is resilient, the inalienable Real cannot be forgotten, for it does not cease to resist any more than the subject (transcendentally radicalized) is able to forget itself in the struggle. The outcome of non-philosophy is a radical Lived-life of hallucination and illusion. The immanent Lived-life is unforgettable without the need for an absolute memory or a memory refashioned by operations and then reconstituted. It is the real condition of salvation such that it engages a task and maintains the subject, head above the world.

Let us generalize toward contemporary philosophy. Non-philosophy places philosophy in a radical state; it takes phenomena as they are given *a priori* in the human or real state, as they are given in their immanent identity, and therefore given *a priori* unilaterally or by the Other. Non-philosophy does not impose an everyday structure or a system of knowledge, whether linguistic or mathematic and based on the “set.” The linguistically rendered text or the ontological knowledge based on the set have to be given as unilateral identity, at the risk that they revert to particularity or Judaic exceptionality, or to a materialistic void and its corresponding idealism; they have to be given as Other rather than in their own sufficiency. There is no preconditioning set that allows for an immediate and tautological reading of mathematical knowledge, nor is there a textualization that allows for an immediate and violent or raw deconstruction. In both cases, we open the door to a practice that is burdened with empiricism and therefore theoreticist and spontaneous or violent and raw, a practice that has forgotten to radically “phenomenalize” the given and in its place has substituted a transcendent phenomenon, in other words a philosophical one. By placing both cases in a state of radical identity, a series of transformations is released. These transformations move from the suspense of sufficiency to the breaking-up of the structure of the philosophical system that was invested in each part of the play. The enclosure is not simply logocentric, nor is it simply quantifiable or calculable, rather is

it always duplicity or double enclosure. This is the principle of a “non-deconstruction” (of a construction of deconstruction within an immanent and *a priori* intuition: a philo-fiction), or a togetherness or *ensemblisme* (in the sense of real identity “en”/“in” semblance), both of them real and transcendental, and destined to relieve and replace the transcendent or *ex machina* divides, whether these divides are linguistic or mathematical.

Non-philosophy is not just a new experience of Man or of the subject, one that sets itself apart from contemporary thought and the way it honours the philosophical paradigm. Non-philosophy demands a new theoretical practice. Instead of taking as given the text—as well as the signifier, the set, desire, or power—as transcendent empiricals conveying, more or less secretly, religious determinations (not only “transcendental signifiers”) that are unjustified except by a certain lazy philosophical rush, non-philosophy places them in a radical state where they are no less ontological than linguistic, scientific, etc. What is actually given as phenomenon or foundation upon which thought can be based? All philosophy partakes in the magic act that transforms the empirical into absolute, and the absolute... into absolute. We ask how the empirical is itself given to us, given to the philosophical subject, and how does this philosophical subject know that he or she has rightful access to language or mathematics? Does the subject speak? Is she a mathematician? Without doubt, but if his or her knowledge is immanent to these activities, what relation, what non-relation does he or she have, as a subject, to this immanence?

# ‡ ON DISMANTLING THE MASTER'S HOUSE

*François Laruelle's Theory (in) Practice*

ROSHAYA RODNESS

*The anti-racist and feminist Audre Lorde's now famous edict, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"<sup>1</sup> has always struck me as a provocative summons rather than a description of current or even future scholarship. For it would seem that the most direct, intuitive route to dismantling would be to locate the master's tools and use them as he did, in reverse. But the project of challenging the structural foundations of racism is neither direct nor intuitive, and I read Lorde's too oft straightforwardly-read statement as a challenge to widen our gaze to the structural substrates of our existences and to rigorously embrace radical methodologies that actively provoke and challenge traditions of thought, an endless dismantling that is never to be dismantled. Lorde's powerful summons is also a call to reconfigure the use of critical theory, or to use the tools of theory without mastery as their objective. François Laruelle's intentions in creating a non-philosophy seem to harmonize with Lorde's vision. Laruelle has created a theory that examines philosophy from without, seeking to expand its horizons beyond its standard use. The terms that comprise non-philosophy are philosophical, but used "non-philosophically," or neutered of their philosophical utility. Reading Laruelle, it can appear as if his prose is simply a repetition of that which he critiques, when in fact he has refashioned these tools into a strange, radical vocabulary that renders inoperable the philosophical means of knowing the Real. Non-philosophy is designed to "destroy the classical usage of philosophy,"<sup>2</sup> but what kind of theory is this, considering that destruction as a*

1 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outside: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007), 110, 123.

2 François Laruelle in Robin Mackay, "Introduction: Laruelle Undivided," *From Deci-*



*mode of theory strikes a chord whose vibration reverberates deep into the recesses of continental philosophy? Lorde's and Laruelle's words join Heidegger's Destruktion and Derrida's deconstruction in the history of critical theory, even as Lorde and Laruelle want to limit the claims of that history. If destruction is also one of the master's tools, then Laruelle's idea of what it means to destroy the classical usage of philosophy is neither direct nor intuitive, and the kind of practice that non-philosophy imagines itself to be doing requires a robust, fine-grained inquiry. What follows will be a consideration of non-philosophy as a practice and a pedagogy as well as a methodology that radically reimagines what it means to use critical terms in communities of thought.*

The question of the utility or application of non-philosophy haunts François Laruelle's often disorienting prose. For how does one "use" a theory that undoes the very practice of explaining the world in philosophical terms? While the many cogent prefaces to Laruelle's work on non-philosophy written in English gesture toward a non-philosophical practice that exceeds Laruelle's own parameters, they tend not to themselves exceed those parameters. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith conclude their illuminating introduction with just this gesture: "Alongside a non-cinematic thinking, how does thought appear in non-literature or non-theatre (a film, book, or play)? It will be the objective of a future volume to examine the thinking within *other* non-philosophies in all their non-Laruellean guises."<sup>3</sup> How to take Laruelle beyond Laruelle is indeed a challenging imperative. His idiosyncratic style and his non-philosophical rearticulation of philosophical terms can have the effect of rendering his theory closed to engagement. In a well-known 1988 conversation, Jacques Derrida expressed a desire to engage with non-philosophy, but accused Laruelle of "carrying out a kind of violent shuffling of the cards in a game whose rules are known to [him] alone."<sup>4</sup> Yet I take Derrida's lessons on hospitality to be a radical invitation to practices that always risk shattering the subject, and Laruelle's alien theory offers an important limit case in our

---

*sion to Heresy: Experiments In Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), 29.

3 John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, "Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle's Knowledge Without Domination," in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 16.

4 Jacques Derrida in 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), 76.

capacity as scholars trained in a wide range of philosophical discourses to remain open and inviting to provocative questions. When reading Laruelle it is easy to feel like a stranger setting foot on a terrain whose geography does not accommodate your presence, and yet Laruelle invokes the very concept of “the stranger”<sup>5</sup> to simulate the subject’s non-philosophical engagement with philosophy.

As non-philosophers, we enter philosophical practice not as colonizing agents with a passport to transcendental realities, but as strangers whose sovereign privileges, connections, and permissions are void. We are, in effect, *sans-papiers*. The difficulty one encounters with non-philosophy is productive and instructive of this disquieting and yet crucially generative interruption of standard modes of philosophical thinking. And yet to be confronted so roughly with our own strangeness in the province of non-philosophy—the alterity of the theory reflecting a sense of not belonging in us—quickly reminds us of the strange conditions under which our scholarly encounters regularly take place, whether they are with peers, students, colleagues, or administrators. Laruelle’s writing is a powerful lure to thought that reminds us that theory should *always* be strange.<sup>6</sup> In this afterword, I suggest that Laruelle is gener-

---

5 The “stranger” in Laruelle’s writing is not a person, but an abstraction or avatar of the practice of non-philosophy as it is performed. See François Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy” *The Non-Philosophy Project.*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 36, where Laruelle dissociates “the stranger” from the subject and the ego.

6 As I have noted, Laruelle has a distinctive and difficult style of writing, yet it continually amazes me that this is cited as a reason not to engage with his work. In his unflattering review of the English translation of Laruelle’s *Les Philosophies de la différence* (*Philosophies of Difference*), Graham Harman, a pioneer of the emerging field of “speculative realism,” claims that Laruelle’s work will not be widely received in the Anglophone world because his style is “abominable” (Harman). Theorists who make this claim seem to be subject to a general amnesia of critical theories of the speech act over the last twenty years. Responding to criticism that the style of her watershed *Gender Trouble* [1990] (1999) was too alienating, Judith Butler writes in the 1999 Preface to the book, “It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes on thought, indeed, on the thinkable itself. But formulations that twist grammar or that implicitly call into question the subject-verb requirements of propositional sense are clearly irritating for some. They produce more work for readers, and sometimes their readers are offended by such demands. Are those who are offended making a legitimate request for ‘plain speaking’ or does their complaint emerge from a consumer expectation of intellectual life? Is there, perhaps, a value to be derived from such experiences of linguistic difficulty?” (New York: Routledge, 1999), xviii-xix. My contention is that as there clearly is for Derrida,

ous with the possibility of taking his theory beyond himself, but to depart from Laruelle is first to engage directly with the difficulties that he poses to philosophically-minded subjects and to accepted modes of theoretical application. I will begin with an overview of modes of use in philosophy and non-philosophy, and continue with a view to non-philosophy as the subject of pedagogy. I will then shift to John Keats' magnificent poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" [1819] (1958) as an occasion to model the concerns and tools of non-philosophical inquiry.

I selected Keats as a concluding model for non-philosophical thought because of the particular concerns about representation, conceptual knowledge, and art that quicken his writing. Coming of age in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Keats was writing during a time of reconstruction and great social unease. He was a member of a young cohort of thinkers who inherited the ideas of the French revolutionaries, the devastating toll of the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, and the poetic innovations and sensibilities of the first wave of Romantic poets. The quintet of odes he composed in the spring of 1819 speak from a sense of immobility while at the same time reimagine the stakes of the ode, expanding what could count as an ode. Keats wrote his odes not about ascendant topics such as joy—as was the convention of the ode—but the perspicacity of material life, such as Grecian urns, nightingales, autumn, melancholia, and indolence. These objects were not vehicles of access to higher principles, but the stuff of life to which he felt answerable. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" treats a surface of representation, a decorated urn that remains silent as the narrator implores it to speak. As the object of the narrator's interest, the urn is unavailable as a representation of higher truths, even when it seems that representation is the labour the urn is designed to perform. By choosing this poem as a lure to the practice of non-philosophy, I want to model a "non-analysis" of literature, or a view to literary objects that does not have a transcendentalizing imperative. The historical context of Keats' writing provides a familiar handle for our own time, in which the horizon of seemingly endless wars and a series of global revolts call upon us to question and rethink fundamental modes of action in our political, social, and intellectual lives. This is the landscape that, I will explain, is the historical and social context for the growing interest in non-

---

Deleuze, and Butler, there is also value to be derived from an encounter with Laruelle's difficult style.

philosophy. By beginning this essay with Lorde's aphorism and ending with Keats' poem, I thread non-philosophy heterogeneously through an anticipatory intellectual imperative and an experimental act of art. Non-philosophy, a mode of thought that questions basic assumptions and practices of analytical and conceptual thought, potentially has a wide-range of stakes that are worth exploring if we are to understand the full impact of the generalizing problem that non-philosophy identifies.

Non-philosophy challenges the principles of use and application that dominate critical scholarship and pedagogical practice. To "apply" a philosophy is to invoke a material double of its operation, assuming that the philosophy itself is nonmaterial or has no worldly substance that acts on its own. A successful application establishes the finitude of the philosophical method by demonstrating how it successfully represents the world. It would appear that philosophy's movement and efficacy are necessarily separate from its formal articulation; it gives a sense that theory itself is inert without another engine. But philosophy is no less a material part of the world than a brain or a fly or an atom. "Think this: thought is a thing,"<sup>7</sup> says Laruelle. But often the litmus test for both the rigour of our own philosophical endeavours and the success of our students' comprehension is the degree to which we and they can represent reality in theoretical terms. The currency of "the example" in our fields—a form of rhetoric that slides between the particular and the abstract—instils the assumption that concepts and the world always bear a perfect alignment, like the map of the empire in Jorge Luis Borges' "On Exactitude in Science."<sup>8</sup> Expectations placed on academic institutions by the public also encourage this cartographic practice. Increasing pressure from corporate-minded governments on the Humanities to justify themselves in the face

7 Laruelle in Mullarkey and Smith, *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, 9.

8 Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science" in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 325. The story in its entirety: "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guild struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that the vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciples of Geography."

of severe budget cuts to higher education insists that our work embrace a limited idea of practice, in which the skills that we teach should prepare students for the “practical” demands of low-level employment, which are vehemently set against the goals of higher-level critical thinking. As members of Humanities departments struggling to maintain ourselves against these pressures, it is understandable that we emphasize the instrumental use of theory to explain the world. This imperative to “map” philosophy onto material realities illustrates what Laruelle calls “philosophical Decision,” or the hybridizing of a transcendental, conditioning term (the concept) and a material, conditioned term (objects in the world)<sup>9</sup>. All philosophy bears a Decisional structure that elevates it to an omniscient status. Non-philosophy presents us, instead, with the radical premise that the map is a lovely fiction among many that does not explain the world, but exists with it in a non-dominating, lateral way.

*Laruelle’s Sabbath: A Classroom for Non-Philosophy*

In her work on Laruelle’s “non-Marxism,” Katerina Kolozova claims that his theory argues for the importance of “*monstrously* radical concepts.”<sup>10</sup> Monstrosity certainly captures the alienating quality of Laruellian concepts and the resistance Laruelle faces from the scholarly community, but the quali-

---

9 Giorgio Agamben is, to my knowledge, the only other thinker ruminating on a generic division in philosophy between a transcendental term and a material term, what he calls the common and the proper, respectively. See William Watkin’s *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), xi-xvii. Watkin elaborates this division in the opening movements of the text and suggests that a dialogue between Laruelle and Agamben would be fruitful.

10 Katerina Kolozova, “The Project of Non-Marxism: Arguing for ‘Monstrously’ Radical Concepts,” in *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* 10 (2007): 1. Following Giambattista Vico, Kolozova claims that monstrosity is the product of “the bordering of two types of languages, the ‘scientific’ and the ‘poetic’” (20). As both a “science of philosophy” and method of turning philosophy into poetry (see Laruelle in Mackay, “Introduction,” 29), non-philosophy is produced at that semantic intersection. However, science and poetry are both material objects for Laruelle that have been denied the capacity to think by the philosophical regime (see Laruelle, “Controversy,” 84). As objects caused by the One, science and poetry would be indifferent to each other, in the sense that they would operate as lateral, non-hierarchical modes of knowledge. Therefore, there can be no real bordering between these two types of knowledge that would produce yet a third term that we could call “non-philosophy.” For Laruelle, non-philosophy is at once a science and a poetry, such that these three terms are only semantically different. Nonetheless, the indifference between science and poetry in the practice of non-philosophy is certainly a monstrous discourse.

fication of “monstrously” also suggests that Laruelle seeks to develop a new fundamental vocabulary, one that perverts the “radix” or roots of concepts themselves. For Laruelle, radical concepts do not include those concepts that stray from the norm or the heavily cited, but those that question the fundamental operation of conceptual work itself. A commitment to the development of truly radical claims—claims that shatter the very idea of the concept—is immanent to the pedagogical work of non-philosophy. Non-philosophy teaches its students the importance of thinking radically in practice and not just in name.

Non-philosophy suspends philosophical operations to forge space for the generation and co-mingling of monstrously radical concepts; it constitutes a “Sabbath” of thought that momentarily holds back to create a space for renewal. At the end of *The Open* (2004), Giorgio Agamben envisions a Jewish Sabbath for human and animal, a clearing that momentarily suspends the anthropocentric machinery that structures relations between human and non-human animals. Agamben writes,

To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new—more effective and more authentic—articulations, but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man.<sup>11</sup>

Agamben’s Shabbat is a space for radical thought made possible only through a holding-back of a divisive conceptual apparatus. Laruelle’s Sabbath is not an abyss between creatures akin to the Derridian *trace*, but a perspective from which the theorist chooses to abstain from legitimized and legitimizing modes of thought. Human exceptionalism is suspended in this space, and the humanisms that ground their articulations in the human’s unique capacity for knowledge are nullified. Agamben reveals the hierarchical division between human and animal to be a hallucination of the human. Thought produced from this space puts us at risk of proceeding without our seemingly inalienable privileges.

This scene of possibility is activated by the engine of inoperability—a

---

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 92.

concept Agamben returns to in other writings—understood not as inertia or sloth but a “generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted (like individual action or collective action understood as the sum of individual actions).”<sup>12</sup> The inoperable is both a refusal to work for institutional interests and a wager of praxis, or a thought or action that may never be realized. Non-philosophy renders philosophical decision inoperable; it refuses to work for the “philosophical machine” and from this non-work it produces monstrous possibility.<sup>13</sup>

In “What Can Non-Philosophy Do?” (2012) Laruelle summons philosophical thinkers to “put practice into theory rather than just inserting practice ‘in theory’.”<sup>14</sup> The destruction of the classical usage of philosophy would be a fundamental *indifférence* between theory and practice,<sup>15</sup> for there is noth-

12 Agamben in Leland De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: An Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 19.

13 Critical theory already boasts many avatars of immobility besides the inoperative. “Inoperativity” or *désœuvrement* was coined by Maurice Blanchot in *L’Espace Littéraire* (*The Space of Literature* (1989)) as the negativity of doing at the heart of the work of literature. Blanchot’s use of the concept is typically translated as “worklessness.” Georges Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Agamben have all made use of the concept to different ends. Alfred Korzybski’s (first A. E. von Vogt’s) concept of the “cortico-thalamic pause” may also fall into this tradition. Important to note for the feminist/queer posture of my intervention is Janet Halley’s *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take A Break From Feminism* (2006), where the author argues that the scholarly community should “take a break” from feminism to avoid participating in the prescriptive use of theory and the consequences thereof for subjected communities. Halley’s provocative monograph makes many of the same criticisms of philosophy as does Laruelle, and takes the additional step of showing how the use of philosophy can be immanently harmful to communities. I have not afforded the book a more central place in this essay because I do not believe that the solution it provides to the problem of the violence of theory is radical enough. Halley argues that we should assume the posture of many theories simultaneously (such as feminism, queer theory, and anti-racist theory), and that the internal negotiation between theories, the difficulties revealed by their coming into contact with each other coextensively, is valuable for and not limiting of the continual generation and renewal of radical politics. I have great respect for Halley’s promotion of a politics at the interstices of theory, and yet I fear that if the answer to the problems raised by one theory is *more theory* then “theory” has won out against what could be a more radical questioning of the work of theory as such. “Taking a Break” from feminism is not ultimately taking a break from theory. A further encounter between Halley and Laruelle would prove to be extremely generative for both thinkers, and particularly for the relevance of non-philosophy to queer, anti-racist, and feminist work.

14 François Laruelle, “What Can Non-Philosophy Do?” in *The Non-Philosophy Project*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 218.

15 Laruelle’s position is very close to Deleuze’s position on the relationship between

ing more theoretical than theory's auto-positioned difference from practice. "Indifference" is perhaps Laruelle's most scandalous and, in effect, most destructive, instrument for the reconfiguration of relations between objects in a moment still productively tarrying with Continental philosophy's interests in "difference." However, indifference is not an absurd negation of differences so much as a non-philosophical orientation between objects that cannot be reduced to absolute alterity. The non-philosophical thinker, Laruelle explains, is a force (of) thought, in which the bracketed preposition expresses the immanence of thought and force as non-philosophical practice.<sup>16</sup>

I invoke "orientation" outside the norms of its use in phenomeno-

---

theory and practice. In his conversation with Michel Foucault in "Intellectuals and Power," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F.B. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 205–217, Deleuze suggests that practice is not an application of theory. Yet for Deleuze, theory "encounters" nodes of reality rather than being derived, wrought, or cohered from reality itself. His representation of Foucault's work with prisoners suggests that the prisoners' focalized reality came only at a second stage of theoretic attunement as a way to recalibrate an already robust constellation of concepts. Practice has an oddly sublating function in Deleuze's description. If the role of the intellectual is not to represent the interests of the underclass, then theory remains as a somewhat virtual labour that preserves its claim to originality and exclusivity. Deleuze discloses the limitations of his "zone of indistinction" between theory and practice when he suggests that, "reality is what actually happens in the factories, in schools, in barracks, in prisons, in police stations. And this action carries a type of information which is altogether different from that found in newspapers" (212). Different, perhaps, but according to what measures? This statement works to define reality as that which unfolds as struggle rather than as the "continuation of power," yet in doing so, it reroutes the information found in newspapers to what must be a virtual reality that can be alienated from the material conditions of its existence. It is worth adding that Laruelle in *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy* (trans. Taylor Adkins), in what must be an intentional reappropriation of Deleuze's metaphor of theory as a "toolbox" in this essay, calls non-philosophy a "toolbox," "where the box is itself a tool, where every tool is inseparable from the box," (1, accessed March 10, 2014, [http://monoskop.org/images/2/2b/Laruelle\\_Francois\\_Dictionary\\_of\\_Non-Philosophy.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/2/2b/Laruelle_Francois_Dictionary_of_Non-Philosophy.pdf)). Laruelle's argument that theory, like the rest of material reality, is caused by and cannot be alienated from the universe of objects (what he calls "the One") suggests that the very partiality of the tool (to combine the metaphors) is its immanence to the box and its incapacity to be instrumentalized reciprocally.

16 Force (of) thought is not a relation between a subject and a thought in the philosophical sense where the terms have a bilateral relation. Laruelle's (non-)relation is "a relation without correlation or reciprocity." See Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 107, or a relation in which force does not conform to our experience of it and lives in excess of our capacity to know it. I have chosen to call this relation "indifference."



logical scholarship, where it typically describes an effect of being-in-the world and therefore anticipates a bilateral relation between a world and an alienated body. In *The Concept of Non-Photography*, Laruelle describes “vision-force,” another term for the force (of) thought, as a stance rather than a position: “The photographer does not throw himself into the World, he replaces himself firstly in his body as a stance, and renounces all corporeal or psychic intentionality. ‘Stance’—this word means: to be rooted in oneself, to be held within one’s own immanence, to be at ones station rather than in a position relative to the ‘motif’.”<sup>17</sup> The stance signals one’s undifferentiated existence of the world, an indifference to the distinction between the world and the body of the photographer, an uninhabitable world that cannot be captured by the photographer. Orientation names the *unidirectional* stance<sup>18</sup> as a function of the non-philosophical encounter, which Laruelle claims is thinking *from* “the One” and *to* philosophy, rather than *from* philosophy and *to* “the One,” the attempt to represent the “the One” in philosophical terms.

Laruelle invokes “the One” in opposition to the neo-Platonic term of the same name.<sup>19</sup> It is an abstract term for the universe of objects foreclosed to thought and therefore unrepresentable by philosophy. The One strikes an indifferent posture toward the objects it causes, and as such is illustrated best according what theorists of gender and sexuality call “queer.” Queer theories follow a vexed and unfinished narrative of identity politics for the generations inheriting a wide range of continental and postcolonial philosophies. Whether scholars invoke queer as a “non-identity”—an amplification of what counts as identity—as an outright rejection of identity as the normative means of ensuring the intelligibility of structures of sexual desire and gender identity, or as an indifference to the very concept of sexual and gender identity, what these designations share is their deferral to a wide range of differences in the mode of a fundamental indifference to the distinctions between them.<sup>20</sup>

17 François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), 12.

18 Because the One is foreclosed to human knowledge, the non-philosophical orientation is never a bilateral relation between the One and what it causes, but a unidirectional relation from *within* the One.

19 For a concise elaboration of the neo-Platonic and Laruelian “One,” see Anthony Paul Smith’s “Thinking From The One: Science and the Ancient Philosophical Figure of the One,” in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 19–41.

20 Judith Butler has recently suggested that the regulatory constitution of gender is

“Queer” incorporates structures of desire that may be otherwise described as lesbian, asexual, transgender, gay, non-normative, or BDSM, to name only a few, without striking a self-differential posture toward them. Queerness produces a gamut of experiences that are themselves unable to retroactively represent queerness in its entirety.<sup>21</sup>

Similar to the Laruellean One, the queer causes a universe of objects but is itself foreclosed to objectification.<sup>22</sup> The One is indifferent to the world of differences it produces, and as a practice oriented from the One, non-philosophy strikes a posture toward philosophy and the rest of the world that strives to *in*-differentiate between the poles of its compass. This guise of causation Laruelle calls “determination-in-the-last-instance” or “unilateral duality.” The material, including philosophy and the philosopher, caused by the One cannot know the One, so their relation cannot be conceived as reflexive, bilateral, or reciprocal. Here, we should remember that the subject of non-philosophy—the stranger, force (of) thought, vision-force—is not a person but an avatar for the practice of non-philosophy, a force strange to the normative distinctions between concepts, persons, and bodies. “The subject,” says Laruelle, “does not use philosophy as if it were already constituted, it is that use. It is not only pragmatic, making use of world-thought, but also and equally

---

indifferent to the regulatory constitution of sexuality. An indifference, therefore, between the very differences that define queer theory. See Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013), 45.

21 See Kolozova’s *The Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), in which the author recapitulates poststructuralist feminist and queer theories under the aegis of Laruelle’s non-philosophical vocabulary. “The aim,” she writes, “is to produce an emancipatory move of stepping out from the scholastic enclosure that constrains the discourse of contemporary gender theory” (15). Kolozova leads the charge in the development of what we could call a “non-gender theory,” or a theory that questions the axioms of gender criticism and expands its relevance beyond poststructural thought.

22 Laruelle has weighed in on queer theory in the Foreword to Kolozova’s *Cut of the Real*. Queer, he says, “is a vector; it has a departure point, a transition point at which it provisionally completes itself, but not an arrival point where it would shut itself away.” See Laruelle in Kolozova, *The Cut of the Real*, xvi. Similar to many poststructuralist queer theorists for whom queer is “radically anticipatory,” Laruelle understands it as a promissory gesture, ushering in a future that contemporary thinkers cannot represent. The “vectoral queer” may be one avatar of Laruelle’s “unilateral duality,” or a relationship to a text in which the text does give itself reciprocally to the reader’s representation.

theoretical, and further, it does not ‘do’ theory, it is the theoretical.”<sup>23</sup> The non-philosophical subject is more akin to the “non-stranger” or a “stranger-in-the-last-instance,” an avatar “queer” to philosophical conceptions of what or who a stranger might be.

Non-philosophy revives indifference as a critical position toward the world that reconfigures the hierarchical division between humans and things.<sup>24</sup> But Laruelle is not the first to enlist indifference as a critical posture, and the term has an august history in continental philosophy. Martin Heidegger formulates “boredom” in *Being and Time* with respect to indifference, or the affective posture through which we relate to the everydayness of being. Invoking Heidegger’s writing on boredom and Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “zones of indiscernibility,” Agamben devises the “zones of indifference,”<sup>25</sup> spaces of exception that both disrupt taxonomical differences between human and nonhuman life and that mark the radical dissolution of life into bare life, or the rendering of “life that is separated and excluded from itself” (Agamben 2004, 38). I suggest that this concept in its most radical form would be a zone of indifference that is itself indifferent to the difference between life and bare life, or what Agamben calls *bios* and *zoë*. The negation of indifference is the engine of Hegel’s dialectic in the development of Being.<sup>26</sup> For Friedrich Schelling, indifference is a primordial monad that exists prior the ground that differentiates Being, an *Ungrund*. Indifference makes possible the differentiation of existence from the ground.<sup>27</sup> Cognates of indifference, such as Derrida’s and Emmanuel Levinas’ “disinterest,” respectively, and Imman-

23 Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” 36.

24 Speculative realists, who share with non-philosophers a desire to circumvent correlationism in philosophy, have written productively, in other terms, about the possibility of an indifferent relationship to nature. See Jane Bennett’s concept of “vital materialism” in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) which describes ecological material and phenomena not as passive matter but lively, unpredictable actants. See also Claire Colebrook’s essay, “Not Symbiosis, Not Now: Why Anthropogenic Change is Not Really Human,” *Oxford Literary Review* 34.2 (2012), which argues that humanity can be conceived of an event of the earth (the anthropocene) and not as occupants *within* it.

25 Agamben, *The Open*, 24, 37.

26 See William Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 52–53, for a detailed approach to the quality and role of indifference in the Hegelian dialectic.

27 See John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007), 83–84, for a detailed approach to the quality and role of indifference in Schelling’s philosophy.

uel Kant’s “apathy” might be generous contributions to this archive.

Laruelle’s practice of indifference accomplishes the dismantling of divisions that support philosophical practice and in doing so renders philosophy inoperable as the tool of the master. His project differs most significantly from his colleagues’ in its insistence on *thinking indifferently* rather than *thinking about indifference*. As a practice concerned specifically with differences in philosophy, indifference neuters the divisions that stratify competing modes of thought, including non-philosophical thought. I enlist the “neuter” both from biology and linguistics, the organism and the machine. Where in biology it describes the arrest of reproduction as well as possibilities for sexual pleasure indifferent to the propagation of the future, in linguistics it describes a third position existing laterally with and indifferent to the first and the second person singular. Invoking Maurice Blanchot’s interest in the term, Roberto Esposito explains,

The neuter [or third person] is not another person to be added to the first two, but what is *neither* one *nor* the other, and what defies all dichotomies founded on, or presupposed by, the language of the person. For this reason it is not located at any particular point in the interlocutory relation—high or low, at the center, on the side, as Levinas would have it—but most definitely outside interlocution, so much so that it ends up being identical with the placeless space of the “outside.”<sup>28</sup>

The neuter does not render dichotomous pronouns inactive, but names that place(lessness) within locution that refuses dichotomy, that does not accommodate the “I” or the “you.” As Esposito explains, the neuter is not a person—neither the subject “I” or the object “you”—but the impersonal “one” that rejects the language of personality altogether. For the first person “I” and second person “you” structurally assume a relation to each other; the third person “one” is not coordinated by a subject-object relation. In the productive spirit of Laruelle’s indifference, the discursive neuter operates indifferently to the central division that structures discourse. As a queer place(lessness), indifference names the production of pleasure opened by a body made inoperable as an instrument of reproduction.

Non-philosophy teaches that philosophical Decision creates the false divisions we have discussed. Philosophical Decision is the atomic structure

28 Roberto Esposito, *Third Person* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 16–17.

that Laruelle identifies in all philosophical practices that divide the One into segments thinkable by philosophy. Its primary effect is to hallucinate a world in which everything is philosophizable, a world that is, in effect, by and for philosophy. Beginning as a Nietzschean scholar, Laruelle soon realized that all the philosophies he was reading were underwritten by this “amphibology” of concept and thing—a false unity that both posits a transcendental double of all worldly material and that brackets theory from the material conditions it studies.

Laruelle traces philosophy’s dominating, auto-authoritative posture toward the world to its Decisionist core. In a fashion that has become typical of non-philosophical discourse, he deploys the concept of Decision to the side of the more familiar discourses of “decisionism” in philosophical, theological, and legal studies. However, what remains so remarkable about this particular indifference to philosophical precedent is its association with the notion of decision as the primary expression of the arbitrary force of sovereign power. Carl Schmitt’s influential pronouncement is apposite: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”<sup>29</sup> But it is worth emphasizing that although Decision may refuse the extant discourse of decisionism, it does so without putting that discourse entirely out of reach. That is because, for Laruelle, the tyranny of philosophy’s auto-legitimation is haunted by the spectre of decisionism in modern political theory, where it names the executive power of political rulers to override democratic norms in the name of state security. In the 1988 conversation, Laruelle and Derrida discuss the stakes of non-philosophy in the pursuit of peace and democracy.<sup>30</sup> If not in letter, Laruelle is certainly writing in spirit against a republic of thought in which freedoms are always under siege.<sup>31</sup> What the Decisionist tendencies Laruelle observes in philosophy conspicuously lack is the singular force of will that marks the decisionist school against other ethico-political theories. If Decision is indeed

---

29 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

30 Laruelle, “Controversy Over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy,” 74–83.

31 Laruelle’s representation of philosophers resembles Jacques Rancière’s “magisterium of thought” in *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006), 97. Rancière, diverging significantly from Laruelle, places emphasis on the representative government of a democracy rather than its equalizing potential. Those who exercise the magisterium of thought could be found equally in a political democratic ontology. For Laruelle, all philosophers would exercise the magisterium.

a *norm* of philosophical practice—a systematic convention that exceeds the absolute authority or dominion of any one philosophy or philosopher—then whatever tyranny it performs on the heterodoxy of thought is not derived from the force of a sovereign power. Absent is the privative, wilful suspension of lawful means of rule that constitutes sovereignty.

Whether Philosophy—as an assemblage greater than the sum of philosophies and philosophers—can be conceived as executing sovereign power depends upon how far we are willing to extend the operation of sovereignty beyond humanistic qualifications. Giorgio Agamben concludes *Homo Sacer* by arguing that “an act is sovereign when it realizes itself by simply taking away its own potentiality not to be, letting itself be, giving itself to itself.”<sup>32</sup> Certainly such a claim against potentiality figures strongly in institutions such as corporate “persons.” A corporate person is a unity of resources sourced from multiple other persons that becomes legally and financially separate from the persons investing in its growth. Its purpose is to gain profit, and its rights and responsibilities are irreducible to those of the individuals that constitute it, even as some of those individuals may take decision-making or representative roles in its name. The corporation, therefore, is an embodiment of sovereign force divested of singular human will, a creature that has decided *sans* decision that it is here to stay and here to make its force felt. Sovereignty, like racism, may be productively understood as a quality of institutions rather than of persons—albeit, it works through these same persons. In non-philosophy, philosophy is lateralized; it becomes a thing in the world no more privileged than a rock, a dream, an art, or a science. Whatever sovereign force it exerts is necessarily conditioned by an automatism indifferent to the human pretensions to will, reason, or desire. In his introduction to *François Laruelle’s Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (2013), Rocco Gangle asks,

What has philosophy done for you lately? Has it challenged you? Has it saved you? Has it become an instrument in your hands for challenging and saving others? Or has it used you merely to propagate itself? Has it tricked you? In this dance or fellowship or war between you and philosophy, who leads and who follows? Are you philosophy’s subject or its object, its mirror or its image? Are you Master or Slave here; maker, tool or half-finished product? To be sure, such images and relations are just metaphors and not

---

32 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 46.

concepts, yet we cannot help but ask what metaphor or image would be appropriate to such questions.<sup>33</sup>

Gangle models the materialist perspective in which non-philosophy reimagines philosophical thought. Theory is a thing that has what Jane Bennett calls a “vital materialism”<sup>34</sup> that lives a life beyond and indifferent to human modes of agency or agenda. If the effect of Decision is to reproduce itself through us, it does so in ways that require a renewed inquiry into the operation of sovereignty.

For Laruelle, nothing less than a democracy of thought is the goal of non-philosophy’s non-dominating intellectual posture toward an unruly world. But the status of democracy in philosophical practice is vexed, claims Laruelle, for committing democracy to thought is not to think democratically:

We regularly confuse the business surrounding democracy, like a political object, with an attitude or a position or a democratic practice... To philosophize on X is to withdraw from X; to take an essential distance from the term for which we posit other terms, for example predicates of X, but the operation does not stop there. The relation cannot remain external but must be interiorized by the means of a supplementary term, a superior unity the circularity of which closes the system. Interiority signifies here that the concept skims over its object or over itself, contemplates and completes it.<sup>35</sup>

What is at stake for non-philosophy is not a political democracy, but a “non-democracy” that thinks *from* the terms of democratic practice rather than about a political ontology as we experience it. Similarly, to think about art is not to think artistically, or to think according to an art object. The more one claims to think about art, the more one thinks over it, both in the sense of thinking in its name and thinking at a distance. In addition to thinking dialectically or conceptually, for example, what if we were also to think artistically, musically, digitally, literarily, or for that matter, emotionally, gastronomically, geologically, bacterially, nasally, or finally, relationally, resistantly, and peace-

33 Rocco Gangle, *François Laruelle’s Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.

34 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13–17.

35 François Laruelle, “Is Thinking Democratic? Or, How to Introduce Theory into Democracy,” in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 229–30.

fully; are these practices also potential lures to thought?

I consider this call for democratic thought to be similar in intent to Derrida's call for hospitality. Derrida's stance posits the exposure to radical Others that effaces the self-sufficiency of the subject. But to submit fully to the horizons of hospitality would mean to be subsumed by the Other, so acting hospitably is always to stand at a necessary distance from its principles. It is equally impossible to think fully democratically, but the lure of its thought, notwithstanding its rhetorical popularity for Western audiences, is the positing of difference prior to opposition, or a plurality of differences that remain in flux and non-exclusive.

A move from tyrannical to democratic thought requires, for Laruelle, a levelling of all Decisions. In one of his more scandalous claims, he argues that "there is no reason to 'choose' Heidegger rather than Nietzsche or inversely."<sup>36</sup> By positing the equivalence of all philosophical Decisions, Laruelle seeks to *expand* rather than to jettison critical engagement with different schools of philosophy. The principle behind this equivalency or democracy of philosophies is their lateral cause by "the One"—the universe of objects always foreclosed to human thought—and their status as material constituents of it, but its effect is to suggest that there is no good reason for choosing one philosophy over another. Every philosophical school believes that it alone possesses the theoretical framework sufficient to explain the world: The Deleuzian body is a network of intensities and flows operating in relation to other bodies; the Foucaultian body is regulated and surveilled by institutions of bio-power; the Nietzschean body is a site of the will to power; and the Freudian body manifests desires foreclosed to consciousness. But none of these schools of philosophy is better equipped than its sisters to explain the world or define what counts as thought. Philosophies do not circulate as a transcendental hierarchy wherein some illuminate the world more brightly than others. In this community of thought, no one philosophy can gain a doctrinal adherence that closes possibilities for criticism that could be opened by exposure to others.

Non-philosophical practice operates to the side of philosophy's "non-sovereignty." It strikes a pose in relation to Decisional thinking that strives to abstain from meta-philosophical critique that, as Timothy Morton has ar-

---

36 François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, trans. Rocco Gangle (New York: Continuum, 2011), 210.



gued, constitutes a history of Western philosophy that proceeds in the spirit and practice of “anything you can do I can do meta.”<sup>37</sup> The non-philosophical posture practices a studied indifference to Decisional thinking—thinking that accomplishes the meta-philosophical pose—rather than a critical methodology designed to supersede philosophy’s claims, a move that would constitute its readmission into the cycle of meta-critique. The precise nature of its encounter with philosophy is variously described as indifference, suspension, or non-Decision; these are benign approaches that strive to embody the non-dominating perspective that philosophy itself lacks, and yet each has a different connotative and etymological force that lends the operation of non-philosophy to different interpretations.<sup>38</sup> Ray Brassier interestingly describes that relationship as one of development:

Non-philosophy is not an anti-philosophical doctrine but a theory for philosophy, a theory that, once applied to a philosophical material, radically reconfigures the structures of philosophical thought on the basis of that material. Far from seeking to terminate or to interrupt philosophical Decision, the Laruellean practise of non-philosophy constitutes a non-Decisional theory for philosophical Decision; a theoretical praxis which seeks to broaden the horizons of Decision and widen conceptual possibilities available to philosophical thought by suspending the sufficiency of Decision as practiced in its autonomously philosophical mode.<sup>39</sup>

If Decision is only one practice of thought among an occluded range of legitimate others, then it is worth lending close scrutiny to Brassier’s evaluation of the effects of “non-Decision” and the therapeutic force it lends to its encounters with Decision. Only by identifying the Decisional structure do we release the possibility for the exercise of its others. But this release also threat-

---

37 Timothy Morton, “Anything You Can Do I Can Do Meta,” *Ecology Without Nature*, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.ca/2010/11/anything-you-can-do-i-can-do-meta.html> (accessed July 26, 2013).

38 While this essay has not intervened in this particular question, further study on Laruelle and non-philosophy could ask if “indifference, suspension, and non-Decision” align easily as cognate descriptions of the operation of non-philosophy, or if perhaps these terms variously reflect the operation of non-philosophy across different stages of its development or coextensively across different stages of its intervention.

39 Ray Brassier, “Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter” (PhD diss. University of Warwick, 2001), 6.

ens the central engine of philosophy, or its authority as the privileged point of access to the material world. The benignity of non-Decision, as Brassier describes it, delivers as an effect a kind of disaster for philosophy, or what Laruelle has called the destruction of the “classical usage of philosophy.”<sup>40</sup> Philosophy is tightly bound up with its use, so while philosophy itself survives the inclusion of non-Decisional thought, it serves a different role altogether. Non-Decision as a theory *for* philosophy also creates a disaster *for* philosophy. What becomes possible from non-Decisional thinking could be one incarnation of what Jacques Khalip calls the “non-normative and transformative effects produced by disaster.”<sup>41</sup> This generative disaster for philosophy is, as Brassier explains, not a foreclosure of philosophical discourse but its radical expansion, a seismic leveling that, as Khalip suggests, “isn’t merely synonymous with the denigration of thought, but rather suggests new conditions of intelligibility and complex forms of non-triumphal, wasted life.”<sup>42</sup>

Non-philosophy exposes new possibilities for thought emerging from the wasted life of philosophy. It represents a growing body of work undertaken against the backdrop of the “death of theory” that thinkers such as Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* (2004) have been quick to pronounce as the only possibility for critical thought “after” post-structuralism. In Borges’ “On Exactitude in Science,” the map that grew to the size of the Empire was not subjected to a violent skirmish once the new generation rejected its use, but was “delivered ... up to the Inclemencies of the Sun and Winters”<sup>43</sup> and remained in the Empire as tattered ruins inhabited by animals and beggars. So too does the ruinous life of philosophy gain new usage among those who inhabit the margins when the new generation of non-philosophers gives philosophy to the universe of objects.

The relevance of non-philosophy for feminist, anti-racist, and queer theory suggest that the stakes of non-philosophy lie in the work of criticism and—as we will see through Keats—the work of literature. It is also worth considering the historical and social conditions that have contributed to an interest in non-philosophy and that have produced a way of life that could

40 Laruelle in Mackay, “Introduction: Laruelle Undivided,” 29.

41 Jacques Khalip, “The Ruin of Things,” *Romantic Frictions*, ed. Teresa Kelley, Special Issue of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/frictions/HTML/praxis.2011.khalip.html> (accessed August 1, 2013).

42 Ibid.

43 Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” 325.

benefit from an encounter with Laruelle. Laruelle's writing has caught the imagination of a new generation in the face of a certain impasse met by some with the "death of theory" and others, with the critical inoperability of the Occupy Movement. Its insistence on the recasting of the master's tools to be used without mastery—what Anne-Lise François affirms as "not-for-profit experience"<sup>44</sup>—has been received both with hostility toward and excitement for; among other things, experimenting with the oppositional power of worklessness, not as a privation, but as a powerful political movement in its own right. Non-philosophy's possibilities for "non-triumphal" thought have inspired young scholars living in exhausted times when the constant spectacle of war, the demolition of unions and social safety nets, the growing power of corporations, and economic and environmental crises are met with a chorus of "how to proceed?" Laruelle's fashioning of a critical encounter with philosophy that does not hinge on self-reflexivity resonates with a generation grappling with a sense that knowing about these global emergencies and our precarious roles in their midst is not to challenge them.<sup>45</sup> Far from ceding to what Elaine Scarry has named the "seduction to stop thinking"<sup>46</sup> in emergency conditions administrated by executive decision, non-philosophy responds to this impasse with an affirmation of the plurality of modes of thought, irreducible to a privative and exclusive scene of *having* knowledge.

The conditions of our present moment, from within which Laruelle speaks to us, recalls the conditions of John Keats' own moment. In the years following Napoleon's final attack on the Anglo-allied army at Waterloo in 1815, the battle that proceeded Napoleon's exile to Elba by one hundred days and the supposed end of the French Revolution by sixteen years, the second generation of Romantic writers were confronting an impasse marked by the

44 Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 21.

45 Laruelle argues that one of the primary gestures of philosophy is to engage reflexively with its own operations in the name of philosophy and its continued privilege. "Philosophy," he explains, "gives itself according to the mode of its own self-positing/giveness/reflection/naming, or according to that of an enlarged self-consciousness or universal cogito. It is, at best, existence and gives itself with the feeling or affect of its own existence ("I know, I feel that I philosophize")" (see Laruelle, "A Summary of non-Philosophy," 31). Non-philosophy departs from the model of reflection as adequate critique and seeks to view its operations from without.

46 Elaine Scarry, *Thinking In An Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 3.

precariousness of what Rei Terada claims was the impossibility of discerning restoration from revolution.<sup>47</sup> In *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci describes the Napoleonic postwar situation as revolution-restoration, an indifference of transformative forces that he also locates in the Italian Risorgimento and the aftermaths of the First World War and the American stock market crash of 1929. The revolution-restoration, or “passive revolution,”<sup>48</sup> is an obstruction of the progressive dialectic where, Gramsci writes, “The thesis alone in fact develops to its full potential for struggle, up to the point where it absorbs even the so-called representatives of the antithesis.”<sup>49</sup> The result is a distension of oppositional energy that does not progress fully into revolution and that retains the conservative structure of restoration.

This inoperable moment was the occasion for Keats to consider the labour of literary history and of classical poetry as legitimized and legitimizing forms of work. Tilottama Rajan shows that Keats struggled with the status of historicist aspirations and epic poetry in the *Hyperions* and argues that “for Keats the fact that poetry ‘makes nothing happen’ (to use W. H. Auden’s words) is not a sign of literature’s difference from a history where things ‘happen.’ For poetry makes ‘nothing’ happen, thus disclosing a negativity that is in history as much as in poetry.”<sup>50</sup> Poetry embodies what Blanchot referred to as *désœuvrement* or worklessness that makes reading Laruelle after Romanticism (and Romanticism after Laruelle) a potentially generative endeavour. Although poetry has not yet seized the particular interest of non-philosophical theorists, it is a form of thought that clearly holds considerable interest for Laruelle.<sup>51</sup> Explaining his intentions in creating non-philosophy, he says,

My idea, which has been growing for some years, and may last a little longer, is to make art with philosophy, to introduce or make a poetry of thought, not necessarily a poetry made of concepts, a poetry that would put forth some

---

47 Rei Terada, “Looking At The Stars Forever,” *Studies in Romanticism*. 50.2 (2011): 279.

48 This term is attributed to Vincenzo Cuoco.

49 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Geoffrey N. Smith and Quintin Hoare (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 110.

50 Tilottama Rajan, “Keats, Poetry, and ‘The Absence of Work,’” *Modern Philology* 95.3 (1998): 335.

51 Many of Laruelle’s own non-philosophical texts resemble poetry. See “Universe Black in the Foundations of Human Color” and “What the One Sees in the One,” in Laruelle’s *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Press, 2012).

philosophical thesis—but to make something poetic with concepts. Thus, to create a practice that could destroy, in a certain way, the classical usage of philosophy.<sup>52</sup>

The aestheticization of philosophy achieves the form of inoperability that Laruelle envisions for criticism. That non-philosophical destruction has the status of a poetic claim suggests that the corrosive materiality of the poetic has the potential to reterritorialize legitimized modes of thought. Poetry functions as a type of discourse that actively *neuters the concept*, and if a poem made of concepts does not describe the non-philosophical goal, it is nonetheless a monstrous thing: a non-philosophical womb for philosophical activity. If poetry is a workless form of knowledge, then the philosophical claims addressed within the poetic are surely being put to use to the side of the philosophical project they appear to endorse.

Again, there is a rich history of such a fantasy in German Romanticism. Schlegel wrote in the *Lyceum Fragments* that “poetry can be criticized only through poetry. A critique which itself is not a work of art, either in content of representation of the necessary impression in the process of creation, or through its beautiful form and in its liberal tone in the spirit of the old Roman satire, has no right of citizenship in the realm of art.”<sup>53</sup> While Schlegel identifies poetry by the work of representation or tone, he favours critique that is indifferent to art and that is refused its own territory outside of art’s dominion. Criticism is given no privileged space that would exempt it from the material conditions that give rise to art. Rajan argues that what counted as “literature” in this period was gradually “narrowed to mean imaginative writing and this new category was further subdivided so as to separate poetry (once synonymous with “making”) from prose.”<sup>54</sup> The history of philosophical Decision as it applies to the critical and interpretative work performed with art—specifically literature—perhaps deserves its own consideration in non-philosophical scholarship as a more recent development of the forces of cultural capital.

---

52 Laruelle in Mackay, “Introduction: Laruelle Undivided,” 29.

53 Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 157.

54 Rajan, “Keats, Poetry, and the ‘Absence of Work,’” 337.

*Laruelle's Indolence: Keats After Non-Philosophy*

To describe Laruelle's pedagogical posture, I enlisted Agamben's concept of the Sabbath as a spatio-temporal clearing where the theorist is free to experiment with radical modes of thought. Keats, to whose poetry I now turn, experienced his own clearing near the end of his short life that he called "indolence." Keats' indolence—like Laruelle's indifference—is a mutated posture invigorated with critical potential. In the spring of 1819, Keats produced five odes in a feat of searching creativity. He describes his countenance during this surge of production as indolence, or an evacuation of affect that renders him inert and yet strangely, paradoxically, happy. He writes to his older brother and his brother's wife on 19 March, 1819,

This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless... my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered to nearly eleven, and weakened the animal fibre all over me, to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and breath of lilies I should call it langour, but as I am I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable power. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek vase—a Man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement. This is the only happiness, and is a rare instance of the advantage of the body overpowering the mind.<sup>55</sup>

Keats describes the very peculiar condition of being overpowered by a body without passions. His words realign the Cartesian tautology of the body and the appetite, and reimagine the productivity of the body evacuated of the engine of the passions. This would be a clean, saintly, masculine state if it weren't characterized by laziness and carelessness. It is, rather, a complexly feminized state in which the subject of poetry is consumed by the *jouissance* of bodily demands—a *jouissance*, rather, that is both passionless and unappealing to the senses. Poetry, ambition, and love pass like indifferent spectres distant from and unconcerned about the poet idly watching their progress. And yet this metaphor of the three figures on a Greek vase produced from the state of

---

<sup>55</sup> John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821, Volume II*, ed. Hyder Edwards Rolins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 78–79.

indolence is the image that structures two of the 1819 odes. Keats' indolence is a condition of being-in-the-world characterized by an abstention from productivity, a pause or impasse, as fleeting as it is activating, experienced and imagined as otherwise than a privation.

Like the clearing for radical thought made possible by non-philosophical inquiry, Keats' indolence is a small opening of radical potential, a holding-back of the forces that regularly shape our actions. Non-philosophy functions by suspending the engine of philosophical production to make room for an expanded regime of thought production, and Keats was invested in that project. His 1819 quintet of odes is an experiment in the boundaries of poetic form. The odes constitute an expanded notion of the genre that includes the quotidian objects and observations of a life steeped in poverty and illness and that reimagines the relation between the ode and its subject. Writing in the spirit of indolence, Keats shares in the suspension of normative modes of thought production to make room for new forms of literary and critical labour.

Turning now to "Ode on a Grecian Urn," I want to regenerate the ideas that have occupied this afterword with respect to one of Keats' magnificent odes. My engagement with this poem will proceed both philosophically and non-philosophically; it will not only serve as a "mutation" of non-philosophical practice but as a model for the concerns raised by non-philosophical scholarship. The ode shares its central imagery of the Greek vase with "Ode on Indolence," and it appears that Keats valued Greek masonry as an ideal form of art worthy of close discussion and emulation.<sup>56</sup>

Of all Keats' odes, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" perhaps most radically disrupts the philosopher's pretensions to knowledge about the material world. The poem is preoccupied with a funereal urn that remains silent as the narrator-philosopher implores it to speak, or grant him access to its meaning. The narrator-philosopher's task in the poem mirrors the strangely parallel task adopted by some Romanticists to locate the urn that served as Keats' model for the ode.<sup>57</sup> Like Keats' narrator-philosopher, who believes that human language will gain him access to the wondrous object, the Romanticists assume

56 Keats was deeply inspired by the Elgin Marbles in England. See Notopoulos, "'Truth-Beauty' In The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and the Elgin Marbles," *The Modern Language Review* 61.2 (1966): 180–82.

57 See Jerome McGann in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43–44.

that the poem, too, is a form of access to an elusive material reality. The poem does not reveal whether Keats was inspired by the memory of a particular urn, a set of two dimensional engravings in a book, or a composite of Greek art, nor does it offer up a set of coordinates leading to the source. The urn's silence, its idle resistance to questions about its source, are instructive of the life of poetry. The poem always lives in excess of our search for meaning, and if I take any meaning of this ode away with me, it is, paradoxically, the poem's resistance to the very idea of its role as a meaning-giver. Like the spectral voice at the close of the poem that pronounces an oddly conclusive equation—"beauty is truth, truth beauty"—meaning may be our own "hallucination," as Laruelle would say. Whatever the material genesis of the poem, it is ultimately foreclosed to human knowledge as the urn in the poem is also silent.

Similar to Laruelle's reconfiguration of the critical posture toward philosophy, the poem begins by reorienting the relation between the poetic form of the ode and the subject of poetic discourse. One of three Keatsian odes written "on" the subject rather than the more traditional "to," the title of this ode is an immediate provocation to the genre conventions of the Ode and its function as a lyrical style of address. In other words, this ode begins as a challenge to the very role of Ode as a mode of address. But the content of the ode is somewhat at odds with its title. The narrator poses questions to the figures on the urn in vain, knowing all too well that they cannot answer. The urn's silence is established in the first two lines before the interrogation begins, suggesting just how redundant—or even indolent—this address will be:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,  
 Sylvan historian who canst thus express  
 A flowery talk more sweetly than our rhyme.<sup>58</sup>

What is the point of questioning the "foster child of silence" unless the questions themselves are a rhetorical mockery of the very idea of such questions put to art?

Keats' narrator-philosopher puts questions to the frozen figures on the urn like a literary theorist puts questions to a poem. The parallel commen-

<sup>58</sup> John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–4, in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 260.



tary on the two forms of art—the urn and the poem—has not been ignored by scholars of Keats. Keats’ praise of the urn’s “Attic shape”<sup>59</sup> in the final stanza suggests that the urn’s toroid canvas is a model for poetry. Thinking about the influence of urns and Greek art on this ode, Adam Roberts asks if the ode could be considered to be “urn-shaped.” In the vocabulary of non-philosophy, Roberts want to know if the poem is speaking *from* the urn. He suggests that because an urn’s geometry is non-Euclidean—its shape is three dimensional and the narrative drawn on its exterior can only be read continuously—and a poem’s geometry is Euclidean—its linear form has a definitive beginning and end—the poem stresses the fundamental difference between the two forms of art. Keats, he suggests, draws our attention to this difference:

It is difficult to avoid the sense that the urn Keats elaborates is a curiously flat, Euclidean urn: a non-continuous, non-toroid urn. Indeed, it could be argued that an “ode” about a torus is an oxymoron to begin with: the dialectic progression implicit in strophe, antistrophe and epode suggests development, such that the position reached at the end of the poem is in some sense different (albeit derived) from the beginning. This is not really compatible with the nature of a torus. It could certainly be argued that the details of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ undercut any idea of toroidity.<sup>60</sup>

For Roberts, the aesthetic constitution of the urn is fundamentally at odds with that of the ode; the two forms of art do not even reside in the same dimensional realities. Indeed, the urn’s silence also stands in contrast to the chatty ode, a poem enlivened with the inquisitive passion that the poet says remains far above the urn. The relationship between the narrator-philosopher and the urn is remarkably unerotic when compared to the equivalent relationship in “Ode on Indolence,” which is punctuated by the intimate, embodied gesture of the narrator repeatedly turning the vase around in his hands. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” the star-crossed lovers could not be more remote. For Roberts, the ode does not speak *from* the urn. But in what sense, as Roberts suggests, does the geometrical difference preclude poetic discourse *about* the torus? To claim that one speaks “about” an object is to make a representational claim that both establishes the difference between the claim and

---

59 Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” line 41, 261.

60 Adam Roberts, “Keats’ ‘Attic Shape’: ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ and Non-Euclidean Geometry,” in *Keats-Shelley Review* 9 (1995): 5.

the object and in the same moment promises closer proximity to the object, or a special, transcendent knowledge made available to the theorist through that difference. In other words, representation is difference that elides the image of difference, a difference masked as a site of repetition.

The ode does appear to take pains to represent the object, but by its own admission that the urn “canst thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme,”<sup>61</sup> it challenges from the start any simple tautology between itself and the urn. The poem asserts its difference from the urn, and it is precisely this difference that coordinates the poem’s effort to speak *about* the urn. By representing the urn, the poem exempts itself from the material reality of the urn; indeed, the urn and the poem exist in different dimensional realities, can they even be said to be of the same world? The rhetorical questions posed *on* rather than *to* the ode establish its hierarchical advantage with respect to the discursive function of the urn. The ode knows its place; it knows that a style of address can hide as a mode of representation. Keats’ poem first appears to be a classic example of philosophical representation. The urn is beholden to the poet to communicate; it is only legible as an object of another’s interest. And yet, the ode and the urn do not cleave neatly into the philosophical and the material, respectively. Keats valorizes the urn precisely for its a-materiality, its transcendence from the passage of time and the world of “breathing human passion.”<sup>62</sup> Even in its Euclidean dimensionality, it expresses the passion and the *telos* of an anxious pursuit arrested on the surface of the urn. The poem is enlivened by a sense of the non-Euclidean that the urn itself rejects. It captures the materiality of embodied affect and emotion while the urn suspends it. There is a difference that structures the poem, but that difference is indifferent to the divide between the philosophical and the material. Indeed, the philosophical “wonder” propelling the narrator-philosopher grounds him among the earthly tangle to which the urn is indifferent.

The “lesson” that concludes the poem is strange one, not in the least because it is attributed to an object that cannot voice it. The ventriloquism, “beauty is truth, truth beauty,”<sup>63</sup> is an unusually conclusive ending for Keats,

61 Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” lines 3–4, 260.

62 Ibid., line 28, 261.

63 Keats adopted the epithet, “truth-beauty,” after being introduced to the Elgin Marbles, a set of Greek scenes set in marble brought from the pantheon to England at the turn of the eighteenth century. For Keats, it described an ideal of Greek art that became a model for the best of English poetry. See Notopolous, “Truth-Beauty,” 180–82.

considering that another of his 1819 odes addressed to a nonhuman companion, “Ode To A Nightingale,” concludes with the ambivalent phrase, “do I wake or do I sleep.”<sup>64</sup> But more than the ending of its sister ode, the unexplained presence and origin of “beauty is truth, truth beauty” provides no closure. As a conclusion, these words refigure what it means to conclude and what it means to learn something intelligible by reading a poem. The tautology is not an invention of Keats. It circulated among the Romantics as a prescription for model art. It was introduced to Keats by the painter Robert Haydon,<sup>65</sup> and Schlegel used it to describe the poetry of Giovanni Boccaccio.<sup>66</sup> Kyoung-Min Han has read the tautology as a blending of the philosophical and the sensual, an expression of “how sensory experience can provide access to that which transcends sensory grasp.”<sup>67</sup> However, both poles of this tautology are conditioning terms, expressions not of two realities but of a fundamental indifference between metaphysical forms. The words are not a Decision creating a false unity between conditioning and conditioned terms; rather, they express the equivalence of conceptual schemas. Like the narrator-philosopher thinks of the urn, there can be no “breathing human passion” in Beauty or Truth, which have no sense of what it means to breathe or to cease breathing. There is nothing beautiful about Beauty.

Perhaps the ode can be thought to be speaking *from* the urn, or to be “urn-shaped,” in the most contradictory sense. If what the narrator-philosopher admires about the urn is its silence—its indifference to the breathing human passion it elicits—then perhaps silence is the aesthetic ideal mimicked by the ode. A silent poem, like the urn, does not respond to our interpretations of its meaning; indeed, does not need them. It does not know the breathing human passion from which comes the desire for meaning. The poem is a Real that causes a plurality of meanings, but the poem itself is not *meaningful*. Keats’ ode does not contain, nor does it care about, this lesson I hallucinate in its presence. That the ode does not mean its indifference to meaning does not make poetic learning impossible, only that this pedagogy occurs at a site of paradox.

64 John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), line 80, 260.

65 *Ibid.*, 180–81.

66 Friedrich Schlegel, *Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works of Frederick von Schlegel*, trans. E. J. Millington, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849), 201.

67 Kyoung-Min Han, “The Urn’s ‘Silent Form’: Keats’ Critique of Poetic Judgment,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 48.3 (2012): 245.

*Conclusion*

The many ways in which students of Laruelle will use his theories as avatars of pedagogical and professional work constitute an anticipated future we cannot yet imagine. But with a future that forecasts any number of ways to read and write non-philosophy and non-philosophically will also come a body of helpful criticisms that will fine-tune the reception of non-philosophical (non-)concepts and (non?)axioms. Anthony Paul Smith, for one, has asked why our conception of philosophy need be the Western kind.<sup>68</sup> Non-philosophy describes a type of philosophical operation that has evolved from the Greco-Occidental tradition and may not resemble uses of philosophy found in non-Western academia. The interest that non-philosophy takes in modes of war and peace—and indeed in its self-image as an usher of peace in the face of a tyrannical mode of thought<sup>69</sup>—is a site of much needed development as well. Laruelle describes non-philosophy’s posture toward the usage of philosophy variously between suspension and destruction. His work is riddled with the language of war, peace, democracy, terror, and destruction, and this murmuration of globalizing language creates a consequential terrain on which Laruelle has made his work legible to others. As a mode of thinking from the One that wants to “destroy the classical usage of philosophy,” we might ask if non-philosophy thinks from destruction—thinks destructively—and how a methodology configured by destruction brings about an order of peace. It is perhaps in this methodology of destruction that Laruelle is closest to Derrida, the father of “deconstruction.” Laruelle’s work should prompt new reviews of the methodology of destruction as it is mobilized by Derrida, whose writing on deconstruction was formed in part as a response to Heidegger’s *Destruktion*.

The stakes of non-philosophy could be significantly elaborated through an encounter with feminist, queer, and anti-racist schools of thought. These scholarly domains were developed, and in their best forms continue to proceed, in the spirit of a questioning and reformulation of the fundamental principles of criticism. William Haver, for instance, suggested in 1997 that “queer research” could be something other than (or as he says, “essentially more disturbing than”) “the manipulation of concepts.” What if it could be,

68 Anthony Paul Smith. “So What?: On Graham Harman’s Abominable Review of Laruelle’s *Philosophies of Difference*,” *An und für sich*, <http://itself.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/so-what-on-graham-harmans-abominable-review-of-laruelle/> (accessed March 10, 2014).

69 Laruelle, “Controversy Over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy,” 74–92.

he says, something other than a representation of queer lives and cultural locations and could “constitute itself in and as a refusal to participate in the struggle for intellectual hegemony, to provide a better explanation of the world?”<sup>70</sup> Non-philosophy offers a collection of resources that seem tailored to rise to the challenge of a constituting set of research practices that seek something other than a “better explanation.” As a radical approach to literature, non-philosophy could unseat the primacy of the “interpretation” as the profit of literary criticism. The experiment I began in this essay with Keats could surely take many forms as a “not-for-profit” approach to literature.

New scholarship will also want to lend a closer eye to the type of “non-triumphal” peace that becomes possible when philosophy no longer has a monopoly on thought. If in suspending philosophical Decision non-philosophy desires peace from philosophy’s dominance, I assume that this peace could only be a peace-in-the-last-instance, a non-peace that we have yet to consider. But here is perhaps the phantasmatic glimmer in Laruelle’s uncompromising work: faced with a world in which war constitutes an all-consuming organizational force, the specter of a non-peace—an amplification of what counts as peace—looms over our desire to forge new ways of living in a constant state of exception. Kant suggested that peace was not the absence of war, and perhaps non-philosophy can pick up where Kant left off and pressure the concept of peace into a clearing for radical thought.

---

70 William Haver, “Queer Research; or, How to Practise Invention to the Brink of Intelligibility,” in *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*, ed. Sue Golding (New York: Routledge, 1997), 278.

**Works Cited**

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *The Open: Man and Animal*. Translated by Kevin Attell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "On Exactitude in Science." In *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley. New York, NY: Viking, 1999.
- Brassier, Ray. "Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter." Diss., University of Warwick, 2001.
- Butler, Judith, and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.
- Colebrook, Claire. "Not Symbiosis, Not Now: Why Anthropogenic Change Is Not Really Human." *Oxford Literary Review* 34.2 (December 2012): 185-209. doi:10.3366/olr.2012.0041.
- Durantaye, Leland De La. *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Esposito, Roberto. *Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel and Gilles Deleuze. "Intellectuals and Power." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, translated

by Donald F. Bouchard and Sharry Simon, 205-17. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

François, Anne-Lise. *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Gangle, Rocco. *François Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers, 1972.

Halley, Janet E. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Han, Kyoung-Min. "The Urn's 'Silent Form': Keats' Critique of Poetic Judgment." *Papers on Language & Literature* 48.3 (Summer 2012). <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-304467110/the-urn-s-silent-form-keats-s-critique-of-poetic> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Harman, Graham. "Review of *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*." *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, August 11, 2011. <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/25437-philosophies-of-difference-a-critical-introduction-to-non-philosophy/> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Haver, William. "Queer Research; Or, How to Practice Invention to the Brink of Intelligibility." In *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*, by Sue Golding. London: Routledge, 1997.

Keats, John, and Hyder Edward Rollins. *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*. Vol. II. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Keats, John. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. Translated by H. W. Garrod. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

Khalip, Jacques. "The Ruin of Things." *Romantic Circles*. September 2011.

<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/frictions/HTML/praxis.2011.khalip.html> (accessed August 1, 2013).

Kolozova, Katerina. "The Project of Non-Marxism: Arguing for 'Monstrously' Radical Concepts." *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* 10 (2007).

Laruelle, François. *The Concept of Non-Photography*. Translated by Robin Mackay. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011.

———. *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*. Translated by Taylor Adkins. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2013.

———. *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Edited by Robin Mackay. Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2012.

———. "Is Thinking Democratic? Or, How to Introduce Theory into Democracy." In *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, 227-37. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

———. *Non-Philosophy Project: Essays*. Edited by Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjević. New York: Telos Press Pub., 2012.

———. *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*. Translated by Rocco Gangle. London: Continuum, 2010.

———. *Principles of Non-Philosophy*. Translated by Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Laughland, John. *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outside: Essays and Speeches*. New York, NY: Ten Speed Press, 2007.

McGann, Jerome J. *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in History, Method and Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.



- Morton, Timothy. "Anything You Can Do I Can Do Meta." *Ecology Without Nature*. November 6, 2010. <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.ca/2010/11/anything-you-can-do-i-can-do-meta.html> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- . *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Mullarkey, John, and Anthony Paul Smith, editors. *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Notopoulos, James A. "'Truth-Beauty' in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and the Elgin Marbles." *The Modern Language Review* 61.2 (April 1966): 180-82. doi:10.2307/3720744.
- Rajan, Tilottama. "Keats, Poetry, and 'The Absence of Work'." *Modern Philology* 95.3 (February 1998): 334-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/438903?ref=search-gateway:d4159ee20bd6d0ff8bb23b7e6b2aca48> (accessed March 24, 2014).
- Rancière, Jacques. *Hatred of Democracy*. Translated by Steve Corcoran. London: Verso, 2007.
- Roberts, Adam. "Keats' 'Attic Shape': 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and Non-Euclidian Geometry." *The Keats-Shelley Review* 9.1 (1995): 1-14. doi:10.1179/ksr.1995.9.1.1.
- Scarry, Elaine. *Thinking in an Emergency*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.
- Schlegel, Friedrich von. *The Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works of Frederick Von Schlegel*. Translated by E. J. Millington. London: H.G. Bohn, 1849.
- . *Lucinde and the Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971.
- Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translated by George Schwab. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985.

- Smith, Anthony Paul. "So What?: On Graham Harman's Abominable Review of Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference." An und für sich. August 15, 2011. <http://itself.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/so-what-on-graham-harmans-abominable-review-of-laruelle/> (accessed March 10, 2014).
- . "Thinking From The One: Science and the Ancient Philosophical Figure of the One." In *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, edited by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, 19-41. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Terada, Rei. "Looking At The Stars Forever." *Studies in Romanticism* 50.2 (Summer 2011): 275-309.
- Watkin, William. *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

# ‡ MUSIC IN THE MONOPOLIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

*Glenn Gould, the CBC, and the Construction of Canadian Intellectual Identity*

MICHAEL MACKENZIE

During the 1950s and throughout the 1970s, Canada pursued its domestic and international goals by developing a national brand, an effort that included valuing certain music as nationally symbolic. For his part, the pianist Glenn Gould's television programmes for the CBC articulated a potent national space for its viewers. In this space Gould interwove his distinctive philosophies regarding music and Canadian national identity with the Canadian intellectual *Zeitgeist*. Culturally, as of the Massey Commission of 1949, Canada took a newly comprehensive and centralized approach that built on the early twentieth-century efforts of Canadian amateur musicians to replicate British culture in Anglophone Canada. According to Canadian historian Maria Tippett, "the bottom-up interests of community groups and the top-down approaches of institutions such as the CBC and the National Film Board conventionalized a broad educational model based on cultural borrowing and nationalism."<sup>1</sup> These top-down institutions, according to economist and media theorist Harold Innis, operated to promote the creation of monopolies of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Through an integration of musicology, media studies, and cultural studies, I will explore how the case of Gould on CBC Television illuminates the nature of intellectual authority and its construction, and the privileges granted to the technocratic elite served by its social and technological institutions.

---

1 Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 18.

2 Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950); Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

In this study, I begin with an interpretation of how Gould capitalized on Marshall McLuhan's pervasive influence during the 1960s, and what effects this had on his position within the Canadian communications school. I then consider Gould's own media theory, and finally, I analyze three case studies of Gould's CBC television programmes as performances of Canadian identity and electronic utopianism. In all of these cases—which are *Music in the U.S.S.R.* of 1962, the *Canada Centennial Concert* of 1967, and the television version of *The Idea of North* of 1970—I will focus on the manifestation of Gould's view of music in Canadian identity more than the viewers' consumption of, or participation in, these programmes. I argue that CBC Television invited viewers to participate as citizens under a monopoly of knowledge, as theorized by Harold Innis, and built an imagined community, as theorized by Benedict Anderson.<sup>3</sup> I will apply this theoretical framework to a selection of Gould's now unprecedentedly available broadcasts and interviews. This investigation will bring us one step closer to understanding the relationship between television and music, as well as the persistent impact of one of the country's few innately domestic cultural icons.

This study is informed by Harold Innis's theorizing of communications and Benedict Anderson's theorizing of national formations. Innis begins his exploration of monopolies in the economic realm of Canadian staples. In his 1930 study, *The Cod Fisheries*, Innis explores the relationship of decentralizing forces and monopolizing forces.<sup>4</sup> Innis recounts several efforts to establish monopolies over the Atlantic shipping and fishing industries, each unsuccessful due to the decentralized nature of the ocean in comparison to the rivers on which the fur trade operated and could be controlled. In his post-1945 works on communications, Innis applies this monopoly-versus-decentralization paradigm to the market of information. During this period, Innis could see that the CBC was able to monopolize knowledge through its ability to control the variety and scheduling of information available to the public. Further, these powers allowed the institution to mold the character of how knowledge was defined.

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that the multifaceted nature of material-cultural practices, which he terms print-capitalism,

3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).

4 Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 379.

contribute strongly to the creation and maintenance of the “imagined community” of a nation whose citizens feel “deep attachments” to each other in absence of personal relationships: “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>5</sup> Anderson’s conception of the nation is that of an abstract community in which meaning is shared and distributed by the mass media addressing citizens as a public. In Gould’s case, his own privileged role in the national media endowed him with the ability to navigate the meanings determining Canadian identity.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Marshall McLuhan studies how communication technology influenced human psychology and social structures across history and various regions of the world. McLuhan contrasts print and electronic media in a way Anderson does not. While Anderson primarily focuses on print communications, he applies his thesis to electronic media such as radio and television as well. McLuhan, however, argues that the nature of electronic media produces a different effect than print media. For McLuhan, the rise of the printing press formed human cognition into patterns of visual/linear thinking. Therefore, print media ordered thought and emphasized the cerebral and quantifiable at the expense of the subjective and emotional. However, whereas print technology made possible nationalism and capitalism, McLuhan sees these effects as challenged by electronic media. However, despite the utopianism McLuhan shares with Gould, I argue that the national mandate of the CBC formed an important subtext to the specific content of its different programmes. Indeed, the medium is the message. Nationalism is not expunged by television so much as exhibited in new ways. In Gould’s case, his privileged role in the national media endowed him with the ability to navigate the meanings determining Canadian identity.

Gould—like McLuhan—saw television as offering a sort of media-based salvation from the spatial imbalance initiated by the printing press, an imbalance causing the societal changes that culminated in the evils of conflict and alienation in the twentieth century. McLuhan believed that electronic media offered the present West a way back to the authentic human condition of the pre-Gutenberg medieval West.<sup>6</sup> Following an exhausting period of

---

5 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 224.

6 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto:

international performing, Gould came to see the technologies that McLuhan considered transformative as both an artistic and physical escape from live concerts. Undoubtedly influenced by his long association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, by the early 1960s Gould began to argue that the future of music lay in the development of technology and the private listening sphere.<sup>7</sup> Gould anticipated a new kind of listener, characterized with an interest in a higher definition of music and improved musical appreciation:

It may well be that the very near future will produce a do-it-yourself laboratory of home recording techniques... We already see this happening in the case of the hi-fi bug, the fellow who places his own interpretative notions on questions of dynamics, of balance, of separation, of textural preferences [on] the recording which he plays on his home stereo.<sup>8</sup>

After a final concert on April 10, 1964, Gould withdrew from public performance and began to expound his own media theory. He read McLuhan's recently published magnum opus, *Understanding Media*, and quickly got to know McLuhan personally.<sup>9</sup> When the University of Toronto awarded Gould a honorary degree in 1964, he used the June 1 convocation as an exhibition for his arguments on the future of music in the electronic age.<sup>10</sup> I will briefly look at Gould's media theory as presented in Gould's convocation address,

---

University of Toronto Press, 1962). McLuhan devotes *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to studying "an inventory of effects" of print on the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages. That the West has returned to a world of multisensory perception from one of linear thought is a large part of McLuhan's historical theory. McLuhan viewed late-twentieth century culture as a renaissance of the Middle Ages which fit into his conception of epochal retrievals.

7 Gould argued in 1962 that "the justification of art is the internal combustion it ignites in the hearts of men and *not its shallow, externalized, public manifestations*. The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but is, rather, the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity" (Quoted in Mark Kingwell, *Extraordinary Canadians: Glenn Gould* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 194, my italics).

8 Glenn Gould, "Forgery and Imitation in the Creative Process," in *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius*, ed. John P.L. Roberts (Toronto: Malcolm Lester, 1999), 219.

9 Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003).

10 Glenn Gould, "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," *The Art of Glenn Gould*. Gould also repeated this speech at the Royal Conservatory of Music's convocation on November 11, 1964.

“An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age,” its relation to McLuhan’s tetrad of the laws of media, and how it informs Gould’s concept of a “participant audience.”

In “An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age,” Gould drew from McLuhan’s theoretical approach. McLuhan eventually organized his media theory into the tetrad, which takes the classic thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic and incorporates a fourth element, that of retrieval, emphasizing the historical grounding of future development.<sup>11</sup> He asked, first, what does an emergent medium enhance; second, what does it render obsolete; third, what does it retrieve that was previously made obsolete; and, fourth, what does it produce? McLuhan considered television in general as, first, enhancing depth experience; second, displacing film and radio; third, retrieving mythology; and, fourth, producing a discarnate spiritual experience.

Firstly, Gould argued in “An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age” that the electronic mediation of music enhanced the listener’s awareness of studio procedures, transforming the way in which westerners *preferred* to encounter music. He contrasted recordings of his time to recordings made during the late nineteenth century, which Gould heard as still oriented to live performance in terms of aesthetics, tempo, and dynamics. Gould proclaimed that, “today the performer conditioned to think in terms of electronic projection automatically comes to think in terms of an immediacy of reception... represented by the microphone... [which makes possible a] subtle range of interpret[at]ions].”<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, Gould clearly viewed electronic media as obsolescing the musical hierarchy of specialization inherent in the Gutenberg era’s concert tradition. For Gould this was encouraging, as “music... has been both victim and beneficiary of the post-Renaissance emphasis on specialization.”<sup>13</sup> Gould located this specialization in the distinction between composers, performers, listeners, and managers. Gould drew from McLuhan’s view that new media took previous media as its content; as a result, the electronic mediation of musical performance through recording not only made live concerts obsolete, but also, and more importantly, it effectively superseded their attendant hierarchy.

---

11 Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

12 Gould, “An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age,” 228.

13 Gould, “An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age,” 223.

Thirdly, Gould argued that electronic media would, by removing music from the public sphere, retrieve the community of art production. This would be achieved because the specific, individual roles of authorship would become obscure in the final artistic product. As Gould told his convocation audience,

the association between electronic technology and the art of music is going to be of such profound effect that it will... provide the one way in which the great schism brought about by the... musical hierarchy can be healed, and that it will provide a new unity between the functions of composer and performer and most important, of the listener.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the fourth aspect—what is produced—is evidenced in Gould’s early 1965 CBC radio programme, “Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording.” In a multiple-subject interview on the effects of electronic technology on music, Gould engaged McLuhan by addressing the concept of a “participant audience”: a liberated audience, produced by electronic media, which represented for Gould a utopian achievement. McLuhan responded that “[The] mass audience is a participant audience because [of its] speed of access... [as the] viewer becomes aware of the services available to him, he becomes much more participant.”<sup>15</sup> Gould agreed that the responsibility in the choice to engage in electronically produced musical performance represents a moral imperative on the part of listeners. But his implicit assumption is that this performance would resemble his own aesthetics.

I argue that, through the intersection of media and music found in his CBC television programmes, Gould held a privileged position regarding the construction of discourse surrounding Canadian national identity. The influence of his personal views was augmented by its location within the monopoly of knowledge produced by the CBC. Implicit in this link was the equation of the participation of Canadian viewers with the integrity of their citizenship. Three case studies will now be drawn on, covering the Cold War, the Canadian Centennial, and the North.

Gould’s thematic special, *Music in the U.S.S.R.*, drew on a recent history of successes in Gould’s career at a time when Cold War tensions would soon

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn Gould, “Prospects of Recording,” Ed. John P.L. Roberts. *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius* (Toronto: Malcolm Lester, 1999), 247–249.



reach their peak.<sup>16</sup> Gould's historic 1957 Soviet tour established his credentials not only as a musical ambassador for the West and the Second Viennese School, but also at home as both a dominant player in the official national culture and as an expert on current events in classical music. At the same time, technological developments formed the context for Gould's actions.

Gould appeared in *Music in the U.S.S.R.* as a Canadian observer, his rhetoric and insight centered on his role in the West as a cultural mediator for the Soviet Union (a position which mirrored Canada's reputation as an international peacemaker). Produced during the golden age of postwar cultural funding, the set spares no expense. The opening frame has Gould in a large antechamber constructed in imitation of the Peterhof Palace in then-Leningrad, complete with portraits of eighteenth century Russian nobles, ornate decorations lining the walls, bookshelves, antique furniture and the like. Gould strolled along the outer walls of the chamber, outlining the great dilemma of Russian music history: its relationship to the West and whether that would come to nourish or corrupt its own artistic values. Gould proffered a history of pre-Soviet Russian composers as evolving toward a synthesis of the Russian and Western musical legacies:

And then there came figures who seemed to reconcile, by their genius, both aims. Composers like Tchaikovsky who brought to the forms and disciplines of Western music the spiritual legacy of Russia. Who brought to the excesses of Wagnerian tonality the reproving mystic glow of the Russian liturgy.<sup>17</sup>

Gould then approached the great tragedy of Russian history. Just as the likes of Scriabin promised the onset of Russia's musical century, the Bolshevik Revolution suddenly shattered the Russian musical achievement and isolated Russia from the West. Gould emphasized that the policies of the USSR did not so much call for the representation of a future communist utopia as for a critique of its own bourgeois past. At the time, the official Soviet slogans claimed that the labour experienced by workers would lead to a "bright future." However, its activities were more directed to purging the remaining tendencies it identified as reactionary or bourgeois, an orientation which formed

16 Glenn Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R.," *Glenn Gould on Television: Complete CBC Broadcasts 1954-1977*, Disc 2, DVD (Sony Classical, 2011). Originally aired on Sunday, January 14, 1962.

17 Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R."

the crux of Gould's objection. In the climax of Gould's critique of Socialist Realism, he condemned the idea that music should reflect society and the State's ideology. Gould concluded that the purpose of art is not its basis in any particular meaning, neither that of the State nor even that of the listener:

The relation of an artist to a society is not determined by his acquiescence to the supposed best interests of that society. His work may in an appreciative sense produce its effect, its reaction, many generations after its own time, as Beethoven's did. And therefore, the assumption that art in an individual creative sense is at all necessary to the present health of the community remains debateable. And, at the very least, one must concede that if the good of the community does not necessarily argue the good of art, then all those qualities which in an artistic sense must be judged most prized cannot be so judged in relation to their contribution to the welfare of the community. In short, art can only play its proper role, which is to say in some cases no role at all perhaps, when it is allowed to stand wholly outside the relationship of moral good and evil which are constructed to govern the community. To remain as Jacques Maritain expressed it, 'disengaged'.<sup>18</sup>

For Gould, the artist must remain disengaged, set outside social notions of morality, and produce works of universal beauty. Perhaps the ideal place of an artist in society as presented in Gould's *Music in the U.S.S.R.* looked suspiciously like Gould's in Canada: funded by the State but without explicit ideological regulation, not dependent on the world of the public concert from which he would soon retire. Gould's role in the Canadian national identity is based in such simultaneous experiences of individuality and communality. Anderson has argued that part of what constitutes the modern national identity is a shared experience of spatial-temporal organization achieved by newspapers and literature, forms that "provided the technical means for 'representing' the kind of imagined community that is the nation."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, media are "a force in shaping or legitimating the nation."<sup>20</sup> The fact that Gould actually poured himself a glass of tea out of a samovar as he described the artist's proper role in society amusingly contrasted his role as a Canadian artist with his colleagues on the "wrong side" of the Iron Curtain.

By the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, Gould's utopian epiph-

---

18 Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R."

19 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

20 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37.

any became concurrent with an abrupt transformation of Canadian national identity. The historian Jose Igartua contends that during the 1960s, English Canada underwent its own Quiet Revolution and that Canada's "British ethnic definition of itself... [came to be] abruptly discarded."<sup>21</sup> The CBC joined the myriad of Centennial-related cultural activities seeking to redefine Canada's apparently outmoded identity. For Gould, the CBC's Centennial Concert series, for which he produced the final programme, offered a testing ground for his budding media theory centred on a "participant audience."<sup>22</sup>

In Gould's "Canada Centennial Concert," Gould performs the Bach Concerto No. 7 with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under conductor Vladimir Golschmann. The sophisticated movement of the camera view offered a critical commentary on Gould's effort to bring to the audience a newfound participation. For example, each movement of the Bach began and ended with the camera facing the performers from a traditional audience's perspective, but immediately after the introductory measures of the first movement the camera cut to Gould's face. After the first close-up of the orchestra, the viewer is increasingly presented with the orchestra not just from the standpoint of a liberated bystander, but from that of the conductor himself. Suddenly, the view which rested on Gould's hands, the sound of the piano and orchestra interacting musically, transitions from Gould's-eye-view to the conductor's-eye-view.

It is important to recognize that the aesthetic choices involved in this aspect of the concert are made by Gould himself and allow the audience a limited role of participation. However, they are consistent with Gould's media doctrine. The audience of this kind of concert had a relationship with the musical performance that would have been impossible in a live performance. Kevin Bazzana illuminates the postwar Canadian discourse on technology, saying that "the history of communications and the psychological, social, political, and cultural effects of the mass media were hot topics in intellectual circles, subjects of scientific research as well as philosophical speculation, and Gould absorbed the theorizing no less enthusiastically than he took the machines themselves."<sup>23</sup> However, it is interesting that while Innis considered the

21 Jose Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 5.

22 Glenn Gould, "Canada Centennial Concert," *Glenn Gould on Television*, 2011, Disc 7. Originally aired on Wednesday, November 15, 1967.

23 Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClell-

non-technological oral tradition as a means of decentralizing the monopolizing nature of media, Gould would pursue work in the latter rather than the former. It is here that there is a curious blending of media technology with Gould's discourse on Canadian national identity.

During the Centennial year of 1967, Gould's utopian epiphany also brought him to produce the first of his contrapuntal radio documentaries, *The Idea of North*.<sup>24</sup> In the documentary Gould wove together the voices of five individuals speaking about their experiences in Canada's North. The TV version of *The Idea of North*, co-produced in 1970 with PBS' Judith Pearlman, complemented the contrapuntal audio of *The Idea of North* with images of an unnamed young Canadian taking the train north from Toronto, Ontario to Churchill, Manitoba.<sup>25</sup> The narrator Wally MacLean—one of the five speakers—shares Gould's notion of metaphorical meaning of the North for Canadians. Their metaphorical conception of the North has implications for Canadian national identity as constructed on television screens tuned in to the CBC.

Gould's *The Idea of North* is an important work joining the conceptual North with music.<sup>26</sup> The only recording of classical music to appear in the film is Sibelius' *Fifth Symphony*, played during the film's climax. Payzant indicates that Gould considered the work a musical representation of the parts of northern Ontario he had visited.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that in Gould's own writing on Sibelius' music he stated that "Sibelius ... partook of that spare, bleak, motivically stingy counterpoint that nobody south of the Baltic ever seems to write."<sup>28</sup> Gould's Sibelius, evoking solitude, formed a counterpoint to Maclean's narrative conclusion which is clearly directed to the young Canadian. Maclean paraphrases William James' view that nothing unites people like something to be against, the most extreme example of which is war. Maclean expressed the view that what the North presents to Canadians is not an

land & Stewart 2003), 257–258.

24 Glenn Gould's *The Idea of North* was originally commissioned for the CBC radio programme "Ideas" as a Canadian centennial project.

25 Glenn Gould, "The Idea of North," *Glenn Gould on Television*, 2011, Disc 8. Originally aired on Wednesday, August 5, 1970.

26 Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange*, 297.

27 Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould: Music & Mind* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), 55.

28 Tim Page, "The Piano Music of Sibelius." in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Time Page (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 103.

imagined space, but instead an unimaginable space, an extreme danger that unites Canadians:

The common enemy of both of us, whether it's now, or yesterday, or forever, you know [...] I suppose the common enemy is... nature [...] Now he's willing now to be a fellow traveller of my imagination, eh? So, I go on to say that the North is the war, that you can afford to be against... nature.<sup>29</sup>

At the programme's conclusion, Maclean elaborates that in the act of going north Canadians bring with them what Maclean calls a "contagion" from the south. This contagion is the colonization brought by human subjectivity, which in conquering the northern frontier destroys what the North represents in its capacity to unite.

The North that was, no longer do humans combine then to defy, or to measure, or to read, or to understand, or to live with this thing we call... nature. Our number one enemy, instead of being... nature, is of course human nature. It's crept stealthily from the South. Not necessarily by steel. All these long and endless miles that we've sort of passed. And now it's infecting the north with a contagion that's, huh, I don't know what it's like. I don't dare tell this person that it's that bad. I just indicate. He's a nice fellow. You know, I don't want to destroy his dream. Also I don't want to smash my own which is paper-thin at times. So, we're up against this William James. The moral equivalent of war. The moral equivalent of this war now is now the North. This William James that wrote in Harvard this many years ago, whatever he did, I suppose he meant really that, not war, the moral equivalent for us is going north.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, we find in Gould's *The Idea of North* that going north is a double-edged sword allowing Canadians neither to find nor lose themselves. Gould's literal re-presentation of the railway, the means of the Canadian struggle against nature, on CBC Television, illustrates a metaphorical linkage between the two technologies. In this linkage, McLuhan would argue that the content of new media is always older media.<sup>31</sup> By connecting broadcast media to the Ca-

---

29 Gould, "The Idea of North."

30 Gould, "The Idea of North."

31 In other words, the role of linking the Canadian nation once achieved via the railway was appropriated by radio and television in the twentieth century. Thus, the content of

nadian landscape in this way, Gould adds an important voice to the discourse on Canadian identity and technology that Arthur Kroker identifies as including Innis, McLuhan, and George Grant.<sup>32</sup> Gould's CBC programme—and the images of the young Canadian as he travels the Muskeg Express through the trackless North—technologically constructed the imaginary nation for CBC viewers. *The Idea of North* brought its Canadian audience to participate as a community of citizens in the experience of imagining the North as presented by Gould, and in turn take part in the CBC's monopoly of knowledge.

The national mandate of the CBC formed an important subtext to the specific content of its different programmes. Indeed, the medium is the message. I contend that Gould's CBC Television work still offers a serious commentary on questions of Canadian identity as articulated through music and technology. Gould argued that the consequences of technology for musical works and performances were negative only when one assumed that the concert performance must continue to be considered the "authentic" means of listening to and creating music. However, Gould was uncritical of his own privileged cultural position on the CBC and his use of its monopoly power to his advantage. Throughout his CBC television programmes, he was able to assert his vision of an authentic music practice. Specifically, Gould targets the controls and limitations imposed on musicians by totalitarian governments, as well as the "oppressively" non-mediated nature of live concerts. In its place, he attempts to erect a musical practice that may not have resembled the oral, democratic ideal of Harold Innis. However, for Gould, these television programmes offer autonomy to himself and fellow-minded artists at the expense of traditional sources of political, economic, and social power. Gould's argument that television and other electronic media created a separate musical art form with its own imperatives constructed an important discourse inextricably linked to Canadian national identity, an authoritative televised national space that remains an historical force in Canada today.

---

"The Idea of North" is not just the discursive and geographical North, but also the railway as a medium. This is a further meaning implicit in McLuhan's aphorism "the medium is the message."

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984).

## Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Bazzana, Kevin. *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003.
- Gould, Glenn, and John P. L. Roberts. "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age." In *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius*. Toronto: Malcolm Lester Books, 1999.
- . "Forgery and Imitation in the Creative Process." In *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius*. Toronto: Malcolm Lester Books, 1999.
- . "Prospects of Recording." In *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius*. Toronto: Malcolm Lester Books, 1999.
- Gould, Glenn, and Tim Page. "The Piano Music of Sibelius." In *The Glenn Gould Reader*. New York: Knopf, 1985.
- Gould, Glenn, Karen Bower, and Robert Russ. "Canada Centennial Concert." In *Glenn Gould on Television: The Complete CBC Broadcasts 1954-1977*. Toronto: CBC, 2011.
- . "Music in the U.S.S.R." In *Glenn Gould on Television: The Complete CBC Broadcasts 1954-1977*. Toronto: CBC, 2011.
- Igartua, José Eduardo. *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.
- Innis, Harold Adams. *Empire and Communications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- . *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951.
- . *The Fur Trade in Canada: an Introduction to Canadian Economic History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930.

Kroker, Arthur. *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Eric McLuhan. *Laws of Media: The New Science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.



# § POLITICAL PERCONTATION

CASEY BEAL

*Of knowledge naught remained I did not know,  
Of secrets, scarcely any, high or low;  
All day and night for three score and twelve years,  
I pondered, just to learn that naught I know.*  
– Omar Khayyam

This<sup>1</sup> is a din of voices interrupting, falling all over each other, trying to say something about moments of rupture or singularity; the doomed attempted authoring of something like a *political uncanny*. They'll show-and-tell to explore the idea that ruptural political and aesthetic events are the only fertile grounds for theory to engage with politics, but also that such events are irreducibly singular and cannot be usefully engaged by showing or by telling. As each fragment intersects with the next, think of them in terms of the questions that motivate their clamouring:

*What can theory (specifically political and aesthetic theory) do?*

## #1 – The Catalogue

Imagine a gallery show with a theme like 'Rupture: the Aesthetic/Political Event'. Some of the pieces approach the theme by means of their content (images of *events* gone by—representations of and commentaries on May 68, Duchamp's Readymades, The Arab Spring, etc.). Other exhibits try

1 At the risk of seeming coy, I want to forego an introductory section which declares a detailed trajectory at the outset. Neither do I want to make any promises regarding questions' answers. The expectation that the results of the investigative process of writing be announced in advance works contrary to the formal point I want to make.

themselves to author some sort of rupture by means of their form; perhaps by presenting a question unanswerable within our present social or linguistic frame of reference; perhaps invoking a temporality alien to the present; or perhaps otherwise enacting feelings of uncanniness, paradox, or absurdity.

Now suppose that this exhibition published a sort of summary text—a catalogue or program. Could such a catalogue itself constitute a ruptural aesthetic or political event? If so, what is the nature of the relationship between the ‘event’ of the catalogue and the ‘content’ of the exhibits in the gallery?

The real question though:

Is political theory forever stuck at the level of the catalogue?

In terms of dealing with eventual singularities it seems as though theory has two potential angles of attack. It can either describe singular moments/ruptures that have happened in the past in terms of the break they constitute with respect to the aesthetic or political *status quo*, or it can attempt somehow to author or perform such a rupture itself. This corresponds roughly to either creating knowledge out of the conceptual *content* of events-gone-by or engaging with the *formal* nature of the rupture to try to ‘figure out how it’s done’.

From the difference between these two approaches, a broad series of questions emerges: Is it possible to author a ruptural event by sheer attention to formal template, or are such moments so inextricably embedded in their own particularities (their content, so to speak) that describing, cataloguing, and enumerating them is useless for anyone but hobbyists and archivists? If we take the Rancièrian line that politics is wholly constituted in such irreducible moments of dissensual rupture, does this mean that theory can sometimes be *about politics* but that it can never itself be directly political?

*Like any heavy object thrown with enough force, a catalogue can smash windows. And would such force be a simple abuse of the painstaking arrangement of text and image within?*

## #2 – The Aesthetic Regime of Political Theory

*The time is coming when it will hardly be possible to write a book as it has been done for so long<sup>2</sup>*

---

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1994), xxi.

Rancière’s *Politics of Aesthetics*,<sup>3</sup> particularly the section entitled ‘Politicized Art’, is a beautiful, maddening tease. He begins to discuss the relation of (political) theory to his conception of the ‘aesthetic regime’ of art, but finishes the conversation before delivering anything well fleshed-out. Perhaps the way that Rancière is bound to only tease us with the paradox he presents is more significant than he would like to acknowledge.

Let us very briefly sketch the important terms. Earlier in *Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière draws an important conceptual distinction between different ‘regimes’ in the production, identification, and theorization of art.<sup>4</sup> For our purposes, two of the three regimes are important: the representative and the aesthetic. The representative regime operates on a logic of *mimesis*—of accurate reproduction of the ‘content’ of the image or thought, or whatever it aims to represent.<sup>5</sup> He argues convincingly that this regime enacts a certain hierarchically disposed mode of thought. The aesthetic regime, on the other hand “identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres... The aesthetic state is a pure instance of suspension, a moment when form is experienced for itself.”<sup>6</sup> Abstract expressionist and other non-representational artwork seems to be what Rancière has in mind. We might look to Picasso’s *Guernica* for a well-known example of this regime that is imbued with a particularly strong political charge.

For Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime’, the necessity of the relationship in representative art between a conceptual ‘idea’ (say the ideational ‘content’ of an artwork) and the manner deemed appropriate to the expression of this idea (‘form’) is challenged. The only way to presume that certain ‘forms’ of expression are more appropriate to certain content is to implicitly cede to hierarchical (and possibly socially or politically contingent) classifications of the ‘appropriateness’ of manners of expression. This means that the aesthetic regime of art demands a certain indifferent relation between the form of a particular work and its content.

The question then becomes: can we think of political theory in terms

---

3 Jacques Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004).

4 Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics*, 20-30.

5 Ibid., 21.

6 Ibid., 23-24.

of Rancière’s regimes of art? In *Politics of Aesthetics* the answer seems to be ‘yes.’ Rancière says, “I think that a theoretical discourse is always simultaneously an aesthetic form, a sensible reconfiguration of the facts that it is arguing about.”<sup>7</sup>

If we equate the aesthetic form with political theory, as Rancière seems to want to do, the following passage should cause us to reconsider what we want from theory:

The dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable and the thinkable *without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle*. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations. As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world.<sup>8</sup>

What is present in this passage is a similar logic to the replacement of the representative regime of art with the aesthetic one. Rather than privileging the content of the message to the form in which it is delivered, the ‘suitable’ political work of art reconfigures the distribution of the sensible, and thus inaugurates fresh political subjectivity by the logic inherent in its manner of expression—prior to the ‘message’.

Thus the perfect aesthetic political work according to Rancière would be one which does not rely upon its representative ‘message,’ but is *itself performatively political*. That is to say, through its own internal reconstruction of the distribution of the sensible aesthetic-regime art (and possibly theory) can inaugurate revolutionary logics and subjectivities much more effectively than straightforward descriptions and diagnoses of contemporary life. Such work, if attainable, would make representational efforts at ‘consciousness-raising’ seem ham-fisted and condescending by comparison.

My problem is that I want very much to agree with him, but it leaves us to deal with the familiar gap between what we know theory *can* do (the catalogue, thrown or studied), and what we want might want aesthetic-regime theory to do.

It seems that, in terms of our expectations, what distinguishes theory

---

7 Ibid., 65.

8 Ibid., 63. Emphasis mine.

from, say, poetry is primarily the relationship of its ‘form’ to its ‘content’. Theory is theoretical (and not simply speculative or sophistic) insofar as it treats the object of its study in a certain rigorous analytical manner. It aims at a degree of faithful representation of its ideas.

If the order of the political distribution of the sensible is most effectively engaged with at the level of form—that accessed by the aesthetic regime of art—then should we not be questioning the degree to which we focus on the ‘content’ (i.e., the analytical rigour, and objective diagnostic correctness of theory) and instead worrying more about the politics implicit in its logic of organization, visibility, and, inevitably, exclusion? Is the ideal form of aesthetic-regime political theory something more like a poem? A text which says the previously unsayable; makes visible the previously unseen by its micropolitical logic of presentation? If this is the case, why bother toiling at the level of the empirical correctness of the ‘message’—the diagnostic?

Rancière makes a nod to this in his final remarks in the Rockhill interview mentioned above. He claims that he tries to structure his theoretical texts in such a way that they subvert typical “means of presenting objects”, however one wonders at the degree to which he could really substantiate this, or to which he is really sure of what his own proposed regime would look like in a theoretical text. Indeed, are we not somewhat accustomed to encountering, in the introductions to anthologies of critical writings on politics—secondary Deleuze scholarship is especially notable for this—some pretense to a textual performativity that is often as sympathetic in its aims as it is hazily defined and unconvincing?

In fact, I have a hard time imagining what ‘aesthetic-regime’ political theory might look like. Would it be similar to the work of Deleuze and Guattari? There it must be admitted that the logic of the text interrupts the expected distribution of the sensible in a fairly dramatic way. Nevertheless, though, it *returns* always, at least somewhat, to an attempt to faithfully represent content (the critique of psychoanalysis, images of organization of thought, etc.) How could it not? Is there any such thing, then, as a pure ‘*livre-evenement*’?

Similarly, the fact that large parts of Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* were, for lack of a less pejorative term, “plagiarized” (“liberated”?) from other works is itself a subversive logic of formal organization. This formal subversion arguably only makes sense though, when wedded to the ‘content’ of anti-capitalist critique (particularly the laudable species that says, ‘fuck intellectual

property’).

This points to a kind of necessary ‘doubling’ which the ‘aesthetic-regime’ political work might demand—a jumping-up out of the representative into the evental, the realm of rupture-via-form, followed by an inevitable gravitational falling back into engagement at the level of content and representation.

*Does this mean that political theory is doomed always to fall back into the hierarchical organizations of thought that characterize the representative regime? If this is the case, what can we truly expect from emancipatory political theory? If we rely on theory will we not be asking the hierarchical to produce or somehow provoke the spontaneous emergence of the non-hierarchical?*

### #3 – The Percontation Point as Political Punctuation

The Wikipedia article on ‘Irony Punctuation’ is a good one. From it we learn that the percontation point is a medieval invention in experimental punctuation that can be used in order to signify an indirect inquiry that does not demand a response. In other words, it signifies a rhetorical question.

According to Anthony Judge’s fascinating article ‘Embodying a Way Round Pointlessness?’, the percontation point is “[...]indicative of qualities of the cognitive uncertainty, surprise and discontinuity in the despairing experience of “nothing”—and its anticipation.”<sup>9</sup>

What might this mean? I’ll say that the ‘nothing’ which the percontation point anticipates is the non-space of the answer; not an absence which goes where an answer ought to be, but an unsettling indication that the space of the answer is not approachable. This non-space interrupts the consensual flow of a text or a performance. From this it is easy to imagine a definitely political inflection to the moment signified by the percontation point. The rhetorical question enacts the uncertain, the unclosed, the uncanny. The rhetorical question is a moment of pure ‘suspension’ in the Rancièrian determination; it is a presentation and holding-open of what Erin Manning calls the ‘Interval.’<sup>10</sup> The projectile at the weightless apex of its arc, played upon by forces cancelling one another out, has a fractional moment of indeterminacy.

9 Anthony Judge. *Embodying a Way Round Pointlessness?* (Accessed online at: <http://www.laetusinpraesens.org/docs10s/geozero.php>: 2012)

10 Erin Manning. *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 18.

Perhaps percontation is what theory's catalogue might strive for. An uncannily free, suspended moment at the top of an arc of flight.

### #4 – *Not at Home; Authoring the Uncanny*

Very roughly, uncanniness can be thought of as the sense that something is missing that should be present, or something is ominously present that ought not to be.

There is a particularly memorable scene in Mark Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*.<sup>11</sup> In the "central narrative" of the book, a passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time* is used to describe a bizarre and unsettling occurrence in a possibly-haunted house. It is the section where Heidegger reminds us that the term *unheimlichkeit*, translated as 'uncanniness' also has the connotation of not-being-at-home, of being removed from a familiar environment. At this point there is a suspension of the normal temporal flow of the book: a four page footnote in the voice of the meta-character who 'found the manuscript' where the central narrative unfolds. He describes his own recent uncanny experience. Working at a tattoo parlour, he is suddenly overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety and dread: the gnawing sense that something terrible is just behind him—that if he looks he'll met with unspeakable, *unrepresentable*, horror. He lingers in this dread, and finally brings himself to look over his shoulder—but nothing is there.

And as readers, we are interrupted by the same nameless dread. The creature is always just behind us. When we look but find nothing there, we are perhaps suspended for a fleeting percontative moment before falling, in Heideggerian fashion, back to a comfortable home.

### #5 – *Dancing the Dance and the Eternal Return to Content*

Freud's writings on the uncanny employ centrally the notion of a certain paranoid double aspect of reality. For Freud, the experience of the uncanny is characterized by a "doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self."<sup>12</sup> Let us now return to the concept of doubling—in a usage, perhaps not immediately identifiable as an instance of the Freudian application, but rather in the sense we employed above in the Rancièrian fragment.

11 Mark Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 24–28.

12 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 17*, ed. James Stachey (Hogarth Press: London, 1964), 217–252, 234.

Let us get there by way of a quotation from an essay by Alain Badiou on dance:

It should be noted that dance, which is both bird and flight, is also everything that the infant designates. Dance is innocence, because it is a body before the body. It is forgetting, because it is a body that forgets its fetters, its weight.<sup>13</sup>

The dancer recoils and scoffs when I read her this passage. The intensity and immediacy of her reaction surprises me.

Not only does Badiou neglect vast swathes of contemporary dance which embrace the grotesque, the heavy, the corporeal, but even more importantly, as any dancer knows, while dance may *sometimes* look as though it is an innocent taking-flight and forgetting of the body, this is always at least a partial illusion. The dancer may conceal her/his relation to the body—s/he may flee from it—but very rarely does s/he forget it. The corporeal is always ghosting along with the pure form of movement. For the dancer, the two are not separable.

While, in all fairness, Badiou does nuance his position later in the essay, a much better articulation of the dancer's double-movement comes from Brian Massumi's *Semblance and Event*:

To dance the dance is to extract animateness—pure-movement qualities—from the actual movements of the body. But the body remains, shadowing the nonsensuous dance-form, in heavy contrast to its tendency to lift-off. One of the shadows the body casts is its physical frailty: its inevitable pull to the ground, counter to the push to the limit. At the counter-limit: mortality. Any intense experience of the animateness of the body contains this contrasting pull in suggestive potential. Appetitive lift to abstraction/gravitational fall-back. It takes very little for the fall-back position to regain ground. Conventional language, with its stockpile of at-the-ready symbolic and metaphorical associations, easily provides the ballast. Content redux. How many reviews of contemporary dance have been written that ponderously reveal a “theme” of death? Or sex and love, romantic ecstasy, and the wrench of jealousy? For the human body is as sexed as it is mortal.<sup>14</sup>

---

13 Alain Badiou, *The Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 57.

14 Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 151–2.



Massumi is tormented here by the content/form dichotomy manifest as a doubling of the movement of art. The shadow of content (the actual physical apparatus of the body) constantly haunts the ‘nonsensuous’ form of the aesthetic event. Content, in this example of dance, is tied to death, and gravity—but also the ‘ballast’ of symbolic representation. For Massumi the relationship of form-content in the aesthetic event happens in a loop that he likens to the Nietzschean Eternal Return.<sup>15</sup> What better metaphor to capture the circuit of revolution and its inevitable cooptation and recovery by the hierarchies it sought to shake off?

What makes dance an especially excellent example of this ‘doubling’ is that the physical apparatus of the artistic transcendence (the body) is also itself a central element that pulls us away from the ‘pure’ Real of the formal ‘movement of movement’—pulls away from the open rhetorical question of the interval and directs us back to content, to gravity, to a question that can be answered in the realm of the symbolic.

The other central element of this return to content is the translation from visceral ‘affect’ into prescribed emotional categories given in the realm of language. Another long but useful quote from Massumi:

The event passes from pure “uncoded” liveness (mechanically reproduced or not) to coded “message”... It becomes communicable... No general category understands the first thing about affect. They are always by nature emotion-ready, because they are always ready-made for content. They have an in-bred appetite for content. They maw for it. That’s what they do. They are voracious techniques of containment. “Common sense” is promiscuously dedicated to general categories. As is “good sense,” in a more selective and disciplined way. “Opinion” invests general categories with a personalized emotional force of their own. Weapons of mass containment, all.<sup>16</sup>

The categories of language construct systems of ‘containment’ of singularity. They do so by establishing structures of equivalence and identity which give meaning but neutralize the singularity of the aesthetic event.

It seems difficult to imagine how theory could operate outside of this linguistic bind and still be understood as signifying anything. Does it not therefore seem as though theory, no matter how radical its content—no mat-

---

15 Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 150.

16 Ibid., 153–4.

ter how it takes flight—is always bound by gravity and symbolic ballast to return from performative, percontative engagement with singularity to a hierarchically structured language of representation and equivalence?

Perhaps theory can, at its best, rupture these equivalences, if only temporarily; holding open spaces by posing rhetorical questions that perhaps author a sense of politically useful uncanniness; disrupting the current distribution of equivalences (and therefore power)? Maybe it can shine a light toward the rare and elusive spaces where equivalence, identity and language cannot quite yet reach?

#6 – *Forget about the Indians*

How might this problematic relationship of form and content and its intersection with a desire to engage performatively with singularity make itself manifest in actual politics?

For resources to understand this, let us look at the ‘long ‘68’ anti-capitalist protests which took place (to greatly varying degrees of intensity) in Italy under the blanket term ‘Autonomia.’

The following excerpt from a 1979 journal kept by Sylvere Lotringer during a sort of journalistic/anthropological tour of Autonomist political nodes, captures the general open spirit of the movement:

Throughout Italy in fact, even in the villages, there are many who see themselves as autonomous even when they lack any theoretical knowledge of the autonomist position. Autonomia... relies on the addition of singularities at the base. No pressure is exerted on *compagni* to accept a predetermined program. What draws together the scattered elements of Autonomia is the refusal of any centralizing organization, or any abstract representation of its diversity. Although ideological disagreements exist within the movement... the contradictions are never pushed to the breaking point or transcended through a declarative synthesis.<sup>17</sup>

In practice, this diffuse, non-centralization manifested in very different, localized articulations which were united only in terms of their opposition to some

---

17 Sylvere Lotringer, “In the Shadow of the Red Brigades,” *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, eds. Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), v-xvi, ix.

aspect of the capitalist status quo.<sup>18</sup> Arguably the ‘autonomist’ towns practicing collective auto-reduction of bus-fares, utility bills, and grocery prices were a world apart from the pirate radio stations and abstract aesthetic and theoretical critiques of the Bologna ‘creative’ autonomists, who themselves were very critical of what they saw as the dogmatic economic Marxism of the autonomists in Rome and other cities. *Autonomia* would eventually be described by one of the State prosecutors of the movement’s members as “a veritable mosaic made of different fragments, a gallery of overlapping images, or circles and collectives, without any central organization.”<sup>19</sup>

At first glance this looks like an almost perfect realization of a diverse and open Multitude resisting the stultifying movements of Empire and the State. Or at least it does until we remember that it was arguably the very reluctance of *Autonomia* to foreclose upon the open space of the movement, its refusal to synthesize its aims under one unitary narrative, that allowed agents of the reactionary State to write a narrative *about them* that eventually brought the long event of *Autonomia* to a close. Indeed, it was by seizing control of the production of public knowledge about *Autonomia* that the State was able to legitimize a massive police-military-judiciary crackdown that doled out long prison sentences to many of the movement’s most important thinkers and activists (most famous among them, of course, being Antonio Negri).

Importantly, because it could argue that the same blanket term could be applied to all autonomists equally, the State was able to be thorough in its repression of anyone to the left of the Italian Communist Party (which was veering ever to the Centre at that time). ‘*Autonomia*,’ which had for so long held at bay the politics of equivalency, found this model strangely amenable to manipulation by agents of the State. The state was able, adeptly, to manipulate structures of equivalency—equivalency of knowledge and language (which we might also call ‘content’) to effectively neutralize the radical singularity, the ruptural event that was *Autonomia*. The radical left in Italy (at the time one of the world’s most eloquent, literate and nuanced in its internecine differentiations) has arguably never since recovered.

The following is excellent quotation from Lotringer that explores the kind of baffling threat that *Autonomia* posed to the state:

---

18 Sound familiar? The ideological resonance with the contemporary World Social Forum and Occupy movements feels like it is worth pointing out overtly.

19 Sylvère Lotringer, “In the Shadow of the Red Brigades,” xi.

The real danger to the State comes not from the Red Brigades [the very loosely associated military cell, whose persecution was used to legitimize the general repression], who speak the same language and who develop structures which “mirror” and thus reinforce its own. The profound menace to the State comes from the fact that Autonomy speaks a language and develops forms of organization and of subjectivity against which there exists no “classic” response.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, they presented the State with a question that, for a while at least, it could not answer. A question that temporarily defied structures of equivalency and identity.

Torealta’s excellent article ‘Painted Politics’ describes a singular moment within the singular political series of *Autonomia*, an enigmatic movement known as the ‘Metropolitan Indians’. His is one of the few accounts of this moment that have found translation into English. Here is the contextualizing epigram at the beginning of the article:

In the Spring of ’77, in the midst of violent demonstrations, nihilistic happenings were staged in various cities, especially Bologna and Rome. Their existence was short-lived but the inventiveness of the Metropolitan Indians, their diffidence of radical rhetoric, their use of simulation and parody as political weapons were not forgotten by the Movement.<sup>21</sup>

Torealta does an excellent job of articulating what makes the movement so interesting on a theoretical level. Essentially he makes the case that the Metropolitan Indian movement recognized that the social and linguistic conditions of capitalism favour the neutralizing structures of equivalency discussed earlier, but that these conditions themselves can provide the grounds for new types of elusive subversion:

Thus the social conditions of simulation and of the arbitrary come into being: there arises a social subject that is not reducible to one precise identity, that arbitrarily invents one for itself and at the same time hangs on the thin

---

20 Sylvère Lotringer & Christian Marazzi, ‘The Return of Politics.’ in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, 8–20, 20.

21 Maurizio Torealta, “Painted Politics” in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, 102–106, 102.

thread of its own precarious language, suspended between absolute power and total absurdity, waiting without fear for some other determination of identity at its ineluctable opening: that of derision... They decided to continue being nomads, but at the same time enter the city of the enemy's language—a city that is always strengthening its fortifications—even if only to remain silent, sitting around, smoking, sleeping. We have termed them nomads, but perhaps it is more correct to call them sophists, in a position to simulate, to enter and leave the walls, to master diverse languages as the situation demands, in a position to play-act, falsify, create paradoxes, sabotage, and disappear once again. This type of sophist is a figure who can intervene in languages with an exact and distinct action, without taking them as a despotic and unyielding totality. This gift is of course not innate; it is a consequence of the relation to wages (wages' general equivalence with the rest of things, exactly like language).<sup>22</sup>

This amounts to using the system's logic of linguistic equivalency against it—in creating nomadic, shape-shifting, anti-capitalist guerrillas—able to resist neutralization of singularity by simply shifting to new planes upon which to pose their unanswerable, paradoxical questions and riddles to power.

Interestingly, the Indians were equally derisive of the more 'representative' or hierarchically organized elements of their own Movement as well—one of their most famous moments was the parodic upstaging of a speech by a high-ranking labour secretary associated with the Italian Communist Party.<sup>23</sup> They thus disoriented and interrupted the model not only of status quo politics, but of dissent as well—mocking the communists as well as the government.

So The Metropolitan Indians, remarkably, are a sort of singularity within a singularity—a rupture within a rupture. *A critique at the level of form of a critique at the level of content of capitalism and State logics of equivalency.*

For me, however, the final few sentences of Torealta's account are as remarkable as the description of the movement itself:

What is left for us to do before concluding is finally to **forget about the Metropolitan Indians** and once again prevent a Movement from becoming a fetish, a hypostasis, shortcircuited by the media's diffusion. There will always be animal reserves and Indian reservations to conceal the fact that

---

22 Torealta, "Painted Politics," 103, 105.

23 See Anonymous, "Lama Sabachthani" in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, 100–101.

the animals are dead, and that we are all Indians. There will always be factories to conceal the fact that production is dead, and that it is everywhere and nowhere. **We follow the momentum of our projects with our song and occupy ourselves with other things.**<sup>24</sup>

Though beautifully written, this passage must cause us to pause: why bother writing about the Indians at all, Torealta, if what we ought to do is forget? What role does archival knowledge play in the production of ruptural political singularity? If one knows enough, can one engineer such an event?

The example of the Metropolitan Indians is useful because it points out a central absurdity of the *Autonomia* anthology to which I have now heavily referred. What function does it hope to serve? That of the catalogue? Does it represent a collection of singularities pinned to a board that we would be better off forgetting instead of fetishizing? As an object this anthology is an enigma, calling as it does for its own erasure. Perhaps in this fleeting percontative moment, with Danielewski's beast hovering over our shoulder, we find the best we might hope for in a political catalogue.

Shall we think further about how we might best cultivate what Lotringer calls "the addition of singularities at the base," or bring about Torealta's nomads? Laden with our anthologized knowledge of their successes and failures we might try to dance the dance as they did, but how could we hope to take flight with so much ballast? Or shall we simply forget it, as Torealta exhorts we do the Indians, and occupy ourselves with other things?

---

24 Torealta, "Painted Politics," 103, 105.

## Works Cited

- Anonymous. "Lama Sabachthani." In *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, 100–101. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.
- Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak. Detroit: Black & Red, 1977.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, 217-52. Translated by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1964.
- Judge, Anthony. "Embodying a Way Round Pointlessness?" Laetus in Praesens. March 10, 2012. <http://www.laetusinpraesens.org/docs10s/geozero.php>.
- Lotringer, Sylvère, and Christian Marazzi. *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*. Edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.
- Lotringer, Sylvère. "In the Shadow of the Red Brigades." In *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.
- Manning, Erin. *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Massumi, Brian. *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*.  
Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004.

Torealta, Maurizio. *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*. Edited by Sylvère Lotringer  
and Christian Marazzi. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007.





# KARL KAUTSKY'S *FORERUNNERS OF MODERN SOCIALISM*

ROLAND BOER

The four-volume *Forerunners of Modern Socialism*, by Karl Kautsky, is one of the most neglected yet important works concerning Christian communism. Only part of this work has been translated, comprising the last section of volume one and all of volume two, as *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*.<sup>1</sup> The German text is far more extensive. Indeed, so grand was the task that Kautsky was unable to complete it,<sup>2</sup> with the final one and a half volumes written by others.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I begin by outlining the topics covered, before focusing on the way Kautsky deals with both the Peasant Revolution under Thomas Müntzer (1525) and then the Anabaptist Revolution in Münster (1534–35). Throughout, we need to remember that by heretical or Christian communism Kautsky means a combination of rupture and communalism, of revolution and new ways of living collectively. Both elements, with differing emphases, appear throughout his detailed study.

---

1 Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, trans. J. L. Mulliken and E. G. Mulliken (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897).

2 *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus I: Kommunistische Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Dietz, 1976 [1895–97]); *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus II: Der Kommunismus in der deutschen Reformation* (Berlin: Dietz, 1976 [1895–97]); Karl Kautsky and Paul Lafargue, *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus III: Die beiden ersten grossen Utopisten* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1922]).

3 Hugo Lindemann and Morris Hillquit, *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus IV* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1922]).

*The Manifold Types of Heretical Communism*

The first lengthy volume begins by discussing early Christian communism and then the socio-economic context of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. The discussion of early Christian communism may be seen as a preliminary sketch of what was to become his more well-known *Foundations of Christianity*,<sup>4</sup> the first full-length Marxist study on the topic. The agenda there he states as follows:

Whatever one's position may be with respect to Christianity, it certainly must be recognized as one of the most titanic phenomena in all human history. [...] Anything that helps us to understand this colossal phenomenon, including the study of its origin, is of great and immediate practical significance, even though it takes us back thousands of years.<sup>5</sup>

The book begins with the person of Jesus in both pagan and Christian sources. Carefully assessing the information in light of New Testament scholarship of his time, Kautsky argues that around this everyday rebel a whole cluster of superhuman stories grew, stories that became the New Testament. He wants to cut through the mythical and legendary accretions and offer a historical materialist analysis. This analysis focuses initially on reconstructing the economic, social, and political context of Jesus within the slave-based mode of production of the Roman Empire, and invokes some key Marxist points concerning the technological limits of such a mode of production and the reasons for its breakdown. From there he tracks backward to offer a history that runs from the origins of Israel through to the early Christian movement. Here again he proposes a model of the underlying social formation, arguing that it was another form of the slave-based mode of production. The final section comes back to Christianity, where he expands on the famous argument concerning early Christian communism, how the movement around Jesus was revolutionary, how that early communism was only a communism of consumption and not production, and how it was subverted in the later

---

4 Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity*, trans. H. F. Mins (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007 [1908]); *Der Ursprung des Christentums: Eine historische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1908]).

5 Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity*, 3.

history of the Church, only to carry on a half-life within monasticism.

To return to *Forerunners*: the second half of volume one traces various “heretical communist” groups in the Middle Ages, inspired as they were by the example of early Christian communism:

- Monastic communism, mysticism, and asceticism.
- Waldensians, in the twelfth century and still existing today in Piedmont, where they hold to the model of Christian communism in the book of Acts.
- Apostolic Brethren, founded by Gerardo Segarelli, from Parma in Italy, who in 1260 renounced his possessions and dressed as the apostles, begging and preaching repentance and gathering a movement around him.
- Their successors, the Dulcinians, under Fra Dolcino of Novara (1250-1307), who was forced to lead the community into a fortress and undertake military excursions, until they were crushed.
- Beguines and Beghards, who lived simple lives in communities across the Netherlands in the twelfth century.
- Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe who stressed personal faith, divine election, the Bible, and were involved in a series of uprisings in England.
- Taborites, a fifteenth century movement that championed asceticism, communal living, and the establishment of the kingdom of God by force of arms.
- Bohemian Brethren, who believed that the kingdom of God was among them in communal life and worship and who had a profound influence on Czech literature through the translation of the Bible.

Since I focus in more detail later on volume two, with its treatment of Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists in Münster, I deal with the remaining two volumes first. In the third, Kautsky writes of his beloved Thomas More, who was also the topic of a separate study.<sup>6</sup> More’s *Utopia* he regards as one of the major socialist texts before Marx and Engels. More too was inspired by Christian communism, which he found in old popular Roman Catholicism and the monastic tradition. Indeed, More was the last representative of this tradition, dying as a martyr. But More also criticised economic exploitation in the England of Henry VIII, offering *Utopia* as an economic, political, and so-

---

6 Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia*, trans. Henry James Stenning (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979 [1888]); *Thomas More und seine Utopie: mit einer historischen Einleitung*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: J.W.H. Dietz, 1947 [1888]).

cial alternative to what he experienced. At this level, he was also a materialist critic, thereby becoming the crucial link between older Christian communism and modern communism, between medieval religiosity and historical materialism. In Kautsky's words:

We believe that we have disclosed the most essential roots of More's Socialism: his amiable character in harmony with primitive communism; the economic situation of England, which brought into sharp relief the disadvantageous consequences of capitalism for the working class; the fortunate union of classical philosophy with activity in practical affairs—all these circumstances combined must have induced in a mind so acute, so fearless, so truth-loving as More's an ideal which may be regarded as a foregleam of Modern Socialism.<sup>7</sup>

In this volume too we find chapters on Thomas Campanella (1568–1639), who sought to establish a movement based on the community of goods and wives and anticipated the Age of the Spirit in 1600 (based on Joachim of Fiore's prophecies), and on the autonomous indigenous communities established by the Jesuits in Paraguay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, they were not written by Kautsky, but by Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law. So too was the final volume written by others, by Lindemann and Hillquit. It covers later movements in France and North America, where we find the influence of Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Étienne Cabet in the countless communist experiments of the nineteenth century.

### *Müntzer and Münster*

If Thomas More was Kautsky's personal favourite, then “in the eyes of the German working class Müntzer was and is the most brilliant embodiment of heretical communism.”<sup>8</sup> Volume two of *Forerunners* is devoted to this theologian of the revolution, as well as the Anabaptist Revolution in Münster. For Kautsky, the core of Thomas Müntzer's theological and political position is as follows:

---

7 Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia*, 128; *Thomas More und seine Utopie: mit einer Historischen Einleitung*, 228–29.

8 Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 154.

In regard to what was to be understood by “the Gospel,” he asserts: “It is an article of our creed, and one which we wish to realise, that all things are in common [*omnia sunt communia*], and should be distributed as occasion requires, according to the several necessities of all. Any prince, count, or baron who, after being earnestly reminded of this truth, shall be unwilling to accept it, is to be beheaded or hanged.”<sup>9</sup>

*Omnia sunt communia* is of course the Latin translation of the slogan “all things in common” in Acts 2:44 and 4:32, the core inspiration for Christian communism itself. Kautsky credits Müntzer with significant revolutionary and indeed communist credentials. The revolutionary currents breaking over Europe were due, in no small degree, “to his extravagant communistic enthusiasm, combined with an iron determination, passionate impetuosity, and statesmanlike sagacity.”<sup>10</sup> Yet this is inseparable from Müntzer’s breathtaking theological engagements, with a view to overthrowing oppressors and freeing those burdened in the name of a thoroughly democratic and communist project.

The narrative of the volume flows from the Peasant Revolution of 1525, through the revolutionary currents and underground work of the Anabaptists, to the watershed of Münster itself in 1534–35. In doing so, Kautsky is careful to read against the anti-revolutionary bias of the sources. Even Luther, whom Müntzer outshines theologically, becomes a suspicious figure. Throughout, the energy and organizational brilliance of the peasants and their leader becomes clear. The real test, however, appears with Kautsky’s account of the Revolution at Münster when Anabaptists from the Netherlands and Western parts of Germany descended on the city and took power. Nearly every other history of the revolution falls into line with the anti-revolutionary bias of the original accounts, which describe a descent into madness under Jan van Leyden. By contrast, Kautsky attempts to construe favourably the situation of what he interprets as a city of radical communists under siege. Seeking the correct path into the unknown, surrounded by forces of the ruling classes desperate to crush them, the Anabaptists did far better than anyone would have expected. So Kautsky reinterprets the austerity and puritan nature of the defenders, the economic need for what has been called “polyga-

---

9 Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 130.

10 Ibid., 110.

my” (of approximately 10,000 defenders, 8,000 were women),<sup>11</sup> the desire for peace, and the enthusiasm of those who knew they were doomed. Even adult baptism, a defining feature of the Anabaptists, is interpreted as a trenchant form of resistance against the political, cultural, and theological hegemony of the ruling class.<sup>12</sup>

I cannot resist asking a question here: were the Anabaptists really revolutionaries? Thomas Müntzer certainly was, as Engels and Kautsky agree. The Anabaptists themselves were clearly regarded as revolutionaries by both sides of the Reformation. Calvin, for instance, worked hard to distance himself from the Anabaptists—with whom the Romish church was keen to connect him—and present his own approach as a middle way between the Anabaptist excesses and the stultifying corruption of Rome.<sup>13</sup> For Kautsky, they exhibited not only the robust debate and struggle of a radical movement in its early days, but also the two crucial elements of revolutionary overthrow and communal life (from Acts 2 and 4).

### *Theology and Revolution*

This grand project on the history of heretical Christian communism, which is really six volumes if we include those on early Christianity and Thomas More, is ultimately indebted to the urging of Engels. It was he who first wrote on Thomas Müntzer and early Christianity from a Marxist perspective,<sup>14</sup> and it was he who discussed at length with Kautsky the need to take up the mantle of a task yet incomplete. However, Kautsky goes much further than Engels might have imagined, especially in terms of his theologi-

---

11 Astutely, Kautsky points out that they “never got beyond the *search* for a suitable form of marriage” that met the extraordinary circumstances in which they found themselves (*Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 269–70). In this way he reads the various reflections, announcements, backtracking, and reformulations. This is really an observation concerning all forms of communist construction.

12 Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 170–72.

13 Roland Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 9–13.

14 Friedrich Engels, “The Peasant War in Germany,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 10, 397–482 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1850 [1978]); “Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,” in *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 7, 327–413 (Berlin: Dietz, 1850 [1973]); “On the History of Early Christianity,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, 445–69 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1894–95 [1990]); “Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums,” in *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 22, 447–73 (Berlin: Dietz, 1894–95 [1972]).

cal appreciation of what was at stake in these movements.

I would like to close on this issue, concerning which Kautsky makes a telling observation: “At the time of the Reformation, the general tone of thought was not legal, but theological, and, in consequence, the more radical a social movement, the more theological were its party words.”<sup>15</sup> Immediate concerns, notes Kautsky, are more obviously economic: a grievance over corn prices, hoarding by the rich, service demanded by a lord, restrictions to traditional rites of access to common lands, an increase in taxes that were already beyond the means of peasants and workers. But when local protests gain more widespread and organised support, they typically take on modes of expression that go deeper, seeking underlying causes and expressing common grievances. At the time of the Reformation the voicing of such grievances was primarily in terms of theology, but in our own day it may be expressed in terms of particular political ideologies. In formulating his argument in this way, he draws closer to Engels’ suggestion, that theology was a code or language for expressing political aspirations. Yet Kautsky does not quite say that either (and thereby goes beyond Engels): no one language provides the authentic core, for which others are cloaks. Instead, his point is that theology and political thought are both modes through which radicalisation takes place.

---

15

Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 220.

**Work Cited**

- Boer, Roland. *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.
- Engels, Friedrich. “Der deutsche Bauernkrieg.” In *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 7, 327–413. Berlin: Dietz, 1850 [1973].
- . “On the History of Early Christianity.” In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, 445–69. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1894-5 [1990].
- . “The Peasant War in Germany.” In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 10, 397–482. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1850 [1978].
- . “Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums.” In *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 22, 447–73. Berlin: Dietz, 1894-5 [1972].
- Kautsky, Karl. *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*. Translated by J. L. Mulliken and E. G. Mulliken. London: Fisher and Unwin, 1897.
- . *Der Ursprung des Christentums: Eine historische Untersuchung*. Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1908].
- . *Foundations of Christianity*. Translated by H. F. Mins. London: Socialist Resistance, 2007 [1908].
- . *Thomas More and His Utopia*. Translated by Henry James Stenning. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979 [1888].
- . *Thomas More und seine Utopie: mit einer historischen Einleitung*. 3rd ed. Berlin: J.W.H. Dietz, 1947 [1888].
- . *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus I: Kommunistische Bewegungen im Mittelalter*. Berlin: Dietz, 1976 [1895–97].
- . *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus II: Der Kommunismus in der deutschen Reformation*. Berlin: Dietz, 1976 [1895–97].



Kautsky, Karl, and Paul Lafargue. *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus III: Die beiden ersten grossen Utopisten*. Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1922].

Lindemann, Hugo, and Morris Hillquit. *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus IV*. Stuttgart: Dietz, 1977 [1922].

## # REVIEWS

## ‡ AFTER QUEER THEORY: THE LIMITS OF SEXUAL POLITICS

*By James Penney. London, New York: Pluto Press, 2014. pp. vii, 212.*

REVIEWED BY ALLAN PERO

James Penney's latest book will prove to be, if it receives the critical attention it deserves, an important and timely intervention in the field of queer theory. I say "if" because if his text is read seriously, it cannot help but be seen as a provocation. However, I think it is just as crucial to say that if Penney is an *agent provocateur*, he is so for no one but himself; he is not interested in dismissing, or even minimizing, the dangers, sometimes lethal ones, which queer subjects face. He is more concerned with re-imagining a kind of politics (through thinkers like Marx, Lacan, and Badiou) which orients itself around the universal, the real, and the eternal, rather than one which continues to shadowbox with particular ideological phantasms. Dogged as the field of queer theory is by a moribund identity politics (which it disavows with statements like the following: "We know very well that identity is very much the trap of racist, heteronormative privilege, and as such, must be subverted, but we should fight all the harder to create identities of our own that receive the support and endorsement of our trappers"), on the one hand, and an emerging discourse of nihilism on the other, Penney takes careful, painstaking aim at dismantling many of the long-held, but rarely troubled, theoretical and political assumptions about its efficacy—namely, the discourses of subversion and transgression that have peppered conference papers, articles, and books for the past three decades. He proceeds to demonstrate that many of the long-held, hard-won critical insights about sexuality made by queer theory

were already substantively made by Freud (who persists as a straw figure of paternalistic heteronormativity in many an argument). Further, he challenges the very notions of heteronormativity that have become structural “givens” in queer studies; he quite rightly contends that if sexuality has been persistently shown to be a fluid, amorphous—in other words, that there is “no such thing as reproductive or fully heterosexual—‘normal’ sex” (6)—then sex itself, as a dimension of the real, is inherently transgressive. That is to say, there cannot be a privileged or particularly “transgressive” sexuality, since all sexuality, whatever the practice, whatever the body, however imagined, however symbolized, encounters the real of sex.

Queer, Penney insists, is not the real of sex; humanity is generically sexed (in Lacanian terms, through sexuation); we are not oriented in terms of sexuality by symbolic law. Instead, we are oriented by our relation to the phallic function—masculine or feminine. As Penney (and other Lacanians) are at pains to argue, sexuation has nothing to do with gender or sexuality. This point is essential to any critique of homophobic laws or edicts, Penney shows, because once one is forced to acknowledge sexuation as universal, then there cannot be a “stable position”—straight, queer, or otherwise—from which to make pronouncements about which sexuality is ethical, proper, true, or normal. This is one of the important reasons why he continues to argue for a psychoanalytic critique of sexuality. Since sexuation is, perforce, utterly unconcerned with gender and sexuality (that is, there is no moral weight attached to them), then a psychoanalytic conception of sexual difference cannot be conscripted to support reactionary notions like heterosexism and anti-feminism. An important consequence of Lacan’s notorious aphorism “there is no sexual relationship (or *rappor*t)” is that if it disrupts the fantasy that heterosexuality is the privileged site of sexual union, then it is just as true for same-sex couples. By implication, there is no utopian vision that can articulate itself exclusively around sexuality. For Penney, these are liberal and libertarian fantasies which are indices of the kind of boutique politics which have effectively abandoned the field of radical political transformation. Homophobia and its heinous implications can be better denounced and fought when it is recognized that they reveal “the disjunction between the true cause or object of homophobic violence—a psychological object of fantasy—and the actual, ‘real-life’ persons whom it affects” (14). Another way of putting it is to saying that if homophobic fantasy is just that—a fantasy—so too are the queer and heteronormative

identities which structure and respond to their hate.

As the first chapter unfolds, one encounters the fetishization of “unconventionality” that marks the queer phenomenology of thinkers like Sara Ahmed, which, for Penney, ultimately falters because of their reliance on anecdotes and narratives of affect utterly divorced from ideological critique; we must keep in mind that it is not only heterosexual notions of, say, the family, that are working in tandem with modes of production, but also queer notions of experiential life which are constituent elements of contemporary capitalism. Affect theory (Penney’s reading of Sedgwick and Klein is especially good) is also taken to task for largely failing to consider that affects are (anxiety excepted) generally narcissistic forms of defence; they can be a good starting point for analysis, but they run the serious risk of offering “a sort of intellectual alibi for wallowing in them” (31) if they are protected and overvalued as being somehow “beyond” political and psychoanalytical critique.

The second chapter stakes a new claim for the universal (a turn that Penney rightly attributes to scholars like Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek) as beneficial for everyone—queer and straight alike—by offering particular avenues of critique of the universal by what the text calls “concrete agencies” (54) within it, like capitalism, without falling into more helpless gesturing towards the vagaries of Foucauldian “power.” In this way, one can begin to explore the substantive differences between what law or authority imagines it is doing, and what its material effects are. One implication of an approach like this is that one is that subversion and transgression are viewed as the opposite of power. Rather, one should instead focus on the unconscious accounting for transgression in the very structure of the law itself; transgression in this reading becomes merely another means of hysterically confirming the law’s claims to authority.

“Is there a Queer Marxism?,” the book’s third chapter, bemoans the radical break of queer theory from the Marxist tradition that Teresa Ebert worked to warn us about in the 1990s, when a ludic, ultimately quietist play of irony and parody that characterized a particular strain of postmodern thought, allowed us to dump ideological critique (and the historical materialism it implies) in favour of hand-wringing alibis about power’s non-subjective and purely intentional force. History, as a force, was essentially theoretically wrested from our all-too-human hands, and unwittingly aided and abetted the dismantling the very mechanisms of critique and control that had been

built to steer capitalism in the post-war period. In his reading of Kevin Floyd, Penney shows how devastating the uncoupling of the modes of production from social relations and sexuality are—the reason is that there is a causal relation between them. Second, Penney undercuts the “universality” of heteronormativity by quite logically arguing that if it is in fact universal, then there would be no room from which to launch a critique of heterosexism. Perhaps most important, one must acknowledge that the emergence of queer identity is largely a Northern hemisphere, bourgeois phenomenon, and as such, has nothing substantive to contribute to a critique of global capital, since it is ultimately concerned with nothing but itself. For Penney, a return to Lacan, Freud, and Marx is imperative to help bring our attention to the relation between and among psychoanalysis, politics, and capitalism (specifically that the critique of the ego and the critique of surplus value, in different theoretical registers, uncover the unconscious forms of enjoyment that the ego requires in order to sustain itself, just as the reification of people and their sexuality in relation to the commodity reduces qualitative relations to purely quantitative ones, thus allowing capitalism to continue unfettered).

The fourth chapter uses a clever re-reading of Guy Hocquenghem’s little-read (and proto-anti-oedipal) *Homosexual Desire* in the context of a critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s assault on psychoanalysis and Lacan’s famed configuration of desire as lack. Since I cannot do justice to the finesse of this reading here, I will say that the critique of Deleuze and Guattari is a tonic. Deleuze and Guattari praise Lacan for his discovery of *objet a* (the symptomatic unconscious object of fantasy), but then chastise him for structuring the object around fantasy and the symbolic, as impediments to the desiring machine’s production, failing to realize that Lacan is not prescribing a “hindering” of desire’s possibility. On the contrary, Lacan’s point, which he makes repeatedly in several seminars, is that desire “sustains itself by sabotaging its own fulfilment” (121). Situating politics at the level of desire itself—that is, at its “negativity”—is, for Penney, precisely their blind spot—because desire cannot be “normalized” (that is, by signification), then the dizzying claims to desire’s liberation are simply misplaced, and merely idealize the drive as the site of freedom from repression.

In the final two chapters, Penney offers thoughtful, crystalline critiques of Tim Dean, Serge André, and Lee Edelman. Chapter five suggests, in its conclusion, that male homosexuality (he restricts his speculation to gay

men) may have an easier time, because of their different relationship both to the phallic function and to object-choice, of raising “the libidinal object of the drive through idealisation as a means of circumventing its disruptive emergence” (173), and of working towards the separation of the idealized narcissistic object from the object of *jouissance*. This possibility is evoked as a means of re-casting the commodified versions of masculinity which populate the pages of gay men’s magazines, and in turn, engaging (perhaps loving?) the disavowed gay male subjects who are the hidden, ideological truth which functions as the support for the white, bourgeois, gentrified gay men who are the visible faces of what we now call “the gay community.” The exploration of Edelman’s currently fashionable *No Future*, with its privileging of the death drive, is described as part of the “anti-social turn” in queer theory, and is understandably found wanting for its “undialectical notion of a radically pure brand of negativity” (181). This is not simply a rhetorical problem for Penney; in its nihilism, Edelman’s argument consigns all notions of the future to the Imaginary, ignoring the important roles versions of the future play in the subject’s life (e.g., the future perfect of analysis, as Lacan explains in his Rome Discourse, and the “anticipated certitude” considered in the *écrit* “Logical Time”—both of which are, in different ways, dialectical, and thus acknowledge the space, political or subjective, in which the impossible can happen). The idealization of the death drive that Edelman evinces fails to take account of the discontinuities which inhere in psychoanalytic conceptions of temporality—discontinuities which open up spaces for critique and agency. Edelman’s privileging of particular queer subjects—that is, those who will have no truck with reproduction and its responsibilities—necessarily excludes the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of LGBTQ couples who are parenting children across the globe. His nihilistic notion of the death drive fails, as Penney convincingly demonstrates, to recognize that desire’s relation to the drive, which is marked by the signifier, is a form of “eternalization” (193)—that is, that the drives are not just “death,” but are the excess of life. Desire’s most radical instantiation, that is, the real of desire, is the eternal which outstrips or stands outside the blandishments of everyday life. As *After Queer Theory* shows us, “we must choose not between life and death, but rather between life and immortality” (196). This study is an important step towards making a choice which truly, and not just rhetorically, moves beyond queer theory’s stultifying identitarian impasse.

## ‡ HEIDEGGER, METAPHYSICS, AND THE UNIVOCITY OF BEING

*By Philip Tonner. New York: Continuum, 2010. pp. 230.*

REVIEWED BY MAZEN SALEH

Philip Tonner's *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being* is a book that deserves reading, even if it is because of the problems it touches upon rather than the convincing power of its arguments. The book's aim is to interpret Heidegger's notion of being in terms of univocity, a concept that dominated the medieval philosophical debates and has roots going back to Aristotle. The author's main argument is constructed around two conceptions of being that appeared in the light of medieval interpretations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: Univocity and Analogy. The book then moves, taking Deleuze's immanence of being as a guide, to associate the analogical interpretation of being with ontotheology and instead attributes a univocal sense to Heidegger's 'concept' of being.

Tonner argues that univocity for Heidegger is when the concept of being has the same sense across all of its intentions. This same sense is nothing else than the temporal horizon of the understanding of being. Motivated by Deleuze's non-hierarchical conception of being, the author claims that Heidegger's philosophy is also a philosophy of immanence that dispenses with any privileging of a being over and above other beings. The tradition of Western philosophy has failed to ask the question of being in a satisfactory way because it has not grasped the ontological difference adequately. This means for the author that time has not been understood as the condition of possibility of revealing beings in their different regions. The privileged being for Husserl was consciousness, for Descartes the cogito, and for Aristotle *ousia*, a term that was translated by Latin scholars as *substantia*. The book classifies



all these traditional conceptions of being as analogical rather than univocal. They failed to see that being is not a being.

The author sets his interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy primarily against that of Thomas Sheehan. Sheehan writes:

[T]alk of "Being itself" can easily lose sight of the analogical character of Being. Heidegger was not after a univocal something that subsists on its own. Over and above the Being of man, the Being of implements, nature, artworks and ideal objects, there is no second level of "Being itself". Rather, the "itself" refers to the analogically unified meaning of Being which is instantiated in all cases of Being this or that.<sup>1</sup>

Tonner does not reject the analogical interpretation entirely, but he claims it is not the whole story. The book moves to show that a univocal sense of being, in terms of time, is present throughout Heidegger's corpus. But what exactly is at stake in the distinction between analogy and univocity? The author approaches this question with the medieval philosophical debate between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in the background. Scotus held that there is one sense of being which is applied to all beings, including God. This univocity is contrasted in the book with the Thomist thesis that being is instantiated in many ways. That is, there is a focal reference, embodied by a privileged being, i.e., God, to which all other instantiations of beings refer. This analogical conception of being is "the middle ground between univocity and equivocality".<sup>2</sup> If being is completely equivocal then there is simply no true way of talking about it—we fall into relativism. On the other hand, if being was univocal, then the same concept, or sense, of being can be applied to both a stone and God, a conception which most medieval philosophers could not tolerate.

Against this background, in effect the book attributes an 'atheistic' philosophy to Heidegger by way of the univocity of being in temporality. The temporal univocal sense of being agrees, so the argument's path indicates, with Deleuze's immanent universe. It is thus no wonder that in the Appendix the author says that Deleuze was concerned with providing an ontology of

---

1 Thomas Sheehan, *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2010), viii.

2 Philip Tonner, *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 23.

modern science through his univocal concept of being. This characterization of Heidegger's philosophy in the terms of non-vulgar atheism and modern science is questionable. The book takes no account of Heidegger's reservation towards the positive sciences. The philosopher more than once expressed his fear that philosophy, or thinking, will one day be merged with the sciences.

One might also ask about the purchase of casting Heidegger's philosophy, a philosophy which explicitly states that its project is to pave the path for overcoming metaphysics, under the light of traditional metaphysical debates. The book's goal is not a mere contextualization of Heidegger's thought in light of the tradition, a project whose necessity no one can deny. The book rather gives the impression of solving a metaphysical problem by way of a metaphysical solution. Perhaps Tonner's reply to this objection would be to reiterate that "[t]his univocal sense of being is time and the point about univocity is a logical one, not a metaphysical one".<sup>3</sup> But it is not clear if Heidegger would take an escape route through a distinction between logical and metaphysical presupposition. This distinction, at least as it stands in Tonner's book, is not sufficiently grounded on non-metaphysical grounds. The distinction could itself be metaphysical, and although Tonner characterizes Heidegger's phenomenology as an investigation into the genesis of philosophical concepts in the concrete life of *Da-sein*, he does not provide such an account to ground the distinction between logic and metaphysics. Heidegger did spend much of his time attempting to re-think logic as *logos*, but he was clear that there is no easy way outside of metaphysics.

That said, Tonner's book, even in its shortcomings, does touch upon this central issue: namely, whether philosophy has moved beyond metaphysics at all. What was at stake in the medieval debate, i.e., the possibility of knowing God, is definitely a matter with which we have not dispensed yet. It is a problem that traditionally has been posited as a problem of immanence and transcendence. If our refined modern senses do not allow us to privilege a being as a focal point of reference, then what should we do? The book clearly struggles to impose a univocal sense of being on Heidegger, but what is more open to question is the equivocality of 'immanence' and 'univocity.' After all, Scotus still held God to be the Supreme Being even if he claimed there is a univocal sense that applies to all beings. If Heidegger read the univocal sense in Scotus as a logical presupposition rather than a metaphysical one, it does

---

3 Ibid., 91.

not follow that it is a move which Heidegger will accept before questioning the metaphysical presupposition of logic itself.

It is worth noting that even the analogical account of being in Sheehan's interpretation claims to avoid giving a being a privileged place, a claim which Tonner's argument of univocity subscribes to. Sheehan writes that "there is no second level of Being in itself"<sup>4</sup> under the analogical conception. The book, therefore, unintentionally casts suspicion on the efficacy of univocity and analogy as adequate vocabulary with which one should approach Heidegger's thought.

---

4 Sheehan, *Heidegger*, viii.

## ‡ THE END OF SAN FRANCISCO

By Mattilda Bernstein. *San Francisco: City Lights*, 2013, pp. 186.

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW HALSE

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's *The End of San Francisco* emerges at a crucial and fertile time in queer thought: thirty-something years into an epidemic, wherein AIDS has developed a history upon which scores of recent memoirs and political accounts have attempted to lay claim, Sycamore's work contextualizes the epidemic in hindsight in concomitance with the mainstreaming of gay politics. But far from a memoir in the conventional sense, Sycamore's challenging, non-linear portrayal of activism, queer theory, gender, abuse, and quotidian life in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood seemingly defies the impulse to frame the evolution of queer life through any one particular valence. Rather, by exposing the history of queer being (and being queer) to endless difference through self-reflexivity—that is, a continuous questioning of what *is* and what *has been*—Sycamore tears at the contours of such historical and political work, troubling the very possibility of providing the definitive accounts which seem so strenuously sought in recent queer writing.

Condensing the (immense) value of *the End of San Francisco* to queer thought becomes relatively impossible—although the following attempts such parsing—for Sycamore's work is in equal measure personal memoir, manifesto, gossip column, theoretical intervention, *belles lettres*, prose poem, call to action, and letter to a younger generation of emergent queers who, like the young Sycamore, dream of escaping suburban America for the seductive tumult of the gay mecca. Sycamore writes: "I'm trying to get to the place where my sexuality doesn't feel so separate from the visions that inspire me, where it's not just moments so charged like a sudden burst of everything I need. Like

I'm filled with possibility it's me I'm everywhere at once" (42). Sexuality may be the lens through which Sycamore's actions are best understood, but sexual possibility—which I take to imply the continuous rethinking of sexuality—is her real concern. *The End of San Francisco* is about manifesting that possibility despite a regulated, policed world, where it is always already lost, where to be 'political' is to mimic certain beliefs. Sycamore's text is about enacting such possibility as a method for thinking beyond the now: what queer might yet become, rather than what it *is*.

Sycamore herself is somewhat of an enigmatic figure in the history of activism. Known for her work in ACT UP, Fed Up Queers, the inaugural Gay Shame event, and her growing collection of writings—including the collection of essays *Why are Faggots so Afraid of Faggots* and novel *So Many Ways to Sleep Badly*—Sycamore bridges theory and practice, studious understanding of socioeconomic issues with political action and demonstration. Her fluctuating relationship with gender—Sycamore is genderqueer and uses female pronouns—becomes intertwined with her own histories of childhood sexual abuse, drug dependencies, and (both failed and flourishing) activist initiatives, producing an intentionally non-linear mode of writing that is both intensely self-conscious (how does Sycamore's abuse at the hands of her father affect her AIDS activism?) and macroscopically global (how does Sycamore's strained relationship to San Francisco Pride, say, speak to larger issues of queer assimilation?).

One might take, as a speciously banal example of her admixture of specific examples implying more generalized advice for queer living, Sycamore's learning to walk in Boston during one of her many escapes from San Francisco:

So let me tell you about runway. The point is that you walk like you're going to die right now you walk like you're never going to die you're never going to die as long as you keep walking and you walk like you're going to kill, kill with this walk and you walk like no one can touch you. And the truth is that no one can touch you, as long as you're walking" (112).

(Her sentences are always this delicious: think William Burroughs meets Dorothy Alison.) Walking, as a metonymic extension of her maturing away from San Francisco, and as an act of self-sustaining expression, is rendered both

deeply personal and educational: it is survival advice far exceeding a sanitized ‘its gets better,’ a form of cultural aggression, a mode of self-proclamation. *The End of San Francisco* is rife with these subtle moments of advice for the careful reader: advice given only through the back door.

San Francisco, as literal city and metaphoric space, doesn’t quite end so much as it is always in the process of ending. For Sycamore, the city is a place of growth where she develops self-expression beyond social expectations, for example, or learns to cope with the pain of sexual abuse inflicted by her father. San Francisco’s social flux—from the changing scenes of punk to new wave to urban hipster, or through processes of gentrification indelibly erasing the unassimilated mode of queerness Sycamore champions—renders the city a place of learning, but from which one must ultimately graduate. For San Francisco to be San Francisco, it must end. One must move on.

The temporal warp and woof Sycamore adopts, where scenes from her childhood, to her later confrontations with her dying father, to her time at Brown University filtered through later experiences at a drug filled party in the mission, re-enacts this continuous process of escape. Such ‘escape’ simultaneously provides the opportunity for self-reflexivity and thus re-entry, if only at the level of thought. So too, San Francisco’s capacity as incubator for queer being and becoming is on the wane: as radicality gives way to corporate culture, as skyrocketing rents force expressions of anarchy or anti-assimilationist activism elsewhere, the queer possibility so treasured by Sycamore becomes increasingly difficult to access. San Francisco’s end equally demarcates a changing conception of queer acceptability, a process with which Sycamore is clearly at odds. San Francisco’s end—contrary, one is led to suppose, to the intentional act of ending San Francisco—is mourned as a loss.

Sycamore’s hopes for the inherent potentiality of contemporary queer thought cannot (and does not) assume polemical form, for any rigidity would directly undermine her version of queerness itself. Rigidity precludes the process of self-realization and perpetual difference Sycamore demands. Consider Sycamore’s portrayal of her generation:

We were the first generation of queers to grow up knowing that desire meant AIDS meant death, and so it made sense that when we got away from the other death, the one that meant marriage and a house in the suburbs, a lifetime of brutality both interior and exterior and call this success or keep

trying, keep trying for more brutality, but when we got away it made sense that everywhere people were dying of AIDS and drug addiction and suicide because we had always imagined death. Some of the dead were among us, just like us, just trying to survive. Others were more in the distance, the elders we barely got to know except as we lost them. We went crazy and cried a lot, or went crazy and stopped crying, or just went crazy. (82-83)

To go crazy is not to succumb to death in any of its forms. Rather, for Sycamore, to go crazy is to surmount death, to move beyond the enclosure and “brutality” of life lived within the bounds of acceptability. To go crazy is an act of refusal, a call for an ending. This, in a nutshell, is Sycamore’s call to arms, directed at an emergent generation: the political lies in the process of ending, for to end or to refuse or to go crazy is to be able to go back again, to refashion the parameters of the literal into the potential of the possible. This, for Sycamore, is the only mode of survival else queer thought foreclose its very queerness. In a world where AIDS, abuse, experimentation, gender expression, activism and public expression of queer sexuality continue to mean death—socially, politically, and otherwise—Sycamore’s advice must be heard at all costs.

# ‡ INDIVIDUATION ET VIE CULTURELLE

*Pour une phénoménologie radicale dans la perspective de Michel Henry*

By Rolf Kühn, Louvain, Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2012. pp. 200.

REVIEWED BY VINCENT MARZANO

With the posthumous publication of previously undisclosed writings by novelist and philosopher Michel Henry,<sup>1</sup> the last decade has seen numerous attempts at deeper comprehension of the socio-political potency of the French thinker's *material phenomenology*.<sup>2</sup> One such attempt is Viennese philosopher and long-time Henry scholar Rolf Kühn's *Individuation et vie culturelle*.<sup>3</sup> Originally a series of lectures given by Kühn as an invited professor at *Université Catholique de Louvain* in the fall and winter semesters of 2010-2011, this cohesive work offers a thorough investigation of the potential for cultural renewal informed by the affective foundation of representation unveiled by material phenomenology.

Concentrating on the possibilities for collective cultural practices, or *praxes* as described by Henry in his *Marx*,<sup>4</sup> *Individuation et vie culturelle* can be

1 Notably Michel Henry, *Le bonheur de Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, Épipiméthée, 2003) and the four tomes of Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie de la vie* (Paris: PUF, Épipiméthée, 2003–2004).

2 To cite a few, Raphaël Gély, *Rôles, actions sociales, imaginaire perception, incarnation* (2012); Rolf Kühn, *Radicalité et passibilité* (2003); and not to forget the yearly international colloquia dedicated to Henry's thought, in Cerisy, Beirut, Louvain, Montpellier, etc.

3 Rolf Kühn is the chair of Modern French religious thought at the University of Vienna has authored and edited multiple volumes on Henry's phenomenology of Life, in English, French and German.

4 Michel Henry, *Marx, I: une philosophie de la réalité*; Michel Henry, *Marx, II: une philosophie de l'économie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).



read as a vibrant manifesto in the name of the priority of lived experience over the advance of techno-scientific reason. Kühn approaches affective experience as the living grounds from which the world of scientific intelligibility springs. Neither a first principle nor an essence, affectivity is described as the condition of possibility for the appearance of any phenomenon. Henry describes affective Life as “a wave that feels itself,” which is to say that, in order to come to existence, every event, each thing of the world must be experienced by an enfleshed individuality pre-existing the worldly plane of its coming into view.<sup>5</sup> The affected *ipseity* is originary and nonetheless entirely submerged in our living cosmos. Kühn describes enfleshed life as the cosmic substance procuring intimacy to our dwelling. Life is the only universal, and it necessarily finds its concretion in the self-experience of an affected *ipseity*. Within affected life these two levels of universality and particularity remain indistinguishable; hence, for both Henry and Kühn, there lies a pathetic community of enfleshed beings, a togetherness through individuating co-affectivity prior to the emergence of any categorial *ousio*-logies.

This pathetic community, or *co-pathos*, is the raw element from which cultural *praxes* are engendered. For Kühn, the joys and pains of human beings guide cultural practices through representation. They are always lived in common, and offer every situation with its cultural readability. This is designated as the “historiality” of Life, the abyssal but pregnant sedimented history of its internal movement. Stepping stones of human communality, artistic and religious practices serve as revelators of the “abyssality” of Life, as evoked in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart or the poetry of Novalis. The emergence of invisible Life through artistic metaphor opens its truth to subjects who recognize lived affective tonality as their own intimacy. Such a recognition can lead subjects of culture to the humble choice of living up to the demands of pathetic life. Hence, Kühn presents his readers with an ethics of cultural life, in which art and religion, acting as *deixis*, point to the burdened potentiality of lived life. For Kühn, the sacrality of life must act as the ultimate principle guiding all human organization as its only possible justice. Against

5 “Pour moi les êtres humains sont beaucoup plus comme des nageurs lâchés dans un océan, supportés par lui, par ses vagues. Et c’est cela la vie: une vague qui se sent elle-même,” [For me, human beings are much more like swimmers dropped into an ocean, supported by it, by the waves. Just like life: a wave that feels itself. –*Editor’s translation*] Michael Henry “Narrer le pathos,” *Phénoménologie de la vie, Tome III* (Paris: PUF Collection Épiméthée 2004), 321.

the Levinasian commandment of the Other, and the Husserlian telic (and Eurocentric) understanding of the perfection of a community of *alter egos*, Kühn postulates an invisible but undeniable solidarity between every man, one too easily forgotten in our cyber-capitalistic century. In affective Life, Kühn identifies a fundamental ethos of affectivity which consists in recognizing and embracing the immemorial fulguration of Life individuating every living being, whilst gathering all in one infrangible and unsurpassable *us*. As such, it is an attempt to overcome the nihilism following the proclamation of the death of God and the resulting abandonment of grand narratives. The ultimate goal of Kühn's interpretation of material phenomenology would be to allow for the exhilaration of all life, to render it to its internal movement from suffering towards elation.

Interestingly, Kühn's treatment of suffering signals a break from Henry's conception of affectivity. Indeed, for the philosopher of Montpellier, more distant from the Christian doctrine than his Austrian commentator, there is no inherent good in Life, no promise of happiness in the *parousia* of affectivity. Where Kühn elaborates an ethics of Beauty, in which affectivity is to guide action through its elation in the recognition of esthetic forms as just and enjoyable, Henry reiterates that Life is not beautiful *per se*, but always pathetically agonizing. I want to argue that for Henry—as can be read in multiple texts from *L'essence de la manifestation*<sup>6</sup> to the posthumous “*Narrer le pathos*,” and as testifies to Henry's recurring use of the French word *épreuve* (which translates both as a challenge and a torment to describe life)—Life is first and foremost *suffered* and narrated to consciousness as an inescapable weight. Here thinking along the lines of a young Levinas,<sup>7</sup> Henry leads us to think that it is through an indescribable, nocturnal suffering—striving to be lived as joy—that cultural forms can emerge, through the co-pathetic coming together of enfleshed beings. In that sense, it could be humbly argued that it is not the plenitude of life experienced as beauty, but rather the despairing affirmation of its impossibility—and the resulting sentiment of unavoidable responsibility for the suffering of all—that would open our community to an ethics of affectivity.

---

6 Michael Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation* (Paris: PUF Collection Épiméthée 1963).

7 Emmanuel Lévinas, *De l'évasion* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1998).

## #NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**CASEY BEAL** is an independent scholar living in London, Ontario.

**ROLAND BOER** – Apart from voyages by freighter ship and riding his bicycle as far and as long as he can, Roland Boer researches and writes in the area of Marxism and religion. To that end, he has published a five volume work called *The Criticism of Heaven and Earth* (2007–14), as well as *Lenin, Religion and Theology* (2013). He is now studying Mao Zedong. He also happens to teach at Renmin (People’s) University of China, Beijing, and research at the University of Newcastle, Australia.

**MATTHEW HALSE** is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Western University.

**NICHOLAS HAUCK** is a 2013-14 Chancellor Jackman Graduate Fellow in the Humanities and a PhD candidate in the Department of French at the University of Toronto where he is writing his dissertation on *L’inhumain poétique*. His interests include Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, French surrealism, 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry, Ghérasim Luca, and Henri Michaux. He is also a translator and a poet.

**EILEEN JOY** is a specialist in Old English literary studies and cultural studies, as well as a para-academic rogue drone-strike machine, with interests in poetry and poetics, historiography, ethics, affects, embodiments, queer studies, the politics of friendship, speculative realism, object oriented ontology, the ecological, and the post/human. She is the Lead Ingenitor of the BABEL Working Group, the Co-Editor of *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, Co-Editor of *O-Zone: A Journal of Object Oriented Studies*, Director of punctum books: spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion, and Assoc. Director of punctum records. She blogs at In The Middle: <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com>.

**MICHAEL MACKENZIE** is a doctoral student in musicology at York University. His research interests include Glenn Gould, folk music, and military music in Canadian national identity, and twentieth century media theory. Michael completed his Masters in musicology at the University of Toronto with funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. He completed a Bachelor of Music in saxophone performance and music education at Dalhousie University.

**VINCENT MARZANO** is a master’s candidate at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Western University.

**ALLAN PERO** is Associate Professor of English and Writing Studies at the University of Western Ontario. He is also Core Faculty at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism. He is currently working as co-editor and contributor to *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Theory* (UTP) and is writing a book on camp, aesthetics, and modernism.

**ANDREW RESZITNYK** is a doctoral candidate at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. His work is generously supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

**ROSHAYA RODNESS** is a senior doctoral student studying at McMaster University. She is completing her dissertation, *From Difference to Queerness: Towards a Non-Philosophical Queer Theory*, which argues that the estranging language of François Laruelle’s “non-philosophy” provides a useful set of claims for returning with renewed critical energy to the radical stakes of queer theory as it emerged in the 1990s.

**MAZEN SALEH** is a master’s candidate at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Western University.